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ABSTRACT

IMMINENCY AND RESTORATIONISM IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

by

Timothy E. Crosby

Adviser: Robert M. Johnston

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: IMMINENCY AND RESTORATIONISM IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Name of researcher: Timothy E. Crosby

Name and degree of faculty adviser: Robert M. Johnston, Ph.D.

Date completed: May 1997

Problem

The problem of the delay of the Parousia is one of the central problems of the Christian faith. In the Seventh-day Adventist Church it usually takes the form of a short delay (100+ years), whereas among New Testament scholars it takes the form of a long delay (1900+ years). This study seeks to shed light on the problem as perceived by New Testament scholars.

Method

In order to delve deeply into the meaning of a handful of cruxes in the New Testament having to do with the imminence of the Parousia, the study attempted to

examine all of the eschatology-related material in the Old and New Testaments and in Jewish and Christian literature between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200. This required an examination of over 2,000 passages. This study focused primarily on the original sources, and only secondarily on secondary literature.

Conclusion

In the course of this research some forgotten trajectories were uncovered in early Christianity that enable us to make better sense of difficult passages such as Matt 24, 2 Thess 2, and even Rom 11. There is evidence of widespread belief around the turn of the era that the messianic kingdom was about to come. This belief was based on the timetables of Dan 7 and 9. Jesus tapped into this expectation with His proclamation that "the time has come; the kingdom of God is near" (Mark 1:15), a probable allusion to Dan 7:22, "the time had come for the saints to receive the kingdom." It appears that the earliest Christians were expecting a heavenly kingdom on earth as promised in the OT, and that this restorationist theology never died out of the church until the third century. The failure of the kingdom to appear in its fullness at the end of the seventy weeks can be explained by reference to numerous Old Testament parallels involving conditional prophecies that remained unfulfilled in the light of disobedience on the part of God's people.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

IMMINENCY AND RESTORATIONISM
IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Timothy E. Crosby

May 1997

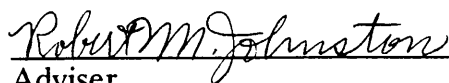
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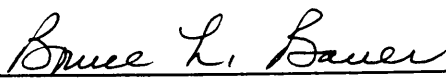
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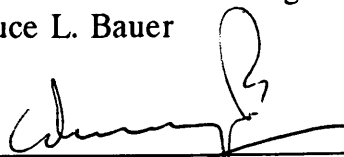
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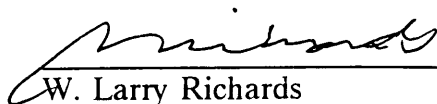
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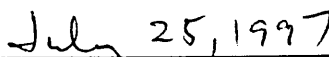
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<i>APOT</i>	R. H. Charles, <i>Apocryphy and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament</i>
<i>ANF</i>	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>
B.	Babylonian Talmud
DSS	Theodore H. Gaster, <i>The Dead Sea Scriptures</i> ; Florentino Garcia Martinez, <i>The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English</i> .
<i>ECF</i>	<i>Early Christian Fathers</i>
<i>NTA</i>	<i>New Testament Apocrypha</i>
<i>OTP</i>	<i>The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i>
Str-B	H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, <i>Kommentar Zum Neuen Testament</i>
<i>SDABC</i>	<i>Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , Kittel and Friedrich, eds.
Yonge	<i>The Works of Philo</i> , C. D. Yonge, trans.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The problem of the apparent delay of Jesus' Second Coming, or Parousia (Greek for "presence, arrival, coming"), has occupied believers for centuries. While various theories have been put forward to explain the delay, no one theory has carried the day. My purpose in this study is not to champion any one of these theories. It is my conviction that before we can come to any satisfactory resolution, we must first realize the immensity of the problem. Seventh-day Adventists tend to wonder why Jesus did not come back in the nineteenth century. Careful analysis of the New Testament suggests the real question is, why did Jesus not come back in the first century?

It is generally admitted among Adventists that there has been a delay of some sort in the Second Coming. But there is an increasing sense of anomie in regards to this problem. Several Adventist scholars have wrestled with this topic. Don F. Neufeld first suggested that "this generation" in Matt 24 was to be interpreted literally and that the prophecy was conditional.¹ Other Adventist scholars who have examined the topic at length include Hans LaRondelle, Ralph Neall, Herb Douglass, Desmond

¹Don F. Neufeld, "Biblical Questions Answered," *Adventist Review*, April 5, 1979, 6.

Ford, Sam Bacchiocchi, Jon Paulien, Jonathan Gallagher, and Ki Kon Kim (see Bibliography).

There is an interlocking web of evidence regarding what Jesus taught about the end of the age. This is a brief, but fairly concentrated, survey of that evidence. I do not deal with material written after the second century A.D., except in Appendix D, and except for the necessary citation of modern scholarship. This is basically a study of how a first-century Jew might have understood the NT statements about the Second Coming of Jesus. I have reduced to a few sentences topics that should require an entire chapter so that the reader might get the sweep of the argument. I have cited the Greek and Hebrew sparingly, and shunned Latin and German.¹ Finally, I choose to regard the text of the synoptic gospels as basically reliable reports of the message of Jesus. Let us see how far we can go by taking the evidence at face value. Even if, to some minds, we err on the side of credulity, we also avoid the wearisome tendency to conveniently dismiss evidence that does not conform to our theory by labelling it as a creation of the early church.

A word about epistemology—the philosophy of how we know what we know—is in order. In the realm of ordinary logic, science, and historical common sense, the best theory is generally regarded as the one which explains the most data. A single theory that explains many different passages of Scripture is to be preferred over alternative explanations of the same passages that require multiple theories. And

¹Including such terms as *urtext*, *ipsissima verba*, *Sondergut*, *theologoumenon*, *vorlage*, *Naherwartung*, and even *pericope*. We will also avoid invoking that elusive chimera known as Q.

when the supporting evidence is sufficiently massive, such a theory cannot be refuted by piecemeal reinterpretation of the evidence, but only by an alternative theory that is at least equally comprehensive. A house supported by a hundred stilts cannot be toppled by removing only three or four of them.

Such "structures" must not be imported from tradition, of course, but derived from careful reading of the text. When the reader stumbles onto the proper key, suddenly all sorts of apparently unrelated, random strands become an interlocking fabric with a clear pattern, and passages become meaningful that were formerly avoided as difficult. This has been my experience in undertaking this study. As I began serious excavation of the NT, I discovered a hundred stilts in the pattern of a house, though the house itself was not everywhere intact. Some parts of the structure were new and strange. There are concepts advocated here which, as recently as one year ago, had never once crossed my mind, but which emerged unexpectedly out of the text.

I undertook this study determined to follow the facts wherever they might lead, regardless of the result. Nevertheless, I began (and end) with a bias. My bias is that of a conservative Seventh-day Adventist Christian; and I write to please the One who will someday call me to account for how I have handled His truth. I take the Bible as the Word of God, the rule of doctrine, and the infallible constitution of the church.

For purposes of this study, however, Scripture functions less as a rule book or doctrinal compendium and more as a witness to history. The question is not "What is present truth about the Second Coming?" but "What did the founders of the Christian

church believe about the end of the age?" The answers to these two questions may not be exactly the same. This study will sift through all of early Christian literature for clues; digging into the documents to unearth bits and pieces of the puzzle—a most rewarding sort of "Biblical Archaeology." By standing on the shoulders of giants we may be able, at certain points, to see a little further, and probe a little deeper, than ever before. Others who follow will see still further and more clearly.

A word about method is in order. The discipline of biblical studies is based in part on the method of finding *analogous parallels* in literature that are roughly contemporary with the text in question, or earlier. At its simplest level, this means that Scripture is its own interpreter, and one can explain obscure passages by finding clearer parallel passages that shed light on them. If we have the resources to extend this to extrabiblical literature—the popular religious literature read by the Jesus' audience—all the better, for even though such material has no canonical authority, it is still useful in helping us to define the meaning of terms and phrases that are rarely used in Scripture (e.g., the phrase "spirit of prophecy," which occurs in Scripture only in Rev 19:10), and it helps us get into the minds of the original audience of the biblical documents so we have a better idea what the words meant to them.

This study involves mining not only the OT and NT but also the writings of some of the "bestsellers" of Jesus' day. Some of these authors write under a famous OT pseudonym. Some recount visionary trips to heaven. Some recount history. Some give moral advice. These books, like those we buy today in religious bookstores, contain a mixture of fact, fantasy, pious exhortation, truth and error; but on the whole

Christians found them edifying, which is why they have been preserved. Today this literature is found in the Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha, and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Jesus was probably familiar with some of these works. For example, we can be relatively certain that His family read the book of Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus, a collection of proverbs written by an earlier teacher named Jesus who lived around 180 B.C., for it left its mark on His teaching.¹

The significance of this literature can best be understood with a modern analogy. To understand the development of Adventist eschatology it is impossible to ignore Uriah Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation*, first published as a series of *Review and Herald* articles in the 1860s. The intertestamental literature cited in this work had

¹The Gospels contain more parallels to Sirach than to the canonical book of Proverbs. Note the following similarities: those who love the Lord will obey him (Sir 2:15-16 > John 14:15, 21, 23); principles relating to pride and humility (Sir 7:5, 11 > Luke 18:9-14); counsel against repetitive prayers (Sir 7:14 > Matt 6:7); old wine is better than new (Sir 9:10 > Luke 5:39); God has cast down the thrones of rulers and exalted the humble (Sir 10:14 > Luke 1:52); the rich fool who faces death (Sir 11:18-19, 23-27 > Luke 12:16-21); do not put yourself forward when invited to a feast (Sir 13:8-10 > Luke 14:8-10); the paved road that leads to destruction (Sir 21:10 > Matt 7:13); oath-taking discouraged (Sir 23:9-11 > Matt 5:33-37); come and eat of me and thirst again (Sir 24:19-21 > John 6:35); one must forgive to be forgiven (Sir 28:2 > Mark 11:25); lay up treasure through almsgiving (Sir 29:10-12 > Luke 12:33); eat what is set before you (Sir 31:16 > Luke 10:8); give as you have received and God will repay (Sir 35:10-11 > Luke 6:38); the widow's prayer for justice (Sir 35:12-20 > Luke 18:1-8); take my yoke upon you (Sir 51:23-27 > Matt 11:28-30). In addition, Jesus seems to have followed Sirach's advice to seek out and listen to wise teachers (Sir 6:32-36; cf. Luke 2:46), and to rise early and pray (Sir 39:5; cf. Mark 1:35). There are also parallels between Sirach and the writing of Jesus' brother James: Sir 1:28, 2:12-13, 7:10 > Jas 1:6, 8; Sir 2:1-6 > Jas 1:2-4; Sir 3:18 > Jas 1:10, 4:10; Sir 5:11 > Jas 1:19; Sir 10:23 > Jas 2:1-7; Sir 15:11-20 > Jas 1:13-15; Sir 19:16 > Jas 3:2; Sir 20:15, 41:22 > Jas 1:4; Sir 23:9 > Jas 5:12; Sir 38:9-11 > Jas 5:14; Sir 48:1-3 > Jas 5:17-18. The previously overlooked parallel between Luke 1:52 and Sir 10:14 is virtually a quotation from the apocrypha on the lips of Mary the mother of Jesus. I suspect Mary read to her children from this book.

similar influence among first-century Jews as Uriah Smith has had among Seventh-day Adventists. Of course, we can never simply presuppose that the NT agrees with this literature; parallel phraseology does not always imply parallel assumptions.

The church has nothing to fear from a candid investigation of its history. Even those who know the risen Lord can profit from the quest for better understanding of the historical Jesus, as long as we humbly seek the aid of the Holy Spirit and take the skeptical pronouncements of certain scholars with sufficient salt. At the same time we must also have the courage to take a calm look at all the evidence and weigh it with as much objectivity as we can muster. So I would ask the reader to set aside preconceived opinions and established end-of-the-world timetables, and attempt to understand, with the aid of religious literature current in Jesus' day, what His words meant to those who first heard Him speak.

It is great fun to tackle a good mystery, particularly when it is an intractable theological problem; and I would argue that this is one of the most important unsolved problems in human history, worthy of lifelong pursuit. Let us, then, pursue.

CHAPTER TWO

FIRST-CENTURY HOPES OF AN IMMINENT ESCHATON

The Literary Background: First-Century Expectation of Daniel's Kingdom

Six centuries before Jesus was born, when Zoroaster, Confucius, Buddha, and Lao-Tse were living, there lived in Babylon a Jewish statesman who dreamed about the future. Daniel put his dreams in a book that outlines the history of the world down to the resurrection and the kingdom of God. Unlike other OT prophets, Daniel attached to his prophecies a timeline. As kingdoms rose and fell, and Daniel's prophetic clock ticked off the years, it began to capture the imagination of not only the Jewish world, but the Roman as well. In response to Daniel, would-be messiahs led hundreds of thousands of people to their deaths, an empire received a mortal wound, and a new faith was born.

A careful study of Daniel lies beyond the scope of this study. Our only concern here is to understand how Daniel's prophecies were interpreted in the first century. The evidence indicates that the mysterious Son of Man prophecy of Dan 7 and the cryptic timetable of Dan 9 had led Jesus' contemporaries to some startling conclusions.

The seventh chapter of Daniel contains a vision of the future history of the

world. Four world empires, portrayed symbolically as fierce animals, were to successively rule down to the end of time. The fourth empire, or an extension of it, would persecute the people of God, but a great heavenly court would sit in judgment, destroy the persecutor, and bestow the kingdom upon the saints, represented by "one like a son of man."

Speculation about the kingdom of Dan 7 was rampant around the time of Jesus; it had captured the attention of both Roman and Jewish writers. The judgment scene of Dan 7 is mentioned repeatedly in 1 Enoch,¹ along with the mysterious Son

¹1 Enoch 14:18-23, 40:1, chaps. 46-49, 61:8-13, 71:10-13, 90:20ff. 1 Enoch influenced the NT more than any other non-canonical book. Most NT writers seem to be familiar with it; there are over 100 allusions in the NT and one citation (Jude 14-15). Indeed, the epistle of Jude is practically *based on* 1 Enoch (besides the quotation, cf. 1 Enoch 108:7 > Jude 4, 1 Enoch 48:10 > Jude 4, 1 Enoch 10 > Jude 6, 1 Enoch 12:4 > Jude 6, 1 Enoch 80:6 > Jude 13, 1 Enoch 60:8 > Jude 14). There are more than 60 allusions in Revelation alone, and the earliest church fathers considered 1 Enoch inspired Scripture. John the Revelator was Jesus' closest disciple, and Jude was His brother; so I cannot help but think that Jesus read and absorbed the "Son of Man" sections of Enoch (chaps. 45 and following).

1 Enoch is a composite work (that is, various parts of it were written at different times by different authors). The oldest portions date from the third century B.C. There has been some question about the date of the latest part of the book, the "Similitudes" or "Parables," chaps. 37-71. This section is of intense interest because it has much to say about an eschatological figure who is called the Elect One, the Righteous One, the Messiah, and the Son of Man. Because no fragments from the Parables were found at Qumran, J. T. Milik concluded that this section was a Christian document composed around A.D. 270. However, Qumran also lacked fragments of Esther. Milik's opinion has been superseded by an impressive scholarly consensus that the Parables are "a Jewish text from either the last half of the first century B.C.E. or the first three quarters of the first century C.E." (George W. E. Nickelsburg, "Enoch," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 2:513). For a full discussion, see the articles by J. H. Charlesworth, M. A. Knibb, and Christopher L. Mearns in *NT Studies* 25 (1978-79): 315-369; G. R. Beasley-Murray, "Excursus: The Date of the Similitudes of Enoch," *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 63-8; J. C. Greenfield and M. E. Stone, "The Enochic Pentateuch and the Date of the Similitudes," *Harvard Theological Review* 70 (1977): 51-65; D. W. Suter,

of Man who is extolled at great length and identified with the Messiah. Contemporary interpretation of Dan 7 implied the end of the age was near, for the messianic age was due during Daniel's fourth kingdom, Rome.¹ One striking prophecy, written twenty to twenty-five years before the birth of Jesus, refers to Rome's victory over Egypt at the battle of Actium in 31 B.C., to be followed by the Messiah and the end of the age:

But when Rome will also rule over Egypt, guiding it toward a single goal, then indeed the most great kingdom of the immortal king will become manifest over men. For a holy prince will come to gain sway over the scepters of the earth forever, as time presses on. Then also implacable wrath will fall upon Latin men. Three will destroy Rome with piteous fate. All men will perish in their own dwellings when the fiery cataract flows from heaven. Alas, wretched one, when will that day come, and the judgment of the great king immortal God?"²

Another apocalyptic work, the *Testament of Moses*, was either written or

Tradition and Composition in the Parables of Enoch, SBL Dissertation Series 47 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979).

All pseudepigraphical books mentioned in this paper are quoted from James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1983), hereafter abbreviated as *OTP*.

¹On the four kingdoms, cf. the Targum of Jonathan on Hab 3:17, "For the kingdom of Babylon shall not endure, nor will it exercise dominion over Israel. The kings of Media shall be slain, and the mighty ones of Greece shall not succeed. The Romans shall be destroyed, and shall not levy the tax from Jerusalem." Samson H. Levey, *The Messiah: An Aramaic Interpretation: The Messianic Exegesis of the Targum* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1974), 95. The liberal position which assigns Daniel's four kingdoms to Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece cannot be supported: The kingdom of Babylon was succeeded by Persia (2 Chr 36:20); the Medes and Persians ruled together and were considered a single kingdom (Esth 1:3, 14, 19, 10:2, Dan 5:28, 6:8, 12, 15, 8:20).

²Sib Or 3:46-56 (*OTP* 1:363); cf. 3:77-92, and cf. 11:272-276 which was written about the same time.

revised around the time Jesus was in his teens. The author, who pretends to be Moses writing prophecies of future events, describes the thirty-four-year reign of Herod the Great (38-4 B.C.), then says, "When this has taken place, the times will quickly come to an end" (Test Mos 7:1). The author's speculation that the world would end soon may be based on the seventy week prophecy of Dan 9, since Test Mos 4:1-5 is a paraphrase of Dan 9:4-19. The end-time scenario of the book is quite interesting:

Then his kingdom will appear throughout his whole creation. Then the devil will have an end. Yea, sorrow will be led away with him. Then will be filled the hands of the messenger, who is in the highest place appointed. Yea, he will at once avenge them of their enemies. For the Heavenly One will arise from his kingly throne. Yea, he will go forth from his holy habitation. . . . The sun will not give light. And in darkness the horns of the moon will flee. Yea, they will be broken in pieces. It will be turned wholly into blood. Yea, even the circle of the stars will be thrown into disarray. . . . For God Most High will surge forth, the Eternal One alone, in full view will he come to work vengeance on the nations. Yea, all their idols he will destroy. Then you will be happy, O Israel! And you will mount up above the necks and the wings of an eagle. Yea, all things will be fulfilled. And God will raise you to the heights. Yea, he will fix you firmly in the heaven of the stars, in the place of their habitations. And you will behold them from on high. Yea, you will see your enemies on the earth. (Test Mos 10:1-10).

We find an approximate timetable for the end of the age in 2 Bar 39-40: When Daniel's fourth kingdom nears the end of its rule, then "at that time the dominion of my Anointed One . . . will be revealed" (39:7). "You ought to know . . . that the end which the Most High prepared is near, and that his grace is coming, and that the fulfillment of his judgment is not far" (2 Bar 82:2). "For the youth of this world has passed away, and the power of creation is already exhausted, and the coming of the times is very near and has passed by. And the pitcher is near the well, and the ship to

the harbor, and the journey to the city, and life to its end" (2 Bar 85:10).

4 Ezra 11-12 has a similar timetable: At a certain point in the history of Rome—Daniel's fourth kingdom—after a sort of deadly-wound-healed experience, will come the "Messiah, whom the Most High has kept until the end of days, who will arise from the posterity of David," followed by the judgment.¹ The author seems to have regarded Daniel's ten kings (Dan 7:24), loosely interpreted, as past, so "the Most High has looked upon his times, and behold, they are ended, and his ages are completed" (11:44); "The age is hastening swiftly to its end" (4:26). Both 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra are Jewish apocalypses written near the end of the first century A.D., but it is not unreasonable to assume that they preserve earlier traditions.

One of the hymns from the Essene community of Qumran seems to indicate that the "birth-pangs of the Messiah" had already begun in the world:

For now, amid throes of death, new life is coming to birth, and the pangs of travail set in, as at last there enters the world the man-child long conceived. Now, amid throes of death, that man-child long foretold is about to be brought forth. Now, 'mid the pangs of hell, there will burst forth from the womb that marvel of mind and might, and that man-child will spring from the throes! From the moment that he was conceived, pangs have been sweeping apace over the whole wide world.²

¹4 Ezra 11:38-40, 12:11, 32-34. 12:18 is probably an allusion to the chaotic unrest immediately following the death of Nero before Vespasian restored confidence in the empire. Cf. Rev 13:3.

²1QH III, in Theodore H. Gaster, *The Dead Sea Scriptures*, 3d ed. (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1976), 152-3. However, a rather different (and less coherent) translation is provided by Florentino Garcia Martinez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English*, 2d ed., translated from the Spanish by Wilfred G. E. Watson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 331. Hereafter both of these titles are abbreviated as *DSS*. Suffice it to say that this much-discussed passage

The concept of a delay of the Eschaton is already present at Qumran. The *peshet* commentary on Hab 2:3 suggests that the kingdom is apparently overdue, yet will still come at the right time:

And God told Habakkuk to write what was going to happen to the last generation, but he did not let him know the end of the age. And as for what he says: **So that the one who reads it may run.** Its interpretation concerns the Teacher of Righteousness, to whom God has disclosed all the mysteries of the words of his servants, the prophets. **For the vision has an appointed time, it will have an end and not fail.** Its interpretation: the final age will be extended and go beyond all that the prophets say, because the mysteries of God are wonderful. **Though it might delay, wait for it; it definitely has to come and will not delay.** Its interpretation concerns the men of truth, those who observe the Law, whose hands will not desert the service of truth when the final age is extended beyond them, because all the ages of God will come at the right time, as he established for them in the mysteries of his prudence.¹

This expectation of the imminent end of the age and the sense that it was already overdue was part of the culture into which Jesus was born. Of course, not everyone believed this: certainly not the skeptical Sadducees. The Jewish philosopher

probably indicates the messianic age is imminent, but the original is not quite as clear as Gaster's translation.

¹1QpHab 7:1-14, in Martinez, *DSS*, 200. I have supplied the boldface to separate the OT quotations from the commentary. The Qumran documents frequently mention "the last days," and, somewhat less frequently, "the final generation." Note 1QpHab 2:5-10: "The interpretation of the word concerns the traitors in the last days. They shall be violators of the covenant who will not believe when they hear all that is going to happen to the final generation, from the mouth of the Priest whom God has placed within the Community, to foretell the fulfillment of all the words of his servants, the prophets, by means of whom God has declared all that is going to happen to his people Israel." Cf. 4QpHos 1:10, "They are the generation of the visitation." 4QCatena 2:16 mentions those who "circumcise the foreskin of their heart in the last generation"; and 1QpMic fragment 17 mentions "the last generation" (Martinez, *DSS*, 198, 192, 210, 194).

Philo, an older contemporary of Jesus, scoffs at the idea that the world will be destroyed by fire, as we shall see. But this conviction that a new age was dawning was not confined to the Jews. Daniel's time prophecies had drawn attention even outside of Jewish circles. Note these often-cited statements from first century Roman historians Suetonius and Tacitus:

There had spread over all the Orient an old and established belief, that it was fated at that time for men coming from Judea to rule the world. This prediction, referring to the Emperor of Rome, as afterwards appeared from the event, the people of Judea took to themselves.

In most there was a firm persuasion, that in the ancient records of their priests was contained a prediction of how at this very time the East was to grow powerful, and rulers, coming from Judea, were to acquire universal empire. These mysterious prophecies had pointed to Vespasian and Titus, but the common people, with the usual blindness of ambition, had interpreted these mighty destinies of themselves, and could not be brought even by disasters to believe the truth.¹

So the Romans, too, had a messianic leader, a conquering hero, and therein hangs a tale. Before he was the Emperor of Rome, Vespasian was a Roman general who, under Nero, was assigned to suppress the Jewish rebellion in A.D. 66. After Nero slit his own throat in 68 to avoid an even worse fate, there was great unrest in the empire, and three men ruled briefly as emperor. In 69 Vespasian took the throne, leaving his son Titus to complete the capture of Jerusalem. Vespasian ruled well, bringing the empire back from the brink of ruin that had resulted from the excesses of Nero. But he may have owed his success, in part, to Josephus.

¹Suetonius *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, "Vespasian," 4; Tacitus *History*, 5:13; quoted in Robert C. Newman, "Daniel's Seventy Weeks and the Old Testament Sabbath-Year Cycle," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 16, no. 4 (1973): 229.

Josephus (b. A.D. 37) is known today as the preeminent Jewish historian of the first century. But before he became a writer and philosopher he was a teenage disciple of one Bannus, who was a desert ascetic, probably an Essene, and possibly a disciple of John the Baptist. Later Josephus became a military leader in the Jewish resistance. When the city he defended was captured by Vespasian early in the war, he defected to the Romans. A shameless opportunist, Josephus made friends with Vespasian by assuming the mantle of a prophet and suggesting that Vespasian should take his rightful place as Emperor.¹ He later justified this by reference to Daniel's prophecy:

But now, what did most elevate them in undertaking this war [of A.D. 67-70] was an ambiguous oracle that was also found in their sacred writings, how, "about that time, one from their country should become governor of the habitable earth." The Jews took this prediction to belong to themselves in particular; and many of the wise men were thereby deceived in their determination. Now, this oracle certainly denoted the government of Vespasian who was appointed emperor in Judea.²

Rabbinic tradition holds that one of their own, Johanan ben Zakkai, also left Jerusalem during the siege and hailed Vespasian as a man destined to destroy the temple and to become emperor, citing Isa 10:34 as his prooftext.³

At any rate, Vespasian took both the hint and the empire, and became the

¹Josephus *Wars* 3.8.9 describes the incident (trans. William Whiston). I am using the Whiston annotation because it is widely available, while the Loeb edition is incomplete, expensive, and available only in large libraries.

²Josephus *Wars* 6.5.4.

³See Jacob Neusner, *Development of a Legend* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970).

tenth Caesar.¹ Unlike his son Domitian—the emperor who exiled John to Patmos, and whose persecution incited the production of at least three apocalypses: Revelation, 4 Ezra, and 2 Baruch—Vespasian made no claims to divinity. But early in his reign, if the story is to be believed, he discovered that he could work miracles:

Vespasian, who against all expectation had mounted the throne as a wholly new prince, still lacked presence and divinely confirmed majesty. But this was granted to him. Two men of the people, one blind and the other lame, came before his tribunal and asked for healing. This had been promised them by Serapis in a dream. The god had promised that Vespasian would restore sight to the blind if he moistened his eyes with his spittle and the leg of the lame man if he would deign to touch it with his heel. Vespasian himself hardly believed this would happen. Hence he could not make up his mind to try. Finally, persuaded by his friends, he publicly attempted both and lo, not without success.²

But those Jewish oracles about a scion of David ruling the world must have left a gnawing fear in his mind. Could the ancient Hebrew prophesies be true? If so, then Roman dominion was in jeopardy. So Vespasian took preemptive action.

¹According to Sib Or 11 and 12, the preceding emperors were: Julius Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, Gaius Caligula, Claudius, and Nero; followed by three minor Caesars who briefly struggled for power, Galba, Otho, and Vitellius. The last of these was overthrown by Vespasian, the tenth Caesar. Vespasian was succeeded by his two sons, Titus and Domitian.

²Suetonius *Caes.*, VIII Vespasianus, 7, 2f.; the story is also told in Tacitus *Hist.*, 4:81 (reproduced in David R. Cartlidge and David L. Dungan, *Documents for the Study of the Gospels* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980], 156), and in Dio Cassius, 66:8 (reproduced in *TDNT*, 8:274). This may have been a scheme cooked up by Vespasian's attendants to increase his self-confidence and provide grist for the political propaganda mill, legitimizing his claim to the throne; see the discussion in John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1994), 2:594-5. Or it may have been a real miracle, whether divine or demonic; Jesus assumed that others could work miracles (Mark 9:38-40, Matt 7:22, 12:27). Tacitus mentions that the blind man was "one of the commoners of Alexandria, who was known for the loss of sight."

According to Eusebius, he attempted to round up any descendants of David, and, later, so did his son Domitian.¹ Like Herod in a former generation, these emperors sought to check any potential insurrectionist who might pose a threat to their kingdom.

But they were too late. The Son of David they were seeking was already well beyond their reach.

The Historical Background: First-Century Messianic Movements

Traditionally the discourse of Jesus recorded in Matt 24 has been called the Olivet discourse. This passage contains Jesus' detailed description of the signs of the end and the destruction of Jerusalem followed by the Second Coming. This section focuses on one of the leading motifs of this discourse.

A major feature of the discourse is the three separate warnings against false Christs and false prophets (Matt 4-5, 11, 23-26). Were there any false messiahs or false prophets that preceded the destruction of Jerusalem? Indeed there were. Daniel's timetables made the first century a messianic hotbed. One needs to keep in mind that the popular concept of the messiah was not so much a supernatural figure as a military leader of revolution against the Roman overlords, as illustrated by the scanty

¹Eusebius *Hist.* 3:11, 20. Eusebius's tradition has been called into question, but the reports from Josephus, Suetonius, Tacitus, Eusebius, and rabbinic sources all fit together like pieces in a puzzle. Surely Vespasian was as informed as the Roman writers regarding prophecies allegedly pertaining to himself—in fact, he may have been the source of their information—and this explains his actions. There is no evidence he actually condemned anyone to death.

references to the Messiah found in Philo, which are based on the prophecy of Balaam in Num 24:7-9, perhaps informed by Daniel:

A man shall hereafter come forth out of thee [the Jewish nation] who shall rule over many nations, and his kingdom shall increase every day and be raised up to heaven. . . . He shall lie down to rest like a lion, and like a lion's whelp, fearing no one, but showing great contempt for every one, and causing fear to all other nations.¹

A man will come forth, says the word of God, leading a host and warring furiously, who will subdue great and populous nations. . . . He will also have an irresistible power of dominion.²

Since it was believed that Daniel's prophecies indicated that it was time for the Roman empire to meet its doom, there were plenty of self-styled Terminators waiting in the wings. The Jewish historian Josephus is our best source for these charismatic figures. We begin with his description of two subversive teachers who flourished about the time of Jesus' birth. While these men did not make messianic claims for themselves, they illustrate the revolutionary milieu into which Jesus was born.

There also now happened to him [Herod the Great] among his other calamities, a certain popular sedition. There were two men of learning in the city [Jerusalem], who were thought the most skillful in the laws of their country, and were on that account held in very great esteem all over the nation; they were the one Judas, the son of Sepphoris, and the other Matthias, the son of Margalus. There was a great concourse of the young men who came to these men when they expounded the laws, and there got together every day a kind of an army of such as were growing up to be men. Now when these men were informed that the king was wearing away with melancholy, and with a distemper, they dropped words to their acquaintance, how it was now a very proper time to defend the cause of God, and to pull down what had been

¹Philo *Mos.* 1:290-91, in *The Works of Philo*, new updated ed., trans. C. D. Yonge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 486; hereafter "Yonge."

²Philo *Praem.* 95-97 (Yonge, 673).

erected contrary to the laws of their country; for it was unlawful there should be any such things in the temple as images, or faces, or the like representation of any animal whatsoever. Now the king had put up a golden eagle over the great gate of the temple, which these learned men exhorted them to cut down: and told them that if there should any danger arise, it was a glorious thing to die for the laws of their country; because that the soul was immortal, and that an eternal enjoyment of happiness did await such as died on that account; while the mean-spirited, and those that were not wise enough to shew a right love of their souls, preferred death by a disease, before that which is the result of a virtuous behavior.¹

Eventually these two rabbis were burned alive by the Romans, along with forty of their disciples who had actually cut down the eagle. This generated festering resentment that eventually resulted in a seditious uprising led by several self-proclaimed kings taking advantage of the vacuum of power at the death of Herod the Great. Ultimately, 2,000 Jews were crucified as punishment for their rebellion.²

Curiously, Josephus reports that on the day these two teachers were martyred, there was an eclipse of the moon, an astronomical sign sometimes associated with the birth or death of important leaders. According to Whiston, this eclipse occurred on March 13, 4 B.C.—about the time of the birth of Jesus.

Jesus was once asked whether it was right to pay taxes to Caesar or not (Matt 22:15-22/Mark 12:13-17). There was a lot of history behind this question, as illustrated by the rebellion of Judas around A.D. 6 in reaction to the census of

¹Josephus *Wars* 1.32.2; there is a fuller account in *Antiquities* 17.6.2-4.

²*Antiquities* 17.9-10.

Quirinius:¹

Under his [Archelaus'] administration it was that a certain Galilean, whose name was Judas, prevailed with his countrymen to revolt; and said they were cowards if they would endure to pay a tax to the Romans, and would, after God, submit to mortal men as their lords. This man was a teacher of a peculiar sect of his own, and was not at all like the rest of those their leaders.²

This Judas is the one mentioned by Gamaliel in Acts 5:37 as evidence that if the Jesus movement was of human origin, it would fail. Gamaliel was suggesting that time would tell whether Jesus was just another would-be messiah like Judas and others listed below in this chapter. According to Gamaliel, Judas was killed and his followers scattered. But they were by no means neutralized. Judas was the founder of the "fourth philosophy" (after the Sadducees, Pharisees, and Essenes), out of which grew the zealots and the sicarii terrorists—young radicals who were ultimately responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem—and Judas' sons, later crucified, carried on his work, until the power of the movement was broken at Masada in A.D. 73.

Josephus gives us only a sampling of some of the larger insurrectionist movements in Palestine; he does not mention, for example, the one with which

¹Luke's mention of this census (2:2) has long been a difficult problem in the NT, as the conventional translation makes it appear that Jesus was born during the census of Quirinius in A.D. 6, when He should have been about ten years old. A solution has been proposed by William Temple, *Readings in St. John's Gospel* (London: Macmillan, 1945), 17; John Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20* (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 101f.; and N. T. Wright, *Who Was Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 89: Luke 2:2 should probably be translated "This census took place before the time when Quirinius was governor of Syria." The Greek word *protos*, when followed by the genitive, can mean "before," as in John 1:15, 1:30, 15:18; see standard lexicons.

²Josephus *Wars* 2.8.1; paralleled by *Antiquities* 18.1.1, 6, 20.5.2.

Barabbas was associated. Barabbas had committed murder in connection with one of these uprisings.¹ The text does not say Barabbas was the ringleader, or that he made messianic claims, although his name ("Son of the Father") is suggestive. However, the name may mean nothing more than son of a teacher, or son of a rabbi.

The controversial paragraph in which Josephus mentions Jesus has been altered by Christian editors. Josephus's statement is discussed at length by John P. Meier and by James H. Charlesworth.² Though we cannot yet recover the exact wording of the Greek original, the recent discovery of an Arabic version in which several of the obvious Christian interpolations are missing moves us closer to that goal. I cite below S. Pines's translation of the Arabic as provided by Charlesworth, who concludes, "We can now be as certain as historical research will presently allow that Josephus did refer to Jesus in *Antiquities* 18."³

At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. His conduct was good, and he was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had

¹Mark 15:7, Luke 23:19, John 18:40.

²Meier, 1:56-88; James H. Charlesworth, *Jesus Within Judaism: New Light from Exciting Archaeological Discoveries* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 90-98.

³Charlesworth, *Jesus Within Judaism*, 96. Charlesworth is still skeptical about the last third of this Arabic passage—the report of the resurrection—but the weight of evidence is now in favor of its authenticity, since even the Arabic, which omits obvious Christian interpolations, retains it. Regarding the final phrase, Charlesworth quibbles, "How could a Jew claim that anyone 'was *perhaps* the Messiah?'" but it is even less likely that a Christian editor would have invented such a statement, as Charlesworth admits. In a later reference (*Antiquities* 20), Josephus speaks of "James, the brother of Jesus, said to be Christ." This implies an earlier reference to Jesus as the Christ, so the Arabic "He was perhaps the Messiah" rings true.

appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive; accordingly he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.

Jesus of Nazareth was not the only charismatic leader put to death under Pilate. Several years later Pilate condemned a Samaritan "messiah" to death:

But the nation of the Samaritans did not escape without tumults. The man who excited them to it, was one who thought lying a thing of little consequence, and who contrived everything so, that the multitude might be pleased; so he bade them get together upon mount Gerizim, which is by them looked upon as the most holy of all mountains, and assured them that, when they were come thither, he would shew them those sacred vessels which were laid under that place, because Moses put them there. So they came thither armed, and thought the discourse of the man probable; and as they abode at a certain village, which was called Tirathaba, they got the rest together to them, and desired to go up the mountain in a great multitude together. But Pilate prevented their going up, by seizing upon the roads with a great band of horsemen and footmen, who fell upon those that were gotten together in the village; and when they came to an action, some of them they slew, and others of them they put to flight, and took a great many alive, the principal of whom, and also the most potent of those that fled away, Pilate ordered to be slain.¹

This action, the culmination of a ten-year reign of cruelty, proved Pilate's undoing.

Josephus records that the Samaritans complained to Vitellius, the governor of Syria, who ordered Pilate to Rome to answer for his deed.

Sometime in the mid-forties another procurator, Cuspius Fadus, was forced to deal with a certain Theudas:

Now it came to pass that while Fadus was procurator of Judea, that a certain magician whose name was Theudas, persuaded a great part of the people to take their effects with them, and follow him to the river Jordan; for he told them he was a prophet, and that he would, by his own command, divide the river and afford them an easy passage over

¹Josephus *Antiquities* 18.4.1.

it; and many were deluded by his words. However, Fadus did not permit them to make any advantage of his wild attempt, but sent a troop of horsemen out against them; who falling upon them unexpectedly, slew many of them, and took many of them alive. They also took Theudas alive, and cut off his head, and carried it to Jerusalem.¹

The fate of these messianic figures sheds light on Mark's so-called "messianic secret," a sort of anti-advertising campaign on Jesus' part.² Anyone making messianic claims was setting himself up as a target of Roman wrath, for the Romans knew that the Jews were looking for someone to lead them in revolt against Rome. So the Romans burned, crucified, or beheaded messianic aspirants along with their followers. According to Josephus, John the Baptist was imprisoned on the mere suspicion that he might eventually lead a rebellion.³ But I do not think self-preservation was the main reason Jesus did not want people proclaiming that He was the Messiah. He knew that their well-intentioned efforts might have aroused an ill-

¹*Ibid.*, 20.5.1. Theudas was proposing to imitate the miracle of Moses (Exod 14:16) and Elijah (2 Kgs 2:8). When the Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign, something like this was what they had in mind. Notice that all the messianic aspirants after Jesus offered to display signs and wonders. Could it be that Jesus set the standard with His miracles?

²Mark 1:25, 34, 43-45, 3:12, 5:43, 7:36, 8:30, 9:9, etc., but contrast 5:19, to a non-Jew. No doubt one factor in the "messianic secret" was Jesus' need for privacy. Mark 1:43-45 and 9:30-31 suggest that Jesus demanded secrecy to avoid being mobbed, and to protect His time alone with His disciples. As any successful modern exorcist or faith healer knows, unless some limitations are imposed on the seemingly endless supply of desperate clientele, there will be no time to eat or sleep. So Jesus discouraged over-eager followers by inviting them to take up their cross (Mark 8:34, Matt 10:38, 16:24). His audience, familiar with the bloody history of messianic movements, must have suspected that one possible outcome of following Him was their crucifixion.

³*Ibid.*, 18.5.2. The mere accusation of messianic claims was enough to get a man condemned to death (Luke 23:2, Acts 17:7).

conceived mass movement that, besides shortening Jesus' ministry, would have endangered thousands of lives. It is to Jesus' credit that, when He did finally allow Himself to be taken, none of His followers lost their lives. He had to work a miracle to ensure this: the healing of the servant's ear (Luke 22:50-51).

In the fifties the number of messianic "impostors" swelled to epidemic proportions.

Now as for the affairs of the Jews, they grew worse and worse continually; for the country was again filled with robbers and impostors, who deluded the multitude. Yet did Felix catch and put to death many of those impostors every day. . . . And now these impostors and deceivers persuaded the multitude to follow them into the wilderness, and pretended that they would exhibit manifest wonders and signs, that should be performed by the providence of God. And many that were prevailed on by them suffered the punishment of their folly; for Felix brought them back, and then punished them.¹

Josephus has a parallel account in *Wars* that sheds additional light on the motivation of these "wicked men" who

deceived and deluded the people under pretence of divine inspiration, but were for procuring innovations and changes of the government; and these prevailed with the multitude to act like madmen, and went before them into the wilderness, as pretending that God would there shew them the signal of liberty; but Felix thought this procedure was to be the beginning of a revolt; so he sent some horsemen and footmen, both armed, who destroyed a great number of them.

But there was an Egyptian false prophet that did the Jews more mischief than the former; for he was a cheat, and pretended to be a prophet also, and got together thirty thousand men that were deluded by him; these he led round about from the wilderness to the mount which is called the Mount of Olives, and was ready to break into Jerusalem by force from that place; and if he could but once conquer the Roman garrison and the people, he intended to domineer over them by the assistance of those guards of his who were to break into the city with

¹*Ibid.*, 20.8.5-6; there is a parallel account in *Wars* 2.13.4-5.

him; but Felix prevented his attempt, and met him with his Roman soldiers, while all the people assisted him in his attack upon him, insomuch that when it came to a battle, the Egyptian ran away with a few others, while the greatest part of those that were with him were either destroyed or taken alive, but the rest of the multitude were dispersed every one to their own homes, and there concealed themselves.¹

This incident occurred about A.D. 55 and is mentioned briefly in Acts 21:38.

When this same Felix later sat in judgment upon Paul, it is interesting to note that the charge was rabble-rousing, which Paul denied.² Felix's successor, Festus, faced another messianic imposter around A.D. 62:

Festus also sent a force of cavalry and infantry against the dupes of a certain imposter who had promised them salvation and rest from troubles, if they chose to follow him into the wilderness. The force which Festus dispatched destroyed both the deceiver himself and those who followed him.³

Only a few months after this Paul predicted that these "impostors" would "go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived."⁴ Paul seems to have expected the

¹Josephus *Wars* 2.13.4-5. The parallel account in *Antiquities* adds: "He [the Egyptian] said further, that he would shew them from hence, how, at his command, the walls of Jerusalem would fall down; and he promised them that he would procure them an entrance into the city through those walls, when they were fallen down"—i.e., posing as the new Joshua.

²Acts 24:5, 12, 18; cf. 17:7. Felix was evidently well acquainted with Christianity, and, according to Luke, one of his conversations with Paul brought him under temporary conviction (Acts 24:22-26). In A.D. 59/60 Felix was recalled to Rome to answer Jewish accusations of partiality in his handling of such uprisings.

³Josephus *Antiquities* 20.8.10, but for this quotation I am using the superior Loeb translation (20.188).

⁴2 Tim 3:13. "Imposter" and "deceiver" were the terms commonly applied to these false messiahs; one of these terms was applied to Jesus by the Jewish leaders after His death (Matt 27:63). This assumes an early date for the pastorals.

problem to intensify right up to the coming of the ultimate false messiah (2 Thess 2), followed by the Parousia.

Why did most of these pretenders lead their followers into the desert? As part of the eschatological gathering of Israel, God had promised to purge Israel by bringing them into the desert (Ezek 20:34-38). With this encouragement, these pretenders were attempting to reenact the Exodus saga and pose as the new Moses, in fulfillment of Deut 18:15, leading the Jews in revolt against Rome as Moses led them in revolt against Egypt, or as the Maccabees in the desert led the Jews in revolt against the Seleucids. When Jesus warned against going into the desert to find the Messiah (Matt 24:26), He was talking about things that would happen in the near future. These sad tales bear out the wisdom of His warning. Jesus, too, journeyed into the desert (Matt 4:1).¹ But He went alone.

Around A.D. 69, a Sabbatical year, during the Jewish war with Rome, six thousand people were trapped and slaughtered when the Romans set fire to the outer compartments of the temple. The victims had gathered there at the instigation of a false prophet:

A false prophet was the occasion of these people's destruction, who had made a public proclamation in the city that very day, that God commanded them to get up upon the temple, and that there they should receive miraculous signs of their deliverance. Now, there was then a great number of false prophets suborned by the tyrants to impose upon the people, who denounced [proclaimed] this to them, that they should wait for deliverance from God; and this was in order to keep them

¹On the idea of a pilgrimage into the desert or wilderness, see Exod 5:1, 3, Isa 40:3, Jer 2:2, 31:2, Ezek 20:10, Hos 2:14, 1 Macc 2:29, 2 Macc 5:27, Ps Sol 17:15-17, Matt 11:7, Gal 1:17, Rev 12:6, 14.

from deserting.¹

Not even the destruction of Jerusalem ended the madness. The last incident recorded in Josephus took place in the seventies:

And now did the madness of the Sicarii, like a disease, reach as far as the cities of Cyrene; for one Jonathan, a vile person, and by trade a weaver, came thither, and prevailed with no small number of the poorer sort to give ear to him; he also led them into the desert, upon promising them that he would shew them signs and apparitions; and as for the other Jews at Cyrene, he concealed his knavery from them, and put tricks upon them; but those of the greatest dignity among them informed Catullus, the governor of the Libyan Pentapolis, of his march into the desert, and of the preparations he had made for it. So he sent out after him both horsemen and footmen, and easily overcame them, because they were unarmed men: of these, many were slain in the fight, but some were taken alive, and brought to Catullus.²

Jonathan himself escaped, but was eventually captured and brought to Rome, tortured, then burned alive. There were further rebellions, culminating in that of Bar Kokhba, "Son of the Star," in A.D. 132-5. His chief supporter, Rabbi Akiba, whose status in Jewish tradition is on a par with Moses and Maimonides, was martyred for his participation in the revolt.

As far as I know, no one seems to have noticed that these messianic uprisings tend to occur in Sabbatical years.³ Jewish peasants who made a livelihood raising crops would have had more free time on their hands in a Sabbatical year, which

¹Josephus *Wars* 6.5.2. These prophets would have appealed to OT promises that Jerusalem would be delivered from its eschatological siege in Isa 29:1-8, 31:4-9, 17:12-14, Ezek 38:18-23, Joel 3:11-17, Zech 12:1-9, 14:1-9.

²*Ibid.*, 7.11.1-3.

³Sabbatical years in this period fell in A.D. 6, 13, 20, 27, 34, 41, 48, 55, 62, 69, 76; see chapter 5 for a full discussion.

explains how these messianic figures could have so easily gotten large crowds of people to follow them into the desert. The reigns of Herod the Great and Vespasian, both of whom had messianic aspirations, also began in Sabbatical years. So did the revolt of Bar Kokhba. And so did the public ministry of Jesus.

The book of Acts mentions two other impostors who, like Theudas above, were magicians: Elymas Bar-Jesus (Acts 13:6-12), and Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-24).¹ According to Justin Martyr, Eusebius, and other early Christian literature, Simon Magus enjoyed quite a sensational career as a magician and eventually ended up in Rome.² Simon Magus was succeeded by Menander, another Samaritan, who pretended to be

the Savior, once sent from the invisible worlds for the salvation of men; teaching also, that no one could overcome even the very angels that formed the heavens in any other way, than by being first initiated into the magic discipline imparted by him, and by the baptism conferred by him for this purpose. Of which, those who were deemed worthy would obtain perpetual immortality in this very life, being no more subject to death, but continuing here the same, would be exempt from old age, and be in fact immortal. . . . [He] deceived many by his magic arts. He persuaded those that followed him that they should never die. And there are now some of his followers that make a

¹See Robert P. Casey, "Simon Magus," and Arthur Darby Nock, "Paul and the Magus," quoted in F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, *The Beginnings of Christianity, Part I, The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1966), 5:151-187.

²Eusebius *Hist.*, 2:13-15. Simon features prominently in the *Acts of Peter*, written c. A.D. 180-190 and the Clementine literature. If the tradition is reliable, Simon Magus and Simon Peter had later confrontations in Rome. Joseph B. Mayor, *The Epistle of Saint Jude and the Second Epistle of Saint Peter* (Macmillan, 1907; repr. Baker, 1965), clxxvii-clxxx, suggests that Simon is the source of the heretical teachings which are attacked in Jude.

profession of the same thing.¹

Other prophets and miracle workers could be listed.² The epidemic of impostors did not finally subside until after the Bar Kokhba rebellion was crushed by the Romans in A.D. 135, and the Jews were finally banished from Jerusalem.

In short, the first century saw the rise and fall of scores of ambitious men who aspired to be the Messiah, men whose names today are merely obscure footnotes to history. But there was One who resisted the title, who disdained the way of the sword and chose the way of the cross.³ Like the rest, He suffered a violent death at the hands of the Romans. Unlike the rest, that was not the end of the matter. Jesus had some unfinished business, for He had promised to return, very soon, in glory on the clouds of heaven.

¹Eusebius *Hist.*, 3:26. Cf. the claims of Jesus in John 8:51, 11:25-6.

²See David R. Cartlidge and David L. Dungan, *Documents for the Study of the Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 151-165. Essene prophets are mentioned approvingly by Josephus in *Antiquities* 15.10.5 and 17.12.3; *Wars* 2.8.12 implies that the Essenes were known for their prophetic ability. Jesus never denied that others could work miracles, and recognized other exorcists (Matt 12:27/Luke 11:19, Matt 7:22, Mark 9:38-40/Luke 9:49-50) besides His own followers (Matt 10:8, Mark 3:15, 16:17). But note Jesus' warning against miracle-working false prophets in Matt 7:15-23. There is a curious story of a magician by the name of Aod in Pseudo-Philo 34 (first century A.D.), who allegedly seduced Israel in the time of the Judges by causing the sun to rise at night—something the Antichrist will do according to Asc Isa 4:5.

³Jesus told his followers to take up their cross (Matt 10:38, 16:24), not their sword (Luke 22:49-52).

CHAPTER THREE

IMMINENCY STATEMENTS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Imminency Statements on the Lips of Jesus

There are about six statements on the lips of Jesus which would probably have been interpreted by His first century Jewish audience as implying an imminent Parousia.

Matt 10:23

The first of Jesus' three promises occurs just after Jesus sent His disciples on a mission confined to the borders of Israel: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matt 10:5-6). Even before they had a chance to complete this limited mission, Jesus promised, "I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes" (Matt 10:23).¹

¹Why does Jesus need to come when He is already here? Because "the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them" (Matt 9:15).

G. C. Berkouwer (*The Return of Christ* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972], 89) dismisses this text with a single sentence: "Whereas many understand Matthew 10:23 as a direct reference to time, Christ is actually talking about the hate and persecution to be faced by believers." But rewriting the text ("the Jews shall not stop persecuting you until the Son of Man comes") does not solve the problem. G. E. Ladd also dismisses Matt 10:23 with the assertion that it "says no more than that the mission of Jesus' disciples to Israel will last until the coming of the Son of Man" (*A*

When Jesus talked about the coming of the Son of Man, what would that have meant to His audience? And what concepts did this phrase evoke in the minds of Matthew's readers? Scholars are generally agreed that this is an allusion to Dan 7:13-14:

In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a *son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven*. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and *his kingdom* is one that will never be destroyed.

Dan 7 provides the source of both Jesus' self-title, the Son of Man, and His kingdom terminology. The concept of a kingdom that belongs to God is mentioned only in passing in the OT¹ outside of Daniel, where it is developed at length.² Jesus never defined the kingdom He proclaimed because it was not necessary; when He came preaching, "The time has come; the kingdom of God is near" (Mark 1:15), His audience would have understood the allusion to Dan 7:22, "the time had come for the saints to receive the kingdom." *The kingdom Jesus proclaimed was the kingdom of Dan 7, informed by the eschatology of Isaiah.*³ When He promised His interrogators

Theology of the New Testament [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1974], 200). This is closer to the mark; but Jesus is speaking of a very limited mission; and I find it difficult to reduce Jesus' "I will come before you are able to cover all the cities of Israel" to Ladd's "You'll always have a ministry to the Jews until I come."

¹ 1 Chr 17:14, 28:5, 29:11, 2 Chr 13:8, Ps 45:6, 103:19, 145:10-13, Isa 9:6-7, Obad 1:21.

² Dan 2:44, 4:3, 34, 6:26, 7:13-27.

³ This kingdom is described in florid detail in Sib Or 3:767-795, written around 150 B.C., one of the sources of Rev 21.

that they would see the Son of Man return with the clouds of heaven, or when He said "You shall not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes," His listeners would have understood Him to refer to the great event described in Dan 7:13. Jesus' electrifying announcement in Matt 10:23 must be understood against the first-century background of eager expectation for the messianic kingdom of Daniel, whose prophecies even Roman emperors took seriously.

Dan 7 is a prophecy of the last times. If Jesus applied the prophecy to Himself, it can only mean that He believed He was living in the last times.¹ This has far-reaching implications. NT eschatology is not, as sometimes claimed, a jumble of contradictory strands of tradition. The NT data can be adequately accounted for by the simple thesis that Jesus taught that *the prophecies of Dan 7, 9, and 11-12 were about to be fulfilled*,² and by later apostolic reaction to the fact that this was not happening as expected. Moreover, this thesis is a conclusion, not a presupposition, for I did not at first believe this.

In Dan 7:13 the Son of Man comes in the clouds to the Ancient of Days. If

¹So Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The End of the Ages Has Come: An Early Interpretation of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 137. Cf. 90: "The early church believed Jesus to be the Messiah. This is crucial. The coming of the Messiah was bound up with the last things, and to claim that the Messiah had come was to claim that the prophetic promises of the Tanach [OT] had begun to meet their fulfillment. It entailed that the messianic age or the age to come was near and thus that the terrors or wonders of eschatological expectation must be present or very near to hand. The implication is unavoidable."

²But not Dan 8, which is largely ignored in the NT and intertestamental literature. Jesus also expected the fulfillment of the eschatological scenario of Isaiah and the rest of the prophets.

Jesus based His teaching on Dan 7, then why does the NT speak of the Son of Man coming on the clouds *to earth*?¹ One possibility is that Jesus understood Dan 7:13 as a coronation (as in Ps 110); a temporary trip to heaven to receive the kingdom (as in Luke 19:12), which kingdom is then immediately given to the saints. Or perhaps Jesus simply borrowed the terminology of the passage without regard to its original context. We are not concerned about what Dan 7:13-14 "really means," only how it was interpreted in the first century.

There is one first-century interpretation of Dan 7, however, that is particularly intriguing. Some sources interpreted Dan 7 as depicting an *earthly* judgment.² This was no doubt suggested by Dan 7:22, "As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them, until the Ancient of Days *came* [to where the saints were] and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints." This would explain why portable thrones had to be put in place (Dan 7:9); like a travelling circuit judge or a conquering king, God visits His realm in judgment, and sets up His throne there.³ The first eleven chapters of Ezekiel describe another judgment visit by God to earth

¹Matt 24:30/Mark 13:26, Matt 26:64/Mark 14:62, Acts 1:11, 1 Thes 4:17, Rev 1:7.

²This is the interpretation of 1 Enoch 90:20, 25:3 (pre-Christian), and perhaps also Sib Or 2:241-2, 4 Ezr 6:20 (post-Christian, ca. A.D. 100). See Maurice Casey, *Son of Man: The Interpretation and Influence of Daniel 7* (London: S.P.C.K., 1979). Cf. the idea in Ap Mos 22 (OTP 2:281) that when God came into Eden to judge Adam, He was seated on a chariot of cherubim and placed His throne near the tree of life. A NT parallel is found in Matt 25:31.

³Cf. Dan 11:45, Jer 1:15, 43:10, 49:38. Biblical allusions to this practice are found only in passages dating from around the time of the exile, which supports an early date for Daniel. Notice the terminology of "setting thrones" in the last two passages which matches Dan 7:9.

on His wheeled throne, and a third instance of this is found in Jer 49:38. This would make Dan 7 congruous with all the other OT Parousia passages, in which God comes to earth (see Appendix C). In the OT, eschatological judgment always takes place on earth.¹ These are some possible reasons why some first-century interpreters saw an earthly judgment in Dan 7; and this might explain why the NT portrays the Son of Man as coming on the clouds to earth.

Matt 10:17-23 contains what might be called a proto-apocalypse of events leading up to the end, which appears to be based on Mark 13. A comparison of Matthew and Mark provides us with a tantalizing clue to Matthew's thinking:²

¹Ps 50:1-6, 96:13, 98:9, Ezek 21:30, Joel 3:2, Mic 4:2-3, Mal 3:1-5. It is appropriate that the judgment take place on earth, because that is where the kingdom is—even in Daniel (2:35, 7:27).

²I accept the traditional consensus of NT scholars that Mark was the first gospel written and served as one of the sources for Matthew and Luke; see Appendix A. Probably the best book to date on the synoptic problem from a conservative viewpoint is Robert H. Stein, *The Synoptic Problem: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987).

You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. *And the gospel must first be preached to all nations [ethne].* Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. (Mark 13:9-13)

Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them *and to the gentiles [ethne].* But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes. (Matt 10:17-23)

The parallels with Mark 13 make it clear that the events of Matt 10 are those leading up to the end of the age, and that the coming of the Son of Man is not any lesser event than the promised kingdom of glory of Dan 7. There can be no question about the meaning of this terminology in the Synoptics: it refers to the Parousia.¹ Curiously, Matthew follows Mark 13:9-13 very closely here—even more closely than in Matt 24:9-14, which should be the parallel passage. But there is one revealing alteration, italicized above. Matthew may have seen a potential conflict between

¹All references to the future coming of the Son of Man in the NT refer to the Parousia: Matt 10:23, 16:27/Mark 8:38, Matt 16:28/Mark 9:1, Matt 24:27/Luke 17:24, Matt 24:30/Mark 13:26/Luke 21:27, Matt 24:37, 24:39, 24:44/Luke 12:40, Matt 25:31, 26:64/Mark 14:62, Luke 9:26, 18:8. There are no exceptions. Mark 10:45/Matt 20:28 and Luke 19:10, which speak of a more mundane coming, are in the past tense.

Jesus' promise to come before the apostles had canvassed the cities of Israel and the statement that the gospel would be preached to the whole world before the end.

Therefore, Matthew downplays the gentile mission by rewording "the gospel must first be preached to all nations" (Mark 13:10) to a vague "witness . . . to the gentiles."

There is one more issue in regard to Matt 10:23 that must be addressed. It is standard fare among liberal scholars to claim that the early church invented many of the sayings of Jesus in the Gospels. The infamous "Jesus Seminar" group claims only one out of six sayings is indisputably genuine. Most scholars regard this as extreme, but some still question the authenticity of Jesus' promises to come back in His generation, or the authenticity of the Son of Man sayings, claiming they are a creation of the early church.

In the case of the Son of Man sayings, this is highly unlikely. The early church called Jesus "Christ," something He rarely called Himself. Jesus called himself "The Son of Man," something the early church rarely called Him. In other words, if the early church invented this terminology, we would expect to find it used often outside the Synoptics. But it is not. This implies that "Son of Man" terminology is a fossil, not an implant. The startling reason why it fell out of use in the early church is discussed below.

In the case of Matt 10:23, even moderate scholars, finding no other way to escape the implications of the passage, have resorted to the claim that Matt 10 is "composite" or "redactional." The passage may be composite and redactional in the

sense that Matthew has borrowed material from Mark 13, but it is not redactional in the sense that Matthew fabricated the event, for Matt 10:23 is the one passage where such an argument clearly will not work. Scholars who reject the possibility of predictive prophecy date Matthew after A.D. 70; but by then it would have been evident that the prophecy had proved false. Why would Matthew invent a false prophecy? Was Matthew so inept that he would make Jesus appear to be predicting something that never happened? The liberal position self-destructs.

On the contrary, this saying is evidence for an early date for Matthew, while the Jewish mission was still in progress. I suspect that this is something Matthew actually heard Jesus say, whether in a missionary context or an eschatological context. The other Synoptics omit it because in Mark 6 and Luke 9 the initial missionary journey was soon over. In Matthew, however, this mission is open-ended; the disciples never "come back." Because of this, Jesus' commission in Matt 10 is relevant to the entire career of the disciples, so Matthew imports into his narrative the warnings about later persecution from Mark 13. Perhaps Matthew is opposing a movement within an increasingly gentile Christianity to completely abandon the Jewish mission. At any rate, Matthew believed the Jewish mission would soon be cut short by the tribulation and Parousia, so for him the saying of Jesus in Matt 10:23 posed no problem.

Unfortunately, one cannot defend the authenticity of the "this generation" sayings discussed below in this same way, for they would not have proved false by the time the Gospels were written. But there are other arguments that tend to

authenticate those statements which also apply to Matt 10:23. Jesus said He did not know the exact time of the Parousia (Mark 13:32/Matt 24:36). All parties agree that this saying is genuine, because no Christian would have invented a statement that ascribes ignorance to the Lord. But then it is unlikely that any Christian would have invented any sort of timesetting statements which might appear to contradict Jesus' disclaimer. And it is also unlikely that some obscure and anonymous Christian editor, or even Matthew, was more bold and original and startling than Jesus. If the forerunner of Jesus, John the Baptist, and the successors of Jesus, the apostles, taught an imminent Parousia, then it is very likely that Jesus did too.¹

Matt 16:28

Jesus' second promise is found in Matt 16:27-28:

For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

This saying is followed in all three Synoptic Gospels by the story of the transfiguration. In the light of this placement of the material and in light of 2 Pet 1:16-18, it is probable that the evangelists regarded the transfiguration as a foretaste of the coming in glory. But this inference should not be pressed too far. As F. F.

¹So Dale C. Allison, "A Plea for Thoroughgoing Eschatology," *JBL* 113/4 (1994): 651-668; Idem, "The Eschatological Jesus," *BR*, Oct. 1976, 34-41, 54-55. The use of the word "imminent" or "imminence" in this study is unrelated to the pre-tribulational belief that Christians are taken out of the world via secret rapture prior to the tribulation. By "imminent" I simply mean "very soon," not that no other event will come first.

Bruce observed, one would not normally use such language to refer to something that is to take place in a week's time.¹ Jesus' words in Matthew are a clear allusion to the Second Coming. It goes without saying that the coming of the Son of Man in vs. 28 means the same thing as the coming of the Son of Man in vs. 27.

Attempts to solve this problem often appeal to the parallel in Mark 9:1 because, at first glance, it seems easier to apply Mark's phraseology ("the kingdom of God come with power") to something other than the Parousia, such as the resurrection or Pentecost.² This is usually accomplished by the trick of ignoring the preceding verse (8:38) which, though part of a continuous narrative, has been unfortunately separated by a chapter break. But Mark's statement is not so easily disposed of. Let us accept for the sake of argument that Mark's version is indeed the earliest (see Appendix A)—the most likely Gospel to retain Jesus' entire speech "in situ," as He originally gave it:

"If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels." And he said to them, "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God *come with power*." After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them *up a high mountain*, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them.³

¹F. F. Bruce, *The Hard Sayings of Jesus* (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1983), 155.

²So F. F. Bruce, (*Ibid.*), also William Barclay, who maintains Matthew mistakenly edited Mark's statement to make it predict the Second Coming in his lifetime (*The Gospel of Matthew*, rev. ed. [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975], 382).

³Mark 8:38-9:2, emphasis supplied. All emphasis in quotations in this paper is supplied unless otherwise noted.

"Coming with power" is an unambiguous allusion to the Parousia; the relevant parallel is "They will see the Son of Man *coming* on the clouds of the sky, *with power*" which occurs in the Olivet discourse in all three Synoptics.¹ The OT source of this expression is Isa 40:10:

A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken." . . . You who bring good tidings to Zion, *go up on a high mountain*. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!" See, the Sovereign Lord *comes with power*, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. (Isa 40:3-10)

This passage is of fundamental importance for understanding NT eschatology; virtually every phrase of it is reflected in the NT, and it seems John the Baptist took it as his charter.² Because the transfiguration accounts in Matthew and Luke obscure

¹The partial parallels at Rom 1:4 and 1 Cor 15:43 are irrelevant, as they mention "power" but no "coming." The only other passage that mentions a coming with power is 2 Pet 1:16. Joseph B. Mayor, 195, maintains that the word *parousia* in this verse is a reference to the Second Coming, not the first, and the transfiguration is portrayed here as a foretaste of that event. At any rate, 2 Pet 1:16 naturally borrows from the Petrine tradition, as found in Mark 9:1, in describing the transfiguration; hence the use of the "coming with power" terminology.

²(1) the "coming with power" is applied to the Parousia in Matt 24:30/Mark 13:26/Luke 21:27, and Mark 9:1. (2) vss. 3-5 form the basis of the message of John the Baptist and are cited in all four gospels (Matt 3:3, Mark 1:3, Luke 3:4, John 1:23). (3) vs. 5 is probably the source of Rev 1:7, "every eye will see him" (with Isa 18:3, 52:8-10). (4) vss. 6-8 (ellipses) is quoted in 1 Pet 1:24-5. (5) vs. 8 may influence Matt 24:35/Mark 13:31. (6) the "good tidings" of vs. 9 (repeated in Isa 41:27, 52:7), resurfaces in the NT as the "gospel." (7) vs. 10b is reflected in Rev 22:12. Thus 5, 10a, and 10b, at least, are applied to the Parousia in the NT. This passage is cited at Qumran in 1QS 8:12-14: "And when these things come to pass for

Mark's allusion to Isa 40, it usually escapes notice that Isa 40:9, "Go up on a high mountain," is reflected in the trip up the "high mountain" of the transfiguration. What does this mean? Did John the Baptist and Jesus understand Isa 40:3-10 as a programmatic prophecy leading up to the Parousia? Is Jesus predicting that the events proclaimed by John the Baptist are about to take place? How does the transfiguration relate to the Eschaton? Can this prophecy shed any light on Jesus' instructions to the disciples to meet Him on a mountain in Galilee after the resurrection?¹ Clearly, there are still gaps in our understanding of Jesus' understanding of the Eschaton.

Jesus' use of a prophecy that mentions a trip up a high mountain confirms that there is a legitimate connection between His prediction and the transfiguration; the connection is not an after-the-fact invention of the evangelists. Still, Jesus' words imply something more than what happened on the mountain. As has already been pointed out, all references to the future coming of the Son of Man in the NT refer to the Parousia; and this is doubly certain in this case because of the verses which

the Community in Israel at these appointed times, they shall be separated from the midst of the habitation of perverse men to go into the desert to prepare the way of Him as it is written, 'In the wilderness prepare the way of . . . Make straight in the desert a highway for our God'" (translated by A. DePont-Sommer, *The Essene Writings*, 92).

¹Mark 14:28, 16:7/Matt 28:7, 28:10, 16; and John 21 indicate that Jesus met His disciples in Galilee after the resurrection. Why, then, does Luke alter this tradition by saying that Jesus told the disciples not to leave Jerusalem (Luke 24:49, Acts 1:4)? This is an unsolved mystery. And what is the connection between this mount of rendezvous (Matt 28:16) with other mountains mentioned in the Gospels: the mount of temptation (Matt 4:8), the mount of commission (Mark 3:13/Luke 6:12), the mount of blessing (Matt 5:1, 8:1), the mount of miracles (Matt 15:29, John 6:3), the mount of prayer (Matt 14:23/Mark 6:46/John 6:15), and the mount of transfiguration (Matt 17:1/Mark 9:2/Luke 9:28)?

immediately precede Matt 16:28/Mark 9:1.

Those who claim that Jesus' words in Matt 16:28/Mark 9:1 were wholly fulfilled at the transfiguration do not seem to fully realize the implications of their position. This interpretation, it seems to me, places us on a trajectory which ends in the denial of a literal Parousia, for if such a clear prophecy of the Second Coming can be fulfilled by a local earthly event, then perhaps this is true of all such prophecies, and the "coming on the clouds" is merely a figure of speech.

Let us examine this possibility for a moment. Is the astronomical language of Matt 24 mere metaphor? N. T. Wright, in his book *Who Was Jesus?*,¹ argues that biblical sayings about sun, moon, and stars being darkened are simply a metaphorical way of talking about earth-shattering events; they are not meant to be taken any more literally than our expression "earth-shattering."

When Jewish writers spoke of the sun and moon being darkened; when they spoke of angels gathering people from the four winds of heaven; when, in particular, they spoke of a Son of Man who would come on the clouds of heaven—in each of these cases they were using language in this metaphorical way. It is flagrantly absurd to think that Jesus, in saying that sort of thing, envisaged himself or anyone else literally flying around in mid-air on an actual cloud.

This is an admirable attempt to cut the Gordian knot and dispose at once of the whole problem of the Parousia. Wright's position might be supported from many of the passages listed in Appendix C, such as Isa 19:1. But whatever this language meant in the OT, the NT authors clearly understand the coming in glory as a literal, future event. In Acts 1:9-11 Luke records that Jesus rose and disappeared into a literal

¹N. T. Wright, 55.

cloud, and two angelic figures predict that He would return in just the same way. The darkening of the sun and moon are also literal descriptions of historical events, as shown below; so there is no reason to consider this language metaphorical. Finally, if this is metaphorical language, why does it gradually diminish in the later NT writings, as the time passes with no Parousia (see discussion below). Why not, instead, elaborate and re-emphasize the metaphor?

The evidence does not support the thesis that the authors of the NT understood the Parousia as mere metaphor.

Matt 24:34

The third and best-known of the promises of Jesus to return in His generation is found in Matt 24:34-36:

I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

This statement comes after the description of the Parousia, so Jesus seems to be saying that "*all* these things" mentioned in the narrative up to that point—including the Second Coming—would occur in the lifetime of some of Jesus' listeners.¹

First, "My words will never pass away" does not necessarily mean "My words will never fail of timely fulfillment." The words "pass away" must have their normal meaning, as in the previous verse. This may mean no more than that Jesus' prophecy

¹Among Seventh-day Adventists this interpretation was first(?) suggested by Don F. Neufeld, 6. Neufeld maintained that "this generation" was to be interpreted literally and that the prophecy was conditional.

will remain extant to the end; it will not be lost or suppressed, which has proved to be the case. Jesus is claiming that His words are equal to OT Scripture, since earlier He had said, "It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law."¹

This does not, of course, solve the problem of this prophecy. None of the suggested solutions to the problem posed in Matt 24 have proven satisfactory. One proposed solution is to deny the ordinary meaning of *genea*, "generation" in favor of the unusual meaning "race." But why would Jesus say, in this context, "The Jews will not pass away until all these things have happened"? Imagine a contemporary prophet who predicts the imminent destruction of Washington, D.C., by a foreign power. Suppose this prophet were to announce, "God has shown me that Americans will still be living on earth when Washington is destroyed." This would be a good way to make the point that the event foretold was not something to be concerned about any time soon. But in the NT, with the single exception of Luke 16:8, *genea* has a temporal rather than a racial connotation.

A similar solution would give this phrase a "theological" meaning: not those now living, but unbelievers of all time, so that Jesus is saying, "Unbelievers will not pass away before I come." I am wary of claims that certain NT expressions—"near," "this generation," "last days"—have special "theological" meanings that bear little connection with the literal meaning. Does the fact that Jesus often speaks of "this

¹Matt 5:18/Luke 16:17. See also Gen 14:22, Deut 4:26, 30:19, 31:28, Ps 146:6, Jer 33:25.

generation" in a derogatory way¹ imply that it means "all bad people everywhere"?

Let us apply the contemporary prophet test: "God has shown me that evil people will still be living on earth when Washington is destroyed." But this is pointless, even laughable. Jesus might as well have said, "Verily I say unto you, trees shall not perish before I come."

We must not confuse connotation with denotation. In the OT, the term "generation" must be preceded by pejorative adjectives such as warped and crooked, stubborn and rebellious, or perverse, in order to convey a negative sense. This indicates that the word by itself is basically neutral in meaning, as in Judg 2:10, "After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel"; or Ps 24:6, "Such is the generation of those who seek him." The same thing is true in the NT, where the current generation is described as perverse, sinful, adulterous, crooked, depraved, wicked, corrupt, and unbelieving. These adjectives are necessary because the word "generation" by itself is neutral, as in Luke 1:50, "His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation"; or Acts 13:36, "For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep." The fact that the NT writers (and Josephus as well!) have nothing good to say about their own generation, just as the OT writers had nothing good to say about the generation of the flood, the

¹As did Josephus, but he was clearly referring to his own generation: "Neither did any other city ever suffer such miseries, nor did any age ever breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness than this was, from the beginning of the world (*Wars* 5.10.5).

wilderness, or the exile, does not mean that "this generation" without a modifier is a pejorative term for the wicked in general. Whatever connotations *genea* may have acquired, its denotation is a contemporary group living at a certain time in history, except when it is followed by the genitive.¹

A few moments with a concordance will provide convincing evidence that whenever the phrase "this generation" occurs in the NT, the obvious meaning is the generation then living.² In many of these passages Jesus mentions local events that took place in His lifetime, and "this generation" clearly refers to the participants in those events.³ It is significant that Jesus never spoke of "*that* generation" that would be living when He returned—only "this generation." Yet Jesus always spoke of the day of His coming as "that" day or time, never "this" day, since it was still future.⁴ Had the generation also been future, He would have spoken of "that" generation.

"This generation" means the same thing in the NT that it did in the Old: the speaker's contemporaries whom God will punish in their lifetime because of their sin. The phrase occurs twice in the Pentateuch and twice in the prophets. "The Lord then said to Noah, 'Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in *this generation*'" (Gen 7:1); "Not a man of *this evil generation* shall see

¹I.e., the generation *of* something or other; as in Luke 16:8, Ps 14:5, 49:20, 73:15, 112:2, etc.

²Cf. Matt 11:16, 12:39-45, 16:4, 17:17, 23:36, 24:34, Mark 8:12, 38, 9:19, 13:30, Luke 1:50, 7:31, 9:41, 11:29-32, 11:50-51, 17:25, 21:32, Acts 2:40, 13:36, Phil 2:15, Heb 3:10.

³Matt 11:16-19, Mark 8:12, Luke 11:29-32, 17:25.

⁴Matt 7:22, 10:19, 13:30, 24:10, 23, 30, 36, 26:69.

the good land I swore to give your forefathers" (Deut 1:35).¹ Jeremiah's contemporaries who ultimately went into exile are addressed in Jer 2:31, "You of *this generation*, consider the word of the Lord"; and this is followed by condemnation, "The Lord has rejected and abandoned *this generation* that is under his wrath" (Jer 7:29). In each case, the phrase refers to the prophet's contemporaries, *and the implied threat materialized in their lifetime*. The Olivet discourse follows this prophetic tradition which, in times of severe apostasy, pronounced doom on "this generation."

There is a fifth case in Ps 95:10, LXX. The Hebrew reads, "For forty years I was angry with that generation," while the LXX reads "*this generation*." Again, the members of "this generation" of Ps 95:10 (LXX) met their doom (death in the wilderness) in their lifetime.² Finally, the phrase is used in a conventional way in the pseudepigrapha.³ In short, the obvious meaning of "this generation" is the correct one.

"This generation" in Matthew is best understood in the light of Matt 1:17,

¹The OT makes a point that this generation died: Deut 2:14, Num 32:13, Ps 95:10/Heb 3:10; see also Exod 1:6, Judg 2:10.

²Ps 95:10 (Matt) should be compared with the three other OT texts which speak of "that generation." Exod 1:6 says that Joseph's generation died; Deut 2:14 says that the wilderness generation died; and Judg 2:10 says that Joshua's generation died. Obviously, "that generation," like "this generation," is a group of contemporaries that live and die within a limited timespan.

³In Pseudo-Philo 40:4 "this generation" is associated with "the wise men of my people." 1 Enoch claims that his Parousia prophecy (the one quoted by Jude) is "not for this generation but for the distant one that is coming" (1:2, cf. 92:1)—exactly the opposite of what Jesus said. 2 Enoch uses this terminology in speculation about a latter-day "Melchizedek" to be born in the "last generation" (2 Enoch 71:34) which is termed "this generation" in 71:29, 37; cf. 72:6.

"Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ."¹ And while the OT speaks of bearing witness of God's redemptive acts to future generations, the NT says nothing about a future generation.² All of this evidence points in the same direction. We must not attempt to solve theological problems by creative redefinition of well-defined NT terms.

Another attempt to solve the problem of Matt 24 focuses on the change of pronouns. In His description of the great persecution leading up to the end (24:4-28), Jesus uses the second person—saying all these things would happen to "you"; i.e., the disciples to whom He was speaking. But when Jesus describes the Second Coming itself (24:29-31) He switches to the third person: "*They* will see the Son of Man coming . . ." It is tempting to see here an indication that Jesus knew the disciples themselves would not live to see the Second Coming.

However, "they" in Matt 24:30 is dictated by its antecedent, the nations (" . . . all the nations of the earth will mourn. *They* will see . . ."). The subject has changed from the disciples to unbelievers, requiring a change in pronoun. Jesus soon reverts to the second person in Matt 24:42, 44: "Therefore keep watch, because *you* do not know on what day your Lord will come. . . . So *you* also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when *you* do not expect him." If Jesus had intended

¹Whether Matthew's matching fourteens here are artificial or not, clearly one generation involves only a limited period of time. Cf. Col 1:26, Eph 3:5.

²Ps 22:30-31, 48:13, 71:18, 78:4-6, 102:18, 109:13, 145:4, Joel 1:3, Es 9:28. The "all generations" of Luke 1:48 and Eph 3:21 are simply formulaic.

chronological distinctions with His pronouns, it seems likely He would have said, "The Son of Man will come at an hour when *men* do not expect him" in vs. 44. Also, the pronoun changes in this same way in Luke 21:23-24 but at a different place in the chronological narrative, back in the description of the destruction of Jerusalem (21:21).

Although it does not work well in Matthew or Luke, this theory is more plausible in Mark: "At that time *men* will see the Son of Man coming in clouds" (13:26). However, "men" here is not a neutral term; in the preceding chapters it is a pejorative term with the connotation of "unbelievers."¹ So Mark 13:26, like Matt 24:30, emphasizes the shock that will overtake the wicked. Also, Mark 13:36 allows for the possibility of the Parousia happening in the lifetimes of the disciples: "If he comes suddenly, do not let him find *you* sleeping." Furthermore, the fact that Jesus shortly thereafter told the Jewish leaders "*You will see* the Son of Man . . . coming on the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:62) seems to contradict this theory (see discussion below). I find it difficult to see any clear chronological significance in the way Jesus alternates between the second and third persons in this and other discourses.² At any

¹Cf. Mark 7:7, 8, 8:33, 9:31, 11:30, 32, 12:14, 40, 13:13.

²The changes of person in Mark 13 are somewhat haphazard: Mark 13:5-14 is second person, 15-20 is third, 20-23 is second, 24-27 is third, 28-37 is second again. Notice a similar pattern in Luke 12 where Jesus is discussing a similar subject: Luke 12:32-35 is second person, 36-39 is third person, and 40 is second again, but this is dictated by the needs of the subject and has no chronological significance. The discourses of Jesus sometimes exhibit random changes of person. For example, the beatitudes are in the third person ("Blessed are they") up through Matt 5:10, then Jesus inexplicably switches to the second ("Blessed are you") in vs. 11. In Matt 23 "you" is Jesus' sympathetic audience and "they" are the Pharisees, up until vs. 13;

rate, if this was Jesus' intent, the disciples seem to have missed it, judging by their statements in the rest of the NT.

A more promising line of defense is based on Matt 24:33, "Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it [the Second Coming] is near, right at the door." It seems obvious that "all these things" in this sentence cannot include the Second Coming, but only the signs leading up to it. The exact same phrase, then, should mean the same thing in vs. 34: "This generation shall not pass away until *all these things* [the signs leading up to the end] are fulfilled." If so, then Jesus did not necessarily promise a first century return; He only promised that events would progress up to the point where the kingdom was "right at the door" (vs. 33). Jesus was simply answering the first of the two questions the disciples had asked in Matt 24:3, "When will *these things* [the destruction of Jerusalem] be?"¹

One weakness of this defense is that it does not work well for the parallel passages in Mark 13:29-30 and Luke 21:31-32, which use the preliminary phrase "these things" for the events leading up to the Parousia, and "*all these things*" to include the Parousia itself.² However, since I have already argued that the "coming of the Son of Man" must mean the same thing in Matt 16:28 as in 16:27, in the

after which Jesus addresses the Pharisees directly in the second person. In Matt 12:31-37 Jesus alternates randomly between second and third person.

¹Among others, this the solution of George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 321.

²I suggest that the terminology "these things"/"all these things" comes from Dan 12:6-7.

interest of consistency I will ignore Mark and Luke for now and allow the strength of the same argument here regarding the phrase "all these things" in Matt 24:33, 34.

A second weakness is that the worldwide preaching of the gospel (vs. 14) would still have to be included in "all these things" to occur in Jesus' generation, thus depriving us of one potential rationale for the delay.

A third weakness is Jesus' statement about standing firm to the end. "The end" in the Olivet discourse (and everywhere in Matthew) means the end of the age.¹ Jesus assumes that His audience—"this generation"—would experience that event: "All men will hate *you* because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved."² It was probably this statement that worried the Thessalonian believers (1 Thess 4:13).

A fourth, probably fatal, weakness of this defense is the absurdity of an at-the-door stage that lasts for 2,000 years, for Matt 24:29 says that the astronomical signs and Second Coming will occur "*immediately after* the distress of those days"—i.e., immediately after the unprecedented tribulation associated with the abomination of desolation (24:15-22).³ "Those days" of vs. 29 clearly refers back to the same time

¹Notice the instances just above and below v. 13: "the end is not yet" (vs. 6), and "then the end will come" (vs. 14). See also Matt 10:22, 13:39, 40, 49, 24:3, 6, 14, 20, 1 Cor 1:8, 15:24, Heb 3:14, 6:8, 11, 9:26, 1 Pet 4:7. Only in Revelation does being faithful "to the end" (2:26) mean "until death" (2:10).

²Mark 24:13/Matt 24:13. Cf. Dan 12:12, "Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days;" 4 Ezra 6:25, "It shall be that whoever remains after all that I have foretold to you shall be saved and shall see my salvation and the end of the world."

³The parallel in Mark 13:24, though it lacks the word "immediately," has the same meaning: "*In* [not *after*] those days, following that distress." Timothy J. Geddert, *Watchwords: Mark 13 in Markan Eschatology* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), p. 227-9, argues that Mark 13:24 allows for a gap between

as "those days" of vss. 19 and 22. Any attempt to break Jesus' description of the woes following the abomination of desolation into two time periods, an early one (vss. 15-20), and a later one (vss. 21ff.), is doomed in light of the linkage provided by the phrase "those days," and in light of the parallel to vs. 21 in Mark 13:19, where the unprecedented tribulation is linked unambiguously with the destruction of Jerusalem. And a later, greater tribulation is ruled out by Jesus' statement that this tribulation would never be equalled again.¹ Objections that this is mere hyperbole are beside the point; this tribulation is the one following the standing up of Michael (Dan 12:1) and leading up to the Parousia, for Jesus is following Dan 12:1-3, where the time of unprecedented tribulation is immediately followed by the resurrection:

At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. *There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then.* But *at that time* your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.

the destruction of Jerusalem and the final events. This might be true if Mark 13:24 had said "*after* those days, following that distress," but Geddert's interpretation is impossible with the text as it stands, particularly in light of the parallel in Matt 24:29.

This passage is sometimes explained by the analogy of a man looking at one end of a chain of distant mountains and seeing only the nearest peak. This analogy does not arise out of Scripture, and it ignores Jesus' "this generation" statements. It seems to me that the "prophetic telescoping" argument, at least as applied to this passage, is a non-falsifiable rationalization to circumvent the plain meaning of "immediately."

¹Matt 24:21/Mark 13:19; cf. Exod 10:14, Ezek 5:9, Dan 12:1, Joel 2:2. Josephus uses this language three times of the destruction of Jerusalem: "Neither did any other city ever suffer such miseries . . . from the beginning of the world" (*Wars* 5.10.5; cf. 6.9.4; *Proem.* 4); and it is unlikely that Josephus was influenced by our Gospels.

Dan 12:1-7 exercised a strong influence on the eschatology of Jesus. Not only is Dan 12:1 the source for the unprecedented tribulation of Mark 13:19/Matt 24:21, but 12:2 is the source for Jesus' description of the resurrection in John 5:28-29; Dan 12:3 is the source for Matt 13:43, "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father"; and Dan 12:7, "When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, *all these things will be completed*," is a source for both Mark 13:4 and Mark 13:30b/Matt 24:34b! This provides yet a fourth reason for rejecting the argument that Jesus' "all these things" need not include the resurrection, for in Jesus' source it clearly does.¹

When Jesus cited Dan 12:1 he made one crucial change. Daniel wrote, "There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until *then*," but Jesus said, ". . . until *now*" (Matt 24:21/Mark 13:19). If Jesus had been thinking of a distant event, Daniel's wording would have been more appropriate. This telltale change suggests expectations of an imminent tribulation, in Jesus' own time.

Another OT passage with a similar scenario (destruction of Jerusalem immediately followed by the end of the age) is Zech 14:

A day of the Lord is coming when your plunder will be divided among you. I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city. Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives

¹Dan 12:13, like 12:2, indicates that the resurrection will occur "at the end of the days"—i.e., the days of persecution that begin when the daily sacrifice is abolished (12:11).

will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him. On that day there will be no light, no cold or frost. It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime—a day known to the Lord. When evening comes, there will be light. On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter. The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name. (Zech 14:1-9)¹

This passage, like Dan 12:1-7 and Isa 40:3-10,² played a crucial role in Jesus' eschatology. Whereas Dan 7 is the source of Jesus' statements about the Son of Man coming in the clouds, vs. 5 of this passage provides the rest of the NT scenario:

"with all his holy angels."³ It is possible that vs. 5 is one source of Jesus' command for His disciples to flee to the mountains when they saw Jerusalem surrounded;⁴ vss.

¹This prophecy is rather remarkable in that it fits in with recent geological discoveries that the ancients had no knowledge of. On July 11, 1927, there was an earthquake which shook Palestine from the Sea of Galilee to the border of Egypt and, after the tremors, geologists discovered a fault in Olivet, running from east to west. Dr. Bailey Willis, of Stanford University, said that the area around Jerusalem was a region of potential danger, a fault line, along which slippage might occur, passing directly under the Mount of Olives. In other words, what Zechariah described is precisely what geologists would expect to occur. See Bailey Willis, "Earthquakes in the Holy Land," *Bulletin of the Seismological Society of America* 18, no. 2 (June 1928): 92.

²The prophecy of Zech 14:4-5 (cf. 4:7) about mountains becoming valleys is probably based on Isa 40:4-5, just as the living water of Zech 14:8 (and Ezek 47) is probably based on Isa 41:18 (cf. Isa 30:25, 35:6-7), and the raising of Jerusalem in Zech 14:10 is probably based on Mic 4:1.

³Matt 16:27, 25:31, Mark 8:38, 1 Thess 3:13, Jude 1:14. Zech 14:5 is a reenactment of Deut 33:2.

⁴Along with Ps 11:1, Jer 6:1, Ezek 7:16, Gen 19:17; Cf. Ps. Sol. 17:16-17.

6-7 are one source of the idea that there will be no night in the kingdom (Rev 21:23-25); and vs. 7 is probably the source of the idea that the day of the Lord is known only to God (Matt 24:36). In addition, Dale Allison finds allusions to this chapter in Matt 27:51b-53, Mark 11, and John 2:16.¹

An early version of the eschatological battle of Zech 14 is found in Isa 29:1-8. After Jerusalem is besieged and brought low, "suddenly, in an instant," the Lord comes and destroys the attackers. Other passages likewise stress God's timely intervention.² In other words, *the idea that the Parousia of God would immediately follow the great end-time attack on Jerusalem is the standard OT prophetic scenario.* Jesus was only passing on that which He found in Scripture.

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that Matt 24:29 maintains the OT scenario of a Parousia which immediately follows the destruction of Jerusalem. Fortunately, Jesus stated that even He did not know the exact time of the Second Coming (Matt 24:36).³ The fact that Jesus would admit ignorance on this point is a

¹Allison, *The End of the Ages*, 33-35. The larger passage of Zech 12-14 is an important source for NT eschatology; notable borrowings include Zech 12:10-14 > Matt 24:30, Rev 1:7; Zech 13:7 > Mark 14:27, Matt 26:31.

²Isa 29:1-8, 31:4-9, 17:12-14 (the basis for Luke 21:25), 66:6-18, Ezek 38:18-23, Dan 12:1-3, 5-7, 11-13 (seems to imply that the total lapse of time between the abomination of desolation and the resurrection was to be 1260 days, or at most 1335), Joel 3:11-17, Zeph 3:8-9, Zech 12:1-9, 14:1-9. The survivors in Jerusalem of the eschatological battle are described in Isa 4:2-6; vs. 4 of this passage is probably the basis for Matt 3:11.

³Evidently Jesus' omniscience, like His omnipresence, was not operative during the incarnation. John 7:8-10 may be another example of this. Textual evidence suggests that "yet" in 7:8 is a scribal addition. Perhaps Jesus changed His mind, or perhaps He did not want word to get out that He was coming.

If Jesus had surrendered His omniscience, and spent hours in prayer to discern

strong argument for the authenticity of the record and its claims. How many messianic pretenders, from Bar Kokhba to David Koresh, are known for saying "I don't know?"

In light of this uncertainty, however, Jesus' confident assurance in vs. 35 might at first seem puzzling. Yet Jesus' words are no more strange or contradictory than it would be to say "I don't know the day or hour, but there will be nuclear war in your lifetime." The precise date is unknown, but the event is near. It would be foolish to adopt any interpretation that makes Jesus contradict Himself in the space of two or three sentences. The simplest way to understand Matt 24:34-36/Mark 13:30-32 is that Jesus announced the proximate time (that generation) on the basis of prophetic interpretation, but He did not know the exact time (day or hour) on the basis of revelation. Therefore, the argument is invalid that Jesus could not have promised to return in His generation since He did not know the day or the hour.

Even Jesus' limited declaration of ignorance is stated in terms that imply that the Coming is very soon: It is the day and hour, not the year, that is in question, as the following verses continually reemphasize.¹ One way to understand His point is that no span of years is contemplated; none should think of the coming as years away. By way of contrast, OT references to coming judgment refer to the day and the *year*.² But now that "the year of the Lord's favor" is already here (Luke 4:19), only

His Father's will, then is it not possible that His understanding of His mission and who He was grew and evolved over time?

¹Matt 24:38, 42, 44, 50, and 25:13.

²Isa 34:8, 61:2, 63:4, Jer 11:23, 23:12, 48:44, 51:46.

the exact date is in question.

The "You'll See Me Again Soon" Statements

Matt 24:34 is the second time in one day that Jesus said "all this" would happen to His generation; earlier on He had made this statement to the Jewish leaders:

Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.¹ I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation. . . . Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." (Matt 23:34-39).

How would Jesus' generation pay for all the righteous blood ever shed by their forefathers? The penalty for bloodshed was the blood of the offender.² Jesus' malediction implies both the destruction of Jerusalem³ as well as the final judgment, when "the Lord is coming out of his dwelling to punish the people of the earth for their sins. The earth will disclose the blood shed upon her; she will conceal her slain no longer" (Isa 26:21). This occurs at the resurrection (26:19), when God will avenge

¹Here Zechariah the son of Jehoida, the last martyr in the Jewish canon (2 Chr 24:17-22), is confused with Zechariah the Son of Berekiah, the author of the OT book of prophecy (Zech 1:1, 7). This confusion was widespread; see the discussion by S. A. Blank, "The Death of Zechariah in Rabbinic Literature," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 12/13 (1937-38): 327-46. Matthew makes a similar slip in 27:9, where a quotation from Zech 11:12-13 is ascribed to Jeremiah.

²Gen 9:5-6, Num 35:33, 2 Kgs 9:7-8.

³Lam 4:11-14, Jer 19:3-9, Ezek 11:5-10, 16:37-41, 22:1-16.

the blood of His saints.¹

Both of these events are further implied by what Jesus said next: "Look, your house is left unto you desolate" (23:38)—implying the destruction of Jerusalem²—and "For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'" (23:39)—the same phrase spoken earlier by the crowd at the triumphal entry (Matt 21:9). This phrase from Ps 118 was associated with "the coming kingdom of our father David" (Mark 11:9-10), and was customarily recited at the Jewish festival of booths.³ Jesus' announcement of His Parousia in Matt 23:39 is the last thing He ever said in the temple. How the disciples understood this is indicated by the question they asked as soon as they were alone with Jesus, "What will be the sign *of your coming?*" (Matt 24:3).

However, Jesus' enemies did see Him again at His trial a few days later, and they were in no mood to bless Him. There in the courtyard of the high priest Jesus repeated His promise: "I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matt 26:64/Mark 14:62).⁴ This again implies that Jesus expected to return in the

¹Rev 6:9-11, 18:24; cf. 4 Ezra 1:32.

²An allusion to the desolation which resulted from the desolating abomination, Dan 9:17, 18, 26, 27; see also Isa 1:7-8, 5:9, 13:9, 24:10, 27:10, Jer 6:8, 7:34 (cf. vs. 29), 10:22, 12:7-11, 26:9, 44:22, Lam 5:18, Ezek 12:20, 35:15, Zech 7:14, etc.

³Mishnah, *Sukkah* 3:9.

⁴A clear allusion to Dan 7:13-14. The Greek which the NIV translates "in the future" is usually translated "from now on"; cf. the same expression in (LXX) Num 18:22, 2 Sam 19:13, 2 Chr 16:9, Isa 9:7, 48:6, 59:21, Mic 4:7, Matt 26:29, Luke 1:48, 5:10, 12:52, 22:18, 22:69, John 8:11, 13:19, 14:7, Acts 18:6, 2 Cor 5:16, Rev

lifetime of His hearers; this is a simpler explanation (Occam's Razor) than the hypothesis of a special resurrection just before the Second Coming, possibly implied by Rev 1:7. I do not question that such a resurrection may take place; but then, by the same token, Jesus' Matt 23 audience would have to be added to the special resurrection list. The point is that the original plan was an imminent return, not a special resurrection—at least that seems to be how Luke understood it, as we will see.

Note that both of these "I'll be back!" statements (Matt 23:39, 26:64) were made to the Jewish leaders. The full implication of Jesus' words becomes startlingly clear in the light of a more-or-less contemporary description of the judgment of the rulers by the Elect One:

Thus the Lord commanded the kings, the governors, and the high officials, and the landlords, and said, 'Open your eyes and lift up your eyebrows—if you are able to recognize the Elect One!' . . . On the day of judgment, all the kings, the governors, the high officials, and the landlords shall see and recognize him. . . . They shall be terrified and dejected; and pain shall seize them when they see that Son of Man sitting on the throne of his glory. These kings, governors, and all the landlords shall try to bless, glorify, and extol him who rules over everything, him who has been concealed. For the Son of Man was concealed from the beginning, and the Most High One preserved him in the presence of his power; then he revealed him to the holy and the elect ones. The congregation of the holy ones shall be planted, and all the elect ones shall stand before him. On that day, all the kings, the governors, the high officials, and those who rule the earth shall fall down before him on their faces, and worship and raise their hopes in that Son of Man; they shall beg and plead for mercy.¹

14:13.

¹ Enoch 62. Note the phrase "the Son of Man sitting on the throne of his glory"; Cf. Matt 19:28, 25:31, Mark 10:37, Luke 24:26. Cf. Enoch's invective against the upper-class to that of Jas 5:1-6.

This passage goes on to describe the punishment of the rulers and the reward of the righteous, and the rulers' fruitless attempt to curry favor by blessing the Lord, which reminds us of the hallel blessing mentioned in Matt 23:39. In His two "I'll be back" statements, then, Jesus is warning those in authority that the next time they see him the tables will be turned, and He will be judging them.¹

Lukan Redaction of the Olivet Discourse

Before going any further a discussion of the dating and sequence of the Gospels is in order. The scholarly consensus for the past century has held that Mark was the first Gospel written (see Appendix A), followed by Matthew, then Luke, then John, though the priority of Matthew continues to have lively champions.

Robert Gundry makes a very convincing case, based on a wide variety of internal evidence, that Matthew was written prior to A.D. 70.² Detractors who hold to a post-70 date appeal mainly to Matt 22:7, "The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city." If this is the strongest evidence for a post-70 date for Matthew, then the case is extremely weak. Even if we were to entertain the gratuitous prejudice against predictive prophecy, any astute observer of the political currents who believed the prophecy of Deut 28:49-57 might

¹Could this also be the intent of Luke 12:58, spoken in an apocalyptic context: "As you [Pharisees] are going with your adversary [Jesus] to the magistrate, try hard to be reconciled to him on the way, or he may drag you off to the judge [God], and the judge turn you over to the officer [cf. Matt 18:34], and the officer throw you into prison."

²See Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 599-609.

plausibly anticipate a replay of what happened in the days of Jeremiah (cf. Jer 34:2).

The *a priori* assumption that predictive prophecy is impossible can be discredited by modern evidence alone apart from Scripture. However, predictive prophecy is usually more cryptic than historical description after the fact; it is not always an exact "photograph" of the future.¹ Jesus' prophecy in Matt 24/Mark 13 makes use of the cryptic prophecy of Daniel about the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place. In fact, the prophecy does not exactly conform to the event, for, according to Eusebius (*Hist.*, 3:5), the Christians did not flee Jerusalem after the Roman soldiers had invaded the holy place, but after they had surrounded the city. This implies that Mark and Matthew were written prior to A.D. 70.

¹For example: the prophecy of the fall of Babylon in Jer 51, written c. 593 B.C. (see vs. 59), describes Babylon's imminent (vs. 33) destruction and burning (vss. 30-32) by the Medes (vs. 28), leaving the city desolate and uninhabited (vss. 29, 37, 43, 62; cf. Jer 25:12). What actually happened was that Cyrus the Great took the city in 539 B.C. without violence, keeping it intact. It survived partial destruction by Xerxes ca. 480 B.C. After Seleucus I Nicator built Seleucia in 312, using bricks from old Babylon, the inhabitants gradually moved from Babylon to Seleucia, leaving only a small community of priestly astronomers and mathematicians by the first century A.D.

Another example: In 587 or 586 (Ezek 26:1) Ezekiel gave a series of prophecies against Tyre (chaps. 26-28), in which he predicted that Nebuchadnezzar (26:7) would destroy Tyre and make her a bare rock (26:4). Tyre would never be rebuilt (vs. 14). The prophecy of destruction pertained to the island fortress itself, which was "out in the sea" (26:5), as distinguished from Tyre's settlements on the mainland mentioned in vss. 6 and 8. Nebuchadnezzar besieged Tyre from 586 to 571 B.C., but he only partially fulfilled the prophecy by taking the mainland settlements; he was unable to breach the defenses of Tyre itself. Nebuchadnezzar's failure is recognized in Ezek 29:17-19, a prophecy given on Apr 26, 571, when God promised to give Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar as compensation for his hard work, since "he and his army got no reward from the campaign he led against Tyre." Later on Alexander the Great completely destroyed Tyre, but even then the city was rebuilt and was thriving in the time of Jesus; the name occurs 12 times in the NT.

In contrast, the parallel passage in Luke 21 describes plainly what happened (21:24): "When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. . . . They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations." Another passage that sounds like eyewitness history is Luke 19:43-4, with no parallel in Matthew and Mark. Also, Luke omits the cryptic "Let the reader understand" of Matthew and Mark as no longer necessary. All of this suggests that Luke was written, or at least revised, after A.D. 70.

The traditional conservative dating of Luke/Acts is around A.D. 60, because Acts ends abruptly at the point of Paul's first Roman imprisonment and says nothing about the deaths of Peter, Paul, or James in the sixties. This is a fairly strong argument. However, an alternative explanation is that Luke, writing after A.D. 70, was interrupted by death or some other event, preventing him from finishing his narrative as he intended. Or it may have been politically inexpedient for Luke to mention that his heroes, Peter and Paul, had been condemned to death by Rome, which would seem to vindicate Jewish opposition. At any rate, whether Luke wrote before or after A.D. 70 is not as significant as the fact that he wrote after Mark.¹ But

¹Could our later date for Luke be motivated by a prior agenda of discrediting those passages which do not support our thesis? Suppose that we ignore all evidence of development over time and assume an early date for Luke (pre-70), and simply count witnesses. In that case Matthew/Mark agree against Luke in regards to the Olivet tradition, and so we would still have accept the majority witness. There is no reason to choose Luke over Matthew/Mark except for the comfort of choosing that which is closer to later Christian tradition—unless we were asking the question "What is present truth?" In that case, we might choose Luke over Matthew/Mark on the basis of progressive revelation, as long as we concede that Luke is the latest of the Synoptics. However, as stated in the introduction, my concern here is not present truth, but which text best reflects what Jesus actually said on Olivet. It is possible that

there is still more evidence that he wrote after A.D. 70. So clearly does it teach an imminent Parousia that Luke found it necessary—apparently after the time had passed—to edit parts of it out.

Luke revises the material of Mark 13/Matt 24 to allow for an indefinite lapse of time between the destruction of Jerusalem and the Parousia.¹ For example, Mark says the wars, earthquakes, and famines "are the beginning birth pains" (13:8)—i.e., the beginning of the final tribulation that gives birth to the age to come. Luke omits this. Mark speaks of believers standing firm "to the end [of the age]" (13:13); Luke (21:19) deletes this now that it is obvious that the end will not come that soon. Luke 21:25 contains no parallel to Matthew's statement that Jesus would return "*immediately after* the distress of those days" (Matt 24:29) or the equivalent statement ("in those days") in Mark 13:24. The false messiahs in Mark 13:6 say, "I am he," but in Luke 21:8 they also say, "The time is near"—*proclaiming the nearness of the Parousia is now one of the signs of false prophecy!* This implies a date after 70, when Luke had seen the damage that certain types of apocalyptic enthusiasm could do.

Whereas the parable of the talents/servants/minas is found in Matthew and

Luke is pre-70, but it is highly unlikely that Luke is prior to Mark, for if the alterations (listed below and in Appendix A) go in that direction, they are very difficult to explain. The bottom line is that Matthew/Mark provide the most accurate record of the Olivet discourse.

¹Many of the following points are from James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the NT: An Enquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*, 2d ed. (London: SCM Press, 1990), 346-9.

Mark in a context that stresses that Jesus' return should be expected momentarily,¹ Luke not only transplants the parable into a different context, he creates a new rationale for the parable that puts it in *opposition* to imminency: Jesus told the parable because "the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once" (Luke 19:11). Luke also modifies the unprecedented tribulation to "great distress in the land and wrath against this people" (Luke 21:23), and omits Jesus' words about the time being cut short (Mark 13:20/Matt 24:22); for by now, after the three-and-a-half year Jewish war leading up to the fall of Jerusalem, it was obvious that the time had been lengthened, not shortened.

One very crucial change is found in Luke's revision of Mark 14:62/Matt 26:64, "From now on *you will see* the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One *and coming on the clouds of heaven.*" Luke edits out the italicized portions to leave no mention of the Second Coming: "But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God" (Luke 22:69). By the time Luke wrote, all of the Jewish leaders to whom Jesus addressed this saying just before His crucifixion were probably dead (they would have been from an older generation than Jesus), and Luke's editing removes the difficulty of the unfulfilled prophecy.

Luke de-eschatologizes Jesus' Parousia promise that precedes the transfiguration: "Some who are standing here will not taste death before they see *the kingdom of God*" (Luke 9:27); in Luke, this kingdom had in some sense already come (Luke 11:20, 17:21). More clearly, he also de-eschatologizes another Parousia saying,

¹Mark 13:33-37, Matt 25:14ff.

"You will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'" (Matt 23:39) by taking it out of passion week and putting it earlier in the narrative (Luke 13:35), making it appear that it was fulfilled at the triumphal entry (Luke 19:38).

We also see the beginning of a transition toward a realized eschatology.¹ Luke records a series of metaphorical statements about God's "coming" that have no close parallel in the other Gospels:

"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because *he has come* and has redeemed his people. (1:68)

They were all filled with awe and praised God. "A great prophet has appeared among us," they said. "*God has come* to help his people." (7:16)

¹A brief history of this term: Albert Schweitzer, in his groundbreaking work, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* (1906), portrayed Jesus as a heroic but tragic and deluded figure who mistakenly expected the kingdom to come within months from when He sent the disciples on their first missionary tour. When the kingdom did not arrive as expected, Jesus attempted to force the matter by His death on the cross. Schweitzer's position has been called "consistent eschatology." Recent defenders of this position include R. H. Hiers, *Jesus and the Future* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), and C. Sullivan, *Rethinking Realized Eschatology* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988).

One of the leading critics of Schweitzer's position was C. H. Dodd. Dodd proposed that Jesus never actually promised to return soon in the clouds of heaven; the early church invented these sayings. Instead, Jesus' kingdom and all that went with it was a present reality, needing only to be recognized; this is known as "realized eschatology." There is but one Coming, and Jesus is "always the coming One" who comes again in every historical judgment and revival and individual conversion. The position that Jesus never spoke of His Parousia is defended in T. F. Glasson, *The Second Advent*, 3d ed. (London: Epworth Press, 1963), and J. A. T. Robinson, *Jesus and His Coming* (London: SCM, 1957).

Both Schweitzer and Dodd denied any future, literal, visible coming in glory. Dodd's terminology is widely used of prophecy that is at least partly fulfilled, or realized, even by those who do not accept his thesis.

[Jesus predicts that Jerusalem will be destroyed] because you did not recognize the time of *God's coming* to you. (19:43-44)¹

It appears that while Matthew, in borrowing material from Mark, tends to *slightly enhance* its imminency, Luke tends to *reduce* it.² But even if Matthew and Mark did not exist and we had only the Gospel of Luke, we would still have Jesus' promise to return in His generation. The older generation of Jewish leaders may have passed, but Jesus' generation had not, so Luke had no reason to alter this prophecy. Indeed, Luke is slightly clearer than Matthew that the Parousia would take place in his generation:

"At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things [i.e., this sequence of events ending with the Parousia] *begin to take place*, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things [this sequence of events] happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until *all these things* [this entire sequence of events] have happened." (Luke 21:27-32)

¹All of these statements follow the OT tradition which speaks of God's "coming" to Israel. See Appendix C. Another related passage is Mark 12:9, "What therefore will the Lord of the vineyard do? *He will come* and destroy the husbandman, and will give the vineyard unto others" (Mark 12:9/Luke 20:16). Note that this is prospective, whereas Luke's statements are retrospective. Some have argued on the basis of Mark 12:9 that Jesus did, in fact, "come" in fulfillment of His promise at the destruction of Jerusalem. But this assumes what is to be proven; namely, that Mark 12:9 is not speaking of a literal coming after the destruction of Jerusalem in the OT sense.

²Ben Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1995), 54, makes this comment: "I would argue, as do Lukan specialists [Joseph A. Fitzmyer is cited], that Luke . . . *tends* to deeschatologize his source material or focus on realized eschatological aspects in accord with his salvation-historical perspective" (emphasis in original).

Usually Matthew and Mark agree against Luke in the Olivet discourse, but in regard to "these things/all these things" Mark and Luke agree against Matthew. And even though the wording is less clear in Matthew (24:33 adds an "all" to the first "these things" and drops the verb "happening"), the intent is the same: When you see the early eschatological events happening, you know the final events in the sequence are near (cp. 4 Ezra 9:1-2, 13:31), and it will all be over in a generation.

Luke still holds to a not-very-distant Parousia.¹ In fact, Luke even includes one possible imminence passage which is unique to his Gospel. Recall Jesus' statement, "How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers!" (Matt 24:19/Luke 21:23). Notice, then, what Jesus told the women on the way to His crucifixion:

Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' Then they will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!' For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?" (Luke 23:28-31)

This is a threat of judgment, specifically on Jerusalem.² Vs. 30 is a quotation from Hos 10:8.³ This phrase had acquired an eschatological connotation in the light of Isa 2:10-21 and 22:5. This would appear to be a prediction that the women at the cross (some of whom were evidently still living in Luke's day) would experience the

¹Luke 10:9, 18:7-8.

²With vs. 31 cf. Ezek 15:2-7, 20:45-21:5; also Matt 3:10, 1 Pet 4:17.

³The change from second to third person is in the OT source.

destruction of Jerusalem followed by the end of the age. I suppose that detractors could argue that Luke 23:30 merely expresses a desire for a speedy death. But in the first century this language was associated with the end of the age:

Then [Elijah] the Thesbite, driving a heavenly chariot at full stretch from heaven, will come on earth and then display three signs to the whole world, as life perishes. *Alas, for as many as are found bearing in the womb on that day, for as many as suckle infant children, for as many as dwell upon the wave; alas, for as many as will see that day.* For a dark mist will cover the boundless world, east and west and south and north. And then a great river of blazing fire will flow from heaven, and will consume every place. . . . For all the stars will fall together from heaven. (Sib Or 2:187-202)

In those days, when he hurls out against you terror of fire, where shall you flee? and where shall you find safety? . . . All the luminaries shall faint with great fear; the whole earth shall faint and tremble and panic. All the angels shall fulfill their orders. *The children of the earth will seek to hide themselves from the presence of the Great Glory, trembling and confounded.* (1 Enoch 102:1-3)

I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. *They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"* (Rev 6:12-17)

As the first century drew to a close it became increasingly apparent that the "this generation" scenario might not work out. John omits the entire Olivet discourse from his Gospel—even though he was one of only four disciples who were privileged to hear it (Mark 13:3)—and places increased emphasis on realized eschatology. The even later *Gospel of Thomas* is totally devoid of eschatology. John does, however,

add another piece to the puzzle. After His resurrection, according to John, Jesus revealed to Peter that he would be martyred when he was old, implying a delayed Parousia. On the other hand, He also mentioned the possibility that John might live until He returned (John 21:18-23). These statements are missing from the Synoptics; perhaps Peter kept them to himself until near the end of his life. It is important to keep in mind that Jesus said this only after He had been to heaven and back, where He may have learned more about God's timetable than He knew before the cross. At any rate, this prophecy would not be evidence against a "this generation" scenario even if it were pre-ascension.

One may quibble about this or that passage, but taken together, the words of Jesus in Matt 10:23, 16:28, and 24:36, not to mention His "you'll see me again" passages in 23:39 and 26:64, form a pattern whose implications are difficult to deny. The evidence so far indicates that Matthew's Jesus expected a first-century advent. But there is more.

The Vow of Abstinence

After having heard Jesus emphasize the nearness of His coming, imagine how the disciples might have interpreted His vow of abstinence at the Lord's Supper: "I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matt 26:29). This appears to be an oath of fasting, similar to that of the Jewish assassins in Acts 23:12, taken in view of the nearness of the kingdom. The parallel passage in Luke 22:15-18 indicates that Jesus was speaking of the Passover feast. Is it not plausible that this would have been

interpreted by the disciples to mean that Jesus would return, at the latest, within one year, by the time of the next Passover?¹

This is the fifth passage discussed so far that might be taken as a hint that Jesus would come back within a year. The first is Matt 10:23 (hearing this, the disciples probably would not have assumed a mission lasting much longer than a year); the second is Matt 23:39 (the next time the rulers see Jesus, it will be to hail Him as the Messiah; one possible interpretation is that Jesus would return by the next festival where the hallel was recited); the third is Matt 24:34-36 (where the only uncertainty is the day and hour, as if the year were already present); and the fourth is Matt 26:62 (the use of the phrase "from now on" might be taken to imply extreme imminency; cp. Matt 23:39/Luke 13:35, "you will not see me again until . . .").

None of these five passages is very impressive by itself because of what I think is deliberate obliqueness on the part of Jesus. Since Jesus did not know the day or the hour, it is very unlikely that He *believed that He would* come back within a year, but it is quite possible that, since He did not know exactly when He would return, He *thought that He might* come back within a year, so He merely *hinted* about the possibility. However, the possibility exists that these statements have been softened or made more ambiguous by the evangelists writing decades after the fact,

¹The apostles may have been inclined to this assumption by the tradition, current in Jesus' day, that the Messiah would return on the night of the Passover; see August Strobel's reconstructions in "Die Passa-Erwartung als urchristliches Problem in Lc 17:20f.," *ZNW* 49 (1958): 157-96; "A. Merx uber Lc 17:20f.," *ZNW* 51 (1960): 133-34; "In dieser Nacht (Luk 17,34). Zu einer alteren Form der Erwartung in Luk 17, 20-37," *ZTK* 58 (1961): 16-29; cited in Meier, 2:425n110. This interpretation of the passover passage is mine, not Strobel's.

just as Luke edited the Olivet discourse (for more examples of such editing, see Appendix A).

There is even a remarkable OT parallel. Isa 32:10 says that *in a little more than a year* Jerusalem would become "a wasteland forever . . . till the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the desert becomes a fertile field" (vss. 14-15). Isaiah evidently wrote this about the time of Hezekiah's revolt from Assyria, expecting that the Assyrians would devastate the land, followed by the kingdom. What actually happened was the abortive 701 B.C. invasion of Sennacherib, described in Isa 36 and 37. Isaiah's prophecy of the peaceable kingdom has not been completely fulfilled to this day. Many more OT examples of this sort are examined in the final chapter of this study.

Perhaps I am reading too much into these Gospel passages. But if Jesus thought it possible that the Eschaton might come within a year, it would explain His statement that the time would be shortened (Matt 24:2/Mark 13:20), since the shortest conventional scenario for the kingdom would require at least three and a half years (see discussion below). More importantly, it would also explain the following phenomenon.

Imminency Material Outside the Gospels

While many of the strongest imminency statements are found in the Synoptic Gospels, the rest of the NT mirrors the note of imminency that Jesus struck during His last year on earth. The epistles seem to assume a Parousia within the near future, and this is also the impression left by the behavior of the earliest believers as

recorded in Acts.

Early Christian Communalism as an Imminency Phenomenon

What did the earliest believers think about the nearness of the Second Coming? Evidently Jesus had left the impression that He would be back momentarily; otherwise it is much more difficult to explain their unusual socioeconomic behavior as documented in Acts. The sudden abandonment of their possessions is most easily explained on the assumption that they expected Jesus to come back in a matter of weeks or months. *After all, had not the resurrection already begun (Matt 27:51-53), with Christ as the firstfruits (1 Cor 15:20, 23)?*—so the believers might have reasoned.

Shortly after the Lord's ascension, "all the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need"¹—much like the 1844 Millerites, who, believing Jesus was coming that year, left their crops unharvested and gave away their goods. The believers were simply practicing Jesus' advice on how to prepare for the Second Coming: Do not worry about food and clothing (Luke 12:22-31), sell your possessions and give to the poor (vss. 32-34), and be ready for the Master to return unexpectedly (vss. 35-40).²

¹Acts 2:44-45, 4:32-35.

²Luke 12 suggests that the original context of the passage on worry in the sermon on the mount (Matt 6:25-34) was the coming tribulation. All other "do not worry" statements occur in passages dealing with end-time persecution (Matt 10:19, Mark 13:11, Luke 12:11, 22, 26, 29, 21:14). Jesus' advice to Christians who worry about the time of trouble is: Don't.

This was in the tradition of the earlier teaching of John the Baptist:

"The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." "What should we do then?" the crowd asked. John answered, "The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same." (Luke 3:9-11)

So, having all things in common, the believers spent their time in communal worship and fellowship (Acts 2:46)—much like another first-century apocalyptic community, the Essenes.¹

However, tensions soon developed between the Hebrews and the Hellenists (Acts 6:1). The persecution of A.D. 34 (Acts 8:1) scattered the believers, serving to spread their lifestyle abroad. Over time the Christian community gradually returned to a more normal economy, but some years later, when the Thessalonian epistles (perhaps the earliest NT documents) were written, there were still groups in the church that refused to work. It seems likely this was either a holdover from the Jerusalem phenomenon or else a reenactment of it.

By this time church leaders must have found that having all things in common

¹Josephus: "Nor is there any one to be found among them [the Essenes] who hath more than another; for it is a law to let what they have be common to the whole order—insomuch, that among them all there is no appearance of poverty or excess of riches, but every one's possessions are intermingled with every other's possessions; and so there is, as it were, one patrimony among all the brethren. . . . They also have stewards [cf. Acts 6:1-7] appointed to take care of their common affairs, who every one of them have no separate business for any, but what is for the use of them all" (*Wars* 2.8.3; cf. *Antiquities* 18.1.5). Philo confirms this (*Quod.* 85-87, *Apol.* 11:4, 12).

John the Baptist may have been associated with the Qumran Essenes. For a skeptical survey of the evidence see Walter P. Wink, *John the Baptist and the Gospel* (New York: Union Theological Seminary Th.D. thesis, 1963), 75-103.

did not work well for very long, just as the early American colonists at Jamestown and Plymouth discovered after initial experiments with communal living failed. The more lazy members of the community tend to take advantage of the more industrious. So Paul encouraged the believers to work with their hands and be independent (1 Thess 4:11) and to warn those who were still idle (5:14). It is no coincidence that these two injunctions bracket a discussion of the Second Coming (4:13-5:11), in which Paul answers questions about the fate of those believers who, contrary to expectations, had already died before the Lord came.¹ Such questions were only natural; had not Jesus said that only those who stood firm to the end of the age would be saved (Matt 24:13/Mark 13:13)?

The no-work party was still a serious problem when Paul wrote 2 Thess (ca. A.D. 52). I suspect this was the motivation for Paul's statement in 2 Thess 2:3 that the Parousia was not quite so near as some thought. As long as the Thessalonians felt that the Second Coming was due any day, the no-work faction would not go back to work. Finally, Paul commanded that those who still refused to work should be ostracized (2 Thess 3:6-15); their behavior was now dysfunctional and fanatical. The spontaneous social experiment in Jerusalem that had managed to wipe out poverty among the believers (Acts 4:34) was over, and the "poor in Jerusalem" remained an

¹An earlier discussion of this same problem is found in 1 Enoch 102 and 103, which concludes, "Joy and honor are prepared for and written down for the souls of those who died in righteousness. Many good things shall be given to you—the offshoot of your labors. Your lot exceeds even that of the living ones. The spirits of those who died in righteousness shall live and rejoice; their spirits shall not perish" (1 Enoch 103:3-4).

ongoing concern (Rom 15:26).

Imminency in the Epistles

Although the initial apocalyptic fervor had died down, the believers still had Jesus' promise to return in their generation. I believe it was on the basis of these well-known sayings of the Lord that Paul maintained that some contemporary believers would live to see the Second Coming:

According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. (1 Thess 4:15)

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. (1 Cor 15:51-52)

If Paul were merely saying that some Christians would still be living on earth when Jesus comes, what would his point be? He was addressing the living, not the unborn. Paul could have written, "*Those* who are alive will not precede *those* who are asleep," but he did not. Instead, he included himself among the "we" who live until the coming of the Lord, as opposed to the "those" who die. By the time he wrote 1 Corinthians Paul is not quite so certain he will live to see the Lord come, and so he not only identifies with the living in 15:51, "We shall not all sleep" (i.e., not all of us will die before the Lord comes), but also with the resurrected in 6:14, "By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also."¹ Paul's assumption

¹1 Cor 6:14; cf. 2 Cor 4:14. Not that it mattered (1 Thess 5:10), but Paul preferred translation over death (this is the meaning of 2 Cor 5:3). Paul's concern with the fate of those who had died before the Parousia may reflect a concern with

that some contemporary believers would live to see the Parousia must have been based on Jesus well-known "this generation" sayings. Indeed, Paul felt that time was so short that there was little point in getting married.¹ Like Matthew and Mark, Paul still assumes his readers will live right up to the end of time, in harmony with Jesus' prophecy in Matt 24:13/Mark 13:13.

Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor 1:7-8)

God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. (2 Thess 1:6-7)

He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. . . . And this is my prayer: that . . . you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ. (Phil 1:6-10)²

Jesus' promise that His generation would not pass, judging by his interest in "those who sleep" vs. "those who remain" (1 Cor 15:6, 16-20, 51-52, 1 Thess 4:13ff., 5:10). 1 Cor 11:30 even suggests a reason why some have died. After the writing of 1 Cor, however, there is no further NT interest in this question.

¹1 Cor 7:26-31; cf. Matt 19:12, "Others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it." Later Paul modified his policy on marriage: younger women should get married and raise a family (1 Tim 5:14). By this time the Parousia has lost some of its urgency, and Paul realizes the need to lay down rules governing the ongoing institution of the church. Hence the Pastoral epistles. This gradual lessening of apocalyptic fervor in the later writings of the NT is documented in Dunn, 344-351. My own survey indicates that in Paul's earliest epistles, the Thessalonians, 38 out of 136 verses are about eschatology (28%), while in his latest epistles, the pastorals, only 16 out of 242 verses even mention eschatology (7%). Paul finally decided that God would bring about the Parousia "in his own time" (1 Tim 6:15).

²Cf. 3:20-21. But as for himself, Paul views death as a real possibility: Phil 1:20-25, 3:10-11. Peter also seems to assume the Second Coming in the lifetime of

Paul was not the only apostle who believed he was living in the last days of earth's history. Indeed, all "last days" texts in the NT are a reference to the writers' own present time. In Acts 2, Peter claims that the baptism of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost is the fulfillment of the "last days" prophecy of Joel 2:28-29. Heb 1:2 claims that "in these last days" God "has spoken to us by his Son." Heb 9:26 says that now Christ has appeared "at the end of the ages." Jas 5:3 accuses the rich: "You have hoarded wealth in the last days." 1 Pet 1:20 says Jesus was "revealed in these last times for your sake."

Even those "last days" passages that appear to be formulated as prophecy are actually realized eschatology. As an example, take the popular passage that has been applied to our own day in countless evangelistic meetings: 2 Tim 3:1-5. After describing how terrible people will be in the last days (lovers of pleasure, etc.), Paul advised Timothy to avoid such people, then went on to describe the problems they were currently causing in the church (3:6-9). Obviously, he was describing contemporary realities.¹ These are essentially the same sins that Paul lists in Rom

his readers: 1 Pet 2:12, 4:7, 17, 5:6, 10.

¹Likewise with 1 Tim 4:1-5, 2 Pet 3:3, and Jude 1:18. Of course, we are still living in the last days, so the modern evangelistic application of these verses to our own time is perfectly valid. One caution: while NT writers saw themselves as living in the last *days* or *times* (plural), the variant expression "last day" (singular) in the Gospel of John is a reference to the still future day of the resurrection and final judgment (John 6:39, 40, 44, 54, 11:24, 12:48). The same thing is true of the singular "last time" in 1 Pet 1:5, "who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time." The last days have arrived, but not the last day; the last times, but not the last time. But John breaks the rule in 1 John 2:18, "This is the last hour."

1:18-32 as characteristic of his own day.

Later Imminency Statements

When Jesus did not come immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem, it became apparent that the Jewish war was not the unprecedented tribulation leading up to the end of the age of Dan 12:1. Hence Luke softened Jesus' prophecy of unprecedented tribulation to "great distress in the land and wrath against this people" (Luke 21:23). When the book of Revelation was written in the nineties, the great tribulation (Rev 7:14) was still placed in the near future.¹ Revelation anticipates the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy and catalogues the events that must take place rapidly before the end—I say "rapidly" because, in Revelation, things do not happen in years, but in days or hours, in harmony with Jesus' expression in Matt 24:38, 42, 44, 50. Smyrna will suffer ten *days* of persecution. Philadelphia is warned of "the *hour* of trial that is about to come upon the whole world." The two prophets lie dead for three and a half *days*. It is the *hour* of His judgment that has come. The ten kings receive authority for one *hour*. Babylon is destroyed in one *day*, even in one *hour*. The

¹Rev 3:10. Early second-century Christian documents maintain this hope: Hermas speaks of "the great tribulation which is to come" (Vis 4:2), and writes "Blessed are ye, as many as endure the great tribulation that cometh" (Vis 2:2). The last chapter of the *Didache* (16) describes in some detail the coming Eschaton; and the *Epistle of Barnabas* (chap. 4) warns, "The last offense is at hand. . . . Wherefore take heed in these last days. For the whole time of our faith shall profit us nothing, unless we now, in the season of lawlessness and in the offenses that shall be, as becometh sons of God, offer resistance, that the Black One may not affect an entrance." In the ellipses Barnabas tantalizes us by mentioning Daniel's ten kings, three of whom were plucked up, without application or further explanation.

longest period mentioned, prior to the Parousia, is 1,260 *days*.¹ And, of course, Revelation opens and closes with an appeal to the momentary imminence of the Second Coming.²

Unlike Daniel, Revelation clearly does not intend to imply centuries of time before the fulfillment of its prophecies. Both are written in code; but Daniel claims that it was not meant to be understood at the time it was written. It was sealed; its prophecies relating to the distant future.³ In Daniel, the end is never said to be near. In contrast, the book of Revelation was intended to be understood by contemporary readers: "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near" (Rev 22:10). Daniel is sealed, Revelation is unsealed. The angel in Rev 10:6 says that there will be no more delay of the Eschaton.⁴

What, then, does "near" mean? John the Baptist preached that the kingdom of

¹Rev 2:10, 3:10, 11:9, 14:7, 17:12, 18:8-19, 11:3, 12:6. Months are mentioned in 9:5,10, 11:2, 13:5.

²Rev 1:1-3, 3:11, 22:6-7, 10, 12, 20. Cf. 6:11, "a little longer."

³Dan 8:17, 26, 10:14, 12:8-13. The same idea is found in 1 Enoch 1:2, which explains that Enoch's prophecy of the second coming (quoted in Jude 14) is "not for this generation but for the distant one that is coming."

⁴Rev 10:6, literally, "no more time" (Gr. *chronos*), but virtually all modern translations and interpreters render "no more delay." Against this interpretation is the fact that (1) *chronos* never means "delay" in any of its other 30 NT occurrences; (2) there is an unambiguous way of expressing delay in Greek using the verb *chronizo*, and (3) 2 Enoch 65:7 would seem to support the rendering "no more time." On the other hand, Rev 10:6 is probably an allusion to Dan 12:7, where the angel's solemn oath is in response to the question, 'How long?' It may also be seen as parallel to Ezek 12:21-28, "The days are near when every vision will be fulfilled. For there will be no more false visions . . . and it shall be fulfilled without delay. . . . None of my words will be delayed any longer; whatever I say will be fulfilled, declares the Sovereign Lord."

heaven was near (Matt 3:2). Then Jesus took up the same message,¹ and commissioned the twelve disciples to preach it.² The NT documents repeatedly state that the Second Coming is just around the corner: "The night is nearly over; the day is almost here" (Rom 13:12); "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Rom 16:20); "The time is short. . . . This world in its present form is passing away" (1 Cor 7:29-31); "These things . . . were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come" (1 Cor 10:11); "The Lord is near" (Phil 4:5); "In just a very little while, He who is coming will come and will not delay" (Heb 10:37); "The Lord's coming is near. . . . The Judge is standing at the door" (Jas 5:8-9), "The end of all things is near. . . . It is time for judgment to begin with the family of God" (1 Pet 4:7, 17); "This is the last hour" (1 John 2:18).

We must assume that when God communicates with His believing children, He uses our language in its normal sense; otherwise the intent is not to reveal but to mislead.³ However, not by any stretch of the imagination is an event that is over 2,000 years away "near" or "soon" in any commonly accepted meaning of the term. When we look at other things said to be "near"⁴ or "soon"⁵ in the NT, the meaning

¹Matt 4:17; Mark 1:15.

²Matt 10:7; Luke 10:9, 11.

³God sends a lying Spirit to deceive Ahab (1 Kgs 22:19-23); Jesus speaks in parables so that unbelievers may not understand (Matt 13:10-17); God sent a spirit of stupor to unbelieving Israel (Rom 11:7-10); He sends a powerful delusion to those who have not believed the truth (2 Thess 2:9-12). But does God deceive His own?

⁴Matt 26:18, 26:45, John 6:4, 7:2, Acts 7:17, Heb 11:22.

of the word can hardly be stretched beyond a few months or years at most. In fact, one could argue that the words "near" and "soon" must *at least* mean "in this lifetime"; otherwise they are meaningless.¹

Should not the "near" of Matt 24:33 ("When you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door") have the same meaning as the "near" just above (when fig leaves come out, summer is near, vs. 28)? Should not the "near" of Luke 21:28 ("your redemption is drawing near") be interpreted like the "near" of vs. 20 just above it ("When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near")?

The imminency language of the NT is the language of people who expect the Second Coming to happen in their lifetime.

⁵1 Cor 4:19, Phil 2:19, 2:23, 24, 1 Tim 3:14, Heb 13:19, 13:23, 2 Pet 1:14, 3 John 1:14, Rev 2:16, 11:14.

¹A scholar friend, upon reading this paragraph, mentioned that his small children made him more aware of the differences between the way adults and children interpret time. To him, a month is nothing, but to a child, it's forever. Is there not a similar difference, he asks, between our perception of time and God's? It seems to me that this apt analogy only increases the difficulty. What astute father would tell his children that the family would be moving to the city "soon," while knowing it would not happen in their lifetime?

CHAPTER FOUR

OLD TESTAMENT ESCHATOLOGY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

This chapter attempts to show that there is much more continuity between OT and NT eschatology than has been realized, and that this may provide an important key for understanding Jesus' promise to return in "this generation."

Daniel's Abomination of Desolation in the NT

Although we have already looked at Jesus' "this generation" statement in Matt 24/Mark 13, it is important now to go back and take another, broader look at the entire Olivet discourse, followed by a brief analysis of 2 Thess 2. The evidence indicates that both of these prophecies were inspired by Daniel's "abomination of desolation," and that both of them probably allude to recent events in Jewish history.

The Olivet Discourse Reconsidered

The Jerusalem temple was one of the wonders of the ancient world. Josephus says that the foundation wall was "the most prodigious work that was ever heard of by man," and that some of the stones used were 25 cubits by 8 cubits by 12 cubits.¹ The Babylonian Talmud calls Jerusalem the perfect example of a splendid city; Pliny

¹Josephus *Antiquities* 15.11.3.

the Elder saluted it as the most celebrated metropolis in the East.¹ These statements were once dismissed as exaggerations, but recent excavations have confirmed that Herod's temple was one of the most magnificent buildings of antiquity. According to R. H. Charlesworth, the most massive stone discovered so far—part of the foundation of the western retaining wall—weighs an incredible 415 tons. By way of comparison, the heaviest stone in the Pyramids weighs less than 15 tons, and the largest stone at Stonehenge weighs around 40 tons.² Surely, this building, with God's blessing, would survive the great eschatological battle when Jerusalem was attacked by the nations, as prophesied in Isa 29, Ezek 38-39, Joel 3, Zech 12-14, etc.

But it was not to be. A few days before His crucifixion, Jesus told the Pharisees, "Your house is left unto you desolate," then announced His Parousia, and left the temple for the last time. As He walked away, the disciples caught up with him and pointed out the magnificence of the buildings Jesus had just condemned. At that point He made a statement that must have startled the disciples: "Do you see all these things? I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down" (Matt 24:1-2).

Jesus' normal route from Jerusalem to Bethany passed over the Mount of Olives, which provided an excellent view of the temple. The Mount of Olives was to play a significant role in the Eschaton (Zech 14:4). As Jesus and the disciples paused

¹Bab. Talmud, *Sukkah*, 51b; Pliny *Natural History* 5:15:70; in Charlesworth, *Jesus Within Judaism*, 119.

²Charlesworth, *Jesus Within Judaism*, 119.

to rest, gazing on the gold and marble gleaming in the late afternoon sun, Jesus answered their questions about when these things would take place, and what would be the sign of the coming He had just mentioned (Matt 23:39). As Jesus listed the signs leading up to His coming, He spoke of contemporary realities; of events that were taking place in the lives of his hearers. His point was that if the disciples would only look around them, they would see that the kingdom was very near.¹ Jesus succeeded in conveying a sense of urgency which, when coupled with His resurrection, launched the early Christian church into orbit.

Here is one small piece of evidence that Jesus on Olivet was not looking down the ages into the twentieth century. If He had been, then I suspect He might have included signs like these: Lawsuits will spring up like weeds. Men will wear more jewelry than women. There will be an epidemic of abortions. Men will practice perverse forms of sex. Women will become increasingly infertile. Such predictions would have made wonderful evangelistic fodder at the beginning of the 21st century.

I did not make these up. Every one of these signs of the end can be found in apocalyptic literature that was probably available to Jesus.² But Jesus did not include

¹That is Jesus' point in Matt 24:33/Mark 13:29/Luke 21:31: When you see these things happening, you should realize that the kingdom is near. Jesus had elsewhere announced that the kingdom was already near (Matt 4:17/Mark 1:15, Matt 10:7/Luke 10:8-11), therefore "when you see these things happening" must refer to current events which are mentioned as a way of reinforcing the point. Jesus was critical of those who were oblivious to the signs of the times (Matt 16:3/Luke 12:56).

²Hos 10:4, 1 Enoch 98:2, 99:5, 2 Enoch 34:2, Sib Or 2:161-4. In some ways Roman society was very much like our own, with public nudity on the part of actors in the theater (Will Durant, *Caesar and Christ: A History of Roman Civilization and of Christianity from Their Beginnings to A.D. 325* [New York: Simon and Schuster,

these signs; nor did He mention "machines that make books" (printing), or "conduits of fire" (electricity), or the ability to talk to someone at a distance (telephone), or "great flying chariots," or "weapons of thunder and fire," or a new universal language (English), or anything that is distinctively modern. Instead, He mentioned signs familiar to His contemporaries; signs which were, to some extent, timeless.

The Olivet discourse divides logically into two sections, characterized by the clue words "the end" and "those days." Matt 24:4-14/Mark 13:5-13 describes events that anticipate "the end," concluding with the gospel to all the world. Then Matt 24:15ff./Mark 13:14ff. describe "those days" of the tribulation and Parousia. In other words, as Jesus describes the preliminary events leading up to the Eschaton, He repeatedly warns His listeners that this is not yet "the end"; then when He gets to the end events themselves He stops talking about "the end" as a soon-coming event and starts talking about "those days" of the tribulation. Jesus is using "the end" as it is used in Dan 11:27, 35, 40, 12:1, 4, where the end events begin in 11:40 and lead up to the unprecedented tribulation of 12:1.

Matt 24:4-8 lists a number of preliminary signs, all of which originate in the OT—which suggests that in the Olivet discourse Jesus was not so much predicting the future based on things he had seen in vision as He was giving an interpretation of OT

1944], 378); running water in every home in some cities, such as Smyrna (Aelius Aristides, *Orat.*, 17:8, in Durant, 514); and even sex-change operations (Justin Martyr, *Apology*, 27; Philo *Leg.* 3:41)!

prophecy. There are wars and rumors of wars,¹ kingdom against kingdom,² famines,³ and earthquakes;⁴ these commonplaces in history are said to be merely the early, initial signs, the "beginning of birth pains" (24:8), which precede even the persecution of the first Christian martyrs (vs. 9). All of these signs had happened in living memory, and Jesus' hearers would have regarded them as already past. In vs. 8 Jesus is saying, in essence, "The countdown has begun, but the worst is yet to come."

¹Matt 24:6. Jesus' source is Jer 51:46, "Do not lose heart or be afraid when rumors are heard in the land; one rumor comes this year, another the next, rumors of violence in the land and of ruler against ruler."

²Matt 24:7. Jesus' source is Isa 19:2, "I will stir up Egyptian against Egyptian—brother will fight against brother, neighbor against neighbor, city against city, kingdom against kingdom." Cf. 2 Chr 15:6, 4 Ezra 9:3, 13:31. Philo states this was the condition of the world prior to the reign of Caesar Augustus (27 B.C. to A.D. 14), who brought peace to the world: "All the affairs of state were in disorder and confusion; for the islands were in a state of war against the continents, and the continents were contending with the islands. . . . The European and Asiatic nations rising up from the extremities of the earth, and waging terrible wars against one another over all the earth, and over every sea, with enormous armaments, so that very nearly the whole race of mankind would have been destroyed by mutual slaughter and made utterly to disappear, if it had not been for one man and leader, Augustus" (Philo *Leg.* 144 [Yonge, 770]). According to Philo, the peace continued under Tiberius (who reigned A.D. 14-37), but was shattered by Gaius Caligula, who demanded divine honors.

³There was a great famine in 24/23 B.C., a Sabbatical year (Josephus *Antiquities* 15.9). Several decades after Jesus' prophecy there was a great famine in the reign of Claudius (Acts 11:28; Josephus *Antiquities* 3.15.3, 20.2.5, 20.5.2), and there was a local famine during the siege of Jerusalem.

⁴Whenever earthquakes are mentioned in a prophecy of the future in the OT they are associated with the final Eschaton; see Isa 29:6, Ezek 38:19, Zech 14:5; see also Job 38:13, Isa 2:19-21, 13:13, 24:18-20, Hag 2:6-7, 21-22. A major earthquake occurred ca. 30 B.C. according to Josephus *Antiquities* 15.5.2: "In the seventh year of the reign of Herod . . . there was an earthquake in Judea, such a one as had not happened at any other time, and which earthquake brought a great destruction upon the cattle in that country. About ten thousand men also perished by the fall of houses."

Next on the agenda is apostasy exacerbated by false prophets (24:10-13). False Christs and false prophets are mentioned three times in the prophecy. As we have already seen, these prophecies were fulfilled many times over in the first century.

Next Jesus predicts that the gospel of the kingdom would be "preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (24:14). But even this does not allow us to assume a long period of time before the advent, for according to Paul, this had already happened in his day.¹ The fact that this is placed prior to the destruction of Jerusalem implies that that destruction is included in "then

¹Rom 1:5, 10:18, Col 1:6, 23, 2 Tim 4:17. Cf. Eusebius *Hist.*, 2:3. Even in OT times the gospel was preached (Heb 4:2, 6) to the entire earth (Ps 98:2-3). Any exceptions (e.g., Spain, Rom 15:20, 24) do not disprove the rule. Paul's fulfillment statements are just as comprehensive as Jesus' prophecy; in neither case is every person on earth included, just as Jesus' statement "All men will hate you" (Mark 13:13/Matt 10:22/Luke 21:17) does not mean all men without exception. Cf. Isa 66:16-19, "For with fire and with his sword the Lord will execute judgment upon *all men*, and *many* will be those slain by the Lord. . . . And I . . . am about to come and gather *all nations and tongues*, and they will come and see my glory. . . . I will send some of those who survive to the nations . . . that have *not* heard of my fame or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory among the nations." I.e., all nations will see, yet not all. In Scripture, "all nations" sometimes requires qualification: "All the peoples, nations and men of every language [who were present] fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up" (Dan 3:7); "All the peoples and nations and men of every language [in his domain] dreaded and feared him [Nebuchadnezzar]" (Dan 5:19).

That Jesus regarded the gospel to all nations as something to happen in the lifetime of the apostles is suggested by its placement in Mark 13. Notice the context: "You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say." (Mark 13:9-11). Cf. Matt 24:9, 14: "You will be hated by *all nations* because of me. . . . And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to *all nations*."

The idea that the gospel must be preached to the ends of the earth comes from Isa 24:13-15, 48:20, 49:6, 62:11, 66:16-19.

the end will come."¹

Following the "gospel to all nations," and preceding "the abomination that causes desolation," Mark 13:12 says "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death."² The same idea, also in an eschatological context, is found in Luke 12:52-53. Wthis prophecy may have reference to family schisms caused by Christianity, yet it also fits the generational rivalry that reached a peak during the Jewish war between the young radicals and the old conservatives. Will Durant summarizes:

The old or well-to-do Hebrews counseled patience, arguing that revolt against so powerful an empire would be national suicide; the young or

¹Luke 17:30-31 takes Jesus' counsel regarding the destruction of Jerusalem ("No one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything") and transplants it into the context of "the day the Son of Man is revealed." Yet it is hard to make good sense of this in its new context, since flight of any kind would then be futile. The fact that Luke can do this implies that the destruction of Jerusalem was considered to be more or less coterminous with the Parousia, and this warning was coupled in the minds of early Christians with the Second Coming.

²The source is Mic 7:6, "For a son dishonors his father, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man's enemies are the members of his own household." Cf. Isa 9:19-21, 1 Enoch 100:1ff.

Jesus said that He had come to turn "a man against his father, a daughter against her mother" (Matt 10:34-36/Luke 12:53)—just the opposite of the work of eschatological Elijah who was to reconcile parents with children (Mal 3:24 > Luke 1:17). Similar statements which tend to downplay the child/parent relationship are found in Mark 10:29, Matt 8:21-22/Luke 9:59-60, and Matt 10:37/Luke 14:26; contrast with this the filial piety advocated in Sir 3:1-16. If the Pharisees thought Jesus had a cavalier attitude toward the fourth commandment, what must they have thought of His attitude toward the fifth?

One possible interpretation of this evidence: there was a profound generation gap in first-century Palestine, and Jesus sided with the youth (but not with the radicals). Keep in mind that Jesus' disciples were probably in their teens and early twenties: In Jesus' day a disciple would not normally be older than his teacher.

poor accused them of connivance and cowardice. The two factions divided the city and nearly every family; one seized the upper part of Jerusalem, the other the lower, and each attacked the other with every weapon at hand. In 68 a pitched battle was fought between the groups; the radicals won, and killed 12,000 Jews, including nearly all the rich; the revolt had become a revolution.¹

However, the betrayal by former friends in Mark 13:12/Matt 24:10/Luke 21:16 may have recently become realized eschatology for Matthew as he wrote in the sixties. 1 Clement 5-6 suggests that the betrayal of Peter and Paul and many other Christians to Nero in the sixties was due to church rivalry. Perhaps this is why Matthew changes the focus from family (Mark 13:12) to church (Matt 24:10).

Vss. 15-28 of Matt 24 recapitulate in greater detail the persecution and apostasy mentioned in vss. 9-13, focusing in on the "abomination of desolation" period—the Orwellian horror sketched out in the last half of Daniel. Then vss. 29-31 focus in on the actual Second Coming, preceded by astronomical signs. Josephus speaks of those as well:

Thus were the miserable people persuaded by these deceivers [false prophets and messiahs] and such as belied God himself; while they did not attend, nor give credit, to the signs that were so evident, and did so plainly foretell their future desolation; but, like men infatuated, without either eyes to see or minds to consider, did not regard the denunciations that God made to them. Thus there was a star resembling a sword, which stood over the city, and a comet, that continued a whole year. Thus also, before the Jews' rebellion, and before those commotions which preceded the war, when the people were come in great crowds to the feast of unleavened bread, on the eighth day of the month Xanthicus [Nisan], and at the ninth hour of the night, so great a light shone round the altar and the holy house, that lasted for half an hour. . . . Besides these, a few days after that feast, on the 21st day of Artemisius, a certain prodigious and incredible phenomenon appeared;

¹Durant, 544.

. . . before sunsetting, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armor were seen running about among the clouds.¹

These signs are not the ultimate fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy, because the astronomical signs were to come *just after*, not during, the Jerusalem tribulation (Matt 24:29/Mark 13:24). But if the tongues of fire at Pentecost could be called a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy of "blood and fire and billows of smoke," as Peter seems to affirm (Acts 2:19), then perhaps Josephus's astronomical signs can be considered a pre-fulfillment of Jesus' signs in the heavens, falling stars or no.² The darkness around the cross (Matt 27:45) would be another pre-fulfillment.

Astronomical anomalies such as daytime darkness are not as rare as we might think. There have been perhaps a score of them in United States history alone. In the first century, there was a dark day in A.D. 79, along with earthquakes, in connection with the eruption of Vesuvius.³ The catastrophic eruption of Santorini/Thera, which

¹Josephus *Wars* 6.5.3.

²Could biblical prophecies about falling stars be fulfilled by a meteor shower? According to Matt 24:21, 29, the stars fall only after the final tribulation; and in these prophecies the stars, once fallen, no longer shine (Isa 13:10, 34:4, Ezek 32:7, Joel 2:10, 3:15, Rev 6:13-14; cf. Sib Or 3:88, 5:528-531). In Sib Or 5:513-531 it is the actual constellations that fall. However, a meteor shower, like Josephus' signs or the darkness around the cross, might be considered a semi-fulfillment or "dress rehearsal" of the real thing which occurs just before the Parousia (Rev 6:13-14).

³This is described vividly by Pliny the younger, who was caught in Campania at the time with his mother: "We had scarcely sat down when night came upon us; not such as we have when the sky is cloudy, or when there is no room, but that of a room when it is shut up, and all the lights put out. You might hear the shrieks of women, the screams of children, and the shouts of men; some calling for their children, others for their parents, others for their husbands, and seeking to recognize each other by the voices that replied; one lamenting his own fate, another that of his family; some wishing to die, from the very fear of dying; some lifting their hands to the gods; but the greater part convinced that there were now no gods at all, and that

dwarfed the 1883 explosion of Krakatoa and gave rise to the Atlantis myth, probably produced dark days in Egypt at a time when the Israelites were enslaved there.¹ Ever since then such events have evoked primordial memories of cosmic destruction.

In short, there is nothing in the prophecy of Matt 24 that has not met with at least the same sort of preliminary or proleptic fulfillment as the prophecy of Matt 16:27-28 did on the mount of transfiguration.

The Man of Sin in 2 Thess 2

Outside of the book of Revelation, the only thing mentioned in the NT as a still-future event that must occur before Jesus can come is the coming of the Antichrist in 2 Thess 2. But keep in mind this crucial fact: Paul is writing before the

the final endless night of which we have heard had come upon the world. . . . During all this scene of horror, not a sign, or expression of fear, escaped me, had not my support been grounded in that miserable, though mighty, consolation, that all mankind were involved in the same calamity, and that I was perishing with the world itself. At last this dreadful darkness was dissipated by degrees, like a cloud or smoke; the real day returned, and even the sun shone out, though with a lurid light, as when an eclipse is coming on" (Pliny Letter to Cornelius Tacitus, in *Harvard Classics: Letters of Pliny*, trans. William Melmoth, rev. F.C.T. Bosanquet [New York: P. F. Collier, 1909], 290-91).

¹The explosion in the Aegean devastated the very advanced Minoan civilization, which featured running water and bathtubs, flush toilets and perhaps even central heating. See Charles Pellegrino, *Return to Sodom and Gomorrah* (New York: Avon Books, 1994). Pellegrino's 1628 B.C. dating is somewhat controversial. Whether or not the Ipuwer papyrus from Egypt describes the Thera explosion, as Pellegrino maintains (p. 214), it certainly describes a dark day: "The Sun is covered and does not shine to the sight of men. Life is no longer possible when the Sun is concealed behind the clouds. Ra has turned his face from mankind. If only it would shine even for one hour! No one knows when it is midday. One's shadow is not discernable. The Sun in the heavens resembles the moon." Another Egyptian text of uncertain age describes a horrible storm with loud noises and says that "for a period of [illegible] days no light shone in the two lands [Upper and Lower Egypt]" (Ibid., 230).

destruction of Jerusalem. Both Paul in 2 Thess 2 and Jesus in Matt 24 are reading from the same script: that of Daniel. Jesus, alluding to Dan 11:31, emphasizes the Desolation, while Paul, alluding to Dan 11:36, emphasizes the Desolator, or "man of lawlessness."¹ Jesus had said, "False Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible" (Matt 24:24); Paul narrows the focus down from many false Christs to a single miracle-working Antichrist who has both an *apokalypsis* (2 Thess 2:3, 8) and a *parousia* (2:9), like the true Christ (1:7, 2:8) that he impersonates.²

In other words, Paul's prophecy is a variation on the Olivet tradition of temple desecration: Jesus spoke of the abomination of desolation in the holy place; Paul speaks of the man of sin who exalts himself as God and sets himself up in God's temple. What prompted Paul's modest development of this tradition? Perhaps Paul's man of sin is colored slightly by the recent confrontation between the Jews and the Roman emperor Gaius Caligula who, unlike his two worthier predecessors (Augustus and Tiberius), set himself up as a god, in a way that must have seemed to fulfill the

¹Cf. Ps Sol 17:11f. and the man who attempts to change times and laws in Dan 7:25.

²Was Paul's description colored somewhat by the messianic impostors catalogued by Josephus? Note his mention of a "rebellion" (vs. 3), the fact that "the secret power of lawlessness is already at work" (vs. 7), and the "counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders" (vs. 9) that deceive "those who are perishing" (vs. 10). This also explains the view of the early church fathers that vs. 6 ("you know what is holding him back") is a reference to the civil government (which at the time was the Roman Empire), an agency of God (Rom 13), which brutally suppressed such "lawless" messianic rebellions. But while Paul's "man of lawlessness" may contain a tincture of these outlaw messiahs, he also differs in being more successful in his deceptions and more hostile to Christianity.

prediction of Dan 11:36. According to Philo,

The madness and frenzy to which he gave way were so preposterous, and so utterly insane, that he went even beyond the demigods, and mounted up to and invaded the veneration and worship paid to those who are looked upon as greater than they, as the supreme deities of the world, Mercury, and Apollo, and Mars.¹

In August of 38 the citizens of Alexandria, encouraged by Caligula's disdain for the Jews, launched a pogrom against them which rivaled that of Germany around 1940. Thousands of Jews were publicly put to death with horrible cruelty, and most who survived had their possessions seized.² Moreover, "all the synagogues that they were unable to destroy by burning and razing them to the ground . . . they set up in every one of them images of Gaius."³ In the summer of 40 Caligula finally ordered the governor of Syria to erect his statue in the Jerusalem temple itself. This prospect horrified the Jewish nation. Caligula was temporarily dissuaded by Herod Agrippa, and before he could change his mind, he was murdered on January 24, 41. Paul probably viewed this incident as an omen of an even worse persecution to come.

The connection between Dan 11-12 and NT eschatology has not been sufficiently explored. We have already noted that the prophecy of Dan 11-12 provides

¹Philo *Leg.* 93 (Yonge, 765).

²"They openly plundered them of all their furniture and treasures, carrying them off in broad daylight, and displaying their booty to every one whom they met, as if they had inherited it or fairly purchased it from the owners" (Philo *Leg.* 122 [Yonge, 768]). Cf. Heb 10:34, "You . . . joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property"—not necessarily a reference to this event.

³Philo *Leg.* 134, cf. 346-7. Cf. Rev 13:14. Keep in mind that Christianity in A.D. 40 was still regarded as a Jewish sect, so these events would have affected any Christians in Alexandria.

the pattern for Jesus' use of the phrase "the end" in Matt 24/Mark 13, and that Dan 12:1-7 influenced Jesus' eschatology. Daniel's prophecy also explains why Jesus cites the abomination of desolation as a sign to flee Jerusalem (Matt 24:15-16): the abomination of desolation in Dan 11:31 is a precursor of the great tribulation of 12:1.

The prophecy of Simeon at the dedication of Jesus, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel" (Luke 2:34), is probably an allusion to Dan 11, which repeatedly mentions the "fall" and "rise" of "many,"¹ including the "wise," which first fall (11:33-35), then rise (12:2-3). From His birth, Jesus' destiny was set by Daniel.

Dan 11 also helps us understand 2 Thess 2. Why does Paul in 2 Thess 2:3 say the man of lawlessness must precede the Parousia? Probably because the antichrist figure of Dan 11:21-45 precedes the great tribulation and resurrection of Dan 12:1f. In fact, the chronology of Dan 11:21-45 provides several intriguing parallels to 2 Thess 2 and Matt 24, including possible parallels to Paul's cryptic "restrainer:"

Wars and rumors of war	Dan 11:21-45	Matt 24:6-7	
Deception	Dan 11:23,27,32	Matt 24:4,5,11,23	2 Th 2:3,9-11
Lawless one restrained	Dan 11:30,32,40?		2 Th 2:6-7
Faithlessness, apostasy	Dan 11:30,32	Matt 24:10	2 Th 2:4?
Abomination in the temple	Dan 11:31	Matt 24:15	2 Th 2:4
Lawless one exalts himself	Dan 11:36-37		2 Th 2:4

¹The fall, Dan 11:19, 26, 33-35, 41; the rise, 11:14, 23, 31, 12:1-3, 13; the many, 11:14, 26, 33, 34, 39, 40, 41, 42, 44, 12:3, 4, 10.

Lawless one's demise	Dan 11:45		2 Th 2:3,8
Unprecedented tribulation	Dan 12:1	Matt 24:21	
Resurrection	Dan 12:2		1 Th 4:13-18
"All things completed"	Dan 12:7	Matt 24:34	

It almost seems as if Paul is filling in the blanks of the Olivet discourse, touching on some aspects of Dan 11 that Jesus omitted.

Basically, then, Paul in 2 Thess 2 is saying that the Second Coming cannot occur until the prophecy of Daniel and Jesus about the abomination of desolation is fulfilled—which had not happened yet when he wrote.¹ But by the time John wrote his epistles near the end of the first century, the antichrist, too, had become realized eschatology:

Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. (1 John 2:18)

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out

¹Whenever Paul speaks of "God's temple" in his subsequent writings, it is used metaphorically (1 Cor 3:16-17, 6:19, 2 Cor 6:16, Eph 2:19-21; cf. Gal 4:25-26). Since 2 Thess 2:4 is earlier and lies outside of the time frame of the later statements; and since it is a quotation from Dan 11:36, it is possible that Paul refers to the literal temple. But this is unlikely: Paul says nothing about its destruction, and he uses not *hieron* but *naos*, which is never unambiguously used for the Jerusalem temple in the NT. If Paul is talking about the church, then the traditional Protestant understanding of this passage is, at the very least, a viable interpretation similar to Jesus' application of Malachi's Elijah prophecy to John the Baptist. That inspired writers do not always fully understand what they write is implied by 1 Pet 1:10-12. The Holy Spirit may have something more in mind than the human author. Paul himself probably thought of the "rebellion" as something to occur within the next few years (cf. Acts 20:28-31).

into the world. . . . Every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. (1 John 4:1-3)

The Seventy Weeks of Dan 9 in the NT

The evidence uncovered in this research has led me, like Peter, where I did not want to go. I now suspect that even the destruction of Jerusalem occurred later than was expected. This brings us to the heart of the problem. While the foregoing case is based upon fairly hard evidence, this section is somewhat more conjectural, for some of the hard evidence no longer exists.

Jesus and the Seventy Weeks

As we have seen, many first-century Jews expected the imminent end of the age because they believed Rome was the fourth and final kingdom of Dan 7. But the prophecy of Dan 9 had also attracted attention. Indeed, I believe Dan 9:24-27 lay at the center of Jesus' entire eschatological scenario:

Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy. Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.

Jesus must have seen this passage as a thumbnail sketch of His entire career. If He believed He would be "cut off in the midst of the week," this may explain His "my time has not yet come" statements.¹ He knew He had only a little over three years (half of the seventieth "week") from the commencement of His ministry in which to work. Luke 13:7, 32 may be a reference to this. And the entire Olivet discourse about the destruction of Jerusalem is based on Dan 9:26, "The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary."² Jesus explicitly refers

¹John 2:4, 7:6, 8, 30, 8:20, 12:23, 13:1, 17:1; cf. Matt 26:18, "My appointed time [to die] is near." If Jesus was crucified in April, A.D. 30—the most likely date—then He was crucified exactly in the middle of the seven-year sabbatical period which began three and a half years earlier, in the fall of A.D. 26.

²It is possible Dan 9:26 was understood by Josephus as a reference, not to the Romans, but to the people of the Messiah. "These men, therefore, trampled upon all the laws of man, and laughed at the laws of God; and for the oracles of the prophets, they ridiculed them as the tricks of jugglers; yet did these prophets foretell many things concerning virtue and vice, which when these zealots violated, they occasioned the fulfilling of those very prophecies belonging to their own country: for there was a certain ancient oracle of those men, that the city should then be taken and the sanctuary burnt, by right of war, when a sedition should invade the Jews, and *their own hands should pollute the temple of God*" (Josephus *Wars* 4.6.3). Josephus believed that it was the Jews, not the Romans, who polluted and defiled the sanctuary; he quotes the high priest, Ananus, referring to the Zealots: "Certainly it had been a good thing for me to die before I had seen the house of God full of so many abominations, or those sacred places that ought not to be trodden on at random, filled with the feet of these blood-shedding villains" (*Wars* 4.3.10). "When any of the zealots were wounded, he went up into the temple and defiled that sacred floor with his blood, insomuch that one may say it was their blood alone that polluted our sanctuary" (*Wars* 4.3.12). "I cannot but think that . . . God had doomed this city to destruction, as a polluted city, and was resolved to purge his sanctuary by fire" (*Wars* 4.5.2). "Wherefore I cannot but suppose that God is fled out of his sanctuary, and stands on the side of those [Romans] against whom you [Jews] fight" (*Wars* 5.9.4).

to the abomination of desolation (KJV)¹ of Dan 9:27. According to Daniel's prophecy, war would "continue until the end" (hence the need to encourage believers to "stand firm until the end," Matt 24:13/Mark 13:13) and three and a half years later the new age would dawn, bringing "an end to sin" and inaugurating an age of "everlasting righteousness." Could it be that Jesus understood the three-and-a-half-year passages in Dan 7:25 and 12:7, and the "abomination of desolation" passage in 11:31ff., as referring to the second half of Daniel's seventieth week?

There are still vestiges of the old three-and-a-half-year scenario in the NT. Rev 11:2 projects the prophecy that the gentiles "will trample on the holy city for 42 months" into the future; but this may well be what was originally expected to happen shortly in real time, in the last half of the seventieth week. A vestigial reference to this, with the timeline removed, is found in Luke 21:24, "Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled."²

There is some evidence that Jesus had this time period in mind in the Olivet discourse. It was suggested earlier that Dan 12:7 was the source for "This generation will certainly not pass away until *all these things have happened*" (Matt 24:34). Since

¹Or, the "desolating abomination." The meaning of this phrase is some detestable sin or sacrilege that brings destruction and desolation to the land; see Ezek 33:28-29, Dan 9:2, 17-18; cf. Luke 21:20.

²Cf. the reference to the three-year (167-64 B.C.) desecration of the sanctuary by Antiochus Epiphanes in 1 Macc 3:45: "The sanctuary was trampled down, and the sons of aliens held the citadel; it was a lodging place for the Gentiles." Also cf. 1 Macc 2:12, Isa 63:18, Dan 8:13, Ps Sol 2:19, 17:22. Does Luke 21:24 suggest that Luke wrote after A.D. 69 and before A.D. 74, when the 1260-day "times of the gentiles" should have been up?

Dan 12:7 says that everything would happen within three and a half "times" (vs. 11 seems to say 1,290 days) from the abomination of desolation, it would certainly seem safe to say that everything would be wrapped up in a generation.¹

Dan 9 would provide an explanation as to why Jesus' concept of the Messiah differed from that of the conventional warrior king. In Dan 9:26 the Anointed One, or Messiah, is "cut off and will have nothing." This does not sound like the triumphant leader of armies of the classical prophets (discussed below). Dan 9:24-27 must be one of the passages Jesus used when He explained to the disciples on the road to Emmaus the OT prophecies of His death and resurrection.² Where else does the OT talk about the Messiah being "cut off"?³ Dan 9:26 is the only passage that links Isaiah's suffering Servant, who is "cut off" (Isa 53:8), with the Anointed One, who in other texts is a triumphalistic figure. Dan 9, therefore, lies at the crux of Jesus self-understanding; it must have provided Jesus with the essential clue for melding Daniel's Son of Man, Isaiah's Suffering Servant,⁴ and the Anointed One.

Additional evidence that Dan 9 is one of the main tributaries flowing into the

¹That the "times" of Dan 4:16, 23, 25, 32, 7:25, 12:7 are years is made explicit in the Hebrew of Dan 11:13, though this is not evident in the English translation. Dan 12:7 is the source for Rev 10:5-7, the angel who swears "there will be no more delay." In the following chapters John explains how the 1260-day prophecy is finally about to be fulfilled. Is it possible that the scroll which is at first sweet, then bitter (Rev 10:8-11) is an allusion to the disappointment of the failure of Daniel's prophecy?

²Luke 24:25-27, 44-47, cf. Mark 14:21, Acts 17:2-3.

³Another passage sometimes regarded as alluding to the death of the Messiah is Zech 13:7 (quoted by Jesus in Mark 14:27).

⁴As we see in Mark 9:12, 10:45, etc.

Olivet discourse is found in the fact that Jesus compares the end of time to Noah's flood in Matt 24:37-39/Luke 17:26-27. This looks very much like a midrash on Dan 9:26, "The end will come like a flood"—just as the parable of the fig tree (Matt 24:32f./Mark 13:28f./Luke 21:29) is a midrash on Isa 34:4, which speaks of the stars falling as leaves from a fig tree.

And now the evidence becomes sparse indeed, but no less tantalizing. I may be grasping at straws, but sometimes one broken straw is all a good tracker needs. Where did Jesus get His figure of three and a half years for Elijah's drought?¹ The OT does not suggest this figure. According to 1 Kgs 17:1 and 18:1, Elijah simply said there would be no rain "for the next few years," and the famine was broken sometime "in the third year," which according to Jewish inclusive reckoning would have made the famine closer to two and a half years long. According to the pseudepigraphal *Lives of the Prophets*, written somewhere around the time of Jesus, the famine is said to have been three years long (21:5). But in Jesus' mind the actual historical figure has become assimilated to the time prophecy. Jesus' statement in Luke 4:25 suggests to me that Jesus had Daniel's three and a half years on his mind, and Rev 11:1-6 and 12:6 confirm that within early Christianity the Elijah tradition became fused with Daniel's apocalyptic half-week tradition.

There is another obscure clue of a similar nature. Antiochus Epiphanes' defilement of the Jerusalem sanctuary in 167 B.C. lasted exactly three years to the

¹Luke 4:25, Jam 5:17.

day.¹ Yet at one point Josephus says that it lasted three and a half years.² Again, the historical figure has been assimilated to the time prophecy.

With this in mind, consider Jesus' statement, "If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened."³ Whatever could this mean? Cut short by what? Well, by the next event on the agenda—the Second Coming. Jesus seems to be saying that the Parousia will be very soon—even sooner than would be expected by the conventional prophetic scenario. And how can something be cut short unless it has a predetermined length? Could it be that Jesus meant that the tribulation would be abbreviated just as it was in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes, when an expected three-and-a-half-year tribulation was shortened by one seventh?

Keep in mind that we are not concerned with what Daniel "really" meant. Jesus certainly did not believe Antiochus fulfilled Daniel's prophecies; He believed the fulfillment was still future. If Mark 13:20/Matt 24:22 is an allusion to this abbreviated tribulation, then Jesus was simply using the historical event as a prototype or paradigm for a more significant event in the future, as happens often in Revelation.

At any rate, Jesus' statement in Matt 24:22 does explain one thing. Earlier I cited the communal sharing of the early believers as an evidence they expected Jesus

¹Josephus *Antiquities* 10.11.7, 12.7.6; 1 Macc 1:54, 4:36-59.

²Josephus *Wars* 1.1.1.

³Mark 13:20/Matt 24:22; Cf. Pseudo-Philo 19:13, "And when the time draws near to visit the world, I will command the years and order the times and they will be shortened." See also Rom 9:28, 2 Bar 20:1, 54:1, 83:1, *Epistle of Barnabus* 4.

back in a period of months. Why months? Why not three and a half years? Because Jesus said the time would be shortened, and His followers should be ready any time.

Stephen and Paul and the Seventy Weeks

The Gospels do not mention the three and a half years, for when Mark and Matthew wrote, it was obvious that this had failed, while the "this generation" scenario was still viable. This would explain why there is no mention of the seventy week prophecy in the NT in spite of the fact that it pinpoints the coming of the Messiah; something which otherwise is very puzzling indeed. It might also explain why Jesus is so rarely called the Son of Man in later literature when that was His most frequent title for Himself. After the uneventful termination of the seventy weeks, this title fell out of use and is mentioned only in Heb 2:5-9,¹ Rev 1:13 and 14:14. The only time this phrase appears on the lips of anyone other than Jesus Himself is near the end of the seventy weeks, when Stephen, in vision, sees the "Son of Man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56).

Stephen's exclamation just before his death is intriguing. All other NT parallels mention that Jesus is *sitting* on the right hand of God.² Why does Stephen

¹The author of Hebrews understands the "son of man" in this citation from Ps 8 not as a generic reference to mankind but as a titular reference to Christ; his point in citing the passage is to prove that God has "put everything under his [the Son of Man's] feet." This is proved by Eph 1:22 and 1 Cor 15:24-27, which indicate that Ps 8:6 was used as a proof-text of Christ's supreme authority by the early church; cf. also Phil 3:21.

²Matt 26:64, Mark 14:62, 16:19, Luke 22:69, Acts 2:33-34, 5:31, Col 3:1, Heb 1:3, 8:1, 12:2; or just "at" the right hand, 1 Pet 3:22, Rom 8:34.

see Him *standing*? In the prophetic tradition, the meaning is clear:

You will arise and have compassion on Zion, for it is time to show favor to her; the appointed time has come. . . . For the Lord will rebuild Zion and appear in his glory. (Ps 102:13, 16)¹

Men will flee to caves in the rocks and to holes in the ground from dread of the Lord and the splendor of his majesty, when he rises to shake the earth. (Isa 2:19)

The Lord takes his place in court; he rises to judge the people. (Isa 3:13)

The Lord will rise up as he did at Mount Perazim, he will rouse himself as in the Valley of Gibeon—to do his work, his strange work, and perform his task, his alien task. (Isa 28:21)

At the thunder of your voice, the peoples flee; when you rise up, the nations scatter. . . . Now will I arise," says the Lord. "Now will I be exalted; now will I be lifted up. . . . The peoples will be burned as if to lime." (Isa 33:3, 10, 12)

I saw the Lord standing by the altar, and he said: "Strike the tops of the pillars so that the thresholds shake. Bring them down on the heads of all the people; those who are left I will kill with the sword. Not one will get away, none will escape. . . . The Lord, the Lord Almighty, he who touches the earth and it melts, and all who live in it mourn. . . . In that day I will restore David's fallen tent." (Amos 9:1, 5, 11)

"Therefore wait for me," declares the Lord, "for the day I will stand up to testify. I have decided to assemble the nations, to gather the kingdoms and to pour out my wrath on them—all my fierce anger. The whole world will be consumed by the fire of my jealous anger." (Zeph 3:8)

At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be

¹In the Psalms, God rises to judge the wicked and vindicate the righteous, Ps 3:7, 7:6, 9:19, 10:12, 12:5, 17:13, 35:23, 44:26, 59:4, 68:1, 73:20, 74:22, 82:8, 94:2.

delivered. (Dan 12:1)

In the first century apocalyptic tradition, the rising up of God, or His messianic agent, was the beginning of the eschaton:

Then a great plague shall take place from heaven upon all these [evils]; the holy Lord shall emerge with wrath and plague in order that he may execute judgment upon the earth. . . . Then the righteous one shall arise from his sleep, and the wise one shall arise; and he shall be given unto them (the people), and through him the roots of oppression shall be cut off. Sinners shall be destroyed; by the sword they shall be cut off. (1 Enoch 91:7-11)

In those days, Sheol shall return all the deposits which she had received and hell will give back all that which it owes. And he shall choose the righteous and the holy ones from among (the risen dead), for the day when they shall be selected and saved has arrived. In those days, (the Elect One) shall sit on my throne. . . . And the faces of all the angels in heaven shall glow with joy, because on that day the elect one has arisen. (1 Enoch 51:1-4)

Then his kingdom will appear throughout his whole creation. . . . For the Heavenly One will arise from his kingly throne. Yea, he will go forth from his holy habitation. . . . In full view he will come to work vengeance on the nations. (Test Mos 10)

Stephen's exclamation, coming as it did around the end of the seventy weeks, would very likely have been understood to mean that the Parousia was beginning, and Jesus was about to come.¹ When James wrote, at least a decade later, he still

¹Eusebius cites Hegesippus, a second-century Jewish historian, regarding the martyrdom of James, the brother of Jesus and author of the epistle. Hegesippus says James' death was precipitated by the following exchange: "The aforesaid scribes and pharisees, therefore, placed James upon a wing of the temple, and cried out to him, 'O thou just man, whom we ought all to believe, since the people are led astray after Jesus that was crucified, declare to us what is the door to Jesus that was crucified.' And he answered with a loud voice, 'Why do you ask me respecting Jesus the Son of Man? He is now sitting in the heavens, on the right hand of great Power, and is about to come on the clouds of heaven.' After this the scribes and pharisees, realizing their mistake, cast James down from the pinnacle of the temple and stoned and beat him to

maintained that "the Judge is standing at the door" (Jas 5:9).

The disappointment caused by the passing of the time might also explain certain heterodox teachings in early Christianity which put the Parousia and resurrection in the past. Paul reports that some Christians were "saying that the day of the Lord has already come" (2 Thess 2:2—note the OT terminology), and others were teaching "that the resurrection has already taken place" (2 Tim 2:18). The Corinthian group that denied a literal future resurrection (1 Cor 15:12ff.) may also be placed in this category.¹ This sounds like a spiritualizing reinterpretation of prophecy in reaction to the lack of a literal Parousia at the end of the seventy weeks. In other words, some Christians were teaching that the prophecy really had been fulfilled after all; there was a spiritual resurrection of some sort. Curiously, Paul himself taught a realized and spiritualized resurrection;² perhaps his readers took him too literally. At

death" (Eusebius *Hist.*, 2:23). However, Josephus's description of the death of James (discussed below) is rather different and probably more reliable as it was written only a few decades after the event by someone not partial to James. Josephus says the Sadducees were the villains, and implies the Pharisees were sympathizers. Could it be, then, that Hegesippus's story is actually a conflation of the martyrdom of James *and Stephen*, with many of the details pertaining to Stephen? If so, then it is interesting that Hegesippus has "James" saying that Jesus "is about to come on the clouds of heaven."

¹Witherington, 189-191, argues on the basis of 1 Cor 4:8 and 6:13 that the Corinthians with whom Paul is arguing taught a realized and spiritualized eschatology.

²"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor 5:17); "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves" (Col 1:13); "When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ" (Col 2:13); "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God" (Col 3:1); "And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:6).

any rate, Paul ultimately rejected an over-realized eschatology.

The Jubilee and the Seventy Weeks

One potential objection to the seventy week hypothesis is that in Jesus' time no one had sufficient historical knowledge to be able to compute the exact number of years after an event that happened centuries earlier. Neither Jesus nor anyone else would have had any way of knowing that the date of His baptism was exactly 483 years after the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem mentioned in Dan 9:24.

The answer to this is twofold. First, Exod 12:41 is evidence that the Jews could compute a 400 year period to the very day. Josephus mentions an event that took place 471 years and three months after the Jews were freed from Babylonia;¹ his writings are filled with such timetables. Second, it was not necessary to compute the date to the nearest year but only to the nearest seven years, which is much easier; and the Jewish Sabbatical cycle (weeks of years) was as fixed and regular as our weekly cycle. The year Jesus was baptized was a Sabbatical year, and it is not implausible that Jesus had calculated that it was the beginning of the seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy. This requires some explanation.

In Dan 10:2-3 we find the unusual phrase "weeks of days," which many translators misinterpret as an idiom meaning full or whole weeks. But the real point is

In spite of the lack of a "coming in the clouds," the NT seems to regard the coronation of Dan 7:13-14 as realized eschatology after the resurrection, judging by the probable allusions in Matt 28:18, John 17:2, Acts 5:31, 7:56, Eph 1:20-22, 1 Pet 3:22 (cf. Dan 7:27 LXX), Rev 5:6-10.

¹Josephus *Wars* 1.3.1.

to distinguish the weeks of days in 10:2-3 from the weeks of years mentioned just above in Dan 9:24-27, since the same word is used for both time periods.¹ The reason the time prophecy of Dan 9:24-27 is divided into sevens is because Daniel is referring to a standard Jewish division of time, the conventional Sabbatical periods which were observed after the exile.

The Jewish seven-year Sabbatical period, or "heptad," or "septennate," was somewhat analogous to our ten-year decade, while their Jubilee (7 X 7 years) was analogous to our century (10 X 10 years). The legislation for the Sabbatical and the Jubilee is given in Lev 25, which is essential background for Dan 9:24-27.² Since the

¹So Louis F. Hartman and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel*, Anchor Bible, vol. 23 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978), 278; and Andre Lacocque, *The Book of Daniel* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), 205. So also the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (hereafter *SDABC*), ed. F. D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1955), 4:24: "Here, evidently, weeks of years are intended rather than weeks of days, for in ch. 10:2, 3 when Daniel wishes to specify . . . seven-day weeks he explicitly says, "weeks of days." . . . Seventy weeks of years would be 490 literal years, without (here) applying the day-year principle."

²Two passages that underlie the prophecy of Dan 9 are Lev 25-26 (note Dan 9:13) and Jer 29 (note Dan 9:2). I suspect that Daniel had been reading Jer 29 and Lev 26 because both passages explain what God's people must do in order to be delivered from exile. Jer 29 is the text of the letter that Jeremiah sent to the exiles which includes his seventy-year prophecy. Daniel's prayer seems to have been prompted by this letter; note the parallels: Jer 29:10 > Dan 9:2; Jer 29:12-13 > Dan 9:3-4; Jer 29:19 > Dan 9:6; Jer 29:18 > Dan 9:7, 16 (listed in Raymond Cottrell's unpublished commentary on Daniel). As far as Leviticus is concerned, the legislation for the Sabbatical year and the Jubilee in Lev 25 is followed by the blessings and curses of chap. 26, which promises that in the event of apostasy, "I will scatter you among the nations and will draw out my sword and pursue you. Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in ruins. Then the land will enjoy its sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. All the time that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the sabbaths you lived in it" (Lev 26:33-35). In case of continued apostasy (cf. Jer 29:19), God would multiply their punishment by

non-observance of the Sabbatical year prior to the exile was one reason for the Babylonian captivity, the returned exiles pledged to faithfully observe it.¹

We know when the Sabbatical years were observed after the exile. According to 1 Macc 6:20, 49, 53, the siege of Jerusalem by Antiochus V (Eupater) and Lysias fell in a Sabbatical year; that would have been 164/63 B.C.² According to Josephus,³ Ptolemy killed the mother and brother of John Hyrcanus in a Sabbatical year (136/35 B.C.); and Jerusalem was captured by Herod and Antigonus was beheaded in a

seven times (Lev 26:18, 21, 24, 28). Daniel's prophetic seventy-week period is seven times as long as the seventy years of punishment predicted in Jer 29.

¹Lev 26:33-35, 43, 2 Chr 36:21, Neh 10:31. The sad episode of the release and recapture of the slaves in Jer 34 suggests a Sabbatical year (see Exod 21:2, Deut 15:12). But this is normally dated to 588 B.C., which does not jibe with the post-exilic Sabbatical cycle, so perhaps Jeremiah was simply seeking to make up for past injustices in mid-cycle. If it was a Sabbatical year, then a totally new cycle was inaugurated after the exile.

²Actually 1 Macc 6:20 claims this happened in the 150th year of the Maccabean era, generally dated from 312 B.C., which would make it 163/62. But this date is one year out of kilter with the dates mentioned below. The Sabbatical year should have been 164/63. There are several possible explanations: (1) the author of Maccabees is simply off by a year: he is actually remembering, not the Sabbatical year itself, but the famine (6:54) that resulted in the year following the Sabbatical year; (2) the normal cycle was disrupted by the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes, so the Jews celebrated it one year later (this is unlikely), or (3) after the Sabbatical year in 164/63, the Jubilee was actually celebrated in 163/62 as due, making this the second non-crop year in a row. This would be the only known Jubilee observance in history, but after the reconsecration of the temple the Jews would have been extraordinarily punctilious in keeping the law of Moses for a time. However, the incident in 1 Macc 16:14 which is dated to the year 177 of the Seleucid era, or 134 B.C., is said by Josephus (see next footnote) to have happened in a Sabbatical year. This would also give us a Sabbatical date one year too late, so for some reason 1 Macc is one year off kilter. See the discussion in Emil Schurer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1973-), 1:35-45.

³Josephus *Antiquities* 13.8.1/Wars 1.2.4; *Antiquities* 14.16.2/15.1.2.

Sabbatical year (38/37 B.C.). A footnote in the Socino Talmud mentions A.D. 40/41 as a Sabbatical year,¹ and Sir William Ramsay gives A.D. 54/55 as a Sabbatical year.² According to Rabbinic tradition, the temple was destroyed by Titus in the year after the Sabbath year, which would have been A.D. 68/69.³ The Sabbatical cycle is still observed today in Palestine; the year 1951/52 was a Sabbatical year.⁴ These dates are mutually self-consistent (i.e., the intervals are divisible by seven) with themselves and with 458/57 B.C. and A.D. 26/27 and 33/34. This is a significant, independent confirmation that the seventy week prophecy began with the decree of Artaxerxes, for this makes the seventy weeks begin (458/57 B.C.) and end (A.D. 33/34) in a Sabbatical year.⁵

¹*Babylonian Talmud*, Sotah 41a (Socino ed.) 16:202n; cited in Newman, 233.

²Sir William Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveler and Roman Citizen* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1966 reprint), 192, cited in Newman, 233.

³*Seder Olam*, ed. Meyer, 91ff.; also *Arachin* 11b, *Taanith* 29a; cited in Shurer, 1:41.

⁴*Encyclopedia Judaica*, 14:585, cited in Newman, 233.

⁵The traditional understanding of the chronology of the 490 years is documented in the *SDABC* 4:851-55; Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9:24-27," *Ministry*, May, 1976, 5D-21D; and Frank B. Holbrook, ed., *The Seventy Weeks, Leviticus, the Nature of Prophecy* (Washington, DC: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1986).

Three different decrees are mentioned in Ezra 6:14: Cyrus (2 Chr 36:22-23, Ezra 1:1-4), Darius (Ezra 6:6-12), and Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:12-26). Adventists have held that it is the third and final decree which meets the time specifications of the prophecy of Dan 9. The date of 457 B.C. for this decree is established by Siegfried H. Horn and Lynn H. Wood, *The Chronology of Ezra 7*, 2d ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1970).

Some scholars feel that Neh 8-10 is a misplaced fragment that relates to events in the book of Ezra. According to Johannes C. De Moor, *New Year with Canaanites and Israelites* (Netherlands, 1972), 1:23: "In 458 B.C. (H. H. Grosheide, Ezra-

In addition to these references, Josephus also cites a decree of Gaius Caesar to Hyrcanus releasing the Jews from paying tribute to Rome during their Sabbatical years, "because thereon they neither receive the fruits of their trees, nor do they sow their land."¹ Furthermore, an entire tractate of the Mishnah (ca. A.D. 200) is devoted to the rules for observing the Sabbatical year. Add to this the references in the Dead Sea Scrolls, such as 1QM 2:8, "During the years of release they shall not equip themselves in order to go out on campaign, for it is a sabbath of rest for Israel." All of this is strong evidence that the Sabbatical year was carefully observed around the time of Jesus.

The Jubilee, however, is another story. There is no evidence that the Jubilee was ever celebrated or observed in history. Today we do not celebrate centuries in any traditional way either; nevertheless they are not only a recognized unit of time, but a sort of mental category (17th century, etc.). The Jewish forty-nine-year

Nehemiah I (COT), Kampen, 1963, p. 35-47) Ezra came to Jerusalem. When the seventh month arrived he celebrated tabernacles (Neh 8) and since it was a Sabbatical year (H. & J. Lewy, *HUCA* [17], 1942-3, p. 128, n. 474; also V. Pavlovsky, *Bibl.* [38] 1957, p. 442, who favors the year 430 B.C.), it was necessary to read the law (Deut 31:9-13)." If this dating is correct, then Ezra 7-10 and Neh 8-10 are related accounts of the very significant event which marked the reconstitution of the nation of Israel and the beginning of the 70 weeks (but cp. Ezra 3:1-6).

The correct starting point of the prophecy is still a matter of debate today, however, and it seems likely that first-century Jews were also unclear on the matter. The earliest conceivable interpretative date for the coming of the Messiah at the end of the 69 weeks would have been 55 B.C. (483 years after 538 B.C.—the probable date of the prophecy of Dan 9 and also the year of the decree of Cyrus). Ever since that time messianic expectation had been rising among the Jews, if the statements in Chapter 2 are any indication. By A.D. 27 the Messiah must have seemed overdue.

¹Josephus *Antiquities* 14.10.5-6.

"century" also came to be used as a period of time-reckoning in the intertestamental period. The book of Jubilees (ca. 150 B.C.) divides Jewish history up into Jubilee periods, weeks (of years), and years—just as we might speak of 743 years as seven centuries, four decades, and three years. At several points the book makes clear what the OT leaves ambiguous: the actual Jubilee year, year 50, when slaves were allowed to go free and property reverted to its ancestral owners, was also the first year of the next forty-nine-year Jubilee period.¹

Although the Jubilee may not have been actually observed, allusions to it appear in OT predictive prophecy.² Curiously, the "seven sevens" of Dan 9:25 constitute one Jubilee (cf. Lev 25:8). Is this some sort of hint? If we consider the decree of Artaxerxes to mark the beginning of the seventy weeks, then this seventy week period, which amounts to ten Jubilees, would bring us to A.D. 34—the end of the seventieth "week," which would have been a Sabbatical year, and, arguably, should have marked the beginning of the Messianic age—the great, antitypical Jubilee.³

¹"950 years he [Noah] completed in his life, nineteen jubilees and two weeks and five years" (Jub 10:15); "And all the days of the life of Sarah were 127. These are two jubilees and four weeks and one year" (19:7); "And he [Abraham] lived three jubilees and four weeks of years, 175 years" (23:8); "And all of the days which he [Jacob] lived were three jubilees, 147 years" (45:13). If you do the math, a Jubilee is 49 years long, not 50. This is an example of inclusive reckoning; similarly, the "eighth day" of the Jewish week was the first day of the next week (Lev 23:39, 2 Chr 7:9, Neh 8:18, Ezek 43:26-27).

²Isa 37:30, 49:8-9, 61:1-2, Ezek 46:17, Dan 9:25 ("seven sevens").

³However, since the kingdom did not come, it is tempting to extrapolate into the future, and to assume a special importance on the part of the 50th Jubilee—the Jubilee of Jubilees. If we start counting at 457 B.C., then the 49th Jubilee Sabbatical

Intertestamental Allusions to the Seventy Weeks

In intertestamental literature the prophecy of the seventy weeks is closely associated with the Jubilee. One significant passage is the *Testament of Levi* 16-18.

Chap. 16 follows:

Now I [Jacob] have come to know that for seventy weeks you shall wander astray and profane the priesthood and defile the sacrificial altars. You shall set aside the law and nullify the words of the prophets by your wicked perversity. You persecute just men: and you hate the pious; the word of the faithful you regard with revulsion. A man who by the power of the Most High renews the Law you name "Deceiver," and finally you shall plot to kill him, not discerning his eminence; by your wickedness you take innocent blood on your heads. I tell you, on account of him your holy places shall be razed to the ground. You shall have no place that is clean, but you will be as a curse and a dispersion among the nations until he will again have regard for you, and will take you back in compassion.

The following chapter (17) divides the seventy weeks into ten Jubilees, characterized by increasing decadence in the priesthood, ending with the priestly messiah who is extolled at length in chap. 18. This passage is significant because it connects the

year would be 1945. That was the year World War II ended and hundreds of thousands of captives were set free. It was also the end of the worst three-and-a-half years of tribulation that the world has ever known. WWII became truly global when America declared war in December of 1941, following the attack on Pearl Harbor. *Three years and seven months later (1290 days)*, Germany officially surrendered.

1798 was also a Jubilee Sabbatical which marked the end of the French Revolution. So was 132, which probably accounts for the rebellion of Bar Kokhba that year. So was 163 B.C., marking the death of Antiochus Epiphanes, shortly after the reconsecration of the temple following the three years of desecration. Actually the Jubilee year itself, as the first year of the next cycle, would have been the year after these Sabbatical years.

What does it all mean? As far as I can tell, it is pure coincidence. 1994, the 50th Jubilee sabbatical, passed uneventfully. But it goes to show how simple it is to construct a time prophecy which has some exciting "hits" with significant events in history.

destruction of Jerusalem and the martyrdom of a reformer figure with the seventy weeks. The *Testament of the 12 Patriarchs* was written in the second century B.C.; but it must be used with care, since it contains Christian interpolations. This passage receives further attention below.

The book of Jubilees itself may allude to the prophecy of the seventy weeks:

And jubilees will pass until Israel is purified from all the sin of fornication, and defilement, and uncleanness, and sin and error. And they will dwell in confidence in all the land. And then it will not have any Satan or any evil one. And the land will be purified from that time and forever. (Jub 50:5)

The seventy week prophecy is also mentioned in the Dead Sea Scrolls. One text mentions how Azazel "left Israel a legacy of wickedness" that would last for seventy weeks (of years). In the *Manual of Discipline* the hymnist says he will praise God "in the years of weeks, in the several seasons thereof, and when, at the Jubilee, the series of weeks begins."¹ The most important reference, a sermon based on Lev 25:13, is found in the Melchizedek text designated 11QMelch. Below are two different translations of this passage side by side; the freer one on the left is by Theodore Gaster, the other is by Florentino Garcia Martinez.²

¹Gaster, *DSS*, 522, 137.

²*Ibid.*, 433-436; Martinez, *DSS*, 139-140. Some of this translation is conjectural since it involves "fill in the blanks" from a damaged original.

As applied to the last days, this [Lev 25:13] refers to the Liberation of those in captivity, consonant with the words of Isaiah: to proclaim liberation to captives (Isa 61:1). . . . At the final jubilee, therefore, God will in fact be restoring them to what is rightfully theirs; they will indeed "return, every one, to his patrimony." All this will happen in the final week of a series of years involving nine preceding jubilees. When, therefore, the Scripture speaks of a Day of Atonement to be observed in the seventh month, on the tenth day of that month (Lev 25:9), what is meant, in the eschatological sense, is that this final jubilee will be marked by a day on which all the children of light and all who have cast their lot with righteousness will achieve forgiveness of their sins. This is the era which Isaiah terms the Year of Favor (Isa 61:2). . . . The herald [of good tidings, Isa 52:7] is he who is elsewhere described as the one anointed with the spirit (Isa 61:1)—the same whom Daniel calls the anointed leader who will make his appearance at the end of seven weeks [of years]—that is, at the final jubilee. Similarly, the herald of good tidings, the same who proclaims shalom, is he of whom it is written, "The Lord has sent me to comfort all who mourn" (Isa 61:2).

Its interpretation for the last days refers to the captives, about whom he said "To proclaim liberty to the captives." . . . He will proclaim liberty for them, to free them from the debt of all their iniquities. And this will happen in the first week of the jubilee which follows the nine jubilees. And the day of atonement is the end of the tenth jubilee in which atonement will be made for all the sons of God and for all men of the lot of Melchizedek. And on the heights he will declare in their favor according to their lots; for it is the time of the "year of grace" for Melchizedek. . . . And the messenger [of Isa 52:7] is the anointed of the spirit about whom Daniel spoke [...] and the messenger of good who announces salvation is the one about whom it is written that he will send him "to comfort the afflicted, to watch over the afflicted ones of Zion."

It would appear that when Jesus preached from Isa 61 near the beginning of His ministry (Luke 4:14-30), He was tapping into a vein of apocalyptic enthusiasm that focused on Daniel's seventieth week. Jesus was announcing Himself as the Comforter,¹ the Herald of good tidings, the Anointed One of Dan 9, and the inaugurator of the eschatological Jubilee, which, though perhaps not due for another seven years, had already begun in His ministry.

¹Isaiah's Paraclete, Isa 61:2; cf. Isa 40:1, 51:3, 57:18, 66:13. Hence the need to send the disciples *another* Comforter (John 14:16) when He left.

Finally, Jesus' announcement in Mark 1:15, "The time has come, . . . The kingdom of God is near," and Paul's statements in Gal 4:4, "When the time had fully come"; Rom 5:6, "at just the right time . . . Christ died for the ungodly"; and 1 Tim 2:6, "who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time"; are probably allusions to Daniel's timetable. This becomes more likely when we look at a set of similar Jewish statements from around the end of the first century: "The coming of the times is very near *and has passed by*" (2 Bar 85:10); "The age is hastening swiftly to its end. For it will not be able to bring the things that have been promised to the righteous in their appointed times, because this age is full of sadness and infirmities" (4 Ezra 3:26-27); "And the Most High has looked upon his times, and behold, they are ended, and his ages are completed" (4 Ezra 11:44). These statements look very much like allusions to the uneventful passing of the seventy weeks. Notice that the Christian statements, which are pre-70, focus on fulfilled prophecy while the Jewish statements, post-70, focus on failed prophecy. From a Jewish standpoint, nothing happened;¹ from a Christian standpoint something wonderful happened, even if the expected kingdom of glory had not yet come.

In short, there is evidence that Jesus' view of last-day events was centered

¹That the time appointed in the OT for the coming of the kingdom had passed was recognized by the Rabbis, according to B. *Sanhedrin* 97b: "R. Samuel b. Nahmani said in the name of R. Jonathan: Blasted be the bones of those who calculate the end. For they would say, since the predetermined time has arrived, and yet he has not come, he will never come. But [even so], wait for him, as it is written, *Though he tarry, wait for him*. [emphasis in original] . . . Rab said: All the predestined dates [for redemption] have passed, and the matter [now] depends only on repentance and good deeds." This passage is both preceded and followed by mention of the time, times, and dividing of times of Dan 7:25 and 12:7.

around Daniel's seventy weeks, and that He expected the kingdom to come at the end of the seventieth week. Unlike the thesis that Jesus promised to return in His own generation, which seems to me more firmly established, the thesis advocated in this section is only weakly confirmed; and in neither case does the evidence constitute absolute proof. Mathematical proof is not to be had in the field of biblical studies; we have to decide on the weight of evidence. Unfortunately, I have discovered that an impartial decision is likely only if the thesis is emotionally neutral. Even the most open-minded of us tend to be uncomfortable with any threat to our tradition. It takes time to process the implications of all of this. I am still doing so.¹

Perhaps the best way to sum up the evidence to this point for the seventy week hypothesis is with an analogy. Suppose that we discovered, in the middle of a desert, a pattern of very ancient signs inscribed into various cliffs and boulders. One points east and says, Tropolis. Ten miles east of that sign is another that points west and says, Tropolis. To the north are several signs pointing south at various distances from Tropolis, and to the south are signs pointing north. In fact, we find a total of more than twenty signs pointing toward a central point. But at that point we find nothing at all but drifting desert sand; and a delegation of civic leaders from the thriving contemporary city of Tropolis, 100 miles away, surveys the area and declares that

¹My testimony matches that of George R. Beasley-Murray: "The present writer inclines to conservative views; he freely admits that on this matter he hesitated long before capitulating before the facts. Yet facts they appear to be and the Christian must come to terms with them; to resist what appears to be truth is to deny the Lord in whose interests it is done." *Jesus and the Future: An Examination of the Criticism of the Eschatological Discourse, Mark 13, with Special Reference to the Little Apocalypse Theory* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1954), 183.

there never was a settlement here by any name.

We now have several options. One is to assume we are the victims of a vast hoax.

A second option is to attempt to explain away the signs one by one; a sort of divide-and-conquer strategy. The first sign was carved by a group of youth at play who got their directions mixed up; another was the work of ancient caravaners who were lost; another is vectored fifteen degrees off. Two of the signs may be nothing more than random markings in the sandstone; and so on.

A third option is to admit the probability that, once upon a time, here was Tropolis, and make arrangements for further investigation.

The Restoration of Israel in the NT

The OT teaches the restoration of Israel—that Israel will be restored to her former glory in the last days, after the great eschatological battle against the attacking nations. When we look closely at the NT, we find evidence that it took a while for the early church to abandon this scenario.

Restorationism in the Preaching of John the Baptist

The first person on record to become concerned about the delay of the kingdom Jesus preached seems to have been John the Baptist. As he sat in Herod's prison, this herald of the Messiah had his doubts. Why was Jesus dawdling? Why did He not assume His rightful role as military deliverer, as John's father had prophesied:

His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:
"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has

redeemed his people. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), *salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us*—to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham: *to rescue us from the hand of our enemies*, and to enable us to serve him without fear. (Luke 1:67-74)¹

This prophecy is in harmony with the OT tradition of the Messiah as a military conqueror, who would lead Israel into triumphant battle with her enemies, followed by an age of peace.² Ps 118, the OT messianic passage most often quoted in the NT, says of the Messiah, "All the nations surrounded me, but in the name of the Lord I cut them off" (Ps 118:10); and Ps 2:9 says the messianic king will dash the nations in pieces like pottery. Isa 9:6 ("Unto us a child is born") is mentioned in connection with the battle of 9:4-5 in which the power of the oppressor is broken. The "shoot of Jesse" (Isa 11:1, 10) will "strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked" (11:4). This may be a metaphorical way of saying

¹Cf. 1 Sam 4:3, 12:10, 2 Sam 18:19, 19:9, 22:1, 2 Kgs 17:39, Job 6:23, Ps 60:12, 97:10, 106:10, 136:24, Mic 4:10; note especially Sir 35:17-36:17.

²The promises that Messiah would bring peace on earth (Isa 9:6-7, 32:15-18, 54:10-15, 60:17-18, 66:12-13, Nah 1:15, Hag 2:9, Zech 9:10, Luke 1:79, 2:14, 19:38) are set aside by Jesus (Matt 10:34-36/Luke 12:51-53, 19:42). Jesus is taking the same iconoclastic stance toward the peace prophecies as did Jeremiah and Ezekiel in light of Israel's pre-exilic sinfulness (Jer 4:10, 6:14, 8:11, 15, 14:13-20, 23:17, Ezek 13:10-16), though after the Babylonian conquest these prophets reaffirmed the peace tradition as a promise for the future (Jer 30:10, 33:6-9, 46:27, Ezek 37:26).

I suspect that Methusaleh's birth blessing upon Noah in Gen 5:29 is a proto-messianic peace prophecy: "He will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed." Noah did lead his people through the end of their world into a new age, but neither he nor Jesus have yet given the world the promised rest. We still await the day when the nations will beat their swords into plowshares (Isa 2:4, Mic 4:3).

that, under the leadership of the Messiah, Israel would "swoop down on the slopes of Philistia to the west; together they will plunder the people to the east. They will lay hands on Edom and Moab, and the Ammonites will be subject to them" (11:14). This prophecy of the plundering of Edom and Moab by the remnant of Israel is repeated in Zeph 2:9.

Micah's messianic prophecy about the coming Ruler to be born in Bethlehem "whose origins are from of old" (Mic 5:2) also says that the "Daughter of Zion" would "break in pieces many nations" (4:13); "The remnant of Jacob will be among the nations . . . like a young lion among flocks of sheep, which mauls and mangles as it goes, and no one can rescue" (Mic 5:8). In Daniel, too, the kingdom of God is slated to "crush all those [gentile] kingdoms and bring them to an end" (Dan 2:44).

Zion's humble king mounted on an ass (Zech 9:9) will bring peace to the earth by leading Israel in battle against her enemies (9:13); and "the Lord Almighty will shield them. They will destroy and overcome with slingstones" (9:15). "On that day I will make the leaders of Judah like a firepot in a woodpile, like a flaming torch among sheaves. They will consume right and left all the surrounding peoples, but Jerusalem will remain intact in her place" (Zech 12:6). The remnant of Israel would wield their swords against the nations:

Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the people of Zion be glad in their King. . . . May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands, to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, to bind their kings with fetters, their nobles with shackles of iron, to carry out the sentence written against

them. This is the glory of all his saints. Praise the Lord.¹

God's covenant promise to the messianic "Son of David" was that "No enemy will subject him to tribute; no wicked man will oppress him. I will crush his foes before him and strike down his adversaries."² Is it any wonder the Jews expected the Messiah to make an end of paying tribute to Rome?

However, unlike some other contemporary "prophets," John preached repentance, not rebellion. John's first concern was for a purified Israel; before God dealt with the wicked nations, His people had to clean up their own act.³

Nevertheless, John's message was that Isaiah's messianic kingdom was at hand:

I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.⁴

So where was the fire? John was languishing in prison, and the kingdom had not come. How long would God's Messiah hold His winnowing fork in His hand

¹Ps 149:2-9. Of course, this idea is picked up by the intertestamental literature: e.g., 1 Enoch 98:12 (*OTP* 1:79), "Woe unto you who love unrighteousness! . . . Do know that you shall be given over into the hands of the righteous ones, and they shall cut off your necks and slay you, and they shall not have compassion upon you." See also Ps Sol 17:21-25. One of the Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran, the War Scroll (1QM, 4QM), is a detailed battle scenario for fighting the great eschatological battle with the Romans.

²Ps 89:22-23; cf. 2 Kgs 17:39, Isa 54:14, Zech 9:8.

³Matt 3:1-12, Luke 3:1-14, Acts 13:24, 19:4. Cf. Zeph 2:1-3.

⁴Matt 3:11-12. On the washing with spirit and fire, see Isa 4:4; on the winnowing fork, see Jer 15:7; on the gathering of the wheat, see Isa 27:12; on the burning of the chaff with fire, see Isa 5:24, 10:17, 29:5-8, 33:10-12.

before He cleared His threshing floor? Could there have been some mistake?

John dealt with his doubts in a responsible way; he took them to Jesus. He sent some messengers to Jesus with this question: "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" (Matt 11:3). Jesus did not explain His timetable; but He reminded John of the abundance of empirical evidence that something supernatural was going on—evidence of a ministry that fulfilled, at least in part, the role of the Messiah.¹ Then He sent the messengers back to John with a gentle rebuke: "Blessed is he who finds no occasion of stumbling in me" (Matt 11:4-6).

John did not receive answers to all of his questions, but he did receive eyewitness testimony of events having no natural explanation. This evidence that the Messiah had come must have bolstered his faith during the last months of his life.

John apparently knew nothing of an elongated two-stage coming, one in grace, and one in glory. In the OT scenario "The year of the Lord's favor" and "the day of vengeance of our God" are one and the same time.² Jesus' statements that the kingdom of God had come were, to John, simply the opening announcement of a sequence that was to have been one continuous transition into the kingdom of glory. God's messianic "V-day" should have followed "D-day" just about as closely as V-day followed D-day in real time in WWII.

Something Jesus said about John the Baptist shows that Jesus' timetable was

¹As defined, for example, in Isa 35:5f, 61:1f., etc.

²Isa 34:8ff., 35:4, 61:2ff., 63:4ff. The day of atoning sacrifice for sin and the day of messianic victory and eschatological peace are the same day according to Zech 3:9-10, 12:1-13:9.

similar to that of John. There was one problem in Jesus' scenario of an imminent Eschaton: it did not fit with current "prophetic time chart" orthodoxy. Elijah had to come first, according to Mal 4:5, and Elijah had not yet shown up. Since Elijah was still living (in heaven), Malachi's prophecy was interpreted literally. Note this intertestamental encomium to Elijah:

You who were taken up by a whirlwind of fire, in a chariot with horses of fire; you who are ready at the appointed time, it is written, to calm the wrath of God before it breaks out in fury, to turn the heart of the father to the son, and to restore the tribes of Jacob.¹

Elijah's absence seems to have been a telling argument on the part of some of the Jewish leaders against the claims of Jesus (Matt 17:10). Jesus' response was that John the Baptist fulfilled this prophecy.²

Both Jesus' response and the very fact that the disciples asked the question imply that Jesus had been teaching that the final event on the prophetic agenda, "the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal 4:5), was imminent—just as Peter at Pentecost was teaching that the presence of the signs predicted by Joel indicated that the "great and glorious day of the Lord" (Acts 2:20) was imminent. If Jesus had assumed that this event was still years away, He need not have made a point of the fact that the precursor was already past; and there would have been no conundrum to puzzle the disciples in the first place. In other words, the disciples were trying to understand how the "great and dreadful day of the Lord" could be imminent when,

¹Sir 48:9-10; ca. 180 B.C. References to the return of Elijah are plentiful in this era; see *TDNT* 2:928-941; Str-B 4:781ff.

²Matt 11:14, 17:9-13, Luke 1:17.

according to Mal 4, Elijah had to come first. Jesus' reply was not, "It's not that close," but "Elijah has already come. Get ready for the kingdom."

We see something similar happening in 1 John 2:18-23, where John says that Antichrist has come and it is the last hour. Just as it was necessary for Jesus to interpret the major OT prerequisite of the Eschaton—the coming of Elijah (Mal 4:5)—as realized eschatology, so John had to do the same with the major NT prerequisite of the Eschaton, the coming of Antichrist (2 Thess 2:3). Both Jesus and John find an unexpected local fulfillment of these prophecies, thus clearing the way for an immediate Parousia.

This illustrates the problem with prophetic timetables full of events which "must" happen before Jesus can come, such as the tribulation or the coming of Antichrist. But what if the prerequisite prophecies, like that of Mal 4, should be fulfilled in such an oblique way that we are not aware until it is too late? In other words, what if certain eschatological events are "stealthy," able to happen without our awareness? What if Antichrist has in fact been on the scene for many years—standard Protestant teaching until recently? What if the horrible bloodbaths in Cambodia, Bosnia, and Africa are end-time fulfillments (or reenactments) of the prophecies of tribulation? Must the tribulation inevitably be universal? It was not in A.D. 70. Could Jesus come when some parts of the world are enjoying an era of peace and plenty? This is implied by Matt 24:37-42, which says the end will come unexpectedly, like Noah's flood, while people are eating, marrying, reaping, and milling. The main point of this and the parallel in Luke 17:26-30 is not that there will be inordinate

dissipation near the end of time,¹ for eating, marrying, reaping, and milling are routine community affairs. The main point is that normal, workaday life will go on as usual, right up until the sudden, unexpected end. Paul makes the same point in 1 Thess 5:3, "While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly."

After all, it is possible that some events on the timetable will never happen, because Jesus said the time would be cut short. This is why Jesus may come when we least expect Him, and why we must always be on the alert.

Restorationism in Acts and the Epistles

If the apostles were expecting the Parousia at the end of the seventy weeks, would we not find some indication of their disappointment early in Acts? Perhaps not. Recall how Luke edited Mark to eliminate most of the imminency statements. Since Luke wrote Acts, we would expect a similar silence there about unfulfilled timetables. However, Luke has not left us entirely clueless. His narrative holds some surprises, not about the timing of the event but about its nature.

Shortly before Jesus' ascension the disciples asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). This is clearly an expression of the old "renewal/restoration" eschatology—that is, the traditional Jewish scenario in which the fortunes of Israel are restored, as the prophets foretold.² But it is often

¹But cf. the warning against dissipation in the quasi-parallel in Luke 21:34f.

²Acts 1:6; cf. Deut 30:3-4, Ps 60:1, 80:1-19, Isa 1:26, 49:5-8, 61:4, Jer 16:15, 30:16-24, 33:11, 26, Lam 5:21, Ezek 16:55, Hos 6:1-3, 7:1, Joel 3:1, Amos 9:11-

overlooked that, even after Pentecost, Peter continued to preach the old eschatology:

But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. He must remain in heaven *until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.* (Acts 3:18-21)

Luke's summary of Peter's sermon includes scarcely three minutes of spoken material. If there were any timetables in Peter's original speech, Luke has omitted them, just as he omitted imminence material from Mark. But even what he left in is enough to tell us that the apostles still had not abandoned the hope of a restored Israel.¹ Indeed, since OT prophecies of the outpouring of the Spirit always occur in the context of the restoration of Israel,² the apostles would naturally have interpreted the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost as the beginning of that restoration.

The fact that the apostles believed they were living in the last days has similar implications. The apostles did not invent the term; they found it in the OT. The claim

15, Na 2:2, Zeph 2:7, 3:20, Zech 10:6, Matt 17:11/Mark 9:12, Acts 15:14-17; Isa 61:4, Lam 5:21, Jub 1:29, 4 Ezr 7:75, 2 Bar 32:1-6, 57:2, Matt 19:28. See *TDNT*, 1:387-393.

¹On the fact that Luke's summary of Peter's speech implies a future for Israel, see A. W. Wainwright, "Luke and the Restoration of the Kingdom to Israel," *ExpTim* 89 (1977-78): 76-79; R. C. Tannehill, "Israel in Luke-Acts: A Tragic Story," *JBL* 104 (1985): 69-85; all cited in Brent Kinman, "Lucan Eschatology and the Missing Fig Tree," *JBL* 113, no. 4 (1994): 675n23. It can be argued that even Luke, writing after 70, had not abandoned hope in the restoration of Israel, or he probably would have edited out these statements, along with certain statements in the birth narratives in Luke 1, and perhaps 21:24.

²The time when "the Spirit is poured upon us from on high" (fulfilled in Acts 2:33, 10:45) is the time when "the desert becomes a fertile field," Isa 32:15; cf. Isa 44:3, Ezek 36:24-28, 37:14, 39:27-29, Joel 2:28-3:1.

that the last days have come implies the imminent fulfillment of the OT "last day" prophecies, such as the famous "swords into plowshares" prophecy: "*In the last days* the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. . . . Nation will not take up sword against nation."¹

Since their hopes were centered upon the restoration of Israel, the apostles did not, at first, conceive of a mission to the gentiles. Acts 10-13 clearly indicates that the apostles' mission was initially limited to the Jews of the dispersion—exactly the group James addresses in his epistle ("To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations," Jas 1:1; cf. the epistle to the *Hebrews*). According to Peter, Jesus' purpose was to "give repentance and forgiveness of sins *to Israel*" (Acts 5:31). And as late as the Jerusalem council in A.D. 49 it would appear that the theology of James was still restorationist.²

Is the restorationism mentioned in Acts 15:16 at the apostolic council of A.D. 49 the last vestige of such theology in the NT? Surprisingly, no. There is an entire NT chapter, written around A.D. 58, whose theology might be construed as

¹Isa 2:2-4/Mic 4:1-3. Micah goes on to explain, "The former dominion will be restored to you; kingship will come to the Daughter of Jerusalem" (Mic 4:8). This is probably one source of the idea in Zech 14:10 that "Jerusalem will be raised up." For other "last days" texts, see Ezek 38:8, Dan 2:28, 44, Hos 3:4-5.

²Acts 15:14-17, citing Amos 9, which predicts the destruction of Israel, followed by its restoration (note 9:15, "I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land"). James cites this passage to justify the inclusion of gentiles in the church as a valid part of the restorationist scenario since it is implied by Amos 9:12.

restorationist. And its author is Paul! This should come as no surprise, as Paul's preaching about the kingdom of God came straight out of the OT.¹ Even though his attitude toward the law and the temple was somewhat non-traditional, he hadn't given up hope for a renewed and restored Israel.

Rom 11 provides a snapshot of the relationship between Christians and Jews prior to the split in the eighties—when the Birkath ha-Minim, or curse against the heretics, was inserted into the Amidah, the second section of the synagogue liturgy—and the ensuing mutual animosity which shows up in the writings of John. In Rom 11:17-24 Paul pictures God's people as a tree,² with individuals represented by branches. The Jews were "broken off" because of their unbelief, and the Gentiles were "grafted in." It is still the same tree, but with different members. That is how Paul can say in vss. 1-5 that God has not rejected His people. He did not cut down the old tree and plant a new one; he just grafted Gentile branches onto the Jewish stock (the "remnant" who did accept Jesus). Jews and Gentiles are now one body (Eph 2:11-3:6). Paul still has high hopes for his native people, though not as a separate entity from the church:

And if they [the Jews] do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these,

¹Acts 28:23; cf. 17:2-3, 11, 3:21, 24, 24:14, 26:6-8, 22-23.

²Cf. Ps 80:8-19, 92:12-14, Jer 11:16, Ezek 17:5-10, 22-24, 19:20-14, 31, Dan 4, Hos 14, Matt 3:10, 13:31-32, Luke 13:6-9. The concept of breaking off the branches recalls Jer 5:10, "Strip off her branches, for these people do not belong to the Lord"; cf. Isa 18:5, 27:10-11, Jer 11:16.

the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree! I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins." As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. (Rom 11:23-31)

Ultimately, *all Israel will be saved* (11:26)¹—that is, Israel redefined to include believing Gentiles (Rom 2:28-9; 9:6-8); this constitutes its "fullness" in 11:12, 25.

This is a modified restorationism; it is only after the full number of the Gentiles come in that Israel is restored. And no geographical component is mentioned. Nevertheless, Paul is not merely talking about "spiritual Israel" in the modern sense of the church, which incidentally includes believing Jews. In Paul's metaphor, ethnic Israel is the root and trunk of the tree, and Paul clearly has ethnic Israel in mind in Rom 11:26. Unfortunately, Paul is vague about what happens after all Israel is saved.

The restorationism in Rom 11 is similar to that taught in the *Testament of the 12 Patriarchs*.² It is explicitly anticipated in Test Ben 10:11, "All Israel will be gathered to the Lord," and this includes Gentiles:

In later times there shall rise up the beloved of the Lord, from the

¹With parallels in Isa 45:25, 4 Ezz 13:48, Test Ben 10:11 (see below), and Mishnah, *Sanhedrin* 10:1 "All Israel have a portion in the world to come," which then goes on to list the exceptions.

²See Test Iss 6, Test Zeb 9, Test Ash 7, and Test Ben 9, Test Dan 5.

lineage of Judah and Levi, one who does his good pleasure by his mouth, enlightening all the nations with new knowledge. The light of knowledge will mount up in Israel for her salvation, seizing them like a wolf coming upon them, and gathering the gentiles. Until the consummation of the ages he shall be in the congregations of the gentiles. (Test Ben 11:2-3)

This statement seems to be free of later Christian interpolation (note the Levitic messiah, which is contrary to Christian tradition). There is one other passage in this work, cited earlier, that now deserves another look:

Now I [Jacob] have come to know that for seventy weeks you shall wander astray and profane the priesthood and defile the sacrificial altars. You shall set aside the law and nullify the words of the prophets by your wicked perversity. You persecute just men: and you hate the pious; the word of the faithful you regard with revulsion. A man who by the power of the Most High renews the Law you name "Deceiver," and finally you shall plot to kill him, not discerning his eminence; by your wickedness you take innocent blood on your heads. I tell you, on account of him your holy places shall be razed to the ground. You shall have no place that is clean, but you will be as a curse and a dispersion among the nations *until he will again have regard for you, and will take you back in compassion.* (Test Levi 16)

Either this passage is a pre-Christian description of a suffering anointed one dating from the second century B.C.,¹ or else it has been reworked by a Christian editor, and reflects the theology of Jewish Christianity² after the crucifixion, but

¹Though no more remarkable than other non-canonical descriptions of the suffering and death of the Righteous Man in Plato's *Republic* (cf. C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* [New York: Harcourt Brace Javonovich, 1958], 104), and Wis 2:12-20, 4:16-5:5. R. H. Charles (*APOT* 2:313) suggests that, if this is not a Christian interpolation, it may be an allusion to one of two intertestamental priests by the name of Onias.

²Assuming this is a Christian interpolation, no Gentile Christian would refer to Jesus as one who renews the law. This appears to be Matthew's understanding of what Jesus is doing in the sermon on the mount. Note that Jesus is called a "deceiver" as in Matt 27:63, and that Jesus is described as an eminent man, as in Acts 2:22-3,

before restorationist theology became untenable. This passage, then, may give us a glimpse into early post-Pentecost Christianity and its restorationist beliefs. The ensuing eschatological scenario found in Test Levi 18 is an earthly kingdom in which the priestly messiah "will grant to the saints to eat of the tree of life" along with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; bringing universal peace and righteousness.

In conclusion, it is probable that Jewish Christianity, at least, was still clinging to restoration theology and thinking in terms of an earthly kingdom until some time after the destruction of Jerusalem. Before that event, the apostles would probably have rejected any suggestion that the OT kingdom prophecies would never be literally fulfilled as heresy. Scripture cannot be broken. Their sermons, as recorded in Acts, say nothing about a change of plan, but proclaim the imminent fulfillment of all that the prophets had written.¹ Even afterwards, the scenario of an earthly kingdom never disappears from the NT. Revelation explicitly says the saints "will reign on the earth" (Rev 5:10). "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ" (Rev 11:15). "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them" (Rev 21:3)—the ultimate fulfillment of Israel's hopes: "Immanuel—God with us" (Matt 1:23). The redeemed do appear in heaven in chaps. 7, 14, 15, 19 of

"Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you . . ." Cf. Acts 17:31.

¹Acts 3:18, 21, 24, 25, 10:43, 13:27-33, 40, 15:14-17, 24:14, 26:6, 7, 22, 27, 28:23.

Revelation;¹ but the final home of the redeemed, as described in the last two chapters, is earth restored, after the descent of the New Jerusalem.²

Restorationism (Chiliasm) in the Second Century

Some fascinating insights await us if we extend this survey into the second century. Revelation is not the only Christian eschatological tract written around the end of the first century. There is a smaller one: a Christian section of an older Jewish work, *The Ascension of Isaiah*, 3:13-4:21, which teaches that the righteous dwell on earth following the Parousia. The *Didache*, sort of an early church manual written shortly after the turn of the century, contains a Eucharistic prayer to be recited at Communion: "Let your Church be brought together from the ends of the earth into your Kingdom."³ Also, no return trip to heaven is mentioned in the eschatological

¹Is this perhaps proleptic, as in Eph 1:3, 2:6, Heb 12:22? It is unlikely that these saints are those who have died and gone to heaven because of Heb 11:40. The idea that the soul goes to heaven at death is labelled by Justin and Irenaeus as heresy; see discussion below. However, 1 Enoch does portray the departed elect as dwelling either in heaven (39:3-8; cf. 41:2 in *APOT* 2:212) or in Paradise in the east (60:8, 23, 61:12, 70:3-4) until the eschaton, when they will descend (39:1) to join the rest of the righteous in an earthly kingdom (38:1-39:1, 45:4-6, 51:5, 69:28, 71:16?). Cf. the pre-Christian Jewish document *Joseph and Asenath* 15:7 (OTP 2:227): "For Repentance is in the heavens, an exceedingly beautiful and good daughter of the Most High. And she herself entreats the Most High God for you at all times, and for all who repent in the name of the Most High God, . . . and *for all who repent she prepared a place of rest in the heavens*. And she will renew all who repent, and wait on them herself forever and ever"; cf. 8:11, 22:9.

²Rev 3:12, 20:9, 21:2, 21:10; cf. 2 Bar 4, T. Dan 5:12-13. Note that other nations and kings still exist (Rev 21:24), as in the OT scenario.

³*Didache* 9:4; similar phraseology is found in 10:5: "Remember, Lord, your Church, to save it from all evil and to make it perfect by your love. Make it holy, and gather it together from the four winds into your Kingdom which you have made

section of the book (chap. 16). The *Epistle of Barnabas* states that the Beloved will soon "come to his inheritance."¹ And an anonymous Christian homily written sometime around the middle of the second century still implies the gathering of the saints into an earthly kingdom:

For the Lord said, "I am coming to gather together all peoples, clans, and tongues." This refers to the day of his appearing, when he will come to redeem us, each according to his deeds. And unbelievers will see his glory and power, and they will be surprised to see the sovereignty of the world given to Jesus.²

The Sibylline Oracles, both Jewish and Christian, teach an earthly kingdom. Sib Or 2:313-338, a Christian segment probably dating from the first half of the second century, describes the home of the righteous: "The earth will belong equally to all, undivided by walls or fences." Yet it allows for the existence of another realm, the Elysian plains (line 337). Earth is also the home of the redeemed in Sib 3:702-761, 4:187, and 8:205ff; and Sib Or 5:247-270, 414-434, dated around A.D. 118 or so, says Jerusalem will be built up with a high tower that touches the clouds (cf. Rev 21:16).

The earliest Christian document that clearly speaks of a trip to heaven following the resurrection of the saints, as far as I know, is the *Epistula Apostolorum*, dated to near the middle of the second century:

ready for it. For yours is the power and the glory forever. Let Grace come and let this world [or "age"] pass away" (*ECF* 176, 177).

¹*Ep. Barn.* 4, in J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1974), 139.

²2 Clem 17:4, quoting Isa 66:18 (*ECF*, 200-201). This homily is falsely ascribed to Clement, but is still early. The reference is to Isa 66:18-20.

Truly I say to you, as the Father awakened me from the dead, in the same manner you also will arise in the flesh, and he will cause you to rise up above the heavens to the place of which I have spoken to you from the beginning, which he who sent me has prepared for you.

Truly I say to you, you and all who believe and also they who yet will believe in him who sent me I will cause to rise up into heaven, to the place which the Father has prepared for the elect and most elect, who will give the rest that he has promised, and eternal life.¹

Still, the second-century church fathers assumed that the millennial reign of Rev 20 would be an earthly one. This is known as millennialism or chiliasm. Around 160 Justin Martyr writes the following:

[Trypho:] "Tell me, do you really admit that this place, Jerusalem, shall be rebuilt; and do you expect your people to be gathered together, and made joyful with Christ and the patriarchs, and the prophets, both the men of our nation, and other proselytes who joined them before your Christ came? . . ."

[Justin:] "I and many others are of this opinion, and [believe] that such will take place, as you assuredly are aware; but, on the other hand, I signified to you that many who belong to the pure and pious faith, and are true Christians, think otherwise. . . . [But] if you have fallen in with some who are called Christians, but who do not admit this [truth], and venture to blaspheme the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; who say there is no resurrection of the dead, and that their souls, when they die, are taken to heaven; do not imagine that they are Christians. . . . I and others, who are right-minded Christians on all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned, and enlarged, [as] the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare."²

¹*Ep. Apost.* 21, 28, in E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), 1:205, 210 (hereafter *NTA*).

²Justin *Dialogue with Trypho*, 80-81 (*ANF* 1:239-40). The quotation goes on to explain that the 1,000-year prophecy in Rev 20 is based on Isa 65:17-25: "Now we have understood that the expression used among these words, 'According to the days of the tree shall be the days of my people; the works of their toil shall abound,' obscurely predicts a thousand years. For as Adam was told that in the day he ate of

In spite of Justin's chiliasm, the account of his death contains a curious dialogue between him and the official who sentenced him to death in which Justin speaks of ascending to heaven, not at death but at the end of the world:

The prefect says to Justin, . . . "If you are scourged and beheaded, do you believe you will ascend into heaven?" Justin said, "I hope that, if I endure these things, I shall have His gifts. For I know that, to all who have thus lived, there abides the divine favor *until the completion of the whole world*." Rusticus the prefect said, "Do you suppose, *then*, that you will ascend into heaven to receive some recompense?" Justin said, "I do not suppose it, but I know and am fully persuaded of it."¹

Irenaeus, writing ca. 189, devotes several chapters to the earthly millennial kingdom,² citing Papias (ca. 70-140) as his authority. According to tradition, Papias was the amanuensis who helped the apostle John write his Gospel. In his chapter on the intermediate state, Irenaeus, too, denies that the soul enters heaven at death. "For the heretics . . . affirm that immediately upon their death they shall pass above the heavens." Jesus did not go to heaven when He died but only after His resurrection, and so it is with His saints. Their souls are kept in an "invisible place" (as in 4 Ezra 7:95) until their resurrection, when they "come thus into the presence of God" and

the tree he would die, we know that he did not complete a thousand years. We have perceived, moreover, that the expression, 'The day of the Lord is as a thousand years,' is connected with this subject. And further, there was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied by a revelation that was made to him that those who believed in our Christ would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem; and that thereafter the general, and, in short, the eternal resurrection and judgment of all men would likewise take place."

¹Justin, *Martyrdom of the Holy Martyrs*, 4 (ANF 1:306).

²Irenaeus *Against Heresies*, book five.

are "taken up, as many as the Lord shall account worthy of this."¹

¹Irenaeus *Against Heresies*, 5:31 (ANF 1:560); this in spite of a belief in immortality of the soul (2:34). The doctrine that the righteous go to God at death is taught in the apostolic fathers: 1 Clem 5:4-7, Ign. Rom 2:1, 4:1-3, 6:1-3, Poly. Phil 9:2 (yet Polycarp denies the heresy that "there is neither resurrection nor judgment," 7:1); cf. Asc Isa 4:14-16. The same was clearly taught by Philo. Why, then, do the two most important Christian theologians of the second century deny the belief that the righteous go to heaven at death? Perhaps because the NT evidence for it is very scanty. There are three key passages not treated elsewhere in this work:

1. In 2 Cor 5:8, Paul states he "would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord." This is a reference, not to death, but to translation at the Parousia, because in vss. 2-4 Paul twice says he wants his heavenly dwelling to be *put on over* his earthly one; i.e., he wants to be translated without seeing death, as in 1 Cor 15:53-54, when that which is mortal will *put on* immortality. What he does *not* want is to be naked (vs. 3), to be unclothed (vs. 4). In other words, he does not want to die (cf. 2 Pet 1:13-14). Since Paul, in vss. 2-4, says twice that he does *not* want to die, and twice that he *does* want to be translated, it is unlikely that he has changed his mind by vs. 8. What he "prefers" in vs. 8, then, is to leave "flesh and blood" behind and be changed at the Parousia (1 Cor 15:50-54; cf. Phil 3:21). Paul's can speak metaphorically of the disembodied state (Col 2:5, 1 Cor 5:3-4, 2 Cor 12:2-3).

2. The preceding argument is admittedly weakened by Phil 1:23, where Paul says "I desire to depart and be with Christ," and he is clearly speaking of death. He does not here separate between the departure and the reward, but he does in 2 Tim 4:6-8: "The time has come for my *departure*. . . . Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me *on that day*." This is a clear reference to the Parousia (2 Thess 2:3, 2 Tim 1:12, 18; see also Matt 7:22, Luke 10:12, 17:31, 21:34, 2 Pet 3:12), as indicated by the continuation: ". . . and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for *his appearing*." It is only after the Parousia that we are with the Lord (1 Thess 4:17), which is why Jesus said "I will come back and take you to be *with me* so that you may also be where I am" (John 14:3). If believers go to heaven at death, this verse does not make sense. Phil 3:10-11, 20-21 indicates that Paul was looking forward to the resurrection, not death. Why, then, does Paul speak of death and the reunion with Christ as if they were simultaneous? Probably because the moment we depart from this world in death, we will (as far as our own consciousness is concerned) immediately awake to be with Jesus. The passing of time is not perceived in the unconscious state.

3. The "spirits of righteous men made perfect" in Heb 12:23 are often regarded as the spirits of the departed saints who were already dwelling in heaven. This interpretation contradicts Heb 11:39-40: "These were all commended for their faith, yet *none of them received what had been promised*. God had planned something better for us so that *only together with us would they be made perfect*." Since the

How do we account for the fact that Justin Martyr and Irenaeus both taught an earthly millennial kingdom, yet they also spoke of being taken up to heaven? A solution here might possibly help us to reconcile these same two strands in the writings of John. Irenaeus cites an early Christian tradition which may provide the answer:

As the presbyters say, then those who are deemed worthy of an abode in heaven shall go there, others shall enjoy the delights of paradise, and others shall possess the splendor of the city [the earthly New Jerusalem], for everywhere the Savior shall be seen according as they who see Him shall be worthy. [They say, moreover,] that there is this distinction between the habitation of those who produce an hundred-fold, and that of those who produce sixty-fold, and of those who produce thirty-fold: for the first will be taken up into the heavens, the second will dwell in paradise, the last will inhabit the city; and that it was on this account the Lord declared, "In My Father's house are many mansions." . . . The presbyters, the disciples of the apostles, affirm that this is the gradation and arrangement of those who are saved.¹

By the time of Eusebius (ca. 325), however, chiliasm had fallen out of favor.

author and his audience had obviously not yet been made perfect (cf. Phil 3:12, Heb 5:9, 7:28), neither had any of the OT saints mentioned in Heb 11. This verse indicates that all of the redeemed will receive their reward together.

¹Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 5:36 (ANF 1:567). This same tradition is mentioned by Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 6:14. And perhaps it lies behind the reference in *Ep. Apost.* 28 (quoted above) to "the place which the Father has prepared for *the elect and most elect*." However, we do not have enough evidence to assume this was actually taught by the apostles. More likely this idea arose in the second century as a way of harmonizing John 14:1-3 with the terrestrial kingdom assumed elsewhere. Another Christian text of uncertain date that teaches something similar is Apoc Elij 4:27-29: those who have fled from the tortures of the Antichrist "will rise up [in the resurrection] and find a place of rest. But they will not be in the kingdom of the Christ as those who have endured [torture] because the Lord said, 'I will grant to them that they sit on my right hand.' They will receive favor over others, and they will triumph over the son of lawlessness. And they will witness the dissolution of heaven and earth. They will receive the thrones of glory and the crowns."

Eusebius denies Papias's teaching that "there would be a certain millennium after the resurrection, and that there would be a corporeal reign of Christ on this very earth."¹ This teaching became so unpopular that the apostolic authorship of the book of Revelation came under question, and Revelation was nearly excluded from the canon in the fourth century.

Restorationism in the Teachings of Jesus

To review briefly, the evidence seems to indicate that not only John the Baptist, but even the early apostolic preaching presupposed the OT prophetic scenario in which the elect were to be gathered into an earthly kingdom. After all, the seventy weeks were not over yet, and the OT kingdom promises were still in force. The disciples' question in Acts 1:6, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" and Peter's pronouncement in Acts 3:21 that God would "restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets" suggest that the disciples still maintained their belief in the restoration of Israel at that time.

Jesus is considered last (instead of in proper chronological sequence) because it is important to establish the eschatological trajectory on either side of Jesus. These findings raise an intriguing question. If John the Baptist taught OT restorationism, and if the apostles were still teaching it after Pentecost, then what does this imply about the teaching of Jesus?

¹Eusebius *Hist.* 3:39. 7:24 explains how this doctrine was suppressed in Alexandria by Dionysius, who was bishop there A.D. 247-265.

Evidence for an Earthly Kingdom

There are strong indications in the Synoptics and Acts that the kingdom Jesus proclaimed was a heavenly kingdom on earth.

First, the primary topic of conversation between Jesus and His disciples after the resurrection was the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). We must assume that the disciples were not stupid, and that Jesus was not an inept communicator. Their understanding of the kingdom at the end of six weeks of instruction by the risen Lord is revealed by their query in Acts 1:6, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus' replied, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority." This is essentially the same thing He said in Mark 13:32/Matt 24:36: Only the Father knows *when*. But Jesus did not question the disciples' conventional views of the kingdom.

Second, we find restorationism on the lips of Jesus Himself in Matt 17:11, "Elijah is coming and will *restore all things*,"¹ and in Matt 19:28, where Jesus promised that "at the *renewal of all things*, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne."² The disciples would "sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of

¹Restoration is one of the functions of Elijah according to Mal 4:5 (LXX) and Sir 48:10. The restoration of "all things" (see Str-B 4:764-98) implies a radical break with the past in the renewal of Israel. Cf. the prophecy of Zephaniah, which begins with the destruction of the entire earth, and ends (3:20) with the gathering and restoration of the nation of Israel. The kingdom that follows the new heaven and earth is still an earthly, nationalistic one, as in Isa 65:17-25, Jub 1:29, 2 Bar 32:6, 72-74, etc. The Exodus was also a sort of new creation according to Wis 19:6.

²The best commentary on "the renewal of all things" is Jub 1:29, which mentions "the day of the new creation when the heaven and earth and all of the creatures shall be renewed according to the powers of heaven and according to the

Israel."¹ Jesus' listeners would have understood such terminology in terms of its OT

whole nature of earth, until the sanctuary of the Lord is created in Jerusalem upon mount Zion." Cf. 1 Enoch 46: "On that day, my Elect One shall sit on the seat of glory and make a selection of their deeds. . . . On that day, I shall cause my Elect One to dwell among them; I shall transform heaven and make it a blessing of light forever. I shall (also) transform the earth and make it a blessing, and cause my Elect One to dwell in her. Then those who have committed sin and crime shall not set foot in her." Cf. 2 Pet 3:13, "We are looking forward to a new heaven *and a new earth, the home of righteousness.*"

¹Cf. Luke 22:30. Gundry, 393, states, "Neither in Jesus' intention nor in Matthew's does 'Israel' mean the church (cf. the distinction maintained in 8:11, 12; 21:43; 22:7; 23:32-36; 27:25)." The disciples would have been thinking in terms of an earthly kingdom as they were when they requested to sit on the right and left of Jesus (Mark 10:37/Matt 20:21). The NT tradition that the saints would judge or rule or sit on thrones (1 Cor 6:3, Rev 2:26-27, 3:21, 20:4) is anticipated in Wis 3:7-8, "In the time of their visitation they will shine forth. . . . They will govern nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord will reign over them forever"; and by 1 Enoch 108:12, which promises the righteous that God would "seat them each one by one upon the throne of his honor, and they shall be resplendent for ages that cannot be numbered." This motif originates in Dan 7, "Thrones were set up . . . judgment was passed in favor of the saints . . . then the kingdom, the dominion . . . will be given to the people of the saints."

Jesus' promise of twelve thrones is a twist on the tradition that the twelve patriarchs would judge restored Israel; cf. Test Jud 25:1, "And after this [the coming of the Messiah] Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will be resurrected to life and I [Judah] and my brothers will be chiefs wielding our scepter in Israel"; and Test Ben 10:7-10, "Then we shall also be raised, each of us over our tribe, and we shall prostrate ourselves before the heavenly king. Then all shall be changed, some destined for glory, others for dishonor, for the Lord first judges Israel for the wrong she has committed, and then he shall do the same for all the nations. Then he shall judge Israel by the chosen gentiles as he tested Esau by the Midianites who loved their brothers."

The leaders of the future messianic community are described in the Dead Sea Scrolls: "This is the assembly of famous men, those summoned to the gathering of the community council, when God begets the Messiah with them. The chief priest of all the congregation of Israel shall enter, and all his brothers, the sons of Aaron, the priests summoned to the assembly, the famous men, and they shall sit before him, each one according to his dignity. After, the Messiah of Israel shall enter and before him shall sit the chiefs of the clans of Israel, each one according to his dignity" (1QRule of the Congregation [1Q28a], 2:11-15, in Martinez, *DSS*, 127).

and intertestamental origins.

Third, Luke's birth narratives portray Jesus in terms that are consistent with OT eschatology but inconsistent with the later NT scenario. Gabriel prophesied that "the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end" (Luke 1:32-33).¹ Zechariah, John's father, expected a military deliverer (Luke 1:67-75). Simeon saw the baby Jesus as the hoped-for "consolation" (2:25) and "glory" (2:32) of Israel; and the birth prophecy of Anna speaks of "the redemption of Jerusalem."² These are clearly pre-Christian concepts,³ for by the time Luke wrote it was obvious that Jesus had neither consoled Israel nor redeemed Jerusalem from her enemies. This suggests, first, that these speeches are not fictional reconstructions by Luke but are reliable reports based

¹Later in Jesus' lifetime, His followers understood the triumphal entry as a harbinger of this same "coming kingdom of our father David" (Mark 11:10)—i.e., the kingdom which was to follow the gathering and restoration of Israel (Jer 23, 30, Ezek 34, 37, Zech 12).

²Luke 2:38. The OT prophets promised national redemption from Israel's oppressors (Ps 25:22, Isa 43:14, 48:20, 49:26, 51:9-11, 52:1-10, 60:16, 63:4-6, Jer 15:21, 31:11, 50:33-34, Mic 4:10) just as God had redeemed Israel from Egypt (Deut 7:8, 9:26, 13:5, 15:15, 24:18, 2 Sam 7:23, Ps 74:2, 77:15, 78:42, 106:9-10, Mic 6:4), and this redemption was associated with the gathering of Israel (Ps 107:2-3, Isa 35:9-10, 43:1-7, 48:20, Zech 10:8). Rarely is this a national redemption from sin (Ps 130:7-8, Isa 44:22). Anna is here speaking of national redemption from Rome, as indicated by the parallels in Luke 1:68-75, 24:21. Luke's usage of this word also suggests that "your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:28; no parallel in Mark 13/Matt 24) is a national redemption (cp. 21:24, "until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled," and v. 31, "the kingdom of God is near," unlike Mark 13:29/Matt 24:33, which have "it is near").

³Allusions to Isa 52:8-10. In other words, Anna and Simeon believed that Isaiah's messianic kingdom was dawning. On the comfort or consolation of Israel, see Isa 12:1, 40:1, 49:13, 51:3, 12, 52:9, 54:11, 57:18, 61:2, 66:13, Jer 31:13, Zech 1:17.

on primitive sources (cf. Luke 1:1-4) that hark back to the beginning of the era.

Second, these prophecies imply that God's original plan for Jesus was quite different than the way it turned out: God intended (of course) that His people would accept their Messiah!

Fourth, Mal 4:1-3 speaks of the final destruction of the wicked, followed by the liberation of the righteous on the earth, where they walk on the ashes of the wicked. This is the latest OT eschatology, with the possible exception of the final chapters of Zechariah. If Jesus' eschatological scenario differs from that of Malachi and Zechariah, then where does He say so? Such a drastic change from a terrestrial to an extra-terrestrial kingdom would have generated much controversy. Why is there no hint of any such controversy in the Synoptics?

Fifth, we have already argued that John the Baptist expected an imminent holocaust, followed by an earthly kingdom. If we compare the teachings of John the Baptist in Matt 3:1-2, 10-12, with the teachings of Jesus in Matt 4:17, 7:19, and 13:30, it appears that Jesus shared John's apocalyptic scenario.

Sixth, in the sermon on the mount Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. . . . Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth" (Matt 5:3-5). Is Jesus here promising different rewards to different groups: the poor in spirit will go to heaven, while the meek will stay on earth? Of course not. The two expressions are equivalent; the kingdom of heaven is on earth.¹

¹"The kingdom of heaven" is Matthew's circumlocution to avoid pronouncing the name of God; the rest of the NT uses "kingdom of God." Since "kingdom of heaven" never occurs outside of Matthew, Jesus probably never used it, but spoke of

Seventh, an earthly kingdom is implied in the Lord's prayer: "Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt 6:10). Christians have always understood this as a reference to the future kingdom of glory, not the present kingdom of grace. The sentence may be understood either as synonymous parallelism—the second clause being a restatement of the first—or as event/consequence: May your kingdom come so that your will might be done on earth. Either way, the presupposition is an earthly kingdom. Similar phraseology is retained in ancient Jewish prayers which are still extant today, such as the "Kaddish." Curiously, Luke 11:2 omits "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Eighth, consider Jesus' answer to the Sadducees' skeptical conundrum about the resurrection:

The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection. (Luke 20:34-36)

Notice that Jesus does not refer to heaven here, but to those who have a part "in that age and in the resurrection from the dead." This statement is an advance over the OT concept of the kingdom found in Isaiah, where even after the re-creation of heaven and earth (Isa 65:17) there is still birth (vs. 23) and death (vs. 20, 22),¹ but Jesus still uses the conventional terminology of the two ages, which presupposes an earthly

the kingdom of God, as indicated by Mark, Luke, and John.

¹But Isa 25:6-9 would seem to imply the abolition of death; this along with Hos 13:14 foreshadow the NT doctrine of eternal life. See also Ps 49:7-15.

kingdom in the age to come. It is significant that Christian writers after Paul/Hebrews abandon this terminology,¹ except for its use on the lips of Jesus in Luke—another evidence of the reliability of the Synoptic records of the words of Jesus.

Ninth, Jesus' parables of the mustard seed and the yeast (Matt 13:31-33/Luke 13:18-21), which speak of a takeover of society by the new kingdom, fit the OT eschatological scenario better than one in which the world is destroyed by fire and the righteous are taken to heaven. This is an OT metaphor.²

The tenth argument is one of the most significant. In most modern Christian teachings about the Second Coming, the righteous are taken out from among the wicked, but in the Synoptics *the wicked are taken out from among the righteous*, as in earlier literature.³ This is first stated in Matt 8:12, "The subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside," then repeated several times in the kingdom parables of Matt 13.

¹The single exception among first- and second-century Christian documents is the *Shepherd of Hermas*, one of the apostolic fathers. Hermas has a strong Jewish flavor, with theological affinities to the NT book of James and, to a lesser extent, Hebrews. At the latest, it dates from the middle of the second century, more likely from the beginning of the second century, and possibly even from the middle of the first, prior to A.D. 70 (in which case the book was probably authored by the Hermas of Rom 16:14 as 1 Clement was probably authored by the Clement of Phil 4:3). Two-age terminology is also still used after A.D. 70 in Jewish sources: 4 Ezra (3:26, 27, 6:7,9,10, 9:13), 2 Bar (14:12, 44:8-15, 48:50, 83:1-8), and Apoc Abr.

²Cf. Ps 80:8-19, Isa 27:6, 60:21-22, 61:11, Ezek 17:22-23, Dan 2:35, Hos 14:5-7. The point is not how slowly the kingdom comes. Beasley-Murray (*Jesus and the Future*, 183-4), citing Easton and Bultmann, points out that these parables do not necessarily imply gradualness: mustard seed grows in a few weeks and leaven works overnight; Jesus never compares the kingdom to the growth of an oak. 1 Clem 23:4-5 compares the kingdom to a grapevine, and his point is how suddenly it will come.

³Ps 37:9-11, 27-29, Prov 2:21-22, 10:30, Isa 49:19, 60:21, Amos 9:10, Zeph 3:11-13, Mal 3:2-5, 1 Enoch 38; cf. John the Baptist in Matt 3:10.

Jesus' parable of the weeds (13:24-43) ends with this explanation:

As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed *out of his kingdom* everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun *in the kingdom* of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear. (Matt 13:40-43)¹

In other words, the wicked are taken out of the kingdom, leaving the righteous to "inherit the earth" or "land" (Matt 5:5). The following parable of the fishnet ends similarly (13:49-50): "The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace." The wicked go, the righteous stay. Matt 8:11-12/Luke 13:28-29 speaks of many who will come from the east, west, north, and south to take their places in the kingdom,² but the subjects of the kingdom are thrown outside.

Even in the Olivet discourse itself the wicked servant is cast "outside, into the darkness" (vs. 30). The setting of the parable of the sheep and the goats is an earthly one: The Son of Man comes down from heaven and sits on his throne in heavenly

¹The motif of the outer darkness with weeping and gnashing of teeth as the destiny of the wicked (Matt 8:12, 13:42, 50, 22:13, 24:51, 25:30, Luke 13:28, 2 Pet 2:4, 17, Jude 1:6,13) is an intertestamental development; cf. 1 Enoch 10:4, "Bind Azazel hand and foot and throw him into the darkness"; 103:5-8, "Woe to you sinners. . . . They will bring your souls down to Sheol; and they shall experience evil and great tribulation—in darkness, nets, and burning flame"; 108:5-6, "Then I asked one of the holy angels . . . 'What is this . . . flame of a fire which is burning—and a voice of weeping, crying, and lamenting as well as strong pain.' And he said unto me, 'This place which you see, into it shall be taken the spirits of sinners.'"

²Obviously, those who come from the east are coming west to Jerusalem, those from the north are coming south to Jerusalem, etc., Zech 8:7-8; cf. Ps 107:3, Isa 43:5-6.

glory amidst all the nations (Matt 25:31-32), including the wicked, who "depart" (vs. 41) and "go away" (vs. 46); the righteous go nowhere (vs. 34).

The Gathering of Israel

All of this suggests that an ascension to heaven is not necessarily implied in Matt 24:31/Mark 13:27, "And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other." It is often assumed that any mention of Jesus' return in glory automatically implies an ascension of the saints to heaven. But in first-century Judaism this was not so; the resurrected saints continue to live on the earth, as in 2 Baruch:

And it will happen after these things when the time of the appearance of the Anointed One has been fulfilled and he returns with glory, that then all who sleep in hope of him will rise. And it will happen at that time that those treasuries will be opened in which the number of the souls of the righteous were kept, and they will go out and the multitudes of the souls will appear together, in one assemblage, of one mind. And the first ones will enjoy themselves and the last ones will not be sad. For they know that the time has come of which it is said that it is the end of times.¹

If Jesus' eschatological scenario differs from this, then where does He say so?

Certainly not in Matt 24:31/Mark 13:27. This passage stands in the OT restorationist tradition about the gathering of Israel. In Deut 30:2-5 Moses promises Israel that

¹2 Bar 30:1-4. Even though this statement, written at the end of the first century, may show some Christian influence, yet there is no mention of a trip to heaven. The same thing is true of Apoc Abr 31:1, written about the same time and showing clear Christian influence: "And then I will sound the trumpet out of the air, and I will send my chosen one, having in him one measure of all my power, and he will summon my people, humiliated by the heathen. And I will burn with fire those who mocked them and ruled over them in this age (Apoc Abr 31:1-2). The temple is restored in 29:17f.

when they return to the Lord, "then the Lord your God will *restore* your fortunes and have compassion on you and *gather* you again from all the nations where he scattered you. . . . He will bring you to the land that belonged to your fathers." Zephaniah teaches that after the soon-coming Day of the Lord, when the whole world would be consumed (1:14, 18), "'At that time I will *gather* you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I *restore* your fortunes before your very eyes,' says the Lord" (3:20). These two passages are but a small sample of the abundant OT promises about the restoration of Israel and the gathering to Jerusalem.¹ Jesus did not need to tell His disciples where the elect would be gathered to; that would have been obvious to them.

The tradition of a reaping or gathering to Jerusalem from the ends of the earth at the sound of the trumpet has its taproot in Isaiah, and can be traced through the intertestamental book of Baruch, through John the Baptist, to Jesus:

In that day the Lord will thresh from the flowing Euphrates to the Wadi of Egypt, and you, O Israelites, will be gathered up one by one. And in that day a great trumpet will sound. Those who were perishing in Assyria and those who were exiled in Egypt will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain in Jerusalem. (Isa 27:12-13)

I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth. (Isa 43:5-6)

Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height, and look toward the east, and see your children gathered from west and east, at the word of the

¹Deut 30:3-5, Neh 1:9, Isa 11:12, 27:12-13, 43:5-6, 49:5, Jer 29:14, 31:8-12, 32:37, Ezek 11:17, 22:19, 28:25, 36:24, 37:21, 39:28, Zeph 3:20; see also Bar 4-5, Sir 36, 48:10, 2 Macc 1:27f., 2:18, Ps Sol 11, 17:28-31, 17:50.

Holy One, rejoicing that God has remembered them. For they went forth from you on foot, led away by their enemies; but *God will bring them back to you, carried in glory*, as on a royal throne. (Baruch 5:5-6)¹

His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire. (Matt 3:12)

First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn. (Matt 13:30b)

And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. (Matt 24:31; cf. Mark 13:27, "from the ends of the earth")

Those who would assert that the tradition changes from an earthly to a heavenly Jerusalem must answer two questions: Where is the evidence for this change? And at what point does this occur—between which two statements above? Surely not between the last two, since both statements are from Jesus; nor between the fourth and fifth, since those are the two most similar statements in the list. Not between the third and fourth, because we have already established John's restorationist beliefs, and John's statement in Matt 3:12 is based on the first statement in the list, Isa 27:12-13. There appears to be no break in this restorationist trajectory; it flows right into Matt

¹This book is part of the Apocrypha and was written somewhere between 150 and 60 B.C. This tradition may be based on Isa 60:4, 8: "Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the arm. . . . Who are these that fly along like clouds, like doves to their nests?" Cf. 1 Enoch 57:1-2, "And it happened afterward that I had another vision of a whole array of chariots loaded with people; and they were advancing upon the air from the east and from the west until midday. . . . And the sound could be heard from the extreme end of the sky unto the extreme end of the earth in one hour."

24—and beyond.

Jesus' scenario would appear to be essentially the same as that of Isaiah. Another striking piece of evidence in favor of this thesis is that it enables us to solve a notorious crux found in the preceding verse, Matt 24:30: "At that time the sign [*semeion*] of the Son of Man will appear in the sky." The identity of this sign, mentioned nowhere else in the NT, occasioned quite a bit of speculation in the second century,¹ which continues to this day. In the end, the often-overlooked solution is provided by Isaiah:

In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner [LXX differs here; I am quoting the NIV] for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious. . . . He will raise a banner [LXX: *semeion*] for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; he will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth (11:10-12).

All you people of the world, you who live on the earth, when a banner [LXX: *semeion*] is raised on the mountains, you will see it, and when a trumpet sounds, you will hear it (18:3).²

¹"Then shall the signs of the truth appear: first a sign of a rift in the heaven [so Lightfoot, 129; Cyril Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 179, (hereafter *ECF*) translates "first the sign of stretched-out {hands} in heaven"], then a sign of a voice of a trumpet, and thirdly a resurrection from the dead; yet not of all, but as it was said, 'The Lord shall come and all His saints with Him.' Then shall the world see the Lord coming upon the clouds of heaven" (*Didache* 16). "So shall I come on the clouds of heaven with a great host in my glory; with my cross going before my face will I come in my glory (Apoc Pet 1 [NTA 2:668]). "Truly I say to you, I will come as the sun which bursts forth; thus will I, shining seven times brighter than it in glory, while I am carried on the wings of the clouds in splendour with my cross going on before me" (Epist Apost 16 [NTA 1:200]). See also Apoc Elij 3:2 (NTA 1:744).

²The banner is also associated with trumpets in Jer 4:21, 6:1, 51:27, 1QM 2:15-4:17.

This is what the Sovereign Lord says: "See, I will beckon to the Gentiles, I will lift up my banner [LXX: *sussemon*] to the peoples; they will bring your sons in their arms and carry your daughters on their shoulders (49:22).

Raise a banner [LXX: *sussemon*] for the nations. The Lord has made proclamation to the ends of the earth: "Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your Savior comes! See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him'" (62:10-11).

"I am about to come and gather all nations and tongues, and they will come and see my glory. I will set a sign [LXX: *semeion*] among them . . ." (66:18-19)

The *semeion* of the Son of Man in Matt 24:30 is none other than Isaiah's banner/ensign/standard/flag which signals the gathering of the elect to Jerusalem at the time of God's coming in glory. Like all armies, God's army bears a flag (cf. 1QM 3:13-4:17). According to Isa 11:10, this flag is the Messiah Himself.

In short, there is ample evidence that Jesus' Olivet prophecy is not incongruous with the OT scenario of a restored kingdom with headquarters in a new, but earthly, Jerusalem.

But wait! Jesus has just described the destruction of Jerusalem! How could the elect return to Jerusalem if there is nothing left to return to?

The Rebuilding of Jerusalem

There are several significant intertestamental allusions to the renewal and restoration of Jerusalem. The first four are from the second century B.C., and two of them contain significant Parousia language.

Jerusalem will be desolate. The house of God in it will be burned down and will be in ruins for a time. But God will again have mercy on them, and bring them back into their land; and they will rebuild the

house of God, though it will not be like the former one until the times of the age are completed. After this they will return from the places of their captivity, and will rebuild Jerusalem in splendor. And the house of God will be rebuilt there with a glorious building for all generations forever, just as the prophets said of it. Then all the Gentiles will turn to fear the Lord God in truth, and will bury their idols. (Tob 14:4-6)

"And you [Moses] write down . . . what will happen in all of the divisions of the days which are in the law and testimony and throughout their weeks (of years) according to the jubilees forever, until I shall descend and dwell with them in all the ages of eternity." And he said to the angel of the presence, "Write for Moses from the first creation until my sanctuary is built in their midst forever and ever. And the Lord will appear in the sight of all. And everyone will know that I am the God of Israel and the father of all the children of Jacob and king upon Mount Zion forever and ever. And Zion and Jerusalem will be holy." And the angel of the presence, who went before the camp of Israel, took the tablets of the division of years from the time of the creation of the law and testimony according to their weeks (of years), according to the jubilees, year by year throughout the full number of jubilees, from [the day of creation until] the day of the new creation when the heaven and earth and all of the creatures shall be renewed according to the powers of heaven and according to the whole nature of earth, until the sanctuary of the Lord is created in Jerusalem upon mount Zion. (Jub 1:26-29)

Then I stood still, looking at the ancient house being transformed: All the pillars and all the columns were pulled out, and the ornaments of that house were packed and taken out together with them and abandoned in a certain place in the South of the land. I went on seeing until the Lord of the sheep brought about a new house, greater and loftier than the first one, and set it up on the first location which had been covered up—all its pillars were new, the columns new; and the ornaments new as well as greater than those of the first, (that is) the old (house) which was gone. All the sheep were in it. (1 En 90:28-29).

And the saints shall refresh themselves in Eden; the righteous shall rejoice in the New Jerusalem, which shall be eternally for the glorification of God. And Jerusalem shall no longer undergo desolation, nor shall Israel be led into captivity, because the Lord will be in her

midst, living among human beings.¹ The Holy One of Israel shall rule

¹There is nothing to suggest that "living among human beings" is a Christian interpolation, contrary to H. C. Kee (*OTP* 1:810). This idea occurs repeatedly in the *Testaments*: "Hate lying, in order that the Lord may dwell among you" (Test Dan 5:1); "It is through him [Levi] that the Lord has chosen to reign in the presence of all the people" (Test Reub 6:11); "God the Lord, the Great One in Israel, will be manifest upon the earth as a man. . . . Then I will arise in gladness and I shall bless the Most High for his marvels, because God has taken a body, eats with human beings, and saves human beings. And now, my children, be obedient to Levi and to Judah. Do not exalt yourselves above these two tribes, because from them will arise the Savior come from God. For the Lord will raise up from Levi someone as high priest and from Judah someone as king, God and man. He will save all the gentiles and the tribe of Israel" (Test Sim 6:5-7:2); "You [Levi] shall be his priest and you shall tell forth his mysteries to men. You shall announce the one who is about to redeem Israel. Through you and Judah the Lord will be seen by men, by himself saving every race of humankind" (Test Levi 2:10-11); "Blessings shall be given to you and to all your posterity until through his son's compassion the Lord shall visit all the nations forever" (4:4), "I saw the Holy Most High sitting on the throne. And he said to me, 'Levi, to you I have given the blessing of the priesthood until I shall come and dwell in the midst of Israel'" (5:1-2); "Levi, your posterity shall be divided into three offices as a sign of the glory of the Lord who is coming" (8:11); "Your posterity will share among themselves the Lord's table" (8:16); "My [Judah's] rule shall be terminated by men of alien race, until the salvation of Israel comes, until the coming of the God of righteousness" (Test Jud 22:2); "And you will see God in a human form, he whom the Lord will choose: Jerusalem is his name" (Test Zeb 9:8); "Through his kingly power God will appear dwelling among men on the earth" (Test Napht 8:3); "You will be scattered to the four corners of the earth . . . until such time as the Most High visits the earth. He shall come as a man eating and drinking with human beings, crushing the dragon's head in the water. He will save Israel and all the nations, God speaking like a man" (Test Ash 7:3).

Kee regards some of these as interpolations, some not. But interpolations are usually not recurring themes tightly woven throughout the body of a work, and they are usually more explicitly Christian than this. These "interpolations" are generally included in all the manuscripts (see *OTP* 1:787 n. 6c). And if these are interpolations, then are we to assume that the same hand was at work in Jubilees? "I shall descend and dwell with them in all the ages of eternity. . . . And the Lord will appear in the sight of all. And everyone will know that I am the God of Israel" (Jub 1:24)? And was the same Christian interpolator at work in the OT? "'Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you,' declares the Lord" (Zech 2:10). "This is what the Lord says: 'I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem'" (Zech 8:3). "Suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple" (Mal 3:1).

over them in humility and poverty, and he who trusts in him shall reign in truth in the heavens. (Test Dan 5:12-13)¹

You however, if you prepare your minds to sow into them the fruits of the law, he shall protect you in the time in which the Mighty One shall shake the entire creation. For after a short time, the building of Zion will be shaken² in order that it will be rebuilt. That building will not remain; but it will again be uprooted after some time and will remain desolate for a time. And after that it is necessary that it will be renewed in glory and that it will be perfected into eternity. We should not, therefore, be so sad regarding the evil which has come now, but much more (distressed) regarding that which is in the future. For greater than the two evils will be the trial when the Mighty One shall renew his creation. (2 Bar 32:1-6)

More important than these statements, however, is Zech 12-14, which we know influenced Jesus (see chapter 2). There the kingdom that follows the attack of the nations on Jerusalem is an earthly one with the purified survivors (Zech 13:8-9) living in a restored Jerusalem (14:10-11).

This idea of an eschatological battle between Jerusalem and the nations assembled against it—sort of an OT Armageddon—is called "the battle on the day of the Lord" in Ezek 13:5. It is first mentioned in either Ps 118:10-13, or Isa 29:1-8, whichever is earlier. In Isa 29 Jerusalem is besieged and brought low by the

Perhaps these statements provide a context for Jesus' pronouncement in Luke 17:21, "The kingdom of God is among you."

¹T Napht 8:3 and parallel passages clearly indicate that Test Dan 5:13 is describing an earthly kingdom; thus "reign in truth in the heavens" must be taken in a metaphorical sense (i.e., "He who trusts in him is really reigning in the heavens"; cf. Paul's concept that the saints are "seated in heavenly places").

²I.e., under Nebuchadnezzar. The author, who is actually writing shortly after A.D. 100, pretends to be Jeremiah's secretary Baruch writing before the first fall of Jerusalem. The statement goes on to predict the second fall under Titus. On the eschatological shaking of all creation cf. Job 38:13, Isa 2:19-21, 13:13, 24:18-20, Hag 2:6-7, 21-22, Matt 24:29/Mark 13:25/Luke 21:26, Heb 12:26-7; 2 Bar 59:3.

Assyrians, then suddenly God comes and destroys the attackers; the climactic moment of the Parousia is enlarged upon in Isa 30:27-31 and 31:4-9. In Joel 3 the great eschatological battle is decided when God brings down His warriors (vs. 11), then "the sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the sky will tremble. But the Lord will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel" (Joel 3:15-16). Ezek 38-39 describes this battle in great detail. There will be a great earthquake (38:19) caused by God's coming (vs. 20), and God will "pour down torrents of rain, hailstones, and burning sulfur on him [Gog] and on his troops and on the many nations with him" (vs. 22). The remaining chapters of Ezekiel provide something of a new constitution for the kingdom which is to follow.

In short, the OT foresees a great eschatological attack on Jerusalem, followed by its restoration as the earthly capital of God's kingdom. Sometimes Jerusalem is devastated, sometimes only partially damaged; but the destruction is only a prelude to restoration—even when the language seems to indicate otherwise. For example, "Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets" (Mic 3:12). This sounds rather final. But the next verse says, "In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and people will stream to it," and Micah goes on to describe the messianic kingdom and the restoration of Israel (4:1-8). We see something similar in Isa 32: Zion is to become "*a wasteland forever . . . till the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the desert becomes a fertile*

field" (vss. 14-15). This same theme—"eternal" desolation followed by restoration—is described at great length in Isa 34 and 35. Indeed, the desolate land (Isa 64:10) was to become like Eden (Isa 51:3, Ezek 36:35).

If Jesus shared this scenario, then why did He say nothing about a restoration of Jerusalem? For one thing, nothing is mentioned about rebuilding the temple in Daniel; Dan 9:26 seems to indicate that the temple would be desolate "until the end." Since Jesus on Olivet was commenting on the prophecy of Daniel, He, like Daniel, did not mention the rebuilding. Or perhaps Jesus was following another OT tradition. The late pre-exilic prophecies of the first destruction of Jerusalem seem to allow for no restoration.¹ Just before the second destruction of Jerusalem, in a time of complacency on the part of the Jewish leaders, Jesus, like the later pre-exilic prophets, had no reassurance to give.

The Conversion of the Jews

But perhaps Jesus did, in fact, say something in Matt 24 that implies restoration. Once again we must return to Zech 12-14, the latest and most detailed description of the eschatological battle and its aftermath in the OT. This passage provides part of the imagery for Matt 24:30: "all the nations [*phulai*] of the earth will

¹See 2 Kgs 21:12-15, 22:16-17, 24:2-4, Jer 7:12-16, 19:3-13, 21:10, 22:6-10, 23:39-40, 25:9, 26:6, 9, Ezek 15:1-8. Jerusalem was to be laid waste so that no one could live there (Jer 9:11, 34:22) just like Sodom, Hazor, and Babylon (49:18, 33, 50:40, 51:29). The messages of doom begin to change in Jer 32 to messages of hope only after the doom appears certain (but see 16:14-15). Jesus' silence about restoration is analogous to His iconoclastic attitude toward the peace prophecies mentioned above.

mourn." This can and probably should be translated "all the [twelve] tribes [*phulai*] of the land [of Israel] will mourn," which is the original intent of Zc 12:10-14, the OT source. I would argue that it was also Jesus' intent on Olivet (whether it is Matthew's intent when he wrote in the sixties is a separate question, as is the question of the intent of Rev 1:7). Even as late as the second half of the second century this was still understood by some Christians to imply the repentance and restoration of the Jews at the Parousia. Note the testimony of Justin: first there is the Parousia, then the resurrection, then the wicked are cast into hell, then:

What the peoples of the Jews say and do, when they see him coming in glory, was thus prophesied through the prophet Zechariah: "I will command the four winds to bring together the scattered children; I will command the north wind to carry them, and the south wind not to keep them back. And there will be great lamentation in Jerusalem, not a lamentation of mouth or lips, but a lamentation of the heart, and they shall rend not their garments but their minds. Tribe after tribe will lament, and then they will see him whom they pierced, and will say: Why, O Lord, did you make us wander astray from thy way? The glory which our fathers praised has become our disgrace."¹

Notice how well this fits with Rom 11:26, "All Israel will be saved, as it is written, 'The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.'" Note that Israel is saved when the redeemer comes, which Paul seems to see as future. Perhaps Paul and Justin Martyr held similar beliefs on this point. Rom 11 has long been a *crux interpretorum*. However, I believe we can now piece together a

¹Justin *Apology*, 1:52, in *ECF*, 275-6. The "prophecy" cited by Justin is a pastiche of OT prophetic fragments: Isa 43:5-6, Zc 2:6, 12:10-12, Isa 63:17, 64:11. Does this statement suggest a possible OT origin for Jesus' teaching that angels would gather the righteous and carry them home? It is but a short jump from winds to angels (cf. Heb 1:7).

restorationist trajectory in early Christianity that makes sense of Paul's statement that all Israel will be saved.

In other words, the eschatological scenario of Jesus' Olivet discourse is not dissimilar from that of Zc 12-14. The theme of the great eschatological battle reappears in Christian form in Rev 14:18-20, 16:13-16, 19:19-21, and 20:7-9, where the nations attack the New Jerusalem, but the city is undamaged and the wicked are destroyed.

But even if Jesus did assume a heavenly kingdom on earth, His Olivet discourse moves beyond conventional Jewish eschatology in that He clearly did not have in mind a military/political Jewish revolt and conquest by force of arms. Also, according to Matthew, He had only recently foretold that the kingdom would be taken from the Jews and given to "another nation," and implied that the opportunity for their gathering was past,¹ so the kingdom of which He spoke included Gentiles. Jesus' educated contemporaries would have regarded all this as heresy. They would no doubt have de-emphasized the destruction of Jerusalem mentioned in texts such as Zech 14:2 and focused on destruction of the nations in Zech 12:2-9, 14:3. In intertestamental Jewish literature the attack on Jerusalem ends in the same way as it does in Rev 20:7-10: fire destroys the attackers, followed by the judgment.²

¹Matt 8:11-12, 21:43, 23:37. Yet as recently as Matt 19:28 Jesus had been teaching that in the regeneration it would be the twelve tribes of Israel that the disciples would be governing.

²Sib Or 3:657-674; cf. 1 Enoch 56:5-8, 4 Ezra 13:1-38. The idea originates in Ps 11:6, Isa 29:6, 30:30, 33, Ezek 38:22. Overconfidence in this scenario must have played a significant role in the Jewish tragedy of A.D. 66-70.

Problem Passages for a Restorationist Scenario

Heaven in the Gospels

If an extra-terrestrial kingdom is not taught in the Synoptics, then what about the promises of heavenly reward: "Great is your reward in heaven"; "Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven"; "Go sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven"?¹ Do these sayings imply that heaven is the home of the righteous? No. I keep my money in a bank, but that does not imply that I live there. This idea originates in Isaiah: "Yet what is due me is in the Lord's hand, and my reward is with my God" (49:4); "See, your Savior comes! See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him" (62:11). The heavenly reward is bestowed on earth at the Parousia. This idea is not uncommon in Jewish literature: "For you have a treasure of works laid up with the Most High; but it will not be shown to you until the last times."² Cf. 1 Tim 6:19, which speaks of laying up treasure through good deeds as a firm foundation for the coming age. Our reward is stored in heaven in the same sense as our hope (Col 1:5), our inheritance (1 Pet 1:4), our citizenship (Phil 3:20), and even our resurrection body, which Paul describes in 2 Cor 5:1-4 as "an eternal house in heaven." Like the New Jerusalem, which comes down from heaven,³ these things are bestowed on earth in the last day.

¹Matt 5:12/Luke 6:23; Matt 6:19-21/Luke 12:33; Mark 10:21/Luke 18:22.

²Ezr 7:77; cf. 8:33, 36, Tob 4:8-9, Test Levi 13:5, 1 Enoch 38:2, Ps Sol 9:6, 9, 2 Bar 14:12, 24:1, Pea 15b, B. Bathra 11a, Shabbath 31b.

³Rev 3:12, 21:2, 10.

Jesus promised the thief on the cross, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Does this imply a non-earthly kingdom? No. According to Jewish tradition, Paradise with its tree of life would be restored to the righteous on earth in the new age,¹ so Jesus was only granting the thief just what he asked for, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." Lamsa is probably correct that the comma is misplaced in our English versions; the verse should be translated, "Truly I tell you today, you will be with me in paradise." The expression "I tell you today" is a common idiom which occurs some thirty-five times in Deuteronomy; see, for example, Deut 30:11, 15, 16, 19, and especially vs. 18, "I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed." Jesus could not have met the thief in Paradise that day, because Paradise is in the third heaven, where God dwells,² and Jesus did not go there until two days later (John 20:17).

We must face the fact that there is no explicit teaching in the Synoptic Gospels about the righteous going to heaven. The Synoptic Jesus maintains the OT scenario of a heavenly kingdom on earth to which the righteous are gathered at the end of the

¹Rev 2:7 with 22:1-2, Test Levi 18:10, Test Dan 5:12, 1 Enoch 25:4, 2 Enoch 65:9-10, 4 Ezra 7:36, 123, Ap Mos 13:2-5, 28:4; see Str-B 4:1151ff. Perhaps the OT basis for this belief is Isa 51:3, Ezek 36:35.

²2 Cor 12:2-4. Paul here follows the earlier Jewish tradition of a three-storied heaven, as in Test Levi 2:6-3:8, rather than slightly later seven- or ten-storied traditions. Intertestamental parallels to Paul's rapture are instructive: Adam is raptured into Paradise in the third heaven, where God is, in the *Life of Adam and Eve*, Vita 25:1-3, Ap Mos 37:5, 40:1 (OTP 2:266, 291). Enoch is raptured into Paradise in the third heaven, but God dwells in the tenth, in 2 Enoch 8-9, 42:3ff. Sedrach is raptured into the third heaven, where God is, in the later *Apocalypse of Sedrach* 2:3-5 (OTP 1:610). Rev 2:7 with 22:1-2 connects paradise with God's throne.

age. Indeed, *how could it have been otherwise?* At least until the end of the seventy weeks, the OT restoration promises were still operative.

To find something close to an explicit promise of an extra-terrestrial kingdom, we must leave the Synoptics and go to the last Gospel, written near the end of the first century. John records something Jesus said in the last few hours before His crucifixion:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. (John 14:1-3)

Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory. (John 17:24)

Even these passages do not mention heaven, but only promise that the saints will be wherever Jesus is. There is some uncertainty as to how 14:1-3 relates to 14:23, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will *come to him and make our home with him.*" However, 14:1-3 was understood by the *Epistula Apostolorum* to refer to a trip to heaven, as we have seen.

Finally, there is John 18:36, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." Note that "of this world" means "from this world," not "in this world," as indicated by the contrasting clause "from another place," and the parallel in John 8:23. Jesus was not talking about location (which would contradict Rev 5:10),

but origin, and hence quality or type.¹ The key here is John 8:23: Jesus was not "of this world" either; He was "from above." Yet though His origin was in heaven, His current location was on earth. Thus this passage does not rule out a heavenly kingdom on earth, though it does mean that Jesus' kingdom was unlike all earthly kingdoms.

The nearest we come in Scripture to an explicit mention of the ascension of the saints are the passages from John cited above, and two verses from the Psalms: 49:15, "God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself"; and 73:24, "afterward you will take me into glory." Whatever the Psalmist meant by this, it is unlikely that he understood it as contradicting the prophets' visions of an earthly kingdom; so perhaps the same thing is true of the statements in John.

The OT Parousia passages (see Appendix C) always speak of God coming to dwell with His people forever, never of His taking them away to a new home. "I am coming, and I will live among you," declares the Lord" (Zech 2:10). "My dwelling place will be with them" (Ezek 37:27). "Son of man, this is the place of my throne. . . . This is where I will live among the Israelites forever" (Ezek 43:7). "The Lord Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders, gloriously" (Isa 24:23). Even Daniel's kingdom is an earthly one: "The rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and *filled the whole earth*" (Dan 2:35). "Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms *under the whole heaven*

¹Cp Matt 11:29-33/Luke 2:3-8, "John's baptism—was it from heaven, or from men?" See also John 3:31, 6:31-58, 1 Cor 15:47-48, Jas 3:15-17. I am well aware that many scholars would deny that the historical Jesus ever made the statements attributed to him in John 14:1-3, 17:24, 18:36 and 21:18-23, and that denying their authenticity would make my case even stronger. But this is unnecessary.

will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and *all rulers will worship and obey him*" (7:27). This is the conventional OT scenario; it is the kingdom of Isaiah.¹ And, as we have observed, it was Daniel's kingdom whose imminent arrival Jesus announced in Mark 1:15.

Nowhere in Scripture is heaven stated to be the destination of the righteous (but Heb 11:13-16 is a close call; see below). The only people who are explicitly said to go "to heaven" in Scripture are the angel of the Lord (Judg 13:20), Elijah (2 Kgs 2:1, 11), personified wisdom (Pr 30:4), Paul in vision (2 Cor 12:2-4), John in vision (Rev 4:1), the two prophetic witnesses (Rev 11:12); and, of course, Jesus. Of the two dozen or so passages which mention the ascension of Jesus,² we might expect several to say that the saints will follow. There are only two which say anything like this. One of them is Eph 2:6, which says *they already have*. The other is Heb 6:19-20: "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, *who went before us*, has entered on our behalf." This statement is best understood in light of the previous clause: our hope enters the inner sanctuary because Jesus went in first; now we who follow can also "enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus" (Heb 10:19). A literal, physical entering is not necessarily implied. Both of these verses are realized eschatology: we

¹Isa 49:7, 23, 60:3, 10-12, 62:2; cf. Ps 22:27, 86:9, Rev 21:24.

²Mark 16:19, Luke 9:51, 24:51, John 3:13, 6:62, Acts 1:2, 9-11, Eph 1:20, 4:10, 1 Tim 3:16, Heb 4:14, 6:20, 8:1, 9:24-5, Rev 12:5. Add to this passages which state that Jesus is at the right hand of God: Matt 26:64, Mark 14:62, Luke 22:69, Acts 2:33-34, 5:31, 7:56, Rom 8:34, Col 3:1, Heb 1:3, 12:2, 1 Pet 3:22.

are already seated in the heavenly realms (Eph 2:6; cf. Heb 12:22-24).

Heaven in the Epistles

This brings us to the writings of Paul, and his well-known passage, "We who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever" (1 Thess 4:17). Is this the earliest mention of the ascension of the saints in Christian literature?

Unfortunately, just as in Matt 24:31, the text does not actually say that the saints go to heaven. But is it implied? Before we answer this question, a brief survey of other Pauline Parousia passages is in order.

A similar ambiguity is found in 2 Thess 2:1, which speaks of our being "gathered," not to heaven, but "to Him"—as in Isa 49:5. This OT terminology is the same as Jesus used on Olivet (Matt 24:31/Mark 13:27). It is significant that the preceding discussion of the Parousia (2 Thess 1:6-10) gives no hint of a trip to heaven where one might be expected; note particularly v. 10: "on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed," where we might expect something like "on the day he comes to take His children home" (since the subject is saving the saints out of persecution).¹ Nor is there any mention of a trip to heaven in the lengthy discussion of the resurrection in 1

¹Note that here, as in Jesus' kingdom parables, the wicked are thrown out of the kingdom and the righteous are left in (2 Thess 1:9). When Paul was at Thessalonica, he probably preached from OT passages such as Isa 35:4, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you." This passage goes on to describe the wonderful conditions to follow, including the gathering of Israel (v. 10) into an earthly kingdom.

Cor 15; or in Phil 3:20-21; or in Heb 9:28, "He will appear a second time . . . to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him"; or in 1 Pet 1:5, which speaks of "the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time." The NT speaks of Jesus bringing us something, not taking us away to something. And Rom 8:19-25 implies the renewal, not destruction, of the present world. These passages seem to fit better with the presupposition of an earthly kingdom than with a heavenly one. Indeed, no description of the Second Coming in the NT mentions a return trip to heaven; not even the detailed scenario in Rev 19:11-20:15.¹

In light of this evidence, we are forced to agree with Ben Witherington that 1 Thess 4:17 may not speak of a trip to heaven at all:

It is probable that Paul is drawing on secular *parousia* imagery, for when a king went to visit a city his herald would go before him to the city walls to announce with trumpet blast and audible words the coming of the king. . . . This suggestion becomes more than a conjecture when we point out that in 1 Thes 4:17 Paul refers to the *apantesin*. Cicero, in the course of his description of Julius Caesar's tour through Italy in 49 B.C., says, 'Just imagine what *apanteseis* he is receiving from the towns, what honors are paid to him.' (*Ad. Att.* 8.16.2; compare 16.11.6 of Octavian). This word refers to the action of the greeting committee that goes out to meet the king or dignitary at his *parousia* who is paying an official visit to the town, and escorts him back into the town on the final part of his journey. 'These analogies (especially in association with the term *parousia*) suggest the possibility that the Lord is pictured here as escorted the remainder of his journey to earth by his

¹The Parousia of Rev 19:11-21 obviously takes place on earth, and the great eschatological battle of 20:7-10 explicitly takes place on earth. In between there is no place where the action changes from earth to heaven or back again; and 5:10 strongly implies that the priestly reign of 20:6 occurs on earth. This is also the position of the *Apocalypse of Elijah* 5:36-39, and second century Christian writers such as Justin ("John . . . prophesied . . . that those who believed in our Christ would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem," *Trypho*, 81). I suspect the millennial reign of Rev 20 is mentioned elsewhere in the NT: in 1 Cor 15:24-28.

people—both those newly raised from the dead and those who have remained alive.¹

Perhaps this enables us to better understand 1 Thess 4:14, "We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him." Does this mean that God is bringing the righteous dead from heaven to earth? This seems to be ruled out by the context: in v. 16 the righteous dead "rise." It has been understood to mean that God will bring the righteous dead from earth to heaven, on the basis of the parallel in 2 Cor 4:14, "We know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence."² But perhaps there is a third option: God will raise the dead at Thessalonika (or wherever) and bring them back with Jesus to the land of Israel, as in Ezek 37:12: "O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel." This might also clarify Col 3:4, "When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also

¹Ben Witherington, *Jesus, Paul, and the End of the World*, p. 157-58, quoting F. F. Bruce. There are scholars who still defend the traditional view: e.g., Joseph Plevnik, "The Taking Up of the Faithful and the Resurrection of the Dead in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 46 (1984), p. 274-83. Keep in mind that we are talking about how Paul's original audience probably would have understood his words. How the Holy Spirit would wish us to understand them today is a separate question.

²2 Cor 4:14 need not be regarded as occurring in heaven, for God Himself is coming to earth (1 Pet 2:12, Rev 21:3, 22:3)—this is the standard OT teaching (see Appendix C). It is on earth that we stand before the judgment seat of God/Christ (Rom 14:10-12, 2 Cor 5:10; cf. Matt 12:41-2), since the wicked are surely not raptured to heaven in order to be condemned to hell. Even the "great white throne" judgment of Rev 20:11-15 seems to be staged on earth (20:7-9). At any rate, one can be "in the presence" of God either in heaven (Luke 1:19, Heb 9:24) or on earth (Exod 18:12, Ps 61:4-8? Acts 10:33, 1 Thes 3:9, 2 Tim 4:1, 1 Jn 3:19).

will appear with him in glory."¹

However, there are still a few pre-70 NT passages which might be interpreted as teaching an otherworldly kingdom, such as Phil 1:23, "I desire to depart and be with Christ"; 3:14, "I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." One particularly relevant passage is Heb 11:13-16:

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were *aliens and strangers on earth*. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for *a better country—a heavenly one*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Surely, if there is any passage in the NT that teaches that heaven is the home of the righteous, this is it. But there are two factors that give us pause. One, the OT also teaches that believers are "aliens and strangers" on earth;² yet it teaches an earthly kingdom. And two, the heavenly city, "whose architect and builder is God" (Heb 11:10), "Mount Zion . . . the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God" (12:22), *is coming down out of heaven*.³ The Scriptural tradition is not that human

¹Even an examination of other "in glory" passages in the NT does not settle the question of locale: Matt 25:31, Mark 8:38, 10:37, Rom 8:17, 1 Cor 15:43, 1 Thess 2:12, 2 Thess 2:14, 1 Tim 3:16, 1 Pet 1:7, 4:13, 5:1, 4.

²In the OT: Lev 25:23, 1 Chr 29:15, Ps 39:12, 119:19; in the NT: Heb 11:13, 1 Pet 1:1, 17, 2:11.

³Rev 3:12, 20:9, 21:2, 21:10; cf. 2 Bar 4, T. Dan 5:12-13; and notice Heb 13:14, "For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come."

beings will be transported to heaven, but that heaven will come to earth. Hebrews says God will "bring salvation to those who are waiting for him" (Heb 9:28); and speaks of the age to come (2:5, 6:5), and the city to come (13:14).

Jewish writers around this time sometimes use heavenly language of the coming earthly kingdom. This language is often a hyperbolic embellishment of the OT motif that Jerusalem would be raised up to the heights of the world and planted on a very high mountain.¹ For example, Test Mos 10:9-10 says that when "all things will be fulfilled," that "God will raise you [Israel] to the heights. Yea, he will fix you firmly in the heaven of the stars, in the place of their habitations. And you will behold them from on high. Yea, you will see your enemies on the earth." The fact that this speaks of the nation and not of individuals suggests that it is metaphor. A relevant parallel is Matt 11:23/Luke 10:15, "And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths."² The implication, I think, is that Capernaum would not share in the restoration and exaltation of Israel which was to come in the Messianic age. Curiously, while many of the towns and villages Jesus frequented are still extant, today nothing remains of Capernaum but ruins.

A second case is Test Dan 5:12-13, "And the saints shall refresh themselves in

¹Isa 2:2-3/Mic 4:1-2, Zech 14:10; cf. Deut 32:13, Ps 68:15-16, Isa 33:16, 58:14, Jer 31:12, Ezek 17:22-23, 20:40, 40:2, Dan 2:35. This is picked up in the Pseudepigrapha: In 4 Ezer 13:6, 35, 36, God's messianic Son carves out without hands a great mountain, which represents Zion, and flies up onto it to destroy the wicked with the breath of his mouth; and Sib Or 5:247-270, 414-434 (c. A.D. 118), says Jerusalem will be built up with a high tower that touches the clouds (cf. Rev 21:16).

²Similar OT statements can be found regarding Babylon (Isa 14:12-15, Jer 51:53), Jerusalem (Lam 2:1), Tyre (Ezek 28:12-16), and Edom (Obad 1:4).

Eden, the righteous shall rejoice in the New Jerusalem. . . . He who trusts in him shall reign in truth in the heavens." If this is indeed the correct reading,¹ it is metaphor, as in Eph 2:6; for Test Levi 18 clearly teaches a restored kingdom on earth, in which the heavens are opened, and God comes down to dwell with His people, and opens the gates of Paradise.

1 Enoch provides a third case where context indicates the exaltation is an earthly one:

Be hopeful, you righteous ones, for the sinners shall soon perish from before your presence. You shall be given authority upon them, such (authority) as you may wish (to have). In the day of the tribulation of the sinners, your children shall be raised high up and be made openly visible like eagles, higher than the vultures will your dwelling place be, you shall ascend and enter the crevices of the earth and the clefts of the rock forever, like squirrels, before the face of the oppressors (1 Enoch 96:1-2).

A fourth case is found in Philo (*Vita I*, 290), which says the kingdom of the coming messiah "shall increase every day and be raised up to heaven." Yet the kingdom to come in Philo is an earthly one (*Praem.* 168).

A fifth and particularly interesting case is found in Syriac Baruch. Eminent scholars have argued that 2 Bar does in fact have the righteous living in heaven.² May I humbly suggest that this is a misunderstanding of the language of chapter 51, which is the angel's positive answer to the question of 49:3, "Will you perhaps

¹The reading is uncertain. R. H. Charles (*APOT* 2:335) reads "He who believeth on Him shall reign amongst men in truth," and considers this an interpolation.

²See Hermann Sasse in *TDNT* 1:206, Joachim Jeremias in *TDNT* 5:767n18, and A.F.J. Klijn in *OTP* 1:619.

change these things which have been *in the world, as also the world itself?*"

According to 51:8, the saints "will see that world which is now invisible to them, and they will see a time which is now hidden to them." This is synonymous parallelism; the "invisible" kingdom is separated from us temporally, not spatially. The two kingdoms are contrasted in 51:16, and again the contrast is temporal, not spatial. In this kingdom of 2 Bar 51 the saints will be transformed (but not transported), they will live in the heights of that world, the extents of paradise will be spread out before them, and they will even see the living beings under the throne, etc. However, the kingdom is still an earthly one, as in chapters 29-30 and 71-74. It is important to keep in mind that heaven is not conceived in Scripture as light years away from earth, in some distant corner of the universe, but relatively near, just above the vault of the sky;¹ and some writers evidently believed that in the new age the eyes of the redeemed would be opened so they could see into it.²

Although even the strongest NT passages do not quite explicitly teach a trip to heaven, it would appear that the NT writers were moving in that direction, for the last book in the NT clearly places the saints in heaven. Evidently God revealed to Jesus' followers the full implications of His mission only gradually. The fact that there were

¹Cf. Gen 28:12 with Am 9:6, Gen 11:4 with Isa 14:13; Isa 40:22, 66:1, Ezek 1:26, etc.

²Perhaps on the basis of Isa 32:3, 33:17; just as the eyes of Balaam and Elisha's servant were opened to the noumenal world in Num 22:31, 2 Kgs 6:17; or Stephen in Acts 7:56, etc. Acc. to 2 Enoch 31:2, 42:3, the earthly paradise of Eden was open to the third heaven. Cp. 1 Enoch 104:2, "But now you shall shine like the lights of heaven, and you shall be seen; and the windows of heaven shall be opened for you."

things Jesus didn't know (Mark 13:31/Matt 24:36) means that He was no more omniscient than He was omnipresent; He had to learn in the school of hard knocks just as we do (Heb 5:8). Moreover, perhaps the Holy Spirit intended some ambiguity on this point to allow for a change. At any rate, there is no ambiguity about the fact that the saints after the resurrection will be with their Lord.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE DELAY AS AN EXAMPLE OF CONDITIONAL PROPHECY

The Delay of the Kingdom in the NT

Jesus warned us He might not come on time. He hinted at a possible delay in several parables that imply that the master, or bridegroom, might not come for "a long time."¹ In the NT this phrase can be used of any period from several hours (Acts 28:6) to several hundred years (Heb 4:7); but it usually refers to some fraction of a lifetime.² Had Jesus come immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem, as indicated in Matt 24:29, it still would have been "a long time" for the early believers, who would probably have interpreted anything beyond several years after the resurrection as a delay. Matthew evidently felt that there had already been a delay, which is why he preserved Jesus' explanations of it in his Gospel. If the destruction of Jerusalem was expected at the end of the seventy weeks, in harmony with the prophecy of Dan 9, the delay was already realized eschatology by the time Matthew

¹Matt 24:48/Luke 12:45; Matt 25:5, 19, Luke 20:9? It is a mistake to make a point of the fact that the cry "My Lord delayeth his coming" (Matt 24:48, KJV) is found on the lips of the wicked servant; just as it would be a mistake to make a point of the fact that the cry "The time is near" is found on the lips of the false prophet in Luke 21:8. The wicked servant is wicked because he becomes abusive and self-indulgent (Matt 24:49), not because he recognizes the delay of his Master.

²Luke 8:27, 23:8, John 5:6, 14:9, Acts 8:11, 14:28, 26:5, 27:21, 28:6.

wrote. Besides, according to Luke, Jesus meant to tell His listeners that the kingdom would not come "at once" (Luke 19:11), not that it would never even come in that generation. Therefore, these warnings do not solve the problem of the unfulfilled prophecy of Jesus' return during the first generation of Christians.

The delay of the Parousia was already a theological problem in the first century, even prior to the destruction of Jerusalem. This is suggested not only by the delay parables in the Synoptics but also by the exhortations to patience in James and Hebrews.

Hebrews appears to be a transcript of an early Christian sermon¹ delivered prior to A.D. 70.² The entire sermon is, in effect, a commentary on "He that endures to the end will be saved," with perseverance a major theme of the book.³ There are repeated calls to "Hold on to your hope."⁴ Heb 10:23-11:40 appears to be a call to persevere in the light of the delay of the Parousia: Jesus will keep His promise; it will

¹Hence the lack of preamble identifying the author; note also 11:32, where the speaker mentions that he is running out of time. However, the sermon has been turned into a letter by the addition of a postscript (cf. 13:22).

²It is extremely unlikely that the author of Hebrews would have used the present tense in passages such as Heb 7:27-28, 8:3-5, 10:1-4, 11, and 13:10-11 after the destruction of Jerusalem; particularly since, whenever he speaks of the *former* tabernacle, he uses the past tense (9:1-10). Also, Hebrews uses the two age terminology that was abandoned by Christianity after the destruction of Jerusalem.

³Note Heb 3:6-4:14, 6:1-12, 10:21-39. Even the opening argument that Christ is superior to angels (1:1-14) and superior to Moses (3:1-6) is leading to the conclusion that Christians must persevere, because turning one's back on Christ is worse than rejecting the law of Moses, which was mediated through angels (2:1-3, 3:6, 10:28-29, 12:25).

⁴Heb 3:6, 6:11, 17-20, 10:23, 11:1.

only be a little while longer. Look at all the OT saints who endured hardship but never actually saw the realization of God's promise to them. Yet they remained faithful, and so should we. A shorter version of the same argument is found in Heb 6:11-20, and also in Jas 5:7-11, which exhorts the elect to "be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near," then cites OT figures as an example of patience.

The strong warnings in Hebrews against apostasy suggest that some weary believers, facing persecution, were leaving the church. When we put these warnings alongside Matt 24:10-13, 2 Pet 3:3-4, and Luke 18:8 ("When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"), the implication is that, in some circles at least, the crisis of faith was severe. One early Christian text seems to confirm this:

"Afterwards, when he [Jesus] is at hand, his disciples will forsake the teaching of the twelve apostles and their faith, their love and their purity, and there will arise much contention about his coming and his appearing."¹

However, the delay of the Parousia never became a paralyzing crisis in the early Christian church, in part because of Jesus' counsel to be on the alert for an unexpected return, and in part because it was sort of a "rolling disappointment." If the three-and-a-half-year Jewish war and destruction of Jerusalem had occurred in A.D. 31-34, and still Jesus had not come, the impact might have been devastating. Instead, the disappointment was spread out over forty years. The fact that there was no unprecedented tribulation and destruction of the temple immediately after the

¹Asc Isa 3:21-22 (NTA 2:648). This section of Asc Isa was written around the end of the first century A.D. The translation in *OTP* 2:161 by M. A. Knibb differs somewhat.

cutting off of the Anointed One (Dan 9:26) gave the apostles advance notice prior to A.D. 34 that God's timetable was on hold for some reason, or not correctly understood. 2 Thess 2:7 might suggest that one early explanation for the delay was that some power was holding back the Antichrist, the precursor of the Parousia. By the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, the early church had already adjusted to decades of delay, so the second disappointment after A.D. 70 must have been somewhat muted.

We have already seen how Luke deals with the problem by editing the imminency sayings of Christ. Still, he does not expect the delay to last much longer: "And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones? . . . I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly" (Luke 18:7). The Revelator addresses this same problem of delayed justice in Rev 6:9-11, where the souls of the martyrs under the alter plead for justice, and are told to wait a little longer until the full number of martyrs had been slain.¹ This idea seems to have been a popular explanation for the delay of the kingdom in Jewish apocalyptic near the end the first century:

Did not the souls of the righteous in their chambers ask about these matters, saying, "How long are we to remain here? And when will come the harvest of our reward?" And Jeremiel the archangel answered them and said, "When the number of those like yourselves is completed; for he has weighed the age in the balance, and measured the times by measure, and numbered the times by number; and he will not move or arouse them until that measure is fulfilled."²

¹On the concept of filling up a predetermined measure or number in Scripture, see Job 14:5, Matt 23:32, Luke 21:24, Rom 11:25, 1 Thess 2:16.

²4 Ezra 4:35-37. Immediately after this Ezra asks his angelic guide if perhaps the delay of the Eschaton is due to the sins of the righteous. The answer is no (4:38-

When Adam sinned and death was decreed against those who were to be born, the multitude of those who would be born was numbered. And for that number a place was prepared where the living ones might live and where the dead might be preserved. No creature will live again unless the number that has been appointed is completed.¹

The most serious attempt to explain the delay in the NT is found in 2 Pet 3:2-15. 2 Peter looks forward to the day of the Lord, when "the heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare." "That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat."² Contemporary parallels from the Sibylline Oracles help us to understand what this sort of language implied to first-century believers:

43). Ezra also asks if he will live to see the Eschaton. The angel does not know (4:51-52). In contrast, the author of 2 Baruch believes that he will live until the end of time (2 Bar 13:1, 25:1)—an anachronistic inconsistency, since the author is supposed to be Jeremiah's Baruch.

¹2 Bar 23:4-5; cf. 1 Enoch 22:3-7, 47:1-4. This sort of deterministic "solution" to the timing of the advent might be further supported from texts such as Dan 11:36, Luke 21:24, Acts 1:7, 17:26, 31, Eph 1:10; and references to "the appointed time" in Ps 102:13, Dan 8:19, 11:27, 29, 35, Hab 2:3, Zeph 2:2, Matt 8:29, 1 Cor 4:5, 2 Thess 2:6; cf. 1 Enoch 92:2. This does not necessarily rule out the idea that Jesus might have come before now. It is possible to preserve both God's sovereignty and foreknowledge, on the one hand, and His contingency on the other, by assuming that God has from all eternity set a fixed and unalterable date for the Second Coming. When that date arrives Jesus will come; there will be no haste and no delay. But God set that date on the basis of His foreknowledge of world conditions at that time; He might have set it earlier if conditions had been right earlier. So He might have returned before now; yet He has never changed His plans. The essential presupposition, of course, is that God has absolute foreknowledge of the future. When Sirach, in his prayer for the Eschaton (Sir 36:1-17), says "Hasten the day, and remember the appointed time," he is expressing this paradox of contingency and predestination.

²2 Pet 3:10, 12. See Mayor, 158f.

Then when a widow reigns over the whole world, and throws gold and silver into the wondrous brine, and casts the bronze and iron of ephemeral men into the sea, then all the elements of the universe will be bereft, when God who dwells in the sky rolls up the heaven as a scroll is rolled, and the whole variegated vault of heaven falls on the wondrous earth and ocean. An undying cataract of raging fire will flow, and burn earth, burn sea, and melt the heavenly vault and days and creation itself into one and separate them into clear air. There will no longer be twinkling spheres of luminaries, no night, no dawn, no numerous days of care, no spring, no summer, no winter, no autumn. And then indeed the judgment of the great God will come into the midst of the great world, when all these things happen.¹

But if you do not obey me, evil-minded ones, but love impiety, and receive all these things with evil ears, there will be fire throughout the whole world, and a very great sign with sword and trumpet at the rising of the sun. The whole world will hear a bellowing noise and mighty sound. He will burn the whole earth, and will destroy the whole race of men and all cities and rivers at once, and the sea. He will destroy everything by fire, and it will be smoking dust.²

And then a great river of blazing fire will flow from heaven, and will consume every place, land and great ocean and gleaming sea, lakes and rivers, springs and implacable Hades and the heavenly vault. But the heavenly luminaries will crash together, also into an utterly desolate form. For all the stars will fall together from heaven on the sea. All the souls of men will gnash their teeth, burning in a river, and brimstone and a rush of fire in a fiery plain, and ashes will cover all. And then all the elements of the world will be bereft—air, land, sea, light, vault of heaven, days, nights. No longer will innumerable birds fly in the air. . . . No sound of trees under the winds. But at once all will melt into one and separate into clear air.³

¹Sib Or 3:77-92 (*OTP* 1:364), written 20-25 years before the birth of Christ. The "widow" is probably Cleopatra.

²Sib Or 4:171-178 (*OTP* 1:388), written ca. A.D. 80. This is immediately followed by the resurrection and the judgment (4:179-192). Notice the parallel with 2 Pet 3:10, "the heavens will disappear with a roar"; cf. Jer 11:16.

³Sib Or 2:196-213 (*OTP* 1:350), written sometime in the first century or early second. The passage just prior to this (lines 154-195) contains extensive parallels to the Olivet discourse.

Evidently the burning of the elements in 2 Pet 3:10-12 and the falling of the stars in Matt 24:29 are simply two different ways of describing the same final cataclysm; the common source for both passages is Isa 34:4-9:

All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree. . . . For the Lord has a day of vengeance, a year of retribution, to uphold Zion's cause. Edom's streams will be turned into pitch, her dust into burning sulfur; her land will become blazing pitch! It will not be quenched night and day; its smoke will rise forever.

In the OT tradition, the astronomical signs in the sun, moon, and stars happen *on* the day of the Lord, not just before.¹ And in Sib Or 5:532 the fallen stars are the cause of the fire; they "quickly kindled the whole earth. But the sky remained starless."

The writings of Philo, a contemporary of Jesus, shed additional light on this destruction of the elements/stars. Philo speaks of "the four principles and powers of which the world is composed—the earth, the water, the air, and the fire; for they say, that all created things are very properly dissolved into these elements"² But Philo is

¹Isa 13:9-13, Joel 2:10-11, 3:14-16.

²*Quis Her.* 281 (Yonge, 300). The idea is elaborated elsewhere: "All compound things which are destroyed are dissolved into the elements of which they were compounded; accordingly, dissolution is nothing else but a return of everything to its original constituent parts; just as, on the contrary, composition is that which compels the things combined to come together, . . . for men are composed of the four elements which together make up the whole of the universe, the heaven, the earth, the air, and fire, borrowing a few parts of each" (*Aet.* 28-29 [Yonge 710]); "Every body, when it is resolved into fire, is dissolved, and melted, and diffused; and when the flame which is in it is extinguished, it is then contracted and shrunk up to nothing; but there is no need of arguments to prove a thing which is so clear, as if it were obscure; and indeed, the world, if consumed by fire, will become greater, inasmuch as all its essence will then be dissolved into the thinnest air. . . . But when the air again is contracted, and when it settles down into water, then again the water is still

one of the scoffers who denies that the world will be destroyed by fire; he wrote an entire treatise on the subject called *On the Eternity of the World*. Some of his objections may help us to understand 2 Pet 3:10 better:

If the world is destroyed it will either be destroyed by some other efficient cause, or by God; now there is certainly nothing else whatever from which it can receive its destruction, for there is nothing whatever which it does not surround and contain; but that which is surrounded and confined within something else is manifestly inferior in power to that which surrounds and confines it, by which it is therefore mastered; on the other hand, to say that it is destroyed by God is the most impious of all possible assertions; for God is the cause not of disorder, and irregularity, and destruction, but of order, and beautiful regularity, and life, and of every good thing, as is confessed by all those whose opinions are based on truth.

But a person may very likely wonder at those who talk about conflagrations and regenerations, not only on account of the arguments which I have just been adducing, by which they are convicted of maintaining erroneous opinions, but also above all other reasons for this one: for since there are four elements of which the world consists, namely, earth, water, air, and fire, why is it that they are to separate fire from all the others, and to affirm that all the others are dissolved into that one? For some one may say, if it is necessary that they should all be resolved into one, why should they not be resolved into air, or water, or earth? For these elements also contain powers of great magnitude; but yet no one has ever said that the world was to pass away into air, or into water, or into earth; so that it would be equally natural to deny that it is resolved into fire.

If the earth were to be destroyed, then all land animals of every kind must also perish with it; and if the water were destroyed, all aquatic animals must perish; and in like manner if the air and fire were to be destroyed, all the animals which traverse the air or which are born in the fire must come to an end at the same time. Therefore, on the same principle, if the heaven is destroyed, and all the other planets likewise will be destroyed, and all the fixed stars, and all that host of gods visible to the outward senses which was formerly considered so happy;

further condensed, so as to be changed into earth, which is the best of all the elements" (*Aet.* 102-103 [Yonge, 718]). These passages help us understand what Peter meant when he said the elements would be "dissolved" (*Gk. luomeno*, 2 Pet 3:11).

and to imagine this is nothing else than to fancy the gods themselves in a process of destruction. . . . And, moreover, those persons who allege conflagrations and regenerations of the world, think and confess that the stars are gods, which nevertheless they are not ashamed to destroy as far as their arguments go; for they are bound to prove them to be either red hot pieces of iron, as some do affirm, who argue about the whole of heaven as if it were a prison, talking utter nonsense, or else to look upon them as divine and godlike natures, and then to attribute to them that immortality which belongs to gods.¹

¹*Aet.* 106-107, 45-47 (Yonge, 719, 712). Philo himself does not believe the stars are gods (he is poking fun at the inconsistency of those who hold this belief and yet argue that the world will end by fire); but he does believe they are living beings: "Some persons have conceived that the sun, and the moon, and the other stars are independent gods, to whom they have attributed the causes of all things that exist. But Moses was well aware that the world was created, and was like a very large city, having rulers and subjects in it; the rulers being all the bodies which are in heaven, such as planets and fixed stars; and the subjects being all the natures beneath the moon. . . . But that the rulers aforesaid are not independent and absolute, but are the viceroys of one supreme Being, the Father of all, in imitation of whom they administer with propriety and success the charge committed to their care. . . . We must, therefore, look on all those bodies in the heaven, which the outward sense regards as gods, not as independent rulers, since they are assigned the work of lieutenants, being by their intrinsic nature responsible to a higher power, but by reason of their virtue not actually called to render in an account of their doings" (*Spec. Leg.* 13, 14, 19 [Yonge, 535]); "It seemed good to the Creator of the universe to fill all the parts of the world with living creatures. On this account he prepared the terrestrial animals for the earth, the aquatic animals for the sea and for the rivers, and the stars for the heaven; for every one of these bodies is not merely a living animal, but is also properly described as the very purest and most universal mind extending through the universe" (*Som.* 135 [Yonge, 377]); "Let us, therefore, reject all such impious dishonesty, and not worship those [heavenly bodies] who are our brothers by nature, even though they may have received a purer and more immortal essence than ourselves (for all created things are brothers to one another, inasmuch as they are created; since the Father of them all is one, the Creator of the universe)" (*Decal.* 64 [Yonge, 523]). However, in *Som.* 1:21-24 Philo is more agnostic on the issue and suggests that we cannot know whether stars are living beings or not.

That the stars were intelligent beings was the common assumption; cf. *Judg* 5:20, *Job* 4:18 with 15:15 with 25:5, 38:7, *Neh* 9:6, *Isa* 14:12-14, *Dan* 8:10, *Sir* 16:26-28, 43:9-10, 1 *Enoch* 43, 80:6-7, etc., *Acts* 7:42-43, *Rev* 1:20, 3:1, 9:1, 12:4; and note the "heavenly bodies" of *Matt* 24:29/*Mark* 13:25/*Luke* 21:26, 1 *Cor* 15:39-41, and *Acts* 7:42-43, where they seem to be identified with pagan gods—perhaps the "rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms" of *Eph* 1:20-21, 3:10, *Eph* 6:12. Note

In the first-century Jewish tradition, then, the fiery dissolution of the heavens at the end of the world involves the stars. To recapitulate the tradition (omitting the Sibylline material cited above): "Therefore I will make the heavens tremble" (Isa 13:13); "All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll" (Isa 34:4); "The heavens will vanish like smoke" (Isa 51:6); "the earth and the sky will tremble" (Joel 3:16); "the heavenly bodies will be shaken" (Mark 13:25/Matt 24:29/Luke 21:26); "The heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed" (Heb 1:10-12, citing Ps 102:25-26); "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens" (Heb 12:26, citing Hag 2:6, 21); "The heavens will disappear with a roar. . . . That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat" (2 Pet 3:10, 12); "The stars in the sky fell to earth. . . . The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up" (Rev 6:13-14); "The heaven will be shaken from its place at that time" (2 Bar 59:3); "The powers of the heavens shall melt" (2 Clem 16:3); "The stars shall be melted by flames of fire" (Apocalypse of Peter 5).¹

also the quotation from Eusebius about Menander above. In the OT, the phrase "heavenly host" is used indiscriminately of angels and stars.

¹Apoc Pet 5 (NTA 2:671). This work, which attained quasi-canonical status (i.e., was sometimes considered part of the NT), was written around A.D. 135. It applies Jesus' Olivet prophecy to the Bar Kokhba rebellion of A.D. 132-35. Bar Kokhba is identified as the antichrist, whose end will be followed by the end of the world. According to Justin Martyr (*Apology*, 31), Bar Kokhba ordered Christians to be tortured unless they would deny Jesus and blaspheme him. Apoc Pet is influenced by the canonical epistles of Peter; and the idea that the stars would be melted is evidently what the author understood 2 Pet 3 to be teaching.

But it is not Peter's burning sky that interests us as much as his discussion of the delay. Peter introduces this section with the statement that "in the last days scoffers will come." Two things indicate that this is realized eschatology (i.e., Peter is talking about a current problem, not just a future one). One is the way the term "last days" is used in the NT to refer to the apostles' own day, as discussed above. The second is a lengthy parallel passage in a letter written around A.D. 96 by Clement, bishop of Rome, to the Corinthians—perhaps the same Clement mentioned by Paul as a coworker in Phil 4:3. This passage is an important witness that there were groups of Christians who had grown skeptical about the Second Coming near the end of the first century:

Let that verse of Scripture be remote from us, which says: "Wretched are the double-minded, those who doubt in their soul and say, 'We have heard these things even in our fathers' times, and, see, we have grown old and none of them has happened to us.'" You fools! Compare yourselves to a tree. Take a vine: first it sheds its leaves, then comes a bud, then a leaf, then a flower, and after this a sour grape, and finally a ripe bunch. You note that the fruit of the tree reaches its maturity in a short time. So, to be sure, swiftly and suddenly his purpose will be accomplished, just as Scripture, too, testifies: "Quickly he will come and not delay" [Hab 2:3], and "The Lord will come suddenly into his temple, even the Holy One whom you expect" [Mal 3:1].

Let us consider, dear friends, how the Master continually points out to us that there will be a future resurrection. Of this he made the Lord Jesus Christ the first fruits by raising him from the dead. . . . [Here Clement gives three examples of resurrection: night follows day, crop follows seed, and the phoenix.] Shall we, then, imagine that it is something great and surprising if the Creator of the universe raises up those who have served him in holiness and in the assurance born of a good faith, when he uses a mere bird to illustrate the greatness of his promise? For he says somewhere: "And you will raise me up and I shall give you thanks" [Ps 50:15?]; and, "I lay down and slept: I rose up because you are with me" [Ps 3:5]. And again Job says, "And you will make this flesh of mine, which has endured all this, to rise up" [Job 19:26].

With this hope, then, let us attach ourselves to him who is faithful in his promises and just in his judgments. He who bids us to refrain from lying is all the less likely to lie himself. For nothing is impossible to God save lying [cf. Heb 6:18]. Let us, then, rekindle our faith in him, and bear in mind that nothing is beyond his reach. By his majestic word he established the universe, and by his word he can bring it to an end. . . . He will do everything when he wants to and as he wants to. And not one of the things he has decreed will fail.¹

The first question we should ask about 2 Pet 3 is whether or not Peter agrees that there has been a delay. While Peter does not explicitly admit a delay, he nevertheless attempts to justify it—a tacit admission of the problem. It is significant that Peter does not say anything like, "God's plans are right on schedule, and when the time is fulfilled, He will come, just as He planned." Instead he implies that it is impossible to tell because when God says a day, He may mean a thousand years.² Even his claim that God is not slow concerning His promise is qualified: *as some count slowness*. In other words, at least God is not slow in a morally objectionable sense; He is not slothful or incompetent; He simply wants to save all He can. He is not willing that any should perish (3:9).

While contemplating this passage a few years ago, I was dismayed by the sudden impression that this explanation would not hold water. In fact, the longer

¹1 Clem 23:3-27:5 (*ECF* 55-56). I have corrected what I consider to be misplaced quotation marks in the first paragraph. 1 Clement is another quasi-canonical book.

²2 Pet 3:8, citing Ps 90:4. Cf. 2 Bar 48:13, "With you, however, the hours are like times, and the days like generations." According to Jub 4, the OT proof for this idea is found in Gen 2:17, "in the day you eat of it you shall surely die." Adam actually died within a millennium, so "A thousand years are like one day in the testimony of heaven" (Jub 4:30).

Jesus delays, the more people perish. Each century's delay may result in the salvation of additional millions while resulting in the loss of additional billions. If it is true that God does not want anyone to perish, and if the majority in any generation are lost, as suggested by Matt 7:13-14, then He should come immediately. 2 Pet 3:9 would lead one to suppose that the death of additional billions of unbelievers means nothing in comparison to the salvation of a few more procrastinating Christians, for whom "our Lord's patience means salvation" (vs. 15).

Then came a turning point. As I continued to think about it, I saw that the force of this objection depended on the destiny of the wicked. If the damned suffer forever in the fires of hell, then for every additional person who is rewarded with an eternity of bliss due to the delay of the advent, many others are rewarded with an eternity of agony. What a horrible thing for God to do—not only breaking His promise, but vastly increasing the total balance of suffering in the universe.

But if, on the other hand, one accepts the minority position held by an increasing number of Bible scholars, that sin and sinners and hell itself eventually come to an end (see Appendix B), then the objection loses its validity; for it is a mathematical certainty that even one additional lifetime of *eternal* bliss is worth more than billions of brief lifetimes of sorrow and trouble. I began to see a glimmer of light. The delay could be defended logically.

It also occurred to me that if Jesus had come back in the first century, then we would not be here to discuss the delay. We might not be anywhere. So while we wait for the day the sky burns, we have reason to be grateful.

The Delay of the Kingdom in the OT

The problem of the delay of the advent is only the culmination of an older difficulty: the delay of the OT kingdom prophecies. Matt 24 is not a unique phenomenon in Scripture. There are several OT prophecies, such as Isa 13, 24, 34, Ezek 32, and the book of Joel, which, like Matt 24, mix descriptions of national catastrophe with descriptions of the end of the age. Just as the dirges against the kings of Babylon and Tyre in Isa 14 and Ezek 28 are heightened into a dirge against the Arch-fiend, so these national disasters are heightened into a description of cosmic holocaust, complete with astronomical signs. Indeed, much of the imagery of Matt 24 comes from these sources. These apocalyptic prophecies are usually associated with traumatic events in Israel's history which seem to threaten an end to their world; the historical judgments upon Israel are an "adumbration" (Robert H. Stein) of God's ultimate judgment at the end of history; but the promised kingdom of peace that is supposed to follow is inevitably postponed. As time passes, the kingdom, like a rainbow, continually recedes from the approaching observer.¹

¹This is sometimes called *deferred eschatology*. G. E. Ladd cites this OT pattern as the solution to the problem of Mark 9:1/Matt 16:28: "This saying shares the same perspective as those statements by the prophets which announce an historical judgment in the immediate future but describe it in terms of the eschatological Day of the Lord. It *was* the Day of the Lord, for God did act; and this action of God in history was an anticipation of the eschatological consummation" (*The Presence of the Future*, 323). Ladd is certainly correct that this text falls into the OT pattern. However, saying "this NT phenomenon is like that OT phenomenon" is not a solution to the problem. Simply categorizing Jesus' promise to return in that generation as another instance of a historical judgment described as if it were the final judgment implies that the real thing will never happen; that "coming in the clouds" is merely a metaphor.

Ladd's work on the kingdom of God sayings is a significant contribution, but

Just as the Second Coming is said to be near in the NT, so in the OT the "day of the Lord" is said to be near.¹ The context of some of these passages is sometimes said to allow for a local (as opposed to global) interpretation; often the "day of the Lord" is brought about by foreign invaders. Jeremiah, for example, views the "day of the Lord's fierce anger" on Jerusalem as already past after it was captured by the Babylonians.² Some passages can be understood as either global or local depending on whether the Hebrew is translated "world" or "land": "The great day of the Lord is near—near and coming quickly. . . . The whole world/land will be consumed; for he will make a sudden end of all who live in the world/land" (Zeph 1:14-18). Either translation is valid. The apocalyptic language, then, is merely prophetic hyperbole—or at least so goes one school of thought.

This explanation, however, leaves too much unexplained. The soon-coming day of the Lord in Joel, for example, involves judgment on all the nations (3:2, 12), *after which foreigners will never again invade* (3:17). This does not sound like

unfortunately Ladd tends to neglect the inductive, nuts-and-bolts examination of the words of Jesus in favor of high-level theological abstractions. That is, Ladd's theology precedes his exegesis. He leaves discussion of some critical passages to near the end of his book, after he has already established his theological position; and he ignores four of the six most important passages, Matt 10:23, Matt 26:64, and Paul's statements that some would live to see the Parousia in 1 Thess 4:15 and 1 Cor 15:51. It is not difficult to reach the desired conclusion if one is careful to exclude inconvenient contrary evidence. However, Ladd attempts to remedy this in his later work *Theology of the New Testament*.

¹Isa 13:6, 29:17, 32:10 ("in a little more than a year"), 56:1, Ezek 30:3, Joel 1:15, 2:1, 3:14, Obad 1:15, Zeph 1:7, 14; cf. Isa 46:13, 51:5-6, 14, 56:1, 60:22, Ezek 7, Mic 7:4, Hag 2:6-22.

²Lam 1:12, 2:1, 21-22. But this is not quite the same expression as "The day of the Lord," which is always future.

hyperbole. The prophets were expecting a genuine once-and-for-all deliverance from evil which never came.

Another explanation of these prophecies is that they have a dual focus: The local event is understood as a "type" of the end of the world (and the end of the world is the "antitype" of the local event). But before we can impose this theoretical construct on the text, we need some evidence that the prophets actually believed this—evidence that they knew they were talking about both a near fulfillment and a distant future one. I know of no such evidence. Only Daniel says that his prophecies apply to the distant future, and in that case there is no local fulfillment. As far as the classical prophets are concerned, there is only this: "The vision he sees is for many years from now, and he prophesies about the distant future" (Ezek 12:27). But this is the cry of the skeptics with whom Ezekiel is arguing!

The day of the Lord in the classical prophets is always said to be imminent; no aspect of it is ever said to be distant. "A little while, and the wicked will be no more" (Ps 37:10-11). "In a very short time, will not Lebanon be turned into a fertile field and the fertile field seem like a forest?" (Isa 29:17; cf. 32:10, "a little more than a year"). "I am bringing my righteousness near, it is not far away; and my salvation will not be delayed. I will grant salvation to Zion, my splendor to Israel" (Isa 46:13). "The day of the Lord is near . . . a time of doom for the nations" (Ezek 30:3). "The day of the Lord is near for all nations" (Obad 1:15). It seems to me that these passages rule out a type/antitype interpretation, at least as long as we are talking

about what the text meant to its original author.¹

A closer look at one of the "astronomical sign" prophecies is in order. Isaiah's prophecy against Babylon contains a passage with astronomical signs:

See, the day of the Lord is coming—a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger—to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it. The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless. I will make man scarcer than pure gold, more rare than the gold of Ophir. Therefore I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the Lord Almighty, in the day of his burning anger. (Isa 13:9-13)

The Medes were to be the instruments of God's wrath (vs. 17). Babylon's destiny was utter annihilation, like Sodom and Gomorrah (vs. 19), no Arab would pitch his tent there (vs. 20), and this would happen very soon: "Her time is at hand, and her days will not be prolonged" (vs. 22). For hundreds of years the prophecy remained unfulfilled. But though delayed, Babylon did eventually become a heap of ruins so sinister that Arabs refused to camp there.² The fulfillment so far, though delayed, is remarkable enough to encourage us as we await the final fulfillment of the

¹However, the type/antitype formula (cf. Zech 3:8) may be a legitimate expression of what the text *means* today, on the assumption that there may be more meaning in the text than the human author understood, as implied in 1 Pet 1:10-12.

²Captain Mignon, accompanied by six armed Arabs, "could not induce them to remain toward night, from apprehension of evil spirits. It is impossible to eradicate this idea from the minds of these people." *Travels*, 35, quoted in Earle Albert Rowell, *Prophecy Speaks* (Takoma Park, Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1933), 63. Arabs consider the spot cursed, and refuse to even temporarily pitch their tents there. They call the ruins *mudjelibe*, "the Overturned" ("Babil," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, cited in W. A. Spicer, *Our Day in the Light of Prophecy* [London: Stanborough Press, n.d.], 35). Recently Saddam Hussein has rebuilt some parts of ancient Babylon.

Parousia prophecy.

Even prior to the exile it was obvious that these prophecies remained unfulfilled. Both Isaiah (5:19) and Jeremiah (17:15) found it necessary to rebuke those who said they wish God would hurry up and do what He said He would do. The prophets compared the delay of the Eschaton to birth pangs never brought to fruition.¹ Both Habakkuk and Ezekiel addressed the problem of delayed prophecy just prior to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians:

Then the Lord replied: "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay. (Hab 2:2-3).

The word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, what is this proverb you have in the land of Israel: 'The days go by and every vision comes to nothing'? Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am going to put an end to this proverb, and they will no longer quote it in Israel.' Say to them, 'The days are near when every vision will be fulfilled. For there will be no more false visions or flattering divinations among the people of Israel. But I the Lord will speak what I will, and it shall be fulfilled without delay. For in your days, you rebellious house, I will fulfill whatever I say, declares the Sovereign Lord.'" The word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, the house of Israel is saying, 'The vision he sees is for many years from now, and he prophesies about the distant future.' "Therefore say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: None of my words will be delayed any longer; whatever I say will be fulfilled, declares the Sovereign Lord.'" (Ezek 12:21-28).

The prophetic threats of judgment upon Israel were indeed fulfilled by the Babylonian invasion and exile, but the promises of the peaceable kingdom to follow²

¹Isa 26:18, 66:7-9, Hos 13:13, Mic 5:3, etc.

²Isa 49, 51, Jer 29-31, Ezek 36, Mic 4:1-8, etc.

remained unfulfilled—exactly the same situation as with Jesus' Olivet prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem.

The OT problem of the delay of the kingdom just after the exile is nearly as acute as the NT problem of the delay. Haggai, writing during the rebuilding of the temple, predicted that God would "shake the heavens and the earth" (Hag 2:21f.) "in a little while" (vs. 6-7), apparently in the lifetime of Zerubbabel (vs. 23). At the same time, Zechariah painted bright pictures of the restored Jerusalem (chap. 8) that was to follow the Parousia:

"Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you," declares the Lord. "Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become my people. I will live among you and you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you."¹

A later prophecy, using similar language ("Then the Lord will appear over them; his arrow will flash like lightning. The Sovereign Lord will sound the trumpet"), describes the great eschatological battle which was to occur *in the reign of Greece*.² But the expected kingdom never came.

Adventist scholars generally concede that the OT prophetic scenario, which involved an end-time attack of all the nations against Israel, followed by their defeat and Jerusalem becoming the world capital, will never be literally fulfilled.

"Tragically," writes Jon Paulien, "the end envisioned by the [OT] prophets never

¹Zech 2:10-11. Notice that the "I" figure in this passage is both identified with and distinguished from Yahweh; just like the "angel of the Lord" in Zech 3.

²Zech 9:13ff.; cf. Dan 8:21, 10:20.

came true in any literal sense."¹

All of this raises questions which are so troubling that I have never seen them addressed in print. If the OT Eschaton failed, then what about the NT? Has it failed too? Is the kingdom of heaven nothing more than a virtual reality, a benevolent deception² whose purpose is to inspire moral behavior? And if not, then what could be so important as to prevent God from keeping His Son's promise to return in the first century?

It is not blasphemous or impious for the committed believer to respectfully ask such questions. While Joshua could testify that "not one of all the Lord's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled,"³ later writers take a less sanguine view. The Psalmist in Ps 89 accuses God of breaking His covenant promise to David:

Once you spoke in a vision, to your faithful people you said: . . . I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered. Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness—and I will not lie to David—that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun; it will be established forever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky." Selah. But you have rejected, you have spurned, you have been very angry with your anointed one. You have renounced the covenant

¹Jon Paulien, *What the Bible Says About the End Time* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1994), 64. Cf. "The Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy," *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1955), 4:25-38.

²God does not lie or change His mind or go back on His word (Num 23:19, 1 Sam 15:29, Ps 145:13, Titus 1:2, Heb 6:18). However, OT figures who told benevolent lies with God's blessing include the Hebrew midwives (Exod 1:15-21), Rahab (Jos 2), Samson (Judg 16:26), Samuel (1 Sa 16:2), Hushai (2 Sa 17:1-22), and Elisha (2 Kgs 6:19, 8:10).

³Jos 21:45, 23:14; this is echoed in 1 Kgs 8:56.

with your servant and have defiled his crown in the dust. . . . O How long, O Lord? Will you hide yourself forever? How long will your wrath burn like fire? . . . Lord, where is your former great love, which in your faithfulness you swore to David?¹

Ps 77:8 asks "Has his promise failed for all time?" Ps 44:17, from an earlier period, accuses God of neglecting to bless His people "though we had not forgotten you or been false to your covenant." Jeremiah accused God of deception when the peaceable kingdom did not arrive in his day: "Ah, Sovereign Lord, how completely you have deceived this people and Jerusalem by saying, 'You will have peace,' when the sword is at our throats" (Jer 4:10). Instead of rebuking His accusers, God put their accusations on display by allowing them to become Scripture.

The Principle of Conditional Prophecy

The Psalmist's accusation that God had broken His covenant promise (Ps 89) provoked a response from Jeremiah. Citing those who call God "Father" and who ask, "Will your wrath continue forever?" (cf. Ps 89:46), Jeremiah retorts, "This is how you talk, but you do all the evil you can" (Jer 3:5). Jeremiah's answer to the problem of unfulfilled prophecy is that God cannot fulfill His covenant promises to an unrighteous people.

Evidently all of the prophecies, covenants, promises, and threats found in the Scriptures are conditional *whether or not a condition is stated*; their fulfillment is contingent upon the human response to God's commands. Promises of blessing cannot

¹Ps 89:19, 34-39, 46, 49. Cf. Ps 74:9-11 which, in effect, asks God to take His hands out of His pockets and do something. Other passages (Ps 44:23, 78:65) call on God to wake up.

be fulfilled to a disobedient nation or individual, and prophecies of cursing will not be fulfilled against a repentant nation or individual. This principle is clearly stated in Jer 18:7-10:

If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.¹

The lament of Ps 89 calls for a closer look at the Davidic covenant. God's original promise to David in 2 Sam 7:8-16 states unequivocally that David's dynasty will rule Israel forever, and even if his descendants commit iniquity, God will not reject them as he did Saul. Nevertheless, later texts make it clear that this promise is conditional upon the obedience of David's sons.² In fact, when Solomon apostatized, God *did* take the kingdom from him, though not completely (1 Kgs 11:9-13). Even promises that are expressed in the most unconditional terms turn out to have a conditional element.

God's gifts and call may be irrevocable (Rom 11:29), but even an irrevocable oath is still conditional: "The Lord swore an oath to David, *a sure oath that he will not revoke*: 'One of your own descendants I will place on your throne—if *your sons*

¹See also Jer 26:1-19, 38:17-18, Dan 4:27; cf. 1 Sam 23:10-13.

²1 Kgs 2:4, 6:12, 8:25, 9:4-9, 1 Chr 28:4-9, 2 Chr 6:16, 7:17-22, Ps 132:11-12. The original "Son of David" was Solomon (cf. the messianic Ps 72, written for Solomon, and 2 Sam 12:24-5—the only other people named by God at birth were Samson, John the Baptist, and Jesus), but since Solomon proved faulty, the prophecy looks forward to a future fulfillment of an ideal "Son of David."

keep my covenant and the statutes I teach them, then their sons will sit on your throne for ever and ever'" (Ps 132:11-12). Dan 9:4 says that God "keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands." "If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands," God says in Lev 26:3, 9, "I will keep my covenant with you."

The OT contains quite a few examples of conditional prophecy. Isaiah's prophecy that Hezekiah would soon die of his disease was not fulfilled (2 Kgs 20:1-6). Elijah's prophecy that dogs would lick up Ahab's blood (1 Kgs 21:19) was postponed to Ahab's sons when Ahab repented (vs. 29). Huldah's prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem was postponed due to the penitance of Josiah (2 Kgs 22). God retracted His earlier promise to Eli that his descendants would serve the Lord forever because of his disobedience (1 Sam 2:30). God's promise to bring the Israelites who came out of Egypt into the promised land (Exod 6:8) was not fulfilled to that generation.¹ Though God through Moses promised the Israelites they would never see the Egyptians again (Exod 14:13), He threatened to break that promise if they were disobedient.² Although God promised Israel "I will never break my covenant with you," yet because of their disobedience God was forced to go back on His promise to drive out the wicked nations from before them (Judg 2:1-3). The unfulfilled prophecy of Zech 6 and 3:8-10 is attached to an explicit condition: "This will happen if you diligently obey the Lord your God" (Zech 6:15). In four of these

¹Num 14:30-34, 32:10-15.

²Deut 28:68, Hos 7:16, 8:13, 9:3, 6, 11:5.

passages God explicitly makes a point of the fact that He is going to break His earlier promise.¹

In Ezek 5 God promises to destroy Jerusalem and then never again repeat such a terrible punishment, where fathers ate their sons and vice versa (vss. 8-10). In fact, the promise that Jerusalem would never again be invaded appears repeatedly in the prophets.² However, Jerusalem was plundered by Antiochus IV in 168 B.C., the Roman general Pompey in 63 B.C., the Parthians in 40 B.C., Herod the Great and the Romans in 37 B.C., and again under Titus in A.D. 70, when parents did indeed, once again, eat their children.

When Jerusalem was under siege by the Babylonians, king Zedekiah supported Jeremiah's call for the release of the Hebrew slaves. At that point God made Zedekiah a promise:

Yet hear the promise of the Lord, O Zedekiah king of Judah. This is what the Lord says concerning you: You will not die by the sword; you will die peacefully. As people made a funeral fire in honor of your fathers, the former kings who preceded you, so they will make a fire in your honor and lament, "Alas, O master!" I myself make this promise, declares the Lord. (Jer 34:4-5)

But when the Babylonians withdrew, and the people went back on their word, God went back on His (34:17-22). Later the offer of clemency was again extended to Zedekiah on condition that he surrender to the Babylonians (Jer 38:17-18). In a letter-of-the-law sort of way God's original promise was indeed fulfilled, for Zedekiah did

¹Num 14:30, Deut 28:68, Judg 2:1, 1 Sam 2:30; see also Zech 11:10.

²Isa 33:20, 51:22, 52:1, 54:9-17, 62:8, Jer 31:40, Ezek 5:8-10, 34:28, 36:12-15, Joel 2:19, 26, 27, 3:17, Amos 9:15, Zeph 3:15, Zech 9:8, 14:11.

not die by the sword. He suffered an even worse fate:

There at Riblah the king of Babylon slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes; he also killed all the officials of Judah. Then he put out Zedekiah's eyes, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon, where he put him in prison till the day of his death. (Jer 52:10-11)

Another prophecy whose fulfillment was forfeited by disobedience is that of Gen 49:10, "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his." In spite of the reaffirmation in Jer 33:17-26, this is altered in Ezek 21:13, 25-27 and Hos 3:4-5 to allow for a period of time in which the scepter *would* depart from Judah before the restoration. This is recognized by the speech of Judah in Test Jud 22:2, "My rule shall be terminated by men of alien race, until the salvation of Israel comes, until the coming of the God of righteousness, so that Jacob may enjoy tranquility and peace, as well as all the nations."

So far we have found twelve examples of unfulfilled promises, and there are more to come. In Num 23:19 Balaam says, "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?" We are reluctantly forced to answer, yes, sometimes He does. But it is not a matter of lying; it is a matter of being faithful to His righteous principles.

In the fall of A.D. 59 Paul found himself a captive sailing for Rome. When the ship encountered rough weather, Paul advised those in charge to stay and spend the winter, predicting that if they went on, "our voyage is going to be disastrous and

bring great loss to ship and cargo, *and to our own lives also*" (Acts 27:10). Just before the shipwreck, however, Paul told the crew about a new revelation he had received:

"Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island." (Acts 27:21-26)

God granted Paul's passengers a reprieve. Does Paul's unfulfilled prediction mark him as a false prophet? Or does it suggest that he may have been an effective intercessor?

It seems to me that Paul's amended orders suggest that prophets are fallible, prophecy is conditional, and that God is inclined towards mercy where there is even a glimmer of penitence, even if it is vicarious. Perhaps no story in the Bible illustrates this more clearly than the saga of the reluctant prophet Jonah.

Jonah predicted the destruction of Nineveh in the most unconditional terms; his prediction even involved a specific time prophecy. But Jonah waited in vain for the fire to fall. In an attempt to explain the non-fulfillment of his prophecy, Jonah put his finger on the crux of the matter: God's compassion. God was looking for a reason not to destroy, and the repentance of the people provided one. "I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who

relents from sending calamity."¹

Hundreds of years later, long after Nineveh had finally fallen, Jesus was challenged to work a miracle as a sign to vindicate His claims. He refused, saying that no sign would be given except that of the prophet Jonah (Matt 12:38-41). Perhaps Jesus fulfilled the sign of the prophet Jonah in other ways besides the fact that they both experienced a reprieve after three days in a place from which no one ever comes back. Just as Jonah predicted the destruction of Nineveh in forty days, so Jesus predicted the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Coming in His generation. The conventional length of a generation was forty years.² Forty years after Jesus' prediction, Jerusalem was destroyed; but part of Jesus' prophecy, like Jonah's, went temporarily unfulfilled.

Jonah's prophecy was a time prophecy. The Jonah episode indicates that time prophecies may be conditional. Further evidence of this is found in Daniel's warning to Nebuchadnezzar in Dan 4:27: "Renounce your sins. . . . It may be that then your

¹Jon 4:2. This statement is the most oft-repeated statement in the OT; it is a quotation from God's original self-revelation to Moses in Exod 34:6, and is repeated with variations in Num 14:18, 2 Chr 30:9, Neh 9:17, Ps 86:15, 103:8, 145:8, Joel 2:13.

²Num 32:13, Deut 1:35 with 2:14, Ps 95:10, Heb 3:9-10; thus God's punishments on wicked generations sometimes lasted forty years, Num 14:34, Judg 13:1, Ezek 29:11-13. There are intriguing allusions to a 40-year period in the Qumran material, such as the Zadokite Document: "About 40 years will elapse from the death of the teacher of the community until all the men who take up arms and relapse in the company of the Man of Falsehood are brought to an end. At that time, the wrath of God will be kindled against Israel, and that will ensue which is described by the prophet [Hos 3:4] when he says, 'No king shall there be nor priest nor judge nor any that reproves aright.'" (Gaster, *DSS*, 78. Cf. 326, the Psalm 37 Commentary: "At the end of 40 years, . . . no wicked man shall be found on earth.")

prosperity will continue." This is a clear statement of conditionality in reference to a specific time prophecy involving a period of seven years (4:25).¹ A third example of a conditional and unfulfilled time prophecy is Isaiah's prophecy that in a little more than a year Jerusalem would become a wasteland (Isa 32:10). And the evidence for the conditionality of the seventy weeks prophecy has already been presented. These four examples indicate that chronological prophecies can be conditional. I know of no evidence that such prophecies are an exception to the rule given in Jer 18:7-10.

Another OT precedent of Jesus' deferred Parousia promises is 2 Chr 12:1-12, which tells the story of another threatened destruction of Jerusalem. After king Rehoboam "abandoned the law of the Lord," Judah was attacked by the king of Egypt. God sent the prophet Shemaiah to predict the destruction of Jerusalem. But when the leaders humbled themselves, God relented. The Egyptians did damage the city, but "because Rehoboam humbled himself, the Lord's anger turned from him, and he was not totally destroyed. Indeed, there was some good in Judah" (vs. 12). The fact that Shemaiah's prediction did not come true does not make him a false prophet.

The same thing happened again in the days of Hezekiah: Micah's prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction was not fulfilled when the people repented (Jer 26:18-19). It is likely that this was the destruction that Isaiah predicted would happen in a little more than a year (Isa 32:10-15). Hezekiah was also granted a reprieve from Isaiah's

¹Conditionality is also implied by the fact that the "Prince of the kingdom of Persia" in Dan 10:13 was able to resist Gabriel for three weeks and delay his answer to Daniel. Thus evil powers are sometimes able to hinder God's plans.

prophecy that he would die (Isa 38:1-6).

Earlier prophets to the northern kingdom pictured God as shrinking from inflicting the punishment which His people so richly deserved:

Hazael king of Aram oppressed Israel throughout the reign of Jehoahaz. But the Lord was gracious to them and had compassion and showed concern for them because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. To this day he has been unwilling to destroy them or banish them from his presence. (2 Kgs 13:22-23)

How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim. For I am God, and not man—the Holy One among you. *I will not come in wrath.* (Hos 11:8-9)

According to Joel, even the day of the Lord itself could be averted by penitence:

The Lord thunders at the head of his army; his forces are beyond number, and mighty are those who obey his command. The day of the Lord is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it? "Even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments." Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing—grain offerings and drink offerings for the Lord your God. (Joel 2:11-14)

Earlier I cited the example of 1 Kgs 21:19, 29, where Elijah's prophecy that dogs would lick up Ahab's blood was postponed when Ahab repented. When man repents, God relents; but sometimes God grants a reprieve even without repentance if there is an intercessor who repents vicariously on behalf of the offender. Abraham persuaded God to spare Sodom if there were only ten righteous people there (Gen

18:23-33). Three times Moses persuaded God not to destroy the rebellious Israelites.¹ When God showed Amos the plagues of locusts and fire that He planned to send upon Israel in judgment, Amos protested, and God relented (Amos 7:1-6). On these occasions God actually allowed Himself to be placed on the losing side of an argument rather than carry out the threatened destruction of His chosen people. God would appear to have this "weakness": His tender heart is highly susceptible to the pleas of a persistent intercessor, and since the Ascension, He has to contend with the most persistent Intercessor of all.²

Luke's parable of the barren fig tree (Luke 13:6-9) has no parallel in the other Gospels. The fact that it follows a long eschatological section implies that Luke understands it as a commentary on the delay of the Parousia, perhaps in response to John's dictum, "The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire" (Luke 3:9). In the parable the owner of the vineyard extends the probationary time of the barren fig tree in response to the intercession of the husbandman: "Leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down." Is it not possible that something like this conversation has been repeated many times between Father and Son in regard to planet Earth? If God can shorten the time (Mark 13:20), then He can also lengthen it.

¹Exod 32:9-14, Num 14:11-20, 16:20-22, 44-48.

²Rom 8:34, Heb 7:25, 9:24, 1 John 2:1. God allows us to participate in the work of intercession for sinners; note the startling promise in 1 John 5:16.

Let's take a worst-case scenario. There are two particularly emphatic heaven-and-earth-shall-pass-type promises in Jeremiah that God could not keep:

This is what the Lord says, he who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the Lord Almighty is his name: "Only if these decrees vanish from my sight," declares the Lord, "will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before me." This is what the Lord says: "Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done," declares the Lord. "The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when this city will be rebuilt for me from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. . . . The city will never again be uprooted or demolished." (Jer 31:35-40)

"'The days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness.' For this is what the Lord says: 'David will never fail to have a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, nor will the priests, who are Levites, ever fail to have a man to stand before me continually to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings and to present sacrifices.'" The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: "This is what the Lord says: 'If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night no longer come at their appointed time, then my covenant with David my servant—and my covenant with the Levites who are priests ministering before me—can be broken and David will no longer have a descendant to reign on his throne. I will make the descendants of David my servant and the Levites who minister before me as countless as the stars of the sky and as measureless as the sand on the seashore.'" (Jer 33:14-22)

Surely each of these is as unequivocal a promise as can be found in Scripture, fully matching the force of Mark 13:31/Matt 24:35, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." Yet evidently they are covered by Jeremiah's caveat in 18:7-10, and God's prior warnings of potential rejection, for the

very thing that God said would never happen did happen. In the NT the Levitical priesthood is replaced with the Melchizedekian (Heb 7), Jerusalem is again destroyed, and national Israel is rejected as God's special people. This last point deserves further examination, for entire theological systems, such as dispensationalism, ignore this very clear NT teaching.

The conditional nature of God's promises to Israel was made clear in the original Deuteronomic legislation, which promised blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience.¹ God threatened to reject His chosen people if they were unfaithful to His covenant,² and warned that taking the covenant promise for granted would result in individual and national ruin (Deut 29:19-28). That is in fact what happened.

God bore long with Israel, but the nation sealed its fate when it crucified its promised Messiah. Since the Jews rejected their King, they lost the kingdom. Since they disobeyed the Promisor, they lost the promises. This is the point of the allegorical parable of Israel's history in Matt 21:33-43. According to vs. 43, the kingdom of God was to be taken from the Jewish leaders and given to another people—namely, the Christian church.³ Jesus also foretold the fall of the house of

¹Deut 4:25-31, 11:13-17, 22-28, 28:1-68, 29:22-30:10, 30:15-20, 31:16-29; cf. Jer 7, 17:24-27.

²Lev 18:28, Deut 8:19-20, Jos 23:14-16, 1 Kgs 9:6-7, Hos 9:15, Isa 48:18-19 (paraphrased by Jesus in Luke 19:42); these prophecies are fulfilled the first time in Jer 11:1-8, 45:4.

³The church is referred to as a "kingdom" in 1 Pet 2:9, Rev 1:6. The kingdom of which Jesus spoke was that of Dan 2; cf. Matt 21:43-44 with Dan 2:44. With Matt 21:43 cf. Test Benj 9:1, "The kingdom of the Lord will not be among you, for he will take it away forthwith" (due to sexual immorality).

Israel on several other occasions.¹ It is significant that although Christ at one point called the Jewish temple "My house" (Matt 21:13), the next day He told the Jewish leaders (proleptically), "*Your house is left unto you desolate*" (Matt 23:38). Some years later, Paul wrote, "The wrath of God has come upon them at last" (1 Thess 2:16)—exactly the same phrase that the author of the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* had two hundred years earlier put in the mouth of Levi in reference to the wicked Canaanites (Test Levi 6:11). After the passing of the seventy weeks, Israel's time had come and gone.

It is true that a few years later Paul still contends that God has not rejected His people utterly beyond hope of redemption (Rom 11:1, 2, 11). He still hopes for their restoration, as we saw earlier. However, even Paul's "All Israel will be saved" (11:26) is conditional: "if they do not persist in their unbelief" (11:23). Currently the Jews had in fact stumbled and fallen (11:11), were lost in transgression (11:12), rejected (11:13), and broken off (11:19-20), with the exception of the remnant who believed in Jesus (11:5).

Had God's promise failed, then? By redefining "Israel" Paul was able to maintain that it had not:

It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac

¹Matt 8:11-12, 22:1-14; Luke 19:41-44 (cf. Isa 48:18-19). The fig tree parables (Matt 21:19/Mark 11:13 and Luke 13:6-9) sound like allusions to Jer 8:13, "I will take away their harvest, declares the Lord. There will be no grapes on the vine. There will be no figs on the tree, and their leaves will wither. What I have given them will be taken from them."

that your offspring will be reckoned." In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. (Rom 9:6-8)

Abraham had many descendants, but only a few of them qualified as the children of promise. Physical descent from Abraham, then, did not count;¹ it was Abraham's *spiritual* descendants—those who accepted Christ as the Messiah—who were now God's special people, and who stood to inherit all the OT kingdom promises:

Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. . . . There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Gal 3:6-7, 28-29)

There was now no difference between Jew and Gentile in regard to salvation or God's favor.² In fact, the term "Jew" itself was redefined in the NT to refer to Christians, so that by the end of the first century John even refused to allow ethnic Jews the right to claim the title "Jew" any more.³ Not only did the Christian church appropriate the title "Jew"; they also called themselves "Israel,"⁴ and took over their canon. So the Christian church saw itself as the legitimate continuation of God's

¹Luke 3:8, John 8:39-44.

²Gal 3:28, Eph 2:11-15, Rom 10:12, 13.

³Rom 2:28-9; Rev 2:9; 3:9. cf. Phil 3:3, "It is we who are the circumcision."

⁴Gal 6:14-16; Rom 9:6.

covenant people, Israel.¹ The modern dispensationalist concept of two separate peoples of God is without NT foundation. Furthermore, Paul would have regarded any modern Jewish geopolitical developments as meaningless apart from a mass conversion to Christianity.

The OT presents God as in covenant relationship with His people, and if they are unfaithful (in modern terms this is called breach of contract), He is not obligated to fulfill His promises of blessings. No one who reads the blessings and curses of Deuteronomy could fail to understand this. For this reason, God's plan A does not always work out—but God is very resourceful, and has many alternative ways to reach His ultimate goals.

The principle of conditional prophecy does not contradict the scriptural teaching that God does not change,² for it is God's unchanging nature that requires Him to change His tactics when His people change their attitude toward Him. It is water's unchanging property of always seeking the lowest level that makes it

¹According to Kinman (675n23), in recent scholarship on Luke/Acts the essential unity of Israel and the church has been emphasized by defining Israel as an entity consisting of those Jews and Gentiles who believed Jesus to be the Messiah. Israel has been redefined so as both to incorporate believing Gentiles and to exclude ethnic Jews who do not believe. See J. Jervell, *Luke and the People of God: A New Look at Luke/Acts* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), 41-74; E. Franklin, *Christ the Lord: A Study in the Purpose and Theology of Luke-Acts* (London: SPCK, 1975), 77-115; D. L. Tiede, *Prophecy and History in Luke-Acts* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 9-11; idem, "The Exaltation of Jesus and the Restoration of Israel in Acts 1," *HTR* 79 (1986): 278-86; Fitzmyer, 59; J. T. Carroll, *Response to the End of History: Eschatology and Situation in Luke-Acts*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 92 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

²Mal 3:6, Jas 1:17.

constantly change its position, sometimes sitting placidly, other times raging and cutting. When God's children change their position relative to Him, they take themselves out of the realm of promised blessing.

The Kingdom That Might Have Been

We are finally able to draw a most important conclusion: *The non-fulfillment of the OT eschatological promises and the non-fulfillment of Jesus' "this generation" promises are not two different failures, but one and the same.* Jesus started out proclaiming the earthly kingdom of glory described by the OT prophets that was originally slated to come at the end of the seventy weeks. But there was a conditional element. The seventy week prophecy is tied to Jeremiah's conditionalism by the prayer that immediately precedes it (Dan 9:4-19), which seems to have been prompted by the seventy year prophecy (Dan 9:2) found in Jeremiah's letter to the Babylonian exiles (Jer 29). The close parallels between Dan 9 and Jer 29¹ indicate that Daniel was agonizing over the fact that the seventy years were almost up, yet the restoration promised by Jeremiah did not seem to be happening. God answered Daniel's prayer by giving him a countdown to the consummation of the kingdom of Jer 29-31.² But

¹Jer 29:10 > Dan 9:2; Jer 29:12-13 > Dan 9:3-4; Jer 29:19 > Dan 9:6; Jer 29:18 > Dan 9:7, 16.

²The parallels include the rebuilding of the city (Jer 30:18, 31:38-40; Dan 9:25), the messianic prince (Jer 30:21; Dan 9:25), and the renewed covenant (Jer 31:31-34, 32:40; Dan 9:27; cf. Ezek 16:62-3). The rest of the imagery of Dan 9:24 ("to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, . . . to anoint the most holy") is supplied by the day of atonement in Lev 16:16(!), and by the consecration ceremony in Exod 29:35-37, 40:9-10, Ezek 43:18-27; cf. 45:18-20. In other words, Dan 9:24 foresees the re-establishment of the priestly cultus and the

in Jer 29:12-14 the full gathering and restoration of Israel was promised on condition that God's people seek Him with all their heart.

The obvious question is, Did this ever happen? Did Israel ever meet the conditions for the restoration? Although the OT says Josiah (2 Kgs 23:25) and Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 22:9) sought the Lord with all their heart, only once does Scripture ever report that the entire nation of Judah did so, in the revival under Asa (2 Chr 15). But these revivals occurred before Jeremiah wrote, and Jer 3:10 denies that Judah had ever really sought God with all her heart. Since no subsequent revivals "with all their heart" are recorded, there is no record that the conditions for the eschatological gathering of Israel were ever met.¹

When Jesus' own people, who in Daniel were the persecuted, became the persecutors, the seventy week prophecy became obsolete. By rejecting their King, they forfeited the kingdom; so much so that instead of being gathered to Jerusalem, the exact opposite happened: they were expelled from Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 135—a perfect example of Jesus' dictum that "Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him" (Mark 4:25). For them, the kingdom did not come, but the day of the Lord—a day of judgment—did.

Earlier I suggested that the prophecies featured in Luke's birth narratives

reconsecration of the sanctuary, in answer to Daniel's prayer (9:17), "Look with favor on your desolate sanctuary." Cf. Dan 8:11-14.

¹The closest the Jews ever came to the Messianic kingdom prior to modern times is when Judea achieved limited independence under Simon Maccabeus in the second century B.C., when "each man set under his vine and his fig tree, and there was none to make them afraid" (1 Macc 14:12).

imply that God's original plan for Jesus was quite different than the way it turned out. Jesus was to console Israel and redeem Jerusalem from her enemies. This conclusion is strengthened by a closer examination of the prophecy given at the birth of John the Baptist, which suggests that the original plan was not for the Messiah to continue the ministry of John but to bring in the new age after John had brought Israel to repentance. The first part of Zechariah's prophecy, Luke 1:68-75, describes the work of the Messiah himself ("to rescue us from the hand of our enemies"), while vss. 76-79 describe the work of the forerunner: "You will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins" (1:76-77). Matt 3:11-12 is another passage which distinguishes the mission of John (baptism of repentance) from that of Jesus (bring in the Eschaton). John's message of "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins"¹ was a prerequisite to the messianic age; repentance and forgiveness must precede deliverance.²

But the work of the forerunner did not have the desired effect (Matt 21:32), so instead of completing the messianic mission as defined in the OT and delivering His people from the Romans, Jesus picked up where John left off. Under the circumstances, Jesus downplayed the messianic model as premature and emphasized other models for His ministry, such as the suffering servant of Isa 53, and continued to

¹Mark 1:4/Luke 3:3, Matt 3:11, Acts 13:24, 19:4.

²See, e.g., Deut 30:2-3, 2 Chr 7:14, Isa 59:10 ("The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins"), Matt 3:2, 4:17.

preach and develop John's message of "repentance and forgiveness of sins," as did the apostles.¹ Unfortunately, the national revival that should have followed never happened. If Israel had repented and united around Jesus, then the "swords into plowshares" messianic kingdom might have become a reality long ago.

That brings us, at long last, to the crux of the matter—a crux which requires a leap of faith, for hypothetical reconstructions of what might have happened are, by their very nature, beyond demonstration. *Jesus was not mistaken in regard to His prophecies of an imminent Parousia.* The kingdom of peace should have and would have come as Jesus promised. I believe this is implied in the "if only" statements of Jesus in Matt 23:37/Luke 13:34 and Luke 19:42. But when Judaism finally rejected Jesus and His message, they rejected their future. When the guests refused to come, the wedding banquet was postponed (Matt 22/Luke 14). When the tenants of the vineyard rebelled, the harvest was delayed (Mark 12/Matt 21/Luke 20). Since the chosen people were not ready, God granted the world a reprieve, offered the kingdom to the gentiles,² and led the church in a transition from a national and earthly eschatology to a universal, spiritual, and cosmic one.

Does this mean that the crucifixion took God by surprise? No. Even if this was not God's plan A, He had a plan B in place. Peter told his fellow Jews that Jesus

¹This is Luke's standard description of the Christian message, Luke 24:47, Acts 2:38, 3:19, 3:26, 5:31, 10:43, 13:38, 26:18, 26:20; and Paul uses it as well, Eph 1:7, Col 1:14. See also Mark 1:15, 6:12, Luke 5:32, Acts 3:26, 11:18, 13:24, 17:30, 20:21.

²Acts 13:46-48, 15:7, 18:6, 28:28, Rom 1:5, 11:11, Gal 2:7-9, etc.

"was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge" (Acts 2:23). Jesus predicted His crucifixion repeatedly. But why, then, did Jesus know some things and not others? It was Jesus, after all, who told the parables of the wedding banquet and the vineyard. And according to Matthew, Jesus predicted the rejection of the Jewish nation. If He foresaw that, then why did He not foresee that the Parousia would not happen in His generation?

We can only guess, but perhaps the answer lies in the fact that, to use a baseball metaphor, it was only the bottom of the eighth. There was at least one more inning yet to come, one far more important than any before, for it would begin with the resurrection and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. Even after the Jewish leaders had rejected Jesus,¹ Pentecost was another chance. Leaders change, and the Jews had three and a half years after the resurrection to accept their Messiah. Peter was still holding forth the possibility of repentance to his countrymen in Acts 3. After all, according to Zech 12:9-13, it was not until their deliverance from the eschatological attack on Jerusalem that Israel was to experience remorse and

¹In the Synoptics it is very clear that Jesus was rejected by the "chief priests and teachers of the law," while the rest of the people were on his side (see Mark 8:31, 10:33, 11:18, 27, 12:12, 14:1, 10, 43, 53, 55, 15:1, 3, 10, 11, 31). It is curious that, even though the Gospel of Mark is moderately pro-Gentile, the only passage which even comes close to being a threat of national rejection in Mark is 12:9, "What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others." But this is directed at the chief priests, while the crowd supported him (11:27, 12:12). This may be a take-off on Isa 3:14, "The Lord enters into judgment against the elders and leaders of his people: 'It is you who have ruined my vineyard; the plunder from the poor is in your houses.'" Cf. Isa 9:15-16. The passage which speaks of the rejection of the Jewish nation (Matt 21:43) is unique to Matthew.

repentance over the one whom they pierced. Jesus' delay parables indicate that He was aware that there would be a delay, but evidently God did not reveal to Him the full extent of the postponement.

The Limits of Grace

That God, in His compassion, sometimes postpones threatened destruction is essentially the theme of 2 Pet 3:9, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." We must consider the possibility that Jesus dreads the Second Coming as much as do the wicked. How can Infinite Love destroy those objects of His love which might have been saved, given more time? Even as He "waits for His enemies to be made his footstool" (Heb 10:13), He does not want to come in wrath.

Nevertheless, *He will eventually come*. The OT prophecies of destruction were in fact fulfilled, even if not in a timely manner. God did eventually "carry out his fierce anger" against Israel by abandoning them to the Assyrians. And while Jerusalem was not destroyed by the king of Egypt, it was destroyed later by the king of Babylon, and again by the Romans. Nineveh was not destroyed in forty days; its grace period was over a thousand times longer than expected, but *destruction did come*.

Israel's journey under Moses to the promised land might have been accomplished in weeks; instead it took forty years. But eventually the promise was fulfilled, and God's people inherited the land. Time is on God's side. And someday

the One who said "Come unto me" will come unto us, and bring us to His promised rest.

Nineveh and Jerusalem were saved—temporarily—by an attitude of penitence. A sprinkling of righteous or penitent individuals can postpone God's judgment on a nation or, presumably, a planet, but not indefinitely. Eight righteous people were not enough to save the whole world from the flood (Gen 7). There was a time when "the sin of the Amorites" had "not yet reached its full measure" (Gen 15:16); and a time when it finally had (Num 21). God told Jeremiah, "If you can find but one person who deals honestly and seeks the truth, I will forgive this city" (5:1). But just before Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem, God said that even if Noah, Daniel, and Job lived there, that would not be enough to save it (Ezek 14:14, 20). There comes a time when even God's mercy is exhausted (cf. Ezek 24:14).

But not yet. God's forbearance is an indication of His surpassing love, grace, and mercy. God is so strong, so kind, and so secure, that He can allow Himself to be weak. He can allow Himself to be perceived as faulty in keeping His promises, since His reasons for delay are for the benefit of His creatures. He does not feel the need to defend Himself. Although it raises difficult questions, the delay does not discredit God; an all-powerful Being who exercises self-restraint is all the more worthy of our worship. Indeed, since we owe our very existence to the delay, we should thank God for it!

The delay of the Parousia and the principle of conditional prophecy tell us that our actions really count: we are not bit actors in a predestined play. God is so

responsive to human initiative that He even allows us, within certain limits, to rewrite the play. Or at least to prolong it.

In the end we must admit that we are unaware of even all the *possible* reasons for a delay. But scriptural precedents suggest that one possible reason is God's compassion. There are still too many righteous or potentially righteous people here; the world is not yet wicked enough to destroy.

If there is truth in the position that the world is not bad enough, is there any truth in the position that the saints are not good enough? It seems unlikely that imperfection on the part of God's people is a complete answer to the problem of the delay. According to Deut 9:4-6, the kingdom comes because of the utter wickedness of the wicked, not because of the righteousness of the righteous. Nowhere does the NT explicitly ascribe the delay to the sins of God's people. Was the delay of the bridegroom in the parable of Matt 25 caused by the sleeping virgins? Did the householder of Matt 25 wait to return until the servants had cleaned up their act before he came?¹

On the other hand, as long as we are deriving tangential lessons from parables, Jesus' parable of the vineyard (Mark 12/Matt 21/Luke 20) implies that the harvest was ready, but was postponed because of the non-cooperation of the rebellious tenants. The scriptural symbol of the harvest² is only a metaphor, for the human race

¹I am indebted for this observation to Ralph E. Neall, *How Long, O Lord?* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1988), 111.

²The harvest principle, that the saints are not harvested until they are ripe, i.e., mature, i.e., holy, is an extrapolation based on the metaphor of Matt 13:24ff., Mark

is not like a single crop that ripens all at one time; instead it is continuously seeded and ripening. Still, the principle of conditional prophecy implies that the moral condition of the elect is a factor in God's timetable, and as long as the harvest principle is simply an expression of that fact, it has some validity.

If the Parousia was conditional for first-century Jews, then it is also conditional for us. Repentance remains a condition for the Parousia according to Acts 3:19: "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ." The message of repentance and forgiveness of sins in preparation for the Parousia is still the mission of the church today.¹ The church has preached forgiveness of sins, but has it modelled penitence and purity any more faithfully than did the Jews? Have God's chosen people today ever corporately sought the Lord with all their heart? Which is more likely: that the Bridegroom has jilted His bride, or that the bride, who is to be a pure virgin (2 Cor 11:2), has failed to make herself ready by maintaining the wedding garment provided (Rev 19:7-8) "without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish" (Eph 5:25-27)?

Whatever the reason for the delay, I am convinced beyond a reasonable doubt that the weight of exegetical evidence supports the position of Ellen White that Jesus

4:29, John 4:35, Jas 5:7. However, the harvest metaphor is sometimes used in a very different way: the harvest is ready because of the complete wickedness of the harvestee (Jer 51:33, Hos 6:10-11, Joel 3:13, Mic 4:11-13, Rev 14:17-19).

¹See, e.g., Tit 2:11-15, 2 Pet 3:10-14, 1 John 3:2-3.

would have come already if conditions had been right.¹ And once we accept the premise of a delay, 1900+ years is no more difficult in principle to explain than

¹Cf. Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages* (1898), 633-4: "In the prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction Christ said, 'Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached on all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.' This prophecy will again be fulfilled. The abounding iniquity of that day finds its counterpart in this generation. So with the prediction in regard to the preaching of the gospel. Before the fall of Jerusalem, Paul, writing by the Holy Spirit, declared that the gospel was preached to 'every creature which is under heaven.' Col. 1:23. So now, before the coming of the Son of man, the everlasting gospel is to be preached 'to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.' Rev 14:6, 14. God 'hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world.' Acts 17:31. Christ tells us when that day shall be ushered in. He does not say that all the world will be converted, but that 'this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.' By giving the gospel to the world it is in our power to hasten our Lord's return. We are not only to look for but to hasten the coming of the day of God. 2 Peter 3:12, margin. *Had the church of Christ done her appointed work as the Lord ordained, the whole world would before this have been warned, and the Lord Jesus would have come to our earth in power and great glory*" (emphasis supplied).

Ellen White recognized that Matt 24 applied to the first century, but she allowed for a double application ("This prophecy will again be fulfilled"). Ellen White's eschatology, as found in her 1888 book *Great Controversy*, involves a double application of major eschatological prophecies. There are two manifestations of Antichrist beyond that of 1 John: a historical one (the Papacy, *Ibid.*, 571), and an eschatological one (Satan's impersonation of Christ, *Ibid.*, 593, 624-5). Likewise, there are two "great tribulations" beyond the destruction of Jerusalem: a historical one (the 1260 years of 538-1798, *Ibid.*, 54, 266-7), and an eschatological one ("the time of trouble," *Ibid.*, 613ff.). Is there a parallel here with the way the OT Parousia becomes two in the NT, a historical one (the incarnation), and a future one (the Second Coming)?

Ellen G. White, like Jesus, made repeated predictions that some of her audience would never die before the Second Coming (see Appendix D). I beg those readers who have great respect for Ellen White to entertain the idea that if Ellen White is not discredited by these predictions, and if Jonah is not discredited by his unfulfilled prophecy, then Jesus is not discredited by His. And I beg those readers who have little respect for Ellen White to entertain the idea that if Christ and Jonah and many other prophets could deliver a prophecy that was never fulfilled, then perhaps a modern prophet could too.

100+ years. The difficulty of Daniel's other time prophecies is easily solved: the apostles, in the providence of God, may not have understood them all. If Jesus had come in the first century, then any time prophecies that reached beyond the first century would never have been an issue. Remember: Jesus' spoke of a shortening of the time!

I have found this study to be paradoxically reassuring because it involves wrestling with what is arguably the ultimate scandal. A great disappointment was part of earliest Christianity: Jesus did not come back in His generation as He said He would. There is probably no theological difficulty, no problem we will ever uncover in the inspired writings, no embarrassing scientific or archaeological discovery, as serious as this. If we can deal with this—and I think we can—then we can deal with anything.

Nevertheless, I suspect some readers will find the information in this study wrenching, feeling somewhat as Israel must have felt after they went into battle at God's direction and lost 40,000 men (Judg 20:17-35); or as Mary must have felt when Lazarus died after Jesus had said, "this sickness will not end in death" (John 11:4); or as the disciples must have felt when they saw their Messiah crucified. But please remember that Israel's battle ended in ultimate victory; that the apparent failure of Jesus' prediction about Lazarus only made the final fulfillment all the more exquisite; and the great disappointment of the cross was only a prelude to a glorious symphony of service to mankind. For those who serve God, the future holds wonderful things. As we faithfully obey the great commission call to preach the

gospel to every nation, God will lead us to the kingdom. And there everything dark will be made plain. Meanwhile, Jesus has told us, "So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him" (Matt 24:44). We must always live as if Jesus were coming today.

It is obviously God's will that His covenant people believe that the kingdom will come in their generation. This explains the success of the early church, it explains the success of the Seventh-day Adventist church, and is essential to its continued success. In fact, successful church leaders all down through history have continued to believe Jesus would come in their day (see Appendix D).

For two thousand years our heavenly reward has been accumulating interest in heaven's treasury, to be bestowed upon the redeemed in God's good time.

Meanwhile, the risen Christ is at work in the transformed lives of His followers. His first coming and His resurrection are the strongest evidence He will return.¹ His

¹N. T. Wright ("How Jesus Saw Himself," *Bible Review*, June 1996, 29) makes this brief but potent case for the resurrection: "Several first-century Jews besides Jesus held, and acted upon, remarkable and subversive views. Why should Jesus be any more than one of the most remarkable of them? The answer must hinge on the resurrection. If nothing happened to the body of Jesus, I cannot see why any of his explicit or implicit claims should be regarded as true. What is more, I cannot, as a historian, see why anyone would have continued to belong to his movement and to regard him as its Messiah. There were several other Messianic or quasi-Messianic movement within a hundred years either side of Jesus. Routinely, they ended with the leader's being killed by the authorities, or by a rival group. If your Messiah is killed, you conclude that he was not the Messiah. Some of those movements continued to exist; where they did, they took a new leader from the same family (But note: Nobody ever said that James, the brother of Jesus, was the Messiah). Such groups did not go around saying that their Messiah had been raised from the dead. The early Christians did believe that Jesus had been raised bodily from the dead. What is more, I cannot make sense of the whole picture, historically or theologically, unless they were telling the truth."

Word is sure, and His commission is unchanged. Ever since Jesus walked in Galilee, one unvarying message has come down to us through the vicissitudes of time: Tell the world that the Son of Man is coming soon to claim those for whom He died; so watch and be ready, for you know not the hour. This is present truth. This is what we must always proclaim, prayerfully and fervently; only then will we have the Spirit's power.

Another strong argument for the resurrection comes from Jesus' own family, who thought He was mentally unbalanced and at one point tried to take Him into custody (Mark 3:20-21, 31-35). Other relevant passages (Mark 6:2-6, 10:29-30, Luke 21:16, John 7:1-5), along with the fact that Jesus on the cross committed his mother to John, probably the youngest disciple, tend to sustain the tradition that Jesus' brothers were older children of Joseph by a previous marriage (younger brothers would not have been so disrespectful to Jesus). At any rate, Jesus' brothers clearly did not believe in Him, and the crucifixion would only have confirmed their previous opinion. What, then, changed their minds? If the testimony of Josephus and the NT is reliable, James was a highly orthodox Jew, a pious traditionalist who enjoyed the favor of the Pharisees—not the type one would expect to support a young iconoclast who claimed to be the Messiah. And James was family. The hardest skeptics to win are always one's own family; they know too much. No prophet is respected in his own home; particularly not by older siblings (cf. Joseph). How then did James come to believe that his brother—perhaps his little brother—was the Savior of the world—and this after Jesus had been crucified—unless there was a resurrection?

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A
THE HYPOTHESIS OF MARKAN PRIORITY

One of the classical rules of textual criticism is that the more difficult reading is to be preferred. That is, when two NT manuscripts read differently, all other things being approximately equal, the authentic reading is more likely to be the one that causes the most problems. The reason for this is that experience has shown that it was not uncommon for pious scribes to try to remove contradictions, harmonize divergent wording, and correct difficulties in the text; they generally did not introduce difficulties except for accidental slips of the pen which, though common, tend to fall into well-known patterns (this is, of course, an vast oversimplification of a complex subject).

Here is how this rule works in actual practice. Suppose that two different ancient manuscripts of Mark each have a different reading in the Greek for a particular passage; the first is exactly like the parallel account in Matthew, the second is unique. In that case, it is probably the second that is the true (more ancient) reading, since we know the scribes tended to change the wording so that it would conform to parallel accounts in the other Gospels, and not vice versa. They wanted to eliminate contradictions, not cause them. But in spite of their good intentions, their harmonizing efforts actually caused more problems. To get at the original text, we

have to undo what they did.

The same principle holds true on a higher level. Good men sometimes have a tendency to idealize their history and to play down its embarrassing aspects. For this reason, most scholars feel that it is more likely that Luke, in writing his Gospel, changed some things Mark had written that might cause problems, than that Mark 13 scrambled the tradition so that Jesus' description of the Parousia and the destruction of Jerusalem are all mixed up. But why take someone else's word for it? Let's look at the evidence for ourselves.

Luke 1:1-4 implies that Luke used earlier written accounts of the life of Christ in writing his Gospel. It has long been considered very likely that Mark was one of them. While the assumption of Markan priority is not absolutely essential to the thesis of this book, it does allow us to make better sense of the data. Changing our presuppositions does not help much. The variances in the Gospels are a problem no matter which Gospel came first. Even if we were to reject the whole idea that one Gospel writer copied from another in favor of the hypothesis that the verbal parallels in the synoptic Gospels are due to the writers' independent use of a fixed oral tradition, as one recent school of thought holds, we still have the same problem: is Luke or Mark closer to the original? Which is more likely: that Mark "garbled" the tradition, or that Luke "expurgated" certain troublesome items in the tradition?

One way to resolve this is to examine other parallel historical accounts in scripture where one author used another and there is no question which came first. We have just such a laboratory control in the Chronicler's use of Samuel/Kings. A

complete study of the parallels and differences between the Chronicler and his source would occupy an entire book; here we will only quote from Raymond Dillard's 1985 introduction to Chronicles in the conservative *NIV Study Bible*:

The Chronicler has idealized David and Solomon. Anything in his source material (mainly Samuel and Kings) that might tarnish his picture of them is omitted. He makes no reference to the seven-year reign in Hebron before the uniting of the kingdom, the wars between Saul's house and David, the negotiations with Abner, the difficulties over David's wife Michal, or the murders of Abner and Ishbosheth (2Sa 1-4). The Chronicler presents David as being immediately anointed king over all Israel after the death of Saul (ch. 11) and enjoying the total support of the people. . . . No mention is made of [David's harsh treatment of the Moabites,] David's sin with Bathsheba, the crime and death of Amnon, the fratricide by Absalom and his plot against his father, the flight of David from Jerusalem, the rebellions of Sheba and Shimei, and other incidents that might diminish the glory of David's reign (2Sa 11-20). David is presented without blemish, apart from the incident of the census (the Chronicler had a special purpose for including it). . . .

The Chronicler handles Solomon similarly. Solomon is specifically named in a divine oracle as David's successor (22:7-10; 28:6). His accession to the throne is announced publicly by David and is greeted with the unanimous support of all Israel (chs. 28-29). No mention is made of the bedridden David, who must overturn the attempted coup by Adonijah at the last moment to secure the throne for Solomon. Nor is there mention that the military commander Joab and the high priest Abiathar supported Adonijah's attempt (1Ki 1). Solomon's execution of those who had wronged David (1Ki 2) is also omitted. The accession of Solomon is without competition or detracting incident. The account of his reign is devoted almost wholly to the building of the temple (2Ch 2-8), and no reference to his failures is included. No mention is made of his idolatry, his foreign wives or of the rebellions against his rule (1Ki 11). Even the blame for the schism is removed from Solomon (1Ki 11:26-40; 12:1-4) and placed on the scheming of Jeroboam. Solomon's image in Chronicles is such that he can be paired with David in the most favorable light (2Ch 11:17). The David and Solomon of the Chronicler, then, must be seen not only as the David and Solomon of history, but also as typifying the Messianic king of the Chronicler's expectation.

Chronicles, then, is a sort of "expurgated" edition of Samuel/Kings. It is

evident that the later historian has enhanced the story by removing embarrassing elements—such as the statement that God caused David to number Israel.¹

Of course, Matthew and Luke are much closer in time to their source, Mark, than Chronicles is to Samuel/Kings, so we would not expect as much alteration of the story. Nevertheless, we find a very similar process at work in the synoptic Gospels.

First, it is important to note that, most of the time, when a certain tradition is found in all three Synoptics, Mark/Matthew agree against Luke or else Mark/Luke agree against Matthew; it is much less usual for Matthew/Luke to agree against Mark. The fact that Mark is not usually the odd man out is one of the arguments for the priority of Mark. But when one takes a close look at some of the exceptions, a startling pattern emerges. Matthew and Luke tend to delete from Mark anything that is potentially embarrassing.² Let's take a detailed look at the evidence.

Matthew and Luke tend to eliminate references to Jesus' anger. Mark 3:5 "He looked around at them *with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart.*" This is omitted by Matthew & Luke. Mark 10:14 says when Jesus saw the disciples forbidding the

¹2 Sam 24:1, 1 Chr 21:1.

²There is some non-tendentious omission of minor details in Mark: the number of pigs in the drowned herd was 2,000 (5:13); the young girl raised to life was twelve years old (5:42); the 5,000 whom Jesus fed sat on the grass in groups of 50 and 100 (6:40); the blind man's name was Bartimaeus (10:46). Matt and Luke omit these details. Which is more likely: that Mark invented these details to fill out the picture, or that Matt and Luke omitted them as unimportant? "Neither," some would say. "Who says Mark invented anything? Perhaps he simply drew them from an earlier tradition or source." Okay, but to say that an earlier tradition provided these details is to say that the presence of these details in Mark is a sign of an earlier tradition—exactly the point. These details, which have no theological value, have the ring of authenticity.

children to come to Him, "He was *indignant*." Matthew & Luke omit this. Mark 1:43, 44 says that Jesus "*sternly* charged him," this is changed in Luke 5:14 to "and he charged him." Luke 4:35 does retain the "sternly" in Mark 1:25.

Matthew and Luke seem to be uncomfortable with the idea that Jesus "could not" do anything. So they omit Mark 6:5, "And he could do no mighty work there." Even when Mark says Jesus "could not" enter a city without being mobbed (1:45), or "could not" find room to eat (3:20), or "could not" keep His presence secret (7:24), Matthew and Luke omit the phrase.

Similarly, Mark's "He healed *many* that were sick" (1:34) becomes "he healed *all* that were sick in Matt 8:16 and "every one of them" in Luke 4:40. In Mark 1:12 Jesus is "driven" into the wilderness by the Spirit; in Matthew and Luke he is "led."

Which is more likely: that Mark alters the tradition to make Jesus look more stern and less capable, or that Matthew and Luke enhance Mark's picture in Jesus' favor?

Matthew and Luke tend to make exceptions to teaching in Mark that might be considered extreme. In Mark 10:11 Jesus teaches no divorce at all; Matthew adds "except for unchastity." In Mark 8:13 Jesus says no sign will be given to this generation; Matthew & Luke add "except for the sign of Jonah." These are higher-level examples of the text-critical rule that the more problematic reading is probably the more original. Matthew and Luke also omit two sayings that Jewish Christians might find troubling: Mark 2:27, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath," and Mark 7:20, "Thus he declared all foods clean."

Another potentially troublesome statement is Mark 10:18, "Why do you call me good? . . . No one is good—except God alone." Although Luke follows Mark here, Matthew's alteration to "Why do you ask me about that which is good?" may be an attempt to head off the misconception that Jesus is disclaiming divinity. And there is one nearby editorial change on which Matthew and Luke agree: In Mark, when Jesus lists the commandments (naming the 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, and 5th), He adds a new one: "Do not defraud" (Mark 10:19). It seems likely that Jesus actually said this, as it is the one "commandment" most relevant to the rich ruler's situation. Perhaps it is a creative restatement of the tenth commandment. But it was certainly unorthodox, and Matthew and Luke delete it.

Matthew and Luke omit these problematic details from Mark: The woman had spent all she had on doctors who were unable to help her (Mark 5:26); As he walked on the lake, Jesus was about to pass the disciples by (Mark 6:48); Jesus cursed the fig tree for not having figs although it was not the season for figs (Mark 11:13). Matthew does retain Mark's record of Jesus' cry of dereliction on the cross, "Why have you forsaken me?" (15:34).

In Mark's version of the parable of the vineyard, the wicked tenants took the son of the owner "and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard" (Mark 12:8). But in real life, Jesus was not killed inside Jerusalem and thrown out unburied; He was killed outside Jerusalem (Heb 13:12-13) and buried. So Matt 21:39 and Luke 20:15 alter Mark so that Jesus is first cast out of the vineyard, then killed. The more difficult reading is clearly original; why would Mark alter the tradition contrary to the

facts of history?¹

Matthew and Luke tend to omit material that might be considered disrespectful to Jesus. For example, in Mark 3:20-23 Jesus' own relatives say He is insane, and the teachers of the law say He is possessed. Matthew and Luke omit this. In Mark 4:38 the disciples say, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" Mark and Luke rephrase this. In Mark 9:22-24 a skeptical father says "If you can do anything, take pity on us." Matthew and Luke omit.

Matthew and Luke tend to smooth over and speed up the healings of Jesus. In Mark 8:22-26 Jesus partially heals a man with spittle, who then sees "Men like trees walking"; a second touch makes the man whole. The other Gospels omit this. Even we today find this difficult to explain. Should not Jesus' healings be instantaneous? Similarly, in Mark 9:25-27, when Jesus commands an evil spirit to come out of a boy, the spirit shrieks and causes the boy to go into convulsions, then leaves him apparently dead. After these disturbances, Jesus raises him up. Matthew eliminates the struggle: "And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured *immediately*" (17:18, similarly Luke 9:42).

There is a similar shortening of the time element in regard to the story of the calming of the sea, if we venture outside the Synoptics. John 6:21 says that when Jesus got into the boat "*immediately* the boat was at the land to which they were going." The Synoptics only say that when he got into the boat the wind ceased. Which is more likely: that the earlier Synoptics reduce the miraculous element, or

¹This is pointed out by Charlesworth, *Jesus Within Judaism*, 141.

that John, writing later, enhances it?¹

Here is a particularly striking example of time shortening: One morning Jesus curses a fig tree (Mark 11). The following morning the disciples notice that it has withered. This makes perfect sense; we might expect the leaves of a tree to be withered 24 hours after it is killed. But in Matt 21:19 the fig tree withers *immediately* when Jesus curses it, and this causes the disciples to marvel and ask how it could have happened "at once." Which is more likely: that Mark has reduced the miraculous element, or that Matthew has enhanced it?

According to Mark, it was James and John who asked to sit on the right and left hand of Jesus in the kingdom. Luke omits the story altogether; Matthew says it was their mother (who was probably Jesus' aunt) who made the request. Indeed, there seems to be a pattern of Matthew and Luke altering the Markan tradition so as to apparently eliminate grounds for criticism of the disciples.² The unlikely alternative explanation is that Mark altered the tradition to make the disciples look bad. Perhaps he carried a grudge?

The evidence indicates that the Gospel writers, *like all good evangelists*, exercise a certain degree of "homiletical license" (following accepted haggadic

¹Additional examples of this in John: the lame man was lame for 38 years (John 5:5); the blind man was blind from birth (9:1); Lazarus had been dead four days (11:39); the official's son is healed at a distance (4:46-54).

²See the synoptic parallels to Mark 4:13, 38, 5:31, 6:52, 8:17-18, 9:6, 38. Curiously, whereas the disciples look worse in Mark than in Matt, the reverse is true for Herod. In Mark 6:17-29 Herod seeks to protect John the Baptist; in Matt 14:3-12 Herod seeks to kill him.

practice) in reshaping the tradition under inspiration to meet the current needs of the church in their communities.

All of this is in addition to the fact that Luke edits out the imminency sayings in Mark. This alone is a compelling argument for Markan priority. To take just one example out of the many listed earlier, recall how Luke 22:69 omits the portions of Matt 26:64/Mark 14:62 which are here italicized: "From now on *you [Jewish leaders at the crucifixion]* will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One *and coming on the clouds of heaven.*" It is highly unlikely that Mark started with the Lukan version of this tradition and then changed it to create an unfulfilled prophecy after the fact. Mark's version is clearly original.

Finally, the deepening understanding of the divinity of our Lord on the part of the early church can be seen in the increasing use of the title "Lord" (*kurie*) for Jesus: Mark uses it 6 times (some scholars say less), Matthew has 19 occurrences, Luke has 16, and John has 28.

These are some of the reasons why scholars have long felt that Mark provides the earliest and most candid picture of Jesus, that Matthew and Luke represent a slightly later development, and that John is still later. There seems to be a growth in the apostles' understanding of Jesus' divinity.¹ There is also a toning down of the

¹In the Jewish tradition, the Messiah is not God, although in the latest portions of 1 Enoch the Messiah is an exalted being hidden in heaven until the proper time for his revelation, and the Test 12 Patr talks about God living among His people as a man. In spite of this, and in spite of OT passages such as Isa 9:6 and Mic 5:2, it must have taken some time for the implications of Jesus' words and actions (such as His claim to forgive sin) to sink into the minds of men whose central doctrinal tenet was monotheism (cf. Jas 2:19).

more primitive objectionable elements in the Gospel tradition, and a slight heightening of the supernatural element. However, this occurs in only a very limited way.

None of this should be considered a roadblock to faith, and certainly it does not provide an excuse for surgery on the text, radical or otherwise. Suppose *Time*, *National Review*, and *Reader's Digest* were to publish an article relating to a particular incident in the life of the President. Each article would have a different slant, each would emphasize different facts. But the average reader would have little trouble gleaning the basic facts of the story and understanding something about the character of the man in question.

Those problematic passages in Mark are, in fact, a gift from God, because they prove that we are dealing, not with hagiography, but with a trustworthy historical tradition. These difficult stories, such as the partial healing of the blind man, or Jesus' cry of dereliction on the cross, are obviously authentic, for *no pious believer would have invented them*. Hence they provide powerful evidence of the basic reliability of the record.

Do these things call into question the inspiration of the Bible? Not at all. Like Jesus, God's Word is not partly human and partly divine, it is *wholly divine and wholly human*. Jesus is God in spite of the fact that He was "made like us in every respect" (Heb 2:17), sin excepted, having surrendered His divine attributes (omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence) so that He had to learn through suffering (Heb 5:8), and shared common human frailties such as hunger, fatigue, elimination, weakness (2 Cor 13:4), and mortality. Likewise, the Bible is God's Word

in spite of the fact that it includes the sort of weaknesses catalogued here. We have this treasure in earthen vessels. When God inspired imperfect men to write, He placed His blessing on their labors, imparted information where necessary, and infused what they wrote with His power. Scripture is the classic case of the whole being much greater than the sum of its parts. Dissecting and analyzing the parts is an interesting diversion, but trusting in the whole—treating the text as it stands as God’s message to us—brings life.

People who use textual problems as an excuse to refuse to trust God’s Word are like a group of scientists lost in a desert and dying of thirst. Eventually they stumble upon an old, battered sign saying ONE MILE TO WATER. After discussing the matter, they decide to set up camp, unpack their scientific equipment, and do an exhaustive scientific analysis of the sign to determine its age and authenticity before proceeding further.

Or perhaps they are more like an intellectual with more water than he knows what to do with: he falls off a pier and cannot swim. As he thrashes about in the water, a bystander throws him a rope. "Has this rope been tested under laboratory conditions?" cries the drowning man.

"I don’t know," cries the bystander, "just grab it, and I’ll pull you out."

"Are you certified in water safety?" gasps the victim, as he comes up for air.

"No. What’s wrong with you? Grab the rope! Hurry!"

With his last ounce of strength the victim, ever the careful scholar, presses the point. "Can you guarantee (glub, glub) that there is *not one broken strand* (glub, glub)

in the rope at any point?"

"NO! But I can guarantee the rope will hold you. Why will you die? TRUST THE ROPE, and you will be saved."

APPENDIX B

THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF HELL

The doctrine of an eternally burning hell is increasingly questioned by evangelical scholars such as John R. W. Stott, John Wenham, Clark Pinnock, Michael Green, Edward Fudge, Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, and others who have been willing to take a fresh look at the scriptural evidence.¹ The Biblical case against an eternal hell is surprisingly strong.

There are overwhelming difficulties, both moral and logical, with the concept of a God who subjects His finite creatures to infinite torture for their mistakes. In the Bible, the degree of punishment is not infinite but is commensurate with the crime (Matt 5:25-6; 18:34-5), and depends on how much a person knew (Luke 12:47-48).

One early Biblical passage on hell is found in Deut 32:22, "For a fire has been kindled by my wrath, one that burns to the realm of death below. It will devour the earth and its harvests and set afire the foundations of the mountains." Although this seminal passage evokes the poetic imagery of the underworld to indicate the thoroughness and extent of the fire, its domain is the surface of the earth. Later passages place hell on the surface of the earth, in the future, at the end of the world

¹For a bibliographical essay on recent developments, see Brian P. Phillips, "Annihilation or Endless Torment?" *Ministry*, August 1996, 15-18.

(Mal 4:1-3, Matt 13:40-43), on "the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men" (2 Pet 3:7-13), at which time they "suffer the punishment of eternal destruction" (2 Thess 1:6-10).

Rev 20:11-21:4 teaches that there will be a Second Coming, followed at some point by a fire which destroys the impenitent, followed by the renewal of this planet. The wicked, as well as death and hell itself, are cast into this fire. After this the earth is created anew, and there is *no more* death or pain. In other words, everything cast into the fire, including death and hell itself, eventually ceases to exist. The fire has reduced the wicked to ashes, leaving nothing (Mal 4:1-3); they are utterly destroyed (Ps 37:10, 20) both soul and body (Matt 10:28), as if they had never existed (Obad 15, 16). Like the officials of Babylon doomed to destruction by fire, "They will sleep forever and not awake" (Jer 51:57-58).

If Scripture teaches annihilation of the wicked, then how did the doctrine of eternal torment prevail? It is the result of a common misunderstanding of the meaning of "eternal" in the NT as denoting an endless process, when in fact it often denotes an endless result. A key verse for understanding the NT teaching about hell is Jude 7, which says that Sodom and Gomorrah were burned with "eternal fire." According to 2 Pet 2:6, this fire reduced these cities to ashes, and this is an example of what is going to happen to the wicked. Sodom is not still burning now; it was the result, not the process, that made the fire eternal. The "eternal fire" of hell will likewise go out, but its results (annihilation) will last forever.

Notice these NT expressions where "eternal" refers to the result, not the

process: "eternal salvation" (Heb 5:9); "eternal judgment" (Heb 6:2); "eternal sin" (Mark 3:29); "eternal punishment" (Matt 25:46); "eternal destruction" (2 Thess 1:9).

It is not the *process* (the saving, the judging, the sinning, the punishing, and the destroying) that is eternal, but the *result* (salvation, judgment, sin, punishment, destruction). When Scripture speaks of "eternal punishment" or "eternal destruction" it does not mean eternal punishing or destroying. The penalty is eternal death, not eternal torture, and this death lasts just as long as the reward of "eternal life" mentioned alongside it (Matt 25:46).

The apocalyptic "beast" of Rev 13 and his "false prophet" are "thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur" (Rev 19:20), and 1000 years later the devil is thrown in with them, and all three are "tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Rev 20:10). These apocalyptic images are modelled on the mythological figures of Leviathan and Behemoth, and they represent governments or supernatural beings (i.e., principalities or powers), like the prostitute of Rev 17, or the dragon who represents Satan. Rev 19:21 and 20:9 distinguish between the way these chimerical figures are treated and their human followers: the beasts are thrown alive into the fire, but the followers are destroyed. And if we accept the traditional interpretation of Ezek 28, then even Satan's suffering comes to an end (Ezek 28:18-19).

Apocalyptic literature often uses hyperbole and metaphor when speaking of the destruction of the wicked. Rev 14:10 says "The smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever." This does refer to human beings, but it is an allusion to Isa 34:9, 10, which depicts the destruction of the land of Edom by fire and its eventual

restoration (34:5-35:10). Although Isa 34:10 says this fire will burn "forever," yet the following verses indicate that wild plants will grow there and wild animals will live there. And although vs. 10 says no one will ever pass through the land "*for ever and ever*" (NIV paraphrases "ever again"), yet the following chapter describes the restoration of this same land (cf. 34:13 with 35:7, 9) and its repopulation by the righteous. So even the expression "forever and ever" clearly means only a limited period of time. A more concise example of "eternal" destruction followed by restoration is Isa 32:14-15, which says the land "will become a wasteland *forever*, . . . till the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the desert becomes a fertile field."

The Greek and Hebrew words translated "forever" in the Bible tend to have the meaning "indefinitely." The sprinkling of blood at the Passover is said to be "forever" (Exod 12:24). So were the Aaronic priesthood (Exod 29:9; 40:15; Lev 3:27), Caleb's inheritance (Jos 14:9), Solomon's temple (1 Kgs 8:12-13), and Gehazi's leprosy (2 K 5:27). Yet none of these things still continue today. "Forever" can mean "as long as life lasts" (1 Sam 1:22, 28; Exod 21:6). It can be used of a very short period (Jon 2:6). The expression "burn forever" (Jer 17:4) may refer to a temporary burning (Jer 23:20, Ezek 5:13). Neither in the OT or the NT does any word translated "forever" always imply absolute endlessness.

Another confusing expression is "unquenchable" fire (Matt 3:12, 17). This is fire that cannot be put out, but goes out by itself when its fuel is exhausted (cf. Jer 7:20 with 2 Chr 36:19, 21 and Neh 2:3). Isa 66:24 speaks of the "dead bodies" of

those who rebel against God, and says that "their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind." This is a reference to the garbage dump outside Jerusalem in the Valley of Hinnom where the maggots that fed on abandoned carcasses never seemed to disappear, and the fires were always burning. This valley became a symbol of what would happen to the wicked; this is the source of the Greek word for hell, gehenna (from "Hinnom"). The bodies being consumed by worms (see Job 17:14, 21:26, 24:19-20, Isa 14:11, 51:8) are not alive to feel the flames (Isa 66:15-17; "those slain by the Lord . . . shall *come to an end* together").

Jesus' story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) has been cited as teaching that hell is burning now. But this story is clearly a parable since Luke's introductory wording is always used for parables ("certain," Greek *tis*, Luke 14:16, 15:11, 16:1, 18:2, 19:12). It is hazardous to base a theological belief on the incidental details of a parable. The parable in Judges 9:8-15 about talking plants should not be used to prove that plants can talk; likewise Jesus' story was not told to prove that the dead can suffer. The essential elements of the story of the rich man and Lazarus were already part of popular Jewish folklore in the time of Christ, who borrowed them to make a point about the use of money and how it affects our destiny. The righteous dead are not literally in Abraham's bosom any more than they are literally under an alter (Rev 6:9-11).

An eternity in hell presupposes that the soul is immortal. But *no text of Scripture teaches the immortality of the soul*. On the contrary, many texts contradict

it. Souls can die (Ezek 18:4, Lev 23:29, 30, Matt 10:28b, Rev 16:3). God alone is immortal (1 Tim 6:15, 16). Immortality is something which the righteous seek (Rom 2:7), and which is acquired at the resurrection (1 Cor 15:53, 54). The "eternal life" which the believer has now by faith (1 John 5:13) is not inherent immortality, and at any rate certainly does not belong to the wicked (1 John 3:15).

The Scriptures do teach that those who reject God will face a horrible end, but it does not teach that they will be tortured forever. Let us bury this monstrous doctrine, and apologize to the world for so misrepresenting the character of our loving heavenly Father.

APPENDIX C

OLD TESTAMENT PAROUSIA PASSAGES

The passages in this list use a variety of Hebrew words to speak of God's "coming" or "visiting" His people. This often involves a replay of the phenomena accompanying the original theophany at Sinai (Exod 19:16-19). The list is not limited to passages which use *parousia* terminology in the Greek of the LXX. Note that in the earlier statements in this list the "coming" is clearly metaphorical; one could argue that it becomes less so in the later statements, progressing from theophany to literal Parousia.

Then the Lord said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son" (Gen 18:10, 14; cf. 21:1-2).

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid [lit. "visit you,"] and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath and said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place" (Gen 50:24-25).

The Lord said to Moses, "I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you." . . . and be ready by the third day, because on that day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people (Exod 19:9, 11).

Make an altar of earth for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and goats and your cattle. Wherever I cause my name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you (Exod 20:24).

The Lord said to Moses: "Bring me seventy of Israel's elders who are known to you

as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the Tent of Meeting, that they may stand there with you. I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the Spirit that is on you and put the Spirit on them." (Num 11:16-17).

Out of the north he comes in golden splendor; God comes in awesome majesty (Job 37:22).

The Mighty One, God, the Lord, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to the place where it sets. From Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth. Our God comes and will not be silent; a fire devours before him, and around him a tempest rages. He summons the heavens above, and the earth, that he may judge his people (Ps 50:1-4).

They will sing before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth (Ps 96:13).

You will arise and have compassion on Zion, for it is time to show favor to her; the appointed time has come. For her stones are dear to your servants; her very dust moves them to pity. The nations will fear the name of the Lord, all the kings of the earth will revere your glory. For the Lord will rebuild Zion and appear in his glory (Ps 102:13-16).

An oracle concerning Egypt: See, the Lord rides on a swift cloud and is coming to Egypt. The idols of Egypt tremble before him, and the hearts of the Egyptians melt within them (Isa 19:1).

Suddenly, in an instant, the Lord Almighty will come with thunder and earthquake and great noise, with windstorm and tempest and flames of a devouring fire (Isa 29:5-6).

See, the Name of the Lord comes from afar, with burning anger and dense clouds of smoke; his lips are full of wrath, and his tongue is a consuming fire. . . . The Lord will cause men to hear his majestic voice and will make them see his arm coming down with raging anger and consuming fire, with cloudburst, thunderstorm and hail (Isa 30:27, 30).

The Lord Almighty will come down to do battle on Mount Zion and on its heights. Like birds hovering overhead, the Lord Almighty will shield Jerusalem; he will shield it and deliver it, he will 'pass over' it and will rescue it (Isa 31:4-5).

Say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you" (Isa 35:4).

See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his

reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him (Isa 40:10).

When the Lord returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God (Isa 52:8-10).

"From the west, men will fear the name of the Lord, and from the rising of the sun, they will revere his glory. For he will come like a pent-up flood that the breath of the Lord drives along. The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins," declares the Lord (Isa 59:19-20).

The Lord has made proclamation to the ends of the earth: "Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your Savior comes! See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him'" (Isa 62:11).

Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you! As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you! For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you (Isa 64:1-3).

See, the Lord is coming with fire, and his chariots are like a whirlwind; he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For with fire and with his sword the Lord will execute judgment upon all men, and many will be those slain by the Lord. . . . And I . . . am about to come and gather all nations and tongues, and they will come and see my glory (Isa 66:15-18).

This is what the Lord says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place (Jer 29:10).

This is what the Lord says: "The people who survive the sword will find favor in the desert; I will come to give rest to Israel" (Jer 31:2).

Then the man brought me to the gate facing east, and I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with his glory. The vision I saw was like the vision I had seen when he came to destroy the city and like the visions I had seen by the Kebar River, and I fell facedown. The glory of the Lord entered the temple through the gate facing east. Then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. While the man was standing beside me, I heard someone speaking to me from inside the temple. He said: "Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet. This is where I will live among the

Israelites forever" (Ezek 43:1-7).

As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them, until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom (Dan 7:21-22).

Let us acknowledge the Lord; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth (Hos 6:3).

It is time to seek the Lord, until he comes and showers righteousness on you (Hos 10:12).

Look! The Lord is coming from his dwelling place; he comes down and treads the high places of the earth (Mic 1:3).

I will bring a conqueror against you He who is the glory of Israel will come to Adullam (Mic 1:15).

The day of your watchmen has come, the day God visits you. Now is the time of their confusion (Mic 7:4).

God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens and his praise filled the earth. His splendor was like the sunrise; rays flashed from his hand, where his power was hidden. Plague went before him; pestilence followed his steps. He stood, and shook the earth; he looked, and made the nations tremble. The ancient mountains crumbled and the age-old hills collapsed. . . . In wrath you strode through the earth and in anger you threshed the nations. You came out to deliver your people, to save your anointed one. You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness, you stripped him from head to foot. . . . Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us (Hab 3:3-16).

Then the trees of the forest will sing, they will sing for joy before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth (1 Chr 16:33).

People of Israel, return to the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, that he may return to you who are left, who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria (2 Chr 30:6).

This is what the Lord Almighty says: "In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory," says the Lord Almighty. (Hag 2:6-7)

Therefore tell the people: This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Return to me," declares the Lord Almighty, "and I will return to you," says the Lord Almighty (Zech 1:3).

Therefore, this is what the Lord says: "I will return to Jerusalem with mercy, and there my house will be rebuilt. And the measuring line will be stretched out over Jerusalem," declares the Lord Almighty. (Zech 1:16)

"Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you," declares the Lord. "Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become my people. I will live among you and you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you" (Zech 2:10-11).

This is what the Lord says: "I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the Lord Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain" (Zech 8:3).

Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him (Zech 14:5).

"See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the Lord Almighty (Mal 3:1).

"So I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, . . ." says the Lord Almighty (Mal 3:5).

See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse (Mal 4:6).

APPENDIX D

IMMINENCY STATEMENTS THROUGHOUT HISTORY

Many generations of Christians have thought that He would return in their day. This list based on unpublished collections by Herb Douglass and Raymond Cottrell, and published collections by L. E. Froom and T. Francis Glasson. The quotations are, for the most part, from church leaders who have analyzed their own world in the light of Bible prophecy concerning the Second Advent. Most of these writers appeal to the same prophecies as we do today to substantiate their conviction that the Advent is imminent. This list is only a small sample; it is by no means complete.

Ignatius (ca. 108) "These are the last times; let us feel shame, let us fear the patience of God, that it may not result in our condemnation."

—Ignatius, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, ch. 11, in Goodspeed, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 210.

Barnabus (ca. 130) "The day is near when all things will perish with the Evil One. The Lord is at hand, with his reward."

—*Epistle of Barnabas*, ch. 21, in Goodspeed, 45.

Montanism (mid-2nd cent). His followers abandoned their possessions, broke off family ties, and prepared for the Second Coming. Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, passim. Bk 3, Ch. 24, talks of signs in the heavens.

—T. Francis Glasson, *His Appearing and His Kingdom: The Christian Hope in the Light of its History* (London: Epworth Press, 1953), 44-45.

Cyprian (200?-258) "Whatsoever things were predicted are fulfilled; and as the end of the world is approaching, they have come for the probation as well of the men as of

the times."

—Cyprian, Treatise I, par. 16, in *ANF* 5:426.

"The world has now grown old. . . . The whole world itself is already in process of failing, and in its end. . . . The day of judgment is now drawing nigh."

—Cyprian, Treatise V, par. 3-5, in *ANF* 5:459.

St. Jerome (ca. 400) "He which held or withheld is removed out of the way; is not Antichrist at hand?"

—Glasson, 45.

Gregory the First (became pope 590)

"Of all the signs described by our Lord as presaging the end of the world, some we see already accomplished; the others we dread as close upon us. For we now see that nation rises against nation, and that they press and weigh upon the land in our own times as never before in the annals of the past. Earthquakes overwhelm countless cities, as we often year from other parts of the world. Pestilence we endure without interruption. It is true that as yet we do not behold signs in the sun and moon and stars; but that these are not far off we may infer from the changes in the atmosphere."

—Glasson, 45.

"Indeed among the clergy and people of this city there has been such an invasion of feverous sicknesses that hardly any freeman, hardly any slave, remains fit for any office ministry. Moreover, from the neighbouring cities we have news daily of havocs and of mortality. Then, how Africa is being wasted by mortality and sickness I believe that you know more accurately than we do, insomuch as you are nearer to it. But of the East those who come from thence report still more grievous desolations. In the midst of all these things, therefore, since you perceive that there is a general smiting as the end of the world draws near, you ought not to be too much afflicted for your own troubles."

—Gregory, 9:123, *Post-Nicene Fathers* (PNF), 13:37.

Waldenses (ca. 1140)

"O Brethren, give ear to a noble lesson. We ought always to watch and pray, for we see the world nigh to a conclusion. We ought to strive to do good works, seeing that the end of this world approacheth. There are already a thousand and one hundred years fully accomplished, since it was written thus, for we are in the last time."

—Samuel Morland, *The History of the Evangelical Churches of the Valleys of Piedmont*, 99 cited in Froom, *Prophetic Faith of our Fathers*, 1:872.

Bernard of Clairvaux, (ca. 1140) "Holy Lord, dost Thou call that 'a little while' in which I shall see Thee? Oh, this 'little' is a long 'little while.'"

—Silver, 115.

Bernard of Cluny (ca. 1140)

The world is very evil;

The times are waxing late;
 Be sober and keep vigil,
 The Judge is at the gate:
 The Judge that comes in mercy,
 The Judge that comes with might,
 To terminate the evil,
 To diadem the right.
 —Glasson, 47.

"William of St. Amour (ca. 1250), the famous opponent of the Friars, saw in them the 'ungodly men' foretold in the NT as a sign of the approaching end of the world. His work, *The Perils of the Last Times*, appeared in the middle of the thirteenth century and affirmed that he and his contemporaries were near the end of the world; the dangers of the last times, heralding the advent of Antichrist, were imminent."
 —Glasson, 48.

John Wycliffe (1320-1384) "The Last Age of the Church" is the title of a tract which was never printed and exists today in manuscript in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin. Wycliffe wrote this tract during a period of widespread earthquakes and ravaging pestilences, which, according to some records, killed one-third of the population of Europe. He thus believed that these terrible events were indeed signs of the end of the world and that the fourteenth century would usher in the advent.
 —Froom, 3:59.

"The great day of the Lord is nigh, and cometh fast, and wonders approach quickly; it will not long tarry."
 —Froom, 2:173, 175.

Columbus (1451-1506) "The greatest part of the prophecies and (of) the Holy Scriptures is already finished. . . . I said above that much remained for the completion of the prophecies, and I say that there are great things in the world, and I say that the sign is that Our Lord is hastening them; the preaching of this gospel in so many lands, in recent times, tells it to me."
 —Froom, 2:175.

Martin Luther (1483-1546) "Printing is the latest and greatest gift, by which God enables us to advance the things of the Gospel. It is the last bright flame, manifesting itself just previous to the extinction of the world. Thanks be to God, it came before the last day came."
 —Michelet, *Life of Luther*, 291.

"I know more than thou (Melanchthon) dost about the destiny of our world; that destiny is destruction; it is inevitably so—seeing how triumphantly the devil walks about, and how mankind grow daily worse and worse. There is one consolation, that the day of judgment is quite close at hand. The Word of God has become a wearisome thing to man, a thing viewed with disgust. . . . Nothing remains but to

pray: 'thy will be done.' . . . All around me I observe an unconquerable cupidity prevalent; this another of the signs which convince me that the last day is at hand; it seems as though the world in its old age, its last paroxysm, was growing delirious, as sometimes happens to dying people.

—Ibid., 344.

"This world will not last any more, if God wills it, than another hundred years";
"This world cannot stand much longer, perhaps a hundred years at the outside"

—Froom, 2:278

"I hope the day of judgment is soon to dawn. Things cannot and will not become worse than they are at this time."

—Froom, 2:281

"It often occurs to me forcibly that the last day will break before we can completely turn the Holy Scripture into German. . . . We have no more temporal things to expect. All is done and fulfilled."

—J. Barton Payne, *The Imminent Appearing of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdemans, 1962), 23.

Melanchthon (1497-1560) In the British Museum is a copy of the first edition of Luther's German Bible, in two volumes. The following words are written upon the third page of the fly leaf of the second volume, in the handwriting of Melanchthon: "Written in the year 1557, after the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ of the Virgin Mary. Year from the creation of the world, 5519. From this number we may be assured that this aged world is not far from its end. . . ."

—Taylor, 160.

Hugh Latimer (1490-1555) "The Lord will not come till the swerving from faith cometh: which thing is already done and past. Antichrist is known throughout all the world. Wherefore the day is not far off. Let us beware, for it will one day fall upon our heads."

—Hugh Latimer, *Works*, 1:356, in Froom, 3:371.

"Therefore all those excellent learned men, which without doubt God hath sent into this world in these latter days to give the world warning, all those men do gather out of scripture that the last day cannot be far off."

—Ibid., 2:364-5, in Froom, 3:372.

Nicholas Ridley (1500?-1555) "The world without doubt—this I do believe and therefore I say it—draws towards an end. Let us, with John, the servant of God, cry in our hearts unto our Saviour Christ, Come, Lord Jesus, come."

—Nicholas Ridley, "Lamentation for the Change of Religion," cited in Taylor, 145.

John Foxe (1517-1587), the author of *The Book of Martyrs*, is quoted by Elliott as believing that the advent of Christ "could not be far off from the time then present."

—E.B. Elliot, *Horae Apocalypticæ*, 2:142.

Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661) "The day is near the dawning. . . . Christ will be on us in haste. . . . Watch but a little and, ere long, the skies shall rend . . . and Jesus will come in the clouds. . . . The day of the Lord is near at hand."

—Silver, 175.

Richard Baxter (1651-1691) "We daily behold the fore-runners of his coming foretold by himself. We see the fig tree putteth forth leaves, and therefore know that summer is nigh. Though the riotous would say my Lord delayeth his coming, yet the saints lift up their heads, for their redemption draweth nigh. Alas! fellow Christians, what should we do if our Lord should not return?"

—Richard Baxter, *The Saint's Everlasting Rest*, 42.

John Wesley (1703-1791) "We are very shortly to expect, one after another, the calamities occasioned by the second beast, the harvest and the vintage; the pouring out of the vials, the judgment of Babylon, the last raging of the beast and his destruction, the imprisonment of Satan. How great things these! And how short the time! . . . This fulfillment [Satan's building] approaches nearer and nearer, and contains things of the utmost importance, the knowledge of which becomes every day more distinct and easy."

—John Wesley, *Notes on the New Testament*, 438.

The Gentlemen's Magazine (1756) "This most tremendous judgment and dreadful catastrophe (Lisbon earthquake) that has now suddenly overtaken these deluded peoples, when reposed in a fatal and hopeless security, at so very critical a juncture and moment of time, attended with so many other very observable circumstances, cannot as I think, fail to awaken all the world to serious and devout contemplations . . . and I doubt not, hath set many to compare it with the prophecies relating to, and now fulfilling in these its last days. . . . This species of calamity, so multiplied and magnified as it is, and of the most striking and terrifying kind, we ought surely to look upon as one of the infallible omens and forebodings of the pangs of nature in her sickening state."

—*The Gentlemen's Magazine*, January, 1756, 68.

William Cowper (1731-1800)

"In a world that seems
To tell the death-bell of its own decease.
And by the voice of all its elements
To preach the general doom. When were winds
Let slip with such a warrant to destroy?
When did the waves so haughtily o'erleap
The ancient barrier, deluging the dry?
Fires from beneath, and meteors from above,
Portentous, unexampled, unexplained,
Have kindled beacons in the skies, and the old

And crazy earth has had her shaking fits
 More frequent, and forgone her usual rest.
 Is it time to wrangle, when the props
 And pillars of our planet seem to fail,
 And nature (seems) with dim and sickly eye
 To wait the close of all?

—Cowper, *The Poetical Works of William Cowper*, "Task", Bk. 2 p. 52.

Charles Finney (Nov. 28, 1830) told an audience in Rochester, New York, that if Christians would unite and dedicate themselves to the task at hand, they could "convert the world and bring on the millennium in three months."

—Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 3-4; cited in Grant Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1993), 8.

Mormon millennialism, mid-1830s: "Some of our number visited the city of Boston, and held forth to that people this important truth, that the Son of Man will appear in this generation" (Quorum of Twelve Apostles); "The signs that have been seen show that this is the very generation spoken of" in Matthew 24 (Edward Partridge). "There are those now living upon the earth whose eyes shall not close in death until they see all these things which I have spoken fulfilled" (Joseph Smith).

—Grant Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism*, 36, 69.

Joseph Smith (1805-1844): "I was once praying earnestly upon this subject and a voice said unto me, My son, if thou livest till thou art 85 years of age [until 1890/91], thou shalt see the face of the son of man."

—Underwood, 119 (late 1834 or early 1835).

Ellen G. White (1837-1915) "Some are looking too far off for the coming of the Lord. Time has continued a few years longer than they expected; therefore they think it may continue a few years more, and in this way their minds are being led from present truth, out after the world. In these things I saw great danger; for if the mind is filled with other things, present truth is shut out, and there is no place in our foreheads for the seal of the living God. I saw that the time for Jesus to be in the most holy place was nearly finished and that time can last but a very little longer. . . . Live and act wholly in reference to the coming of the Son of man. The sealing time is very short, and will soon be over."

—*Early Writings*, 58. (1850)

"I was shown the company present at the conference. Said the angel, 'Some food for worms, some subjects of the seven last plagues, some will be alive and remain upon the earth to be translated at the coming of Jesus.'"

—*Testimonies*, Vol 1. 131-2. (1856)

"Christ spoke repeatedly of his second coming to the earth. At one time he said, 'Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves

shall hear his voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.' More than eighteen hundred years have passed since he . . . uttered those words . . . which implied that the hour was at hand; but the dead are still in their graves. The Lifegiver's voice has not yet called the sleeping saints from their gloomy prisons, but we have not lost faith, because the predicted hour has not yet arrived. We work on, trusting, and believing, and waiting. . . . The hour will come; it is not far distant, and *some of us who now believe will be alive upon the earth, and shall see the prediction verified*, and hear the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God echo from mountain and plain and sea, to the uttermost parts of the earth. All creation will hear that voice, and those who have lived and died in Jesus, will respond to the call of the Prince of life.

—*Review and Herald*, July 31, 1888.

Mariah Woodworth-Etter (1844-1920) "The Lord showed me he was judging his saints, separating the wheat from the tares, that the household of faith was getting their portion of meat in this God's due season. The angel was sealing the last ones of the members of the bride, with the seal of the living God. They were a little flock and the last one would soon be sealed, then the Lord would come in a cloud of glory to take his bride to the marriage feast."

—Mariah Etter, vision dated March 24, 1904 (SW 187). Etter was a remarkable charismatic evangelist with a healing ministry. There is a critical biography by Wayne E. Warner, *The Woman Evangelist: The Life and Times of Charismatic Evangelist Maria B. Woodworth-Etter* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1986). Her autobiography, *A Diary of Signs and Wonders*, originally published in 1916, has been reprinted by Harrison House, P.O. Box 35035, Tulsa, Oklahoma 74153. Hereafter it is abbreviated as SW.

"God is preaching to Europe at the cannon's mouth, because he spread his hands all day long to a rebellious people, speaking to them by the Spirit. Each nation claims its God to be the greatest, yet in reality they are mocking God. Tell the American people they are the last nation to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit and to repent while the windows of heaven are open to pour out the Spirit on all flesh. . . . A man will soon conquer Europe and then God will preach to this nation at the mouth of the cannon and those who are asleep (deceived) will remain asleep and those who have their eyes on man will remain with man and this country will also be conquered by the man of Europe, then Jesus will catch away his bride and God will take his Spirit from the earth."

—SW 447-8. Near the outbreak of WW I John Riese attended one of Maria Etter's meetings, where he received a message through tongues. Shortly thereafter, on October 15, 1915, he had a vision of two angels standing by his bed with long, golden hair. This is what they told him. The prophecy was published before it was falsified by the course of events.

"All those who have had visions and revelations bring back the message to warn the people that Jesus is coming soon; that sinners make their peace with him, and that

those who are saved get established and anointed with power and sealed with the knowledge that he is coming soon, that they may be found faithful and true at his appearing."

—SW 146 (1916).

"This generation will never die until Jesus comes. Some of these living here tonight will never see death until they see the Son of God coming in glory."

—SW 580, prophecy given in a 1916 meeting.

Kenneth Hagin "America is receiving her last call. Some nations already have received their last call and never will receive another. . . . The time that is left is comparable to the last seven days of Noah's time. Warn this generation, as Noah did his generation, for judgment is about to fall. And these sayings shall be fulfilled shortly, for I am coming soon. . . . This is the last revival. I am preparing my people for my coming. Judgment is coming, but I will call my people away, even unto Myself, before the worst shall come. But be thou faithful, watch and pray, for the time of the end of all things is at hand."

—1950 vision of Kenneth Hagin, *I Believe in Visions* (Tulsa, OK: Rhema Bible Church, 1984), 47-49.

A recent apparition of the Virgin Mary: "Our Blessed Mother told us through Father Gobbi in a message given September 18, 1988, that we had a period of ten years—ten decisive years: 'In this period of ten years there will come to completion the time of the great tribulation, which has been foretold to you in holy Scripture, before the Second Coming of Jesus. . . . and all the events which had been foretold to you by me will take place.'"

—Ted and Maureen Flynn, *The Thunder of Justice* (Sterling, Virginia: MaxKol Communications, Inc., 1993), 12.

Angie Fenimore (1990) "I could feel the urgency in the spirits who were scurrying about to do the work of God. I was then told that we are in the final moments before the Savior will return to the earth. I was told that the war between darkness and light upon the earth has grown so intense that if we are not continually seeking light, the darkness will consume us and we will be lost. I was not told when it would happen, but I understood that the earth is being prepared for the Second Coming of Christ."

—Angie Fenimore, *Beyond the Darkness: My Near-Death Journey to the Edge of Hell and Back* (New York: Bantam, 1995), 145-46.

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