
Eschatology

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Preface

These lessons were taught over the course of the last several years. I've attempted to reformat them consistently, but some variation remains. The collection is by no means complete. In time, I hope to add some additional chapters on various topics, especially on Ezekiel.

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1 Corinthians 15: Physical Resurrection

We examine the physical and spiritual aspects of resurrection and the eternal state.

1.0 Introduction

Eschatology is the study of last things, the end of the world. Beyond that is our eternal state. What is the final disposition of humanity? The traditional Christian view has always been that our physical bodies will be resurrected; we will continue to exist in some sort of perfected physical form. Not everyone agrees with this view. Some heretical forms of Christianity deny a physical resurrection. Those who hold the so-called Full Preterist view¹ believe in a strictly spiritual resurrection: only our non-corporeal souls ascend to Heaven at our death. Liberal Christianity² denies the physical resurrection as part of its rejection of miracles *in toto*. Neither Full Preterism's nor Liberal Christianity's view of non-physical resurrection is consistent with scripture.

We will examine the scriptures used to argue for physical and non-physical resurrection. Other issues of eschatological theology, such as millennialism, the intermediate state (of the soul between death and the resurrection), baptism for the dead³, and other related topics that might be brought up in the passages we will examine are outside the scope of this study. However, in addition to apologetics for the orthodox belief in a physical resurrection, we will also look at historical context to understand the vocabulary used to discuss the subject in scripture.

-
1. The Full Preterist view presupposes that all Biblical prophecy has already been fulfilled.
 2. It is questionable that one should apply the word "Christianity" to this view. The term is used here only because it would be used by those holding this view.
 3. 1 Corinthians 15:29.
-

2.0 1 Corinthians 15

1 Corinthians 15 is Paul's premiere essay on the topic of resurrection and will be the central focus of this study. On the basis of a few select verses of this chapter, ripped from their context, it is argued by the heterodox non-physical resurrection views that Paul did not teach a physical resurrection.

... 1 Co 15:44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. 15:45 So also it is written, "***The first man, Adam, became a living person***"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. 15:46 However, the spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and then the spiritual. 15:47 The first man is from the earth, made of dust; the second man is from heaven. 15:48 Like the one made of dust, so too are those made of dust, and like the one from heaven, so too those who are heavenly. 15:49 And just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, let us also bear the image of the man of heaven.

15:50 Now this is what I am saying, brothers and sisters: Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

To correctly understand these verses, we must examine the greater context. That context includes not just the whole of chapter 15, but also the whole of scripture and the historical context in which 1 Corinthians was written by Paul and received by its addressees in Corinth.

2.1 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Christ's Resurrection

1 Co 15:1 Now I want to make clear for you, brothers and sisters, the gospel that I preached to you, that you received and on which you stand, 15:2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message I preached to you – unless you believed in vain. 15:3 For I passed on to you as of first importance what I also received – that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, 15:4 and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, 15:5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 15:6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 15:7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 15:8 Last of all, as though to one born at the wrong time, he appeared to me also. 15:9 For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me has not been in vain. In fact, I worked harder than all of them – yet not I, but the grace of God with me. 15:11 Whether then it was I or they, this is the way we preach and this is the way you believed.

This paragraph is Paul's introduction to his essay on the resurrection. The first two verses are a long, complicated sentence in the Greek, complexity which is reflected in many English translations. It will prove constructive to break it down. The core of the sentence is the statement "I want to make clear for you... the gospel". The "you" being addressed is ἀδελφοί, literally "brothers", but plural masculine is often inclusive of

both genders¹. Paul is addressing all the believers in Corinth, not just the men. The word “gospel” is modified by four phrases:

- “that I preached to you”
- “that you received”
- “on which you stand”
- “by which you are being saved”

The final phrase is further modified by the conditional “if you hold firmly to the message I preached to you”, then finally a statement of the alternative to being saved if the gospel were to be false “unless you believed in vain.” The alternative situation is not contrasting what happens if you don’t believe, but rather what happens if you are not saved in spite of that belief.

The NIV simplifies this by breaking it up into three sentences.

1 Co 15:1 Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 15:2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. [NIV]

The point that Paul is making here, and that he will expand upon, is the objective truthfulness of the gospel message and the importance of that truthfulness with regard to the efficaciousness of the gospel.

Scholars recognize verses 3 through 7 as a primitive creedal statement, although it is perhaps more accurately called a testimonial statement with its long list of witnesses, most of whom would have still been alive (v. 6). Two sets of witnesses are cited: scriptures and disciples. The core of the gospel message is that “Christ died for our sins... was buried... was raised on the third day... and... appeared”. We see this emphasis in the four Gospels also, which are effectively accounts of the crucifixion and resurrection introduced by short accounts of his prior ministry.² It is probable that this creedal statement with its testimonials is not Paul’s composition but is a liturgical statement memorized and well known throughout the church, and that Paul was quoting it.³

In verses 8 through 10, Paul added his own testimony to the other witnesses. It is not just the account of what he had seen, but the change in his life, what he had become (“by the grace of God I am what I am”, which I would understand ingressively, that is “I have become what I am”), that testifies to the veracity of the gospel message. He summarized in verse 11 that the gospel preached by himself and the other witnesses was the same, and that it was this gospel that the Corinthians believed.

This stands in contrast to liberal Christianity’s de-emphasis on historical veracity of the Gospel events. Bultmann, for example, thought he could “demythologize” the New Tes-

1. Bauer. “ἀδελφὸς” (ADELPHOS) in *A Greek-English Lexicon*.

2. I don’t recall where I heard this witticism. It is not original with me.

3. Habermas. *The Historical Jesus*. pp. 152-158.

tament yet still maintain a “true” gospel message. Paul would call such a belief “vain”. The scenario proposed by liberal Christianity is that of course Jesus wasn’t physically resurrected, but the early church experienced Jesus in perhaps visions. Paul taught a spiritual resurrection. Then only later the Gospel writers invented a physical resurrection. They assume their conclusion, however. It is only the desire to not see the Gospel accounts as accurately representing the beliefs of the early church, let alone the actual teachings and life of Jesus, that leads to a late dating for the Gospels. In actuality there is really little, if any, evidence for dating the Gospels to after Paul’s time.¹

The creedal statement quoted by Paul here cites “scripture” behind the primary gospel events. Most commentaries assume that by “scripture” Paul must have meant the Old Testament. However, in 1 Timothy 5:18, Paul cited a verse from Luke 10:7 as scripture, and in 2 Peter 3:16, Peter referred to Paul’s letters as scripture. There is no need to assume that Paul must have meant the Old Testament here. In fact, the difficulty of identifying what Old Testament passages the statements would be alluding to is an embarrassment. Although there are passages that prophesied the gospel events in a general way, such as Isaiah 53:5-6, Psalm 16:8-11, the precise details that are said to be “according to scripture” are not found in the Old Testament. They are, of course, found in the Gospels. The scriptures in mind are more likely an early canonical Gospel (Mark’s is a likely candidate since Matthew and Luke’s were probably not written till the early 60’s² while Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in the mid 50’s) or a proto-Gospel that stands behind the canonical ones (Luke 1:1-4). Thus the liberal view of an evolution of the resurrection doctrine is not supported by actual historical evidence, but rather it is the assumption behind the liberal interpretation of the scriptures.

2.2 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

No Resurrection?

1 Co 15:12 Now if Christ is being preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? 15:13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 15:14 And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is futile and your faith is empty. 15:15 Also, we are found to be false witnesses about God, because we have testified against God that he raised Christ from the dead, when in reality he did not raise him, if indeed the dead are not raised. 15:16 For if the dead are not raised, then not even Christ has been raised. 15:17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is useless; you are still in your sins. 15:18 Furthermore, those who have fallen asleep in Christ have also perished. 15:19 For if only in this life we have hope in Christ, we should be pitied more than anyone.

In the next paragraph, Paul turned from the gospel in general to the resurrection specifically. Evidently the Corinthians thought they could dispense with the resurrection, much like Bultmann’s demythologization (there is truly “nothing new under the sun”!), and still have the gospel. Paul in no uncertain terms denied that this is possible. If we can’t be raised, then neither could Christ. If Christ was not raised in historical fact, then the gospel is futile and empty. Then the witnesses have been lying (the “we” in verse 15 are the witnesses cited above: Paul, the Apostles, and the other disciples). Then when we

1. Robinson. *Redating the New Testament*.
2. See “Dating The Gospels” on page 113.

die we will simply cease to exist. Then we “should be pitied more than anyone” for ever believing otherwise.

To understand why the Corinthians were having trouble with the concept of resurrection, we need to examine the historical context here. Chapter 32 of Bulfinch’s *Mythology* synthesizes a portion Virgil’s *Aeneid* that sheds light on what the ancient pagans believed. We’ll look at a few extracts below.¹ Here we’ll see that the pagan concept of the afterlife is as a disembodied spirit.

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Then a roaring was heard in the earth, the woods on the hill-tops were shaken, and the howling of dogs announced the approach of the deities. “Now,” said the Sibyl, “summon up your courage, for you will need it.” She descended into the cave, and Æneas followed. Before the threshold of hell they passed through a group of beings who are enumerated as Grievs and avenging Cares, pale Diseases and melancholy Age, Fear and Hunger that tempt to crime, Toil, Poverty, and Death,- forms horrible to view. The Furies spread the couches there, and Discord, whose hair was of vipers tied up with a bloody fillet. Here also were the monsters, Briareus, with his hundred arms, Hydras hissing, and Chimaeras breathing fire. Æneas shuddered at the sight, drew his sword and would have struck, but the Sibyl restrained him. They then came to the black river Cocytus, where they found the ferryman, Charon, old and squalid, but strong and vigorous, who was receiving passengers of all kinds into his boat, magnanimous heroes, boys and unmarried girls, as numerous as the leaves that fall at autumn, or the flocks that fly southward at the approach of winter. They stood pressing for a passage and longing to touch the opposite shore, But the stern ferryman took in only such as he chose, driving the rest back. Æneas, wondering at the sight, asked the Sibyl, “Why this discrimination?” She answered, “Those who are taken on board the bark are the souls of those who have received due burial rites; the host of others who have remained unburied are not permitted to pass the flood but wander a hundred years, and flit to and fro about the shore, till at last they are taken over.” Æneas grieved at recollecting some of his own companions who had perished in the storm. At that moment he beheld Palinurus, his pilot, who fell overboard and was drowned. He addressed him and asked him the cause of his misfortune. Palinurus replied that the rudder was carried away, and he, clinging to it, was swept away with it. He besought Æneas most urgently to extend to him his hand and take him in company to the opposite shore. But the Sibyl rebuked him for the wish thus to transgress the laws of Pluto; but consoled him by informing him that the people of the shore where his body had been wafted by the waves should be stirred up by prodigies to give it due burial, and that the promontory should bear the name of Cape Palinurus, which it does to this day. Leaving Palinurus consoled by these words, they approached the boat. Charon, fixing his eyes sternly upon the advancing warrior, demanded by what right he, living and armed, approached that shore. To which the Sibyl replied that they would commit no violence, that Æneas’s only object was to see his father, and finally exhibited the golden branch, at sight of which Charon’s wrath relaxed, and he made haste to turn his bark to the shore, and receive them on board. The boat, adapted only to the light freight of bodiless spirits, groaned under the weight of the hero.²

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1. Public domain text found at <http://www.bulfinch.org/fables/bull32.html>.

2. Virgil. *Aeneid*. Book VI. lines 355-540.
hydra.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/text?lookup=verg.+a.+6.268&vers=english;williams&browse=1

Ixion was there, fastened to the circumference of a wheel ceaselessly revolving; and Sisyphus, whose task was to roll a huge stone up to a hill-top, but when the steep was well-nigh gained, the rock, repulsed by some sudden force, rushed again-headlong down to the plain. Again he toiled at it, while the sweat bathed all his weary limbs, but all to no effect. There was Tantalus, who stood in a pool, his chin level with the water, yet he was parched with thirst, and found nothing to assuage it; for when he bowed his hoary head, eager to quaff, the water fled away, leaving the ground at his feet all dry. Tall trees laden with fruit stooped their heads to him, pears, pomegranates, apples, and luscious figs; but when with a sudden grasp he tried to seize them winds whirled them high above his reach.¹

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The Sibyl now warned Æneas it was time to turn from these melancholy regions and seek the city of the blessed. They passed through a middle tract of darkness, and came upon the Elysian fields, the groves where the happy reside. They breathed a freer air, and saw all objects clothed in a purple light. The region has a sun and stars of its own. The inhabitants were enjoying themselves in various ways, some in sports on the grassy turf, in games of strength or skill, others dancing or singing. Orpheus struck the chords of his lyre, and called forth ravishing sounds. Here Æneas saw the founders of the Trojan state, magnanimous heroes who lived in happier times. He gazed with admiration on the war chariots and glittering arms now reposing in disuse. Spears stood fixed in the ground, and the horses, unharnessed, roamed over the plain. The same pride in splendid armour and generous steeds which the old heroes felt in life, accompanied them here. He saw another group feasting and listening to the strains of music. They were in a laurel grove, whence the great river Po has its origin, and flows out among men. Here dwelt those who fell by wounds received in their country's cause, holy priests also, and poets who have uttered thoughts worthy of Apollo, and others who have contributed to cheer and adorn life by their discoveries in the useful arts, and have made their memory blessed by rendering service to mankind. They wore snow-white fillets about their brows. The Sibyl addressed a group of these, and inquired where Anchises was to be found. They were directed where to seek him, and soon found him in a verdant valley, where he was contemplating the ranks of his posterity, their destinies and worthy deeds to be achieved in coming times. When he recognized Æneas approaching, he stretched out both hands to him, while tears flowed freely. "Have you come at last," said he, "long expected, and do I behold you after such perils past? O my son, how have I trembled for you as I have watched your career!" To which Æneas replied, "O father! your image was always before me to guide and guard me." Then he endeavoured to enfold his father in his embrace, but his arms enclosed only an unsubstantial image.²

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2.3 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

1 Co 15:20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 15:21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also came through a man. 15:22 For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. 15:23 But each in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits; then when

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1. Virgil. *Aeneid*, Book VI, lines 708-809.
hydra.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/text?lookup=verg.+a.+6.548&vers=english;williams&browse=1
 2. Virgil. *Aeneid*, Book VI, lines 810-911.
hydra.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/text?lookup=verg.+a.+6.628&vers=english;williams&browse=1

Christ comes, those who belong to him. 15:24 Then comes the end when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, when he has brought to an end all rule and all authority and power. 15:25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 15:26 The last enemy to be eliminated is death. 15:27 For **he has put everything in subjection under his feet**. But when it says “everything” has been put in subjection, it is clear that this does not include the one who put everything in subjection to him. 15:28 And when all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will be subjected to the one who subjected everything to him, so that God may be all in all.

Paul next drew a tight connection between the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of all Christians.¹ Jesus’ resurrection is the firstfruits of the more general resurrection. We are to understand from this that his resurrection and our resurrection are essentially of the same nature: both are physical or both are non-corporeal. See Romans 6:5 where Paul states this same doctrine: “For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be united in the likeness of his resurrection.”

The Gospel accounts give the orthodox view of Jesus’ resurrection. First we have the empty tomb: Matthew 28:1-15, Luke 24:1-12, 22-23, and John 20:1-9. The empty tomb makes no sense if it was not the body that was resurrected.

Luke 24:36-43 makes several points to emphasize that the resurrection had physically happened:

- He invited the apostles to touch him;
- He explicitly stated he was not a ghost;
- He explicitly stated he had “flesh and bones”;
- He pointed out his hands and feet (presumably to point out the wounds, see the verses from John below); and
- He ate in front of them.

Jesus Makes a Final Appearance

Lk 24:36 While they were saying these things, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” 24:37 But they were startled and terrified, thinking they saw a ghost. 24:38 Then he said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 24:39 Look at my hands and my feet; it’s me! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones like you see I have.” 24:40 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. 24:41 And while they still could not believe it (because of their joy) and were amazed, he said to them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” 24:42 So they gave him a piece of broiled fish, 24:43 and he took it and ate it in front of them.

In John 20:20 we have another account of this episode where he showed his hands and his side (again to point out the wounds).

Jn 20:20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

1. Paul didn’t say anything here about what happens to those that are not his. This passage also hints at the timing of the resurrection and other topics, but these are beyond the scope of this essay.

Then a few verses later, in John 20:24-28, when Thomas was with the group, Jesus invited him to touch the wounds, finally erasing his doubts.

The Response of Thomas

Jn 20:24 Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 20:25 The other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he replied, “Unless I see the wounds from the nails in his hands, and put my finger into the wounds from the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe it!”

20:26 Eight days later the disciples were again together in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” 20:27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and examine my hands. Extend your hand and put it into my side. Do not continue in your unbelief, but believe.” 20:28 Thomas replied to him, “My Lord and my God!” 20:29 Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are the people who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Also, the women Jesus appeared to in Matthew 28:9 were able to grasp his feet. So, there is no doubting that the Gospel accounts teach a physical resurrection of Jesus’ body.

Acts also makes it clear that Jesus’ resurrection was physical. Peter, preaching to those who witnessed the miracle of tongues, cited Psalm 16:10 when pointing out that Jesus’ body did not see decay because he was raised (Acts 2:31-32). In Acts 10:39-41, Peter told Cornelius that the Apostles ate and drank with Jesus after he was raised. In Acts 13:34-35 Paul sites the same prophecy as Peter above:

Ac 13:34 But regarding the fact that he has raised Jesus from the dead, never again to be in a state of decay, God has spoken in this way: *‘I will give you the holy and trustworthy promises made to David.’* 13:35 Therefore he also says in another psalm, *‘You will not permit your Holy One to experience decay.’*

Paul also applied this cessation of decay with regard to our resurrection in Romans 8:19-23.

Ro 8:19 For the creation eagerly waits for the revelation of the sons of God. 8:20 For the creation was subjected to futility – not willingly but because of God who subjected it – in hope 8:21 that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage of decay into the glorious freedom of God’s children. 8:22 For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers together until now. 8:23 Not only this, but we ourselves also, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we eagerly await our adoption, the redemption of our bodies. [emphasis added]

Since Luke was Paul’s traveling companion and the author of Luke-Acts, it is inconceivable that his resurrection theology would be significantly different from Paul’s. Jesus himself referred to a physical resurrection in Matthew 10:28, where he refers to both the soul and body going to Hell, making it clear that our resurrection, even of those condemned to Hell, is physical.

2.4 1 Corinthians 15:35-41

The Resurrection Body

1 Co 15:35 But someone will say, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?” 15:36 Fool! What you sow will not come to life unless it dies. 15:37 And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare seed – perhaps of wheat or something else. 15:38 But God gives it a body just as he planned, and to each of the seeds a body of its own. 15:39 All flesh is not the same: People have one flesh, animals have another, birds and fish another. 15:40 And there are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies. The glory of the heavenly body is one sort and the earthly another. 15:41 There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon and another glory of the stars, for star differs from star in glory.

Even in the Gospel accounts, although Jesus’ body was still physical, it was not simply reanimated. In Luke 24:30-31¹, Jesus was able to conceal his identity, then vanish from the two disciples’ sight, and in John 20:26², he was able to enter a locked room. Resurrection also differs from simple resuscitation in another fundamental way. A body that is simply resuscitated, such as presumably Lazarus’ (John 11), will eventually die again. But Jesus is now immortal (see on 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 below). He will not die again.

The Corinthians presumably imagined resurrection as a crude resuscitation and were repulsed by the idea. But Paul here explained how there are many kinds of bodies. Note that all these examples are of physical bodies. Ghosts are decidedly absent from his list. Paul explained that the resurrection body rises transformed, analogous to the way a seed is buried and “dies” to grow into a plant. There is continuity of identity between the body of the seed and the body of the plant, but they are two different kinds of bodies. There are many kinds of flesh in living items as well as many kinds of inanimate matter in non-living items (Verse 41 makes it clear that the distinction between heavenly and earthly bodies in verse 40 refers to astronomical items, and not to angels vs. men).

2.5 1 Corinthians 15:42-44

1 Co 15:42 It is the same with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. 15:43 It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 15:44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

Here Paul made explicit connection to the seed metaphor. The body that is buried is transformed into the body that is raised. The point is not that a body is buried, and a ghost is raised. Taken out of context, and in English translation, verse 44 is easy to mistake as making such an implication. But the words translated “natural” and “spiritual” here are contrasting moral qualities. In both cases we still have bodies, which implies a physical object, not a body and a ghost.

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1. Lk 24:30 When he had taken his place at the table with them, he took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 24:31 At this point their eyes were opened and they recognized him. Then he vanished out of their sight.
 2. Jn 20:26 Eight days later the disciples were again together in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!”

The Greek word translated “natural” here is ψυχικός (*psuchikos*). In 1 Corinthians 2:14, ψυχικός δὲ ἄνθρωπος (*psuchikos de anthropos*) means an unbeliever (a “natural man”). In James 3:15, it is applied to wisdom, to mean wisdom that is not of God. In Jude 17, it refers to people who are scoffers of *christ*. the word “spiritual”, πνευματικός (*pneumatikos*), is used in contrast to the ψυχικός. See for example 1 Corinthians 2:14-15 which contrasts the “natural man” with a πνευματικός, a spiritual man.

1 Co 2:14 The unbeliever [*Grk* “natural person”] does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him. And he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. 2:15 The one who is spiritual discerns all things, yet he himself is understood by no one.

2.6 1 Corinthians 15:45-49

1 Co 15:45 So also it is written, “*The first man, Adam, became a living person*”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. 15:46 However, the spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and then the spiritual. 15:47 The first man is from the earth, made of dust; the second man is from heaven. 15:48 Like the one made of dust, so too are those made of dust, and like the one from heaven, so too those who are heavenly. 15:49 And just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, let us also bear the image of the man of heaven.

The contrast between natural and spiritual is continued here as the contrast between Adam and Jesus. But it does not say we cease to be physical. In fact verse 49 emphasizes the opposite when it says “just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, let us **also** bear the image of the man of heaven” [emphasis added]. Note the “also”, not “instead”.

2.7 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

1 Co 15:50 Now this is what I am saying, brothers and sisters: Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 15:51 Listen, I will tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – 15:52 in a moment, in the blinking of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 15:53 For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. 15:54 Now when this perishable puts on the imperishable, and this mortal puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will happen,

“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

15:55 **“Where, O death, is your victory?**

Where, O death, is your sting?”

15:56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 15:57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! 15:58 So then, dear brothers and sisters, be firm. Do not be moved! Always be outstanding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Verse 50, taken out of context, seems to contradict our thesis — “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God”. It would also seem to contradict Luke 24:39 that we cited above: “a ghost does not have flesh and bones like you see I have”. But consider the fuller context here to see what Paul meant. In verses 51 and 52 he twice said we will be **changed**. Verse 53 and 54a make the point that “this perishable body must put on the

imperishable....”. That is, the perishable body is not replaced with something different, but takes on something additional and is transformed. Remember earlier Paul’s discourse on how different flesh and objects have different attributes (“glory”). The old body of flesh and blood is transformed into a different kind of body, but there is continuity between the two. Paul’s use of the word “flesh” here and elsewhere emphasizes the fallen, sinful nature, where as Jesus’ use of the word emphasizes the physical, solid, material nature¹. They meant different things by “flesh” and, therefore, did not contradict each other.

Romans 8:5-11 makes this usage of the words “flesh” and “spirit” very clear, plus it ends with an explicit statement of physical resurrection.

Ro 8:5 For those who live according to the flesh have their outlook shaped by the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit have their outlook shaped by the things of the Spirit. 8:6 For the outlook of the flesh is death, but the outlook of the Spirit is life and peace, 8:7 because the outlook of the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to the law of God, nor is it able to do so. 8:8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 8:9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, this person does not belong to him. 8:10 But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is your life because of righteousness. 8:11 Moreover if the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will also make your mortal bodies alive through his Spirit who lives in you. [emphasis added]

Paul spoke of transformation elsewhere too. In Philippians 3:21, he wrote:

Php 3:20 But our citizenship is in heaven – and we also await a savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 3:21 who will transform these humble bodies of ours into the likeness of his glorious body by means of that power by which he is able to subject all things to himself.

Also note the details in one of Paul’s earliest letters, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18:

The Lord Returns for Believers

1 Th 4:13 Now we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest who have no hope. 4:14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, so also we believe that God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep as Christians. 4:15 For we tell you this by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will surely not go ahead of those who have fallen asleep. 4:16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 4:17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be suddenly caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord. 4:18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

The relevant points are in verse 14, where, when Jesus returns, he brings with him those Christians who have died, and then, in verse 16, where the dead Christians are resurrected. If the resurrected are just disembodied souls floating around, what does it mean

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for them to come back to earth to be resurrected (are they playing peek-a-boo with Satan or something?). Rather our souls go to be with Christ upon death (see 2 Corinthians 5), then we come back with him and are bodily resurrected at the “end of the world”.

3.0 Conclusion

By lifting a few passages out of context some have attempted to argue against a physical resurrection. Some Corinthians did this because their pagan background caused them to think of the afterlife in terms of being ephemeral ghosts. In more modern times Full Preterists begin with the presupposition that all scriptural prophecy has already been fulfilled. This leads them to conclude the resurrection, rather than being a future event, is something that has been happening upon believers’ death, and has nothing to do with the physical body. Liberal Christianity, presupposing that the miraculous doesn’t really ever happen, argues that the belief in the resurrection must have evolved.

We have seen that interpreting certain of Paul’s statements to say that the resurrection is only of the spirit fails to properly take into account the way Paul uses the words elsewhere. Paul insisted he taught the same gospel as the disciples who had seen the resurrected Christ. He emphasized the historical reality of Christ’s resurrection and how that was the assurance of our resurrection. Both he and the other disciples, especially Luke, taught a physical resurrection.

The Full Preterist view can only be sustained by tortured misinterpretation of scripture in the service of a faulty presupposition. The Liberal Christian view is not tenable either. Only by picking a few verses out of context can Paul be imagined to have a different view on resurrection than the Gospel writers. The context shows that Paul did not refer to a non-physical resurrection in the passages in question, and elsewhere, he clearly taught a physical resurrection.

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Ezekiel 40-48: Ezekiel's Temple

We examine the predictive vs. prescriptive nature of the temple that Ezekiel describes.

1.0 Introduction

This study will examine Ezekiel 40-48. (But, we will not read every verse). These chapters are a major source of the Dispensational view of an eschatological temple being built in Jerusalem¹. This study will argue against that interpretation. General hermeneutical principles will be an important part of this investigation.

2.0 Historical Context

Eze 40:1 In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth day of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was struck down, on this very day, the hand of the LORD was on me, and he brought me there.

Ezekiel 40:1 sets the historical context. Hebrew theology is unique in ancient religions, being focused on history rather than on myth. Note how the bulk of the Old Testament is a more or less continuous historical narrative, starting with creation in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges-Ruth, Samuel, and Kings (repeated again briefly in Chronicles), and finally Ezra-Nehemiah and Esther. Old Testament passages should always be studied in their historical contexts: doubly so when the text itself goes out of its way to specify an exact time and place, as the opening of our subject scripture does².

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1. "Ezekiel" in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*.
 2. Most prophetic books have such notices.
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The Babylonian exile that Ezekiel cites did not begin with the destruction of Jerusalem. Rather, it began a little over a decade earlier when the young King Jehoiachin was captured (See 2 Kings 24:8-17). This happened in mid-597 BC^{1 2 3}. Nebuchadnezzar set up Zedekiah as a puppet king. After he rebelled, Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the city about Aug 14, 586 BC (See 2 Kings 25:1-12).

Ezekiel was carried away captive in 597 BC and had been in exile 25 years — it had been 14 years since Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. It would not be till about 538 BC that the Persian king Cyrus would issue the edict that would end the exile (Ezra 1:1ff). The exact date specified in Ezekiel 40:1 was April 19, 573. (If you're doing the math, Ezekiel is counting calendar years that began in the spring⁴... the 14th calendar year was really 12 elapsed years and some change). Most of the adults that Ezekiel was ministering to would not live to see the end of the exile, and fewer would live to see the completion of the temple's reconstruction in c. 516 BC (Ezra 6:15).

Eze 40:2 By means of divine visions he brought me to the land of Israel and placed me on a very high mountain, and on it was a structure like a city, to the south.

Ezekiel 40:2 establishes more of our context. "By means of divine visions," he began. The entire contents of chapters 40-48 are of one or more visions. This is very important for understanding these chapters because visions are rarely, if ever, straight-forward representations of reality. Let's do a quick sampling of some visions in the Bible.

- Genesis 40:9-19: The dreams of Pharaoh's baker and cup bearer interpreted by Joseph;
- Genesis 41:17-27: Pharaoh's dream;
- Daniel 2:31-45: Nebuchadnezzar's dream;
- Daniel 7: Daniel's dream of sea monsters; and
- Acts 10:9-16, 28: Peter's vision of the unclean animals.

It would be quite proper to question (to the extent that Ezekiel 40-48 may be predictive) whether it is predictive of a literal temple, since such visions elsewhere are not literal.

3.0 Literary Form

Literary form is important in understanding any literature. Poetry is different from narrative is different from an informal letter, etc. My thesis is that Ezekiel 40-48 is deliberately imitative of Moses' instructions for the construction of the tabernacle and its rituals.

1. <http://www.jeff-jackson.com/new/religion/kings.pdf>

2. http://www.jeff-jackson.com/new/old_testament/old_testament.html

3. Thiele. *Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*. p. 186.

4. Thiele. *Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*.p. 187.

Let's first look at how the design for the tabernacle was revealed to Moses. See Exodus 25:9, Exodus 25:40, Numbers 8:4, and Hebrews 8:5 . Moses was shown a vision of what he was to construct. The vision did not function predictively, but prescriptively.

Ex 25:9 According to all that I am showing you – the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings – you must make it exactly so.

Ex 25:40 Now be sure to make them according to the pattern you were shown on the mountain.

Nu 8:4 This is how the lampstand was made: It was beaten work in gold; from its shaft to its flowers it was beaten work. According to the pattern which the LORD had shown Moses, so he made the lampstand.

He 8:5 The place where they serve is a sketch and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary, just as Moses was warned by God as he was about to complete the tabernacle. For he says, “See that you make everything according to the design shown to you on the mountain.”

Compare Exodus 26 and Ezekiel 41, then compare Exodus 29 and Ezekiel 43:13-27. Ezekiel's vision served the same prescriptive purpose as Exodus' regulations.

It is not necessary to find a literal historical fulfilment. Rather, while Moses and his generation followed the prescription and constructed the tabernacle and its furnishings as directed, the generation returning from the exile did not (Haggai 1:2-4).

The Indifference of the People

Hag 1:2 The Lord who rules over all says this: “These people have said, ‘The time for rebuilding the Lord’s temple has not yet come.’” 1:3 So the Lord spoke through the prophet Haggai as follows: 1:4 “Is it right for you to live in richly paneled houses while my temple is in ruins?”

4.0 Temple and Sacrifice

The presence of temple sacrifice in the vision shows that a literal fulfilment cannot come after the advent of the Messiah. Look at Daniel 9:20-27. Near the end of the 70 "weeks", which represent about 5 centuries symbolically (a day for a year), the sacrifice and offering cease and the city and sanctuary are destroyed. This is brought about by a "desolating abomination" which Jesus referred to when he spoke of the destruction of the temple in the Olivet Discourse (Mark 13:14, and see Luke's interpretation of this in Luke 21:20-21).¹ The temple was in fact destroyed in 70 AD by the Romans, right when Daniel's prophecy said it would be.²

Hebrews 10:1-18 further makes it clear that after the sacrifice of Jesus, there is no further sacrifice needed.

1. See “Abomination Of Desolation (Mark 13:14-20)” on page 151.

2. See “Daniel 9:24-27 — Seventy Weeks” on page 52.

Conclusion

He 10:18 Now where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

In Revelation, there is no indication of an eschatological temple as part of God's plan. The only temple mentioned is in heaven itself, except possibly Revelation 11:1-14.¹ If Ezekiel's temple is not the second temple, but a future temple, then it will not be part of proper worship of God. It will exist in spite of Jesus' sacrifice, not as a proper part of the Kingdom of God.

In Revelation 21:22, it explicitly states that in the New Jerusalem "I saw no temple in the city". Even more significantly, it says "because the Lord God – the All-Powerful – and the Lamb are its temple". This is important for understanding both the actual physical temples, and the prescribed temple in Ezekiel. They are types that foreshadow the Jesus and his sacrifice.

John 2:12-22 also makes this link, when Jesus refers to his resurrection as a rebuilding of "this temple". In John 4:21, Jesus declared the irrelevance of the physical temples in the future.²

Further, consider the water that Jesus offers the Samaritan woman (John 4:10-14), in light of the river flowing from the temple in Ezekiel 47:1-12. The image of the small stream coming from the temple and growing to a great river in the space of only a few thousand feet is as realistic as, say, the great sea monsters of Daniel's visions. It is obvious that it is to be taken figuratively. It is no coincidence that fish (the early symbol for Christianity) figures so prominently there.

5.0 Conclusion

Ezekiel was ministering to Israel in exile. Solomon's temple and the whole city of Jerusalem had been destroyed. He had a vision of a new temple in the same way that Moses had had a vision of the tabernacle. The vision give Israel a blueprint for the construction of a new temple, and, implicitly, hope of eventual restoration to the land. Israel was eventually restored to the land but never built the temple as prescribed. This should not be surprising as Israel never fully lived up to their covenant requirements. Ultimately, both the actual and the prescribed temples and sacrificial systems are types of Jesus Christ. Jesus claimed to be the true temple and the source of living water. After his sacrifice, there is no place for temple or further sacrifice in God's plan. Revelation specifically says that there will be no temple in New Jerusalem because God and Christ are the temple.

1. See "Second Interlude: The Two Witnesses (Revelation 11:1-14)" on page 217.

2. See "Jesus' References to the Temple" on page 21.

Paul's Use of "Temple" as a Metaphor

We trace the "temple" metaphor through scripture.

1.0 Introduction

Eph 2:19 So then you are no longer foreigners and noncitizens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household, 2:20 because you have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. 2:21 In him the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 2:22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

The dictionary definition of temple is "an edifice [i.e., building] for religious exercises"¹. Since Paul does not likely have in mind stacking Christian bodies into a literal work of civil engineering, we may assume his usage here is metaphorical. This study will trace the development of this metaphor throughout scripture, beginning with the literal temples of Biblical Israel and ending with the eschatological implications of Paul's temple metaphor.

2.0 The Historical Temples

2.1 The Tabernacle

Israel's first "temple" of sorts was the tabernacle, which was actually an elaborate tent. Moses was shown the blueprints for the tabernacle in visions (Exodus 25:9, 40, Numbers 8:4, see also Hebrews 8:5). To see the sort of detail that Moses was shown and communicated to Israel, see Exodus 26:1-6 and Exodus 29:1-14. We'll be returning to these descriptions below.

1. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*.

2.2 Shiloh

The tabernacle traveled with Israel in the wilderness. Once they settled in the land, the tabernacle was kept at Shiloh (Joshua 18:1). Eventually, a more formal temple was built there (1 Samuel 1:9), which was eventually destroyed (Jeremiah 7:12-14).

2.3 Solomon's Temple

Solomon's temple is the most famous. It was the first one built in Jerusalem, and so is often called the First Temple, although as we saw above, there was an earlier one in Shiloh. This temple stood throughout the existence of Judah and Israel until it was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC.

2.4 Ezekiel's Temple¹

Ezekiel's temple is not an actual temple that was ever built. Instead it is a temple that Ezekiel saw in a vision (Ezekiel 40-48). The question that drives interpretation of this passage is "Is this passage a prophecy that has not yet been fulfilled?" Dispensationalists argue that Ezekiel's temple is a temple to be built after the rapture and will function during the Millennial rule of Christ². This is the wrong question because the passage is not predictive, but rather prescriptive. Compare Ezekiel 40:2, 5 with the tabernacle and how Moses was shown its blueprint in visions (in the passages cited above). Moses' vision was no different from Ezekiel's. Ezekiel was prophesying during the Babylonian exile and was giving Israel a blueprint for a new temple to be built when they would return to the land of Israel from the exile. That the actual temple they built didn't follow this design is not relevant to this understanding. We can compare the details of Ezekiel's temple (Ezekiel 41, Ezekiel 43:13-27) with the descriptions of the tabernacle above to see these parallels more fully.

2.5 The Second Temple

If Solomon's temple is the so-called "First Temple", the temple built when Israel returned from exile (Ezra 6:15), completed about 516 BC, is called the "Second Temple". It was remodeled by Herod the Great in Jesus time (John 2:20) and stood until it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.

2.6 Samaritan Temple

The Samaritans had a temple on Mount Gerizim, but it had been destroyed by Jesus' time.^{3 4 5}

1. See "Ezekiel 40-48: Ezekiel's Temple" on page 15.

2. See any Dispensational commentary, such as *Expositor's Bible Commentary*.

3. "Gerizim, Mount" in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*.

4. Josephus. *Antiquities* 11.8.2, 4.

5. 2 Macc. 5:23, 6:2

3.0 Jesus' References to the Temple

Jesus predicted the future irrelevance of physical temples. When Jesus was speaking to the Samaritan women, he told her, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem” (John 4:21). “This mountain” refers to Mt. Gerizim, where the Samaritans had a temple at one time. The reference to the mountain and Jerusalem are metonyms for the temples built there. He goes on to say, “But a time is coming—and now is here—when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such people to be his worshipers.”

But Jesus said things even more radical than that the literal temples would become irrelevant. He called himself the temple! When he drove the sellers out of the temple, he told everyone “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again” (John 2:19) which John explained that “Jesus was speaking about the temple of his body.” (John 2:21).

Jesus also appropriated language used to describe Ezekiel’s temple to describe his own mission. See Ezekiel 47:1-12. The river that flowed from the temple, starting as a trickle and growing to be a great river in the space of a few thousand feet, is obviously not literal. This is normal procedure for visions in scripture. The images in a vision are nearly always symbolic. For some examples, see:

- Genesis 40:9-19 — Pharaoh’s baker an cupbearer
- Genesis 41:17-27 — Pharaoh’s dream
- Daniel 2:31-45 — Nebuchadnezer’s dream
- Daniel 7 — Sea monsters
- Acts 10:9-16 — Peter’s vision of unclean animals

When Jesus was talking to the Samaritan woman, he offered her living water that would yield eternal life (John 4:10-14). The water of Ezekiel’s temple comes from Jesus.

The key to understand what Jesus meant by calling himself the temple is to realize that the literal buildings of the past were actually a foreshadowing of Jesus. The technical terminology is that they are a “type” and Jesus is the “antitype”. Hebrews 10:1-18 explains this in detail. In offering his life, he supplanted the temple and its sacrifices in about AD 30. Then shortly afterwards, the temple was destroyed and sacrifices brought to an end, in 70 AD.

Concluding Exposition: Old and New Sacrifices Contrasted

He 10:1 For the law possesses a shadow of the good things to come but not the reality itself, and is therefore completely unable, by the same sacrifices offered continually, year after year, to perfect those who come to worship. 10:2 For otherwise would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers would have been purified once for all and so have no further consciousness of sin? 10:3 But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year after year. 10:4 For the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins. 10:5 So when he came into the world, he said,

“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me.
10:6 “Whole burnt offerings and sin-offerings you took no delight in.

10:7 *"Then I said, 'Here I am: I have come – it is written of me in the scroll of the book – to do your will, O God.'"*

10:8 When he says above, *"Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sin-offerings you did not desire nor did you take delight in them"* (which are offered according to the law), 10:9 then he says, *"Here I am: I have come to do your will."* He does away with the first to establish the second. 10:10 By his will we have been made holy through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. 10:11 And every priest stands day after day serving and offering the same sacrifices again and again – sacrifices that can never take away sins. 10:12 But when this priest had offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, he sat down at the right hand of God, 10:13 where he is now waiting until his enemies are made a footstool for his feet. 10:14 For by one offering he has perfected for all time those who are made holy. 10:15 And the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us, for after saying, 10:16 *"This is the covenant that I will establish with them after those days, says the Lord. I will put my laws on their hearts and I will inscribe them on their minds,"* 10:17 then he says, *"Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no longer."* 10:18 Now where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

This is in line with the prophecy in Daniel 9:20-27 written five centuries earlier of the end of the sacrifice at the end of 70 weeks¹, which is symbolic of a 490 year period (a day for a year - a symbolism that also occurs in Ezekiel 4:5-6). Revelation 21:22 makes the connection even more explicit. Referring to the New Jerusalem, "Now I saw no temple in the city, because the Lord God – the All-Powerful – and the Lamb are its temple."

4.0 Paul's use of the Temple Metaphor

Paul builds on the metaphor of Jesus as a temple to include the whole church, through which Jesus works. It is no coincidence that Paul also uses the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ in the same letters as he uses the metaphor of the temple. The two are parallel concepts. Note the following especially:

- Christ is the head of the body (Ephesians 1:22)
- Apostles and prophets have first and second place in the body (1 Corinthians 12:28)
- The church, Christ's body, is filled with his Spirit (Ephesians 1:23)

1 Co 6:15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!

1 Co 12:12 For just as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body – though many – are one body, so too is Christ. 12:13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body. Whether Jews or Greeks or slaves or free, we were all made to drink of the one Spirit. 12:14 For in fact the body is not a single member, but many. 12:15 If the foot says, "Since I am not a hand, I am not part of the body," it does not lose its membership in the body because of that. 12:16 And if the ear says, "Since I am not an eye, I am not part of the body," it does not lose its membership in the body because of that. 12:17 If the whole body were an eye, what part would do the hearing? If the whole were an ear, what part would exercise the sense of smell? 12:18 But as a mat-

1. See "Daniel 9:24-27 — Seventy Weeks" on page 52.

ter of fact, God has placed each of the members in the body just as he decided. 12:19 If they were all the same member, where would the body be? 12:20 So now there are many members, but one body. 12:21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I do not need you," nor in turn can the head say to the foot, "I do not need you." 12:22 On the contrary, those members that seem to be weaker are essential, 12:23 and those members we consider less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our unpresentable members are clothed with dignity, 12:24 but our presentable members do not need this. Instead, God has blended together the body, giving greater honor to the lesser member, 12:25 so that there may be no division in the body, but the members may have mutual concern for one another. 12:26 If one member suffers, everyone suffers with it. If a member is honored, all rejoice with it.

1 Co 12:27 Now you are Christ's body, and each of you is a member of it. 12:28 And God has placed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, gifts of healing, helps, gifts of leadership, different kinds of tongues.

2 Co 4:8 We are experiencing trouble on every side, but are not crushed; we are perplexed, but not driven to despair; 4:9 we are persecuted, but not abandoned; we are knocked down, but not destroyed, 4:10 always carrying around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our body.

Eph 1:22 And God *put all things under Christ's feet*, and he gave him to the church as head over all things. 1:23 Now the church is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Eph 4:11 It was he who gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 4:12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, that is, to build up the body of Christ, 4:13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God – a mature person, attaining to the measure of Christ's full stature.

Col 1:24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and I fill up in my physical body – for the sake of his body, the church – what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ.

Now in the temple metaphor, we have several parallels:

- Christ is the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20); c.f. head of the body
- The apostles and prophets are the foundation (Ephesians 2:20)
- God's Spirit inhabits the temple (1 Corinthians 3:16, Ephesians 2:22)

1 Co 3:16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? 3:17 If someone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, which is what you are.

1 Co 6:19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 6:20 For you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God with your body.

1 Co 9:13 Don't you know that those who serve in the temple eat food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar receive a part of the offerings? 9:14 In the same way the Lord commanded those who proclaim the gospel to receive their living by the gospel.

2 Co 6:16 And what mutual agreement does the temple of God have with idols? For we are the temple of the living God, just as God said, "***I will live in them and will walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.***"

Eph 2:19 So then you are no longer foreigners and noncitizens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household, 2:20 because you have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. 2:21 In him the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 2:22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

5.0 Conclusion

The Dispensational expectation of a future eschatological temple with sin offerings and other sacrifices is wrong. As the author of Hebrews said,

He 10:18 Now where there is forgiveness of these [sins and lawless deeds], there is no longer any offering for sin. [NET]

The temples and sacrifices prior to Jesus Christ's death and resurrection were merely foreshadowings of His incarnation and sacrifice. They were the types, but now the anti-type has come, rendering them obsolete. Consider how awesome the responsibility to be part of "a holy temple in the Lord", to be "a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." We are the eschatological temple, and even our most private sins profane that temple. Let us instead work diligently to complete the temple and so glorify God.

Isaiah 13:1-14:23 — The Burden of Babylon

We examine the use of figures of speech in Scripture in studying the relationship this passage has, if any, to the fall of Satan.

1.0 Introduction

The passage in question has nothing to do with eschatology. Nonetheless, we must study it because it is often misinterpreted as dealing with the end-of-the-world. However, I do not wish to spend great amounts of time deconstructing Dispensationalism. Thus we will focus on what the passage does say, and hermeneutic principles for understanding it, implicitly ruling out Dispensational and other erroneous views. The key to understanding this passage is context. We will examine the passage in its context in the book of Isaiah as a whole, its context in history, and its context in literature and language.

2.0 Context

2.1 Context in Scripture

The immediate context is usually the best place to start studying any literary passage, whether scripture or otherwise. Isaiah is a rather large book, so commentaries come in handy in getting a good bird's eye view of its overall structure. Outlining is a useful tool here. There is no one "right" outline, but most commentaries will more or less agree on the overall structure, though they they may split or combine some points here and there. The below outline is based on *Wycliff Bible Commentary*.

- I. Rebuke and Promise (Isa 1-6)
- II. Immanuel (Isa 7-12)
- III. Judgment on the Nations (Isa 13-23)
 - A. Babylon

- B. Assyria
 - C. Philistia
 - D. Moab
 - E. Damascus and Samaria
 - F. Ethiopia
 - G. Egypt
 - H. Babylon
 - I. Edom
 - J. Dedan and Kedar
 - K. Jerusalem
 - L. Tyre
- IV. General Rebuke and Promise, I (Isa 24-27)
 - V. Woes on Unbelievers (Isa 28-33)
 - VI. General Rebuke and Promise, II (Isa 34-35)
 - VII. Hezekiah (Isa 36-39)
 - VIII. Comfort (Isa 40-66)

One thing we notice about the book of Isaiah is that it is not in simple chronological order. Rather it was probably collected together by Isaiah's disciples at the end of his career¹. Its structure therefore is not planned by the author nor chronological, but related materials are brought together. The passage we are going to examine opens up a block of material that deals with the various nations of the region that were in conflict with Assyria (except for the brief mention of Assyria itself of course). The passage itself establishes its subject matter as being about Babylon: Isaiah 13:1, 19, 14:4. It would be quite odd if Isaiah meant something by "Babylon" other than the literal nation that his contemporaries would have known. Our default position, absent strong evidence to the contrary, is that Babylon is not symbolic for the Roman Catholic church, or the kingdom of the antichrist, or any other such thing. It was the 8th century BC nation.

2.2 Context in History

Scripture itself puts great emphasis on its own historical context. Biblical events do not take place in a mythical past, but in a past that is human history solidly connected with the present. The very first verse of Isaiah establishes the timeframe of Isaiah's ministry. Chapters 36-39 appear to be lifted directly from the account in Kings. Modern archeology has discovered Assyrian and Babylonian records that help to fill in the details of the historical context of Isaiah. We'll briefly overview the historical background for the purposes of this study.²

In 745 BC, Tiglath-pileser III ascended the throne of Assyria and revitalized the Assyrian empire, meaning, he expanded the empire by conquest. By 740 BC he had annexed northern and southern Syria, and by 734 BC the coastal Philistines. In 732 BC he annexed Damascus. Assyrian records record the receipt of tribute from the biblical

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1. Many scholars think Isaiah 40-66 are written by later prophets, but this issue is beyond the scope of this study.
 2. See Siegfried. *Ancient Israel*. and Prichard. *ANET*.

Rezin of Damascus (before he was conquered) and Menaham of Israel. 2 Kings 16:5-9 records that Ahaz paid tribute to Assyria to get support against Damascus and Samaria.

Revolts were common. Shalmaneser V was kept very busy defending against them, including besieging Samaria, which fell under Shalmaneser's successor, Sargon II, 722-705 BC. The death of one king and the accession of the next was always an opportunity for revolt. When Sargon ascended the throne, Merodach-baladan led Babylon in revolt and ruled as its king until 710 BC. He survived the fall of Babylon, and managed to lead another shorter lived revolt a few years later, after Sargon II's death and Sennacherib's accession to the throne (704-703 BC). It is almost certain that it was during one of these periods of Babylonian revolt that constitutes the background of Isaiah's Babylonian prophecy.

The exact dating and sequence of the Biblical events surrounding the above events are difficult. The Biblical data is confusing. Thiele¹ demonstrated that there were several different calendars in use in Israel and Judah over their history, and different ones were adopted during different periods by each kingdom. The below reconstruction should be viewed as somewhat tentative.

2 Kings 18:13-16 records that Sennacherib attacked Jerusalem in the 14th year of Hezekiah (713/2 BC). Sennacherib was not yet king of Assyria at that time, so perhaps he led the attempted conquest as crown prince. Hezekiah paid him off to leave. 2 Kings goes on to record another attack by Sennacherib that we know from Assyrian records took place in 701 BC.

The next account is that of Hezekiah's illness, which took place 15 years before he died (his life was spared and extended by 15 years, 2 Kings 20:1-11), and so must have taken place about the same time as Sennacherib's first attack, presumably shortly afterwards. After his illness, Hezekiah received representatives from Merodach-baladan, king of Babylon (2 Kings 20:12-21). Pay special attention to Isaiah's prophecy in 2 Kings 20:16-18.

2 Ki 20:16 Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Listen to the word of the LORD, 20:17 'Look, a time is coming when everything in your palace and the things your ancestors have accumulated to this day will be carried away to Babylon; nothing will be left,' says the LORD. 20:18 'Some of your very own descendants that you produce will be taken away and will be made eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.'"

It is near this event that most, if not all the prophecies against Babylon in Isaiah are to be dated as that would have been one of the few times in Isaiah's time that Babylon was active. It is not necessary to date the passage to the exile as some liberal scholars do.

2.3 Context in Literature and Language

In the 19th century, many scholars thought that the Greek of the New Testament was a special dialect, distinct from the classical Greek of Homer *et al*, especially for the revelation of scripture, sometimes referred to as "Holy Ghost Greek". Then, numerous

1. *Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*.

Greek papyri were discovered. Scholars realized they were written in the same dialect as the New Testament.¹ This is an important point: scripture is communicated in ordinary language using the idioms and literary conventions familiar to those who first received it. The interpreter of scripture must steer a course between two extremes: an excessive literalness that makes the passage say things not intended by the writer, and an excessive looseness that allows the interpreter to allegorize the scripture into saying anything he wants without regard to the intent of the author.

The following quotations are from the NET, but will often follow the more literal notes instead of the main text in order to emphasize the idiom of the original language. The NET, like nearly all translations, interprets many ancient figures of speech using more modern forms of expression. We will now survey many of the figures of speech that occur in this passage, highlighting them with an underscore:

Is 13:7 For this reason all hands drop [hang limp],
every human heart melts [loses its courage].

Obviously the hands and heart do not detach from the body and fall to the ground. Symbolism is occurring on two levels here. First, hands represent the person doing something in several idioms (e.g., “do whatever your hands find to do”) or the power a person has over something (e.g., “delivered into his hands”) and the heart is symbolic for the center of emotion and courage. Second, these symbols are then themselves presented as doing an action that is symbolic. They fall to the ground, representing a loss of efficacy.

Is 13:8 They panic—
cramps and pain seize hold of them like those of a woman who is straining to give birth.
They look at one another in astonishment, their faces are faces of flames [flushed red].

This is a standard simile. The pain is like labor, but not identical to it. Flame is a metaphor for the color of their faces.

Is 13:10 Indeed the stars in the sky and their constellations
do not flash forth their light [no longer shine];
the sun is darkened as soon as it rises,
and the moon does not shed forth its light [shine].

This verse is not eschatological. The stars, sun, and moon are not being said to cease to exist. Rather, their light is not being shed forth (onto the observer). In the context of military conquest (Isaiah 13:4), it is rather a poetical image of the light being blotted out by conflagration, specifically of Babylon.

Is 13:13 So I will shake the heavens [Or “the sky”],
and the earth will shake loose from its place [foundation],
because of the fury of the LORD who commands armies,
in the day he vents his raging anger.

These are poetic hyperboles, not dissimilar to how in English we describe momentous events as “earth-shattering”, or say they “rock our world”. Ancient peoples pictured the sky as a solid dome, about which it was meaningful, if still hyperbolic, to speak of as

1. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, p. 25.

being shaken. Today, such an image doesn't even have a sensible literal meaning since we know the sky is not a solid object.

Is 13:14 Like a frightened gazelle or a sheep with no shepherd,
each will turn toward home,
each will run to his homeland.

Again we have a straight-forward simile.

Is 13:16 Their children will be smashed to pieces before their very eyes;
their houses will be looted
and their wives raped.

This is a stock phrase for military conquest. It is somewhat hyperbolic, thought not too far from the truth. Children are not brittle like pottery to shatter into multiple pieces if smashed into the ground, although the actual mutilation of bodies is not going to be far from that.

Is 13:18 Their arrows will cut young men to ribbons;
they have no compassion on a person's offspring,
their eye does not [they will not] look with pity on children.

An arrow does cut a man quite severely, but it is hyperbole to describe the flesh as cut into neat ribbons, though the reality is hardly less gruesome.

The eye (not) looking with pity is an example of metonymy. The eye stands for the person (a part for the whole). And even the action, looking, stands for the empathetic emotional feelings of that person, so there is a metonymy inside the metonymy.

Is 13:19 Babylon, the most admired of kingdoms,
the Chaldeans' source of honor and pride,
will be destroyed by God j
ust as Sodom and Gomorrah were.

This is another example of simile. Just how was Babylon's destruction just like Sodom and Gomorrah's? Nothing in this passage suggests angels visiting Babylon and raining down fire and brimstone on the city. Rather the similarity is a matter of metaphysics rather than physics. That is, Babylon's destruction was a judgment from God and perhaps some hyperbole regarding the totality of its destruction.

Is 14:5 The LORD has broken the club of the wicked,
the scepter of rulers.

The club/scepter is symbolic of the power of oppressors. The image of their destruction is a metonymy for the destruction of the powers behind those symbols.

Is 14:6 It furiously struck down nations with unceasing blows.
It angrily ruled over nations,
oppressing them without restraint.

“It” here is the club/scepter of the preceding verse. The striking is symbolic of the oppression carried about by those who wielded the symbols.

Is 14:7 The whole earth rests and is quiet;
they break into song.

This is an obvious hyperbole. The Mayas and Aztecs in Mexico did not rest as a result of the destruction of Babylon, let alone break into song. The point is only the totality of the relief that the king of Babylon's death will bring about.

Is 14:8 The evergreens also rejoice over your demise,
as do the cedars of Lebanon, singing,
'Since you fell asleep,
no woodsman comes up to chop us down!'

The personification of the evergreens and cedars is another type of figure of speech. If they were persons capable of rejoicing and singing, they certainly would do so at the prospect of no longer being chopped down.

Is 14:22 "I will rise up against them,"
says the LORD who commands armies.
"I will blot out all remembrance of Babylon and destroy all her people,
including the offspring she produces,"
says the LORD.

This is hyperbole. Since the existence of Babylon is written in scripture, and scripture will never pass away, it will always be remembered that Babylon existed. What this verse points more precisely to is that the day will come when no one has a personal recollection of Babylon. The city has ceased and has remained extinct long enough for everyone who knew her to have died.

Is 14:23 "I will turn her into a place that is overrun with wild animals
and covered with pools of stagnant water.
I will get rid of her, just as one sweeps away dirt with a broom,"
says the LORD who commands armies.

This is another poetic simile. God was not going to take a mountain-sized broom to Babylon, but he was going to discard her like one discards household dirt.

2.4 New Testament Allusions

The New Testament alludes to three verses in our passage here: Isa 13:10 and Isa 14:13-14. These bring up important exegetical questions, and so will be examined in detail here.

2.4.1 Isaiah 13:10, 13 (Matthew 24:29, Mark 13:24-25, Luke 21:26)

Is 13:10 Indeed the stars in the sky and their constellations
no longer give out their light;
the sun is darkened as soon as it rises,
and the moon does not shine....
Is 13:13 So I will shake the heavens,
and the earth will shake loose from its foundation,
because of the fury of the LORD who commands armies,
in the day he vents his raging anger.

Mt 24:29 “Immediately after the suffering of those days, *the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken.*

Mk 13:24 “But in those days, after the suffering, *the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light; 13:25 the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.*

Lk 21:26 People will be fainting from fear and from the expectation of what is coming on the world, for *the powers of the heavens will be shaken.*

Jesus quoted phrases from Isaiah 13:10, 13 when talking about Jerusalem’s destruction in the Olivet discourse. I’ve argued elsewhere for a non-eschatological understanding of that discourse¹. Note how the bulk of that discourse is bracketed:

Mk 13:2 Jesus said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left on another. All will be torn down!” ... Mk 13:4 “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that all these things are about to take place?”..... Mk 13:30 I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. [NET]

In invoking the language that Isaiah used in the Babylon oracle, he did not simply just apply the same language to a similar situation (the destruction of a city), he implicitly accused Jerusalem of being a second Babylon.

2.4.2 Isaiah 14:13-14 (2 Thessalonians 2:4)

Is 14:13 You said to yourself,
“I will climb up to the sky.
Above the stars of El
I will set up my throne.
I will rule on the mountain of assembly
on the remote slopes of Zaphon.
14:14 I will climb up to the tops of the clouds;
I will make myself like the Most High!”

2 Th 2:4 He opposes *and exalts himself above every* so-called *god* or object of worship, and as a result *he takes his seat* in God’s temple, displaying himself as God.

Paul picked up some phrases from Isaiah 14:13-14. Paul was using it in describing a future, possibly eschatological, figure with delusions of godhood. The hyperbolic language Isaiah used in describing the king of Babylon is apropos, but the two are not to be identified.

The popular identification of the king in Isaiah 14 with Satan is simply incorrect, at least on the literal level. The king of Babylon was certainly an evil person who makes a good type of Satan, but was himself an actual human. See more on this below.

1. See “Mark 13: Jesus Answers (vv. 5-37)” on page 145.

3.0 Pulling It All Together

Now that we've established our contexts, let's go through paragraph by paragraph and exegete the passage in greater detail.

3.1 Title (Isaiah 13:1)

The Lord Will Judge Babylon

Is 13:1 This is a message about Babylon that God revealed to Isaiah son of Amoz:

The title verse of the section says it's about Babylon. It seems best to assume then that the passage is about the literal Babylon, and not symbolically Jerusalem, Rome, America, or some other place.

3.2 Universal Judgment (Isaiah 13:2-16)

Is 13:2 On a bare hill raise a signal flag,
shout to them,
wave your hand,
so they might enter the gates of the princes!
13:3 I have given orders to my chosen soldiers;
I have summoned the warriors through whom I will vent my anger,
my boasting, arrogant ones.
13:4 There is a loud noise on the mountains—
it sounds like a large army!
There is great commotion among the kingdoms—
nations are being assembled!
The LORD who leads armies is mustering
forces for battle.
13:5 They come from a distant land, from the horizon.
It is the LORD with his instruments of judgment,
coming to destroy the whole earth.
13:6 Wail, for the LORD's day of judgment is near;
it comes with all the destructive power of the sovereign judge.
13:7 For this reason all hands hang limp,
every human heart loses its courage.
13:8 They panic—
cramps and pain seize hold of them
like those of a woman who is straining to give birth.
They look at one another in astonishment,
their faces are flushed red.
13:9 Look, the LORD's day of judgment is coming;
it is a day of cruelty and savage, raging anger,
destroying the earth
and annihilating its sinners.
13:10 Indeed the stars in the sky and their constellations
no longer give out their light;
the sun is darkened as soon as it rises,
and the moon does not shine.
13:11 I will punish the world for its evil,
and wicked people for their sin.
I will put an end to the pride of the insolent,

I will bring down the arrogance of tyrants.
13:12 I will make human beings more scarce than pure gold,
and people more scarce than gold from Ophir.
13:13 So I will shake the heavens,
and the earth will shake loose from its foundation,
because of the fury of the LORD who commands armies,
in the day he vents his raging anger.
13:14 Like a frightened gazelle
or a sheep with no shepherd,
each will turn toward home,
each will run to his homeland.
13:15 Everyone who is caught will be stabbed;
everyone who is seized will die by the sword.
13:16 Their children will be smashed to pieces before their very eyes;
their houses will be looted
and their wives raped.

These verses interrupt the flow from verse 1 (“This is a message about Babylon...”) to verse 17 (“Look, I am stirring up the Medes to attack them [Babylon]”) with a passage of universal scope (“coming to destroy the whole earth”, v. 5). These verses actually function as an introduction to the entire Judgment on the Nations section (Isaiah 13-23). The armies are already summoned (verse 3) and are already being assembled (verse 4). The day of judgment it looks forward to is near (“the LORD’s day of judgment is near”, verse 6) and not some distant eschatological age. Its universal judgment finds its fulfillment in the fulfillment of the individual prophecies of the following 11 chapters. An immanent, not a distant eschatological, judgment is prophesied here.

3.3 Medes Will Destroy Babylon (Isaiah 13:17-22)

Is 13:17 Look, I am stirring up the Medes to attack them;
they are not concerned about silver,
nor are they interested in gold.
13:18 Their arrows will cut young men to ribbons;
they have no compassion on a person’s offspring,
they will not look with pity on children.
13:19 Babylon, the most admired of kingdoms,
the Chaldeans’ source of honor and pride,
will be destroyed by God
just as Sodom and Gomorrah were.
13:20 No one will live there again;
no one will ever reside there again.
No bedouin will camp there,
no shepherds will rest their flocks there.
13:21 Wild animals will rest there,
the ruined houses will be full of hyenas.
Ostriches will live there,
wild goats will skip among the ruins.
13:22 Wild dogs will yip in her ruined fortresses,
jackals will yelp in the once-splendid palaces.
Her time is almost up,
her days will not be prolonged.

The Medes referred to here were likely Median mercenaries in the Assyrian army¹. The Median reputation referred to here is referred to by Xenophon in the 4th century BC: [Cyrus speaking....] “Ye Medes, and others who now hear me, I well know that you have not accompanied me in this expedition with a view of acquiring wealth.”—Cyp. lib. 5.²

The language used to describe Babylon’s destruction here is conventional for the genre. We encounter it elsewhere in scripture. Jeremiah 25:9-25 uses such language in referring to 6th century Jerusalem and Babylon.

Je 25:9 So I, the LORD, affirm that I am going to send for all the peoples of the north and my servant, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and all the nations that surround it. I will utterly destroy this land, its inhabitants, and all the nations that surround it and make them everlasting ruins. I will make them objects of horror and hissing scorn. 25:10 I will put an end to the sounds of joy and gladness, to the glad celebration of brides and grooms in these lands. I will put an end to the sound of people grinding meal. I will put an end to lamps shining in their houses. 25:11 This whole area will become a desolate wasteland. These nations will be subject to the king of Babylon for seventy years.’

Notice how in nearly the same breath, Jeremiah can describe the land and its inhabitants as utterly destroyed and the ruins as everlasting, yet limit the subjugation to only 70 years. He unambiguously did not intend for his word picture of destruction to be pressed to absolute literalness. He goes on to describe what is to happen to Babylon at the end of the seventy years using the same terms in Jeremiah 25:12-14.

Je 25:12 ““But when the seventy years are over, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation for their sins. I will make the land of Babylon an everlasting ruin. I, the LORD, affirm it. 25:13 I will bring on that land everything that I said I would. I will bring on it everything that is written in this book. I will bring on it everything that Jeremiah has prophesied against all the nations. 25:14 For many nations and great kings will make slaves of the king of Babylon and his nation too. I will repay them for all they have done!””

Later, in Jeremiah 50:39-40, he also invokes the Sodom and Gomorrah image for Babylon’s destruction, but without giving any indication that he meant that Fire and Brimstone would rain down on it from the heavens.

Je 50:39 Therefore desert creatures and jackals will live there.
Ostriches will dwell in it too.
But no people will ever live there again.
No one will dwell there for all time to come.
50:40 I will destroy Babylonia just like I did
Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighboring towns.
No one will live there.
No human being will settle in it,”
says the LORD.

1. Heater, *JETS 41:1*, p. 47-48
2. Clarke, *Clarke’s Commentary: Isaiah*.

Jeremiah also used the exact same words to describe Edom in Jeremiah 49:18. This illustrates how the word picture is a literary convention more than a “scientific” description.

Je 49:18 Edom will be destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah
and the towns that were around them.
No one will live there.
No human being will settle in it,”
says the LORD.

De ja vue all over again! There is more concerning Babylon in Jeremiah 51:11, 26, 62.

Je 51:11 “Sharpen your arrows!
Fill your quivers!
The LORD will arouse a spirit of hostility in the kings of Media.
For he intends to destroy Babylonia.
For that is how the LORD will get his revenge—
how he will get his revenge for the Babylonians’ destruction of his temple.

Je 51:26 No one will use any of your stones as a cornerstone.
No one will use any of them in the foundation of his house.
For you will lie desolate forever,”
says the LORD.

Je 51:62 Then say, ‘O LORD, you have announced that you will destroy this place so
that no people or animals live in it any longer. Certainly it will lie desolate forever!’

Concerning Mount Seir (Edom), Ezekiel wrote about “perpetual desolation” [NET] in Ezekiel 35:9.

Eze 35:9 I will make you a perpetual desolation, and your cities will never be inhabited
again. Then you will know that I am the LORD.

Zephaniah wrote concerning Moab and Ammon being “permanently desolate” [NET] in Zephaniah 2:9.

Zeph 2:9 Therefore, as surely as I live,” says the LORD who commands armies, the God
of Israel,
“be certain that Moab will become like Sodom
and the Ammonites like Gomorrah.
They will be overrun by weeds,
filled with salt pits,
and permanently desolate.
Those of my people who are left will plunder their belongings;
those who are left in Judah will take possession of their land.”

Returning back to Isaiah, in a later prophesy, Isaiah 23:13, Isaiah was prophesying to Tyre and referred to the Chaldean’s [Babylonia’s] destruction as having already happened. This was presumably written after Merodach-baladan was defeated and Babylon reconquered in 710 or 703 BC.

Is 23:13 Look at the land of the Chaldeans,
these people who have lost their identity!
The Assyrians have made it a home for wild animals.
They erected their siege towers,

demolished its fortresses,
and turned it into a heap of ruins.

We may summarize thusly: The language here is poetic, and not impassionate, clinical prose. The poetic word pictures are conventional of the genre of prophecy of destruction — the same word pictures are used over and over by Isaiah and other prophets. While the potential for absolute destruction was there, the original readers would have understood the language as hyperbolic, as can be seen in Jeremiah’s use of the language, immediately followed by a prophecy of restoration after 70 years! We may therefore conclude that the Babylon being prophesied about by Isaiah was the Babylon of his day, and that the prophesy was fulfilled in his day.

3.4 Compassion on Jacob (Isaiah 14:1-4a)

Is 14:1 The LORD will certainly have compassion on Jacob; he will again choose Israel as his special people and restore them to their land. Resident foreigners will join them and unite with the family of Jacob. 14:2 Nations will take them and bring them back to their own place. Then the family of Jacob will make foreigners their servants as they settle in the LORD’s land. They will make their captors captives and rule over the ones who oppressed them. 14:3 When the LORD gives you relief from your suffering and anxiety, and from the hard labor which you were made to perform, 14:4a you will taunt the king of Babylon with these words:

Recall that in Isaiah 39:6, he had prophesied:

Is 39:6 ‘Look, a time is coming when everything in your palace and the things your ancestors have accumulated to this day will be carried away to Babylon; nothing will be left,’ says the LORD. [NET]

Here, Isaiah is looking past that to Judah’s restoration. Isaiah 13 is not the immediate context of this prophecy as that passage does not deal with Judah going into exile. Chapter 14 is positioned by Isaiah’s anthologist after chapter 13 only because both deal with Babylon.

3.5 Taunt of the King of Babylon (Isaiah 14:4b-21)

Is 14:4b “Look how the oppressor has met his end!
Hostility has ceased!
14:5 The LORD has broken the club of the wicked,
the scepter of rulers.
14:6 It furiously struck down nations
with unceasing blows.
It angrily ruled over nations,
oppressing them without restraint.
14:7 The whole earth rests and is quiet;
they break into song.
14:8 The evergreens also rejoice over your demise,
as do the cedars of Lebanon, singing,
‘Since you fell asleep,
no woodsman comes up to chop us down!’
14:9 Sheol below is stirred up about you,
ready to meet you when you arrive.

It rouses the spirits of the dead for you,
all the former leaders of the earth;
it makes all the former kings of the nations
rise from their thrones.
14:10 All of them respond to you, saying:
‘You’ve also become weak like us!
You’ve become just like us!
14:11 Your splendor has been brought down to Sheol,
as well as the sound of your stringed instruments.
You lie on a bed of maggots,
with a blanket of worms over you.
14:12 Look how you have fallen from the sky,
O shining one, son of the dawn!
You’ve been cut down to the ground,
O conqueror of the nations!
14:13 You said to yourself,
“I will climb up to the sky.
Above the stars of El
I will set up my throne.
I will rule on the mountain of assembly
on the remote slopes of Zaphon.
14:14 I will climb up to the tops of the clouds;
I will make myself like the Most High!”
14:15 But you were brought down to Sheol,
to the remote slopes of the pit.
14:16 Those who see you stare at you,
they look at you carefully, thinking:
“Is this the man who shook the earth,
the one who made kingdoms tremble?
14:17 Is this the one who made the world like a desert,
who ruined its cities,
and refused to free his prisoners so they could return home?”
14:18 As for all the kings of the nations,
all of them lie down in splendor,
each in his own tomb.
14:19 But you have been thrown out of your grave
like a shoot that is thrown away.
You lie among the slain,
among those who have been slashed by the sword,
among those headed for the stones of the pit,
as if you were a mangled corpse.
14:20 You will not be buried with them,
because you destroyed your land
and killed your people.
The offspring of the wicked
will never be mentioned again.
14:21 Prepare to execute his sons
for the sins their ancestors have committed.
They must not rise up and take possession of the earth,
or fill the surface of the world with cities.”

This passage is an imaginative poem. Its content is a taunt. Just as the trees didn’t literally “get down and party” when the king of Babylon died (14:8), we shouldn’t read the description of Sheol as a theological treatise on the afterlife.

The passage is clearly about the literal Babylon (14:4a, 22) and her human king (14:16). As the epitome of evil, the language used to describe the arrogance of the king of Babylon here was used by Paul to describe an eschatological “man of lawlessness” in 2 Thesalonians 2:4 (cf. Isaiah 14:13-14). But Paul was not interpreting this passage in Isaiah as referring to him, but rather was using the language as a sort of cliché; at most, he was treating the king of Babylon as a type of the man of lawlessness.

Historically, it has been a common practice to spiritualize this entire passage to be about Satan rather than the human king of Babylon. This misinterpretation is behind much popular mythology about Satan. The reference in 14:11 to his string instruments (which in context would not refer to the king’s personal instruments, but the instruments of the musicians at his court — compare with David playing the harp at Saul’s court) is behind the myth of Satan originally being the chief musician of heaven until he attempted to rebel and take over. Whatever the actual details of Satan’s fall from heaven¹, this passage is not about that.

3.6 Babylon Condemned (Isaiah 14:22-23)

Is 14:22 “I will rise up against them,”
says the LORD who commands armies.
“I will blot out all remembrance of Babylon and destroy all her people,
including the offspring she produces,”
says the LORD.
14:23 “I will turn her into a place that is overrun with wild animals
and covered with pools of stagnant water.
I will get rid of her, just as one sweeps away dirt with a broom,”
says the LORD who commands armies.

If all remembrance of Babylon is to be blotted out, but Babylon is mentioned in scripture, and scripture can never pass away, isn’t remembrance of Babylon going to continue? Again, this is an example of poetic language that, while it has a serious point that should not be “spiritualized” away, should also not be pressed too literally.

4.0 Concluding Thought: The Experience of Jonah

Consider also the experience of Jonah (See especially Jonah 1:2, Jonah 3:1-4, Jonah 3:10, Jonah 4:10-11).

Jon 1:2 “Go immediately to Nineveh, that large capital city, and announce judgment against its people because their wickedness has come to my attention.”

Jon 3:1 The LORD said to Jonah a second time, 3:2 “Go immediately to Nineveh, that large city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” 3:3 So Jonah went immediately to Nineveh, as the LORD had said. (Now Nineveh was an enormous city—it required three days to walk through it!) 3:4 When Jonah began to enter the city one day’s walk, he announced, “At the end of forty days, Nineveh will be overthrown!”

1. See “Revelation 12: Woman, Child, and Dragon” on page 223.

Jon 3:10 When God saw their actions—they turned from their evil way of living!—God relented concerning the judgment he had threatened them with and he did not destroy them.

Jon 4:10 The LORD said, “You were upset about this little plant, something for which you have not worked nor did you do anything to make it grow. It grew up overnight and died the next day. 4:11 Should I not be even more concerned about Nineveh, this enormous city? There are more than one hundred twenty thousand people in it who do not know right from wrong, as well as many animals!”

The possibility of God’s mercy is ever present. So even if one presses the poetic figures of speech to be literally understood, there is always the possibility that God will be merciful and spare people the full brunt of their deserved punishment.

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The Kingdom Visions in Daniel

By comparing the parallels between Daniel's Kingdom Visions, we can determine with certainty which kingdom is meant by each symbol.

1.0 Introduction

The book of Daniel contains accounts of several visions. These visions predicted the coming of four kingdoms, followed by the Kingdom of God. The visions were interrelated. Examining these interrelationships is an important hermeneutic for interpreting them. Context is always important studying Scripture. In addition to the immediate historical circumstances of each individual vision, the visions taken as a whole form a context for each other.

These visions are usually described as being apocalyptic. The popular meaning of the word is somewhat misleading here. In this context, “apocalyptic” does not mean “forecasting the ultimate destiny of the world”¹ precisely. Rather, “apocalyptic” here describes the form, not necessarily the content. The apocalyptic form has two parts. The first part is the vision proper. It is an often strange or bizarre vision where the elements of the vision have symbolic meanings. The second part is an interpretation, often, but not always, given by an angel who guides the prophet through the vision.

Space does not permit covering apologetic issues regarding the date of composition and authorship of Daniel. However, the conclusions drawn from studying the relationships between the visions are one factor (of many) pointing to a solution to the apologetic issues.

1. Merriam-Webster. “Apocalyptic”

2.0 The Visions

2.1 Daniel 2:31-45 — The Statue

Da 2:31 “You, O king, were watching as a great statue – one of impressive size and extraordinary brightness – was standing before you. Its appearance caused alarm. 2:32 As for that statue, its head was of fine gold, its chest and arms were of silver, its belly and thighs were of bronze. 2:33 Its legs were of iron; its feet were partly of iron and partly of clay. 2:34 You were watching as a stone was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its iron and clay feet, breaking them in pieces. 2:35 Then the iron, clay, bronze, silver, and gold were broken in pieces without distinction and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors that the wind carries away. Not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the statue became a large mountain that filled the entire earth. 2:36 This was the dream. Now we will set forth before the king its interpretation.

Daniel Interprets Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream

2:37 “You, O king, are the king of kings. The God of heaven has granted you sovereignty, power, strength, and honor. 2:38 Wherever human beings, wild animals, and birds of the sky live – he has given them into your power. He has given you authority over them all. You are the head of gold. 2:39 Now after you another kingdom will arise, one inferior to yours. Then a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule in all the earth. 2:40 Then there will be a fourth kingdom, one strong like iron. Just like iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything, and as iron breaks in pieces all of these metals, so it will break in pieces and crush the others. 2:41 In that you were seeing feet and toes partly of wet clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom. Some of the strength of iron will be in it, for you saw iron mixed with wet clay. 2:42 In that the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, the latter stages of this kingdom will be partly strong and partly fragile. 2:43 And in that you saw iron mixed with wet clay, so people will be mixed with one another without adhering to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay. 2:44 In the days of those kings the God of heaven will raise up an everlasting kingdom that will not be destroyed and a kingdom that will not be left to another people. It will break in pieces and bring about the demise of all these kingdoms. But it will stand forever. 2:45 You saw that a stone was cut from a mountain, but not by human hands; it smashed the iron, bronze, clay, silver, and gold into pieces. The great God has made known to the king what will occur in the future. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is reliable.”

The first apocalyptic vision broke with the classical form somewhat. It wasn’t the prophet of God who had the vision, but a pagan king. Instead of an angel providing the prophet with an interpretation, it was the prophet who provided the pagan king an explanation, although we probably wouldn’t be straying far from the truth if we presumed that an angel gave Daniel the vision and explanation the night before.

The central symbol in this vision was a large statue divided into four sections. Each was explicitly identified as a kingdom. Only the first was explicitly identified, as Nebuchadnezzar (i.e., the Babylonian Empire — note the interchangeability of the king with the kingdom, here and elsewhere). The others were not identified, but they were terminated with a fifth kingdom, the Kingdom of God, symbolized by a stone that destroyed the statue, became a mountain and filled the whole earth.

By comparing the scheme of four kingdoms followed by the Kingdom of God with analogous symbols in other visions in Daniel (see the comparison chart below), we will be able to positively identify the other three kingdoms.

2.2 Daniel 7:2-14, 17-18, 23-27 -- The Four Beasts

Daniel has a Vision of Four Animals Coming up from the Sea

... Da 7:2 Daniel explained: “I was watching in my vision during the night as the four winds of the sky were stirring up the great sea. 7:3 Then four large beasts came up from the sea; they were different from one another.

7:4 “The first one was like a lion with eagles’ wings. As I watched, its wings were pulled off and it was lifted up from the ground. It was made to stand on two feet like a human being, and a human mind was given to it.

7:5 “Then a second beast appeared, like a bear. It was raised up on one side, and there were three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, ‘Get up and devour much flesh!’

7:6 “After these things, as I was watching, another beast like a leopard appeared, with four bird-like wings on its back. This beast had four heads, and ruling authority was given to it.

7:7 “After these things, as I was watching in the night visions a fourth beast appeared – one dreadful, terrible, and very strong. It had two large rows of iron teeth. It devoured and crushed, and anything that was left it trampled with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that came before it, and it had ten horns.

7:8 “As I was contemplating the horns, another horn – a small one – came up between them, and three of the former horns were torn out by the roots to make room for it. This horn had eyes resembling human eyes and a mouth speaking arrogant things.

7:9 “While I was watching,
thrones were set up,
and the Ancient of Days took his seat.
His attire was white like snow;
the hair of his head was like lamb’s wool.

His throne was ablaze with fire
and its wheels were all aflame.
7:10 A river of fire was streaming forth
and proceeding from his presence.
Many thousands were ministering to him;
Many tens of thousands stood ready to serve him.
The court convened
and the books were opened.

7:11 “Then I kept on watching because of the arrogant words of the horn that was speaking. I was watching until the beast was killed and its body destroyed and thrown into the flaming fire. 7:12 As for the rest of the beasts, their ruling authority had already been removed, though they were permitted to go on living for a time and a season. 7:13 I was watching in the night visions,

“And with the clouds of the sky
one like a son of man was approaching.
He went up to the Ancient of Days
and was escorted before him.

7:14 To him was given ruling authority, honor, and sovereignty.
All peoples, nations, and language groups were serving him.
His authority is eternal and will not pass away.
His kingdom will not be destroyed.

An Angel Interprets Daniel's Vision

... 7:17 'These large beasts, which are four in number, represent four kings who will arise from the earth. 7:18 The holy ones of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will take possession of the kingdom forever and ever.'

...

7:23 "This is what he told me:
'The fourth beast means that there will be a fourth kingdom on earth
that will differ from all the other kingdoms.

It will devour all the earth
and will trample and crush it.

7:24 The ten horns
mean that ten kings will arise from that kingdom.
Another king will arise after them,
but he will be different from the earlier ones.

He will humiliate three kings.
7:25 He will speak words against the Most High.
He will harass the holy ones of the Most High continually.
His intention will be to change times established by law.
They will be delivered into his hand
For a time, times, and half a time.

7:26 But the court will convene, and his ruling authority will be removed –
destroyed and abolished forever!

7:27 Then the kingdom, authority,
and greatness of the kingdoms under all of heaven
will be delivered to the people of the holy ones of the Most High.
His kingdom is an eternal kingdom;
all authorities will serve him and obey him.'

The second apocalyptic vision was purely of classical form. Daniel had a vision of four beasts rising out of the sea, then an angel gave a partial explanation (that each beast was a king), though without explicitly identifying the kingdoms.

The identity of the first beast is pretty clear: Babylon. The winged lion image was common in Babylonian iconography¹. The reference to the beast being given a human mind and standing up like a human being was certainly an allusion to Nebuchadnezzar's mental illness and recovery (Daniel 4). The sequence of kingdoms was terminated by the Kingdom of God. As both envisioned a sequence of four kingdoms, starting with Babylon, and terminated by the Kingdom of God, we may logically conclude that the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th kingdoms of each vision also corresponded. This is further confirmed by the fact that the fourth kingdom in each vision had a number of parallels: both used the iron image, the feet image, referred to crushing, and involved the number ten (toes and horns respectively).

1.

The vision of the statue provided few details for the second and third kingdoms, so there weren't any parallels readily identifiable for them, but the process of elimination should make us confident they corresponded between the two visions. The second kingdom would seem to have been the Medo-Persian Empire. That the bear was raised up (taller?) on one side would symbolize the dominance of the Persians over the Medes, and the three ribs would then symbolize the early victories that made the empire into a 'super-power'. The third beast would then have to have been the Greek Empire of Alexander the Great and the four kingdoms it split into after his death, the later symbolized by the four heads and wings.

Many interpreters split the Medo-Persian empire into separate Median and Persian empires¹ (usually assuming that the real author of Daniel erred in his understanding of history when he made the prophecies up). The effect is to understand the fourth beast as representing the Seleucid Kingdom of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. It was during his reign that these skeptics believe Daniel was written, and thus must not have any accurate "prophecy" past that point in time. They hold that the author was predicting the defeat of Antiochus followed immediately by a Messianic era, that of course didn't actually materialize. The third vision demonstrates the errors of the skeptical interpretations, and confirms the traditional interpretation of the four kingdoms.

We'll examine identity the fourth kingdom in more detail below.

2.3 Daniel 8:1-14, 19-26 — The Two Beasts

Daniel Has a Vision of a Goat and a Ram

Da 8:11 In the third year of King Belshazzar's reign, a vision appeared to me, Daniel, after the one that had appeared to me previously. 8:2 In this vision I saw myself in Susa the citadel, which is located in the province of Elam. In the vision I saw myself at the Ulai Canal. 8:3 I looked up and saw a ram with two horns standing at the canal. Its two horns were both long, but one was longer than the other. The longer one was coming up after the shorter one. 8:4 I saw that the ram was butting westward, northward, and southward. No animal was able to stand before it, and there was none who could deliver from its power. It did as it pleased and acted arrogantly.

8:5 While I was contemplating all this, a male goat was coming from the west over the surface of all the land without touching the ground. This goat had a conspicuous horn between its eyes. 8:6 It came to the two-horned ram that I had seen standing beside the canal and rushed against it with raging strength. 8:7 I saw it approaching the ram. It went into a fit of rage against the ram and struck it and broke off its two horns. The ram had no ability to resist it. The goat hurled the ram to the ground and trampled it. No one could deliver the ram from its power. 8:8 The male goat acted even more arrogantly. But no sooner had the large horn become strong than it was broken, and there arose four conspicuous horns in its place, extending toward the four winds of the sky.

1. Laymon. *Interpreter's*, for example. P. 440 identifies the 2nd through 4th parts of the statue as the Medes (which he points out as an error on Daniel's part since the Medes were contemporary of Babylon), the Persian Empire, and the Macedonian-Greek Empire without even considering alternatives. P. 445 make the same identifications for the four beasts, noting that the second beast "represents the Median Empire, which the author [of Daniel] mistakenly believed had savagely torn at Babylon" and struggles with guesses for the meaning of the four heads of the third beast which similarly don't fit the Persian Empire.

8:9 From one of them came a small horn. But it grew to be very big, toward the south and the east and toward the beautiful land. 8:10 It grew so big it reached the army of heaven, and it brought about the fall of some of the army and some of the stars to the ground, where it trampled them. 8:11 It also acted arrogantly against the Prince of the army, from whom the daily sacrifice was removed and whose sanctuary was thrown down. 8:12 The army was given over, along with the daily sacrifice, in the course of his sinful rebellion. It hurled truth to the ground and enjoyed success.

8:13 Then I heard a holy one speaking. Another holy one said to the one who was speaking, "To what period of time does the vision pertain – this vision concerning the daily sacrifice and the destructive act of rebellion and the giving over of both the sanctuary and army to be trampled?" 8:14 He said to me, "To 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be put right again."

An Angel Interprets Daniel's Vision

...

8:19 Then he said, "I am going to inform you about what will happen in the latter time of wrath, for the vision pertains to the appointed time of the end. 8:20 The ram that you saw with the two horns stands for the kings of Media and Persia. 8:21 The male goat is the king of Greece, and the large horn between its eyes is the first king. 8:22 The horn that was broken and in whose place there arose four others stands for four kingdoms that will arise from his nation, though they will not have his strength. 8:23 Toward the end of their rule, when rebellious acts are complete, a rash and deceitful king will arise. 8:24 His power will be great, but it will not be by his strength alone. He will cause terrible destruction. He will be successful in what he undertakes. He will destroy powerful people and the people of the holy ones. 8:25 By his treachery he will succeed through deceit. He will have an arrogant attitude, and he will destroy many who are unaware of his schemes. He will rise up against the Prince of princes, yet he will be broken apart – but not by human agency. 8:26 The vision of the evenings and mornings that was told to you is correct. But you should seal up the vision, for it refers to a time many days from now."

This vision had only two beasts representing two of the four kingdoms of the previous visions, although different species were involved. The first beast was a ram and had several parallels with the second beast of the Daniel 7 vision. The ram of this vision had two horns, with one longer than the other, and corresponded to the bear of the previous vision being raised up on one side (that is, one side being higher than the other). The ram butted in three directions, corresponding to the three ribs in the bear's mouth.

The interpretation phase of the apocalyptic vision tells us explicitly that this beast represented the Medo-Persian Empire. Interpreting the second and third beast as separate Median and Persian empires as is popular in skeptical circles is simply not an option. Persia dominated the Medians in the empire, hence one side of the bear being raised up and one horn being longer than the other. The three ribs/three directions represented the conquests of Cyrus to establish his empire: The Medes in 550 BC, Lydia in 547 BC, and Babylon in 539 BC.¹

1. Young, T. Cuyler. "Cyrus" in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Many interpreters, rather than citing the defeat of Media, look to Egypt, which was conquered in 525 BC, as the third rib. This was by a later king however. I think it better to look to just the activities of the founding king.

The goat of this vision corresponded to the leopard of the previous vision. Although the goat initially had a single horn, it was broken and replaced with four horns, corresponding to the four heads and wings of the leopard. The interpretation tells us the first horn represented the king of Greece, and that the four horns that replaced it represented the four kingdoms that arose from his nation. The allusion to Alexander the Great, and the four kingdoms headed by his generals after his death is clear. A single beast represented both phases of the Greek kingdom in both visions.

The vision went on to speak of a small horn growing from one of the four. The allusion to Antiochus IV Epiphanes desecrating the temple and halting sacrifice for a period is clear. See below on Daniel 11-12 and 9.

Thus we can see that Daniel's vision represented the Medo-Persian Empire by a single beast, and the Greek Empire and its successors by a single beast, and these corresponded to the second and third beasts of the vision of chapter 7.

An interesting problem of interpretation is what does the phrase "the time of the end" mean in Daniel. On the face of it, one would expect it to mean eschatological times. However in Daniel 8:19, the angel said "the vision pertains to the appointed time of the end", yet the vision only dealt with the second and third kingdoms. There was yet the fourth kingdom and the Kingdom of God. Here, "end" seems to have referred only to the conclusion of specific divine sovereign plans, and not the end of "everything" (eschatology).

2.4 Daniel 11-12 -- The Battles of Kings

This vision deviated significantly from the apocalyptic pattern — it only had the interpretation phase. Daniel 10:1 indicates there was a vision behind it, but it was not recorded in Scripture.

For the most part, it is outside the scope of this study to examine the details of the fulfillment of these predictions. We are interested primarily in how it relates to the other visions. Only the briefest outline of the correspondences between the vision and secular history will be given here.¹

The Angel Gives a Message to Daniel

Da 11:2b "Three more kings will arise for Persia. Then a fourth king will be unusually rich, more so than all who preceded him. When he has amassed power through his riches, he will stir up everyone against the kingdom of Greece. 11:3 Then a powerful king will arise, exercising great authority and doing as he pleases. 11:4 Shortly after his rise to power, his kingdom will be broken up and distributed toward the four winds of the sky – but not to his posterity or with the authority he exercised, for his kingdom will be uprooted and distributed to others besides these.

Daniel 11:2 predicted three more kings of Persia, then a fourth who would enter in conflict with Greece. These are readily identified as Cyrus successors: Cambyses (530-522 BC), Pseudo-Smerdis (522 BC), Darius I Hystaspas (522-486 BC) and Xerxes I (486-

1. *New Geneva Study Bible*.

465 BC). The correspondence here is with the second kingdom (the Medo-Persian Empire).

There were more kings of Persia after Xerxes, but the vision jumps to the third kingdom. Daniel 11:3-4 clearly referred to Alexander the Great (340-323 BC) and the breakup of his kingdom into four after his death. Note that there was a little over a century gap between verses 2 and 3. Verses 5-35 predicted various exploits between “the king of the south” and “the king of the north”. These were not individual single kings, but rather the Ptolomaic and Seleucid dynasties of Egypt and Syria respectively. The individual kings are readily identifiable from secular history. Note that the text itself gives little or no hint when the identity of “the king of the south” or “the king of the north” changes from one individual to another. Little distinction was made between the individual king, the office, and the kingdom in traditional despotic monarchies.

Da 11:5 “Then the king of the south and one of his subordinates will grow strong. His subordinate will resist him and will rule a kingdom greater than his. [NET]

The king of south=Ptolemy I Soter, 322-285 BC; his subordinate=Seleucus I Nicator, 312-280 BC.

Da 11:6 After some years have passed, they will form an alliance. Then the daughter of the king of the south will come to the king of the north to make an agreement, but she will not retain her power, nor will he continue in his strength. She, together with the one who brought her, her child, and her benefactor will all be delivered over at that time. [NET]

Daughter=Berenice, daughter of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, 285-246 BC; alliance (c. 250 BC) between Antiochus II Theos (261-246 BC) and Ptolemy II.

Da 11:7 “There will arise in his place one from her family line who will come against their army and will enter the stronghold of the king of the north and will move against them successfully. 11:8 He will also take their gods into captivity to Egypt, along with their cast images and prized utensils of silver and gold. Then he will withdraw for some years from the king of the north. [NET]

Ptolemy III Euergetes, 246-221 BC (brother of Berenice).

Da 11:9 Then the king of the north will advance against the empire of the king of the south, but will withdraw to his own land. [NET]

Seleucus II Callinicus (246-226 BC), unsuccessful campaign against Ptolemies 240 BC

Da 11:10 His sons will wage war, mustering a large army which will advance like an overflowing river and carrying the battle all the way to the enemy’s fortress. [NET]

His sons=Seleucus III Ceraunus (226-223 BC), Antiochus III the Great (223-187 BC); his fortress=Raphia (major battle in 217 BC).

Da 11:11 “Then the king of the south will be enraged and will march out to fight against the king of the north, who will also muster a large army, but that army will be delivered into his hand. 11:12 When the army is taken away, the king of the south will become arrogant. He will be responsible for the death of thousands and thousands of people, but he will not continue to prevail. [NET]

King of the south=Ptolemy IV Philopator, 221-203 BC; king of the north=Antiochus III.

Da 11:13 For the king of the north will again muster an army, one larger than before. At the end of some years he will advance with a huge army and enormous supplies.

11:14 "In those times many will oppose the king of the south. Those who are violent among your own people will rise up in confirmation of the vision, but they will falter. [NET]

Antiochus III in alliance with Philip V of Macedon; Ptolemy IV died under mysterious circumstances, succeeded by 4-year-old Ptolemy V Epiphanes (203-181 BC).

Da 11:15 Then the king of the north will advance and will build siege mounds and capture a well-fortified city. The forces of the south will not prevail, not even his finest contingents. They will have no strength to prevail. 11:16 The one advancing against him will do as he pleases, and no one will be able to stand before him. He will prevail in the beautiful land, and its annihilation will be within his power. [NET]

Antiochus III's defeat over General Scopos in 198 BC - end of Ptolemaic rule in Palestine.

Da 11:17 His intention will be to come with the strength of his entire kingdom, and he will form alliances. He will give the king of the south a daughter in marriage in order to destroy the kingdom, but it will not turn out to his advantage. [NET]

Cleopatra given in marriage to Ptolemy V by Antiochus III, sought Roman help against her father.

Da 11:18 Then he will turn his attention to the coastal regions and will capture many of them. But a commander will bring his shameful conduct to a halt; in addition, he will make him pay for his shameful conduct. 11:19 He will then turn his attention to the fortresses of his own land, but he will stumble and fall, not to be found again. [NET]

Roman general Lucius Cornelius Scipio defeats Antiochus III, takes son (Antiochus IV) hostage to Rome.

Da 11:20 There will arise after him one who will send out an exactor of tribute to enhance the splendor of the kingdom, but after a few days he will be destroyed, though not in anger or battle. [NET]

Seleucus IV Philopator (187-175 BC).

Da 11:21 "Then there will arise in his place a despicable person to whom the royal honor has not been rightfully conferred. He will come on the scene in a time of prosperity and will seize the kingdom through deceit. [NET]

Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 BC), but Seleucus IV had son who was legitimate heir.

Da 11:22 Armies will be suddenly swept away in defeat before him; both they and a covenant leader will be destroyed. 11:23 After entering into an alliance with him, he will behave treacherously; he will ascend to power with only a small force. 11:24 In a time of prosperity for the most productive areas of the province he will come and accomplish what neither his fathers nor their fathers accomplished. He will distribute

loot, spoils, and property to his followers, and he will devise plans against fortified cities, but not for long. [NET]

Covenant leader=high priest Onias III, assassinated by supporters of Antiochus IV in 171 BC.

Da 11:25 He will rouse his strength and enthusiasm against the king of the south with a large army. The king of the south will wage war with a large and very powerful army, but he will not be able to prevail because of the plans devised against him. 11:26 Those who share the king's fine food will attempt to destroy him, and his army will be swept away; many will be killed in battle. 11:27 These two kings, their minds filled with evil intentions, will trade lies with one another at the same table. But it will not succeed, for there is still an end at the appointed time. 11:28 Then the king of the north will return to his own land with much property. His mind will be set against the holy covenant. He will take action, and then return to his own land. 11:29 At an appointed time he will again invade the south, but this latter visit will not turn out the way the former one did. [NET]

King of the south=Ptolemy VI Philometer.

Da 11:30 The ships of Kittim will come against him, leaving him disheartened. He will turn back and direct his indignation against the holy covenant. He will return and honor those who forsake the holy covenant. 11:31 His forces will rise up and profane the fortified sanctuary, stopping the daily sacrifice. In its place they will set up the abomination that causes desolation. 11:32 Then with smooth words he will defile those who have rejected the covenant. But the people who are loyal to their God will act valiantly. 11:33 These who are wise among the people will teach the masses. However, they will fall by the sword and by the flame, and they will be imprisoned and plundered for some time. 11:34 When they stumble, they will be granted some help. But many will unite with them deceitfully. 11:35 Even some of the wise will stumble, resulting in their refinement, purification, and cleansing until the time of the end, for it is still for the appointed time. [NET]

Ships of Kittim=Roman armies under Gaius Popilius Laenas who forced Antiochus IV to retreat from Egypt.

Of particular interest is Antiochus IV Epiphanes in Daniel 11:31 ff, who precipitated the Maccabean revolt when he banned the Jewish religion, desecrated the temple, and halted the sacrifices (temporarily).

Da 11:36 "Then the king will do as he pleases. He will exalt and magnify himself above every deity and he will utter presumptuous things against the God of gods. He will succeed until the time of wrath is completed, for what has been decreed must occur. 11:37 He will not respect the gods of his fathers – not even the god loved by women. He will not respect any god; he will elevate himself above them all. 11:38 What he will honor is a god of fortresses – a god his fathers did not acknowledge he will honor with gold, silver, valuable stones, and treasured commodities. 11:39 He will attack1 mighty fortresses, aided by a foreign deity. To those who recognize him he will grant considerable honor. He will place them in authority over many people, and he will parcel out land for a price.

11:40 "At the time of the end the king of the south will attack1 him. Then the king of the north will storm against him with chariots, horsemen, and a large armada of ships. He will invade lands, passing through them like an overflowing river. 11:41 Then he will

enter the beautiful land. Many will fall, but these will escape: Edom, Moab, and the Ammonite leadership. 11:42 He will extend his power against other lands; the land of Egypt will not escape. 11:43 He will have control over the hidden stores of gold and silver, as well as all the treasures of Egypt. Libyans and Ethiopians will submit to him. 11:44 But reports will trouble him from the east and north, and he will set out in a tremendous rage to destroy and wipe out many. 11:45 He will pitch his royal tents between the seas toward the beautiful holy mountain. But he will come to his end, with no one to help him.

Up through 11:35, the correspondence with the third beast with its division into four kingdoms is clear and the identification with historical persons is straightforward. Daniel 11:36-45 present special difficulties though. Verse 36 reads “Then the king will do as he pleases...” without specifying “king of the north”, “king of the south”, or “king of whatever”. There are three views of how to interpret this. The Dispensational view considers him to be the king of the north. In verse 40, “At the time of the end the king of the south will attack him”, the pronoun “him” would refer to the king of the north being attacked by the king of the south, and “then the king of the north will storm against him”, the pronoun “him” would refer to the king of the south being stormed against by the king of the north. In this view, the king of the north will be the eschatological Antichrist. That is, the sequence of events predicted suddenly jumped forward thousands of years. (But, for a contrary meaning of “the time of the end”, see above on chapter 8.)

The skeptical view also treats “the king” in verse 36 as the king of the north. In this view, the pseudo-prophet has “predicted” the events leading up to his own time during the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. He then proceeded to try to guess what was next, but got the circumstances of Antiochus’ defeat wrong.

While it is possible grammatically, it is also awkward. Every single other reference to the kings of the north and south included the “north” or “south” specification. Since chapter 12 clearly looks forward to the Kingdom of God, and we’ve already seen that the Greek kingdoms were the third beast, the skeptical view requires us to skip the fourth kingdom. Thus, the most reasonable view is that “the king” in 11:36 was neither the king of the north nor the south, but was a separate king, in conflict with both the other kings (both pronouns in verse 40 would refer back to this third king). This is the most straightforward reading of the passage. The king would then correspond to the fourth beast. The obvious candidate for historical fulfillment of the fourth kingdom is Rome.¹

Da 12:1 “At that time Michael,
the great prince who watches over your people,
will arise.
There will be a time of distress
unlike any other from the nation’s beginning
up to that time.
But at that time your own people,
all those whose names are found written in the book,
will escape.
12:2 Many of those who sleep

1. Calvin. *Commentary on Daniel*

in the dusty ground will awake –
some to everlasting life,
and others to shame and everlasting abhorrence.
12:3 But the wise will shine
like the brightness of the heavenly expanse.
And those bringing many to righteousness
will be like the stars forever and ever.

In chapter 12, verse 1's description of a time of distress is similar to Jesus' description of suffering in the Olivet Discourse (see esp. Mark 13:19), which predicted the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. Verse 2 is difficult. It says "Many of those who sleep in the dusty ground [ie, are dead] will awake". This is an obvious resurrection reference, but the difficulty is that it refers only to "many of" the dead, not all of the dead. "Many" doesn't necessarily even imply a majority of the dead. Some translations gloss over this by translating "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake" [NIV] or "And the multitude of those sleeping in the dust of the ground do awake" [YLT], but most translations stick to what the Hebrew text actually says. If Daniel wasn't referring to the universal resurrection of all the dead, then what might he have been referring to? Does the Bible anywhere teach about a pre-eschatological resurrection of a portion of the dead? Yes! Matthew 27:50-53¹ says:

Mt 27:50 Then Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and gave up his spirit. 27:51 Just then the temple curtain was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks were split apart. 27:52 And tombs were opened, and the bodies of many saints who had died were raised. 27:53 (They came out of the tombs after his resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.) [NET]

Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of God was never about a political kingdom, but a spiritual one. He proclaimed it as imminent at the beginning of his ministry ("Repent! For the kingdom of heaven is near" [Matthew 4:17], "But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has already overtaken you" [Luke 11:20]), and described it as an spiritual rather than political reality:

Lk 17:20 Now at one point the Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God was coming, so he answered, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed, 17:21 nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is in your midst."² [NET]

2.5 Daniel 9:24-27 — Seventy Weeks

This vision, like Daniel 11-12, did not have an account of visual imagery, but just an Angel conveying the message directly to Daniel. There are a number of translation and interpretation difficulties with the passage that I want to briefly overview here.

Da 9:24 "Seventy weeks have been determined concerning your people and your holy city

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1. One might also look at Revelation 20:4, but interpretation of Revelation is difficult and well beyond the scope of this essay. See "The First Resurrection and Second Death (Revelation 20:4-6)" on page 265.
 2. "Traditionally "within you", but as he was addressing Pharisees in opposition to him, he hardly meant within them as individuals, but rather within them as a group: among you." [NET note]

to put an end to rebellion,
to bring sin to completion,
to atone for iniquity,
to bring in perpetual righteousness,
to seal up the prophetic vision,
and to anoint a most holy place.

Contextually, Daniel had just prayed for the ending of 70 years captivity, as had been prophesied by Jeremiah. Daniel was told that there are yet 70 “weeks” (literally “sevens”; the usual word for “week” was not the word used here) to be fulfilled. These “sevens” are usually understood to be weeks of years (ie, seven years). Something other than a period of 490 24-hour days seems to be what was in view here. (Much ink has been spilled in attempting to understand what each phrase in this verse means, but that is beyond the scope of this paper. See the Bibliography for a sampling of literature on the topic.)

9:25 So know and understand:
from the issuing of the command to restore and rebuild
Jerusalem until an anointed one, a prince arrives,
there will be a period of seven weeks and sixty-two weeks.
It will again be built, with plaza and moat,
but in distressful times.

The seventy “weeks” were split into three periods: 7, 62, and 1 “week(s)”. The significance of the split between the 7 and the 62 “weeks” is enigmatic. Many interpreters attach the 62 “weeks” to the following sentence, having “an anointed one¹, a prince” appear after 7 “weeks”, and the city built after an additional 62 “weeks”. But the anointed one would still around after the 62 “weeks” (over 4 centuries later!) in the next verse. Unless the 70 “weeks” are actually calendar weeks, this is very unlikely.

A second problem is that verse 25 seems to refer to one person, “an anointed one, a prince”, while in verse 26, the anointed one and the prince appear to be two separate people. It would seem a single letter, *waw*, that looks very similar to the adjacent letters, *het* and *nun*, has dropped from the text (מְשִׁיחַ וְנָגִיד vs מְשִׁיחַ נָגִיד). Since they enter the picture after the 62 “weeks”, it is the reconstruction of Jerusalem that would appear to be what is happening after the 7 “weeks”.

Now, let’s review the history to see when these things occurred.

538 BC - Cyrus permitted the Jews to return to build the temple, but not Jerusalem (Ezra 1:2-4). People settled in the surrounding ancestral cities (Ezra 2:1)

538 BC - 520 BC - Temple construction began but was frustrated by the Samaritans until the second year of Darius (Ezra 4:5)

520 BC - Under the urging of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, the temple construction began again (Ezra 4:24). Note that Ezra 4:6-23 is chronologically displaced - more on this below at 486 BC.

516 BC - The temple was completed and dedicated in the 6th year of Darius (Ezra 6:15).

1. *messiah*

ca 487 BC - Reconstruction of the city of Jerusalem began shortly before the following event (q.v.). **This was the beginning of the 70 “weeks”.**

486 BC - When Xerxes began to reign, the Samaritans filed an accusation against the Jews (Ezra 4:6). This was evidently the same accusation as the one that would be filed in the reign of Artaxerxes (464 BC), accusing the Jews of planning revolt by rebuilding the fortifications of Jerusalem (Ezra 4:7, 12). The reconstruction must have begun shortly beforehand.

464 BC - The Samaritans protested to Artaxerxes and halted construction of the city (Ezra 4:7-23). That this material is in fact chronologically misplaced¹ is demonstrated by the difference in subject matter (construction of the city vs. construction of the temple) and the fact that Zechariah dates the resumption of construction of the temple to 70 years after the destruction of Jerusalem (Zechariah 1:12, 7:5), putting it in the reign of Darius I before the events of Ezra 4:6-23 instead of the reign of Darius II afterward.

458 BC - Ezra came to Jerusalem in the 7th year of Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:7)

445 BC - Nehemiah came to Jerusalem with authorization to rebuild Jerusalem in the 20th year of Artaxerxes. The walls were completed in 52 days (Nehemiah 6:15). After that, the city was resettled.

ca. 438 BC - After 49 years (**the end of the first 7 “sevens”**), the city was finished

433 BC - Nehemiah returned to Artaxerxes in his 32nd year.

ca. 4 BC - This date is 62 times 7 years after 487 BC. Anyone answering to the title of “Messiah” show up around then? **This brings us to the end of the 62 “sevens”.**

This interpretation of the first 69 “weeks” works out quite nicely (and precisely!) without resorting to “prophetic years” and other such questionable devices one encounters in many other attempts to interpret them. See the Bibliography for these other interpretations.

Da 9:26 Now after the sixty-two weeks,
an anointed one will be cut off and have nothing.
As for the city and the sanctuary,
the people of the coming prince will destroy them.
But his end will come speedily like a flood.
Until the end of the war that has been decreed
there will be desolations.

Many things take place after the 62 “weeks”. A messiah² and a prince arrive. The messiah is cut off. The city and sanctuary (temple) are destroyed. the sacrifices come to a halt. Dispensationalist have long held there to be a gap between the end of the 62 “weeks” and the final “week”. I’m inclined to agree. But the final week is not eschatological. It is the Jewish-Roman war, which lasted 7 years, and in the middle of which, Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. The prince would have been the Roman emperor.

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1. Perhaps the author simply wanted to gather all accounts of opposition together without regard to chronology.
 2. A Hebrew word meaning “anointed one”.

Da 9:27 He will confirm a covenant with many for one week.
But in the middle of that week
he will bring sacrifices and offerings to a halt.
On the wing of a abomination will come one who destroys,
until the decreed end is poured out on the one who destroys.”

Jesus, in the Olivet Discourse (Mk 13 and parallels), cited the desolating abomination¹ in Daniel (Mark 13:14, Luke 21:20-21, Matthew 24:15-16) and Luke’s version explicitly identifies it as Jerusalem being surrounded by armies (ie, the Roman armies), leaving no doubt as to how this passage was interpreted by Jesus.²

3.0 Comparison

TABLE 1.

Daniel’s Visions

Daniel 2	Daniel 7	Daniel 8	Daniel 11-12	Daniel 9
2:31-32 Statue; head of gold; 2:37-38 Represents Nebuchadnezzar	7:2-4 Beast like a lion with eagles’ wings, wings pulled off and made to stand like a human being and human mind given to it; 7:17 Each beast represents a king	8:1-4 Ram with two horns, one longer than the other, Persia	11:2 Next four kings of butting west, north, and south; 8:19-20 time of the end, ram with two horns is kings of Media and Persia	
2:32 Chest and arms of silver; 2:39 An inferior kingdom after the first	7:5 Beast like a bear, ribs in its mouth, told to devour much flesh; 7:17 Each beast represents a king			

1. “abomination that causes desolation” Dan 9:27 NIV.
2. See “Abomination Of Desolation (Mark 13:14-20)” on page 151.

Comparison

TABLE 1.

Daniel's Visions

Daniel 2 2:32 Belly and thighs of brass; 2:39 A third kingdom	Daniel 7 7:6 Beast like a leopard, four wings, four heads, ruling authority; 7:17 Each beast represents a king	Daniel 8 8:5-14 Goat from the west, horn between eyes, defeated ram, horn broken, replaced with four horns, extending to the four winds, from one horn a small horn grew, great airs, halted sacrifice, desolating transgression, then sanctuary vindicated; 8:21-26 Goat is king of Greece, single horn is first king, four horns are four kings arising from first king's nation, little horn is rash and duplicitous king, will rise up against the Prince of princes, but will be broken	Daniel 11-12 11:3-35 Powerful king, kingdom distributed to others, exploits of the kings of the south and north	Daniel 9 9:24 Seventy "weeks"
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TABLE 1. Daniel's Visions

Daniel 2	Daniel 7	Daniel 8	Daniel 11-12	Daniel 9
<p>2:33 Legs of iron, feet of iron mixed with clay; 2:40-43 A fourth kingdom, strength of iron to break and crush others, divided, toes part iron and part clay indicate part strong and part weak, people mixed and not adhering to one another</p> <p>2:34-35 Stone cut without human hands stuck statue and pulverized it, stone becomes large mountain filling entire earth; 2:44-45 God will bring an everlasting kingdom</p>	<p>7:7-8 Dreadful beast, teeth of iron, devoured and crushed and trampled with its feet, different from previous beasts, ten horns, another horn comes up and tears out three of the previous horns, horn has human eyes and arrogant mouth; 7:17 Each beast represents a king; 7:23-25 fourth kingdom different from all the others, devour, trample, and crush the earth, ten horns are ten kingdoms, another king arises who humiliates three others, speaks words against Most High, harasses holy ones who are delivered to him time, times, and half a time 7:9-14 Theophany, beast destroyed, son of man approaches Ancient of Days with the clouds of the sky, given eternal kingdom; 7:18 holy ones receive eternal kingdom; 7:26-27 fourth kings ruling authority removed, kingdom delivered to the holy ones, eternal kingdom</p>	<p>8:1-17 Vision of the chariot and the four horses, the king of the north and the king of the south, the king of the north attacks the king of the south, the king of the south escapes, Egypt does not, He will come to an end.</p> <p>12:1-13 Time of distress, many of the dead awake, book to be sealed, enigmatic time references</p>	<p>11:36-45 A king exalts himself above Deity, worships foreign god, god of fortresses, attacked by kings of north and south, the king invades the land of beauty, Edom, Moab and Ammonite leadership escape, Egypt does not, He will come to an end.</p>	<p>9:25-26 Messiah and prince come after the 7+62 weeks, sacrifice ended, desolating abomination</p>

4.0 The Kingdoms

Now we've looked at each vision one at a time and related it to the others briefly. We'll now recap by examining each kingdom in turn.

4.1 First Kingdom — Babylon

In the vision of the statue, Daniel explicitly identified the first of the four kingdoms (the head of gold) as Babylon. Allusions to Babylonian iconography and Nebuchadnezzar are evident in the lion, the first beast of the vision of four beasts, also. Babylon was not dealt with in the remaining visions. This is because they date to near the end of the Babylonian Empire (Daniel 8:1) or to the Medo-Persian period (Daniel 9:1, 11:1): Babylon was waning or gone then.

4.2 Second Kingdom — Medo-Persia

The chest and arms of silver were not identified in the vision of the statue: only that it would be a kingdom that would follow the Babylonian kingdom. It corresponded to the bear, the second beast in the vision of four kingdoms, and the ram, the first beast in the vision of two beasts. The ram was explicitly identified as the Medo-Persian Empire. The parallels between the bear and the ram confirm that they were symbolizing the same kingdom.

The ram had two horns, one longer than the other, representing the Persian domination of the Medians; the bear was raised up on one side (a rather odd posture as a bear would normally be thought of as raising up on its hind legs) representing the same imbalance.

The ram was butting in three directions while the bear held three ribs in its mouth; these would appear to symbolize the conquests of Cyrus to establish his empire.

The vision of the battles between kings briefly mentioned the Medo-Persian empire by enumerating four kings before the Persians enter into conflict with the Greeks. At that point, the vision skipped the remainder of the Persian period, jumping directly to Alexander the Great.

Clearly, we can't split the Median and Persian empires into two in the visions. Not only is it historically inaccurate (what Median kingdom there was had been concurrent with the Babylonian empire, not its successor) but it is forced onto the text only with great violence to its meaning and integrity.

4.3 Third Kingdom — The Greek Empires

The parallels between the third beast, the leopard, of the vision of four beasts, and the second beast, the goat, of the vision of two beasts, make their identity secure. The goat was explicitly identified as the Greek Empire which was divided between four subsequent kings. The allusion to Alexander the Great and the division of his empire among four of his generals is unmistakable. The leopard with four heads clearly symbolized the same division into four simultaneous leaders. The vision of the battles between kings provided remarkable details of the interactions between two of them (Syria and Egypt).

4.4 Fourth Kingdom — The Roman Empire

The fourth beast was not identified in scripture: neither its species nor its national identity. Rather we identify it partially by the process of elimination (it is the kingdom between the Greeks and Christ) and partly by discovering parallels between Rome and the symbols in the visions.

The fourth beast was different from all that came before it (7:7). Further it had ten horns at the same time (7:7). The horns did not represent a series of kings, but contemporaneous rulers. Three of the horns are supplanted by an additional horn (7:8). Rome was different from all previous empires in that it was a Republic. Instead, it was ruled by a senate. The supplanting of three horns by one represented the transition from the government head being a triumvirate to being a single emperor. It is no coincidence that the

ten toes of the statue in the first vision are explicitly mentioned. They represented the same thing.

Skeptics try to equate the eleventh horn with Antiochus IV Epiphanes, but his circumstances ill fit the description of multiple contemporaneous rulers implied by the horns. Compare this with the horn symbolism in the vision of two beasts where the first beast had two horns of different size representing the imbalance between the Medes and Persians, and the second beast had one horn, which was replaced by four horns, representing Alexander the Great, and after his death, the four contemporaneous kingdom created by his four generals.

Dispensationalists propose a gap between the third and fourth kingdoms not alluded to in scripture and regard the fourth kingdom as a future kingdom of the Antichrist. But even they often regard that kingdom as a Roman Empire reborn. The text provides no such hint of a multi-millennia gap. Rather, we must side with Calvin who clearly saw the Roman Empire reflected through out the description of the fourth empire.¹

4.5 The Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God is not an eschatological concept, limited to a future millennium with Christ ruling physically on the earth. As noted earlier, Christ preached an imminent Kingdom of God.

In the vision of the statue, the stone that struck the statue then changed into a mountain that filled the whole earth (Daniel 2:35). This more aptly matches the post-millennial expectation of Christianity eventually spreading over the whole earth through a more gradual process than the cataclysmic advent expected by Dispensationalists or even amillennialists.

In the vision of four beasts, the theophany of Daniel 7:9-10 was not an eschatological judgment scene. Daniel 7:12 made it clear that life goes on afterwards. New Testament references to Daniel 7:13-14 are especially informative. The “coming” of “one like a son of man” was a coming of the son of man to the “Ancient of Days”. That is, he was coming to heaven, not to earth in the Parousia. Two things Jesus said illustrated what event was actually in view here. After the first time he predicted his death and resurrection he said:

Mt 16:28 I tell you the truth, there are some standing here who will not experience death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. [NET]

During his trial, Jesus made the following statement to the high priest.

Mt 26:64..., “You have said it yourself. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man *sitting at the right hand* of the Power and *coming on the clouds of heaven*.” [NET]

In these statements, we see Jesus explicitly claiming fulfillment of the predictions of the Kingdom of God in the events occurring then in about 30 AD.

1. Calvin. *Commentary on Daniel*.

Daniel 12 also looked to the inauguration of the Kingdom of God. It looked to the great distress to the Jewish people experienced in the Jewish revolt, as Jesus also spoke about in the Olivet Discourse. It also made a remarkable prediction about the resurrection of many of the dead, an event we see happening when Jesus was resurrected.

Daniel 9 made the most remarkable prediction. It pointed to the actual date of the incarnation! It was these predictions that fueled the Messianic expectations of the first century Jews^{1 2}. Jesus also cited these predictions in the Olivet Discourse, and Luke made it certain that it was the Roman armies surrounding Jerusalem that were the “desolating abomination”.

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1. *Daniel*. Word Biblical Commentary. p. xxvii “Partly on the basis of Dan 9 the Essenes were actually expecting the messiah between 3 B.C. and A.D. 2.” p. xxix 2 Esdr. identifies the fourth empire as Rome. Josephus also believed that Daniel wrote of Rome.
 2. Walton. “The Four Kingdoms of Daniel”. JETS 20. p. 26 “There is no question that the earliest Jewish interpreters favored the Roman view.... The evidence in the writings of the Church fathers is massive and in unison in favor of the Roman view.”

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Zechariah

Zechariah, along with Daniel, formed much of the apocalyptic vocabulary used in the book of Revelation. So even where it is not eschatological, its use of symbolism is important in developing an understanding of Revelation.

1.0 Preface

To understand the eschatological passages (alleged and actual) of Zechariah, it is necessary to examine the whole book. However, it is not the intent of this essay to produce a complete verse-by-verse commentary. The approach of this study will be to examine the higher level structures of Zechariah, then delve down to the details of individual verses selectively. In addition to studying the eschatology of Zechariah, some select hermeneutic principles will also be illustrated.

The greater context is always important in understanding an individual verse. One should not only examine the paragraph or pericope of a verse, but the book as a whole and its position in history, canon, and literature. It is important to read a book as a whole and also to study other parts of scripture and even secular history that illustrate its historical context. Identify pericopes in the book and relate them in an outline structure. Meditate on the genre and form of the literature and how the author's intent shapes it.

2.0 Introductory Pericope (Zechariah 1:1-6)

Introduction

Zech 1:1 In the eighth month of Darius' second year, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Zechariah, son of Berechiah son of Iddo, as follows:

1:2 The LORD was very angry with your ancestors. 1:3 Therefore say to the people: The LORD who rules over all says, "Turn to me," says the LORD who rules over all, "and I will turn to you," says the LORD who rules over all. 1:4 "Do not be like your ancestors, to whom the former prophets called out, saying, 'The LORD who rules over all says, "Turn now from your evil wickedness,'" but they would by no means obey me," says the LORD. 1:5 "As for your ancestors, where are they? And did the prophets live for-

ever? 1:6 But have my words and statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, not outlived your fathers? Then they paid attention and confessed, ‘The LORD who rules over all has indeed done what he said he would do to us, because of our sinful ways.’”

The very first verse identifies the point in history the prophecy was given and the prophet. In the Bible, God is a god who acts within actual history, and not some mythically distant past. The importance of this is borne out by the frequent chronological notes in scripture. History is even the theme of this introductory oracle. God had spoke to the former prophets and their words had come to pass. The ethical teachings of these former prophets is a theme Zechariah returns to multiple times.

A brief time line of events of this period will be instructive here:¹

- 520 BC, August 29** - Haggai’s first message (Haggai 1:1)
- 520 BC, September 21** - Building of temple resumed (Haggai 1:12f, Ezra 5:2)
- 520 BC, October 17** - Haggai’s second message (Haggai 2:1)
- 520 BC, October/November** - Zechariah’s first message (Zechariah 1:1)
- 520 BC, December 18** - Haggai’s third and fourth messages (Haggai 2:10, 20)
- ca. 519-518** - Tattenai’s letter to Darius, etc. (Ezra 5:3f)
- 519 BC, February 19** - Zechariah’s night vision(s) (Zechariah 1:7)
- 518 BC, December 7** - Question about fasting (Zechariah 7:1)
- 516 BC, March 12** - Dedication of the temple (Ezra 6:15f)
- after 516 BC(?)** - Zechariah’s final prophecies (Zechariah 9-14)

3.0 The Eight Night Visions (Zechariah 1:7-6:8)

The next block of pericopes is a series of visions. Each is structurally introduced by some indication that Zechariah “saw”. In form, these visions are apocalyptic. That is not to say that they are necessarily eschatological or judgmental in content. Rather, it indicates that what is seen in the vision is a set of visual symbols and that there is an angel present to provide some degree of explanation or narration.²

The first verse, Zechariah 1:7, sets the historical context as about three months later than the very first oracle. Commenters generally assume the eight visions happened in one night. This is not explicitly stated, but neither are there any chronological markers indicating multiple nights. This point does not effect interpretation of the apocalyptic visions, so there is no point in being dogmatic about it.

1. Table adapted from Barker. “Zechariah”. *EBC*. p. 598

2. See “Introduction” on page 41.

3.1 First Vision (Zechariah 1:7-17)

The Introduction to the Visions

Zech 1:7 On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, the month Shebat, in Darius' second year, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah son of Iddo, as follows:

The Content of the First Vision

1:8 I was attentive that night and saw a man seated on a red horse that stood among some myrtle trees in the ravine. Behind him were red, sorrel, and white horses.

The Interpretation of the First Vision

1:9 Then I asked one nearby, "What are these, sir?" The angelic messenger who replied to me said, "I will show you what these are." 1:10 Then the man standing among the myrtle trees spoke up and said, "These are the ones whom the LORD has sent to walk about on the earth." 1:11 The riders then agreed with the angel of the LORD, who was standing among the myrtle trees, "We have been walking about on the earth, and now everything is at rest and quiet." 1:12 The angel of the LORD then asked, "LORD who rules over all, how long before you have compassion on Jerusalem and the other cities of Judah which you have been so angry with for these seventy years?" 1:13 The LORD then addressed good, comforting words to the angelic messenger who was speaking to me. 1:14 Turning to me, the messenger then said, "Cry out that the LORD who rules over all says, 'I am very much moved for Jerusalem and for Zion. 1:15 But I am greatly displeased with the nations that take my grace for granted. I was a little displeased with them, but they have only made things worse for themselves."

The Oracle of Response

1:16 "'Therefore,' says the LORD, 'I have become compassionate toward Jerusalem and will rebuild my temple in it,' says the LORD who rules over all. 'Once more a surveyor's measuring line will be stretched out over Jerusalem.' 1:17 Speak up again with the message of the LORD who rules over all: 'My cities will once more overflow with prosperity, and once more the LORD will comfort Zion and validate his choice of Jerusalem.'"

The first vision was of a horseman and some horses. The exact count was not specified, though they are of three colors. As is typical in the apocalyptic genre, there was an angel nearby for Zechariah to talk to and get some explanation. The horses and horsemen (the "riders" of verse 11 were presumably on the horses behind the man seated on a red horse of verse 8¹) were agents of the LORD who went about the earth and report back to Him what they observe. They are a symbolic representation. Angels don't go around riding on literal horses, but such would be a culturally relevant symbol as that would be the method kings of the time would monitor and control their empires. A modern equivalent might be a pilot in a U2 spy plane.

The report that the nations were "at rest and quiet", a *Pax Persia* if you will, is one we will see a few more times. Zechariah further learned from the angels that God was going to have compassion on Jerusalem and would rebuild the temple (note that the subject of that verb is "I", that is, God), work on which had been temporarily halted until

1. e.g., Barker, p. 611; Craigie, p. 164; Hartman, *loc. cit.*, etc.

shortly before this vision. God was also displeased with the Gentile nations, which were at rest and quiet and had taken His grace for granted.

The rebuilding of the temple was something that happened in Zechariah's time. We are not looking to an eschatological temple in this passage.

3.2 Second Vision (Zechariah 1:18-21)

Vision Two: The Four Horns

Zech 1:18 (2:1) Once again I looked and this time I saw four horns. 1:19 So I asked the angelic messenger who spoke with me, "What are these?" He replied, "These are the horns that have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem." 1:20 Next the LORD showed me four blacksmiths. 1:21 I asked, "What are these going to do?" He answered, "These horns are the ones that have scattered Judah so that there is no one to be seen. But the blacksmiths have come to terrify Judah's enemies and cut off the horns of the nations that have thrust themselves against the land of Judah in order to scatter its people."

The symbols seen in this vision are four horns and four blacksmiths. The four horns (usually a symbol of strength or power¹) were the enemies "that have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem". It is too much to equate the four horns with the four empires of Daniel²: the horns were spoken of in the past tense, but two of Daniel's empires were still yet to come. More likely, the number four represents the four cardinal directions: the enemies were all around Israel. We see the four winds, and four colors of horses going off in different directions in a later passage as well. Perhaps this relates to the four horns of the altar as well (Exodus 27:2). The blacksmiths were not identified beyond that they "cut off the horns of the nations that... scatter [Judah's] people". It is probably best to just see them as representing God's supernatural help through whatever agents it was accomplished without getting more specific. Babylon had been banished and the surrounding peoples were not going to be successful in preventing the temple and Jerusalem from being rebuilt, although they would try.

3.3 Third Vision (Zechariah 2:1-13)

Vision Three: The Surveyor

Zech 2:1 (2:5) I looked again, and there was a man with a measuring line in his hand. 2:2 I asked, "Where are you going?" He replied, "To measure Jerusalem in order to determine its width and its length." 2:3 At this point the angelic messenger who spoke to me went out, and another messenger came to meet him 2:4 and said to him, "Hurry, speak to this young man as follows: 'Jerusalem will no longer be enclosed by walls because of the multitude of people and animals there. 2:5 But I (the LORD says) will be a wall of fire surrounding Jerusalem and the source of glory in her midst.'"

2:6 "You there! Flee from the northland!" says the LORD, "for like the four winds of heaven I have scattered you," says the LORD. 2:7 "Escape, Zion, you who live among the Babylonians!" 2:8 For the LORD who rules over all says to me that for his own glory

1. "Horn" in Ryken, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*

2. Barker, p. 615, and Clarke, *loc. cit.*, mention this view. Hartman, *loc. cit.*, accepts and develops it.

he has sent me to the nations that plundered you – for anyone who touches you touches the pupil of his eye. 2:9 “I am about to punish them in such a way,” he says, “that they will be looted by their own slaves.” Then you will know that the LORD who rules over all has sent me.

2:10 “Sing out and be happy, Zion my daughter! For look, I have come; I will settle in your midst,” says the LORD. 2:11 “Many nations will join themselves to the LORD on the day of salvation, and they will also be my people. Indeed, I will settle in the midst of you all.” Then you will know that the LORD who rules over all has sent me to you. 2:12 The LORD will take possession of Judah as his portion in the holy land and he will choose Jerusalem once again. 2:13 Be silent in the LORD’s presence, all people everywhere, for he is being moved to action in his holy dwelling place.

Verse 11 looked forward to the day many nations “join themselves to the LORD”, an event quintessentially realized in the church. To the Christian, the promise “I will settle in the midst of you all” goes beyond the Shekinah glory dwelling in the temple. It was realized in Jesus’ incarnation, and further in the Holy Spirit being given to the church. Adam Clarke on 2:10 wrote “This must chiefly refer to the Christian church, in which God ever dwells by the power of his Spirit, as he had done by the symbol of his presence in the first Jewish temple.”

The NET note is wrong in verse 6¹ to suggest that, because the Jews of the Babylonian Diaspora had already returned, the scattered Jews will be those of eschatological times. Ezra brought back many more (Ezra 8:1-14), and there were still many still left behind, such as Nehemiah who came later yet (and then returned to Susa).

3.4 Fourth Vision (Zechariah 3:1-10)

Vision Four: The Priest

Zech 3:1 Next I saw Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, with Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. 3:2 The LORD said to Satan, “May the LORD rebuke you, Satan! May the LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Isn’t this man like a burning stick snatched from the fire?” 3:3 Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood there before the angel. 3:4 The angel spoke up to those standing all around, “Remove his filthy clothes.” Then he said to Joshua, “I have freely forgiven your iniquity and will dress you in fine clothing.” 3:5 Then I spoke up, “Let a clean turban be put on his head.” So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the LORD stood nearby. 3:6 Then the angel of the LORD exhorted Joshua solemnly: 3:7 “The LORD who rules over all says, ‘If you live and work according to my requirements, you will be able to preside over my temple and attend to my courtyards, and I will allow you to come and go among these others who are standing by you. 3:8 Listen now, Joshua the high priest, both you and your colleagues who are sitting before you, all of you are a symbol that I am about to introduce my servant, the Branch. 3:9 As for the stone I have set before Joshua – on the one stone there are seven eyes. I am about to engrave an inscription on it,’ says the LORD who rules over all, ‘to the effect that I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day. 3:10 In that day,’ says the LORD who rules over all, ‘everyone will invite his friend to fellowship under his vine and under his fig tree.’”

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1. “These are the scattered Jews of eschatological times (as *four winds of heaven* makes clear) and not those of Zechariah’s time who have, for the most part, already returned by 520 b.c. This theme continues and is reinforced in vv. 10–13.”

Satan's role here was a reprise of his role in Job. But the filthy clothes, symbolizing Joshua's iniquity were replaced. God forgave him. Verse 8 is especially important. Joshua and his colleagues are a symbol of the Branch, that is, for the Messiah. Interestingly, the Branch was also called a servant, combining the two Messianic symbols.¹

The stone is another Messianic symbol (1 Peter 2:7, Isaiah 8:14, 28:16)², and the seven eyes may represent the Holy Spirit (Revelation 5:6, Zechariah 4:10). Also compare with 2 Chronicles 16:9, "the eyes of the LORD move quickly through all the earth" (NET note). It is tempting, with some commentator, to see the inscription on the stone as representing the wounds of the passion of Jesus.³

3.5 Fifth Vision (Zechariah 4:1-14)

Vision Five: The Menorah

Zech 4:1 The angelic messenger who had been speaking with me then returned and woke me, as a person is wakened from sleep. 4:2 He asked me, "What do you see?" I replied, "I see a menorah of pure gold with a receptacle at the top and seven lamps, with fourteen pipes going to the lamps. 4:3 There are also two olive trees beside it, one on the right of the receptacle and the other on the left." 4:4 Then I asked the messenger who spoke with me, "What are these, sir?" 4:5 He replied, "Don't you know what these are?" So I responded, "No, sir." 4:6 Therefore he told me, "These signify the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by strength and not by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD who rules over all."

Oracle of Response

4:7 "What are you, you great mountain? Because of Zerubbabel you will become a level plain! And he will bring forth the temple capstone with shoutings of 'Grace! Grace!' because of this." 4:8 Moreover, the word of the LORD came to me as follows: 4:9 "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundations of this temple, and his hands will complete it." Then you will know that the LORD who rules over all has sent me to you. 4:10 For who dares make light of small beginnings? These seven eyes will joyfully look on the tin tablet in Zerubbabel's hand. (These are the eyes of the LORD, which constantly range across the whole earth.)

4:11 Next I asked the messenger, "What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the menorah?" 4:12 Before he could reply I asked again, "What are these two extensions of the olive trees, which are emptying out the golden oil through the two golden pipes?" 4:13 He replied, "Don't you know what these are?" And I said, "No, sir." 4:14 So he said, "These are the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth."

It is not clear how the menorah signifies "Not by strength and not by power, but by my Spirit". But, the phrase itself seems to signify that God's redemption of Israel will not be by military conquest. That is an aspect of the Messiah that many Jews had difficulty

1. NET cites these passages: Isaiah 41:8, 9; 41:10; 41:1-2, 21; Psalms 132:17; Jeremiah 23:5, 33:15.

2. "Stone" in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*.

3. Henry, p. 1115-1116.

grasping¹. Compare this with Jesus' concept of the Kingdom of God as a non-political, but very real and present, entity that he was inaugurating.

The use of symbolism continues. Zerubbabel did not literally turn a mountain into a level plain, but he did overcome all the obstacles to building the temple. The image of seven eyes (of the LORD) also appears here, perhaps referring to the seven lamps².

The difficulty in understanding how the menorah represents its interpretation should serve as a caution when we attempt to interpret other symbols. The symbolism probably made sense within the cultural context of the 6th century BC, but we are not in full possession of that context.

3.6 Sixth Vision (Zechariah 5:1-4)

Vision Six: The Flying Scroll

Zech 5:1 Then I turned to look, and there was a flying scroll! 5:2 Someone asked me, "What do you see?" I replied, "I see a flying scroll thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide." 5:3 The speaker went on to say, "This is a curse traveling across the whole earth. For example, according to the curse whoever steals will be removed from the community; or on the other hand (according to the curse) whoever swears falsely will suffer the same fate." 5:4 "I will send it out," says the LORD who rules over all, "and it will enter the house of the thief and of the person who swears falsely in my name. It will land in the middle of his house and destroy both timber and stones."

The scroll is a symbol of the same message to turn from wickedness as encountered in Zechariah 1:4 and other passages in the book.

3.7 Seventh Vision (Zechariah 5:5-11)

Vision Seven: The Ephah

5:5 After this the angelic messenger who had been speaking to me went out and said, "Look, see what is leaving." 5:6 I asked, "What is it?" And he replied, "It is a basket for measuring grain⁵ that is moving away from here." Moreover, he said, "This is their 'eye' throughout all the earth." 5:7 Then a round lead cover was raised up, revealing a woman sitting inside the basket. 5:8 He then said, "This woman represents wickedness," and he pushed her down into the basket and placed the lead cover on top. 5:9 Then I looked again and saw two women going forth with the wind in their wings (they had wings like those of a stork) and they lifted up the basket between the earth and the sky. 5:10 I asked the messenger who was speaking to me, "Where are they taking the basket?" 5:11 He replied, "To build a temple for her in the land of Babylonia. When it is finished, she will be placed there in her own residence."

This vision symbolically represents evil being removed from the land and banished to "Babylon" as a reversal of the late exile of Israel.

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1. See "Messianic Expectations" on page 87. Compare with John the Baptist questioning Jesus in Luke 7:18-35.
 2. Some translators think a portion of text has become displaced here, and this reference to seven eyes should be placed with the previous one. See NEB for example.

3.8 Eighth Vision (Zechariah 6:1-8)

Vision Eight: The Chariots

Zech 6:1 Once more I looked, and this time I saw four chariots emerging from between two mountains of bronze. 6:2 Harnessed to the first chariot were red horses, to the second black horses, 6:3 to the third white horses, and to the fourth spotted horses, all of them strong. 6:4 Then I asked the angelic messenger who was speaking with me, “What are these, sir?” 6:5 The messenger replied, “These are the four spirits of heaven that have been presenting themselves before the LORD of all the earth. 6:6 The chariot with the black horses is going to the north country and the white ones are going after them, but the spotted ones are going to the south country. 6:7 All these strong ones are scattering; they have sought permission to go and walk about over the earth.” The Lord had said, “Go! Walk about over the earth!” So they are doing so. 6:8 Then he cried out to me, “Look! The ones going to the northland have brought me peace about the northland.”

The symbolism here is enigmatic; some text-critical questions beyond the scope of this essay don’t make things any clearer. The idea seems to be that the Persians’ conquest of Babylonia had brought peace to the nations. (Although Babylon is somewhat east of the land of Israel, the roads from there come into Israel from the north, hence the reference to the northland here). Compare the reference to peace in verse 8 with “rest and quiet” in Zechariah 1:11 and “Be silent ... all people everywhere” in Zechariah 2:12. It probably served to encourage the Jews that there would not be further interference in construction of the temple. Contrary to the note in the NET on verse 8¹, there is nothing to suggest that this peace has an eschatological dimension.

4.0 Words of the LORD

The next five pericopes are each characterized by the phrase “the word of the LORD” in contrast to the previous eight, characterized by phrases such as “I looked” or “I saw”. Only one is dated. Because of the obvious grouping by form, one should be cautious about assuming chronological ordering.

4.1 The Crown (Zechariah 6:9-15)

A Concluding Oracle

Zech 6:9 The word of the LORD came to me as follows: 6:10 “Choose some people from among the exiles, namely, Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah, all of whom have come from Babylon, and when you have done so go to the house of Josiah son of Zephaniah. 6:11 Then take some silver and gold to make a crown and set it on the head of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. 6:12 Then say to him, ‘The LORD who rules over all says, “Look – here is the man whose name is Branch, who will sprout up from his place and build the temple of the LORD. 6:13 Indeed, he will build the temple of the LORD, and he will be clothed in splendor, sitting as king on his throne. Moreover, there will be a priest

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1. “The immediate referent of *peace about the northland* is to the peace brought by Persia’s conquest of Babylonia, a peace that allowed the restoration of the Jewish people (cf. 2 Chr 36:22-23; Isa 44:28; 45:1-2). However, there is also an eschatological dimension, referring to a time when there will be perfect and universal peace.”

with him on his throne and they will see eye to eye on everything. 6:14 The crown will then be turned over to Helem, Tobijah, Jedaiah, and Hen son of Zephaniah as a memorial in the temple of the LORD. 6:15 Then those who are far away will come and build the temple of the LORD so that you may know that the LORD who rules over all has sent me to you. This will all come to pass if you completely obey the voice of the LORD your God.”””

Understand verse 12 in light of the fourth vision. Neither Joshua nor Zerubbabel were *the* Branch; they are symbolic of the Branch. Note that Joshua is the Hebrew form of the Greek name Jesus! But Jesus built a very different temple: the body of believers¹, an action symbolized by Joshua and Zerubbabel constructing the literal temple. In the immediate context, “those who are far away” refers to Jews in exile, but this symbolizes the Gentiles entering the church in the Messianic age.

4.2 Inquiry about Fasting (Zechariah 7:1-7)

The Hypocrisy of False Fasting

Zech 7:1 In King Darius’ fourth year, on the fourth day of Kislev, the ninth month, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah. 7:2 Now the people of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem-Melech and their companions to seek the LORD’s favor 7:3 by asking both the priests of the temple of the LORD who rules over all and the prophets, “Should we weep in the fifth month, fasting as we have done over the years?” 7:4 The word of the LORD who rules over all then came to me, 7:5 “Speak to all the people and priests of the land as follows: ‘When you fasted and lamented in the fifth and seventh months through all these seventy years, did you truly fast for me – for me, indeed?’ 7:6 And now when you eat and drink, are you not doing so for yourselves?” 7:7 Should you not have obeyed the words that the LORD cried out through the former prophets when Jerusalem was peacefully inhabited and her surrounding cities, the Negev, and the Shephelah were also populated?

Only some of Zechariah’s prophecies are dated. Zechariah’s anthologist probably only recorded the dates when he knew them. Zechariah used the opportunity of the question about fasting (fasts which commemorated the destruction of the temple 70 years earlier — a round number... it was closer to 68 years earlier) to rail against hypocrisy and to once again cite the former prophets.

4.3 Justice (Zechariah 7:8-14)

Zech 7:8 Again the word of the LORD came to Zechariah: 7:9 “The LORD who rules over all said, ‘Exercise true judgment and show brotherhood and compassion to each other. 7:10 You must not oppress the widow, the orphan, the foreigner, or the poor, nor should anyone secretly plot evil against his fellow human being.’

7:11 “But they refused to pay attention, turning away stubbornly and stopping their ears so they could not hear. 7:12 Indeed, they made their heart as hard as diamond, so that they could not obey the Torah and the other words the LORD who rules over all had sent by his Spirit through the former prophets. Therefore, the LORD who rules over all had poured out great wrath.

1. See “Paul’s Use of “Temple” as a Metaphor” on page 19.

7:13 “It then came about that just as I cried out, but they would not obey, so they will cry out, but I will not listen,’ the LORD LORD who rules over all had said. 7:14 ‘Rather, I will sweep them away in a storm into all the nations they are not familiar with.’ Thus the land had become desolate because of them, with no one crossing through or returning, for they had made the fruitful land a waste.”

Zechariah again repeated the message of the former prophets.

4.4 Concern for Jerusalem (Zechariah 8:1-17)

The Blessing of True Fasting

Zech 8:1 Then the word of the LORD who rules over all¹ came to me as follows: 8:2 “The LORD who rules over all says, ‘I am very much concerned for Zion; indeed, I am so concerned for her that my rage will fall on those who hurt her.’ 8:3 The Lord says, ‘I have returned to Zion and will live within Jerusalem. Now Jerusalem will be called “truthful city,” “mountain of the LORD who rules over all,” “holy mountain.”’ 8:4 Moreover, the LORD who rules over all says, ‘Old men and women will once more live in the plazas of Jerusalem, each one leaning on a cane because of advanced age. 8:5 And the streets of the city will be full of boys and girls playing. 8:6 And,’ says the LORD who rules over all, ‘though such a thing may seem to be difficult in the opinion of the small community of those days, will it also appear difficult to me?’ asks the LORD who rules over all.

8:7 “The LORD who rules over all asserts, ‘I am about to save my people from the lands of the east and the west. 8:8 And I will bring them to settle within Jerusalem. They will be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and righteousness.’

8:9 “The LORD who rules over all also says, ‘Gather strength, you who are listening to these words today from the mouths of the prophets who were there at the founding of the house of the LORD who rules over all, so that the temple might be built. 8:10 Before that time there was no compensation for man or animal, nor was there any relief from adversity for those who came and went, because I had pitted everybody – each one – against everyone else. 8:11 But I will be different now to this remnant of my people from the way I was in those days,’ says the LORD who rules over all, 8:12 ‘for there will be a peaceful time of sowing, the vine will produce its fruit and the ground its yield, and the skies will rain down dew. Then I will allow the remnant of my people to possess all these things. 8:13 And it will come about that just as you (both Judah and Israel) were a curse to the nations, so I will save you and you will be a blessing. Do not be afraid! Instead, be strong!’

8:14 “For the LORD who rules over all says, ‘As I had planned to hurt you when your fathers made me angry,’ says the LORD who rules over all, ‘and I was not sorry, 8:15 so, to the contrary, I have planned in these days to do good to Jerusalem and Judah – do not fear! 8:16 These are the things you must do: Speak the truth, each of you, to one another. Practice true and righteous judgment in your courts. 8:17 Do not plan evil in your hearts against one another. Do not favor a false oath – these are all things that I hate,’ says the LORD.”

In verse 3, God’s return to Zion was a completed act. This wasn’t the eschatological Parousia. This pericope is only talking about return from exile and the establishment of a bustling Jewish community in the holy land again.

Contrary to the NET note on verse 5¹ and various commentators, verses 4-5 are not about eschatological idealism in a millennial kingdom². They are simply about a return to normal life in Jerusalem where people are born and live all their lives.

The ethical preaching of the former prophets was again repeated (verses 16-17).

4.5 Fasts Turned to Feasts (Zechariah 8:18-23)

Zech 8:18 The word of the LORD who rules over all came to me as follows: 8:19 “The LORD who rules over all says, ‘The fast of the fourth, fifth, seventh, and tenth months will become joyful and happy, pleasant feasts for the house of Judah, so love truth and peace.’ 8:20 The LORD who rules over all says, ‘It will someday come to pass that people – residents of many cities – will come. 8:21 The inhabitants of one will go to another and say, “Let’s go up at once to ask the favor of the LORD, to seek the LORD who rules over all. Indeed, I’ll go with you.”” 8:22 Many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the LORD who rules over all and to ask his favor. 8:23 The LORD who rules over all says, ‘In those days ten people from all languages and nations will grasp hold of – indeed, grab – the robe of one Jew and say, “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.””’

As a sequel to 7:1-7, Zechariah next said that the four fasts kept in honor of various phases of the destruction of Jerusalem —

- tenth month = siege of Jerusalem, Jan. 15, 588 BC (2 Kings 25:1)
- fourth month = breach of the city walls, ca. July 18, 586 BC (Jeremiah 39:2-5)
- fifth month = destruction of the temple, Aug. 14, 586 BC (2 Kings 25:8)
- seventh month = assassination of Gedaliah, governor of Judah, ca. 581 BC (Jeremiah 40:13-14; 41:1)³

— would turn into feasts. He further said that many peoples and nations would seek the LORD, a reality that found its fulfillment in Christianity. People tend to forget that the apostles were Jews. We should see the fulfillment of verse 23 in passages such as Acts 2:37-41; 8:12, 38; 10:44-48 (especially); etc.

5.0 Two Oracles

Each of these oracles is actually a collection of prophecies. The two collections share a similar structure.

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1. “The references to longevity and to children living and playing in peace are eschatological in tone. Elsewhere the millennial kingdom is characterized in a similar manner (cf. Isa 65:20; Jer 31:12-13)”
 2. Although, as a post-millennialist, I am certainly sympathetic to anything that might indicate such an idealistic time, we don’t do scripture justice by shoe-horning every passage possible into our pet theologies.
 3. NET notes, *loc. cit.*

5.1 First Oracle (Zechariah 9:1-11:17)

5.1.1 Syria to Philistia Invaded, Jerusalem protected (Zechariah 9:1-8)

The Coming of the True King

Zech 9:1 An oracle of the word of the LORD concerning the land of Hadrach, with its focus on Damascus:

The eyes of all humanity, especially of the tribes of Israel, are toward the LORD, 9:2 as are those of Hamath also, which adjoins Damascus, and Tyre and Sidon, though they consider themselves to be very wise. 9:3 Tyre built herself a fortification and piled up silver like dust and gold like the mud of the streets! 9:4 Nevertheless the Lord will evict her and shove her fortifications into the sea – she will be consumed by fire. 9:5 Ashkelon will see and be afraid; Gaza will be in great anguish, as will Ekron, for her hope will have been dried up. Gaza will lose her king, and Ashkelon will no longer be inhabited. 9:6 A mongrel people will live in Ashdod, for I will greatly humiliate the Philistines. 9:7 I will take away their abominable religious practices; then those who survive will become a community of believers in our God, like a clan in Judah, and Ekron will be like the Jebusites. 9:8 Then I will surround my temple to protect it like a guard from anyone crossing back and forth; so no one will cross over against them anymore as an oppressor, for now I myself have seen it.

Josephus told a story about Alexander the Great¹. When he was in Macedonia, he had a vision of a man telling him that he would conquer Persia. Alexander defeated Darius' army and took Syria, Damascus, and Sidon, and besieged Tyre. He sent a message to Jerusalem and the High Priest Jaddua demanding provisions. Jaddua refused, saying he had sworn an oath to Darius, and could not break it as long as Darius was alive.

This infuriated Alexander, and when Tyre fell, he marched on Jerusalem. Jaddua was told in a vision to simply go out with the priests, all dressed in their priestly attire, and meet with Alexander. To everyone's amazement, Alexander approached the High Priest and saluted him. It had been the image of Jaddua who had appeared to him in his vision in Macedonia. So Jerusalem was not only spared Alexander's wrath, but was allowed to not pay tribute every seven years (when the land wasn't sown on the Sabbath year), and all the Jews in his domain were allowed to live by their own laws.

However much of this story might be embellished legend, the fact remains that Alexander bypassed sacking Jerusalem on his march to conquer the world. Most commentators see this as the fulfillment of the subject passage.

5.1.2 Messianic Kingdom (Zechariah 9:9-17)

Zech 9:9 Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion!
Shout, daughter of Jerusalem!
Look! Your king is coming to you:
he is legitimate and victorious,
humble and riding on a donkey –
on a young donkey, the foal of a female donkey.
9:10 I will remove the chariot from Ephraim
and the warhorse from Jerusalem,

1. *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XI, Chapter VIII.

and the battle bow will be removed.
Then he will announce peace to the nations.
His dominion will be from sea to sea
and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth.

9:11 Moreover, as for you, because of our covenant relationship secured with blood, I will release your prisoners from the waterless pit. 9:12 Return to the stronghold, you prisoners, with hope; today I declare that I will return double what was taken from you. 9:13 I will bend Judah as my bow; I will load the bow with Ephraim, my arrow! I will stir up your sons, Zion, against yours, Greece, and I will make you, Zion, like a warrior's sword.

9:14 Then the LORD will appear above them, and his arrow will shoot forth like lightning; the Lord GOD will blow the trumpet and will sally forth on the southern storm winds. 9:15 The LORD who rules over all will guard them, and they will prevail and overcome with sling stones. Then they will drink, and will become noisy like drunkards, full like the sacrificial basin or like the corners of the altar. 9:16 On that day the LORD their God will deliver them as the flock of his people, for they are the precious stones of a crown sparkling over his land. 9:17 How precious and fair! Grain will make the young men flourish and new wine the young women.

Zechariah 9:9 is quoted in Matthew 21:5 and John 12:15 in reference to Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Jesus, as the Messiah, not only acted this passage out literally, but also fulfilled the symbolic meaning of the passage: that of his humility in coming as the suffering servant instead of a bold conquering warlord. His message of peace was universal (verse 10). More on this will be discussed in the next chapter. The image of the king on a donkey calls to mind David's fleeing on a donkey from the rebellion of Absalom (who in contrast rode in a chariot behind horses).¹

Verses 11-17 are full of symbolic language: the waterless pit, prisoners, Judah a bow, Ephraim an arrow, Zion a sword, etc. The mention of Greece here should not be too surprising. It was not far removed from the wars between Persia and Greece of the second half of the 5th century BC.² After the coming of Alexander the Great, seen in the beginning of this chapter, the whole of the eastern Mediterranean was Hellenized. The conflict predicted here is not literal warfare — rather it's talking about the Holy Spirit the spread of the Gospel.

The reference to overcoming with sling stones in verse 15 is another Davidic reference³. The meaning is not the literally throwing of stones, but that they would overcome, "not by strength and not by power, but by my Spirit" (Zechariah 4:6). The references to blood and grain find meaning in Jesus' sacrifice and in communion done in remembrance of it.

There is nothing strictly eschatological about this. It finds its realization in the Kingdom of God that Jesus preached, although it does perhaps suggest an eventual victory of the Gospel within history (post-millennialism).

1. 2 Sam 15-19, esp. 16:1 and 15:1; *Word Biblical Commentary*, *loc. cit.*

2. "Greece (Place)" in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*.

3. Calvin, *loc cit.*

5.1.3 Restoration of Judah (Zechariah 10:1-5)

The Restoration of the True People

Zech 10:1 Ask the LORD for rain in the season of the late spring rains – the LORD who causes thunderstorms – and he will give everyone showers of rain and green growth in the field. 10:2 For the household gods have spoken wickedness, the soothsayers have seen a lie, and as for the dreamers, they have disclosed emptiness and give comfort in vain. Therefore the people set out like sheep and become scattered because they have no shepherd. 10:3 I am enraged at the shepherds and will punish the lead-goats.

For the LORD who rules over all has brought blessing to his flock, the house of Judah, and will transform them into his majestic warhorse. 10:4 From him will come the cornerstone, the wall peg, the battle bow, and every ruler. 10:5 And they will be like warriors trampling the mud of the streets in battle. They will fight, for the LORD will be with them, and will defeat the enemy cavalry.

The pagan religion of the Canaanites regarded Baal as a storm god. After deprecating the leaders who lead Judah astray (verse 3), we have another messianic prediction. Verse 4 uses several images that are used symbolically throughout scripture. The cornerstone is especially a messianic symbol (Isaiah 28:16; Psalm 118:22; and NT quotations of these). What NET translates as wall peg here may also be translated tent peg. In Ezra's prayer it was used as a metaphor for security. Isaiah used it similarly in a metaphor where Jerusalem is a tent (Isaiah 33:20). Etc. Given that symbol was stacked upon symbol here, the fight being referenced was most likely a symbolic fight as well.

5.1.4 Restoration of Joseph (Zechariah 10:6-12)

Zech 10:6 "I (says the LORD) will strengthen the kingdom of Judah and deliver the people of Joseph and will bring them back because of my compassion for them. They will be as though I had never rejected them, for I am the LORD their God and therefore I will hear them. 10:7 The Ephraimites will be like warriors and will rejoice as if they had drunk wine. Their children will see it and rejoice; they will celebrate in the things of the LORD. 10:8 I will signal for them and gather them, for I have already redeemed them; then they will become as numerous as they were before. 10:9 Though I scatter them among the nations, they will remember in far-off places – they and their children will sprout forth and return. 10:10 I will bring them back from Egypt and gather them from Assyria. I will bring them to the lands of Gilead and Lebanon, for there will not be enough room for them in their own land. 10:11 The LORD will cross the sea of storms and will calm its turbulence. The depths of the Nile will dry up, the pride of Assyria will be humbled, and the domination of Egypt will be no more. 10:12 Thus I will strengthen them by my power, and they will walk about in my name," says the LORD.

The northern kingdom of Israel (AKA Ephraim AKA Joseph) was carried away into captivity by Assyria long before Judah's captivity, and other peoples were settled into the land. Those who remained intermingled with the other peoples and became the Samaritans. They were all that was left of Ephraim. What Zechariah suggested here, the reunification of Ephraim and Judah, was simply unthinkable. We read in Ezra that the Samaritans offered to help build the temple, but were rebuffed by Zerubbabel and Jeshua (Ezra 4:1-5): "You have no right to help us build the temple of our God." This set in motion a pattern of conflict between them. The Samaritans frustrated the efforts to build the temple, which is what occasioned Haggai and Zechariah to begin prophesying in the first place. After the temple was built, they frustrated the construction of the

city walls (Ezra 4:6-23). Later, when Ezra came to Jerusalem and learned some of the Jews had taken Samaritan wives, he made them divorce them and send them and their children away! (Ezra 9-10).

5.1.5 Annulment of the Covenant (Zechariah 11:1-17)

The History and Future of Judah's Wicked Kings

Zech 11:1 Open your gates, Lebanon,
so that the fire may consume your cedars.

11:2 Howl, fir tree,
because the cedar has fallen;
the majestic trees have been destroyed.

Howl, oaks of Bashan,
because the impenetrable forest has fallen.

11:3 Listen to the howling of shepherds,
because their magnificence has been destroyed.

Listen to the roaring of young lions,
because the thickets of the Jordan have been devastated.

11:4 The LORD my God says this: "Shepherd the flock set aside for slaughter. 11:5 Those who buy them slaughter them and are not held guilty; those who sell them say, 'Blessed be the LORD, for I am rich.' Their own shepherds have no compassion for them. 11:6 Indeed, I will no longer have compassion on the people of the land," says the LORD, "but instead I will turn every last person over to his neighbor and his king. They will devastate the land, and I will not deliver it from them."

11:7 So I began to shepherd the flock destined for slaughter, the most afflicted of all the flock. Then I took two staffs, calling one "Pleasantness" and the other "Binders," and I tended the flock. 11:8 Next I eradicated the three shepherds in one month, for I ran out of patience with them and, indeed, they detested me as well. 11:9 I then said, "I will not shepherd you. What is to die, let it die, and what is to be eradicated, let it be eradicated. As for those who survive, let them eat each other's flesh!"

11:10 Then I took my staff "Pleasantness" and cut it in two to annul my covenant that I had made with all the people. 11:11 So it was annulled that very day, and then the most afflicted of the flock who kept faith with me knew that that was the word of the LORD.

11:12 Then I said to them, "If it seems good to you, pay me my wages, but if not, forget it." So they weighed out my payment – thirty pieces of silver. 11:13 The LORD then said to me, "Throw to the potter that exorbitant sum at which they valued me!" So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them to the potter at the temple of the LORD. 11:14 Then I cut the second staff "Binders" in two in order to annul the covenant of brotherhood between Judah and Israel.

11:15 Again the LORD said to me, "Take up once more the equipment of a foolish shepherd. 11:16 Indeed, I am about to raise up a shepherd in the land who will not take heed to the sheep headed to slaughter, will not seek the scattered, and will not heal the injured. Moreover, he will not nourish the one that is healthy but instead will eat the meat of the fat sheep and tear off their hooves.

11:17 Woe to the worthless shepherd
who abandons the flock!
May a sword fall on his arm and his right eye!
May his arm wither completely away,
and his right eye become completely blind!"

Zechariah's solution to the problem was the annulment of the old covenant. He enacted his message by being a shepherd to an afflicted flock destined for slaughter (verse 7). He was detested (verse 8), and broke a staff to symbolize the annulment of the covenant (verses 10-11). He was paid off for with the price a slave for his effort (verse 12-13). He then broke another staff symbolizing the brotherhood between Judah (the Jews) and Israel (the Samaritans). He then acted out the part of a foolish shepherd (verses 15-17).

This whole passage is a symbolic telling of the first century AD history of the Suffering Servant, the Messiah. The application of verses 11-13 to Judas' betrayal and the rejection of Jesus by the Jewish leadership is well known. The covenant between God and the Jews was ended. The devastation spoken of here (including literal cannibalism! cf. verse 9) happened in AD 70.

This is not anti-Semitism however. It is not that the Jews were irrevocably rejected. Otherwise, the prophecies of chapter 10 could not be fulfilled. It only means that the Jews, and Samaritans, stand before God now as no different (neither better, nor worse) than the Gentiles. Paul expressed it as the Jews having been cut off from the olive tree, and Gentiles grafted in, and that the Jews may be grafted in in the same way (Romans 11:13-24). Everyone, Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles alike, may now be united to God through the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ — see the communion imagery in Zechariah 9:15-17.

5.2 Second Oracle (Zechariah 12:1-14:21)

Note that there is a structure in common with the second oracle. A pre-Messianic prophecy (9:1-8 || 12:1-9) followed by a positive Messianic prophecy (9:9-10:12 || 12:10-13:6) followed by a negative judgment prophecy (11:1-17 || 13:7-14:21).

5.2.1 Jerusalem Will Be Protected From A Siege (Zechariah 12:1-9)

The Repentance of Judah

Zech 12:1 The revelation of the word of the LORD concerning Israel: The LORD – he who stretches out the heavens and lays the foundations of the earth, who forms the human spirit within a person – says, 12:2 “I am about to make Jerusalem a cup that brings dizziness to all the surrounding nations; indeed, Judah will also be included when Jerusalem is besieged. 12:3 Moreover, on that day I will make Jerusalem a heavy burden for all the nations, and all who try to carry it will be seriously injured; yet all the peoples of the earth will be assembled against it. 12:4 In that day,” says the LORD, “I will strike every horse with confusion and its rider with madness. I will pay close attention to the house of Judah, but will strike all the horses of the nations with blindness. 12:5 Then the leaders of Judah will say to themselves, ‘The inhabitants of Jerusalem are a means of strength to us through their God, the LORD who rules over all.’ 12:6 On that day I will make the leaders of Judah like an igniter among sticks and a burning torch among sheaves, and they will burn up all the surrounding nations right and left. Then the people of Jerusalem will settle once more in their place, the city of Jerusalem. 12:7 The LORD also will deliver the homes of Judah first, so that the splendor of the kingship of David and of the people of Jerusalem may not exceed that of Judah. 12:8 On that day the LORD himself will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the weakest among them will be like mighty David, and the dynasty of David will be like God, like the angel of the LORD before them. 12:9 So on that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.”

This passage prophesies the Maccabees defeating the Seleucids. This is not the millennial age¹. Phrases like “all the peoples of the earth will be assembled against it [Jerusalem]” in verse 3 are hyperbolic². Compare with 1 Maccabees 3:7, “He [Judas Maccabeus] embittered many kings, but he made Jacob glad by his deeds”; 1 Maccabees 12:13, “But as for ourselves, many trials and many wars have encircled us; the kings around us have waged war against us”; 1 Maccabees 14:13, “No one was left in the land to fight them, and the kings were crushed in those days”.³

5.2.2 Kingship of David (Zechariah 12:10-13:6)

Zech 12:10 “I will pour out on the kingship of David and the population of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication so that they will look to me, the one they have pierced. They will lament for him as one laments for an only son, and there will be a bitter cry for him like the bitter cry for a firstborn. 12:11 On that day the lamentation in Jerusalem will be as great as the lamentation at Hadad-Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. 12:12 The land will mourn, clan by clan – the clan of the royal household of David by itself and their wives by themselves; the clan of the family of Nathan by itself and their wives by themselves; 12:13 the clan of the descendants of Levi by itself and their wives by themselves; and the clan of the Shimeites by itself and their wives by themselves – 12:14 all the clans that remain, each separately with their wives.”

The Refinement of Judah

13:1 “In that day there will be a fountain opened up for the dynasty of David and the people of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and impurity. 13:2 And also on that day,” says the LORD who rules over all, “I will remove the names of the idols from the land and they will never again be remembered. Moreover, I will remove the prophets and the unclean spirit from the land. 13:3 Then, if anyone prophesies in spite of this, his father and mother to whom he was born will say to him, ‘You cannot live, for you lie in the name of the LORD.’ Then his father and mother to whom he was born will run him through with a sword when he prophesies.

13:4 “Therefore, on that day each prophet will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies and will no longer wear the hairy garment of a prophet to deceive the people. 13:5 Instead he will say, ‘I am no prophet – indeed, I am a farmer, for a man has made me his indentured servant since my youth.’ 13:6 Then someone will ask him, ‘What are these wounds on your chest?’ and he will answer, ‘Some that I received in the house of my friends.’

John cited Zechariah 12:10 as receiving fulfillment at the crucifixion:

Jn 19:33 But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. 19:34 But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and blood and water flowed out immediately. 19:35 And the person who saw it has testified (and his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth), so that you also may believe. 19:36 For these things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled, “*Not a bone of*

1. Contrary to the claims of the NET note in 12:8 — “The statement *the dynasty of David will be like God* is hyperbole to show the remarkable enhancements that will accompany the inauguration of the millennial age.”

2. See “Context in Literature and Language” on page 27.

3. NRSV

his will be broken.” 19:37 And again another scripture says, “*They will look on the one whom they have pierced.*”

The mourning (12:10-14) has two dimensions. First, those who followed or at least admired Jesus (and they were no small number, else the leadership would not have felt threatened) were certainly mournful of his death. Second, the rejection of Jesus resulted in judgment on the nation and the revocation of the covenant (Zechariah 11), culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

The fountain in 13:1 is not a literal fountain. It is a symbol for cleansing from “sin and impurity”. Isaiah used a similar metaphor in Isaiah 12:3, “Joyfully you will draw water from the springs of deliverance”. Ezekiel 47:1-12 also saw in his vision a symbolic river welling up under the threshold of the temple.¹ The image here is Messianic, looking forward to the Son of David. See Jesus’ use of the image in the story of the Samaritan woman, esp. John 4:13-14:

Jn 4:13 Jesus replied, “Everyone who drinks some of this water will be thirsty again.
4:14 But whoever drinks some of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again, but the water that I will give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up to eternal life.”

The remainder of this passage, verses 13:2-6, deals with the removal of idolatry and prophecy. After the Apostolic age, prophecy ceased and the canon of scripture was closed. However the focus is not on true prophecy, but on false prophecy. The wounds in verse 6 probably refer to self-inflicted wounds that were the custom of prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:28, see also Leviticus 19:28, Deuteronomy 14:1). The timing of the fulfillment of this is difficult, as it doesn’t follow on immediately to the 1st century fulfillment of the preceding verses. Millennial eschatologies (pre- and post-) would see it ultimately being fulfilled in the future millennium. I’m not clear what an amillennialist could do with this passage. A post-general-resurrection/judgment time frame is ruled out by verse 3. That is, a fulfillment within ordinary human history before the “last day” is required by the idea of there still being an occasional false prophet.

5.2.3 Strike The Shepherd That The Flock May Be Scattered (Zechariah 13:7-9)

Zech 13:7 “Awake, sword, against my shepherd,
against the man who is my associate,”
says the LORD who rules over all.
Strike the shepherd that the flock may be scattered;
I will turn my hand against the insignificant ones.
13:8 It will happen in all the land, says the LORD,
that two-thirds of the people in it will be cut off and die,
but one-third will be left in it.
13:9 Then I will bring the remaining third into the fire;
I will refine them like silver is refined
and will test them like gold is tested.
They will call on my name and I will answer;
I will say, ‘These are my people,’
and they will say, ‘The LORD is my God.’”

1. See “Ezekiel 40-48: Ezekiel’s Temple” on page 15.

Jesus cited this passage just before going to Gethsemane:

Mk 14:27 Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away, for it is written

*‘I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep will be scattered.’* [NET]

The shepherd is the Messiah. Compare the remainder of the passage to Ezekiel 5:1-4:

Eze 5:1 “As for you, son of man, take a sharp sword and use it as a barber’s razor. Shave off some of the hair from your head and your beard. Then take scales and divide up the hair you cut off. 5:2 Burn a third of it in the fire inside the city when the days of your siege are completed. Take a third and slash it with a sword all around the city. Scatter a third to the wind, and I will unleash a sword behind them. 5:3 But take a few strands of hair from those and tie them in the ends of your garment. 5:4 Again, take more of them and throw them into the fire, and burn them up. From there a fire will spread to all the house of Israel. [NET]

Ezekiel is one of the “former prophets” that Zechariah refers to several times (Zechariah 1:4, et al). The Jews went through a great catastrophe after the crucifixion in the Jewish war of 66-73 AD. But one should never forget there were thousands who joined the church (Acts 2:41, 4:41, 21:20).

5.2.4 A Day Of The LORD (Zechariah 14:1-21)

The Sovereignty of the Lord

Zech 14:1 A day of the LORD is about to come when your possessions will be divided as plunder in your midst. 14:2 For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to wage war; the city will be taken, its houses plundered, and the women raped. Then half of the city will go into exile, but the remainder of the people will not be taken away.

14:3 Then the LORD will go to battle and fight against those nations, just as he fought battles in ancient days. 14:4 On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives which lies to the east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in half from east to west, leaving a great valley. Half the mountain will move northward and the other half southward. 14:5 Then you will escape through my mountain valley, for the mountains will extend to Azal. Indeed, you will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of King Uzziah of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come with all his holy ones with him. 14:6 On that day there will be no light – the sources of light in the heavens will congeal. 14:7 It will happen in one day (a day known to the LORD); not in the day or the night, but in the evening there will be light. 14:8 Moreover, on that day living waters will flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea; it will happen both in summer and in winter.

14:9 The LORD will then be king over all the earth. In that day the LORD will be seen as one with a single name. 14:10 All the land will change and become like the Arabah from Geba to Rimmon, south of Jerusalem; and Jerusalem will be raised up and will stay in its own place from the Benjamin Gate to the site of the First Gate and on to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the royal winepresses. 14:11 And people will settle there, and there will no longer be the threat of divine extermination – Jerusalem will dwell in security.

14:12 But this will be the nature of the plague with which the LORD will strike all the nations that have fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh will decay while they stand on their feet, their eyes will rot away in their sockets, and their tongues will dissolve in

their mouths. 14:13 On that day there will be great confusion from the LORD among them; they will seize each other and attack one another violently. 14:14 Moreover, Judah will fight at Jerusalem, and the wealth of all the surrounding nations will be gathered up – gold, silver, and clothing in great abundance. 14:15 This is the kind of plague that will devastate horses, mules, camels, donkeys, and all the other animals in those camps.

14:16 Then all who survive from all the nations that came to attack Jerusalem will go up annually to worship the King, the LORD who rules over all, and to observe the Feast of Tabernacles. 14:17 But if any of the nations anywhere on earth refuse to go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD who rules over all, they will get no rain. 14:18 If the Egyptians will not do so, they will get no rain – instead there will be the kind of plague which the LORD inflicts on any nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. 14:19 This will be the punishment of Egypt and of all nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.

14:20 On that day the bells of the horses will bear the inscription “Holy to the LORD.” The cooking pots in the LORD’s temple will be as holy as the bowls in front of the altar. 14:21 Every cooking pot in Jerusalem and Judah will become holy in the sight of the LORD who rules over all, so that all who offer sacrifices may come and use some of them to boil their sacrifices in them. On that day there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD who rules over all.

Interpretations of this chapter vary greatly. It is probably too much to reach definitive conclusions in this brief study. Rather, we can probably only summarize some interpretive alternatives and set some limits and principles for how the chapter might be approached.

Dispensational interpretation generally takes the images contained very literally. However, the use of symbols in the rest of the book should caution us in this regard. The geographic upheavals described lack plausibility of literal fulfillment. This is not because God couldn’t perform such as miracles, but because of the logistics that would be involved. An earthquake violent enough to split a mountain in two would not likely leave any survivors in the vicinity to escape between the two mountains. Rather than dwelling securely (verse 1), Jerusalem would be wiped from the map. An interpretation that must pile miracles upon miracles that aren’t explicitly claimed in the text in order to be plausible isn’t a likely interpretation.

These images also appear symbolically elsewhere. Two mountains of bronze occur in Zechariah 6:1. Isaiah 2:2 and Micah 4:1 forecast Mt. Zion being lifted up above all other hills¹. In contrast to the mountains, Zechariah 14:10 describes the land becoming a plain (i.e., like the Arabah). The image of a plain is used in Isaiah’s Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 40:3-4. Zechariah himself already used it as a metaphor in Zechariah 4:7. Ezekiel also has a symbolic river flowing from the Temple in Jerusalem to the whole world (Ezekiel 47:1-12). See similar imagery in the poetry of Joel 3:18².

Phrases such as “all the nations” in verse 2 do not help in ruling out the period of the Maccabees, or the Romans (two common preterist interpretations) as such a phrase is

1. Cited by Calvin, *loc. cit.*

2. Cited by Keil-Delitzsh, *loc. cit.*

often hyperbolic. Verse 8, I think does rule out a pre-Christian interpretation. The image of “living water” flowing out from Jerusalem into the seas is Messianic. In Hebrew idiom, the gentiles are across the seas — Gentile nations are often called the isles of the Gentiles. The disciples had initially settled in Jerusalem after the crucifixion, but after the persecution that started with Stephen’s execution, they scattered, taking the Gospel far afield of Jerusalem (Acts 8:1). The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD completed this by removing all Christians from Jerusalem. See Jesus’ warning to flee the city to the mountains in the Olivet Discourse (Mark 13:14), and Eusebius’ account of them doing precisely that (*Church History* 3.5.2).

Verse 9 does not necessarily imply an eschatological time (like the millennium). Jesus’ teaching of the Kingdom of God was that of it being an immanent reality; however, a future millennium does nicely account for the Edenic description of the following verses. It is interesting that the worship cites the Feast of Tabernacles, which comes at the end of the agricultural year in the autumn¹, and thus celebrates the harvest (in addition to its historic association the wilderness wanderings), and not the Day of Atonement. After the sacrifice of the Messiah, the latter is no longer necessary, but giving thanks to God for his bounteous provision is still relevant. But even with a millennial interpretation, this passages says nothing about the bodily return of Christ being before or after it.

Verses 20-21 are not implying an eschatological temple. Quite the contrary, because all the vessels of Jerusalem are holy like the vessels of the temple, the idea of a temple is reduced in relevance. The reality of this in the church age is that the body of believers is the temple and we are all holy before God.²

6.0 Concluding Thoughts

One is faced with a sort of chicken-and-egg problem in Bible study. To understand an individual verse one must understand its context. But to understand the context, one must understand the individual verses. To break the dilemma, two approaches may be taken. First a good commentary will help provide the context needed for individual verses, and explain how individual verses make up the context. Second, one must use an iterative approach. Dive in and read the whole book. Alternate between studying individual verses and the whole context. With each iteration, more of the individual verses will make sense once you understand more of the context, and more of the overall context will make sense as you understand the individual verses. It is easy to get caught up with exegeting individual verses and phrases, and forget to look at the larger picture

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1. “Harvest” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*.
 2. See “Paul’s Use of “Temple” as a Metaphor” on page 19.

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Messianic Expectations

Understanding Jewish Messianic expectations around the time of Jesus may help us in understanding the eschatological vocabulary of the New Testament.¹

1.0 Introduction

What did a first century Jew expect eschatologically? If we wanted to ask that question of Jews in Israel today, one would hire Gallup or some similar polling organization. They would create a questionnaire, then scientifically select a random sample of the population group to survey. The answers would be collated and complicated statistical analysis techniques would be applied to let us know what they expected and how that correlated with various demographic variables, etc.

Unfortunately we can't go back in time and do this survey in Judea and Galilee in 27 AD. Nor did anyone who was alive in 27 AD do such a survey (at least, if they did, the results are not extant). Instead we must examine the remains of the era to look for clues as to what those expectations were. Primarily, this means looking at the writings of the era. This has several drawbacks; foremost is that it is not a proper random sample. The accidents of history can leave some writings abundantly extant, while eliminating others. Those who held one belief may have been more likely to write about it (for a variety of reasons) than those who held another. The writings of some groups may have been actively suppressed. We engage in this survey of the extant writings, therefore, with caution.

1. This study was originally done as background for a study on John the Baptist's questioning of Jesus in Luke 7:18-35. Since it touches on eschatological expectations of the milieu, it seems appropriate to extract that portion of the previous study for this series.

2.0 The Dead Sea Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls are a cache of scrolls discovered hidden in caves in the Qumran region by the Dead Sea. They were hidden there in 68 AD from the onslaught of the Roman soldiers putting down the Jewish rebellion. It would appear that they constituted the library of the Essenes (some scholars dispute this, but if not the Essenes, then a sect very similar to the Essenes).

From the writings we find that they were a very apocalyptic cult. They expected a future war in which Israel (that is, themselves) would conquer their oppressors, the Kittim (that is, Rome) and establish a Messianic kingdom on earth. Some scrolls contain elaborate battle plans and outline laws for the restored eschatological community. Much of the material is now fragmentary, but we do find references to one or more Messiahs in them. We don't find one single well-developed Messianic belief system in the scrolls. Some seem to have expected a single Davidic Messiah. Others expected two Messiahs: the Messiah of Aaron and the Messiah of Israel, and, some, even a third figure who would be a prophet.

The *Rule of War* quotes the messianic text Isaiah 10:34-11:1, then interprets it saying

4Q285, fr. 5 [...] the Branch of David and they will enter into judgement with [...] and the Prince of the Congregation, the Br[anch of David] will kill him [...] by strokes and by wounds.¹

The *Commentaries on Isaiah* cites an overlapping passage (Isaiah 11:1-3) and then goes on to say:

4Q161, frs. 5-6 [Interpreted, this concerns the Branch] of David who shall arise at the end [of days] ... God will uphold him with [the spirit of might, and will give him] a throne of glory and a crown of [holiness] and many-coloured garments ... [He will put a sceptre] in his hand and he shall rule over all the [nations]. And Magog .. and his sword shall judge [all] the peoples.

And as for that which he said, *He shall not [judge by what his eyes see] or pass sentence by what his ears hear:* interpreted, this means that ... [the Priests] ... As they teach him, so will he judge; and as they order, [so will he pass sentence].²

The *War Scroll (1QM, xi.5)* sites Numbers 24:17-19 ("A star shall come out of Jacob...") which was evidently understood to be Messianic.³ Another document, the *Florilegium*, aka *Midrash on the Last Days*, sites some passages from 2 Samuel and Amos and associates the future Messiah with another character called the Interpreter of the Law. It is not clear if these two were equated with the Messiahs of Israel and of Aaron respectively.

4Q174, i.10 The Lord declares to you that He will build you a House (2 Sam. vii, 11c). I will raise up your seed after you (2 Sam. vii, 12). I will establish the throne of his kng-

1. *CDSSE*, p. 189

2. *CDSSE*, p. 467

3. *CDSSE*, p. 174

dom [for ever] (2 Sam. vii, 13). [*I will be*] *his father and he shall be my son* (2 Sam. vii, 14). He is the Branch of David who shall arise with the Interpreter of the Law [to rule] in Zion [at the end] of time. As it is written, *I will raise up the tent of David that is fallen* (Amos ix, 11). That is to say, the fallen *tent of David* is he who shall arise to save Israel.¹

Works which explicitly mention two Messiahs do so incidentally, so we don't get much clue as to what the theological reasoning was behind them or how they related to the Davidic Messiah. Were there competing Messianic theologies in the community throughout its history or did one belief supplant the other? The **Messianic Rule** is typical of these fragments, giving rules for the future Messianic banquet:

IQSa ii ... When God engenders (the Priest-) Messiah, he shall come with them [at] the head of the whole congregation of Israel with all [his brethren, the sons] of Aaron the Priests, [those called] to the assembly, the men of renown; and they shall sit [before him, each man] in the order of his dignity. And then [the Mess]iah of Israel shall [come], and the chiefs of the [clans of Israel] shall sit before him, [each] in the order of his dignity, according to [his place] in their camps and marches....

... let no man extend his hand over the firstfruits of bread and wine before the Priest.... Thereafter, the Messiah of Israel shall extend his hand over the bread....²

Another document, the **Community Rule** mentions also a third, prophetic figure:

IQS, ix.10 They shall depart from none of the counsels of the Law to walk in all the stubbornness of their hearts, but shall be ruled by the primitive precepts in which the men of the Community were first instructed until there shall come the Prophet and the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel.³

The **Damascus Document** refers to “**CD B ii** the Messiah out of Aaron and Israel”⁴. It is ambiguous whether it refers to one or two Messiahs.

One very intriguing fragment is from an **Aramaic Apocalypse**. This fragment refers to someone as the “son of God” and the “son of the Most High”. Its interpretation is highly debated. Some hold it is a reference to a Messiah, others that it refers to more of an Antichrist like figure.

4Q246 ii The son of God he will be proclaimed (or: proclaim himself) and the son of the Most High they will call him. Like the sparks of the vision, so will be their kingdom. They will reign for years on the earth and they will trample all.... until the people of God will arise and all will rest from the sword. Their (the people of God's) kingdom will be an eternal kingdom...⁵

In summary, the sect of the Dead Sea Scrolls looked forward to an apocalyptic future where God would aid them in conquering the foreign occupier of the land and establish

1. *CDSSE*, p. 494

2. *CDSSE*, p. 159

3. *CDSSE*, p. 110

4. *CDSSE*, p. 134

5. *CDSSE*, p. 577

an ideal Israelite kingdom. They expected one to three leaders in this time, either a Davidic Messiah, or a pair of Messiahs (of Aaron and Israel) and sometimes a third, prophetic figure. These figures would be men anointed by God for these roles in the last days.

3.0 Early Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha

Great caches of literature from the other branches of early first century Judaism have, unfortunately, not been discovered. However there are some works from this time known as the Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha that have been preserved.

One such work is the called the *Psalms of Solomon*. Despite the title, the book makes no pretensions about being actually written by Solomon. In fact it contains explicit historic allusions to the Roman General Pompey conquering Jerusalem in 63 BC and to his death in 48 BC.¹ The collection was probably completed shortly afterwards, in the second half of the first century BC. The ascription “of Solomon” should be understood as describing the work’s character as wisdom literature rather than as ascribing its authorship, much as in English we might refer to any complex mechanism as a “Rube Goldberg Device”.

In the first part of the *17th Psalm of Solomon*, the psalmist recalled the promise to David and how Israel’s sins had caused David’s kingdom to end:

17:4 Lord, you chose David to be king over Israel,
and swore to him about his descendants forever,
that his kingdom should not fail before you.
17:5 But (because of) our sins, sinners rose up against us,
they set upon us and drove us out.....²

Then the psalmist prayed for a new king:

17:21 See, Lord, and raise up for them their king,
the son of David, to rule over your servant Israel
in the time known to you, O God.
17:22 Undergird him with the strength to destroy the unrighteous rulers,
to purge Jerusalem from gentiles
who trample here to destruction;
17:23 in wisdom and in righteousness to drive out
the sinners from the inheritance;
17:24 To shatter all their substance with an iron rod;
to destroy the unlawful nations with the word of his mouth;
17:25 At his warning the nations will flee from his presence;
and he will condemn sinners by the thoughts of their hearts.
...
17:32 And he will be a righteous king over them, taught by God.
There will be no unrighteousness among them in his days,

1. *OTP*, p. 2:640-641

2. *OTP*, p. 2:665-666

for all shall be holy,
and their king shall be the Lord Messiah.¹

The psalmist was clearly expecting a political figure who would reestablish the Davidic kingdom and continue the Davidic dynasty. In contrast to the Dead Sea Scroll community, the psalmist was not expecting this to be established by war:

17:33 (For) he will not rely on horse and rider and bow,
nor will he collect gold and silver for war.
Nor will he build up hope in a multitude for a day of war.

.....
17:35 He will strike the earth with the word of his mouth forever;
he will bless the Lord's people with wisdom and happiness.

17:36
He will expose officials and drive out sinners
by the strength of his word.²

There was a fad among Jewish doomsday cults to write books of apocalyptic visions in the name of Enoch. One such collection of works, originally written in Hebrew and/or Aramaic, but preserved primarily in Ethiopic, is called the *Ethiopic Apocalypse of Enoch*, or *1 Enoch*, to distinguish it from other similar works. Parts of this work have been found with the Dead Sea Scrolls, but it probably didn't originate with the Qumran community. One very symbolic vision describes the whole of Israelite history up to the Maccabean revolt (prophecy after the fact) and then describes the rise of something like a Messianic figure, symbolized by a horn.

90:9 I kept seeing till those lambs grew horns; but the ravens crushed their horns. Then I kept seeing till one great horn sprouted on one of those sheep, and he opened their eyes; and they had vision in them and their eyes were opened. ... 90:12 Those ravens gather and battle with him (the horned ram) and seek to remove his horn, but without success.

90:13 I saw thereafter the shepherds coming; and those vultures and kites cried aloud to the ravens so that they should smash the horn of that ram. But he battled with them, and they fought each other; and he cried aloud, while battling with them, so that (God's) help should come.³

A similar fad was to write in the name of the Greek mythical Sibyl. There are several books of these *Sibylline Oracles* extant. The third book, dating to the second century BC contains a prediction of a Messianic king and eschatological prophetic figures.

(3:652-656)
And then God will send a King from the sun
who will stop the entire earth from evil war,
killing some, imposing oaths of loyalty on others;
and he will not do all these things by his private plans
but in obedience to the noble teachings of the great God.

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1. *OTP*, p. 2:667
 2. *OTP*, p. 2:668
 3. *OTP*, p. 1:69-70

(3:767-771)

And then, indeed, he will raise up a kingdom for all ages among men, he who once gave the holy Law to the pious, to all of whom he promised to open the earth and the world and the gates of the blessed and all joys and immortal intellect and eternal cheer.

(3:781-782)

Prophets of the great God will take away the sword for they themselves are judges of men and righteous kings.¹

In the intertestamental period there was a consciousness that prophecy of the Old Testament kind had ceased. In the Dead Sea Scrolls we saw an eschatological prophetic figure alongside the Messiahs in some texts. The apocryphal *1 Maccabees* also contains a couple of allusions to a future prophet.

4:45 And they thought it best to tear it down, so that it would not be a lasting shame to them that the Gentiles had defiled it. So they tore down the altar, 4:46 and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until a prophet should come to tell what to do with them.

14:41 The Jews and their priests have resolved that Simon should be their leader and high priest forever, until a trustworthy prophet should arise...

The *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* was originally a Jewish work, but was taken over and reworked by a Christian cult. Some fragments of this work were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. This work provides some of the background for the idea of two Messiahs because it heavily emphasizes the dual leadership role of Levi and Judah. For example the *Testament of Gad 8:1* reads “Tell these things to your children as well, so that they will honor Judah and Levi, because from them the Lord will raise up a Savior for Israel.” The prophetic figure is found too. *Testament of Benjamin 9:2* reads “But in your allotted place will be the temple of God, and the later temple will exceed the former glory. The twelve tribes shall be gathered there and all the nations, until such time as the Most High shall send forth his salvation through the ministration of the unique prophet.”

4.0 Historical Revolts

We can find several clues about Messianic expectations from the various Jewish revolts, and attempts at revolts of the Roman era. I will first discuss the revolt of *Simon bar Kosiba* in 132-135 AD because it is the most explicitly Messianic. Then we'll examine some revolts recounted by Josephus.

Simon bar Kosiba was the leader of the Second Jewish Revolt of 132-135 AD (The First being the one of 66-73 AD when the temple was destroyed). To be sure, there were more than two revolts while Rome occupied Judea, these two were the only ones to meet any measure of success. Unlike the first revolt, which is documented in so much detail by Josephus, there is no extensive account of the second revolt. We know that

1. *OTP*, p. 1:360, 376-379

Simon managed to secure a good piece of Judea, although there is some uncertainty if he ever conquered Jerusalem. His government was able to mint coins and carry on other governmental functions.

What interests us here is the fact that Rabbi Akiba declared Simon to be “King Messiah”, and his followers knew him by the Messianic title “bar Kokhba”, which means “son of a star” (Numbers 24:17 “I see him, but not now / I behold him, but not close at hand, / A star will march forth out of Jacob, / and a scepter will rise out of Israel. / He will crush the skulls of Moab, / and the heads of all the sons of Sheth.”).¹

Josephus records accounts of several earlier insurrectionists, many of which appear to have had Messianic pretensions. Josephus avoids the use of the word Messiah (or Christ) in conjunction with them, for reasons that will be discussed below. A selection of these insurrectionists are presented here:²

Antiquities 18.4.1. (85) 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 Gerizzim, which is by them looked upon as the most holy of all mountains, and assured them that, when they were come thither, he would show them those sacred vessels which were laid under that place, because Moses put them there. (86) 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. (87) 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.

Antiquities 20.5.1. (97) Now it came to pass, 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 it; (98) 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. (99) This was what befell the Jews in the time of Cuspius Fadus’s government.

Antiquities 20.8.6. (167) These works, that were done by the robbers, filled the city with all sorts of impiety. And now these impostors and deceivers persuaded the multitude to follow them into the wilderness, (168) 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 punishments of their folly; for Felix brought them back, and then punished them. (169) Moreover, there came out of Egypt about this time to Jerusalem, one that said he was a prophet, and advised the multitude

1. “Bar Kokhba”, “Bar Kokhba Letters”, and “Messianic Movements in Judaism” in *ABD*. “Revolutionary Movements” in *DJG*.

2. Whiston’s translation.

of the common people to go along with him to the Mount of Olives, as it was called, which lay over against the city, and at the distance of five furlongs. (170) He said farther, that he would show them from hence, how, at his command, the walls of Jerusalem would fall down; and he promised that he would procure them an entrance into the city through those walls, when they were fallen down. (171) Now when Felix was informed of these things, he ordered his soldiers to take their weapons, and came against them with a great number of horsemen and footmen, from Jerusalem, and attacked the Egyptian and the people that were with him. He also slew four hundred of them, and took two hundred alive. (172) But the Egyptian himself escaped out of the fight, but did not appear any more. And again the robbers stirred up the people to make war with the Romans, and said they ought not to obey them at all; and when any persons would not comply with them, they set fire to their villages, and plundered them.

Rejecting this flavor of Messianism, Josephus instead reinterprets the Messianic expectation to refer to the Roman Emperor Vespasian, who was proclaimed Emperor while he was in Judea putting down the Jewish Revolt of 66-73 AD.

Wars 6.5.4 ... (312) But now, what did most elevate them in undertaking this war, 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." (313) 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. (314) However, it is not possible for men to avoid fate, although they see it beforehand. (315) But these men interpreted some of these signals according to their own pleasure; and some of them they utterly despised, until their madness was demonstrated, both by the taking of their city, and their own destruction.

5.0 Justin's Dialog with Trypho

Written in the mid second century AD, this is an account of Justin, a Christian, debating Trypho, a Jew about Christianity. It gives some hints of what Jews believed about the Messiah. By that time, Jews regarded the Messiah to be a man who won't even know he is the Messiah until Elijah announces him.

[Trypho speaking] Chapter VIII: "...But Christ -- if He has indeed been born, and exists anywhere -- is unknown, and does not even know Himself, and has no power until Elias come to anoint Him, and make Him manifest to all. And you, having accepted a groundless report, invent a Christ for yourselves, and for his sake are inconsiderately perishing."¹

Chapter XLIX: And Trypho said, "Those who affirm him to have been a man, and to have been anointed by election, and then to have become Christ, appear to me to speak more plausibly than you who hold those opinions which you express. For we all expect that Christ will be a man [born] of men, and that Elijah when he comes will anoint him. But if this man appear to be Christ, he must certainly be known as man [born] of men; but from the circumstance that Elijah has not yet come, I infer that this man is not He [the Christ]."²

1. *ANF*, p. 1:198

2. *ANF*, p. 1:219

[Justin speaking about Mic. 4] Chapter CX: And when I had finished these words, I continued: “Now I am aware that your teachers, sirs admit the whole of the words of this passage to refer to Christ; and I am likewise aware that they maintain He has not yet come; or if they say that He has come, they assert that it is not known who He is; but when He shall become manifest and glorious, then it shall be known who He is. And then, they say, the events mentioned in this passage shall happen, just as if there was no fruit as yet from the words of the prophecy.”¹

6.0 Late Pseudepigrapha

Except for the Dead Sea Scrolls, which represent only a single sect of Jews, the amount of early first century material is obviously very scarce, although it does have some consistency in expecting one or more political figures that would rule Israel as Messiah(s) and free Israel from its oppressors, either by war, or by the force of their word. After the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, we begin to find a larger number of extant writings of various cults. These cults typically have a non-political Messiah. Their Messiah is usually some sort of transcendent heavenly figure. It is likely that it is purely an accident of history that none of the early first century documents contain such a view (assuming none of these documents actually date that early, which some may).

A number of pseudepigrapha (and apocrypha) were written in the name of Baruch (Jeremiah’s scribe) and Ezra. This is because these figures were prominent in the 6th century BC Babylonian captivity. Babylon was often used as a code word for talking about Rome without being overtly subversive. One such work is called **2 Baruch**, to distinguish it from other works attributed to Baruch. In it, Baruch claimed that it had been revealed to him that he would live till the end of the world, although he kept this secret from his contemporaries, even his own son.

13:2 Stand upon your feet, Baruch, and hear the word of the mighty God. 13:3 Because you have been astonished at that which has befallen Zion, you will surely be preserved until the end of times to be for a testimony...

25:1 And he answered and said to me: You also will be preserved until that time, namely until that sign which the Most High will bring about before the inhabitants of the earth at the end of days....

43:1 You, however, Baruch, strengthen your heart with a view to that which has been said to you, and understand that which has been revealed to you because you have many consolations which will last forever. 43:2 For you will go away from this place and leave the regions which are now before your eyes. And you shall forget that which is corruptible and not again remember that which is among the mortal ones....

44:2 Behold, I go to my fathers in accordance with the way of the whole earth....

46:7 But with regard to the word that I shall be taken up, I did not let it be known to them at that time, not even to my son....

It is likely that the cult leader himself claimed to be Baruch. Several passages describe a Utopic vision of the Messianic kingdom:

1. *ANF*, p. 1:253

29:3 And it will happen that when all which should come to pass in these parts has been accomplished, the Anointed One will begin to be revealed... 29:5 The earth will also yield fruits then thousandfold.... 29:6 And those who are hungry will enjoy themselves and they will, moreover, see marvels every day.

30:1 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 home of him will rise... 30:4 But the souls of the wicked will the more waste away when they shall see all these things. 30:5 For they know that their torment has come and that their perditions have arrived....

39:5 After that a fourth kingdom arises whose power is harsher and more evil than those which were before it, and it will reign a multitude of times like the trees on the plain, and will rule the times and exalt itself more than the cedars of Lebanon.... 39:7 And it will happen when the time of its fulfillment is approaching in which it will fall, that at that time the dominion of my Anointed One which is like the fountain and the vine, will be revealed. And when it has revealed itself, it will uproot the multitude of its host....

40:1 The last ruler who is left alive at that time will be bound, whereas the entire host will be destroyed. And they will carry him on Mount Zion, and my Anointed One will convict him of all his wicked deeds and will assemble and set before him all the works of his hosts. 40:2 And after these things he will kill him and protect the rest of my people who will be found in the place that I have chosen. 40:3 And his dominion will last forever until the world of corruption has ended and until the times which have been mentioned before have been fulfilled...

72:2 After the signs have come of which I have spoken to you before, when the nations are moved and the time of my Anointed One comes, he will call all nations, and some of them he will spare, and others he will kill... 72:6 All those, now, who have ruled over you or have known you, will be delivered up to the sword.

73:1 And it will happen that after he has brought down everything which is in the world, and has sat down in eternal peace on the throne of the kingdom, then joy will be revealed and rest will appear. 73:2 And then health will descend in dew, and illness will vanish, and fear and tribulation and lamentation will pass away from among men, and joy will encompass the earth... 73:7 And women will no longer have pain when they bear, nor will they be tormented when they yield fruits of their womb.¹

The Messiah (Anointed One) that Baruch proclaimed appears to be a pre-existent figure who will be “revealed” in the end times. He will “sit down in eternal peace on the throne of the kingdom”. With the elimination of illness and lamentation, it appears that everyone in this eschatological kingdom will be immortal.

4 Ezra, like 2 Baruch above, was written in the name of a hero of the earlier Babylonian captivity, but was actually about the Roman occupation. Scholars regard the reference to the thirtieth year and Babylon to be not about the thirtieth year after Babylon captured and destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC, but about Rome having destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD. Accordingly, the date this book was actually written was about 100 AD.

3:1 In the thirtieth year after the destruction of our city, I Salathiel, who am also called Ezra, was in Babylon. I was troubled as I lay on my bed, and my thoughts welled up in

1. *OTP*, p. 1:615-652

my heart, 3:2 because I saw the desolation of Zion and the wealth of those who lived in Babylon. ...

The cult leader here was conscious that his pseudepigraphon's existence needed explaining because it had not been known for the previous six and a half and more centuries as the canonical books had. So he created an origins myth for his "scripture". In the captivity, Israel's scriptures had been lost, so he claimed, and Ezra was given a miraculous memory and redictated all scripture again. First the twenty-four canonical books that had been openly known (remember that 1-2 Samuel, etc are a single book in Hebrew), then another seventy books that were entrusted to "the wise among your people". The cult leader, naturally, would have claimed to be of that secret order of the wise and was inducting his followers into its secrets and mysteries.

...14:41 and my mouth was opened, and was no longer closed. 14:42 And the Most High gave understanding to the five men, and by turns they wrote what was dictated, in characters which they did not know. They sat forty days, and wrote during the daytime, and ate their bread at night. 14:43 As for me, I spoke in the daytime and was not silent at night. 14:44 So during the forty days ninety-four books were written. 14:45 And when the forty days were ended, the Most High spoke to me, saying, "Make public the twenty-four books that you wrote first and let the worthy and the unworthy read them; 14:46 but keep the seventy that were written last, in order to give them to the wise among your people...."

4 Ezra's Messiah is paradoxically both a being "kept until the end of days ... for many ages" and also "from the posterity of David". When he is revealed, the nations will stop fighting each other and gang up on him. He will reprove the nations and "destroy them without effort by the law". Afterwards, the world will live in an Eden-like paradise for four hundred years. At the end of the four hundred years, the Messiah and everyone on earth will die, and remain dead for seven days. Afterwards, is the resurrection of all the dead.

7:27 And everyone who has been delivered from the evils that I have foretold shall see my wonders. 7:28 For my son the Messiah shall be revealed with those who are with him, and those who remain shall rejoice four hundred years. 7:29 And after these years my son the Messiah shall die, and all who draw human breath. 7:30 And the world shall be turned back to primeval silence for seven days, as it was at the first beginnings; so that no one shall be left. 7:31 And after seven days the world, which is not yet awake, shall be roused, and that which is corruptible shall perish. 7:32 And the earth shall give up those who are asleep in it; and the chambers shall give up the souls which have been committed to them...

... 12:11 The eagle which you saw coming up from the sea is the fourth kingdom which appeared in a vision to your brother Daniel...

12:31 And as for the lion that you saw rousing up out of the forest and roaring and speaking to the eagle and reproving him for his unrighteousness, and for all his words that you have heard, 12:32 this is the Messiah whom the Most High has kept until the end of days, who will arise from the posterity of David, and will come and speak to them; he will denounce them for their ungodliness and for their wickedness, and will cast up before them their comoptemptuous dealings. 12:33 For first he will set them living before his judgment seat, and when he has reproved them, then he will destroy them. 12:34 But he will deliver in mercy the remnant of my people those who have been saved throughout my borders, and he will make them joyful until the end comes, the day of judgment, of which I spoke to you at the beginning....

13:25 This is the interpretation of the vision: As for your seeing a man come up from the heart of the sea, 13:26 this is he whom the Most High has been keeping for many ages, who will himself deliver his creation; and he will direct those who are left. 13:27 And as for your seeing wind and fire and a store coming out of his mouth, 13:28 and as for his not holding spear or weapon of war, yet destroying the onrushing multitude which came to conquer him, this is the interpretation: 13:29 Behold, the days are coming when the Most High will deliver those who are on the earth. 13:30 And bewilderment of mind shall come over those who dwell on the earth. 13:31 And they shall plan to make war against one another, city against city, place against place, people against people, and kingdom against kingdom. 13:32 And when these things come to pass and the signs occur which I showed you before, then my son will be released, whom you saw as a man coming up from the sea. 13:33 And when all the nations hear his voice, every man shall leave his own land and the warfare that they have against one another; 13:34 and an innumerable multitude shall be gathered together, as you saw, desiring to come and conquer him. 13:35 But he will stand on top of Mount Zion. 13:36 And Zion will come and be made manifest to all people, prepared and built, as you saw the mountain carved out with hands. 13:37 And he, my Son, will reprove the assembled nations for their ungodliness (this was symbolized by the storm), 13:38 and will reproach them to their face with their evil thoughts and with the torments with which they are to be tortured (which were symbolized by the flames); and he will destroy them without effort by the law (which was symbolized by the fire)...¹

Enoch is another figure that was used as a pseudonym by the authors of pseudepigraphic apocalypses. We first encountered this book earlier because fragments of it had also been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. One section of it, *1 Enoch 37-71*, has not been found at Qumran. However, it is not clear if this is simply because it was written later or because the Messianism of it was not compatible with Essene theology.

In it, the Messiah was clearly a preexistent heavenly being who would be sent to the earth to dwell among men.

45:4 On that day, I will cause my Elect One to dwell among them
I will transform heaven and make it a blessing of light forever
45:5 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 here...

The author expanded greatly on the “one like a son of man” in Daniel, and made extensive use of the Son of Man title for the Messiah.

47:4 This Son of Man whom you have seen is the One who would remove the kings and the mighty ones from their comfortable seats and the strong ones from their thrones. He shall loosen the reigns of the strong and crush the teeth of the sinners. 46:5 He shall depose the kings from their thrones and kingdoms. For they do not extol and glorify him, and neither do they obey him, the source of their kingship. (See also 47:1-6).

48:5 All those who dwell upon the earth shall fall and worship before him; they shall glorify, bless, and sing the name of the Lord of the Spirits. 48:6 For this purpose he became the Chosen One; he was concealed in the presence of (the Lord of the Spirits) prior to the creation of the world, and for eternity. 48:7 And he has revealed the wisdom of the Lord of the Spirits to the righteous and the holy ones, ...48:9 I shall deliver them

1. *OTP*, p. 517-559

into the hands of my elect ones like grass in the fire and like lead in the water, so they shall burn before the face of the holy ones and sink before their sight, and no place will be found for them. 48:10 On the day of their weariness, there shall be an obstacle on the earth and they shall fall on their faces; and they shall not rise up (again), nor anyone (be found) who will take them with his hands and raise them up. For they have denied the Lord of the Spirits and his Messiah. Blessed by the name of the Lord of the Spirits! (See also 48:2-49:4, 51:1-4)

52:4 And he said to me, "All these things which you have seen happened by the authority of his Messiah so that he may give orders and be praised upon the earth."...

62:7 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....

69:27 (Then) there came to them a great joy. And they blessed, glorified, and extolled (the Lord) on account of the fact that the name of that (Son of) Man was revealed to them. He shall never pass away or perish from before the face of the earth.... 69:29 Thenceforth nothing that is corruptible shall be found; for that Son of Man has appeared and has seated himself upon the throne of his glory; and all evil shall disappear from before his face....¹

One intriguing passage at the conclusion may indicate that this eschatological Son of Man is Enoch himself. M. A. Knibb translates it:

71:14 And that angel came to me, and greeted me with his voice, and said to me, You are the Son of Man who was born to righteousness, and righteousness remains over you, and the righteousness of the Head of Days will not leave you.²

Another book of Sibylline oracles, *5 Sibyl*, which dates to the early second century has a passage which seems to refer to a similar sort of Messianic figure, coming from the heavens.

(414-417)
For a blessed man came from the expanses of heaven
with a scepter in his hands which God gave him,
and he gained sway over all things well, and gave back the wealth
to all the good, which previous men had taken.³

7.0 Summary

The accidents of history dictate what is and is not preserved of the written documents of the first century. We must therefore be cautious about how we interpret those documents that do survive as they may not accurately reflect the actual demographics of first century Jewry.

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1. *OTP*, p. 5-12, 29-50
 2. *AOT*, p. 256
 3. *OTP*, p. 390-405

We see significant variety in the documents. One, two, or even three human figures are predominate in the earliest ones. The simple mortal human Messiah was seen as being another David, a political figure establishing a political kingdom and reestablishing a Davidic dynasty ruling over it. In some surviving literary documents, he establishes his rule by his word rather than his sword. In the Dead Sea scrolls, the Messianic age is establish by warfare, although no extant document places the Messiah in charge Israel's armies during this conflict. However, it is not necessarily so that a non-warrior Messiah was the dominate expectation. The fact that David himself was a warrior would suggest to most otherwise. The long series of leaders of revolts had Messianic overtones, played down by Josephus, but explicitly seen in the records of the last, bar Kockba. They show that a would-be warrior Messiah would find no shortage of followers. The disasterous lack of success of these false Messiahs prompted Josephus to downplay their Messianic claims and proclaim the Roman Emperor Vespasian as the fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies instead.

At some point a different view of the Messiah became popular, especially common in literature that could be described as cultic. Based on Danial's "one like a son of man", these cult leaders, seeking to avoid the political disasters of those who claimed to be Messiah themselves, proclaimed a future Messiah who was something more than a mere human, either an angelic being of some sort, or perhaps even the translated Enoch. Although we know this view only from post 70 AD documents we can't rule it out from early first century or before since such a small amount of material exists from that time. Jesus himself used the "son of man" terminology and the Daniel passage to speak of his own role. Books such as 1 Enoch don't seem to be derivative from Christian belief in other ways, and so we may presume this belief extends back to the early first century

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8.1 Abbreviations

ANF. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. (Roberts and Donaldson).

AOT. *The Apocryphal Old Testament*. (Sparks).

CDSSE. *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*. (Vermes).

DJG. *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. (Green).

NET. *New English Translation*. (Biblical Studies Foundation).

OTP. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. (Charlsworth).

The Day of the LORD

“The Day of the LORD” is a technical term whose meaning changed between the Old and New Testaments.

1.0 Introduction

The phrase “the day of the LORD” and some variations will be used to illustrate some hermeneutical principals in the study of the Bible. It is important to take into account history, linguistics and context. When a phrase such as this has a technical meaning beyond the simple meaning of the words and syntax involved, it is important to determine that the context demands the technical meaning and to determine if its usage in technical contexts didn’t evolve over time, as language is never static: the Bible was written over a period of a millennium and a half in three different languages.

2.0 The Literal Phrase

The phrase as typeset (with small capitals) in the title is as it appears in the most English versions of the Old Testament. In the New Testament, some variation will be seen and discussed later in this essay. First, we will examine the individual words’ meanings as well as the meaning contributed by the syntax in isolation of the context.

2.1 Day

The Hebrew word for “day” is *yom* (rhymes with dome). The basic meaning is the period of daylight (as opposed to night). When counting periods of time, it can refer to a full 24-hour day-night cycle. It can also be used for a more general period of time much like its English counterpart. Phrases like “day of ...” often mean not a particular day on the calendar, but rather something like “the time of” or “when”. As time keeping became more precise, smaller units of time were used similarly (hour in Greek, minute, second, or even instant in modern idiom).

2.2 The LORD

In Hebrew, this is actually the Divine Name: *YHWH* (Yahweh). Most translations follow the tradition of substituting the phrase “the LORD” for the name and printing the word “LORD” using small capitals for the lower case letters. Thus the phrase is really the “day of Yahweh”. In the New Testament, the Greek word for “Lord” (κύριος) is used (the tradition of substituting the word “Lord” for the Divine Name is pre-Christian) as well as references to Jesus and/or Christ (Day of the Lord Jesus).

2.3 Of

There is no word for “of” in Hebrew. The idea is expressed syntactically. The phrase X of Y is expressed by simply saying X' Y where X' is a (usually) shortened form of the word X called the Construct Form. X' also has the definite article prefix stripped off, so the word “the” isn't actually present either. It is added by the translator to English because of the demands of English syntax and style. Thus in Hebrew, the phrase is only two words: *yom YHWH*.

2.4 Syntax

What does it mean to say “the day of the LORD”? It is surprisingly ambiguous. It can express the simple possessive: the day that He owns. Ultimately every day belongs to God of course, so unless that is the point of the context, the phrase probably means something beyond that. In English, we refer to the Sabbath as the Lord's Day. That is, a day the especially belongs to God, or is dedicated to God. However, that, as we shall see, isn't the point of the contexts it is used in the Old Testament.

“Of” can also specify origin. Of course, every day is from God. So unless that is the specific point of the context, “of” as origin must mean that a day that is from God in some special way. Most occurrences of the phrase will be in this latter sense. However in what way the day is specially from God can only be determined by context. The phrase in isolation does not denote the meaning that precisely.

3.0 Old Testament Usage

3.1 Isaiah

Although the language is universal in scope, the context of Isaiah 13:6-9 is an “oracle concerning Babylon” (Isaiah 13:1 NASB). Verse 6 says the day is “near” and describes it as a time of destruction. As we saw in a previous study¹, these prophecies concerning Babylon are already fulfilled.

1. See “Isaiah 13:1-14:23 — The Burden of Babylon” on page 25.

3.2 Lamentations

Lamentations is a collection of laments concerning the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon in 586 BC. Lamentations 2:21-22 refers to this past event as “the day of Your/the LORD’s anger”.

3.3 Ezekiel

In Ezekiel 13:1-7, the day of the LORD was the then current situation (the Babylonian conquest) that the false prophets had done nothing to protect Israel from (esp. Ezekiel 1:5). Ezekiel 30:1-10 describes the day of the LORD as near (Ezekiel 30:1) and explicitly identifies it with the “hand of Nebuchadnezzar” (Ezekiel 30:10).

3.4 Joel

Joel’s prophecy opened with a description of a recent foreign invasion (Joel 1:6), which was metaphorically described as a series of locust invasions (Joel 1:4). In Joel 1:15, he proclaimed the nearness of the day of the LORD, whose destruction would be even worse than what had come so far. Joel 2:1-2 also proclaims its nearness and that it will be worse than anything that has happened before then, and than anything that will happen for many generations to come. Thus we see that the day of the LORD that Joel proclaimed was something of his own time, and not eschatological: it was near, and there would be many generations afterwards. Further, Joel 2:28-32 records a prophecy regarding “after all of this” that Peter, in Acts 2:16-21, proclaimed as fulfilled at Pentecost.

3.5 Amos

In Amos 5:18-20, the day of the LORD was a day some people were mistakenly looking forward to. Amos proclaimed that it would be a day of “darkness and not light”, but gave no indication that an eschatological judgment was in view.

3.6 Obadiah

Obadiah, in verse 15, repeated the common refrain that the day of the LORD was drawing near.

3.7 Zephaniah

Zephaniah, in 1:7, also proclaimed the day of the LORD to be near. Although Zephaniah 1:2-3 makes this sound like an eschatological judgment (“I will destroy everything from the face of the earth ... people and animals ... the birds ... and the fish in the sea ... I will remove humanity from the face of the earth”), comparison against Zephaniah 2:3, 7 (“... Maybe you will be protected on the day of the LORD’s angry judgment.... Those who are left from the kingdom of Judah....”), which holds out hope of a remnant surviving, shows that Zephaniah 1:2-3 is typical prophetic-poetic hyperbole.¹

3.8 Malachi

Malachi 4:5-6, one of the latest of the prophets, shows some hint of an eschatological meaning. In this passage, the phrase was loaded with superlatives, “the great and terrible day of the LORD”, and was an event that was said to be after Elijah would be sent to Israel. Jesus proclaimed this later prophecy to be fulfilled in the person of John (Mt 11:14). But even at that, Malachi 4:6 indicates that “Elijah’s” ministry would avert the judgment, presumably to a much more distant time.

4.0 New Testament Usage

When the Old Testament was translated into Greek, the divine name YHWH (Yahweh) was translated by κύριος, “lord”. In the New Testament, this title is applied to Jesus and the phrase “the day of the Lord Jesus Christ”, and permutations thereof. There, it takes on a different technical meaning that is eschatological.

4.1 Gospels

Jesus himself does not appear to have used the phrase “day of the Lord”, but some of his sayings may have influenced later usage of the term in the New Testament.

In a parable in Matthew 24:42-44, Jesus says “you do not know which day your Lord is will come” [NET]. Here the use of the word “day” is idiomatic for “when”... see verse 44 where the word “hour” is used similarly. Nonetheless, the phrasing does call to mind the Old Testament phrase in a possibly eschatological context.¹

In Luke 17:22-37, Jesus uses the phrase “days of the Son of Man” in an interesting context:

Lk 17:22 Then he said to the disciples, “The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. [NET]

The phrase appears to refer to the time of Jesus’ earthly ministry before the crucifixion and resurrection. The next verse then warns to not go after false messiahs as a result of their longing.

Lk 17:23 Then people will say to you, ‘Look, there he is!’ or ‘Look, here he is!’ Do not go out or chase after them. [NET]

In the next two verses, Jesus refers to “his [the Son of Man’s] day” as a future event that comes after his suffers and is rejected.

Lk 17:24 For just like the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day. 17:25 But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. [NET]

1. See “Context in Literature and Language” on page 27.

1. See page 127.

The exact meaning of “his day” is not obvious, but it is suggestive of the Old Testament phrase “day of the LORD”. The following verses use the phrases “days of Noah” and “days of Lot” meaning their earthly lifetimes, analogous to the “days of the Son of Man” above, which also occurs in this passage. The temporal horizon in verse 22 and 25 is the lifetimes of the disciples being addressed.

Lk 17:26 Just as it was in the days of Noah, so too it will be in the days of the Son of Man. 17:27 People were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage—right up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. 17:28 Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot, people were eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, building; 17:29 but on the day Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. [NET]

Although the days of Noah and Lot led up to destruction, the destruction itself is incidental to his point. The point of these verses is the event took people by surprise... they were not expecting it. So, too, the Son of Man ... “in his day” (v. 24) will be something unexpected.

Lk 17:30 It will be the same on the day the Son of Man is revealed. [NET]

This is commonly taken as a reference to the second coming, but this makes no sense of what the “days of the Son of Man” would mean. The revelation of the Son of Man that will take people, even the disciples, by surprise, his suffering, rejection (v. 25), crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection. The conquering Messiah that many people had expected, or at least hoped for, was one who would defeat the Romans and set up a political kingdom, not the Messiah who conquered death and ruled from heaven, as Jesus told the High Priest¹:

Mt 26:64 Jesus said to him, “You have said it yourself. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.” [Underline added for emphases] [NET]

Admittedly this leaves the following verses even more enigmatic that they were to begin with.

Lk 17:31 On that day, anyone who is on the roof, with his goods in the house, must not come down to take them away, and likewise the person in the field must not turn back. 17:32 Remember Lot’s wife! 17:33 Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it. 17:34 I tell you, in that night there will be two people in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. 17:35 There will be two women grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left.” [NET]

Who is being taken? the sinner in judgment? the saved to heaven? some of each taken by an invading army? The disciples were equally perplexed, but Jesus’ response was even more enigmatic.

Lk 17:37 Then the disciples said to him, “Where, Lord?” He replied to them, “Where the dead body is, there the vultures will gather.” [NET]

1. See “Messianic Expectations” on page 87.

As enigmatic as this is, it certainly sounds as if those who are “taken” are not taken someplace pleasant. I suggest that the import of these verses is actually evangelistic, and those who are taken are those who die without accepting Jesus. The image of the vultures (or, eagles, the word means both in Greek), may be evocative of the Romans destroying Jerusalem in AD 70 after the Christians had fled the city.

In John 8:56, Jesus refers to “my day”, but the meaning there is clearly the time of his earthly ministry.

We’ve seen in these passages that Jesus did not use a phrase analogous to the “day of the LORD”. There is the idea of a day that is uniquely his, but this seems to refer to the resurrection. However, there is also a passage where he refers to the “last day” when the general resurrection will occur:

Jn 6:39 Now this is the will of the one who sent me—that I should not lose one person of every one he has given me, but raise them all up at the last day. 6:40 For this is the will of my Father—for everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him to have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” [NET]

He also used the phrase “day of judgment” similarly: Matthew 10:15, 11:22-24, 12:36.

Mt 10:15 I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for the region of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town!

Mt 11:22 But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you! 11:23 And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be thrown down to Hades! For if the miracles done among you had been done in Sodom, it would have continued to this day. 11:24 But I tell you, it will be more bearable for the region of Sodom on the day of judgment than for you!”

Mt 12:36 I tell you that on the day of judgment, people will give an account for every worthless word they speak.

4.2 Paul

In what may be the earliest epistles, Paul applies the Greek phrase “day of the Lord” (the usual translation of the Hebrew phrase “day of the LORD”) to the day of judgment (1 Thessalonians 5:2, 4; 2 Thessalonians 2:2-3). In the latter letter, he refutes a false letter going around claiming that the day of the Lord had already come. What was meant by that is not clear since a literal judgment had not taken place (such as the destruction of Jerusalem)¹. Perhaps a spiritual resurrection in contrast to a physical resurrection, as Paul had refuted in 1 Corinthians 15, was the nature of the false teaching.

In later letters, Paul expands the familiar expression from the LXX to include the name Jesus and/or the title Christ. In 1 Corinthians 1:8, “[Jesus] who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ”. Referring back to this day in 1 Corinthians 3:13, “each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it...”. 1 Corinthians 5:5, “... so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” (See also 2 Corinthians 1:14). The eschatological meaning is particularly clear in Philippi-

1. See “Warning of a Heresy (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3a)” on page 170.

ans 1:6, 10: “For I am confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus... so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ”. In Romans 2:5, 16, Paul described this day as a day of judgment.

Rom 2:5 But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath for yourselves in the day of wrath, when God’s righteous judgment is revealed!

Rom 2:16 on the day when God will judge the secrets of human hearts, according to my gospel through Christ Jesus.

4.3 Peter

Peter also uses the phrase eschatologically: “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief; when it comes, the heavens will disappear with a horrific noise, and the celestial bodies will melt away in a blaze, and the earth and every deed done on it will be laid bare.” (2 Peter 3:10).

5.0 Conclusion

The phrase “day of the Lord” is not in itself eschatological. It tends to be a technical term whose usage changed between the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, it is nearly always described as a day that was “near” and even associated explicitly with then contemporaneous foreign incursions. Only in the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, does it take on a hint of eschatological meaning.

Jesus himself did not use the term, but he did use the phrases “last day” and “day of judgment” eschatologically. When the title “Lord” was applied to Jesus, the phrase “day of the Lord” with “Jesus” and/or “Christ” was adapted and applied to eschatology by both Paul and Peter.

While Old Testament descriptions of the day of the Lord may be applied typologically to the eschatological judgment, their primary meaning is always to history. Those passages should not be taken as prophetic of eschatology.

Conclusion

Mark 13: Introduction

Rarely does the so-called “Synoptic Problem” have an actual effect on interpretation, but it does for Mark 13, so we first discuss this issue in detail.

1.0 How The Gospels Came To Be

apol·o·get·ics \-tikz\ *noun plural but singular or plural in construction*
(circa 1733)

1 : systematic argumentative discourse in defense (as of a doctrine)

2 : a branch of theology devoted to the defense of the divine origin and authority of Christianity¹

1.1 Importance of Synoptic Study

A comparison of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke shows that they often recount the same events and sayings of Jesus. Comparison also shows there are often differences between these parallel accounts. These differences are often exploited by skeptics to argue against the reliability of the Gospels in producing an accurate picture of the historical Jesus. It is important for the Bible student of today, especially one entering the secular college environment, to be versed in these issues to be able to mount a defense against such an attack.

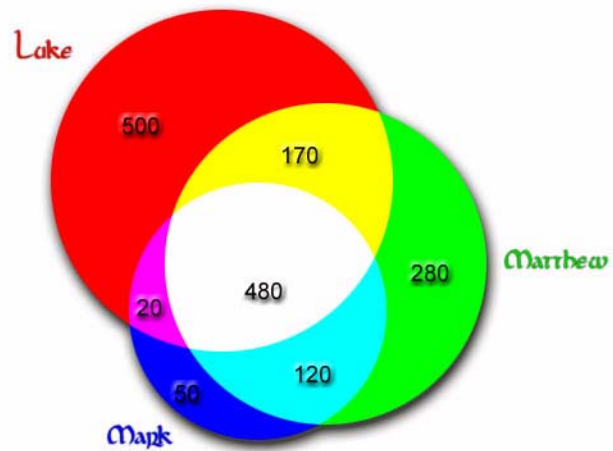
1.2 Synopsis of the Synoptics

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke often present the same events and same sayings of Jesus in nearly the same words. The following chart² shows the approximate breakdown of the overlap as measured in verses (approximate because what is one verse in one Gospel might be two verses in the parallel passage):

1. *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*.

2. Derived from Robert C. Newman, “The Synoptic Problem! A Proposal for Handling both Internal & External Evidence”. *Westminster Theological Journal Vol 43 #1*. p. 137.

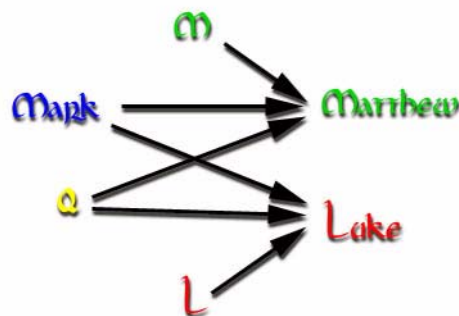
(And you thought those Venn diagrams you studied in math class would never have any useful purpose!) Some interesting patterns emerge here. One is that nearly all of Mark is contained in the other two synoptic Gospels. Another is that there is a sizable chunk of verses shared by Luke and Matthew that aren't in Mark. The closeness of the wording of the individual verses has suggested to many scholars



that there is a literary relationship between the Gospels. That is, the author of a given Gospel had in his possession one, the other, or both of the others and freely quoted from it, or them. For a variety of reasons, none of which are absolutely conclusive individually, it is usually assumed that Mark is the first of the three and the other two quoted extensively from it. The verses shared by Luke and Matthew but not in Mark are mostly sayings of Jesus, rather than a mix of sayings and stories that much of the three synoptic Gospels themselves are. This strongly suggests that they were copied from a hypothetical source document that consisted primarily of sayings. This hypothetical document is called *Q*, probably from the German word for “source”. Materials unique to Matthew and Luke are referred to as Special Matthew and Special Luke and are often symbolized by the letters *M* and *L*, respectively.

One would think that this theory would be referred to as the Four-Source Theory, and sometimes it is. But in practice, skeptical scholarship disparages the Special Matthew and Luke material and calls it the Two-Source Theory.

Most commentaries, whether evangelical, liberal, or secular will adopt this view point. Others have turned this around and argued that Mark is a condensed version of Matthew, Luke, or both (*a la* Readers Digest), but they are a minority. Mark's version of pericopes are often more detailed than Matthew's or Luke's.



1.3 Dating The Gospels

Skeptical scholars approach source analysis with an ideological ax to grind. Specifically, they are seeking to come up with a developmental view of the Gospels. It is here that much discussion of the “historical Jesus” centers. The developmental view of the Gospels argues that as Christian theology developed, these developments were written back into the sayings and stories of Jesus. Thus any difference between, say, Mark and Matthew arises because the community out of which Matthew was written had developed additional or different beliefs and then put these words into Jesus’ mouth to give them authority: words never spoken by the historical Jesus.

Intrinsic in this approach is a late dating of the Gospels. Because the Olivet Discourse so clearly refers to the destruction of Jerusalem, it is assumed that all the Gospels date to about AD 70 at the earliest. Mark is usually placed at shortly after AD 70 while Matthew and Luke are dated towards the end of the 1st century. The significance of this is that they were written long after most of the original apostles were dead, giving ample time for the orally preserved traditions to be shaped and rewritten in light of theological and ideological development. Once written down, they became less mutable.

Now, the question is, once you shed this anti-supernatural bias and accept that the Olivet Discourse could be spoken by the Son of God 40 years before the event itself, what evidence is there to indicate when it was really written? Evidences for a pre-AD 70 date are totally ignored by those with an anti-supernatural bias because it is assumed *a priori* that accurate predictions can’t predate the events predicted.

1.3.1 Mark

Papias is an early 2nd century writer quoted by Eusebius who said the following regarding the Gospel of Mark:

14 Papias gives also in his own work other accounts of the words of the Lord on the authority of Aristion who was mentioned above, and traditions as handed down by the presbyter John; to which we refer those who are fond of learning. But now we must add to the words of his which we have already quoted the tradition which he gives in regard to Mark, the author of the Gospel.

15 “This also the presbyter said: Mark having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things said or done by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterward, as I said, he followed Peter, who adapted his teaching to the needs of his hearers, but with no intention of giving a connected account of the Lord’s discourses, so that Mark committed no error while he thus wrote some things as he remembered them. For he was careful of one thing, not to omit any of the things which he had heard, and not to state any of them falsely.” These things are related by Papias concerning Mark.¹

The “presbyter John” referred to here was probably either the apostle John or a disciple of one of the apostles. There is also the following comment in the writings of Justin in the mid 2nd century:

And when it is said that He changed the name of one of the apostles to Peter; and when it is written in the memoirs of Him that this so happened, as well as that He changed the

1. Eusebius. *Church History*. Book 3, Chapter 39.

names of other two brothers, the sons of Zebedee, to Boanerges, which means sons of thunder;¹

The referent of the pronoun in “memoirs of Him” could refer to Peter as well as to Christ. If Mark, who is the only one of the Gospels to record the change of name of the sons of Zebedee, was writing Peter’s teaching, then it might be that Justin here is referring to the gospel of Mark as the memoirs of Peter. One final ancient reference is preserved by Eusebius. Here, Clement claimed:

The Gospel according to Mark had this occasion. As Peter had preached the Word publicly at Rome, and declared the Gospel by the Spirit, many who were present requested that Mark, who had followed him for a long time and remembered his sayings, should write them out. And having composed the Gospel he gave it to those who had requested it.

7 When Peter learned of this, he neither directly forbade nor encouraged it.²

The weight of these traditions, combined with their consistency with modern analysis that Mark was written independently of the other Gospels (rather than being a condensed version of Matthew and/or Luke) suggests that they are most probably correct. We know that Peter was martyred in Rome in the mid-60’s AD, so Mark would have to be written sometime before that, but since we don’t know when, or on how many occasions Peter had visited Rome, we can’t really say for sure when before then, but see below on Luke. Since Peter was still in Jerusalem in AD 49, for the council meeting that validated Paul’s teaching (Acts 15:1-35), it couldn’t have been earlier than the 50’s.

The idea that Mark was written before Luke and Matthew is often referred to as the “priority of Mark”: ie, Mark is prior to the others. However the word “priority” also carries with it the idea of more importance, which is especially significant here because because of the skeptic’s concept of development of the gospel. I prefer the term “independence of Mark” as I believe all four Gospels accurately depict the historical Jesus.

1.3.2 Luke

The opening verses of Luke read:

Lk 1:1 Now many have undertaken to compile an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, 1:2 like the accounts passed on to us by those who were eyewitnesses and servants of the word from the beginning. 1:3 So it seemed good to me as well, because I have followed all things carefully from the beginning, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 1:4 so that you may know for certain the things you were taught. [NET]

This makes several important points. First Luke was aware of many written accounts already in existence. Second, Luke was not himself an eyewitness of Jesus’ life. He obtained his data from careful investigation. Given the parallels between the Gospels of Luke and Mark and that Mark most likely was written without the use of written

1. Justin. *Dialogue* 106.

2. Eusebius. *Church History*. Book 6, Chapter 14

sources, we can safely say that Luke had Mark's gospel and made use of it in writing his. We can also pinpoint when Luke was written fairly closely. Note this verse in Acts:

Ac 1:1 I wrote the former account, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach 1:2 until the day he was taken up to heaven, after he had given orders by the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. [NET]

Clearly Luke and Acts are two volumes of a single literary work, both written by the same author. From the first person passages towards the end of Acts, we know that the author was with Paul in the journey to Rome. The last even recorded in Acts is Paul being under house arrest for two years, where it ends abruptly without giving any indication of what happened to Paul (Acts 28:30-31). It seems most likely that Luke-Acts was written and published at this time, i.e. AD 62. Since Luke made use of Mark, this gives us another clue when Mark was written: in order for Luke to have it available, Mark must have been written some time in the 50's (or earlier).

1.3.3 Matthew

Matthew's Gospel has some complicated issues. Papias said the following:

16 But concerning Matthew he writes as follows: "So then Matthew wrote the oracles in the Hebrew language, and every one interpreted them as he was able."¹

Irenaeus, in the late second century also says

Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church.²

There are a number of problems with this tradition. First, Matthew, as we know it, is written in Greek and quotes extensively from Mark, which was also written in Greek. Second, the Greek of Matthew doesn't read like a translation (translations frequently reflect the source language in idioms, syntax, and loan words). This Aramaic gospel (Aramaic being the language of the Hebrews at that time) was almost certainly not the Gospel of Matthew that we know today. If the Aramaic gospel cited above had relationship to the Gospel we know, then it would be as one of the sources, either *Q* or some or all of Special Matthew. However, it is possible that the Aramaic gospel that Irenaeus knew was actually a translation of the canonical Gospel back into Aramaic, and he mistakenly assumed that it was the original.

A case can be made for dating Matthew to before the destruction of the Temple, however. For one thing, Matthew often points out how aspects of Jesus' life was fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. If it was written after 70AD, one might reasonably expect it to point out how Jesus' prophecy regarding the Temple was fulfilled. Another thing to note is that comparison of the synoptic Gospels shows that Matthew's author tended to combine topically related sayings of Jesus into longer blocks of sayings. His use of Mark 13 is a case in point. He combined it with prophecies Jesus said regarding the end times (things which Luke recorded as a separate incident from the Olivet Discourse). Had Matthew been written after 70 AD, it seems likely that the two would not

1. Eusebius. *Church History*. Book 3, Chapter 39

2. Irenaeus. *Against Heresies*. Book 3, Chapter 1

have been linked so closely together since at that time, one would be fulfilled prophecy, and the other yet-to-be fulfilled prophecy, and thus be more distinct from the author's perspective.

2.0 Historical Jesus

Behind debate over the date and composition of the Gospels is the search for the historical Jesus: that is, the determining of what Jesus really taught during his earthly ministry. Jesus himself did not leave written teachings. He taught by speaking. If the written Gospels were not written until the late 1st century AD, then they were written only after Jesus' teachings existed in memorized oral tradition, and long after anyone who actually heard Jesus speak them had died (consider how many 80 year olds you know today; now drop the average life span from 75 to about 30 years and see how many are left; now persecute and martyr them — virtually none will be left — in fact, tradition holds that of the Twelve only John lived to the end of the first century and died a natural death). The belief then of scholars such as the Jesus Seminar is that as later generations developed additional beliefs and accumulated additional teachings, these beliefs and teachings were given authority by being placed on the lips of Jesus.

The result of this mind set is the so-called "Search for the Historical Jesus", where scholars attempt to discern which teachings in the gospels are later additions, and which are actually spoken by Jesus. The Jesus Seminar attempted to do this by vote. Each scholar voted via a colored marble (red, pink, gray, and black) representing a measure of certainty that Jesus spoke each individual saying. The interesting thing is, as someone on USENET once commented, how Jesus winds up sounding more like a 20th century liberal Californian than a 1st century Galilean Jew. These searches for the historical Jesus inevitably end up finding a Jesus congenial to the searcher.

Of course, if the gospels were written much earlier, while the original witnesses were still alive, and using material written by the apostles themselves, then our approach to the historical Jesus must be vastly different from skeptics such as the Jesus Seminar. One must confront the Jesus presented in the gospels without picking and choosing passages based on man-made criteria.

There is no indication that Jesus himself wrote any of his teachings down. Society being more or less illiterate, Jesus propagated his teaching by preaching and by teaching his apostles and disciples to preach and sending them out (Matthew 10:1-11:1; Mark 6:7-13; Luke 9:1-6; 10:1-24). Thus initially, Jesus' teachings were preserved by memorization of an oral tradition. Anyone who has heard a speaker who travels around speaking at conferences, concerts, etc. knows such speakers have a repertoire of stories and teachings. Anyone who travels with such a speaker soon knows the repertoire by heart. Jesus undoubtedly taught the same things over and over again in his ministry. The apostles and disciples heard various teachings, sayings, and parables many many times and memorized them.

Similarly, Jesus performed many many healings over the course of his ministry and confronted opponents many times. As a result, the precise chronological order of episodes and teachings of Jesus are not likely to be remembered. In fact, when comparing the Gospels, we find that they often differ in the order they present their material. Episodes

were rearranged and teachings were grouped in different ways. Matthew especially collected together material into five large discourses, material that we find scattered throughout the other Gospels. Note also the quote above regarding the authorship of Mark: he “wrote down accurately, though not in order”.

Thus, what we should expect to find of the historic Jesus in the Gospels is not a precise biography in the modern sense, but rather what we should expect to find are his teachings. Their precise arrangement does not effect the faithfulness of their presentation. The Olivet Discourse provides an excellent laboratory for examining the process of arranging and rearranging the teachings of Jesus by the writers of the Gospels. The following section places the relevant texts from Mark, Luke, and Matthew in parallel columns to illustrate the process of their composition.

3.0 Synopsis of Mark 13

The below table arranges the passages parallel to Mark 13 into 3 columns, plus a 4th column for notes.

TABLE 1. Synopsis of Mark 13 and Parallels

Mark	Luke	Matthew	Notes
13:1 Now as Jesus was going out of the temple courts, one of his disciples said to him, “Teacher, look at these tremendous stones and buildings!”	21:5 Now while some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and offerings, Jesus said,	24:1 Now as Jesus was going out of the temple courts and walking away, his disciples came to show him the temple buildings.	
13:2 Jesus said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left on another. All will be torn down!”	21:6 “As for these things that you are gazing at, the days will come when not one stone will be left on another. All will be torn down!”	24:2 And he said to them, “Do you see all these things? I tell you the truth, not one stone will be left on another. All will be torn down!”	Note that Luke recorded two occasions that Jesus made the comment that one stone would not be left on another: the one he quoted from Mark, and another occasion that occurred shortly before Mark’s account, on the approach to Jerusalem.
	19:41 As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it		
	19:42 saying, “If you had only known on this day, even you, the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.		
	19:43 For the days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and surround you and close in on you from every side.		
	19:44 They will demolish you – you and your children within your walls – and they will not leave within you one stone on top of another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.”		

TABLE 1. Synopsis of Mark 13 and Parallels

Mark	Luke	Matthew	Notes
13:3 So while he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately,		24:3 As he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, his disciples came to him privately and said, “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”	Luke skipped the change of setting. Matthew didn’t tell which disciples. Matthew, because he was combining Mark’s Olivet discourse with sayings about the end of the world (mostly obtained from Q and quoted by Luke in Luke 17), had the disciples asking about his (second) coming and the end of the age. They certainly did ask such questions, though probably not at the Olivet Discourse: Matthew is telescoping two events together to build a larger group of sayings (he made several such aggregations in his gospel).
13:4 “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that all these things are about to take place?”	21:7 So they asked him, “Teacher, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that these things are about to take place?”		
13:5 Jesus began to say to them, “Watch out that no one misleads you.	21:8 He said, “Watch out that you are not misled. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he,’ and, ‘The time is near.’ Do not follow them!	24:4 Jesus answered them, “Watch out that no one misleads you.	The warning about false messiahs occurs in two other places as well. See Mk 13:21 Mt 24:23 later in the Olivet Discourse, and in Lk 17:23 Mt 24:26, Luke’s apocalyptic material. There can be little doubt that Jesus warned his disciples of false Messiah’s many times. They were common enough even before Jesus came, and resulted in devastating consequences for the Jewish people in the Jewish War when the temple was destroyed, and especially the Bar Kochba revolt in the second century AD.
13:6 Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he,’ and they will mislead many.		24:5 For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will mislead many.	Luke’s addition of “Do not follow them” probably came from another incidence of this warning that Luke was aware of.
13:7 When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. These things must happen, but the end is still to come.	21:9 And when you hear of wars and rebellions, do not be afraid. For these things must happen first, but the end will not come at once.”	24:6 You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. Make sure that you are not alarmed, for this must happen, but the end is still to come.	

TABLE 1. Synopsis of Mark 13 and Parallels

Mark	Luke	Matthew	Notes
13:8 For nation will rise up in arms against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines. These are but the beginning of birth pains.	21:10 Then he said to them, “Nation will rise up in arms against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.	24:7 For nation will rise up in arms against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.	Luke’s paraphrase perhaps alludes to Mark 13:24-26. Note too that Josephus reported two comets portending the destruction of Jerusalem. Compare Luke’s “and fearful events...” with Matthew 24:30.
	21:11 There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.		
		24:8 All these things are the beginning of birth pains.	
13:9 “You must watch out for yourselves. You will be handed over to councils and beaten in the synagogues. You will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a witness to them.	21:12 But before all this, they will seize you and persecute you, handing you over to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and governors because of my name.	10:17 Beware of people, because they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues.	Matthew moved this verse from the Olivet Discourse to the commissioning of the missionary activity of the disciples in chapter 10. See Matthew 24:9 below where he summarized instead.
	21:13 This will be a time for you to serve as witnesses.	10:18 And you will be brought before governors and kings because of me, as a witness to them and the Gentiles.	
13:10 First the gospel must be preached to all nations.		24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole inhabited earth as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.	In Mark, verse 10 interrupts the flow of thought from verse 9 to verse 11. It seems likely that what was spoken by Jesus during the historical Olivet Discourse did not include this verse, but rather Mark inserted this saying, which Jesus spoke on some other occasion because it is on the same topic, witnessing to the Gentiles, as the context here. Note that Luke omitted it and Matthew placed a fuller version of it later in the discourse, adding further evidence that the Olivet Discourse was not the original setting of this saying.
		10:23 Whenever they persecute you in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.	Matthew’s account of the commissioning of the apostles includes a saying very similar to the above. More interesting, it has another allusion to Dan 7:13, the coming of the Son of Man. Here, it is clear that Jesus expected the fulfillment of that prophecy in the very near future: The disciples would not even finish going through all the cities of Israel before that happened, in contrast to the above passage where the gospel would be preached to the whole world before the end of the world comes.

TABLE 1. Synopsis of Mark 13 and Parallels

Mark	Luke		Matthew	Notes
13:11 When they arrest you and hand you over for trial, do not worry about what to speak. But say whatever is given you at that time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.	21:14 Therefore be resolved not to rehearse ahead of time how to make your defense.	12:11 But when they bring you before the synagogues, the rulers, and the authorities, do not worry about how you should make your defense or what you should say,	10:19 Whenever they hand you over for trial, do not worry about how to speak or what to say, for what you should say will be given to you at that time.	<p>Matthew placed these verses in the Commissioning of the Twelve in chapter 10. This appears to have been prompted by the desire to group together persecution sayings with Matthew 10:23.</p> <p>Luke recorded two versions, one here in the Olivet Discourse, and the other in a block of sayings that is a collection of warnings and encouragements. Undoubtedly, this was a theme Jesus spoke to the disciples about on many occasions. The version Luke put in chapter 12 is closer to Mark's in wording than the version Luke put in the Olivet Discourse. This may indicate that Luke's paraphrases of Mark can frequently be influenced by similar sayings delivered on other occasions.</p> <p>Note the trinitarian implications of Luke 21:15's "I will" in parallel with the other version's "Holy Spirit will".</p>
	21:15 For I will give you the words along with the wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.	12:12 for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that moment what you must say."	10:20 For it is not you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.	
13:12 Brother will hand over brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rise against parents and have them put to death.	21:16 You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends, and they will have some of you put to death.	10:21 "Brother will hand over brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rise against parents and have them put to death.	<p>Luke recorded two versions of this saying too. Like the above saying, this doublet also appears in Luke 12. This grouping would be for thematic reasons, not because of development of the oral tradition. It is inconceivable that Jesus would only make this point only one time in his ministry. Both versions can easily be the words of the historical Jesus.</p>	
	12:53 They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."			

TABLE 1. Synopsis of Mark 13 and Parallels

Mark	Luke	Matthew	Notes
13:13 You will be hated by everyone because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.	21:17 You will be hated by everyone because of my name.	24:9 “Then they will hand you over to be persecuted and will kill you. You will be hated by all the nations because of my name.	In Matthew, this verse opens with a summary that parallels Mark 13:9, which he otherwise quotes in chapter 10. Given that Matthew paraphrased less than Luke and that he combined blocks of sayings together into longer discourses, this summary and the change of “all men” to “all nations” may be because he knew such a version of the saying linked with the following three verses. This especially seems likely since at Matthew 10:22, he quotes Mark 13:13 word for word.
		24:10 Then many will be led into sin, and they will betray one another and hate one another. 24:11 And many false prophets will appear and deceive many, 24:12 and because lawlessness will increase so much, the love of many will grow cold.	Matthew inserted three additional verses of sayings that were related to the topic of the current context. Note that verse 11 reiterates the theme of Mark 13:5-6, 21-22. Jesus undoubtedly spoke on this topic on many occasions and so there were undoubtedly many versions of this warning known.
	21:18 Yet not a hair of your head will perish.		Luke replaced the second half of Mark 13:13 with two similar sayings of Jesus.
	21:19 By your endurance you will gain your lives.	24:13 But the person who endures to the end will be saved.	cf. Luke 12:7, Acts 27:34, 1 Samuel 14:45, 2 Samuel 14:11, 1 Kings 1:52. Safety of hair was a common hyperbolic metaphor.
		10:22 And you will be hated by everyone because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.	Matthew moved Mark 13:13 to the commissioning discourse. Note that he has used the second half of the verse in the Olivet discourse too.

TABLE 1. Synopsis of Mark 13 and Parallels

Mark	Luke	Matthew	Notes
13:14 “But when you see <i>the abomination of desolation</i> standing where it should not be (let the reader understand), then those in Judea must flee to the mountains.	21:20 “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near.	24:15 “So when you see <i>the abomination of desolation</i> – spoken about by Daniel the prophet – standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),	When we read “Jesus said, ‘yadda yadda yadda’” in an English Bible, we know that what it really means is that Jesus said a bunch of words in (presumably) Aramaic and what is in the quotes is not strictly what Jesus said, but a representation of what Jesus meant. Luke was writing to a more Gentile audience and rather than quoting the prophecy that Jesus quoted, he provided a more precise interpretation of what that prophecy meant: i.e., the Roman armies were the abomination that causes desolation. Compare this with Luke 21:24, where he preserved an additional saying of Jesus on the destruction of Jerusalem, and with Luke 19:43 (quoted above), where Jesus referred to enemies besieging the city.
	21:21 Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. Those who are inside the city must depart. Those who are out in the country must not enter it,	24:16 then those in Judea must flee to the mountains.	
13:15 The one on the roof must not come down or go inside to take anything out of his house.	17:31 On that day, anyone who is on the roof, with his goods in the house, must not come down to take them away, and likewise the person in the field must not turn back.	24:17 The one on the roof must not come down to take anything out of his house,	Luke moved these sayings to another context where he combined them with a number of related sayings.
13:16 The one in the field must not turn back to get his cloak.		24:18 and the one in the field must not turn back to get his cloak.	
	21:22 because these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written.		See below on Luke 21:24
13:17 Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing their babies in those days!	21:23 Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing their babies in those days! For there will be great distress on the earth and wrath against this people.	24:19 Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing their babies in those days!	

TABLE 1. Synopsis of Mark 13 and Parallels

Mark	Luke	Matthew	Notes
	21:24 They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led away as captives among all nations. Jerusalem will be trampled down by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.		Only Luke has these sayings (including verses 22, 23b). Clearly, the Olivet discourse was not the only occasion that Jesus spoke to his disciples on the future of Jerusalem (see, for example, the Luke 19:41-44). Presumably, sayings from these other occasions informed most of Luke's additions to the discourse, as well as Luke's interpretation in Luke 21:20 above.
13:18 Pray that it may not be in winter.		24:20 Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath.	Luke skipped this passage in his version of the discourse. It was somewhat redundant with the passages he has included from other sources.
13:19 For in those days there will be suffering unlike anything that has happened from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, or ever will happen.		24:21 For then there will be great suffering unlike anything that has happened from the beginning of the world until now, or ever will happen.	
13:20 And if the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would be saved. But because of the elect, whom he chose, he has cut them short.		24:22 And if those days had not been cut short, no one would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.	
13:21 Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'Look, there he is!' do not believe him.	cf. Luke 17:23, Matthew 24:5	24:23 Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe him.	
13:22 For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, the elect.		24:24 For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.	
13:23 Be careful! I have told you everything ahead of time.		24:25 Remember, I have told you ahead of time.	

TABLE 1. Synopsis of Mark 13 and Parallels

Mark	Luke	Matthew	Notes
	17:23 Then people will say to you, ‘Look, there he is!’ or ‘Look, here he is!’ Do not go out or chase after them.	24:26 So then, if someone says to you, ‘Look, he is in the wilderness,’ do not go out, or ‘Look, he is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe him.	Matthew and Luke appear to have picked up this passage from Q. Luke placed it earlier in his Gospel. Matthew included it in the Olivet Discourse because it included a warning about false messiahs. Jesus probably sounded this warning many times during his ministry.
	17:24 For just like the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day.	24:27 For just like the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so the coming of the Son of Man will be.	Note how Matthew divorced the enigmatic Luke 17:37b from its narrative context.
	17:37 Then the disciples said to him, “Where, Lord?” He replied to them, “Where the dead body is, there the vultures will gather.”	24:28 Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.	
13:24 “But in those days, after that suffering, <i>the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light;</i>	21:25 “And there will be signs in the sun and moon and stars, and on the earth nations will be in distress, anxious over the roaring of the sea and the surging waves.	24:29 “Immediately after the suffering of those days, <i>the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken.</i>	Luke appears to have quoted some material from a different source here rather than quoting the similar material from Mark. Luke appears to have avoided allusions to Old Testament Prophets, presumably because his audience was Gentile.
13:25 <i>the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.</i>	21:26 People will be fainting from fear and from the expectation of what is coming on the world, for <i>the powers of the heavens will be shaken.</i>		
13:26 Then everyone will see <i>the Son of Man arriving in the clouds</i> with great power and glory.	21:27 Then they will see <i>the Son of Man arriving in a cloud</i> with power and great glory.	24:30 Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn. They will see <i>the Son of Man arriving on the clouds of heaven</i> with power and great glory.	The added sentence in Matthew here may be related to the material quoted by Luke above. Matthew 24:30 refers to seeing “the sign of the Son of Man” in the sky, not seeing the Son of Man himself. Although this is suggestive of the second coming, that is not necessarily what was in mind. The reference is to a sign in the sky, not the Son of Man himself. See earlier comments on the meaning of “coming in clouds with great power and glory”.

TABLE 1. Synopsis of Mark 13 and Parallels

Mark	Luke	Matthew	Notes
13:27 Then he will send angels and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.	21:28 When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”	24:31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet blast, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.	Luke again quoted from something other than Mark here.
13:28 “Learn this parable from the fig tree: Whenever its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near.	21:29 Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the other trees. 21:30 When they sprout leaves, you see for yourselves and know that summer is now near.	24:32 “Learn this parable from the fig tree: Whenever its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near.	
13:29 So also you, when you see these things happening, know that he is near, right at the door.	21:31 So also you, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near.	24:33 So also you, when you see all these things, know that he is near, right at the door.	Luke resolved the antecedent of “it” by explicitly stating that the “kingdom of God” is near, which, as was argued earlier in this study, is the rule of Christ through the Holy Spirit in the hearts of Christians.
13:30 I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.	21:32 I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.	24:34 I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.	cf. Mark 9:1 Matthew 16:28 Luke 9:27
13:31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.	21:33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.	24:35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.	
13:32 “But as for that day or hour no one knows it – neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son – except the Father.		24:36 “But as for that day and hour no one knows it – not even the angels in heaven – except the Father alone.	Luke skipped this verse and the following, though it is not clear why.

TABLE 1. Synopsis of Mark 13 and Parallels

Mark	Luke	Matthew		Notes
	17:26 Just as it was in the days of Noah, so too it will be in the days of the Son of Man.	24:37 For just like the days of Noah were, so the coming of the Son of Man will be.		Another quotation from Q. Matthew added this to the Olivet Discourse because it shared a theme with the adjacent material: that of people being oblivious to when their judgement will take place. Luke incorporated it in chapter 17, which is discussed in more detail below.
	17:27 People were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage – right up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.	24:38 For in those days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark.		
		24:39 And they knew nothing until the flood came and took them all away. It will be the same at the coming of the Son of Man.		
	17:30 “It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed.			
	cf. 17:36 note: Several MSS ... add ... “There will be two in the field; one will be taken and the other left.”	24:40 Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one left.		
	17:35 There will be two women grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left.”	24:41 There will be two women grinding grain with a mill; one will be taken and one left.		
13:33 Watch out! Stay alert! For you do not know when the time will come.		24:42 “Therefore stay alert, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.	25:13 Therefore stay alert, because you do not know the day or the hour.	Jesus certainly sounded the theme of being alert on many occasions. See Mark 13:37 where he said as much. Matthew preserved another episode where he used almost the same words at the conclusion of a parable. Because here it comes after the eschatological material from Q, Matthew put an eschatological version of this statement here in the Olivet discourse. That he preserved two versions indicates that Jesus applied this saying to many situations.

TABLE 1. Synopsis of Mark 13 and Parallels

Mark	Luke	Matthew	Notes
13:34 It is like a man going on a journey. He left his house and put his slaves in charge, assigning to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to stay alert.	12:39 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into.	24:43 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have been alert and would not have let his house be broken into.	Luke moved these verses from the Olivet Discourse to chapter 12. See above where chapter 12 contains some other material from Mark’s version of the Olivet Discourse, where it is adjacent to another similar parable (Luke 12:42-46).
13:35 Stay alert, then, because you do not know when the owner of the house will return – whether during evening, at midnight, when the rooster crows, or at dawn –	12:40 You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”	24:44 Therefore you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.	
13:36 or else he might find you asleep when he returns suddenly.			Instead of these verses, Matthew went on to include the parable of the 10 virgins (Mt 25:1ff), which was on the same theme.
13:37 What I say to you I say to everyone: Stay alert!”			
	21:34 “But be on your guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day close down upon you suddenly like a trap. 21:35 For it will overtake all who live on the face of the whole earth.		As seems to be Luke’s pattern in many cases, he substituted a different saying of Jesus for Mark 13:36-37. The warning to “Watch!” was present in both.
	21:36 But stay alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that must happen, and to stand before the Son of Man.” 21:37 So every day Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, but at night he went and stayed on the Mount of Olives. 21:38 And all the people came to him early in the morning to listen to him in the temple courts.		

4.0 Luke 17

To better illustrate Matthew’s use of the material in common with Luke 17, the whole of that passage in Luke is presented here in parallel with the verses from Matthew.

TABLE 2. Luke 17

Mark	Luke	Matthew	Notes
	17:20 Now at one point the Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God was coming, so he answered, “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed,		Note that Jesus was here saying the kingdom of God is not a political kingdom one can see with the eyes. Instead it is the rule of God in our hearts. It is a kingdom that has spread across all the nations of earth and one that will never end.
	17:21 nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is in your midst.”		
	17:22 Then he said to the disciples, “The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it.		This would seem to allude to his coming crucifixion.
	17:23 Then people will say to you, ‘Look, there he is!’ or ‘Look, here he is!’ Do not go out or chase after them.	24:26 So then, if someone says to you, ‘Look, he is in the wilderness,’ do not go out, or ‘Look, he is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe him.	cf. Mark 13:21; Matthew 24:23 Mark has a similar warning in the Olivet discourse. Matthew quoted part of this passage there. Luke 17:24 refers to the second coming. The reference to “Son of Man in his day” has Christological implications. In the Old Testament, we frequently meet the phrase “day of Yahweh” in connection with judgement ¹ .
	17:24 For just like the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day.	24:27 For just like the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so the coming of the Son of Man will be.	
	17:25 But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.		
	17:26 Just as it was in the days of Noah, so too it will be in the days of the Son of Man.	24:37 For just like the days of Noah were, so the coming of the Son of Man will be.	cf. Genesis 7:7 Luke consistently referred to day(s) of the Son of Man here, where Matthew has “coming of the Son of Man”. Perhaps Matthew was paraphrasing to make the passage saying more understandable to his audience (although, Luke was the one who usually did that), or Jesus spoke on the topic many times with minor variations, resulting in more than one version being known.
	17:27 People were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage – right up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.	24:38 For in those days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark.	

TABLE 2. Luke 17

Mark	Luke	Matthew	Notes
	17:28 Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot, people were eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, building;		cf. Genesis 19:24
	17:29 but on the day Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.		
	17:30 It will be the same on the day the Son of Man is revealed.	24:39 And they knew nothing until the flood came and took them all away. It will be the same at the coming of the Son of Man.	
13:15 The one on the roof must not come down or go inside to take anything out of his house.	17:31 On that day, anyone who is on the roof, with his goods in the house, must not come down to take them away, and likewise the person in the field must not turn back.	24:17 The one on the roof must not come down to take anything out of his house,	
13:16 The one in the field must not turn back to get his cloak.		24:18 and the one in the field must not turn back to get his cloak.	
	17:32 Remember Lot's wife!		cf. Genesis 19:26
8:35 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and for the gospel will save it.	17:33 Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it.	9:24 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.	10:39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life because of me will find it.
		16:25 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.	This appears to be one of those phrases Jesus used frequently in many situations.
	17:34 I tell you, in that night there will be two people in one bed; one will be taken and the other left.		
	17:35 There will be two women grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left."	24:41 There will be two women grinding grain with a mill; one will be taken and one left.	Matthew and Luke are both quoted from Q. The original text of Luke probably didn't include a parallel to Matt 24:40, but in some manuscripts the scribe, presumably because of his familiarity with Matthew, inserted it into Luke.
	(17:36)	24:40 Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one left.	

TABLE 2. Luke 17

Mark	Luke	Matthew	Notes
	17:37 Then the disciples said to him, "Where, Lord?" He replied to them, "Where the dead body is, there the vultures will gather."	24:28 Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.	This is a very enigmatic passage. I suspect it was built on some byword of the day, that if we were familiar with would make the passage make sense. Matthew separated it from the context that it evidently had in Q, and so he would seem to think it made sense on its own. Given Jesus propensity for saying the unexpected, I suspect that while the disciples probably meant to ask where the one is taken, Jesus may have been making statement about the one who was left. But then, would those left be the carcass, or the vultures?

1. See "The Day of the Lord" on page 103.

5.0 Matthew 24

Since Matthew's version of the Olivet Discourse is apparently a conflation of the Olivet Discourse and some other material, I think it would be useful to view a brief layout of the parallels in Matthew's order. The individual verses have already been commented on in detail elsewhere in this study. This page will just look at the overall structure of how Matthew arranged the material since the other synopses are in Mark or Luke's order, and thus chop Matthew up a little bit.

TABLE 3. Matthew 24

Mark	Luke	Matthew	Notes
13:1	21:5	24:1	Quoting Mark
13:2	21:6	24:2	
13:3		24:3	Here, because Matthew was conflating Mark's Olivet Discourse with End of the World material, the apostles asked about the just predicted destruction of Jerusalem and about his return and the end of the age.
13:4	21:7		
13:5	21:8	24:4	Quoting Mark
13:6		24:5	
13:7	21:9	24:6	

TABLE 3.

Matthew 24

	Mark	Luke	Matthew	Notes
	13:8	21:10	24:7	
		21:11	24:8	
	13:13a	21:17	24:9	Matthew rearranged material here a little. Mark 13:9 is found in Matthew 10:17-18 (although the opening of Matthew 24:9 is a summary of this material) and Mark 13:11-12 in Matthew 10:19-21. Mark 13:13 was then moved ahead and three topically related verses from another source inserted in the middle of it.
			24:10	
			24:11	
			24:12	
	13:13b	21:18	24:13	
		21:19		
	13:10		24:14	As discussed elsewhere, Mark 13:10 interrupts the flow of thought in Mark and would seem to be a saying of Jesus originally delivered in a separate context but inserted by Mark here because it was topically related. Luke omitted it, and Matthew separated it from the context that Mark had it and had a longer version of it, setting it in an eschatological context.
	13:14	21:20	24:15	Quoting Mark
		21:21	24:16	
	13:15	17:31	24:17	
	13:16		24:18	
	13:17	21:23	24:19	
	13:18		24:20	Quoting Mark, but added "or on the Sabbath"
	13:19		24:21	Quoting Mark
	13:20		24:22	
	13:21		24:23	
	13:22		24:24	
	13:23		24:25	

TABLE 3.

Matthew 24

Mark	Luke	Matthew	Notes
	17:23	24:26	Luke and Matthew quoting Q. 24:27 is eschatological, but the emphasis was on not being deceived by false messiahs because Jesus' second coming would be quite unmistakable. The material was inserted here because it was topically related: Jesus had just warning against false messiahs directly above.
	17:24	24:27	
	17:37	24:28	
13:24	21:25	24:29	Quoting Mark
13:25	21:26		
13:26	21:27	24:30	Quoting Mark, but adding "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn."
13:27	21:28	24:31	Quoting Mark
13:28	21:29	24:32	
	21:30		
13:29	21:31	24:33	
13:30	21:32	24:34	
13:31	21:33	24:35	
13:32		24:36	
	17:26	24:37	Quoting Q. This material was inserted here because it built on and illustrated the idea of no one knowing the day or time.
	17:27	24:38	
	17:30	24:39	
	(17:36)	24:40	
	17:35	24:41	
13:33		24:42	Quoting Mark.
13:34	12:39	24:43	
13:35	12:40	24:44	

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Mark 13: The Disciples Ask A Question (vv. 1-4)

The question defines the scope of the answer.

1.0 Disciples Admire The Temple (Mark 13:1)

Mk 13:1 Now as Jesus was going out of the temple courts, one of his disciples said to him, “Teacher, look at these tremendous stones and buildings!”

The temple of Jesus’ time was truly a magnificent building.^{1 2} Solomon built the original temple in the mid 10th century BC. That temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC when Judah was deported from the land into captivity. After the Persians defeated Babylon in 536 BC, the Jews were allowed by Cyrus to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their temple. The story of this can be read in Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, and Zechariah in the Old Testament. This temple stood for over 5 centuries. After the Persians, Alexander the Great ruled Palestine. After his death, and the break up of his empire into four empires, the Jews were often in the middle of the conflicts between the empires, until Antiochus tried to eradicate Jewish culture and, in revolt, the Maccabees managed to establish an independent kingdom. That lasted till the Romans came and captured Jerusalem and the temple.

Herod, ruling Jerusalem on behalf of the Romans, rebuilt the temple and greatly enlarged its precincts. This project started in 20 BC (some books say 19 BC) and continued for many decades (In John 2:20, the temple had been under construction for 46 years).

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1. “Temple, Jerusalem” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. See especially the picture of a model of the temple.
 2. Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, Book 5, Chapter 5, “A Description of the Temple”
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2.0 Jesus Predicts The Temple's Destruction (Mark 13:2)

Mk 13:2 Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left on another. All will be torn down!"

2.1 Synopsis Of The Jewish War¹

The Jewish revolt that started in AD 66 was very disorganized. Jewish factions fought against each other as much as against the Romans. One of the leaders, Menachem, was killed. Unfortunately, this didn't end the rebellion. The rebels decimated a Roman garrison at Jerusalem and, on the same day, 20,000 Jews are killed by the Gentiles of Caesarea. The Jews retaliated and the Gentiles counter-retaliated.

The Roman governor of Syria, Cestius Gallus, took 30,000 troops to quell the rebellion but was defeated and suffered 6,000 casualties. This was in October AD 66. Nero appointed Vespasian to take care of the situation. By Spring 68, only Jerusalem was left. The rebellion had been suppressed elsewhere.

"On June 9, 68, Nero died and Vespasian's mandate to conduct the war likewise expired. He was forced to await fresh orders from the new emperor. The transfer of authority in Rome did not go smoothly. This year is known in Roman history as the Year of the Four Emperors. Galba was acknowledged as emperor but was soon followed by Otho; and he, in turn, by Vitellius. Rebellion and insurrection were the order of the day, and no one in the imperial city was interested or concerned enough to address himself to the question of Judea. After a year's waiting, and after having observed with consternation the increasing chaos engulfing Rome, Vespasian, on July 1, 69, staked a claim to become the new emperor of Rome. The road from declaration of intentions to final realization, however, was not altogether smooth, and another half year passed before Vespasian and Titus were able to validate that declaration. In December 69, Vespasian was acknowledged as Rome's new ruler. It was only then that the new emperor was prepared to realize his goals in Judea, but now he had to await the advent of spring, for it was a cardinal rule in the Roman army not to fight during the winter months."

Meanwhile, factions within and without Jerusalem continued to battle each other until Titus came and besieged the city. The temple was destroyed and the city burned. Innumerable Jews were killed. Numerous details have been glossed over here.

2.2 Extract From The Church History of Eusebius

Eusebius wrote his Church History in the early 4th century. In chapters 5-7 of book 3 he quotes extensively from the 1st century Jewish historian Josephus and adds some additional information specific to Christianity. This does such a good job of summarizing the situation in Jerusalem at the time, I'm going to quote those chapters in full here.

1. From "Jewish War" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*.

Chapter V. The Last Siege of the Jews After Christ.

1 After Nero had held the power thirteen years, and Galba and Otho had ruled a year and six months, Vespasian, who had become distinguished in the campaigns against the Jews, was proclaimed sovereign in Judea and received the title of Emperor from the armies there. Setting out immediately, therefore, for Rome, he entrusted the conduct of the war against the Jews to his son Titus.

2 For the Jews after the ascension of our Savior, in addition to their crime against him, had been devising as many plots as they could against his apostles. First Stephen was stoned to death by them, and after him James, the son of Zebedee and the brother of John, was beheaded, and finally James, the first that had obtained the episcopal seat in Jerusalem after the ascension of our Savior, died in the manner already described. But the rest of the apostles, who had been incessantly plotted against with a view to their destruction, and had been driven out of the land of Judea, went unto all nations to preach the Gospel, relying upon the power of Christ, who had said to them, "Go ye and make disciples of all the nations in my name."

3 But the people of the church in Jerusalem had been commanded by a revelation, vouchsafed to approved men there before the war, to leave the city and to dwell in a certain town of Perea called Pella. And when those that believed in Christ had come thither from Jerusalem, then, as if the royal city of the Jews and the whole land of Judea were entirely destitute of holy men, the judgment of God at length overtook those who had committed such outrages against Christ and his apostles, and totally destroyed that generation of impious men.

4 But the number of calamities which everywhere fell upon the nation at that time; the extreme misfortunes to which the inhabitants of Judea were especially subjected, the thousands of men, as well as women and children, that perished by the sword, by famine, and by other forms of death innumerable,—all these things, as well as the many great sieges which were carried on against the cities of Judea, and the excessive sufferings endured by those that fled to Jerusalem itself, as to a city of perfect safety, and finally the general course of the whole war, as well as its particular occurrences in detail, and how at last the abomination of desolation, proclaimed by the prophets, stood in the very temple of God, so celebrated of old, the temple which was now awaiting its total and final destruction by fire,— all these things any one that wishes may find accurately described in the history written by Josephus.

5 But it is necessary to state that this writer records that the multitude of those who were assembled from all Judea at the time of the Passover, to the number of three million souls, were shut up in Jerusalem "as in a prison," to use his own words.

6 For it was right that in the very days in which they had inflicted suffering upon the Savior and the Benefactor of all, the Christ of God, that in those days, shut up "as in a prison," they should meet with destruction at the hands of divine justice.

7 But passing by the particular calamities which they suffered from the attempts made upon them by the sword and by other means, I think it necessary to relate only the misfortunes which the famine caused, that those who read this work may have some means of knowing that God was not long in executing vengeance upon them for their wickedness against the Christ of God.

Chapter VI. The Famine Which Oppressed Them.

1 Taking the fifth book of the History of Josephus again in our hands, let us go through the tragedy of events which then occurred.

2 "For the wealthy," he says, "it was equally dangerous to remain. For under pretense that they were going to desert men were put to death for their wealth. The madness of the seditions increased with the famine and both the miseries were inflamed more and more day by day.

3 Nowhere was food to be seen; but, bursting into the houses men searched them thoroughly, and whenever they found anything to eat they tormented the owners on the ground that they had denied that they had anything; but if they found nothing, they tortured them on the ground that they had more carefully concealed it.

4 The proof of their having or not having food was found in the bodies of the poor wretches. Those of them who were still in good condition they assumed were well supplied with food, while those who were already wasted away they passed by, for it seemed absurd to slay those who were on the point of perishing for want.

5 Many, indeed, secretly sold their possessions for one measure of wheat, if they belonged to the wealthier class, of barley if they were poorer. Then shutting themselves up in the innermost parts of their houses, some ate the grain uncooked on account of their terrible want, while others baked it according as necessity and fear dictated.

6 Nowhere were tables set, but, snatching the yet uncooked food from the fire, they tore it in pieces. Wretched was the fare, and a lamentable spectacle it was to see the more powerful secure an abundance while the weaker mourned.

7 Of all evils, indeed, famine is the worst, and it destroys nothing so effectively as shame. For that which under other circumstances is worthy of respect, in the midst of famine is despised. Thus women snatched the food from the very mouths of their husbands and children, from their fathers, and what was most pitiable of all, mothers from their babes, And while their dearest ones were wasting away in their arms, they Were not ashamed to take away from them the last drops that supported life.

8 And even while they were eating thus they did not remain undiscovered. But everywhere the rioters appeared, to rob them even of these portions of food. For whenever they saw a house shut up, they regarded it as a sign that those inside were taking food. And immediately bursting open the doors they rushed in and seized what they were eating, almost forcing it out of their very throats.

9 Old men who clung to their food were beaten, and if the women concealed it in their hands, their hair was torn for so doing. There was pity neither for gray hairs nor for infants, but, taking up the babes that clung to their morsels of food, they dashed them to the ground. But to those that anticipated their entrance and swallowed what they were about to seize, they were still more cruel, just as if they had been wronged by them.

10 And they devised the most terrible modes of torture to discover food, stopping up the privy passages of the poor wretches with bitter herbs, and piercing their seats with sharp rods. And men suffered things horrible even to hear of, for the sake of compelling them to confess to the possession of one loaf of bread, or in order that they might be made to disclose a single drachm of barley which they had concealed. But the tormentors themselves did not suffer hunger.

11 Their conduct might indeed have seemed less barbarous if they had been driven to it by necessity; but they did it for the sake of exercising their madness and of providing sustenance for themselves for days to come.

12 And when any one crept out of the city by night as far as the outposts of the Romans to collect wild herbs and grass, they went to meet him; and when he thought he had already escaped the enemy, they seized what he had brought with him, and even though oftentimes the man would entreat them, and, calling upon the most awful name of God,

adjure them to give him a portion of what he had obtained at the risk of his life, they would give him nothing back. Indeed, it was fortunate if the one that was plundered was not also slain.”

13 To this account Josephus, after relating other things, adds the following: “The possibility of going out of the city being brought to an end, all hope of safety for the Jews was cut off. And the famine increased and devoured the people by houses and families. And the rooms were filled with dead women and children, the lanes of the city with the corpses of old men.

14 Children and youths, swollen with the famine, wandered about the market-places like shadows, and fell down wherever the death agony overtook them. The sick were not strong enough to bury even their own relatives, and those who had the strength hesitated because of the multitude of the dead and the uncertainty as to their own fate. Many, indeed, died while they were burying others, and many betook themselves to their graves before death came upon them.

15 There was neither weeping nor lamentation under these misfortunes; but the famine stifled the natural affections. Those that were dying a lingering death looked with dry eyes upon those that had gone to their rest before them. Deep silence and death-laden night encircled the city.

16 But the robbers were more terrible than these miseries; for they broke open the houses, which were now mere sepulchres, robbed the dead and stripped the covering from their bodies, and went away with a laugh. They tried the points of their swords in the dead bodies, and some that were lying on the ground still alive they thrust through in order to test their weapons. But those that prayed that they would use their right hand and their sword upon them, they contemptuously left to be destroyed by the famine. Every one of these died with eyes fixed upon the temple; and they left the seditious alive.

17 These at first gave orders that the dead should be buried out of the public treasury, for they could not endure the stench. But afterward, when they were not able to do this, they threw the bodies from the walls into the trenches.

18 And as Titus went around and saw the trenches filled with the dead, and the thick blood oozing out of the putrid bodies, he groaned aloud, and, raising his hands, called God to witness that this was not his doing.”

19 After speaking of some other things, Josephus proceeds as follows: “I cannot hesitate to declare what my feelings compel me to. I suppose, if the Romans had longer delayed in coming against these guilty wretches, the city would have been swallowed up by a chasm, or overwhelmed with a flood, or struck with such thunderbolts as destroyed Sodom. For it had brought forth a generation of men much more godless than were those that suffered such punishment. By their madness indeed was the whole people brought to destruction.”

20 And in the sixth book he writes as follows: “Of those that perished by famine in the city the number was countless, and the miseries they underwent unspeakable. For if so much as the shadow of food appeared in any house, there was war, and the dearest friends engaged in hand-to-hand conflict with one another, and snatched from each other the most wretched supports of life.

21 Nor would they believe that even the dying were without food; but the robbers would search them while they were expiring, lest any one should feign death while concealing food in his bosom. With mouths gaping for want of food, they stumbled and staggered

along like mad dogs, and beat the doors as if they were drunk, and in their impotence they would rush into the same houses twice or thrice in one hour.

22 Necessity compelled them to eat anything they could find, and they gathered and devoured things that were not fit even for the filthiest of irrational beasts. Finally they did not abstain even from their girdles and shoes, and they stripped the hides off their shields and devoured them. Some used even wisps of old hay for food, and others gathered stubble and sold the smallest weight of it for four Attic drachmae.

23 “But why should I speak of the shamelessness which was displayed during the famine toward inanimate things? For I am going to relate a fact such as is recorded neither by Greeks nor Barbarians; horrible to relate, incredible to hear. And indeed I should gladly have omitted this calamity, that I might not seem to posterity to be a teller of fabulous tales, if I had not innumerable witnesses to it in my own age. And besides, I should render my country poor service if I suppressed the account of the sufferings which she endured.

24 “There was a certain woman named Mary that dwelt beyond Jordan, whose father was Eleazer, of the village of Bathezor (which signifies the house of hyssop). She was distinguished for her family and her wealth, and had fled with the rest of the multitude to Jerusalem and was shut up there with them during the siege.

25 The tyrants had robbed her of the rest of the property which she had brought with her into the city from Perea. And the remnants of her possessions and whatever food was to be seen the guards rushed in daily and snatched away from her. This made the woman terribly angry, and by her frequent reproaches and imprecations she aroused the anger of the rapacious villains against herself.

26 But no one either through anger or pity would slay her; and she grew weary of finding food for others to eat. The search, too, was already become everywhere difficult, and the famine was piercing her bowels and marrow, and resentment was raging more violently than famine. Taking, therefore, anger and necessity as her counselors, she proceeded to do a most unnatural thing.

27 Seizing her child, a boy which was sucking at her breast, she said, Oh, wretched child, in war, in famine, in sedition, for what do I preserve thee? Slaves among the Romans we shall be even if we are allowed to live by them. But even slavery is anticipated by the famine, and the rioters are more cruel than both. Come, be food for me, a fury for these rioters, and a byword to the world, for this is all that is wanting to complete the calamities of the Jews.

28 And when she had said this she slew her son; and having roasted him, she ate one half herself, and covering up the remainder, she kept it. Very soon the rioters appeared on the scene, and, smelling the nefarious odor, they threatened to slay her immediately unless she should show them what she had prepared. She replied that she had saved an excellent portion for them, and with that she uncovered the remains of the child.

29 They were immediately seized with horror and amazement and stood transfixed at the sight. But she said This is my own son, and the deed is mine. Eat for I too have eaten. Be not more merciful than a woman, nor more compassionate than a mother. But if you are too pious and shrink from my sacrifice, I have already eaten of it; let the rest also remain for me.

30 At these words the men went out trembling, in this one case being affrighted; yet with difficulty did they yield that food to the mother. Forthwith the whole city was filled with the awful crime, and as all pictured the terrible deed before their own eyes, they trembled as if they had done it themselves.

31 Those that were suffering from the famine now longed for death; and blessed were they that had died before hearing and seeing miseries like these.”

32 Such was the reward which the Jews received for their wickedness and impiety, against the Christ of God.

Chapter VII. The Predictions of Christ.

1 It is fitting to add to these accounts the true prediction of our Savior in which he foretold these very events.

2 His words are as follows: “Woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day; For there shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.”

3 The historian, reckoning the whole number of the slain, says that eleven hundred thousand persons perished by famine and sword, and that the rest of the rioters and robbers, being betrayed by each other after the taking of the city, were slain. But the tallest of the youths and those that were distinguished for beauty were preserved for the triumph. Of the rest of the multitude, those that were over seventeen years of age were sent as prisoners to labor in the works of Egypt, while still more were scattered through the provinces to meet their death in the theaters by the sword and by beasts. Those under seventeen years of age were carried away to be sold as slaves, and of these alone the number reached ninety thousand.

4 These things took place in this manner in the second year of the reign of Vespasian, in accordance with the prophecies of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who by divine power saw them beforehand as if they were already present, and wept and mourned according to the statement of the holy evangelists, who give the very words which he uttered, when, as if addressing Jerusalem herself, he said:

5 “If thou hadst known, even thou, in this day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a rampart about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee and thy children even with the ground.”

6 And then, as if speaking concerning the people, he says, “For there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” And again: “When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh.”

7 If any one compares the words of our Savior with the other accounts of the historian concerning the whole war, how can one fail to wonder, and to admit that the foreknowledge and the prophecy of our Savior were truly divine and marvelously strange.

8 Concerning those calamities, then, that befell the whole Jewish nation after the Savior's passion and after the words which the multitude of the Jews uttered, when they begged the release of the robber and murderer, but besought that the Prince of Life should be taken from their midst, it is not necessary to add anything to the account of the historian.....

3.0 Disciples Ask When It Will Happen and For Signs (Mark 13:3-4)

13:3 So while he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, 13:4 “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that all these things are about to take place?”

Verse 3 takes us to a later point in time, presumably later that same day. The location shifts from the temple, to the Mount of Olives. According to Luke 21:37, this is where Jesus spent the night during the last few days before the crucifixion. This location is what gives Jesus’ reply the name “Olivet Discourse”.

Signs to validate a prophecy have Old Testament precedents.

- In Judges 6:17ff Gideon asked for a sign that it is really the LORD speaking to him. His offering is consumed by a fire when touched by the tip of the staff of the angel of the LORD.
- In 1 Samuel 3:34 the death of Eli’s sons were to be a sign to him of God’s judgement on his family and that he would raise up a faithful priest in Eli’s place.
- In 1 Samuel 14:10, the Philistines telling Jonathan “Come up to us” was a sign that the LORD had given them into Jonathan’s hands.
- In 1 Kings 13:3, a prophet gave the sign that the altar would split apart and the ashes spill out to prove the truth of his prophecy.
- Etc.

In the New Testament, Jesus was asked a sign by the multitudes, he refused, saying only that the only sign they would receive would be the sign of Jonah, here, in private with four of his disciples, Jesus did grant an answer. But, the answer was a “sorry I asked” kind of answer: the sign was persecutions, torture, and death of the disciples.

Note very carefully what is being asked about. “These things” referred to what Jesus had just said in verse 2: the destruction of the Temple complex, which we know took place 40 years later, in AD 70. They were not asking about anything further than that, and so we should be very cautious about reading anything further than that into Jesus’ answer, especially apocalyptic, end-of-the-world prophecies. It is common for dispensationalists to read the entire discourse as apocalyptic, which totally ignores the contextual setup here.

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Mark 13: Jesus Answers (vv. 5-37)

“I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.”

1.0 The Beginning of Birth Pains (Mark 13:5-8)

Mk 13:5 Jesus began to say to them, “Watch out that no one misleads you. 13:6 Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he,’ and they will mislead many. 13:7 When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. These things must happen, but the end is still to come. 13:8 For nation will rise up in arms against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines. These are but the beginning of birth pains.

Note especially two phrases here “the end is still to come” and “these are but the beginning of birth pains”. This pretty much rules out interpreting these verses as end time prophecy *per se*. Rather, we should look to the 1st century AD for all these items.

1.1 False Messiahs

False messiahs had already plagued Judaism. Acts 5:36-39 mentions two: Theudas and Judas the Galilean. Christianity was to be no different. In Acts 8:4-24 we met a magician by the name of Simon. It was said of him “This man is the power of God that is called ‘Great’” (Acts 8:10). He ostensibly believed the preaching of Philip and was baptized. However he tried to buy with money the Holy Spirit, for which he was rebuked. In Acts, there the story ends, but in the book *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus wrote in about 180 AD:

He, then, not putting faith in God a whit the more, set himself eagerly to contend against the apostles, in order that he himself might seem to be a wonderful being, and applied himself with still greater zeal to the study of the whole magic art, that he might the better bewilder and overpower multitudes of men. Such was his procedure in the reign of Claudius Caesar, by whom also he is said to have been honored with a statue, on account of his magical power. This man, then, was glorified by many as if he were a

god; and he taught that it was himself who appeared among the Jews as the Son, but descended in Samaria as the Father while he came to other nations in the character of the Holy Spirit. He represented himself, in a word, as being the loftiest of all powers, that is, the Being who is the Father over all, and he allowed himself to be called by whatsoever title men were pleased to address him.

2. Now this Simon of Samaria, from whom all sorts of heresies derive their origin, formed his sect out of the following materials:—Having redeemed from slavery at Tyre, a city of Phoenicia, a certain woman named Helena, he was in the habit of carrying her about with him, declaring that this woman was the first conception of his mind, the mother of all, by whom, in the beginning, he conceived in his mind [the thought] of forming angels and archangels. For this Ennoea leaping forth from him, and comprehending the will of her father, descended to the lower regions [of space], and generated angels and powers, by whom also he declared this word was formed. But after she had produced them, she was detained by them through motives of jealousy, because they were unwilling to be looked upon as the progeny of any other being. As to himself, they had no knowledge of him whatever; but his Ennoea was detained by those powers and angels who had been produced by her. She suffered all kinds of contumely from them, so that she could not return upwards to her father, but was even shut up in a human body, and for ages passed in succession from one female body to another, as from vessel to vessel. She was, for example, in that Helen on whose account the Trojan war was undertaken; for whose sake also Stesichorus was struck blind, because he had cursed her in his verses, but afterwards, repenting and writing what are called palinodes, in which he sang her praise, he was restored to sight. Thus she, passing from body to body, and suffering insults in every one of them, at last became a common prostitute; and she it was that was meant by the lost sheep.

3. For this purpose, then, he had come that he might win her first, and free her from slavery, while he conferred salvation upon men, by making himself known to them. For since the angels ruled the world ill because each one of them coveted the principal power for himself, he had come to amend matters, and had descended, transfused and assimilated to powers and principalities and angels, so that he might appear among men to be a man, while yet he was not a man; and that thus he was thought to have suffered in Judaea, when he had not suffered. Moreover, the prophets uttered their predictions under the inspiration of those angels who formed the world; for which reason those who place their trust in him and Helena no longer regarded them, but, as being free, live as they please; for men are saved through his grace, and not on account of their own righteous actions. For such deeds are not righteous in the nature of things, but by mere accident, just as those angels who made the world, have thought fit to constitute them, seeking, by means of such precepts, to bring men into bondage. On this account, he pledged himself that the world should be dissolved, and that those who are his should be freed from the rule of them who made the world.

4. Thus, then, the mystic priests belonging to this sect both lead profligate lives and practice magical arts, each one to the extent of his ability. They use exorcisms and incantations. Love-potions, too, and charms, as well as those beings who are called “Paredri” (familiaris) and “Oniropompi” (dream-senders), and whatever other curious arts can be had recourse to, are eagerly pressed into their service. They also have an image of Simon fashioned after the likeness of Jupiter, and another of Helena in the shape of Minerva; and these they worship. In fine, they have a name derived from Simon, the author of these most impious doctrines, being called Simonians; and from them “knowledge, falsely so called,” received its beginning, as one may learn even from their own assertions.¹

Irenaeus went on to document other similar false messiahs: Menander, Saturninus, Basilides, Carpocrates, etc. By the second century, Gnosticism had arisen out of their teachings, the basic myth of which was that the God of the Old Testament is an evil god and Jesus had come from the real Father in heaven and was sent to rescue bits of divine light that were trapped in the evil world of matter by the God of the Jews. Thus they preached a false Jesus.¹

1.2 Wars and Rumors of Wars

Rome was in chaos during the Jewish War during which the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. One year is known as “the year of four emperors”. Generals and their armies were fighting each other in Rome itself to succeed Nero as emperor. Vespasian broke off his siege of Jerusalem to go and take the throne himself.²

Note the wording “when you hear...”. The “you” being addressed is not us, the reader, but was the apostles who asked for sign. It was they who would see these signs in their lifetime.

1.3 Earthquakes and Famines

Josephus reported during the Jewish War:

But the shame that would attend them in case they returned without doing any thing at all, so far overcame that their repentance, that they lay all night before the wall, though in a very bad encampment; for there broke out a prodigious storm in the night, with the utmost violence, and very strong winds, with the largest showers of rain, with continued lightnings, terrible thunderings, and amazing concussions and bellowings of the earth, that was in an earthquake. These things were a manifest indication that some destruction was coming upon men, when the system of the world was put into this disorder; and any one would guess that these wonders foreshowed some grand calamities that were coming.³

Modern historians have argued that the devastating famine of AD 48, “combined with the oppressive taxations of the procurators, impoverished the people” and these socio-economic conditions contributed to the breaking out of the revolt.⁴

During the persecutions of the early church it was fashionable to blame Christians for any famine or earthquake that happened, saying “to the lions with the Christians”.⁵ Evidently these sorts of incidents were common enough for this to be an issue.

1. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 1, Chapter 23.

1. See “Messianic Expectations” on page 87.

2. See “Synopsis Of The Jewish War” on page 136.

3. Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, Book IV, Chapter 4, Paragraph 5 (4:285).

4. “Jewish War” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*.

5. “Roman Empire and Christianity: Attitude Of The Roman Empire To Religions” in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*

2.0 Persecution (Mark 13:9-13)

Mk 13:9 “You must watch out for yourselves. You will be handed over to councils and beaten in the synagogues. You will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a witness to them. 13:10 First the gospel must be preached to all nations. 13:11 When they arrest you and hand you over for trial, do not worry about what to speak. But say whatever is given you at that time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit. 13:12 Brother will hand over brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rise against parents and have them put to death. 13:13 You will be hated by everyone because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

2.1 Early Persecutions

Peter and John were arrested and warned not to preach about Jesus not long after Pentecost (Acts 4). Further arrests soon followed (Acts 5:17ff). This soon escalated to the stoning of Stephen (Acts 6:8-7:60). Emboldened, Saul began a persecution in earnest. Most were forced to leave Jerusalem, which, rather than squelching the movement, caused it to spread more rapidly (Acts 8:1-3 & ff.). Saul obtained authority to arrest Jews who were followers of the Way in Damascus to bring them to Jerusalem. On his way to Damascus, he experienced his conversion (Acts 9). With his conversion, the worst of that persecution seems to have been over.

The next persecution was by the secular authorities. Herod executed James and imprisoned Peter (Acts 12) in about AD 42 or 43¹. Paul met resistance on numerous occasions, which often brought in the secular authorities because of the breach of public order that would result. He reported having been arrested, imprisoned, and beat on many occasions. (2 Corinthians 11:23-27)

Except for Saul’s persecution, these weren’t really organized general persecutions yet.

2.2 The Ten Primitive Persecutions

In July AD 64, most of the city of Rome burned to the ground. It was rumored that the fire was started by Emperor Nero himself, and many historians have judged the rumor true. To deflect the blame from himself, Nero blamed the Christians, and for a time, sought them out for particularly hideous executions. On one occasion, their clothes were dipped in wax and they were set afire to illuminate a chariot race that Nero competed in! Tradition has it that Paul and Peter were martyred in Rome around this time, although if Paul were executed by the courtesy of beheading, as tradition holds, it was likely before or a while after this particular persecution. A Roman historian, Tacitus, wrote:

“But not all the relief of men, nor the bounties of the emperor, nor the propitiation of the gods, could relieve him [Nero] from the infamy of being believed to have ordered the conflagration. Therefore, in order to suppress the rumor, Nero falsely charged with the guilt, and punished with the most exquisite tortures, those persons who, hated for their crimes, were commonly called Christians The founder of that name, Christus, had

1. NET Note on Acts 12:1..

been put to death ... by the procurator of Judaea, Pontius Pilate, in the reign of Tiberius; but the pernicious superstition ..., repressed for a time, broke out again, not only through Judaea, the source of this evil, but also through the city [of Rome], whither all things vile and shameful flow from all quarters, and are encouraged Accordingly, first, those only were arrested who confessed. Next, on their information, a vast multitude ..., were convicted, not so much of the crime of incendiarism as of hatred of the human race And in their deaths they were made the subjects of sport; for they were wrapped in the hides of wild beasts and torn to pieces by dogs, or nailed to crosses, or set on fire, and when day declined, were burned to serve for nocturnal lights Nero had offered his own gardens [on the Vatican] for this spectacle, and also exhibited a chariot race on the occasion, now mingling in the crowd in the dress of a charioteer, now actually holding the reins. Whence a feeling of compassion arose towards the sufferers, though justly held to be odious, because they seemed not to be cut off for the public good, but as victims to the ferocity of one man.”¹

This was but the first of what is sometimes referred to as the ten primitive persecutions that were carried out by the Roman Empire before Christianity was legalized, and occurred just a few years before the destruction of the temple, as predicted by Jesus.

A chilling exchanged is recorded in the letters of Pliny the Younger, between himself and the Emperor Trajan over what to do about the Christians (this would have been during the 3rd persecution at the beginning of the second century).

C. PLINY TO TRAJAN EMPEROR, HEALTH

“IT is my usual custom, Sir, to refer all things, of which I harbor any doubts, to you. For who can better direct my judgment in its hesitation, or instruct my understanding in its ignorance? I never had the fortune to be present at any examination of christians, before I came into this province. I am therefore at a loss to determine, what is the usual object, either of inquiry or punishment, and to what length either of them is to be carried. It has also been with me a question very problematical, whether any distinction should be made between the young and the old, the tender and the robust; whether any room should be given for repentance, or the guilt of christianity once incurred is not to be expiated by the most unequivocal retraction; whether the name itself, abstracted from any flagitiousness of conduct, or the crimes connected with the name, be the object of punishment. In the mean time this has been my method, with respect to those who were brought before me as christians. I asked them whether they were christians? If they pleaded guilty, I interrogated them twice afresh, with a menace of capital punishment. In case of obstinate perseverance, I ordered them to be executed. For of this I had no doubt, whatever was the nature of their religion, that a sullen and obstinate inflexibility called for the vengeance of the magistrate. Some there were infected with the same madness, whom, on account of their privilege of citizenship, I reserved to be sent to Rome, to be referred to your tribunal. In the course of this business, information pouring in, as is usual when they are encouraged, more cases occurred. An anonymous libel was exhibited, with a catalogue of names of persons, who yet declared, that they were not christians then, or ever had been; and repeated after me an invocation of the gods and of your image, which, for this purpose, I had ordered to be brought with the images of the deities, performed sacred rites with wine and frankincense, and execrated Christ, none of which things, I am told, a real christian can ever be impelled to do. On this account I dismissed them. Others, named by an informer, first affirmed and then denied the charge of christianity, declaring that they had been christians, but had desisted, some

1. Tacitus, *Annal.*, XV 44, quoted in Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*. Section 37

three years ago, others still longer, some even twenty years ago. All of them worshipped your image, and the statues of the gods, and also execrated Christ. And this was the account which they gave me of the nature of the religion they once had professed, whether it deserves the name of crime or error, that they were accustomed on a stated day to meet before daylight, and to repeat among themselves a hymn to Christ as to a God, and to bind themselves by an oath with an obligation of not committing any wickedness, but on the contrary, of abstaining from thefts, robberies, and adulteries, also of not violating their promise, or denying a pledge, after which, it was their custom to separate, and to meet again at a promiscuous, harmless meal, from which last they yet desisted, after the publication of my edict in which, agreeably to your orders, I forbade any societies, On which account, I judged it the more necessary, to inquire by torture from two females, who were said to be deaconesses, what is the real truth. But nothing could I collect, except a depraved and excessive superstition. Deferring, therefore, any further investigation, I determined to consult you. For the number of culprits is so great, as to call for serious consultation. For many are informed against of every age and of both sexes, and more still will be in the same situation. For the contagion of the superstition hath spread not only through cities, but even villages and the country. Not that I think it impossible to check and correct it: The success of my endeavors hitherto forbids such desponding thoughts; for the temples once almost desolate, begin to be frequented, and the sacred solemnities, which had long been intermitted, are now attended afresh; and the sacrificial victims are now sold every where, which once could scarce find a purchaser. Whence I conclude, that many might be reclaimed, were the hope of impunity on repentance absolutely confirmed.”

TRAJAN TO PLINY

“You have done perfectly right, my dear Pliny, in the inquiry which you have made concerning christians. For truly, no one general rule can be laid down, which will apply itself to all cases. They must not be sought after. If they are brought before you and convicted, let them be capitally punished, yet with this restriction, that if any renounce christianity, and evidence his sincerity by supplicating our gods, however suspected he may be for the past, he shall obtain pardon for the future, on his repentance. But anonymous libels in no case ought to be attended to; for the precedent would be of the worst sort, and perfectly incongruous to the maxims of my government.”¹

2.3 Roman Attitudes Towards Christianity

In Roman law, a religion could be a *religio licita* (licensed religion) or a *religio illicita* (unlicensed religion). Although in practice, the distinction was seldom enforced. Judaism was a *religio licita*, and was accorded a number of privileges, including the right to contribute to the temple instead of paying the poll tax to the temple of the Capitoline Jupiter. Christianity initially enjoyed these same rights. Even after the Jewish War, Judaism remained a *religio licita*, although it lost many of its extra privileges. Christianity, however, came not only to be regarded as a separate, and thus *religio illicita*, but especially hated.

There are many reasons why this was the case.²

- Christianity inherited the hatred that was already often expressed towards Judaism.

1. David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination*, Volume 1. 1813. Ages Library. pp. 12-14

- Christians' use of the term "kingdom of God" was misunderstood and mistrusted by the government.
- Apocalyptic teaching implied the eventual destruction of the Roman Empire.
- Christianity appeared suddenly, and thus was not protected by its antiquity, as Tacitus described Judaism.
- Christianity claimed exclusiveness, not tolerating other religions, refusing the syncretism that was nearly universal in pagan religions. This was especially a problem with regard to the cult of the Genius of the emperor.
- The separateness of Christianity from the world and the language used in the Eucharist led to rumors of scandalous crimes.
- Christians were aggressive in proselytizing.
- It became popular to blame Christians for drought, pestilence, earthquakes, and other public calamities.
- Christian doctrine of the sinfulness of man and need for repentance led to accusations of hatred of humanity.
- Heresies within the church, and the heretic's behavior (especially the Gnostics), led to guilt by association for orthodox Christians.

2.4 Do Not Worry

The admonishment to not worry about responding is an encouragement to confidence, not an injunction to not prepare. I've known churches that held that it was wrong for a preacher to preach from prepared notes on the basis of this passage, but that is to totally misunderstand it. This is not a negative injunction as much as it is a positive encouragement. Elsewhere Jesus taught the importance of preparation (see Luke 14:28-33).

3.0 Abomination Of Desolation (Mark 13:14-20)

13:14 "But when you see *the abomination of desolation* standing where it should not be (let the reader understand), then those in Judea must flee to the mountains. 13:15 The one on the roof must not come down or go inside to take anything out of his house. 13:16 The one in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. 13:17 Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing their babies in those days! 13:18 Pray that it may not be in winter. 13:19 For in those days there will be suffering unlike anything that has happened from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, or ever will happen. 13:20 And if the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would be saved. But because of the elect, whom he chose, he has cut them short.

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2. The following list is derived from "Attitude of the Roman Empire To Religions" and "Relations Between The Roman Empire And Christianity" in the article "Roman Empire And Christianity" in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*.

3.1 “let the reader understand”

Jesus obviously wouldn't have referred to a recipient of his message as the 'the reader' when he was delivering his message orally. Rather, he was referring to the reader of the Old Testament prophecy he was quoting, namely Daniel 9:27.

Da 9:24 “Seventy weeks have been determined
concerning your people and your holy city
to put an end to rebellion,
to bring sin to completion,
to atone for iniquity,
to bring in perpetual righteousness,
to seal up the prophetic vision,
and to anoint a most holy place.
9:25 So know and understand:
From the issuing of the command to restore and rebuild
Jerusalem until an anointed one, a prince arrives,
there will be a period of seven weeks and sixty-two weeks.
It will again be built, with plaza and moat,
but in distressful times.
9:26 Now after the sixty-two weeks,
an anointed one will be cut off and have nothing.
As for the city and the sanctuary,
the people of the coming prince will destroy them.
But his end will come speedily like a flood.
Until the end of the war that has been decreed
there will be destruction.
9:27 He will confirm a covenant with many for one week.
But in the middle of that week
he will bring sacrifices and offerings to a halt.
On the wing of abominations will come one who destroys,
until the decreed end is poured out on the one who destroys.”

Commentators differ considerably about how to interpret this passage. One view holds that this (and all other prophecies in Daniel) pointed to the situation with Antiochus IV and the revolt against him under the lead of the Maccabees. Antiochus captured and desecrated the temple, halting the sacrifices and erecting a pagan altar. However, it is traditional to understand the “anointed one”, to be the Messiah. This is more consistent with the usual understanding of the ‘sevens’ as being seven years. While several interpretations have been proposed regarding exact dates, for our purposes here it is sufficient to note that the time between Daniel and Christ was about five centuries (70*7=490).¹

Since Jesus himself associated the abomination with the destruction of Jerusalem (see especially the parallel version in Luke, which is discussed in more detail later), then it would seem best to take this passage to refer to this period of time. Too much should not be made of the exact time frame of the 70 ‘sevens’. In the greater context, Daniel has noted that the 70 years of captivity predicted by Jeremiah is nearly over and prays to God for Israel. The vision of the 70 ‘sevens’ is God’s reply. The point would appear to

1. See “Daniel 9:24-27 — Seventy Weeks” on page 52.

play off of the number 70 more than to specify a time frame as precise as, say, 492 years, 2 months, 5 days, 3 hours, 38 minutes 55.234335579423 seconds. That 490 years from Daniel's time gets us to the neighborhood of Jesus' ministry and the destruction of the temple and the permanent end of the sacrifice is enough to confirm this interpretation. Arguments over exact dates and calendars are interesting, but unnecessary.

3.2 Eusebius

Refer back to the quotes from Eusebius made earlier.¹ He noted that the Christians were warned by a prophecy to flee Jerusalem in time to escape its siege and destruction and quoted Josephus at length about the horrors that Jesus predicted here.

4.0 False Messiahs (Mark 13:21-23)

Mk 13:21 Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'Look, there he is!' do not believe him. 13:22 For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, the elect. 13:23 Be careful! I have told you everything ahead of time.

See previous discussion of false messiahs.²

Notice how urgently he was speaking to his disciples. He was talking about a situation that would happen in the lifetime of the four apostles he was talking to, not some distant age.

5.0 Allusions From Old Testament Prophets (Mark 13:24-27)

The Arrival of the Son of Man

Mk 13:24 "But in those days, after that suffering, *the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light; 13:25 the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.* 13:26 Then everyone will see *the Son of Man arriving in the clouds* with great power and glory. 13:27 Then he will send angels and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

This passage consists primarily of quotations and allusions to the Old Testament. To understand what Jesus meant by them, we must look at their original context.

5.1 Isaiah 13:10,13

Is 13:1 This is a message about Babylon that God revealed to Isaiah son of Amoz:

....

13:9 Look, the Lord's day of judgment is coming;

1. See "Extract From The Church History of Eusebius" on page 136.

2. See "False Messiahs" on page 145.

it is a day of cruelty and savage, raging anger,
destroying the earth
and annihilating its sinners.
13:10 Indeed the stars in the sky and their constellations
no longer give out their light;
the sun is darkened as soon as it rises,
and the moon does not shine.
13:11 I will punish the world for its evil,
and wicked people for their sin.
I will put an end to the pride of the insolent,
I will bring down the arrogance of tyrants.
13:12 I will make human beings more scarce than pure gold,
and people more scarce than gold from Ophir.
13:13 So I will shake the heavens,
and the earth will shake loose from its foundation,
because of the fury of the Lord who commands armies,
in the day he vents his raging anger.
....
13:17 Look, I am stirring up the Medes to attack them;
they are not concerned about silver,
nor are they interested in gold.
13:18 Their arrows will cut young men to ribbons;
they have no compassion on a person's offspring,
they will not look with pity on children.
13:19 Babylon, the most admired of kingdoms,
the Chaldeans' source of honor and pride,
will be destroyed by God
just as Sodom and Gomorrah were.
...

Chapter 13 of the book of Isaiah is a prophecy against Babylon, making the specific prediction that the Medes would be the instrument of Gods wrath against them. Although the language used is often described as apocalyptic, it is clear that the thrust of the chapter is a prediction of events that took place in the second half of the 6th century BC. The literary form is poetic, so we must expect the use of poetic imagery and not take each detail, such as the heavens trembling, or the sun itself being extinguished as literal, matter-of-fact, details. Rather, I see here a country devastated by invasion, the cities burning, the sounds of buildings collapsing, the sky filled with black smoke such that even the noon day is dark. Isaiah was painting an image of devastation here, even invoking Sodom and Gomorrah, not because God is going to rain down fire and brimstone as he did on them, but to paint a word picture of the destruction that would be carried out by the Medes on Babylon, a conflagration that would be, none-the-less, the work of the hand of God just as much as the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah had been.¹

5.2 Isaiah 34:4

The Lord Will Judge Edom

Is 34:1 Come near, you nations, and listen!
Pay attention, you people!

1. See "Isaiah 13:1-14:23 — The Burden of Babylon" on page 25.

The earth and everything it contains must listen,
the world and everything that lives in it.
34:2 For the Lord is angry at all the nations
and furious with all their armies.
He will annihilate them and slaughter them.
34:3 Their slain will be left unburied,
their corpses will stink;
the hills will soak up their blood.
34:4 All the stars in the sky will fade away,
the sky will roll up like a scroll;
all its stars will wither,
like a leaf withers and falls from a vine
or a fig withers and falls from a tree.
34:5 He says, "Indeed, my sword has slaughtered heavenly powers.
Look, it now descends on Edom,
on the people I will annihilate in judgment."
34:6 The Lord's sword is dripping with blood,
it is covered with fat;
it drips with the blood of young rams and goats
and is covered with the fat of rams' kidneys.
For the Lord is holding a sacrifice in Bozrah,
a bloody slaughter in the land of Edom.
34:7 Wild oxen will be slaughtered along with them,
as well as strong bulls.
Their land is drenched with blood,
their soil is covered with fat.
....

Here again Isaiah used some apocalyptic sounding imagery, but again, it is clear from the context that the end of the world was not indicated, but rather the prophecy was directed towards Edom and was focused on the 7th and 6th centuries BC. Again, we have a poetic word picture of destruction of cities. We should imagine a whole town burning, the sky full of smoke, burning embers rising from the fire and falling elsewhere, spreading the destruction further.

And so, what was Jesus intending here? He was talking about the destruction of the Temple and of Jerusalem. He was invoking these poetic word pictures to describe the destruction of Jerusalem 40 years later in AD 70. But not just an image of destruction was meant to be portrayed, but of judgement too.

5.3 Daniel 7:13

Daniel has a Vision of Four Animals Coming up from the Sea

Da 7:1 In the first year of King Belshazzar of Babylon, Daniel had a dream filled with visions while he was lying on his bed. Then he wrote down the dream in summary fashion. 7:2 Daniel explained: "I was watching in my vision during the night as the four winds of the sky were stirring up the great sea. 7:3 Then four large beasts came up from the sea; they were different from one another.

7:4 "The first one was like a lion with eagles' wings. As I watched, its wings were pulled off and it was lifted up from the ground. It was made to stand on two feet like a human being, and a human mind was given to it.

7:5 “Then I saw a second beast appeared, like a bear. It was raised up on one side, and there were three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, ‘Get up and devour much flesh!’”

7:6 “After these things, as I was watching, another beast like a leopard appeared, with four bird-like wings on its back. This beast had four heads, and ruling authority was given to it.

7:7 “After these things, as I was watching in the night visions a fourth beast appeared – one dreadful, terrible, and very strong. It had two large rows of iron teeth. It devoured and crushed, and anything that was left it trampled with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that came before it, and it had ten horns.

7:8 “As I was contemplating the horns, another horn – a small one – came up between them, and three of the former horns were torn out by the roots to make room for it. This horn had eyes resembling human eyes and a mouth speaking arrogant things.

....

7:13 I was watching in the night visions,
“And with the clouds of the sky
one like a son of man was approaching.
He went up to the Ancient of Days
and was escorted before him.

7:14 To him was given ruling authority, honor, and sovereignty.
All peoples, nations, and language groups were serving him.
His authority is eternal and will not pass away.
His kingdom will not be destroyed.

I’m going to spend a little more time here because I understand this vision and Jesus’ use of it in a somewhat unconventional manner¹. The four beasts represented four kingdoms, as Daniel was later told. The first was the Babylonian Empire. The second was the Medo-Persian Empire. Its being raised up, or perhaps taller, on one side, may represent the fact the Persian element dominated the Median. The three ribs are often interpreted as representing the three major conquests of the Medes and Persians². The third beast quite clearly represented Alexander the Great and the four kingdoms his empire split into after his death. The fourth beast was the Roman Empire.

Thus far, this is traditional Christian understanding of the vision. In modern interpretation of apocalyptic writings, the ten horns are often seen as ten countries, such as the Common Market, making up a future reconstituted Roman Empire³. However, verse 24 makes it clear that the ten horns are kings that come **from** the empire, not go into constituting the empire.

Da 7:24 The ten horns
mean that ten kings will arise from that kingdom.
Another king will arise after them,
but he will be different from the earlier ones.
He will humiliate three kings.

1. See “Daniel 7:2-14, 17-18, 23-27 -- The Four Beasts” on page 43.

2. See “Daniel 8:1-14, 19-26 — The Two Beasts” on page 45.

3. *The Late Great Planet Earth*.

This rise of another king is highly suggestive of the rise of Vespasian as emperor after the year of four emperors when he succeeded as emperor after three very short lived would be rulers each supported by factions of the army battling each other and then proceeded to destroy Jerusalem, ending the sacrifices and severely limiting the legal status of Jews, making the legal status of Christians even more precarious. Or, it may represent the earlier replacement of the triumvirate by an emperor.¹

The Jews were expecting a Messiah to deliver them. Jesus claimed to be that Messiah, the Son of Man that Daniel spoke about. However Jesus proclaimed a kingdom very different from what the Jews were expecting. Many expected a literal, political, theocratic kingdom², but Jesus proclaimed something very different. He began his ministry by proclaiming “the kingdom of heaven is near” [Matthew 4:17, et al]. He said, “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and forceful people lay hold of it.” [Matthew 11:12] “But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has already overtaken you.” [Matthew 12:28] Look at the many parables about the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 13. Perhaps most telling is Luke 17:20-21 (Luke consistently refers to the kingdom of heaven as the kingdom of God).

Lk 17:20 Now at one point the Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God was coming, so he answered, “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed, 17:21 nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is in your midst.”

Jesus also, on one other occasion, made reference to Daniel 7:13.

Mt 26:64 Jesus said to him, “You have said it yourself. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man *sitting at the right hand* of the Power and *coming on the clouds of heaven*.”³

Jesus saw himself fulfilling that prophecy with his crucifixion and resurrection, as he here said so in addressing the high priest at his trial. This is confirmed especially when you consider that in the context of Mark 13:26, four verses later in verse 30, Jesus said of his discourse “I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.” An interpretation further confirmed by Mark 9:1, where Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, there are some standing here who will not experience death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.”

Everything else in Daniel’s vision in Daniel 7 was symbolic. Every image was a cipher, so to speak. It would be strange for everything else to taken in a symbolic manner, and this verse be taken as a matter-of-fact literal description. I think, rather, what the image was, and especially what Jesus meant by it, was the establishment of the kingdom of

1. See “Fourth Kingdom — The Roman Empire” on page 58.

2. See “Messianic Expectations” on page 87.

3. The NIV translation “In the future” in Matthew 26:64 is misleading. The Greek phrase doesn’t mean at some future point in time, but rather in all of the future. The Greek phrase is literally “from now” and is translated “henceforth”, “hereafter”, or better, “from now on” by nearly all other translations. It is the exact same phrase used in John 14:7, where it reads, “From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

God in the Church after his resurrection: the reign of the holy spirit within the hearts of the elect. This is clearly what Jesus meant by the kingdom of God elsewhere and I think this is what Jesus taught to be the meaning of Daniel 7:13-14.

The kingdom referred to in Daniel 7:14 is here right now. Are we Christians not Christians first and citizen's of our country second? Do we not obey Christ rather than man where the two are in conflict (Acts 4:19-20)? Is he not then our king, and we his subjects?

5.4 Gathering The Elect

The language here is very similar to what was used elsewhere to refer to the resurrection event at the end of the world. Compare with Matthew 13:40-43, where the angels will weed out the kingdom, and with verses 47-50 of the same chapter where the angels will separate the wicked from the righteous. However, here we have to deal with the statement in verse 30 where Jesus says that all these things will happen during this generation's lifetime.

Perhaps something like gathering the elect into the kingdom, i.e., the establishment of the church, was meant. This would compare with John 10:14-16, where Jesus, the good shepherd, would bring in sheep "not of this sheep pen", i.e., Gentiles, who are not Jews, and with Matthew 23:37, where Jesus referred to gathering the children of Israel in Jerusalem together as a mother hen gathers her chicks. But the involvement of angels seems strange to this interpretation.¹

However, the Greek word for angels does not exclusively refer to supernatural beings, but refers to human messengers as well.

6.0 Parable Of The Fig Tree (Mark 13:28-31)

13:28 "Learn this parable from the fig tree: Whenever its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. 13:29 So also you, when you see these things happening, know that he is near, right at the door. 13:30 I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. 13:31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

6.1 Right At The Door

Here, Jesus emphasized the nearness of these events, especially once the signs begin. Again this is a strong confirmation that we should seek their fulfillment in the first century, and not in our own future. When the disciples saw these things (note the wording: "when you see these things happening", the "you" being the four that Jesus was speaking to), they were to know that "it", i.e., the thing they had just asked about (the destruction of the temple) was right at the door. And in fact that was what happened.

1. See "The Eternal Gospel (Revelation 14:6-7)" on page 238. See "The Harvests" on page 240.

6.2 This Generation

And if that wasn't clear enough already that the Olivet Discourse deals with 1st century events, Jesus explicitly said "this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened". Those who take the Olivet Discourse as eschatological try to deal with this by arguing that "generation" means "race" here, i.e., the Jewish people. However, this is grasping at straws. Yes, the word can mean progeny, or descendants. However, nearly always, this word denotes the set of people alive at a particular point in time.

For example, look at Matthew 23:29-36. Here, Jesus recounted the sins of the Jew's forefathers, killing and persecuting the prophets. He then said that more prophets, wise men, and teachers would be sent and "you", i.e., the Jews he was addressing, would kill, crucify, and flog them. Then finally he said all the blood of those previous martyrs will be on "this generation" because by their actions they show they approved of their forefather's persecutions. The temporal aspect shows clearly that a "generation" in the sense of "those alive now" was intended.

Also compare this with Mark 9:1,

Mk 9:1 And he said to them, "I tell you the truth, there are some standing here who will not experience death before they see the kingdom of God come with power."

where I think Jesus was speaking of the same thing, that is, "the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory" (see on verse 26).

6.3 My Words Will Never Pass Away

This builds on the opening of the previous verse: "I tell you the truth,...". It emphasizes the certainty of what was just said. But it has significant theological implications as well. In other scripture, such language is reserved for God alone. See Numbers 23:19, where God does not lie or change his mind; Joshua 23:14-16, where all God's promises are fulfilled; Psalm 118:89, where his word is eternal; Psalm 118:152, where his statutes last for ever; Isaiah 40:8 and 1 Peter 1:23-24, where his word stands forever; Matthew 5:18 and Luke 16:17, where not even a stroke of the pen will disappear from the law; 2 Timothy 2:13, where he is faithful; Hebrews 1:10-12, where he remains the same forever. Jesus' statement here would be tantamount to blasphemy if he wasn't of the Godhead.

7.0 Stay Alert! (Mark 13:32-37)

Be Ready!

Mk 13:32 "But as for that day or hour no one knows it – neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son – except the Father. 13:33 Watch out! Stay alert! For you do not know when the time will come. 13:34 It is like a man going on a journey. He left his house and put his slaves in charge, assigning to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to stay alert. 13:35 Stay alert, then, because you do not know when the owner of the house will return – whether during evening, at midnight, when the rooster crows, or at dawn –

13:36 or else he might find you asleep when he returns suddenly. 13:37 What I say to you I say to everyone: Stay alert!”

7.1 Similar Parables

Jesus told several parables where a landlord or king leaves and returns.

- Matthew 21:33-44 || Mark 12:1-11 || Luke 20:9-18

The landowner plants a vineyard, then rents it out and leaves on a journey. He sends servants to collect his fruit, but they are beat, killed, and stoned. Finally, he sends his son, who is killed. The implication of a return and retribution at the end of the world is clear. The primary emphasis however is on how the tenants treated the servants and the son.

- Matthew 24:45-51 || Luke 12:42-48

The homeowner leaves a servant in charge of the household while he is gone. The master will return when the servant doesn't expect him. The primary emphasis is on faithfulness in carrying out ones duties, with idea of a second coming being secondary, though it is clearly there.

- Matthew 25:1-13

The bridegroom is on his way to the wedding, but five of the virgins are not prepared for his arrival because he was a long time coming. The departure theme is missing here, but none the less, it is clear that the second coming is in mind here too. However, the primary emphasis is preparedness.

- Matthew 25:14-30

A business man leaves various sums of money with his servants while he goes on a journey. Two of them earn more money, but one hid his. Again, an end-of-the world judgement is in mind, but the primary emphasis is making full use of what God has given us.

- Luke 19:12-27

This parable is almost identical to the previous one, except that the amounts of money are different, and it is a king who is the master.

- Luke 12:36-40

There are actually three parables here. The first is essentially a very short version of Matthew 25:1-13. A bridegroom is coming, so the servants must keep ready for his arrival (vv. 35-36). The second is similar to Matthew 24:45-51 || Luke 12:42-48.

The third also puts emphasis on being prepared, but instead of a master returning, a thief is breaking in. The idea of the second coming is behind all three.

Like all parables with the theme of a bridegroom, master or king leaving on a journey and returning at an unexpectedly, the second coming is in view. But that is almost incidental to the parables. They are not told with the primary intent of teaching that doctrine, but with an emphasis on remaining faithful, or on being prepared, or in this case, on alertness. The application goes beyond the end of the world.

In the present context, the alertness must be for the coming destruction of Jerusalem so that the Christians can escape, as Eusebius recorded they in fact did do. Jesus didn't

predict the day of the destruction of Jerusalem, nor of his return. Note how in the parables cited above, the return is often delayed and unexpected. This has application beyond just the second coming. God's answer to our prayers often seems delayed to us, but we must always be alert and prepared for when the answer does come; for it will come, and at the proper time.

7.2 Similarity of the Parables

The similarity of the above parables raises an interesting point about the transmission of Jesus' teaching. As Jesus went from town to town teaching, he would (a) retell the same parables over and over again, and (b) adapt parables from his repertoire to specific situations. The fact that he told the same parables many times gave the apostles and disciples ample opportunity to memorize his teaching. On the other hand, the fact that he would adapt them to the situation meant that multiple versions would be known. Compare especially Matthew 25:14-30 with Luke 19:12-27 for an example of this.

There are several implications of this in study of the Synoptic Gospels. Since the parables were retold countless times, there is no particular significance to the order they are presented in the Gospels. It is improper to regard differences in sequence between the Synoptics as contradictions. Further, it by no means follows that variations in details are contradictions, nor are they signs of long oral transmission (during which skeptics allege the disciples adapted or invented them to later situations).

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1 Thessalonians

It is important to strip away our presuppositions and assumptions, and let a passage say only what it says, and not read into it more than that.

1.0 Introduction

Paul's letters to the Thessalonians were probably his first, dating to about 50-51 AD.¹ While only a portion of the letter deals with eschatology, it is important to view those eschatological passages in context. This study will cite the larger context in its section titles, quote the key eschatological passages from it, make some comments on individual phrases in the key passages, then conclude with some general comments.

2.0 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

1 Th 1:9 For people everywhere report how you welcomed us and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God 1:10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus our deliverer from the coming wrath.

10 wait for his Son from heaven: that is, wait for the eschatological parousia. **whom he raised from the dead:** the resurrection is central to Paul's message. **the coming wrath:** the fate of the unsaved.

Paul had nothing but good things to say about the Thessalonian church. The citation of the fundamentals of the Gospel here: the resurrection, his return, his delivering of the church, and the wrath against those who are not saved, was incidental. These were things the Thessalonian church had already been taught and which they accepted. They were truths they already knew.

1. Milligan. *St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians*. p. xxxv-xxxvi, xxxix.
Mills, M. "The Historical Setting for the Apostolic Period" *Letters to Thessalonica*.

3.0 1 Thessalonians 2:1-20

1 Th 2:19 For who is our hope or joy or crown to boast of before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not of course you? 2:20 For you are our glory and joy!

19 his coming: the eschatological parousia.

“As you know” and the like (2:1, 2, 5, 9, 10, 11) are a common refrain in this chapter. Paul was praising them and reminding them of the basis for that praise. Paul regarded the Thessalonians as an example to be imitated (1:7).

The “wrath [that] has come on [the Jews] completely” in 1 Th 2:16 is not to be confused with the eschatological wrath referred to in 1:10. Many commentators regard this line as a late interpolation referring to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.¹ Our late perspective distorts how we view such events. From Paul’s view in the early 50’s, there are other events, while not so drastic as the destruction of Jerusalem, that could be what he had in mind. The Jews had suffered under Caligula a decade earlier. Eusebius reported “Philo has reported in five books what happened to the Jews in the reign of Gaius, ..., the misery of the Jews in his time, Philo’s mission to Rome on behalf of his compatriots ... and how he ... narrowly escaped with his life.” More recently, there had been a famine in the mid 40’s that the Christians in Antioch had sent relief to Judea for (Acts 11:29-30).² And most immediately, the Jews had just been expelled from Rome in 49 A.D. (Acts 18:2).³ These events are sufficiently traumatic to be taken as what Paul had in mind by “wrath” here.

4.0 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13

1 Th 3:12 And may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we do for you, 3:13 so that your hearts are strengthened in holiness to be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

13 coming of our Lord Jesus: the parousia again. **with all his saints:** literally, “holy ones”, which could also mean angels. However, see below which makes it clear that it is the dead in Christ that he has in mind.

Paul repeated mentions of the coming of Jesus as though they were a heart beat. This doctrine was the life blood, so to speak, of Paul’s Gospel message. If Paul had not already explained the resurrection of the dead, then the reference to “the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints” in such an incidental manner would have been quite confounding. In 1 Th 3:3-4 Paul continued to emphasize that he was saying things they already knew.

1. *Interpreter’s Bible Commentary*, *loc cit.*

2. “Famine” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*.

3. See NET footnote on the word “Claudius” *loc cit.*

5.0 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

Paul continued to remind the Thessalonians what he had already taught them. It has been suggested that he is responding to questions, but a close reading shows he was still reiterating things already taught: “you have no need for anyone to write you” (4:9), “as we commanded you” (4:11), “you have no need for anything to be written to you” (5:1), and “you know quite well” (5:2). Rather, the letter reads more like a primitive catechism.

Most commentators assume there is a problem with idleness in the Thessalonian church that Paul is addressing in 4:10-12. Usually this is associated with the eschatological teaching that follows by assuming that an expectation of an immanent parousia is the cause. In actuality there is no such problem actually indicated in the letter. Even in 2 Thessalonians 3:11, where Paul was responding to such a problem in the church, no connection was made to immanent eschatology. Rather it was connected to the idea of living a disciplined life. Elsewhere such issues come up not because of eschatological doctrine but because of misunderstanding of the doctrine of grace (Romans 3:8).

6.0 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

1 Th 4:13 Now we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest who have no hope. 4:14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, so also we believe that God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep as Christians. 4:15 For we tell you this by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will surely not go ahead of those who have fallen asleep. 4:16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 4:17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be suddenly caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord. 4:18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

13 asleep: common euphemism for death¹. **no hope:** condemned to hell. **14 God will bring with him:** alluded to in 1 Thessalonians 3:13 above. The dead saints are with Christ. *15 by the word of the Lord:* Paul claims direct revelation as authority. **16 the dead in Christ:** that is, the dead who are saved. **will rise first:** a clear reference to physical resurrection. The disembodied souls were with Christ², and brought with him to earth to be rejoined with physical bodies and raised into the clouds. **17 we who are alive, who are left:** the living who are saved when Christ returns. Wesley suggested that “we who are left” implies fewness of number³, but that reads too much into the phrase. **caught up together with them:** with the resurrected dead, **in the air. always be with the Lord:** the eternal eschatological state.

1. BDAG, p. 551. κοιμάω definition 2.

2. See Philippians 1:20-24 for Paul’s expectation of being with Christ without the body immediately after death.

3. *Wesley’s Notes: First Thessalonians.* 1 Th 4:15.

When Paul said “we do not want you to be uninformed .. about those who are asleep”, we should not imagine that up until this point, Paul had not yet taught them about the resurrection of the dead. 1 Thessalonians 3:13 certainly presupposed such teaching already. Rather, with these words, Paul was gently reminding the Thessalonians of the resurrection (and perhaps filling in some details) to encourage them in their grief. While it is not explicitly stated that one or more Thessalonian church members had died, the phrasing of “those who are asleep” is understood by most commentators to imply an actual rather than a hypothetical situation.

Regarding “no hope”, Barclay cited a number of pagan sources from antiquity:

Aeschylus wrote, “Once a man dies there is no resurrection.” Theocritus wrote, “There is hope for those who are alive, but those who have died are without hope.” Catullus wrote, “When once our brief light sets, there is one perpetual night through which we must sleep.” On their tombstones grim epitaphs were carved. “I was not; I became; I am not; I care not.” One of the most pathetic papyrus letters that has come down to us is a letter of sympathy which runs like this. “Irene to Taonnophris and Philo, good comfort. I was as sorry and wept over the departed one as I wept for Didymas. And all things whatsoever were fitting, I did, and all mine, Epaphroditus and Thermouthion and Philion and Apollonius and Plantas. But nevertheless against such things one can do nothing. Therefore comfort ye one another.”¹

It has been suggested that Paul was responding to some sort of Gnostic spiritual resurrection heresy, but the early date of the letter makes it very unlikely that Gnosticism, per se, could be the issue.² In fact, there is no indication of a theological problem existing in the Thessalonian church at all. If there is a problem at all, it is emotional rather than doctrinal.

The main points of Paul’s doctrine of resurrection are:

1. Jesus died and rose again.
2. Jesus will return.
3. God will bring the dead in Christ with him when he returns.
4. The dead in Christ will be physically resurrected first.
5. The living in Christ will be raised into the clouds with Jesus second.
6. All in Christ will be with him forever.
7. Paul gives no indication of a thousand year reign after his return.

Many commentators see Paul’s use of the first person plural in verse 17 to indicate that Paul expected Jesus’ return within his lifetime. As the use of the first person plural is incidental and the time frame of the return is not the point of the passage, that is reading too much into it. It may, however, be fair to say that Paul had a reasonable hope for the return happening in his lifetime.

1. Barclay. *Daily Study Bible Series: The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians*. p. 203.

2. Martin. *The New American Commentary: 1, 2 Thessalonians*. p. 141.

7.0 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

1 Th 5:1 Now on the topic of times and seasons, brothers and sisters, you have no need for anything to be written to you. 5:2 For you know quite well that the day of the Lord will come in the same way as a thief in the night. 5:3 Now when they are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction comes on them, like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will surely not escape. 5:4 But you, brothers and sisters, are not in the darkness for the day to overtake you like a thief would. 5:5 For you all are sons of the light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of the darkness. 5:6 So then we must not sleep as the rest, but must stay alert and sober. 5:7 For those who sleep, sleep at night and those who get drunk are drunk at night. 5:8 But since we are of the day, we must stay sober by *putting on the breastplate* of faith and love and as a *helmet* our hope *for salvation*. 5:9 For God did not destine us for wrath but for gaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. 5:10 He died for us so that whether we are alert or asleep we will come to life together with him. 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, just as you are in fact doing.

1 you have no need for anything to be written to you: the difficulty with understanding this passage is we are entering the middle of a conversation and hearing only one side of it. **2 the day of the Lord:** the eschatological day of judgment. **as a thief in the night:** only unbelievers are so surprised; believers are prepared (v.4).¹ the metaphor refers to its suddenness; not how soon it will be. **9 wrath:** eternal judgment. **salvation:** resurrection and being with Christ for eternity.

The metaphorical use of dark/light and night/day is well common in Jewish literature. Clarke cited the *Midrash Tehillim*, on Psalm 9:8: “*When the holy blessed God shall judge the Gentiles, it shall be in the night season, in which they shall be asleep in their transgressions; but when he shall judge the Israelites, it shall be in the day time, when they are occupied in the study of the law.*”²

Paul was reiterating what he already had taught them regarding the timing. He gave no indicators of when it would be, but only said that it wouldn’t catch the Christians by surprise. By this, he didn’t mean that they’d see it coming well in advance, but that when it happens, they will not discover themselves to be destined for wrath.

8.0 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

Paul concluded with a block of practical and ethical wisdom, continuing what appears to be a catechistic purpose to the letter in his physical absence.

1. Martin. *The New American Commentary: 1, 2 Thessalonians*. p. 28.

2. Clarke. *Clarke’s Commentary: First Thessalonians*. 1 Th 5:4.

2 Thessalonians

Great caution should be exercised in identifying the Man of Lawlessness and his restrainer, despite the temptation to read our favorite speculations into this letter.

1.0 Introduction

Paul's second letter to the Thessalonian church was written only a short time after the first.¹ The time frame is limited to when Silvanus and Timothy were with Paul. Several scholars argue that the letter wasn't actually written by Paul. Some cite alleged theological differences with the first letter making it unlikely the same author wrote both. Others cite similarities between the letters as evidence a forger is using the first to emulate Paul's style. Skeptics will see what they want to see. This essay will focus on the eschatological issues raised (or alleged to be raised) by this letter and how they relate to the first letter (especially when apologetically important).

2.0 Suffering (2 Thessalonians 1:5-7)

2 Th 1:5 This is evidence of God's righteous judgment, to make you worthy of the kingdom of God, for which in fact you are suffering. 1:6 For it is right for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 1:7 and to you who are being afflicted to give rest together with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed⁹ from heaven with his mighty angels.

This passage is not eschatological itself, but it does segue into one that is. It is significant apologetically however. This passage speaks of current suffering for the kingdom of God. 1 Thessalonians 1:6, 2:2, 14 spoke only of opposition in the past. Some scholars argue that this inconsistency is proof that Paul did not write both letters. There are others who think this is evidence that the letters order in the wrong order chronologically. However, the first letter was making mention of opposition during Paul's preaching in Thessalonica. It didn't actually say anything about ongoing persecution during Paul's

1. Milligan, p. xxxvi.

absence one way or the other. And even if it did, persecution can come in waves. So, drawing such conclusions over-reaches the evidence quite significantly.

3.0 Hell (2 Thessalonians 1:8-10)

2 Th 1:8 With flaming fire he will mete out punishment on those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 1:9 They will undergo the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his strength, 1:10 when he comes to be glorified among his saints and admired on that day among all who have believed – and you did in fact believe our testimony.

Paul rarely spoke in detail about the ultimate fate of the unrighteous. Here Paul spoke of “eternal destruction, separated from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might”. While evocative, the language in isolation is ambiguous. Was Paul speaking of final annihilation or is destruction a process that lasts for eternity?¹ Philippians 3:18-19 doesn’t clarify his meaning any. Nor did Paul here indicate whether their continued existence (assuming he meant there is one) is physical or spiritual.

However, Luke records a speech of Paul’s where he clearly indicated a physical resurrection for both the righteous and the unrighteous. “I have a hope in God (a hope that these men themselves accept too) that there is going to be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous.” (Acts 24:15)

Other scriptures also indicate a continued existence for those in Hell. We should assume that Paul knew and believed anything Jesus taught on the subject. Jesus referred to the unrighteous being cast into “the eternal fire that has been prepared for the devil and his angels” Matthew 25:41-46). Elsewhere he described Hell as “an unquenchable fire .. where their worm never dies” (Mark 9:42-48). Jesus conceived of Hell as a place where the body was eternally being consumed by fire & worm, but where conscious existence continued (see also the story of Lazarus and the Rich Man in Luke 16:19-31). It was this that Paul must have had in mind by his phrase “eternal destruction”.

Revelation further confirms the lake of fire as a place of “eternal torment” (Revelation 20:10-15, 21:8). It is impossible to argue for universalism from scripture. It clearly teaches that people will go to Hell.

4.0 Warning of a Heresy (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3a)

2 Th 2:1 Now regarding the arrival of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to be with him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, 2:2 not to be easily shaken from your composure or disturbed by any kind of spirit or message or letter allegedly from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here. 2:3a Let no one deceive you in any way.

1. Clarke, *loc cit*, argues that their being continues since the destruction is everlasting, which is certainly what Paul intended, but the language in isolation is not so cut-and-dried.

Most commentaries make far too many presumptions about this passage. They tend to presume that Paul was reacting to a problem already present and even originating in the Thessalonian community. They often then go on to imagine that this heresy originated as a misunderstanding of the first letter. Some skeptical scholars have even proposed that 1 Thessalonians was the heretical letter opposed in this passage¹ or that Paul had changed his mind between the two letters!

The false teaching that Paul was opposing was not a simple misunderstanding of Paul's earlier teaching. Verse 3 refers to it as a deception. Verse 2 makes it clear that some heretic was even going so far as to forge letters from Paul. The heretic had not misunderstood Paul: he was actively creating a lie that he was knowingly attributing falsely to Paul. There was no indication that the heresy had ever reached the Thessalonians yet. Rather, the most natural way to read this passage is to see Paul as preemptively warning them. Verse 5 indicates that Paul had already taught them these things. He was reiterating them so that the Thessalonians would be prepared to defend against the deception.

Paul said little about what the heresy actually was, just that it claimed "that the day of the Lord is already here". The commentaries are full of speculation. Some speculations can be dismissed out of hand, such as suggestions that the heresy was Gnosticism. While it is possible that this heresy was incorporated into Gnosticism, it wouldn't be until a half century later that we can really speak of Gnosticism *per se*². Speculations range from thinking the end-times tribulation had already started (see KJV. "the day of the Lord is at hand") to over-spiritualizing the concept so that the event doesn't have any direct effect in the physical world.

In a later letter Paul had to defend the concept of a physical resurrection to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 15)³. Then, in a letter to Timothy, Paul condemned Hymenaeus and Philetus who taught "that the resurrection had already occurred" (2 Timothy 2:16-18)⁴. But if that were the heresy here, one might expect Paul to have focused on the physicality of the event, appealing to Jesus' resurrection as he did to the Corinthians. Instead, he focused on the physical events that would lead up to the final events. This strongly suggests that the heretic who was impersonating Paul was leading some sort of doomsday cult not unlike the many we see from time-to-time even in the modern world, and was preaching that God's judgment on the world (i.e. "Rome") was already underway.

5.0 Rebellion (2 Thessalonians 2:3b)

2 Th 2:3b For that day will not arrive until the rebellion comes

Paul's reference to "the rebellion" is enigmatic. He was relying on the fact that he had already taught the Thessalonians about it (v. 5) to make his reference clear to them. It is

1. *Word Biblical Commentary Vol 45*, p. 164 sites Lindemann.

2. Martin, p. 141.

3. See "1 Corinthians 15: Physical Resurrection" on page 1.

4. *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, p. 257 also sites 1 Cor 4:8.

not explicit who would be doing the rebelling nor what they would be rebelling against. The traditional understanding is that it is the actions of the man of lawlessness we read of in the following verses. This seems very likely, but caution should be exercised when deriving further conclusions from this interpretation¹.

6.0 Man of Lawlessness (2 Thessalonians 2:3c-17)

6.1 Identity (2 Thessalonians 2:3c)

2 Th 2:3c and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction.

The commentaries are varied in the identity of the man of lawlessness². Dispensationalism sees him as a singular figure, the Antichrist, of the seven year tribulation before the millennial reign. Traditionally, reformed Protestant theology saw him as the institution of the papacy. 1 John 2:18-22 refers to many antichrists having already appeared³. Since in apocalyptic literature, such as Daniel, an individual may stand for a whole empire or dynasty, it is very prudent to avoid dogmatism and be tentative in identifying the man of lawlessness.

6.2 Claims Deity (2 Thessalonians 2:4)

2 Th 2:4 He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, and as a result he takes his seat in God's temple, displaying himself as God.

In the first century world, there was nothing remarkable about such a claim. Caligula had the audacity to claim divine honors for himself while still alive. Other emperors had been proclaimed gods upon their deaths. The idea seems foreign to us today, but even atheistic despots of the modern world, such as Stalin, proclaim themselves to be gods by their actions, if not by their words.

The reference to God's temple is more difficult. If the temple in Jerusalem is meant, it was destroyed in 70 A.D. An extreme preterist interpretation would allow for this, but it puts at least nearly two millennia between the man of lawlessness and the day of judgment. A future temple, as figures prominently in dispensational thought would bypass this problem, but scripture nowhere clearly claims there will be a rebuilt temple. On the other hand, everywhere else that Paul refers to a temple he does so in a metaphorical sense, meaning the church or the individual believer⁴. One only need look at today's liberal denominations to imagine how this might play out.

6.3 Surely You Recall (2 Thessalonians 2:5)

2 Th 2:5 Surely you recall that I used to tell you these things while I was still with you.

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1. Wesley *loc cit* said "This began even in the apostolic age".
 2. Weatherly, *loc cit*, lists some
 3. Clarke, *loc cit*, sites Judas Iscariot being called by the same epithet in John 17:12.
 4. See "Paul's Use of "Temple" as a Metaphor" on page 19.

This verse explains why this letter is so difficult to understand. Paul was not writing a systematic theology. He had already taught them a more systematic explanation in person. Now he was reminding them of select points that were relevant to refute the false teaching that some nefarious cult leader was spreading in Paul's name. Two millennia later, we are listening in on one side of the middle of a conversation.

6.4 Held Back (2 Thessalonians 2:6-8)

2 Th 2:6 And so you know what holds him back, so that he will be revealed in his own time. 2:7 For the hidden power of lawlessness is already at work. However, the one who holds him back will do so until he is taken out of the way, 2:8 and then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will destroy by the breath of his mouth and wipe out by the manifestation of his arrival.

Verse 3 has already mentioned that the man of lawlessness was yet to be revealed. Verse 6 indicates that there was some "thing", emphasis on the impersonal "thing", holding him back. Verse 7 then indicates it was a person holding him back with the use of a personal pronoun. This has led to many interpretations being proposed. Recall that in apocalyptic literature, such as Daniel, an individual King, his dynasty, and his kingdom are referred to interchangeably in the symbols. The restrainer has been variously seen as the Roman emperor, the Roman empire, civil order, an angel, Paul himself, Jesus, God, etc.

Despite the restraint, whatever or whoever was its agent, the hidden power of lawlessness (like the restrainer, the man of lawlessness was also referred to impersonally) was active already however restrained that activity might be. This is not unlike how John describes the antichrist(s) in 1 John 2:18-22. The relationship to Revelation 20 is not so clear¹. In that passage, the dragon is bound in chains and locked away in the abyss for a thousand years. During that time, he no longer deceives the nations. This contrasts with the restrained man of lawlessness who was none the less, still active (v. 7).

The man of lawlessness' "15 minutes" of fame would be short-lived. He would be destroyed by the arrival of Jesus.

6.5 Deception and Stand Firm (2 Thessalonians 2:9-17)

2 Th 2:9 The arrival of the lawless one will be by Satan's working with all kinds of miracles and signs and false wonders, 2:10 and with every kind of evil deception directed against those who are perishing, because they found no place in their hearts for the truth so as to be saved. 2:11 Consequently God sends on them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false. 2:12 And so all of them who have not believed the truth but have delighted in evil will be condemned.

Call to Stand Firm

2:13 But we ought to thank God always for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. 2:14 He called you to this salvation through our gospel, so that you may possess the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2:15 Therefore, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold on to the traditions that we taught you, whether by speech or

1. See "Defeat of the Dragon (Revelation 20:1-10)" on page 263.

by letter. 2:16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, 2:17 encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good thing you do or say.

The Olivet Discourse of Jesus warned of deceivers, false prophets and deceptive miracles in the context of what the Apostles would face in the events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (Mark 13:5-6, 21-22). Again we also see Paul's belief that some people would be condemned reiterated. (Issues about predestination that this passage raises are beyond the scope of this essay).

7.0 Idleness (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15)

Response to the Undisciplined

3:6 But we command you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from any brother who lives an undisciplined life and not according to the tradition they received from us. 3:7 For you know yourselves how you must imitate us, because we did not behave without discipline among you, 3:8 and we did not eat anyone's food without paying. Instead, in toil and drudgery we worked night and day in order not to burden any of you. 3:9 It was not because we do not have that right, but to give ourselves as an example for you to imitate. 3:10 For even when we were with you, we used to give you this command: "If anyone is not willing to work, neither should he eat." 3:11 For we hear that some among you are living an undisciplined life, not doing their own work but meddling in the work of others. 3:12 Now such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to work quietly and so provide their own food to eat. 3:13 But you, brothers and sisters, do not grow weary in doing what is right. 3:14 But if anyone does not obey our message through this letter, take note of him and do not associate closely with him, so that he may be ashamed. 3:15 Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

The commentaries frequently link this passage to the eschatological issues. The situation imagined is that because some people thought the end of the world was immanent, they saw no need to be industrious.¹ It is not unlike modern Dispensationalists' attitude toward environmentalism: "why polish the brass on a sinking ship?", as one is alleged to have said².

The fault with this interpretation is that the text neither makes nor implies any such statement. As we've already seen, the eschatological error that Paul dealt with in chapter 2 wasn't even a problem internal to the Thessalonian community, but a threat from without that he was warning them about. And even if the heresy did exist within the Thessalonian church, no connection between the idleness and the heresy is even hinted at! Later, when Paul dealt with the idleness issue in Romans 3:8, the context was not eschatology but a misunderstanding of grace. Personal experience suggests that we might imagine less-than-scrupulous individuals taking advantage of the love and forgiveness of the Christian community as well.

1. 2 Th 3:11, *Baker NT Commentary: Thessalonians*.

2 Th 3:6, *New American Commentary: 1, 2 Thessalonians*.

2. Many variations are often cited unattributed. Sometimes attributed to D. L. Moody. I've not been able to find a primary reference.

8.0 Summary

Because this study looked at a whole letter, it touched briefly on a number of apologetic and eschatological issues with limited interrelationships. The salient points made are:

- Alleged contradictions between the letters (1 and 2 Thessalonians) are imagined and without substance;
- Although he usually focused only on the fate of the saved, Paul did teach that the unregenerate will also be resurrected and will spend eternity in Hell;
- Paul was warning about a false teaching being spread in his name, but contrary to the presumptions of most commentaries, said nothing that actually implies that it had already reached, let alone originated in Thessalonica;
- The end of the world was still a ways off;
- The actual details preceding the end of the world (the rebellion, the man of lawlessness, the restrainer, etc) are difficult to understand because was presuming more detailed teaching he already had told the Thessalonians in person;
- There is no indication that the problem with idleness had anything to do with faulty eschatology.

The identity of the man of lawlessness and his restrainer evokes human curiosity greatly. The temptation to take an interpretation and run with it is overwhelming. But caution is greatly advised. Perhaps we can correlate Paul's teaching with the book of Revelation, though its ubiquitous use of symbolism means that even such a correlation might not tell us anything with certainty.

Whoever these two figures are, the important point is God knows who they are and will take care of the situation in his sovereignty when the time comes. Nothing will take him by surprise. This is the important lesson to take away from Paul's mention of these two figures. Had God wanted us to know more, he would have told us.

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Revelation 1: Introduction

**Introduce the Biblical, Cultural, Historical,
and Literary Context of the book of
Revelation**

1.0 Author and Date

1.1 Tradition: John the apostle in the late 1st Century

See Justin Martyr [d. 165], Clement of Alexandria [d. c. 220], Hippolytus [d. c. 236], Origen [d. c. 254] for authorship and Irenaeus [185] for the date.¹ The author identifies himself simply as “John”.

1.2 Often Challenged on Authorship and Date

1.2.1 Authorship

The Greek of Revelation is much less refined and grammatical than that of Gospel and Letters of John. It is unlikely that the same individual was solely responsible for both. The text of Revelation only identifies its author as “John”, without specifying which one. If John the apostle wrote both, then perhaps Revelation is in his own writing style while the Gospels and Letters were filtered through an amanuensis (compare with John 21:24-25 which refers to John in the third person). Since John was in exile on Patmos when he wrote Revelation, it would be likely that he would be cut off from such assistance.

1.2.2 Date

Some interpreters argue for a pre-70 AD date (before the destruction of Jerusalem). This is not based on any tradition or explicit claims of the text, but on the presupposition that the text is predictive of the events surrounding 70 AD, the so-called preterist² interpretation. We will see in our study that this approach is very unlikely to be correct.

1. pp. 404, 406, Johnson, *Expositors Bible Commentary*

2. From, preterit, or past tense

1.2.3 Conclusion

For the purposes of this study, we will assume that John the Apostle wrote Revelation near the end of the first century.

1.3 Historical Background

After the close of Acts, Rome burned in AD 64. Nero found a convenient scapegoat in the Christians (it has been alleged that Nero burned Rome himself). The remainder of the decade saw Rome in civil war, and the Jewish War culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in AD 70.

The break between Judaism and Christianity is generally considered to be complete after that (compare with Paul teaching in the synagogues; around AD 90, the Jews formulated curses against heresy, including Christianity, at Jamnia). Toward the end of the century, Emperor Domitian is reputed to have persecuted Christians, although the extent of that persecution is debated. It was Domitian who Irenaeus says exiled John to Patmos (the text of Revelation is somewhat ambiguous on this point saying only “I ... was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony about Jesus” [Revelation 1:9]).

2.0 Genre

Revelation is of mixed genre.

2.1 Gospel

Revelation 1:1-3 opens somewhat like a Gospel. Compare “The Revelation of Jesus Christ” with “This is the record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ” [Matthew 1:1] or “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ” [Mark 1:1]. In a very real sense, Revelation is a recounting of the Gospel story: see Revelation 12:1-5 especially, which is only a thinly veiled telling of the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus.¹ Revelation also shares with Luke and Acts having an introduction like a letter, identifying sender and recipient but subsequent to chapter 3, like Luke and Acts, does not address the recipients directly again.

2.2 Letter

After the prologue, Revelation 1:1-3, that refers to John in the third person, John speaks in the first person. He opens the book as though it were a letter although the bulk of the book (chapters 4-22) are not in the form of a letter. This is not surprising as John is isolated on Patmos from his home community. If were in Asia, it would seem a little silly to write a letter to people he sees every day.

1. See “The Woman, Child, and Dragon (Revelation 12:1-6)” on page 223.

Chapters 2-3 are short messages addressed to seven different churches, addressed in the sequence one would follow moving from church to church, making the passage a sort of circular letter.¹



2.3 Apocalypse

After chapter 3, John does not address the recipients again, nor does the book close with the greetings typical of a letter. These chapters, the bulk of Revelation, are what is often called an apocalypse. The word tends to be used in many senses, which can be rather confusing.

- The Greek word *apocalypsis* means revelation, what is revealed, disclosure².
- When applied to Biblical, cultic, and other religious literature, it refers to a particular mode of revelation: symbolic dream or vision accompanied by partial interpretation.
- Because apocalyptic literature often involves judgements and destruction, it is often applied to catastrophic events such as the Mt. St. Helen eruption, Hurricanes, and especially global cataclysm, such as nuclear war or runaway greenhouse effects.
- Often used to refer specifically to end-of-the-world type events (parousia, asteroid collision, etc.).

For the purposes of these studies, apocalypse will be used to refer to the mode of revelation without any particular implication about the content. The content will be allowed to speak for itself.

The apocalyptic form was a popular one in cultic literature. In its cultic form, apocalypses were written in the name of a great hero of the past. Thus we have Apocalypses

1. Map traced from Classic Map Collection. Ages.

2. Swansen, *A Dictionary of Biblical Languages: Greek*

of Enoch, the Sibyls, Shem, Ezekiel, Zephaniah, Ezra, Baruch, Abraham, Adam, Elijah, and Daniel.¹ Revelation contrasts with these in a very stark manner. John addresses his audience as himself. He is well known to his audience, and so doesn't even bother to identify himself as more than "John" (a rather common name of the time). Whereas the cult leaders had to pass off their apocalypse as some recently discovered ancient text, John claims his as his own. One should be very cautious about using the non-canonical apocalypses, therefore, in trying to understand the imagery and circumstances of Revelation.

3.0 Background of Symbolic Visions

I highly recommend that you read some of the following passages for Biblical background of the symbolic visions in Revelation. We will refer back to many of these as we work our way through the book.

3.1 Genesis

The Joseph stories have several dream...interpretation passages.

- Genesis 37:5-10 - visions of sheaths of grain; sun, moon, stars
- Genesis 40:5-23 - visions of butler and baker
- Genesis 41:1-37 - pharaoh's visions of ears of grain and cattle

3.2 Isaiah's Commissioning Vision (Isaiah 6)

3.3 Ezekiel & Zechariah

3.4 Daniel

- Daniel 2 - Nebuchadnezzar's dream
- Daniel 7 - Four Beasts
- Daniel 8 - Ram and Goat
- Daniel 11-12 - Battles of Kings

3.5 Cultic Writings

Apocalypse was a favorite form of various early cults. Enoch was popular in the Dead Sea Scrolls. See "Apocalypse" on page 179 above where this was already discussed.

4.0 Interpretations of the Bulk of the Visions

Here I will just overview the basic vocabulary. How these various interpretations play out will be sketched in more detail when we cover the relevant passages. Interpretations

1. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Apocalyptic Literature & Testaments*.

of the millennium is orthogonal to these schemes and will be discussed in the next section.

4.1 Futurist

Everything after chapter 3 is a prediction of the events surrounding the end times (usually, the 7 years prior to the inauguration of the Millennium -- called the tribulation). This includes, but is not limited to Dispensationalism.

4.2 Historicist

Everything, including chapters 2 and 3, are predictions of events throughout history, especially of the church age. This was the approach of the reformers.

4.3 Preterist

Everything after chapter 3, but before the last few chapters, predict events surrounding the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. Some see events surrounding the Jewish revolt of AD 135, or even the fall of Rome. The difference between Historicist and Preterist is one of degree: how wide a period of history is specifically covered.

Some extreme “hyper-preterists” (also called full preterists) even include the final chapters of Revelation that nearly all other interpreters believe refer to the end times. This heretical view also denies physical resurrection since the passages everyone else takes as referring to the resurrection must be spiritualized to refer to events in AD 70.

4.4 Idealist

The bulk of the material between chapters 3 and the clearly eschatological chapters do not refer to specific historical events, but to general principles (or ideals). The images are often described as spiritual images.

4.5 Literary Critical (Skeptical)

This approach treats Revelation and the cultic apocalypses as a single kind. John is regarded as either creating the work out of whole cloth, or plagiarizing from others who had done so themselves. This is the view of those who do not regard the Bible as scripture, and won't be discussed in as great detail as the other approaches.

4.6 Some Thoughts about Hermeneutics

The problem with all these approaches is the tendency to decide on one, then try to force-fit every passage into that mold. Rather, I think we need to use these labels descriptively, rather than prescriptively, and let each passage and image speak for itself first, acknowledging the tension when it seems two passages suggest differing interpretations.

On the whole, my opinion about the interpretation of Revelation would be described as Idealist, although the other orthodox views¹ make valid points that Idealists are sometimes reluctant to admit. Historicists are often right to see parallels between history and

Revelation's images. This is not to say that the Revelation passages are predicting those events particularly, but expressing spiritual truths that play out throughout history. An analogy would be: Ben Franklin was not prophesying about "Honest Abe" Lincoln when he said "Honesty is the best policy", but Abraham Lincoln can be said to have illustrated the statement's truth.

What was said about Historicist interpretation is also true of Preterist interpretation. Moreover, since the events of AD 70 were in the recent past for John and his readers, we may well see references to those events, not as predictions of those events, but as those events being archetypes of spiritual principles that will play out throughout history.

Even if one of the futurist, historicist, or preterist interpretation is "the" correct one, the idealist has truth to contribute because those specific events, whether in history or end times, illustrate spiritual truths that have application throughout history.

5.0 Interpretation of the Millennium

To a degree, interpretation of the millennium in Revelation is independent of the interpretation of the rest of Revelation. One can find nearly all combinations of interpretations. The basic terms will be defined here, but will be discussed in more detail when we reach the relevant passages.

5.1 Hyper-preterist

This heretical view spiritualizes the resurrection and regards all prophecy in the Bible as already fulfilled by 70 AD. See "1 Corinthians 15: Physical Resurrection" on page 1. for a discussion of the Biblical doctrine of resurrection in contrast to the full preterist view.

5.2 Premillennial

Christ will return before the millennium, and reign on earth for 1000 years. Dispensationalism is a modern form of this, but other variations existed as early as the 2nd century (e.g., Justin Martyr). Dispensationalism of one form or another is most common in modern evangelical Protestant churches.

5.3 Postmillennial

Christ will return after the millennium. The millennium is either the whole church age, ending with the world being more or less converted to Christianity, or a future "silver" age (in contrast to the eternal state being the "golden" age) during which the world is more or less converted to Christianity. The latter is my view. This has some popularity in Reformed circles, often combined with "partial" preterism. It was the view of the Puritans.

-
1. The full preterist and literary critical approaches are well beyond the pale of orthodox.

5.4 Amillennial

The millennium is the whole church age, but there is no general conversion to Christianity of the whole world (a pessimistic amillennialism, in contrast to some forms of post-millennialism sometimes called optimistic amillennialism). This is the interpretation most common in Reformed (combined with idealistic interpretation) and Roman Catholic (combined with idealistic or “partial” preterist) circles.

5.5 Who’s Right?

Albertus Pieters wrote:

None of these schools of interpretation can claim any monopoly on scholarship or faith. Each group numbers many fine scholars and devout Christian believers. Therefore complete certainty in regard to the interpretation of the Apocalypse is not to be had. It is our duty to do the best we can, to study the various systems and accept the view that seems to us right, but always with a certain amount of reservation and of respect for the opinions of others.¹

6.0 Revelation 1

6.1 Prologue (Revelation 1:1-3)

The Prologue

Rev 1:1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must happen very soon. He made it clear by sending his angel to his servant John, 1:2 who then testified to everything that he saw concerning the word of God and the testimony about Jesus Christ. 1:3 Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy aloud, and blessed are those who hear and obey the things written in it, because the time is near!

John. John is referred to in the third person: a sort of “publisher’s forward”.

Blessed is the one who reads... blessed are those who hear. In the culture of the time most Christians would be functionally illiterate. The contrast in number reflects the service of the time: one reads (aloud), everyone else hears.

6.2 Greetings and Doxology (Revelation 1:4-8)

Rev 1:4 From John, to the seven churches that are in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from “he who is,” and who was, and who is still to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, 1:5 and from Jesus Christ – the faithful witness, the firstborn from among the dead, the ruler over the kings of the earth. To the one who loves us and has set us free from our sins at the cost of his own blood 1:6 and has appointed us as a kingdom, as priests serving his God and Father – to him be the glory and the power for ever and ever! Amen.

1. *The Lamb, the Woman and the Dragon*, p. 42, quoted in Steve Gregg, *Revelation: Four Views*.

1:7 (Look! He is returning with the clouds,
and every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him,
and all the tribes on the earth will mourn because of him.
This will certainly come to pass! Amen.)

1:8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God – the one who is, and who was,
and who is still to come – the All-Powerful!

From John. Opening like a letter. Compares to Paul’s letters. Addressed to seven churches. The number seven is very prominent in the book. “Grace and peace” is Paul’s customary greeting too: it combines the common Greek greeting (*charis*) with the common Semitic greeting (*shalom*).

He who is ... Seven spirits ... Jesus Christ. Revelation is the most explicitly trinitarian book in the New Testament. Like Paul, John cites the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (though Paul usually focuses on the Father and Son (“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!” Romans 1:7). “The seven spirits” -- no where else in Scripture, except Revelation, is the Holy Spirit described this way. In Revelation, “seven” is a highly symbolic number (of completeness or perfection). Some such symbolic sense is surely meant here.

Clouds. Rev 1:7 (Look! He is [coming]¹ with the clouds,
and every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him,
and all the tribes on the earth will mourn because of him.
This will certainly come to pass! Amen.) [NET]

Verse 7 has allusions to Daniel 7:13 and Zechariah 12:10. In Daniel, the one “like a son of man” is coming to God on the throne in heaven on clouds, not returning to Earth. Jesus interprets this in Matthew 26:64 when he tells the priests: “But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.” That is, it is fulfilled on the church’s very continued existence. Similarly, Zechariah 12:10 reads, “I will pour out upon the kingship of David and the population of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication so that they will look to me, the one they have pierced. They will lament for him as one laments for an only son, and there will be a bitter cry for him like the bitter cry for a firstborn.” That is, the mourning is not because of judgment, but because of a pouring out of grace, which happened when Christ was crucified and raised from the dead. The majority of interpreters, however, see a reference to the parousia here, but I just can’t justify that from scripture.

Alpha and Omega. God identifies himself as Alpha and Omega (A and Z, so to speak). Jesus also will make claim to be the first and the last.

The one who is. This is probably a play on the meaning of YHWH or “I am” (Exodus 3:14-15).

1. NET has “returning” here, but “coming” which most translations have, is more accurate.

6.3 Introduction of the Vision (Revelation 1:9-11)

Rev 1:9 I, John, your brother and the one who shares with you in the persecution, kingdom, and endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony about Jesus. 1:10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day when I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, 1:11 saying: "Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches – to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea."

Tribulation. "Persecution" [Revelation 1:9] is the same word translated "tribulation" elsewhere. This is overlooked by dispensationalists, who see the tribulation as the seven year period before the second coming. Note the kingdom is also shared already: the kingdom of God is a present reality now.

6.4 Seven Lampstands and Son of Man (Revelation 1:12-16)

Rev 1:12 I turned to see whose voice was speaking to me, and when I did so, I saw seven golden lampstands, 1:13 and in the midst of the lampstands was one like a son of man. He was dressed in a robe extending down to his feet and he wore a wide golden belt around his chest. 1:14 His head and hair were as white as wool, even as white as snow, and his eyes were like a fiery flame. 1:15 His feet were like polished bronze refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. 1:16 He held seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp double-edged sword extended out of his mouth. His face shone like the sun shining at full strength.

Son of man. This alludes to Daniel 7:13 again. It was Jesus' usual self-identification. His clothing may be high priestly (Exodus 28:4). The hair alludes back to Daniel's description of God (Daniel 7:9). The fiery eyes and metallic feet allude to the mysterious figure in Daniel 10:5-6). Stars are associated with angels (Job 38:7) and with those who lead people to righteousness (Daniel 12:3).

6.5 John Commissioned (Revelation 1:17-20)

Rev 1:17 When I saw him I fell down at his feet as though I were dead, but he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid! I am the first and the last, 1:18 and the one who lives! I was dead, but look, now I am alive – forever and ever – and I hold the keys of death and of Hades! 1:19 Therefore write what you saw, what is, and what will be after these things. 1:20 The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

First and Last. Jesus makes claim to Deity: first and last, compare with Alpha and Omega. He also presents the basic Gospel core: I was dead... I am alive -- forever".

The Commission. John was commissioned to write "what you saw, what is, and what will be after these things.", that is, all history from the incarnation of Christ to the eschatology (John's lifetime -- "what you saw" -- and forward). This is the problem with Futurist and Preterist views in that they focus too exclusively on the end times and the first century.

Revelation 2-3: Letters to the Seven Churches

Jesus directs John to write letters to seven churches in Asia before beginning the apocalypse proper.

1.0 The Seven Churches

Located in the Roman Province of Asia (modern western Turkey). The order of the cities follows the path one would use to visit them all.¹



1. Map traced from Classic Map Collection. Ages.

2.0 The Letters

2.1 Structure

Each letter has a common structure:

- Address
- Description of Christ
- Blame and/or Praise
- Threat and/or Admonition
- Exhortation and Promise¹

2.2 Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7)

To the Church in Ephesus

Rev 2:1 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus, write the following:

“This is the solemn pronouncement of the one who has a firm grasp on the seven stars in his right hand – the one who walks among the seven golden lampstands: 2:2 ‘I know your works as well as your labor and steadfast endurance, and that you cannot tolerate evil. You have even put to the test those who refer to themselves as apostles (but are not), and have discovered that they are false. 2:3 I am also aware that you have persisted steadfastly, endured much for the sake of my name, and have not grown weary. 2:4 But I have this against you: You have departed from your first love! 2:5 Therefore, remember from what high state you have fallen and repent! Do the deeds you did at the first; if not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place – that is, if you do not repent. 2:6 But you do have this going for you: You hate what the Nicolaitans practice – practices I also hate. 2:7 The one who has an ear had better hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers, I will permit him to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God.’

One should go through the outline above for each church. Beyond that, I’m just going to make notes about what I find to be the more interesting points. While it would be interesting to go through this phrase by phrase (and I encourage you to do so on your own), we need to maintain a reasonable pace.

Ephesus. Capital of the Province of Asia.

Angels. Why would John be addressing spiritual beings? “Who are the angels? There is no totally satisfactory answer to this question.”² The Greek word can also mean “messenger” (Luke 7:24; 9:52; James 2:25). My opinion is that the text makes much more sense if it is taken to indicate a human, perhaps a preacher (hence, a messenger from God). Most commentaries would probably disagree, but then struggle to make sense of what that would mean.

1. List is adapted from NAB footnotes

2. Johnson. p. 430. *Expositor's Bible Commentary* Vol 12.

Nicolaitans. “The Nicolaitans were a sect (sometimes associated with Nicolaus, one of the seven original deacons in the church in Jerusalem according to Acts 6:5) that apparently taught that Christians could engage in immoral behavior with impunity.”¹

The identification with that Nicolaus is probably nothing more than a guess.

2.3 Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11)

To the Church in Smyrna

Rev 2:8 “To the angel of the church in Smyrna write the following:

“This is the solemn pronouncement of the one who is the first and the last, the one who was dead, but came to life: 2:9 ‘I know the distress you are suffering and your poverty (but you are rich). I also know the slander against you by those who call themselves Jews and really are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 2:10 Do not be afraid of the things you are about to suffer. The devil is about to have some of you thrown into prison so you may be tested, and you will experience suffering for ten days. Remain faithful even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown that is life itself. 2:11 The one who has an ear had better hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will in no way be harmed by the second death.’

Tribulation. Tribulation (distress, etc.) is something suffered in 95 AD: not an eschatological tribulation.

“Those who call themselves Jews and really are not, but are a synagogue of Satan”. This could be either Judaizing Christians like Paul struggled with, or post-Jamnia ethnic Jews in conflict with the Christians. (Around AD 90, the Jews formulated curses against heretics and Christians at Jamnia).

Ten days. I would suggest that time references like this are intended to be symbolic in Revelation, this one as a way of stating a relative short period of time. This will be returned to later, so I will not dwell on it here.

Second death. A metaphorical way of referring to damnation. It is used here in such a way that presupposes the readers would already be familiar with the metaphor.

2.4 Pergamum (Revelation 2:12-17)

To the Church in Pergamum

Rev 2:12 “To the angel of the church in Pergamum write the following:

“This is the solemn pronouncement of the one who has the sharp double-edged sword: 2:13 ‘I know where you live – where Satan’s throne is. Yet you continue to cling to my name and you have not denied your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was killed in your city where Satan lives. 2:14 But I have a few things against you: You have some people there who follow the teaching of Balaam, who instructed Balak to put a stumbling block before the people of Israel so they would eat food sacrificed to idols and commit sexual immorality. 2:15 In the same way, there are

1. NET note Rev 2:6

also some among you who follow the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 2:16 Therefore, repent! If not, I will come against you quickly and make war against those people with the sword of my mouth. 2:17 The one who has an ear had better hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers, I will give him some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and on that stone will be written a new name that no one can understand except the one who receives it.’

Satan’s Throne. Perhaps the white marble altar erected and dedicated to Zeus by Eumenes II (197-160 BC).¹

Teaching of Balaam. They were probably not looking to Balaam himself as their spiritual leader, but following the same sort of teaching. This particular teaching is distinct from the Nicolaitans (v. 15).

Which thing I Hate. This phrase was copied from the description of the teaching of the Nicolaitans in Revelation 2:6. It is not found in the earlier manuscripts. In modern translations, it is found only in the NKJV. KJV-only zealots often point to “omissions” like this in modern translations as evidence that they are corrupt: covering over God’s hate for the Nicolaitan’s practices. If that were the intent of modern translators, they needed to delete it from Revelation 2:6 well. None do. Such “missing phrases” are nearly always redundant like this.

If not, I will come quickly. Here, Jesus’ coming does not appear to be eschatological. Compare with similar phrases in the letters to the other churches.

2.5 Thyatira (Rev 2:18-29)

To the Church in Thyatira

Rev 2:18 “To the angel of the church in Thyatira write the following:

“This is the solemn pronouncement of the Son of God, the one who has eyes like a fiery flame and whose feet are like polished bronze: 2:19 ‘I know your deeds: your love, faith, service, and steadfast endurance. In fact, your more recent deeds are greater than your earlier ones. 2:20 But I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and by her teaching deceives my servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. 2:21 I have given her time to repent, but she is not willing to repent of her sexual immorality. 2:22 Look! I am throwing her onto a bed of violent illness, and those who commit adultery with her into terrible suffering, unless they repent of her deeds. 2:23 Furthermore, I will strike her followers with a deadly disease, and then all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts. I will repay each one of you what your deeds deserve. 2:24 But to the rest of you in Thyatira, all who do not hold to this teaching (who have not learned the so-called “deep secrets of Satan”), to you I say: I do not put any additional burden on you. 2:25 However, hold on to what you have until I come. 2:26 And to the one who conquers and who continues in my deeds until the end, I will give him authority over the nations –

2:27 *he will rule them with an iron rod*
and like clay jars he will break them to pieces

1. NAB

2:28 just as I have received the right to rule from my Father – and I will give him the morning star. 2:29 The one who has an ear had better hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Jezebel. The name is a reference to Jezebel in the Old Testament, who introduced pagan practices to Israel (1 Kings 16:31; 18:1-5; 19:1-3; 21:5-24¹). Jezebel was probably not her actual name.

Her Children. This probably means her followers, not those she has literally given birth to.

Morning Star. This is rather enigmatic. The commentaries make some guesses. An important hermeneutic principle is that it is not necessary to come up with a good sounding meaning for every idiom, figure of speech, and symbol in Revelation. It is better to leave such mysteries open rather than force fit everything into some interpretive scheme. Whatever is meant, it is clearly meant to be something good.

Hear What the Spirit Says. This is very trinitarian. The Spirit is identified with Christ who as already been identified with God.

2.6 Sardis (Rev 3:1-6)

To the Church in Sardis

Rev 3:1 “To the angel of the church in Sardis write the following:

“This is the solemn pronouncement of the one who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars: ‘I know your deeds, that you have a reputation that you are alive, but in reality you are dead. 3:2 Wake up then, and strengthen what remains that was about to die, because I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. 3:3 Therefore, remember what you received and heard, and obey it, and repent. If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will never know at what hour I will come against you. 3:4 But you have a few individuals in Sardis who have not stained their clothes, and they will walk with me dressed in white, because they are worthy. 3:5 The one who conquers will be dressed like them in white clothing, and I will never erase his name from the book of life, but will declare his name before my Father and before his angels. 3:6 The one who has an ear had better hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Like a Thief. This suggests the unexpectedness their judgment. Compare What Jesus said in Matthew 24:42-44.

White Clothing. Colors are significant in Revelation. In general, white symbolizes purity and sinlessness in the Bible (Isaiah 1:18). In the opening chapters of Revelation, God’s hair is white as wool or snow (Rev 1:14), a white stone is a reward for the one who conquers (Revelation 2:17), white clothing is worn because “they are worthy” or because they conquer/overcome (Revelation 3:4-5). It’s a symbol worth paying attention to, especially when we come to the seven seals in a few weeks.

1. NET

I will never erase his name. On first blush this seems to suggest the possibility of a name being erased. However, we could think of the act of erasing as a symbolic act representing the reprobate, without suggesting there was a salvation that was had, then lost. Moreover, the focus is on the elect, not the reprobate, so we should be extra cautious about over-interpreting the symbolism.

2.7 Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13)

To the Church in Philadelphia

Rev 3:7 “To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write the following:

“This is the solemn pronouncement of the Holy One, the True One, who holds the key of David, who opens doors no one can shut, and shuts doors no one can open: 3:8 ‘I know your deeds. (Look! I have put in front of you an open door that no one can shut.) I know that you have little strength, but you have obeyed my word and have not denied my name. 3:9 Listen! I am going to make those people from the synagogue of Satan – who say they are Jews yet are not, but are lying – Look, I will make them come and bow down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. 3:10 Because you have kept my admonition to endure steadfastly, I will also keep you from the hour of testing that is about to come on the whole world to test those who live on the earth. 3:11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have so that no one can take away your crown. 3:12 The one who conquers I will make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will never depart from it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God (the new Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven from my God), and my new name as well. 3:13 The one who has an ear had better hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Key of David. A symbol of the authority of the Davidic king. See Isaiah 22:20-25. Verse 22 is virtually quoted here.

A Pillar in the Temple of my God. The temple is a symbolic temple, not an eschatological building in Jerusalem (a person is a pillar).¹

The New Jerusalem. The descent of New Jerusalem from the heavens occurs in Revelation 21:10ff. The reference here seems to presuppose the readers already knew about this. It is likely that the first century church had teaching regarding this directly from the apostles even before the book of Revelation, though Revelation is the only scripture that happens to tell us today about it.

2.8 Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-22)

To the Church in Laodicea

Rev 3:14 “To the angel of the church in Laodicea write the following:

“This is the solemn pronouncement of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the originator of God’s creation: 3:15 ‘I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot! 3:16 So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit you out of my mouth! 3:17 Because you say, “I am rich

1. See “Ezekiel 40-48: Ezekiel’s Temple” on page 15.
See “Paul’s Use of “Temple” as a Metaphor” on page 19.

and have acquired great wealth, and need nothing,” but do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked, 3:18 take my advice and buy gold from me refined by fire so you can become rich! Buy from me white clothing so you can be clothed and your shameful nakedness will not be exposed, and buy eye salve to put on your eyes so you can see! 3:19 All those I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent! 3:20 Listen! I am standing at the door and knocking! If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come into his home and share a meal with him, and he with me. 3:21 I will grant the one who conquers permission to sit with me on my throne, just as I too conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. 3:22 The one who has an ear had better hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

This letter plays off several cultural items specific to Laodicea.

Cold nor Hot. Water from the hot springs of Hierapolis were tepid by the time they reached Laodicea.

White Clothing. Laodicea was well known for its glossy black wool.

Eye Salve. Laodicea was also famous for “Phrygian powder”, an eye ointment.

3.0 Historicist Interpretation

The Reformers and early Dispensationalists believed that the letters to the seven churches were not literal letters to the seven churches in Asia of AD 95, but to churches of seven different periods of church history.

- Ephesus: the apostolic church AD 30-100
- Smyrna: the persecuted church AD 100-313
- Pergamos: the compromised church AD 313-500
- Thyatira: the papal church AD 500-1500
- Sardis: the reformation church AD 1500-1700
- Philadelphia: the missionary church AD 1700-present
- Laodicea: the liberal church of the present¹

We may criticize this approach on several points:

- The correspondences are easily forced: there’s nothing that stands out as being unambiguously about the church of a particular age.
- There are churches like each of the seven in every age.
- Genre-wise, they are letters, not apocalypses, and so the natural reading would be that they are addressed to who they claim to be addressed too.
- If the letters were not truly addressed to the addressees and their actual situations, then they would have been offensive: consider if I wrote a letter addressed to you and published it in the newspaper accusing you of serious sins, but then claimed it was just a symbol for some future person a thousand years from now.

1. *Revelation: Four Views*

- The cultural references, especially in the letter to Laodicea, make more sense for that specific historical time and place.
- There is no explicit description of who the Nicolaitans were, implying that they were a well-known problem in the churches addressed, and thus citing them by name was sufficient.

Now, this is not to say the Reformers were totally off base. They were not wrong to see papal Rome reflected in the condemnations of the church of Thyatira, nor were they wrong to see themselves as “a few individuals in Sardis who have not stained their clothes”. The diversity of the seven churches insures that every church of every age will see some of themselves in one or more of them.

Revelation 4-5: Theophany and the Sealed Scroll

Now we begin the Apocalypse proper. It begins with a glorious vision of God in Heaven.

1.0 Structure of the Book

1.1 High Level Structure

We've identified some high level structure in the book already. Chapters 1-3 are letters addressed to specific churches while chapters 4-22 are the apocalypse proper. In the apocalypse, the churches are not addressed using the form of a letter. Twenty-two chapters is a substantially sized book, so it is prudent to identify more easily processed and digested sections. Chapter 12 forms a significant division. We'll deal with that when we get there. For now, we'll deal with chapters 4-11 as a unit.

1.2 Revelation 4-11

We may outline this section thusly:

1.2.1 Revelation 4 — Theophany

1.2.2 Revelation 5 — The Sealed Book and the Lamb

1.2.3 Revelation 6-8:1 — The Seven Seals Opened

- Revelation 6:1-2 — Seal 1: White Horse
- Revelation 6:3-4 — Seal 2: Red Horse
- Revelation 6:5-6 — Seal 3: Black Horse
- Revelation 6:7-8 — Seal 4: Pale Horse
- Revelation 6:9-11 — Seal 5: Altar
- Revelation 6:12-19 — Seal 6: Earthquake

- Revelation 7:1-8 — 144,000 Sealed
- Revelation 7:9-17 — Great Multitude of Every Nation
- Revelation 8:1 — Seal 7: Silence

1.2.4 Revelation 8:2-11:19 -- The Seven Trumpets Blown

- Revelation 8:7 — Trumpet 1: Hail and Fire
- Revelation 8:8-9 — Trumpet 2: Great Mountain
- Revelation 8:10-11 — Trumpet 3: Wormwood
- Revelation 8:12 — Trumpet 4: Darkness
- Revelation 8:13 — Woe Woe Woe
- Revelation 9:1-12 — Trumpet 5: Locusts for 5 Months
- Revelation 9:13-21 — Trumpet 6: Three Plagues
- Revelation 10:1-11 — Little Scroll
- Revelation 11:1-14 — Two Witnesses for 1260 Days
- Revelation 11:15-19 — Trumpet 7: Kingdom of our Lord

1.2.5 Discussion

The two sequences of seven (seals and trumpets) share a distinct pattern. The first four and last three are distinct groupings within each, and there are two interludes between six and seven. Although we have a clear break after chapter 11, chapters 4-11 have many common symbols and references.

2.0 Relationship of Revelation 4-5 to Ezekiel 1-2

2.1 Survey of Ezekiel 1-2

Read through the following passages from Ezekiel 1-2:

- Ezekiel 1:1-11
- Ezekiel 1:22-31
- Ezekiel 2:1-2
- Ezekiel 2:9-10

We may highlight a number of phrases:

- Ezekiel 1:2 — “the heavens opened”
- Ezekiel 1:4 — “I watched ... flashing fire ... glowing substance”
- Ezekiel 1:5 — “four living creatures”
- Ezekiel 1:6 — “Each had four faces and four wings”
- Ezekiel 1:10 — “face of a man ... a lion ... an ox ... an eagle”
- Ezekiel 1:22 — “a platform [dome], glittering awesomely like ice stretched out over their heads”

- Ezekiel 1:23 — “a throne made of sapphire... on the throne ... a man”
- Ezekiel 1:25 — “a voice”
- Ezekiel 1:28 — “light all around him was like a rainbow”
- Ezekiel 2:2 — “a wind [spirit] came into me”
- Ezekiel 2:9 — “a written scroll”
- Ezekiel 2:10 — “He unrolled it ... it had writing on the front and back ... lamentation, mourning and woe”

2.2 Survey of Revelation 4-5

Now we may look at revelation 4-5 and see many parallels as well as distinct contrasts.

- Revelation 4:1 — “I looked” cf. Ezekiel 1:4; “a door standing open in heaven” cf. Ezekiel 1:1; “the first voice” cf. Ezekiel 1:25
- Revelation 4:2 — “in the Spirit” cf. Ezekiel 2:2; “a throne ... someone seated on it” cf. Ezekiel 1:23
- Revelation 4:3 — “jasper ... carnelian ... emerald” cf. Ezekiel 1:23
- Revelation 4:5 — “flashes of lightning ... flaming torches” cf. Ezekiel 1:4
- Revelation 4:6 — “Sea of glass, like crystal” cf. Ezekiel 1:22; “four living creatures” cf. Ezekiel 1:5
- Revelation 4:7 — “a lion .. an ox ... a man’s ... an eagle flying” cf. Ezekiel 1:10
- Revelation 4:8 — “six wings” cf. Ezekiel 1:6, Isaiah 6:2
- Revelation 5:1 — “a scroll” cf. Ezekiel 2:9; “written on the front and back” cf. Ezekiel 2:10
- Revelation 5:4 — “no one ... was able to open the scroll” cf. Ezekiel 2:10

2.3 Literary Criticism

The skeptic would assume that John was inventing his account of a vision (i.e., that it is a work of fiction) and had borrowed heavily from Ezekiel to do so. To those congenial to such a view, the parallels might even seem as evidence of same. While the two accounts were written by two separate persons, Ezekiel and John, over six centuries apart, it was the same God who “scripted” both visions. The subtle, and not so subtle, differences between the two scenes reminds us that the visions are not simple literal views of objective reality, but symbolic representations. While there may well be four living creatures in front of God’s throne, their actual appearance (if that is even a meaningful term for spiritual beings!) is not likely to be like either of these two descriptions. We have evidence of neither literary borrowing nor contradiction here.

3.0 Rev 4-5

The Amazing Scene in Heaven

Rev 4:1 After these things I looked, and there was a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet said: “Come up here so that I can show you what must happen after these things.” 4:2 Immediately I was in the Spirit,

and a throne was standing in heaven with someone seated on it! 4:3 And the one seated on it was like jasper and carnelian in appearance, and a rainbow looking like it was made of emerald encircled the throne. 4:4 In a circle around the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on those thrones were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white clothing and had golden crowns on their heads. 4:5 From the throne came out flashes of lightning and roaring and crashes of thunder. Seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God, were burning in front of the throne 4:6 and in front of the throne was something like a sea of glass, like crystal.

In the middle of the throne and around the throne were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. 4:7 The first living creature was like a lion, the second creature like an ox, the third creature had a face like a man's, and the fourth creature looked like an eagle flying. 4:8 Each one of the four living creatures had six wings and was full of eyes all around and inside. They never rest day or night, saying:

***“Holy Holy Holy is the Lord God, the All-Powerful,
Who was and who is, and who is still to come!”***

4:9 And whenever the living creatures give glory, honor, and thanks to the one who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, 4:10 the twenty-four elders throw themselves to the ground before the one who sits on the throne and worship the one who lives forever and ever, and they offer their crowns before his throne, saying:

4:11 “You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
since you created all things,
and because of your will they existed and were created!”

The Opening of the Scroll

Rev 5:1 Then I saw in the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne a scroll written on the front and back and sealed with seven seals. 5:2 And I saw a powerful angel proclaiming in a loud voice: “Who is worthy to open the scroll and to break its seals?” 5:3 But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or look into it. 5:4 So I began weeping bitterly because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. 5:5 Then one of the elders said to me, “Stop weeping! Look, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has conquered; thus he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”

5:6 Then I saw standing in the middle of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the middle of the elders, a Lamb that appeared to have been killed. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 5:7 Then he came and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne, 5:8 and when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders threw themselves to the ground before the Lamb. Each of them had a harp and golden bowls full of incense (which are the prayers of the saints). 5:9 They were singing a new song:

“You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals
because you were killed,
and at the cost of your own blood you have purchased for God
persons from every tribe, language, people, and nation.

5:10 You have appointed them as a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”

5:11 Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels in a circle around the throne, as well as the living creatures and the elders. Their number was ten thousand times ten thousand – thousands times thousands – 5:12 all of whom were singing in a loud voice:

“Worthy is the lamb who was killed
to receive power and wealth
and wisdom and might
and honor and glory and praise!”

5:13 Then I heard every creature – in heaven, on earth, under the earth, in the sea, and all that is in them – singing:

“To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise, honor, glory, and ruling power forever and ever!”

5:14 And the four living creatures were saying “Amen,” and the elders threw themselves to the ground and worshiped.

4.0 God

4.1 Theophany

Theophany is from the Greek for “appearance of god”. Anchor Bible Dictionary defines it as “the self-disclosure of God”. Such appearances display through visual and/or auditory symbols something of the attributes of God, usually focusing on his awesome power. The chief Canaanite gods, such as Baal, were usually storm gods. It is thus especially significant when Yahweh is accompanied by weather phenomena in the Old Testament as it underscores that he is the one in control

4.2 Doxologies

Accompanying the theophany in Revelation is a crescendo of five doxologies. An ever increasing number of beings praise God:

- Revelation 4:8 — four living creatures praise him in the third person
- Revelation 4:11 — twenty-four elders praise him directly in the second person
- Revelation 5:9-10 — both the living creatures and the twenty-four elders praise him directly in the second person
- Revelation 5:12 — the angels praise him in the third person
- Revelation 5:13 — all creatures in creation praise him in the third person

We see many attributes of God praised:

- Holiness
- Power
- Eternal Existence
- Worthiness of Glory, Honor, and Power
- Creator
- Will

- Worthiness to open the seals
- Sacrifice
- Elector
- Worth of Power, Wealth, Wisdom, Might, Honor, Glory, Praise
- Dominion

5.0 The Scroll and the Lamb/Lion

The scroll parallels the scroll in Ezekiel. Each has writing on both sides and reveals “lamentation, mourning, and woe” (Ezekiel 2:10, cf. Revelation 8:13). A significant contrast though is its being opened. In Ezekiel 2:10, it is unrolled immediately; “He unrolled it before me”. In Revelation, it seemingly can’t be opened. “But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or look into it” [Revelation 5:3].

I would suggest that it is because the scroll reveals more than just woe. Not to get ahead of ourselves here, but see the interlude between the sixth and seventh seals and the seventh trumpet. There is grace revealed in the opening of the scroll, and that could only be brought about by the justification brought about by the sacrifice of the Christ.

You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals
because you were killed,
and at the cost of your own blood you have purchased for God
persons from every tribe, language, people, and nation.
You have appointed them as a kingdom and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign on the earth. [Revelation 5:9b-10, NET]

“New” songs (Revelation 5:9a) in the Old Testament are usually in celebration of God intervening in the world, especially in a “fresh and exciting way”.¹ They are always praise songs (doxologies).

6.0 Interpretive Issues

Issues raised by the various interpretive schemes intrude little in this passage. This part of the visions describes the circumstances under which John is to receive the rest of the vision, and so is rooted in John’s present time. Dispensationalists tend to identify the the twenty-four elders as the resurrected church, but that is just one of at least a dozen other speculations about their identity.

Such speculation is not particularly fruitful as there is no concrete evidence of their identity. We should simply accept that they are there for purpose of proclaiming God’s praise. Since we find twelve and its multiples associated with God-ordained organization (twelve tribes, twelve governors, twelve apostles, twenty-four groups of twelve

1. Psalms 33, 40, 95, 98, 144, 149, Isaiah 42:10. See NET notes on “new song” as well.

musicians in the temple, etc.) their number may express something of God's government and sovereignty.

Another hint at trinitarianism appears at Revelation 5:8 where the living creatures and twenty-four elders fall down before the lamb in what appears to be an act of worship.

Revelation 5:10 suggested a millennial interpretation: "You have appointed them as a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." What is the timeframe of the church's reigning? As translated by nearly all translations, it is future tense "they will reign". Postmillennialists would identify this as a future millenium when most of the earth has been converted to Christianity. Premillennialists would identify it as a future millennium inaugurated by the return of Jesus. Amillennialists must spiritualize the meaning of "reign" to mean "a spiritual reign over their own spirits (no longer as slaves of sin) in the spiritual kingdom at the present time".¹ The problem with this is the use of future tense suggests something that is not yet so. Unfortunately, the textual evidence is actually split between future and present tense.

1. On Rev 5:10 in *Revelation: Four Views*.

Revelation 6-7: The Scroll Unsealed

We will overview the interpretive schools of thought regarding the meaning of the seals, and examine some debates in more detail.

1.0 Overview of the Interpretive Schools¹

1.1 Historicist

The visions accompanying the seals represent events beginning with the reign of Domitian (d. AD 96) and tracing the decline of the empire through the fourth and fifth centuries when the Goths and Vandals invaded. In this scheme, the first seal, the white horse that conquers, represents the “five good emperors” of AD 96-180 that expanded Rome by Conquest; The second seal, the red horse that brings war, represents the period of civil war in Rome in AD 180-286; and so on through the silence of the seventh seal, a half hour of silence, which represents the interval between Constantine’s victory over Licinius in AD 324 and the invasion of Alaric in AD 395.

1.2 Preterist

The seals represent the war with Rome in AD 66-70 and the depravations that accompanied that. The 144,000 sealed are the Christian Jews who escaped Jerusalem before it fell.

Some historicists actually follow the Preterist view this far, and see later parts of the vision advancing through the decline of Rome. Therein lies the weakness of these schools. The symbols in the visions are interpreted so broadly so as to make them fit the presupposition that the same hermeneutical principle could make them fit most any time period.

1. Summarized from Steve Gregg, *Revelation: Four Views*.

1.3 Futurist

The seals represent the beginning of the 7-year tribulation at the end of the world. The white horse and rider of the first seal in particular are the appearance of the antichrist at the beginning of the seven-year great tribulation. The 144,000 are generally taken to be ethnic Jews converted during the tribulation.

1.4 Idealist

The seals represent principals of God's dealing with the world, and not specific events. In essence, this view (which is the one I will expand on below) takes the criticism of the historicist and preterist school above to the logical conclusion that the symbols are in fact about the whole time period rather than specific events in the time period.

2.0 First through Fourth Seal: The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (Revelation 6:1-8)

2.1 The White Horse and Rider: Christ or Antichrist?

The Seven Seals

Rev 6:1 I looked on when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a thunderous voice, "Come!" 6:2 So I looked, and here came a white horse! The one who rode it had a bow, and he was given a crown, and as a conqueror he rode out to conquer.

The range of interpretation of the first seal (the white horse and its rider) is an exercise in extremes. The historical interpretation, as early as Irenaeus in the second century, was that they represent Christ and the Gospel. A more modern view, popular especially with dispensationalists, but also found in some reformed commentaries, is that the conqueror is the antichrist, the man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians 2.

Since there is no passage anywhere that says the white horse and its rider of the first seal is one or the other, we must decide on the meaning through logical deduction (assuming we can decide at all). To this end, we will examine the text of Revelation for facts from which we can deduce conclusions.

First, the symbols God uses in Revelation show something of the true nature of the thing symbolized, whether it is Christ as a lamb, or Satan as a beast.

Second, white, not only in Revelation, but in all of scripture, symbolizes purity. We may list the occurrences in Revelation here:

- Revelation 1:14 — of the hair of the "one like a son of man";
- Revelation 3:4 — of the (figurative) clothing of the men of Sardis whose deeds are not dead;
- Revelation 3:5 — of the (figurative) clothing of those who conquer, whose name will never be erased from the book of life;

- Revelation 3:18 — of the (figurative) clothing that the men of Laodicea are advised to buy from one like a son of man;
- Revelation 4:4 — of the clothing of the 24 elders around the throne;
- Revelation 6:11 — of the robe given to the souls under the altar;
- Revelation 7:9-14 — of the robes of the multitude before the throne;
- Revelation 14:14 — of the cloud the one like a son of man is seated on;
- Revelation 19:11-14 — of the horse the Messiah is riding on, and of the clothing and horses of the armies of heaven;
- Revelation 20:11 — the throne of God

Given this, it would seem the first horseman is representing something pure that will conquer. Further, in the seven letters, it is the elect who conquer. In the theophany, it is the Lion of the tribe of Judah who conquered. In chapter 12, Satan is conquered by the blood of the Lamb, etc.

To be fair, the beast is also said to conquer the saints temporarily. The arguments for the white horse and rider being antichrist go something like this¹:

- the parallelism with the other horses suggests it being part of a sequence of calamities (but, we will see these represent not a series of events, let alone calamities, but the situation of man in the church age)S
- Christ is already represented by the lamb in this vision (but, the Holy Spirit is represented by both the seven flames in Revelation 4:5 and the seven eyes of the Lamb in Revelation 5:6; these are symbolic visions, and thus not bound by the conventions of physical reality);
- parallelism with the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24, Luke 21, Mark 13) line up the white horse with false christs (but, the parallelism isn't as strong as suggested², and I've elsewhere argued that the Olivet Discourse is specifically about the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, and so has little bearing on this passage unless one argues for a preterist interpretation);
- there are differences between this white horse and the one in Revelation 19:11 that is Christ (but, there are differences between Revelation 19:11 that and the Lamb in Revelation 5, yet both are Christ as well; they're symbols after all).

On the whole, I think we must side with the traditional interpretation that the white horse conquering must represent either Christ, the Gospel, or the elect conquering. Since the elect conquer by the blood of Christ with the Gospel, the distinction is effectively moot.

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1. See David J. MacLeod. "The Four Horsemen Of Apocalypse". *Emmaus Journal Volume 1*. Winter 1991.
 2. Mt 24:5 is lined up with the white horse, but they mislead, not conquer. Wars, rumours of war, famines, plagues and earthquakes are grouped together in Mt 24:6-7 || Lk 21:10-11, but rumors, famine, and disease are a normal part of any war; there is nothing remarkable about this clustering, which is the point of the idealist interpretation. Also, the horsemen symbology says nothing about earthquakes.

2.2 The Horsemen as Representing History in General

Rev 6:3 Then when the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come!" 6:4 And another horse, fiery red, came out, and the one who rode it was granted permission to take peace from the earth, so that people would butcher one another, and he was given a huge sword.

6:5 Then when the Lamb opened the third seal I heard the third living creature saying, "Come!" So I looked, and here came a black horse! The one who rode it had a balance scale in his hand. 6:6 Then I heard something like a voice from among the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat will cost a day's pay and three quarts of barley will cost a day's pay. But do not damage the olive oil and the wine!"

6:7 They when the Lamb opened the fourth seal I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come!" 6:8 So I looked and here came a pale green horse! The name of the one who rode it was Death, and Hades followed right behind. They were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill its population with the sword, famine, and disease, and by the wild animals of the earth.

Read Revelation 6:1-8. What characters are introduced, what roles do they play, and what events are predicted? That was a trick question. Four characters and their roles are given, but precious little is said about specific events.

The first seal brings a white horse whose rider has the role of conqueror. As discussed above, if the rider is not Christ himself, then it is something like the Gospel personified. The Gospel advances, conquering by the double edged sword that comes from Christ's mouth (Revelation 1:16 and the references to conquering in the seven letters) throughout the Church Age.

The second seal brings a red horse. Where white symbolizes purity, red symbolizes evil in Revelation. We'll see this use of red later in Revelation with the beasts.¹ The rider is a satanic force who agitates people to kill one another. Every generation has seen warfare. There is nothing exceptional about this in history.

The third seal brings a black horse. It's rider brings subsistence living. A day's wages barely pays for the food an individual or family needs in a day. But regardless of the severity of famine conditions, the rich have all the oil and wine they could want! Compare this with the complaints of Job (Job 21:7 *ff*) and of Solomon (Ecclesiastes 7:15). The 20th century western standard of living has been an blip on the screen of history. Even today, in Africa, Asia, South America, etc., this seal reflects the standard of living of most of the world's population². There is nothing exceptional about this seal in history.

The fourth seal brings a horse with a sickly pallor (pale green). It's rider is Death and Hades. They kill a fourth of the earth with sword, famine, disease, and wild animals. In most of history, as in many parts of the world today, people did not live to their 80's and die of old age very often. The stark view of death by violence presented by this seal is the normal, not an exceptional, course of history.

1. Though the blood of Christ is red, it is always associated with washing clothes white!

2. For that matter, the inner city of New Orleans too, as we have learned.

An interesting parallel to this passage is Zechariah 6:1-7, where red, black, white, and dappled horses are seen in a vision and described by an angel as “the four spirits [or winds] of heaven that have been presenting themselves before the Lord of all the earth”.

3.0 Fifth Seal: The Altar of Martyrs (Revelation 6:9-11)

Rev 6:9 Now when the Lamb opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been violently killed because of the word of God and because of the testimony they had given. 6:10 They cried out with a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Master, holy and true, before you judge those who live on the earth and avenge our blood?” 6:11 Each of them was given a long white robe and they were told to rest for a little longer, until the full number was reached of both their fellow servants and their brothers who were going to be killed just as they had been.

With the fifth seal we are introduced to the martyrs. Their martyrdom is symbolized by their being in an altar. Because of this clear symbolism, we shouldn't necessarily pull from this any particular details about what the intermediate state¹ is like. That isn't the point of this passage.

John is looking at the altar in a particular point in time, presumably his own. Many of the elect, including Old Testament saints, had been martyred in the past, and more would be in the future. Thus even though the scene is rooted in a point in time, it tells us something about the whole age - there will be martyrdom - and that there will be a particular number, determined by God, that will be martyred before the end.

4.0 The Sixth Seal: Cosmological Signs (Rev 6:12-17)

Rev 6:12 Then I looked when the Lamb opened the sixth seal, and a huge earthquake took place; the sun became as black as sackcloth made of hair, and the full moon became blood red; 6:13 and the stars in the sky fell to the earth like a fig tree dropping its unripe figs when shaken by a fierce wind. 6:14 The sky was split apart like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved from its place. 6:15 Then the kings of the earth, the very important people, the generals, the rich, the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 6:16 They said to the mountains and to the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one who is seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, 6:17 because the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to withstand it?”

Cosmological signs like this occur in a number of passages in the Bible. They never signal literal cosmological upheaval or eschatological cataclysm. In Isaiah 13:10, 13, they apply to the destruction of Babylon to happen in Isaiah's time. In Isaiah 34:4, they apply to Edom of Isaiah's day. In the Olivet Discourse, Mark 13:24-27, they apply to Jerusalem of AD 70.² Similar language is found in Amos 8:8-9; Isaiah 50:2-3; Joel 2:10, 30-31.

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1. The state of the soul between death and the resurrection.
 2. See “Isaiah 13:10, 13 (Matthew 24:29, Mark 13:24-25, Luke 21:26)” on page 30. See “Allusions From Old Testament Prophets (Mark 13:24-27)” on page 153.

If there is anything recent events¹ should remind us of, it is that catastrophes happen regularly in this age. So again, this seal seems to represent the normal course of history under God's providence.

5.0 The Interludes (Revelation 7)

The Sealing of the 144,000

Rev 7:1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth so no wind could blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. 7:2 Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, who had the seal of the living God. He shouted out with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given permission to damage the earth and the sea: 7:3 "Do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees until we have put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God." 7:4 Now I heard the number of those who were marked with the seal, one hundred and forty-four thousand, sealed from all the tribes of the people of Israel:

7:5 From the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed,
from the tribe of Reuben, twelve thousand,
from the tribe of Gad, twelve thousand,
7:6 from the tribe of Asher, twelve thousand,
from the tribe of Naphtali, twelve thousand,
from the tribe of Manasseh, twelve thousand,
7:7 from the tribe of Simeon, twelve thousand,
from the tribe of Levi, twelve thousand,
from the tribe of Issachar, twelve thousand,
7:8 from the tribe of Zebulun, twelve thousand,
from the tribe of Joseph, twelve thousand,
from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand were sealed.

7:9 After these things I looked, and here was an enormous crowd that no one could count, made up of persons from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb dressed in long white robes, and with palm branches in their hands. 7:10 They were shouting out in a loud voice,

"Salvation belongs to our God,
to the one seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

7:11 And all the angels stood there in a circle around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they threw themselves down with their faces to the ground before the throne and worshiped God, 7:12 saying,

"Amen! Praise and glory,
and wisdom and thanksgiving,
and honor and power and strength
be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

7:13 Then one of the elders asked me, "These dressed in long white robes – who are they and where have they come from?" 7:14 So I said to him, "My lord, you know the answer." Then he said to me, "These are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb! 7:15 For this reason they are before the throne of God, and they serve him day and night

1. The tsunami in the Indian Ocean and Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans.

in his temple, and the one seated on the throne will shelter them. 7:16 *They will never go hungry or be thirsty again, and the sun will not beat down on them, nor any burning heat, 7:17 because the Lamb in the middle of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*”

Between the sixth and seventh seals, John sees two mini-visions. There is a similar sort of interlude between the following sixth and seventh trumpets, unifying chapters 4-11 structurally.

In the first mini-vision, Revelation 7:1-8, John sees 12,000 of each of twelve tribes of Israel, 144,000, sealed. In the second mini-vision, John sees an huge crowd, “made up of persons from every nation, tribe, people, and language” worshiping God and the Lamb. That the huge crowd are the redeemed can scarcely be denied as this language was already used of them in the doxology of Revelation 5:9-10. The weakness of the Historicist and Preterist views here is the convolutions that must be done to force fit this passage into their schemes. They are described as having come out of “the great tribulation”. If they are in fact all the redeemed (and the language suggest such), then that tribulation is not just some final seven year period, but each individuals life experience in this world. See Revelation 1:9; 2:9, 10, and 22 for uses of the word to describe the then current situation.

The interpretation of the 144,000 is much more difficult. We can dismiss out of hand cultic interpretations such as the Jehovah Witnesses, who believe only 144,000 will go to heaven (the great crowd is before the throne in heaven after all!). The number itself is almost certainly symbolic rather than literal. A common suggestion is that they also represent the church. It is true that the church is identified with true Israel, especially by Paul. In context though, there seems to be a distinction between the 144,000 and the great crowd. One suggestion for understanding a distinction is that the 144,000 is the church militant, the church present on earth at any given time, and the great crowd is the church triumphant, all the elect from all the ages present in heaven with Christ. The weakness of this is there is nothing in the passage to suggest there is a “moving window” of 144,000.

For my understanding, I look forward to Revelation 12 where we have a woman clothed with the sun, moon, and twelve stars who seems to represent Israel. She gives birth to a child who is clearly Jesus the Messiah. Then, after Satan is cast out of heaven to the earth, he first pursues the woman, then makes war on “the rest of her children”, which would seem to be the Gentile church. I therefore think the 144,000 from Israel are ethnic Jews, but, not Jews saved in the tribulation like dispensationalists would have it, but the Jews who gave birth to the Messiah, that is, the Old Testament saints, while the great crowd is the gentile church that sprang from them.

An apologetics issue in this passage is the list of twelve tribes. Many a skeptic has pointed out that it is “wrong”. It omits the tribes of Dan and Ephraim. The twelve tribes were originally descendants of each of the twelve sons of Jacob (aka Israel). But Jacob declared of Joseph’s sons “Ephraim and Manasseh will be mine just as Reuben and Simeon are” (Genesis 48:5). This would technically make 13 tribes. But, when the land was divided, Levi did not receive an inheritance of land (Deuteronomy 18:1-5). They did not “count” as part of the twelve, maintaining the convention of twelve tribes. Later, when Israel split, it was in the tribes of Dan and Ephraim that golden calves were

set up for the Israelites to worship. Their omission from the list in Revelation is symbolic that this is faithful Israel, and not rebellious Israel.¹ To maintain the convention of twelve tribes, Levi is included in the twelve again, and Joseph is listed instead of his son Ephraim. The significance of the choice of tribal names is the symbolism, and not genetic or political realities.

The sealing itself is reminiscent of Ezekiel 9 where angels put a mark on the foreheads of “the men who moan and groan over all the abominations practiced in [Jerusalem]”. Then angels are told to “strike people down ... But do not touch anyone who has the mark.” The situation in Ezekiel is the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC by the Babylonians. The sealing is symbolic of the fact that God has always preserved a remnant of his people who are faithful to him (compare with Elisha’s experience in 1 Kings 19:18).

6.0 The Seventh Seal: Silence and the Trumpets (Revelation 8:1)

The Seventh Seal

Rev 8:1 Now when the Lamb opened the seventh seal there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

The seventh seal takes us into chapter 8-11. With it there is silence in heaven followed by the seven trumpets. We will discuss this in the next lesson or two.

7.0 Sovereignty of God

Regardless of which interpretive school one takes regarding the events depicted in the visions accompanying the opening of the seven seals, the central theme that comes through is the Sovereignty of God. These events do not happen out of God’s control, but are already scripted in the scroll long before they occur.

1. There is a tradition often cited that the antichrist would come from the tribe of Dan, but it is quite an unsubstantiated leap to claim such a belief has anything to do with Dan’s omission here, especially since it is paired with Ephraim’s omission.

Revelation 8-11: The Seven Trumpets

The Seven Trumpets sound after the seventh seal is opened. We'll break this section into two lessons, looking at the first six seals one week, then the two interludes and the seventh seal the following week.

1.0 Overview of the Interpretive Schools¹

1.1 Historicist

The first four trumpets are the invasions of Rome by Goths, Vandals and Huns from AD 408 to 476 when the Western Empire came to an end. The fifth trumpet is the rise of Islam and the invasions of the Saracens. The sixth trumpet is the rise of the Turks (the Ottoman empire), ending with the fall of the Byzantine Empire. The first interlude, the angel with the little book, represents the invention of the printing press and the greater availability of the Bible. The second interlude represents the period of the papacy between its rise and the reformation. The two witnesses are groups such as the Waldensians who opposed the papacy before the reformation. The seventh trumpet brings us to the eschaton (end-time).

On the details, the Historicist view spawns many speculations. For example, the mountain that crashes into the sea in the second trumpet is seen as symbolizing the Vandals under king Genseric, the leader or leaders of heretics, or the city of Rome. The great star of the third trumpet is speculated to symbolize either Atilla the Hun, Pelagius, or Arius.

1.2 Preterist

The trumpets represent the ever increasing deprivation of those trapped in Jerusalem by the Romans. The three and one half years represents either Nero's persecution or the siege of Jerusalem. The two witnesses are either two men in Jerusalem warning the

1. Summarized from Steve Gregg, *Revelation: Four Views*.

Jews before AD 70 (such as James and Peter) or symbolize the witnesses of the old covenant or the priestly and civil heads of the Jews or some such.

1.3 Futurist

The trumpets represent events in the seven-year tribulation preceding the eschaton. The three and one half years are a literal portion of the tribulation and the two witnesses two prophets who will appear then.

Many futurists try to take these visions literally as most of the descriptions are not so remarkable as to be unthinkable in that way. On the other hand, in a book of visions full of symbolic representations, it seems a strange hermeneutic to try and take these simply literally, and in fact some futurists do read symbolism of one sort or another into them. For example, Gaebelain takes the green things to represent economic prosperity. Hal Lindsey takes to whole section to represent a nuclear war.

Speculations about the mountain-like object include a revived Roman Empire, spiritual Babylon, a meteor, a satellite, and a nuclear bomb. Speculations about the darkness include pollution and nuclear warfare. The wild range of such speculations should convince one of the futility of the effort.

1.4 Idealist

The trumpets represent the tribulation the church experiences throughout the church age, a period of time represented by the three and one half years. The two witnesses represent the witness of the church.

2.0 The First Four Trumpets (Revelation 8:2-13)

Rev 8:2 Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. 8:3 Another angel holding a golden censer came and was stationed at the altar. A large amount of incense was given to him to offer up, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar that is before the throne. 8:4 The smoke coming from the incense, along with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand. 8:5 Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it on the earth, and there were crashes of thunder, roaring, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

8:6 Now the seven angels holding the seven trumpets prepared to blow them.

8:7 The first angel blew his trumpet, and there was hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was thrown at the earth so that a third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.

8:8 Then the second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain of burning fire was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea became blood, 8:9 and a third of the creatures living in the sea died, and a third of the ships were completely destroyed.

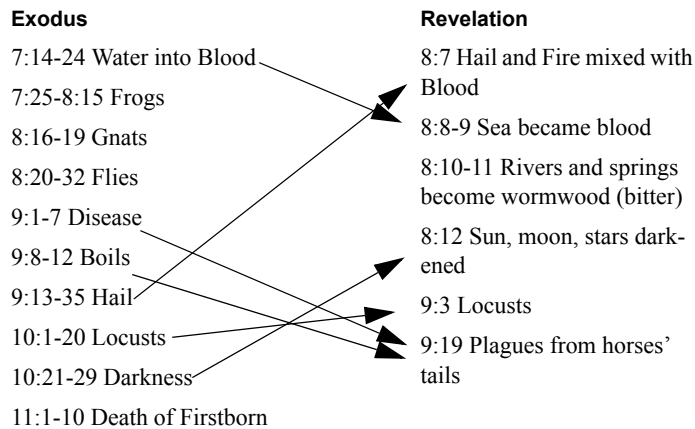
8:10 Then the third angel blew his trumpet, and a huge star burning like a torch fell from the sky; it landed on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. 8:11 (Now the name of the star is Wormwood.) So a third of the waters became wormwood, and many people died from these waters because they were poisoned.

8:12 Then the fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. And there was no light for a third of the day and for a third of the night likewise. 8:13 Then I looked, and I heard an eagle flying directly overhead, proclaiming with a loud voice, “Woe! Woe! Woe to those who live on the earth because of the remaining sounds of the trumpets of the three angels who are about to blow them!”

The first four trumpets (Revelation 8:2-12) are set off from the remaining ones by Revelation 8:13. This parallels the seals, where the first four seals are set off from the remaining ones. Accompanying the blowing of the trumpets are visions of calamities that resemble in many ways the ten plagues on Egypt in Exodus.

TABLE 1.

Exodus-Trumpets Parallels



The first four trumpets all detail things happening to the four divisions of the material world commonly seen in ancient cosmologies: land, sea, fresh water, and sky. Each effects a third of that realm. This fraction is an echo of Ezekiel 5. Such parallels strongly suggest that we are not looking at eschatological calamities here. Nor is the scale to be seen as worldwide. Think of John’s perspective here. He’s seeing these things happen from a perspective that lets him see the details he’s mentioning. This is not a “satellite view” of the world (even if he is in heaven).

In the seven letters, Jesus threatened coming in judgment if they did not repent. “Look! I am throwing her onto a bed of violent illness, and those who commit adultery with her into terrible suffering, unless they repent of her deeds. Therefore, I will strike her followers with a deadly disease, and then all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts” [Revelation 2:22-23a]. These trumpets are representative of the catastrophes that happen throughout the church age that God purposes for good. We are seeing the trumpets fulfilled multiple times in the southeast United States with all the severe hurricanes that have been striking. And they have been being so for the last two thousand years.

3.0 The Fifth Trumpet (Revelation 9:1-12)

Rev 9:1 Then the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the abyss. 9:2 He opened the shaft of the abyss and smoke rose out of it like smoke from a giant furnace. The sun and the air were darkened with smoke from the shaft. 9:3 Then out of the smoke came locusts onto the earth, and they were given power like that of the scorpions of the earth. 9:4 They were told not to damage the grass of the earth, or any green plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their forehead. 9:5 The locusts were not given permission to kill them, but only to torture them for five months, and their torture was like that of a scorpion when it stings a person. 9:6 In those days people will seek death, but will not be able to find it; they will long to die, but death will flee from them.

9:7 Now the locusts looked like horses equipped for battle. On their heads were something like crowns similar to gold, and their faces looked like men's faces. 9:8 They had hair like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. 9:9 They had breastplates like iron breastplates, and the sound of their wings was like the noise of many horse-drawn chariots charging into battle. 9:10 They have tails and stingers like scorpions, and their ability to injure people for five months is in their tails. 9:11 They have as king over them the angel of the abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon.

9:12 The first woe has passed, but two woes are still coming after these things!

The fifth trumpet is set off from the previous four in two ways. First, it is introduced as the first of three woes. Second, it afflicts man directly instead of aspects of man's world (Revelation 9:4).

If there is any question about the visions accompanying the trumpets being symbolic, this vision should put those doubts to bed. A star fallen from heaven to earth (Satan, perhaps) opens the abyss and releases a plague of locusts. Although this is reminiscent of the plague of locusts in Egypt, these locusts are quite different.

There description is unlike anything that occurs in the natural world and is replete with symbolism. They are:

- like horses equipped for battle and,
- with crowns on their heads,
- faces of men,
- hair like women,
- teeth like lions,
- iron breastplates,
- wings that sound like horse-drawn chariots, and
- tails like scorpion stingers.

All these are symbols of power and strength. The period of their time of terror is five months. This number was probably selected because it is the normal life span of locusts rather than representing a literal five month period in history. It serves to signify that "this too will pass". Their power is only for a limited time.

The references to the abyss and the angel of the abyss indicate that these locusts are of a demonic nature. We will meet these demonic forces in the world in later chapters.

4.0 The Sixth Trumpet (Revelation 9:13-21)

Rev 9:13 Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a single voice coming from the horns on the golden altar that is before God, 9:14 saying to the sixth angel, the one holding the trumpet, “Set free the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates!” 9:15 Then the four angels who had been prepared for this hour, day, month, and year were set free to kill a third of humanity. 9:16 The number of soldiers on horseback was two hundred million; I heard their number. 9:17 Now this is what the horses and their riders looked like in my vision: The riders had breastplates that were fiery red, dark blue, and sulfurous yellow in color. The heads of the horses looked like lions’ heads, and fire, smoke, and sulfur came out of their mouths. 9:18 A third of humanity was killed by these three plagues, that is, by the fire, the smoke, and the sulfur that came out of their mouths. 9:19 For the power of the horses resides in their mouths and in their tails, because their tails are like snakes, having heads that inflict injuries. 9:20 The rest of humanity, who had not been killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so that they did not stop worshiping demons and idols made of gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood – idols that cannot see or hear or walk about. 9:21 Furthermore, they did not repent of their murders, of their magic spells, of their sexual immorality, or of their stealing.

With the sixth trumpet, four angels are released from the Euphrates, and with a vast army, they kill one third of all mankind. The symbolism of a threat from that region is striking to the milieu. Rome’s only real external threat of the time was the Parthian Empire, and the Euphrates River was the border between them. In the fifth trumpet, the iron breastplates may echo the bright armor of the Parthians, and the ability to wound with their tails echoes the Parthian tactic of shooting two volleys of arrows: one on charge and another on withdraw. The vast, even hyperbolically huge, army described here would reflect the Roman fears of the Parthians, whose empire was second only to the Roman’s in size.¹ Rome thought of the Parthians in the same way as the United States thought of the Soviet Union during the Cold War or al Qaeda today.

That said, the fifth and sixth trumpets are not actually about the Parthians. Not only did the Parthians not conquer Rome, but the fantastic symbolism suggests these echoes are being used as an archetype (a symbolic idea) for what is intended.

We have great violence represented here. A third of humanity is killed by three plagues represented by fire, smoke, and sulfur that comes out of their mouths. Like the double edge sword that comes out of Jesus’ mouth represents the teachings of Jesus, it would seem likely that these plagues would also represent teachings, but of a more sinister kind. They are also represented by colors: red, dark blue, and yellow, which resemble the colors of the later three horses of the seals (red, black, and sickly pale green). They contrast with white, which represents purity. Red later will be used to symbolize Satan himself (the red dragon).

1. “Parthians” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*.

The suffering of humanity is the consequence of the false teaching and of their actions that result from it. Yet they refuse to learn their lesson from it (Revelation 9:20-21).

5.0 Summary of the Fifth and Sixth Trumpets

The fifth and sixth trumpets describe Satanic influence in the world. The locusts of the fifth trumpet and the army of the sixth trumpet suggest Satan and his minions, both demonic and human. The remarkable thing here is the statement that they are prepared “for this hour, day, month, and year”. They are part of God’s plan and providence. What specific hour, day, month, and year meant here will be discussed in a later lesson.

I have asserted much here without really building a strong case for it. That case is coming. When we cover Revelation 12, a lot of pieces will come together. Once we understand the less ambiguous symbolism in that chapter, I believe the Idealist¹ view presented here will make a lot more sense.

6.0 First Interlude: The Little Book (Revelation 10)

The Angel with the Little Scroll

Rev 10:1 Then I saw another powerful angel descending from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun and his legs were like pillars of fire. 10:2 He held in his hand a little scroll that was open, and he put his right foot on the sea and his left on the land. 10:3 Then he shouted in a loud voice like a lion roaring, and when he shouted, the seven thunders sounded their voices. 10:4 When the seven thunders spoke, I was preparing to write, but just then I heard a voice from heaven say, “Seal up what the seven thunders spoke and do not write it down.” 10:5 Then the angel I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven 10:6 and swore by the one who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, and the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, “There will be no more delay! 10:7 But in the days when the seventh angel is about to blow his trumpet, the mystery of God is completed, just as he has proclaimed to his servants the prophets.” 10:8 Then the voice I had heard from heaven began to speak to me again, “Go and take the open scroll in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.” 10:9 So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, “Take the scroll and eat it. It will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth.” 10:10 So I took the little scroll from the angel’s hand and ate it, and it did taste as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter. 10:11 Then they told me: “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages, and kings.”

In chapter five, we saw that the sealed scroll echoed the scroll in Ezekiel 2. In Ezekiel 3, Ezekiel is told to eat the scroll and it is described as tasting sweet (Ezekiel 3:3). Here in Revelation 10, an angel descends with an open scroll that John is commanded to eat and it too is described as tasting sweet (though bitter in the stomach). The continuation of the allusion to Ezekiel strongly suggests the recently unsealed scroll and this scroll are the same scroll, although the text does not explicitly say so.

1. Also called Spiritualist, but that word can be misleading as it can also mean occultist.

The act of eating the scroll is a symbolic commissioning to prophecy.

Eze 3:1 He said to me, “Son of man, eat what you see in front of you —eat this scroll— and then go and speak to the house of Israel.” [NET]

Words of prophecy are symbolically given to John to speak. Given that the bulk of the vision of the seals and trumpets is already over, and (judging from Revelation 10:4) already written down, this commissioning must be for an additional prophecy. In fact Revelation 10:11 says

Rev 10:11 Then they told me: “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages, and kings.” [emphasis added] [NET]

It would appear then that this vision is a commissioning to deliver the message of Revelation chapter 12-22, which, we will see, is a recapitulation of chapters 4-11.

There is some speculation that the “powerful angel” here is Christ as he is accompanied by some symbols one ordinarily associates with Jesus or God, like the rainbow, the cloud, etc. However it would be highly unusual, even jarring, for Christ to be referred to as an angel (contrast with Hebrews 1:3-4, 13-14). The symbols probably are meant to indicate that the angel is acting on God’s behalf. Revelation 19:10 shows us we must be very careful about such identifications.

The seven thunders were evidently meant for John’s ears only as he is forbidden to write them. That he appears to be recording the vision as he receives it, is also a fascinating tidbit. The vision is not happening during sleep, but in a wakeful state.

7.0 Second Interlude: The Two Witnesses (Revelation 11:1-14)

The Fate of the Two Witnesses

Rev 11:1 Then a measuring rod like a staff was given to me, and I was told, “Get up and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and the ones who worship there. 11:2 But do not measure the outer courtyard of the temple; leave it out, because it has been given to the Gentiles, and they will trample on the holy city for forty-two months. 11:3 And I will grant my two witnesses authority to prophesy for 1,260 days, dressed in sackcloth. 11:4 (These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.) 11:5 If anyone wants to harm them, fire comes out of their mouths and completely consumes their enemies. If anyone wants to harm them, they must be killed this way. 11:6 These two have the power to close up the sky so that it does not rain during the time they are prophesying. They have power to turn the waters to blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague whenever they want. 11:7 When they have completed their testimony, the beast that comes up from the abyss will make war on them and conquer them and kill them. 11:8 Their corpses will lie in the street of the great city that is symbolically called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was also crucified. 11:9 For three and a half days those from every people, tribe, nation, and language will look at their corpses, because they will not permit them to be placed in a tomb. 11:10 And those who live on the earth will rejoice over them and celebrate, even sending gifts to each other, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth. 11:11 But after three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and tremendous fear seized those who were watching them. 11:12 Then they

heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them: "Come up here!" So the two prophets went up to heaven in a cloud while their enemies stared at them. 11:13 Just then a major earthquake took place and a tenth of the city collapsed; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

11:14 The second woe has come and gone; the third is coming quickly.

At the time John is writing, the Temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed some 25 years earlier. Dispensationalists, and presumably most other futurists, see in this chapter the idea that a new temple will be constructed. This only works if the forty-two months (aka 1,260 days) are a literal period. The fact that a stylized calendar using round numbers of 30 days per month and 360 days per year is used here and in other passages in Revelation might suggest something other than literal days, months, and years are in mind.¹

Revelation 12, in fact, will indicate that this three and one half year period represents a much longer time period: the entire church age, nearly 2000 years and counting so far. Now given this as a presupposition (for now), there are great ramifications for the understanding of the text of this passage. The two witnesses *cannot* be two literal individuals.

Now what witness have we had through the ages? What witness is Satan trying to kill even in our time? Here's some hints:

Lk 11:49 For this reason also the wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,'... [NET]

Eph 2:20 ... because you have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.² [NET]

2 Pe 3:2 I want you to recall both the predictions foretold by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles. [NET]

Re 18:20 (Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has pronounced judgment against her on your behalf!) [NET]

Further, since literal temple has not existed all these centuries either, the temple too must represent something else. We find the clue for this after one of the above passages.

Eph 2:21 In him the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 2:22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. [NET]

-
1. The Essenes used a 364 day year, that is exactly 52 weeks, which caused the holy days to always fall on the same day of the week from year to year. The normal Jewish calendar was a 354 day year, with occasional additional months to bring it in sync with the 365.2440 solar year.
 2. Many interpreters see this pairing as meaning New Testament prophets, but the same pairing in 2 Peter 3:2, quoted next, clearly indicates a merism encompassing the writers of the Old and New Testaments.

In short, the temple is the church, and the witnesses are the scriptures of the old and new testaments (the prophets and the apostles).¹

Many interpreters would see the church militant as being symbolized by the two witnesses, the pairing being an echo when Jesus sent out disciples to teach (Luke 10:1-2). The witnesses are called two Olive trees. When Paul used this metaphor in Romans 11:17-24, Israel was the cultivated Olive Tree and the Gentiles wild Olive shoots that are grafted into Israel. Thus only one of the trees is the church, so Paul's usage would seem to be somewhat different. To the extent that both the Jews and the Gentiles are witnesses, it is through the Old and the New Testaments. The two witnesses are also called lampstands. This symbol was used of the individual congregations that John was addressing in Revelation 1:20, but surely more than two congregations are meant if this is the meaning of the symbol here.

Although the best hermeneutic for identifying symbols is to see how they are used elsewhere in scripture, in this case it doesn't seem to lead us to a definitive conclusion. At any rate, the difference between the two understandings is fairly subtle. If the Gospel itself is being fought against, it is the church that suffers persecution. This would seem to be the point of the image of the outer courtyard of the temple (i.e., the church) being trampled on for forty-two months.

Verse 7 refers to "the beast that comes up from the abyss". We have not as of yet encountered this beast in Revelation. If the Book of Revelation was the original reader's only knowledge of this beast, then this "out of the blue" reference would be rather perplexing. However, Revelation did not spring out of a theological vacuum. At the very least, they would have had familiarity with the four beasts of Daniel. Paul's letters to the Thessalonians make it clear he had eschatological teachings he had taught that went beyond what was in the letters. The original readers had an easier time understanding Revelation because they had had the eye-witness testimony of the Apostles that went beyond what comes down to us in scripture. In this case, the image of "the beast that comes up from the abyss" was probably an already familiar one for them.

Why would three and a half years (forty-two months or 1,260 days) be chosen as the symbol for the church age? Recall that Revelation also calls this a period of tribulation, a fact reflected in the symbolism in the visions accompanying the opening of the seals and the blowing of the trumpets. The period is one that has recurred several times during Israel's history. The drought in Elijah's time was three and one half years (Luke 4:25, James 5:17). The Sieges of Samaria (2 Kings 18:10) by the Assyrians, and Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:1-2) by the Babylonians were about three years. More importantly, and recently, the desecration of Jerusalem by Antiochus IV lasted three and a half years (1 Maccabees 1:20, 29; 4:52) as did Rome's siege of Jerusalem. Nero's persecution of Christians a generation earlier had also lasted about three and one-half years. Three and one-half years therefore became an archetype for the history of tribulation that extends through the whole church age.

There are allusions to the Elijah and Moses stories here:

1. See "Ezekiel 40-48: Ezekiel's Temple" on page 15.
See "Paul's Use of "Temple" as a Metaphor" on page 19.

- Revelation 11:5 — compare 2 Kings 1:9-15 (Note the symbolic significance of the fire coming from the mouth in the Revelation passage)
- Revelation 11:6a — 1 Kings 17:1
- Revelation 11:6b — Exodus 7-11 (compare with the trumpets as well)

But these are not literal events being described (although their archetypes are literal events). These are symbolic representations of the power of the Gospel and of its prophetic origin.

Resurrection was used symbolically in Ezekiel 37, the vision of the valley of dry bones. In this vision, Ezekiel sees a valley full of dry bones. Flesh returns to the bones and the bodies come to life. This represents the restoration of the people to their land (as explained by Ezekiel 37:11-12), and not literal resurrection.¹ Likewise here, the witness of the apostles and prophets is “resurrected” after their temporary defeat. In Revelation 9:21, we are told that men did not repent of their evil. Here, in a picture that is a negative image of another Elijah episode, they do repent!

In 1 Kings 19:18, God tells Elijah that He still had seven thousand followers who had not worshipped Baal. They were a remnant that had been preserved. Here in Revelation 11:13, seven thousand are destroyed rather than reserved, and the balance gave glory to God!

These symbols are open to several different specific interpretations within the Millennial frameworks. I don’t think at this point in Revelation that it is possible to exegete a resolution to the Millennial question. It is rather easy, on the other hand, to read into them (eisegete) presuppositions. At this point, we should just focus on the “pan-millennial” implications: everything will “pan out” according to God’s plan in the end.

8.0 The Seventh Seal (Revelation 11:15-19)

The Seventh Trumpet

Rev 11:15 Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven saying:

“The kingdom of the world
has become the kingdom of our Lord
and of his Christ,
and he will reign for ever and ever.”

11:16 Then the twenty-four elders who are seated on their thrones before God threw themselves down with their faces to the ground and worshiped God 11:17 with these words:

“We give you thanks, Lord God, the All-Powerful,
the one who is and who was,
because you have taken your great power
and begun to reign.

1. Although, the concept is presupposed.

11:18 The nations were enraged,
but your wrath has come,
and the time has come for the dead to be judged,
and the time has come to give to your servants,
the prophets, their reward,
as well as to the saints
and to those who revere your name, both small and great,
and the time has come to destroy those who destroy the earth.”

11:19 Then the temple of God in heaven was opened and the ark of his covenant was visible within his temple. And there were flashes of lightning, roaring, crashes of thunder, an earthquake, and a great hailstorm.

The proclamation of verse 15, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever”, is a rather provocative statement. However, it’s interpretation is no easy matter. Preterists say it means only that Christianity became a world religion. This is interpretation rather forced, and is a result of *a priori* adoption of Preterism as a hermeneutic. Most other interpreters see this as bringing us to the end of the age.

There is a sense in which Christ reigns now. The Kingdom of God was always something within reach in Christ’s teaching. The amillennialist sees the resurrection of the saints in the “kingdom of the world” *becoming* the “kingdom of our Lord”. Millennialists (pre- and post-) would see the inauguration of the millennium. Either way, Christ’s reign is “for ever and ever” after that.

Verses 16-18 give us hint of the eschatological judgment. It does not describe it. It is given thanks for and praised by the worship of the twenty-four elders. The visions we have encountered up to this time were of the actions of “those who destroy the earth”, and hence were of events throughout history. Now we come to the “end game” of history.

Verse 19 emphasizes that the temple in view is in heaven, and so is not a literal “brick-and-mortar” building in Jerusalem. It is representative of the resurrected church.

9.0 Questions to Ponder¹

- How do the visions of the seals and trumpets help us understand the world in which we live? (Matthew 24:6-8)
- What role do demons have in the world?
- How should God be praised and thanked?
- What is our role in conveying the witness of the Apostles and Prophets?
- What is the world’s response to the witness of the Apostles and Prophets?
- Is God absent or present in times of hardship? How?

1. Mick Welton and Drew DiNardo, class notes.

Questions to Ponder

Revelation 12: Woman, Child, and Dragon

This chapter is the keystone to understanding Revelation. In it, that Revelation is a broad view of the tribulation of the whole church age, represented by three and one-half years, can be demonstrated exegetically.

1.0 Protevangelion

Ge 3:15 And I will put hostility between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring; her offspring will attack your head, and you will attack her offspring's heel. [NET]

Genesis 3:15 is referred to as the “protevangelion” or “proto-gospel”. It tells of the conflict between Satan and Eve’s “seed” (offspring). Revelation 12 also tells this story. It is the story of Christ’s birth, death, and resurrection. Since it is so key to understanding Revelation, we shall go through this chapter verse by verse in more detail than we have been doing.

2.0 The Woman, Child, and Dragon (Revelation 12:1-6)

The Woman, the Child, and the Dragon

Rev 12:1 Then a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and with the moon under her feet, and on her head was a crown of twelve stars. 12:2 She was pregnant and was screaming in labor pains, struggling to give birth. 12:3 Then another sign appeared in heaven: a huge red dragon that had seven heads and ten horns, and on its heads were seven diadem crowns. 12:4 Now the dragon’s tail swept away a third of the stars in heaven and hurled them to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child as soon as it was born. 12:5 So the woman gave birth to a son, a male child, who is going to *rule over all the nations with an iron rod*. Her child was suddenly caught up to God and to his throne, 12:6 and she fled into the wilderness where a place had been prepared for her by God, so she could be taken care of for 1,260 days.

1 a woman clothed with the sun, and with the moon under her feet, and her on her head was a crown of twelve stars: A echo of Joseph’s dream occurs here. In Genesis 37:9, he has a vision of the sun, moon, and 11 stars bowing down to him. They represented his father, mother, and brothers. Here, this symbol is adapted to represent Israel.

2 pregnant ... in labor pains: She’s about to give birth to her offspring. Many commentators think this refers specifically to the Jews under Roman oppression.

3 in heaven ... a red dragon: Dramatically, the dragon is not identified right away. We have encountered the symbolism of the color red there in the context of war and killing. He is Satan of course (Revelation 12:9).

4 swept away a third of the stars: This probably represents “his angels” (Revelation 12:8-9). **the dragon stood before the woman ... so that he might devour her child:** He is planning to “attack her offspring’s heel” as described in the Protevangelion.

5 the woman gave birth to a son ... who is going to rule over all the nations with an iron rod: The identity of the son should be rather obvious. The description of the son is an allusion to Psalm 2:9. Revelation 19:15 also says this of Christ. Now given the identity of the son, one might be tempted at this point to identify the woman with just Mary rather than Israel (or rather elect Israel). We will see why this isn’t the correct below.

Her child was suddenly caught up to God and to his throne: Revelation’s telling of the Gospel story skips from the incarnation directly to the resurrection. See Hebrews 8:1 — “Now the main point of what we are saying is this: We have such a high priest, one who *sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven,...*”.

Now that we’ve identified the child, we can see that Satan’s first attack on the child was the slaughter of the children in Bethlehem by Herod. Reread verse 4 in this light.

6 she fled into the wilderness ... so she could be taken care of for 1,260 days: This is symbolic. There was no literal three and one-half years beginning with the resurrection during which events like these took place. This is faithful Israel being “in the wilderness”, in tribulation, through out the church age. In the context of AD 30, this would have been the Jewish Church. We’ll see how the Gentiles fit into this below. The 40 years wondering in the wilderness is central to the Jewish religion, and would also have been a significant image to the Jewish church even in John’s day because they had fled Jerusalem before its fall.¹

3.0 The War in Heaven (Revelation 12:7-12)

War in Heaven

Rev 12:7 Then war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. 12:8 But the dragon was not strong enough to prevail, so there was no longer any place left in heaven for him and his angels. 12:9 So that huge dragon – the ancient serpent, the one called the devil and

1. According to Eusebius

Satan, who deceives the whole world – was thrown down to the earth, and his angels along with him.

The vision now turns its attention to events in heaven. Until this time, Satan had access to heaven. See Job 1-2 and Zechariah 3.¹ Here Satan and his angles battle Michael² and his angels (presumably the third of the stars his tail swept away in verse 4) and are cast down to the earth “so there was no longer any place left in heaven for him and his angels”.

Rev 12:10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven saying,

“The salvation and the power
and the kingdom of our God,
and the ruling authority of his Christ, have now come,
because the accuser of our brothers and sisters,
the one who accuses them day and night before our God,
has been thrown down.

12:11 But they overcame him
by the blood of the Lamb
and by the word of their testimony,
and they did not love their lives so much that they were afraid to die.

12:12 Therefore you heavens rejoice, and all who reside in them!

But woe to the earth and the sea
because the devil has come down to you!

He is filled with terrible anger,
for he knows that he only has a little time!”

This song of rejoicing says that “the overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony”. Compare this to what Jesus said when the 72 disciples he sent out to preach returned — “I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning” [Luke 10:18]. There, the battle began, and was completed in Jesus’ resurrection and the preaching (testimony) of the word. Compare verse 12 with the sounding of the trumpets (“woe to the earth and the sea because the devil has come down to you!”).

4.0 The War on Earth and Sea (Revelation 12:13-18)

Rev 12:13 Now when the dragon realized that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. 12:14 But the woman was given the two wings of a giant eagle so that she could fly out into the wilderness, to the place God prepared for her, where she is taken care of – away from the presence of the serpent – for a time, times, and half a time. 12:15 Then the serpent spouted water like a river out of his mouth after the woman in an attempt to sweep her away by a flood, 12:16 but the earth came to her rescue; the ground opened up and swallowed the river that the dragon had spewed from his mouth.

The dragon, cast from heaven now persecutes the woman. But she is protected for “a time, [two] times, and half a time” — three and a half years, forty two months, 1,260 days.

1. See “Fourth Vision (Zechariah 3:1-10)” on page 69.

2. Some interpreters identify Michael with Jesus Christ. This is speculative in the extreme.

Rev 12:17 So the dragon became enraged at the woman and went away to make war on the rest of her children, those who keep God's commandments and hold to the testimony about Jesus.

Now, here's they key to understanding the identity of the women. The woman has other children: those who keep God's commandments and hold to the testimony about Jesus. The symbolism of verse 1 had already suggested that the woman was Israel. Here we see the Jewish church "giving birth" to the Gentile church "her other children". The period of their tribulation is not a literal 1,260 days beginning in the spring of AD 30, but the entire time of Church history that Satan is making war on the woman and her children.

Rev 12:18 And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore.

This verse segues us into the next vision. The manuscripts differ on whether it is the dragon or John ("I") who stands at the seashore. It makes little or no difference to the interpretation of the texts however, as it merely serves to shift our focus to the next scene.

5.0 The Meta-narrative

Salvation history is a narrative thread that runs from ethnic Israel in Old Testament times to "persons from every tribe, language, people, and nation" [Revelation 5:9, 7:9] before the throne of God. We've seen this expressed several ways in Revelation and the rest of the New Testament. In the interludes of the Seals, we saw 144,000 Israelites sealed before the tribulation began (Revelation 7:3) followed by an uncountable multitude (presumably after the resurrection) before the throne in heaven. We see this in the two witnesses being the Apostles and the Prophets: the testimony of the New and the Old Testaments. We see this in the woman being Israel and her children being the Gentile church. This later metaphor is similar to Paul's where Israel is the cultivated olive tree. Those who are not faithful are cut off (like Ephraim and Dan are omitted from the list of twelve tribes in Revelation) and the Gentiles are grafted in.

We may lay out the time-line surrounding the three and a half years with this table:

TABLE 1.

The Three and a Half Years

Revelation 11	Revelation 12:1-6	Revelation 12:7-17	Revelation 13
	Messiah <i>Revelation 12:1-5</i>	Fall of Satan <i>Revelation 12:7-12</i>	
	Woman Protected for ...		
Courtyard trampled 42 months; Two Witnesses for 1,260 Days <i>Revelation 11:2-3</i>	1,260 Days <i>Revelation 12:6</i>	Time, Times, Half a Time <i>Revelation 12:13-16</i> Rest of Her Children <i>Revelation 12:17</i>	Beast Has Ruling Authority for 42 Months <i>Revelation 13:5</i>

6.0 Other Interpretations

As clear as the interpretation of this chapter seems to be, there are other interpretations. I believe we will see that these are the result of eisegesis. That is, the assumption of particular interpretation schools have been decided *a priori*, which results in the need to force fit everything into those frameworks.

6.1 Historicist

Since the seventh trumpet of brings us up to the Eschaton, the remainder of the book must logically be recapitulating some earlier history. In spite of the rather clear reference to the incarnation of chapter 12, the historicist presuppositions dictate this must refer to a later point in time. This is because for them the 42 months (aka 1,260 days) represents 1,260 years during which the church is oppressed by the papacy, roughly 254 to 1514 AD, although many other beginning and end dates have been suggested.

For Historicist, the woman represents the true church. Her nearing birth represents the potential and promise of growth. The Dragon is imperial Rome. The child being caught up to heaven represents the enthronement of Constantine, who ended the persecutions. We could go on, but a moments reflection will show the ad hoc nature of these assignments. It seems especially strange that Constantine's enthronement would be represent by the child being with God and His throne, since the historicists also regard that as the beginning of the corruption of the church that led to the papacy.

6.2 Preterist

The ease with which both Preterists and Historicists assign the same visions to various historical events is their great weakness. After chapter 12, the Preterists split into two camps, further multiplying the number of interpretations. Some Preterists see these chapters as continuing to deal with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 from another perspective, identifying Babylon with Jerusalem. Others identify Babylon with Rome.

For chapter 12 itself, Preterists generally interpret the woman, dragon, and child in line with the Idealist view discussed above. For the three and a half years though, they skip to the Jewish war. They regard the woman fleeing to the desert as representing the Jewish church fleeing Jerusalem before the city fell as warned to do by Jesus and recorded by the church historian Eusebius. Actually, this isn't too far off the mark. The Jewish war is one of the archetypes that the three and a half years as a symbol is based on. The woman fleeing into the desert is certainly an echo of the Jewish Christians fleeing Jerusalem.

6.3 Futurist

Futurists have many interpretations of this passage. Some would see the woman representing the professing church while the child represents the true overcoming church. There are a number of cultic interpretations broadly in the futurist camp as well. For example, Christian Scientists identify the woman as their founder.

The majority however would, like the Idealists and Preterists, identify the woman with Israel and the Child with Christ. Some would see the third of the stars representing the fallen angels, but others, anxious to skip to the seven-year tribulation see them as political powers brought under Satan's control.

The 1,260 days are generally viewed as the second half of the tribulation. This means the passage invisibly skips from the ascension to the end times. In fact, a troubling principle of dispensationalism in general is the idea that prophetic scripture skips over the church age entirely. They regard the time that we are in to be a dispensation about which the Bible says nothing about. That alone should make it suspect. The dating of the fall of Satan from heaven seems to strange too, given Jesus' statement Luke 10:18 discussed above.

Dispensationalists often make some fantastic and specific speculations about some of the symbols. For example, regarding the woman being given "two wings of a giant eagle so that she could fly out into the wilderness" Hal Lindsey writes:

Some kind of massive airlift will rapidly transport these fleeing Jews across the rugged terrain to their place of protection. Since the eagle is the national symbol of the United States, it's possible that the airlift will be made available by aircraft from the U. S. Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean.¹

This symbolism is actually based on the poetic images used in Exodus 19:4 and Deuteronomy 32:11-12, which many, more sober, dispensationalists point out as well.

Some see the flood as a literal flood. Others, rightly, see it symbolizing evil teaching. It is to be compared with other symbolism of things coming out of mouths, such as the double-edge sword from Jesus' mouth or the three plagues from the rider's mouths in the sixth trumpet vision.

1. Quoted in *Revelation: Four Views*

7.0 Road Map

We've passed the half-way point in Revelation now, so now would be a good time to review where we've been and overview where we're going.

7.1 The Letters (Revelation 1-3)

The first three chapters are in the form of a circular letter sent to seven churches in Asia Minor (modern Turkey). While Historicists and early Dispensationalists saw these seven churches as symbolic, we saw they more likely were the literal contemporary churches named. The Apostle John was writing around AD 95 from the island of Patmos, where he was exiled. Unlike cultic adaptations of the Apocalypse genre, which wrote in the name of Old Testament heroes, John wrote in his own name to churches that know him.

7.2 The Unsealing of the Book (Revelation 4-11)

7.2.1 Theophany (Revelation 4-5)

The first set of visions are of the unsealing of a scroll. With each of the seven seals being opened, John saw a symbolic vision. With the last seal, John saw another series of seven visions accompanied by trumpet blasts. The whole scene opens with a vision of God in heaven that reveals His power and majesty. The visions emphasize the sovereignty of God over history.

7.2.2 The Seven Seals (Revelation 6-8:1)

The opening of the seals introduces characters and forces at work in history, but don't really detail a sequence of events.

Seals 1-4: The Four Horsemen (Revelation 6:1-8). The Gospel, Conflict, Subsistence Living, Death.

Seal 5: Martyrs Under the Altar (Revelation 6:9-11). Their number is not yet complete.

Seal 6: Cosmological Signs (Revelation 6:12-16). Hyperbolic language identical to that used in the Old Testament to describe historical destruction of cities. Here it represents the wars and conflicts that are ever with us.

Interlude 1: The Sealing of the 144,000 (Revelation 7:1-8). These are the remnant of Israel, marked for preservation: God's first fruits of redemption.

Interlude 2: Persons of Every Nation, Tribe, People, and Language (Revelation 7:9-16). These are the whole church, the Gentiles who are "grafted" into Israel.

Seal 7: Silence before the Trumpets (Revelation 8:1). The Seven Trumpets should probably be seen as part of the seventh seal.

7.2.3 The Seven Trumpets (Revelation 8-11)

Trumpets 1-4: Judgments on the Earth, Sea, Fresh Water, and Sky (Revelation 8).

Trumpet 5: The Locust Plague (Revelation 9:1-12).

Trumpet 6: The Army from the Euphrates (Revelation 9:13-21). “Furthermore, they did not repent...”

Interlude 1: The Little Scroll (Revelation 10).

Interlude 2: The Temple and the Two Witnesses (Revelation 11:1-14). “the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven”

Trumpet 7: The Kingdom (Revelation 11:15-19). “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever”.

7.3 Women, Beasts, and Judgment (Revelation 12-22)

7.3.1 The Woman, Child, and Dragon (Revelation 12)

7.3.2 Two Beasts (Revelation 13)

This is where the infamous “Mark of the Beast” is written about.

7.3.3 A New Song and Three Messages (Revelation 14)

7.3.4 Seven Final Plagues (Revelation 15-16)

7.3.5 The Prostitute and Babylon (Revelation 17-18)

7.3.6 Judgment of the Beasts (Revelation 19-20)

This is where we’ll get heavily into Millennial issues

7.3.7 New Heaven and New Earth (Revelation 21-22)

Revelation 13: The Two Beasts

The Mark of the Beast is probably the most familiar images from Revelation in popular culture.

1.0 Background From Daniel

The images from this chapter come largely from Daniel 7. Daniel saw a vision in which four beasts came up from the sea:

- Lion with eagle's wings (Daniel 7:4)
- Bear (Daniel 7:5)
- Leopard with Four Heads (Daniel 7:6)
- Dreadful Beast with Ten Horns (Daniel 7:7)

Careful study¹ of Daniel shows that these four beasts represent four kingdoms: Babylon of Daniel's time, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome respectively. The final kingdom is supplanted by the kingdom of God:

Dan 7:26 But the court will convene, and his ruling authority will be removed—
destroyed and abolished forever.

7:27 Then the kingdom, authority,
and greatness of the kingdoms under all of heaven
will be delivered to the people of the holy ones of the Most High.
His kingdom is an eternal kingdom;
all authorities will serve him and obey him.

1. See "The Kingdom Visions in Daniel" on page 41..

2.0 Beast with Seven Heads and Ten Horns (Revelation 13:1-10)

2.1 Appearance (Revelation 13:1-2)

The Two Beasts

Rev 13:1 Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads, and on its horns were ten diadem crowns, and on its heads a blasphemous name. 13:2 Now the beast that I saw was like a leopard, but its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. The dragon gave the beast his power, his throne, and great authority to rule.

John sees a beast coming out of the sea with the following attributes:

- Ten Horns
- Seven Heads
- Like a Leopard
- Feet like Bear's
- Mouth like Lion's

In other words, this beast was a chimera of the four beasts of Daniel. The beast is also in the image of the dragon (Satan) as both have seven heads and ten horns.

This beast is not any one nation *per se*, but in the spirit of the symbolism from Daniel, it represents the kingdoms of the world throughout history under the authority of Satan. Revelation will use both Babylon and Rome as archetypal symbols for this concept.

2.2 Wounded Head (Revelation 13:3-4)

Rev 13:3 One of the beast's heads appeared to have been killed, but the lethal wound had been healed. And the whole world followed the beast in amazement; 13:4 they worshiped the dragon because he had given ruling authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast too, saying: "Who is like the beast?" and "Who is able to make war against him?"

The image of one of the heads being fatally wounded and healed is almost certainly a reference to the Roman civil war that occurred after Nero's death, a year also known as the year of four emperors. Interpreters of the literary-critical school will often identify this with the *Nero redivivus* myth. They would date a source document that "John" is using to shortly after Nero's death and have it perpetuating the popular myth of that time that Nero would come back to life and retake the empire. The evidence for this is nothing more than wishful thinking. A writer in AD 95, inspired or not, could easily think of the events of the year of four emperors as a death and resurrection of the empire.

2.3 Blasphemy and Authority (Revelation 13:5-8)

Rev 13:5 The beast was given a mouth speaking proud words and blasphemies, and he was permitted to exercise ruling authority for forty-two months. 13:6 So the beast

opened his mouth to blaspheme against God – to blaspheme both his name and his dwelling place, that is, those who dwell in heaven. 13:7 The beast was permitted to go to war against the saints and conquer them. He was given ruling authority over every tribe, people, language, and nation, 13:8 and all those who live on the earth will worship the beast, everyone whose name has not been written since the foundation of the world in the book of life belonging to the Lamb who was killed.

The beast is given a ruling authority of forty-two months. As the beast is not Rome in particular, the forty-two months are not likely to be some literal forty two months that Rome does something in particular (like besiege Jerusalem or persecute Christians). Rather, we are looking again at the three and a half years representing the church age we have seen repeatedly (and especially clearly in Revelation 12).

Note that the book of life was written “since the foundation of the world”. Compare with Ephesians 1:4. Regardless of what one thinks about predestination verses free will, election took place before the beginning of time. There is no room for the “open theism” fad of late.

2.4 Providence (Revelation 13:9-10)

Rev 13:9 If anyone has an ear, he had better listen!

13:10 If anyone is meant for captivity,
into captivity he will go.

If anyone is to be killed by the sword,
then by the sword he must be killed.

This requires steadfast endurance and faith from the saints.

A common theme in Revelation is that the events of (to John) future history are under God’s control. Here we see another statement of this. It is, in fact, a major theme of the whole book.

3.0 Beast with Two Horns (Revelation 13:11-18)

3.1 Appearance (Revelation 13:11)

Rev 13:11 Then I saw another beast coming up from the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but was speaking like a dragon.

Daniel sees another beast, this one with two horns and the voice of a dragon. Many commentaries make a big deal of the “like a lamb” phrase, but only the horns are described as being like a lamb’s, not its general appearance. The beast is hardly lamb-like in either appearance or comportment.

3.2 Authority (Revelation 13:12)

Rev 13:12 He exercised all the ruling authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and those who inhabit it worship the first beast, the one whose lethal wound had been healed.

The authority of the second beast is derived from the first beast (which in turn was derived from the red dragon). This beast directs worship to the first beast. Where the first beast represents political power (*à la* Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome), this beast seems to carry on a religious function. In fact, Revelation 16:13, 19:20, and 20:10 refer to it as “the false prophet”. There is an interesting chain of command here: Satan, secular authority, and then religious authority. False doctrine is the servant of the state, and the state is the servant of Satan.

3.3 Signs (Revelation 13:13-15)

Rev 13:13 He performed momentous signs, even making fire come down from heaven in front of people 13:14 and, by the signs he was permitted to perform on behalf of the beast, he deceived those who live on the earth. He told those who live on the earth to make an image to the beast who had been wounded by the sword, but still lived. 13:15 The second beast was empowered to give life to the image of the first beast so that it could speak, and could cause all those who did not worship the image of the beast to be killed.

The second beast deceives people, partially by producing signs similar to those of the two witnesses back in Revelation 11. The giving life to an image was a proverbial deception of the pagan priesthoods in the ancient world. For one (probably fictional) account, see the apocryphal *Bel and the Dragon*¹ 1-22. The signs that John sees the beast performing are not specific literal actions. By evoking the story of the battle between Elijah and the prophets of Baal, who were unable to bring fire down, the vision is indicating an increase in the intensity of the battle. The beast does bring down fire.

3.4 The Mark of the Beast — 666 (Revelation 13:16-18)

Rev 13:16 He also caused everyone (small and great, rich and poor, free and slave) to obtain a mark on their right hand or on their forehead. 13:17 Thus no one was allowed to buy or sell things unless he bore the mark of the beast – that is, his name or his number. 13:18 This calls for wisdom: Let the one who has insight calculate the beast’s number, for it is man’s number, and his number is 666.

The Mark of the Beast enters the public consciousness through various occult themed movies that have been made through the years as well as through dispensational literature, such as Hal Lindsey’s *Late Great Planet Earth* or the LaHaye’s *Left Behind* series.

Biblically it is analogical to the mark God placed on the 144,000 Jews in Revelation 7. As such, one might expect that the mark is not literal, but a symbolic representation in the vision of election. Economic isolation or shunning is hardly the invention of the Kennedy administration for dealing with Cuba. The idea, and practice, has existed for millennia. In an incident pointed to by Historicists, Pope Martin V issued a decree requiring that “they permit not the heretics to have houses in their districts, or enter into contracts, or carry on commerce.”², referring to the Waldenses, which the Historicists

1. Also called Daniel 14.

2. Gregg. *Revelation, Four Views*.

points to as one of the faithful remnants (symbolized by the two witnesses) before the Reformation.

Here, the economic restriction seen in the vision almost certainly represents more than mere boycott. For an example brewing today, see the editorial in the November 2005 issue of *Analog: Science Fiction and Fact* magazine. It is about the debate over pharmacists who don't dispense certain drugs (such as birth control) because of religious objections. The editor's argument was that the pharmacist's right to freedom of religion ends where it interferes with someone else's rights¹. He goes on to suggest that perhaps the pharmacist who can't dispense the drug should leave the field. The beast can be far more subtle in restricting Christian's economic activity than simple outright ban.

Far too much ink has been spilled identifying the man represented by 666. Preterists would generally identify it with Nero Caesar, which when spelled in Hebrew letters, and the customary numeric values are assigned to each letter, the sum comes up 666. This is not impossible from the Idealist perspective as Nero would then be serving as an archetype. One of the earliest suggestions known is Irenaeus' suggestion that it is the Greek word *Lateinos*, identifying the beast with the Roman Empire specifically. Historicists often identified the number with the Latin title for the Pope: VICARIVS FILII DEI, pulling out the letters that can represent numbers thusly: DCLVVIIIIII. More recently, it was pointed out that Ronald Wilson Reagan has six letters in each of his name.

In short, identifying an specific individual or institution represented by 666 is a futile exercise. Even the typical Idealist approach of finding meaning in the digit 6 as representing man falling short of perfection, represented by the digit 7, is little more than numerological speculation. The number probably meant something specific to the recipients in Ephesus and the other six cities. For us today, we need to humbly accept that we just don't know. We will be more productive as Christians to just accept the mystery and move on to things we do know.

4.0 Other Interpretations

4.1 Historicist

Historicists are widely split three ways on the specifics of identifying the beasts. One view is that both beasts represent pagan Rome. Others see the first beast as pagan Rome, and the second beast as papal Rome. Others see both beasts as aspects of papal Rome. Since the historicist presupposition precludes identifying the wounded head with the death of Nero, they look elsewhere, such as the death of the last heathen emperor, Julian the Apostate, and the end of tolerance of pagan ritual religion as the fatal wound, and the rise of the papacy as the revival of the beast. Another view among Seventh-Day Adventists has been that the wound was inflicted by Napoleon and restored by Mussolini! Much anti-papal rhetoric of the Reformers looked to this passage for inspiration.

1. The argument is, of course, reversible. The customer's rights end when they interfere with the pharmacist's rights. Further, forcing the pharmacist to sell the drug anyway not only violates his religious freedom, but would amount to reducing him to slavery!

4.2 Preterist

Preterists see Rome as a persecuting power, either under Nero and the Jewish War, or subsequently, leading up to Constantine. The wounded head has been identified with Nero, Julius Caesar, or the Empire being wounded by the spread of the Gospel.

4.3 Futurist

Futurists typically associate the first beast with a future “revived” Roman Empire. Back when the European Union had only ten members, it was common to identify that as the beast. The forty-two months is usually associated with the second half of the seven-year tribulation. The antichrist is usually associated with the first beast, although some would identify him with the second one. The mark of the beast is generally taken literally and expected to be the basis of a future cashless society.¹

1. Even if that is not the intent of this passage, there are plenty of good reasons to fear such an economy any way.

Revelation 14: The Great Commission

This chapter is about the growth of the Church and the spread of the Gospel message through evangelism.

1.0 Introduction

Mt 28:19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 28:20 teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
[NET]

Chapter 14’s vision is a series of seven short scenes:

- v. 1-5, The Lamb with the 144,000;
- v. 6-7, An angel proclaims the eternal gospel;
- v. 8, An angel proclaims the fall of Babylon;
- v. 9-12, An angel proclaims the judgment of those who worship the beast;
- v. 13, A voice proclaims the blessedness of “those who die in the Lord from this moment on!”;
- v. 14-16, Christ reaps the elect;
- v. 17-20, An angel reaps the reprobate.

At first glance, these seem almost a random collection of unrelated scenes. I suggest that the theme is a radical change in the heavenly economy: the opening up of Israel to include the Gentiles through the Gospel Message, and the defeat of Satan’s hold on the world. It recapitulates the time of the dragon (Revelation 12) and the beasts (Revelation 13).

2.0 The Lamb with the 144,000 (Revelation 14:1-5)

An Interlude: The Song of the 144,000

Rev 14:1 Then I looked, and here was the Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with him were one hundred and forty-four thousand, who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. 14:2 I also heard a sound coming out of heaven like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. Now the sound I heard was like that made by harpists playing their harps, 14:3 and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one was able to learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been redeemed from the earth.

14:4 These are the ones who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These were redeemed from humanity as firstfruits to God and to the Lamb, 14:5 and no lie was found on their lips; they are blameless.

The clock is set back to the incarnation. We see the Lamb, the Messiah, on Mount Zion with the elect from Israel who are here described as firstfruits. It is they who give birth to the church, the new Israel that includes people of "every nation, tribe, language, and people". The last time we encountered a "new song" was in Revelation 5:9 when the four living creatures sang a "new song", before the seals were opened and the trumpets revealed:

Rev 5:9 You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals
because you were killed,
and at the cost of your own blood you have purchased for God
persons from every tribe, language, people, and nation.... [NET]

Here, the 144,000 are celebrating their redemption. They are described as virgins. This is symbolic. Worshiping other gods is repeatedly called adultery and prostitution in the Bible. It is not their sexual practices, *per se*, that is at issue here, but their worship practices. They are the firstfruits¹ of a crop that would yield "persons from every tribe, language, people, and nation."

3.0 Three Angels

Three angels fly overhead next in John's vision, each proclaiming a message. The time frame of each of these proclamations is also the beginning of the church age.

3.1 The Eternal Gospel (Revelation 14:6-7)

Three Angels and Three Messages

Rev 14:6 Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, and he had an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth – to every nation, tribe, language, and

1. This term is discussed in more detail below in "Idealist" on page 244.

people. 14:7 He declared in a loud voice: “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has arrived, and worship the one who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water!”

The first angel proclaims “the eternal gospel”, that is, the Gospel of Christ, to “every nation, tribe, language, and people, that is the Gentiles. There is only one Gospel (contrary to many Dispensationalists), as Paul wrote to the Galatians, “not that there really is another gospel But even if we (or an angel from heaven) should preach a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be condemned to hell!”¹

While it is not a literal angel from heaven that proclaims the eternal gospel in the church age, recall that the word *angelos* means messenger. The flying angel here represents the evangelistic role of the church to preach the gospel. Compare this with the angels of the seven churches that John addresses in Revelation 2-3.²

3.2 Fall of Babylon (Revelation 14:8)

Rev 14:8 A second angel followed the first, declaring: “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great city! She made all the nations drink of the wine of her immoral passion.”

The Fall of Babylon is here proclaimed, although Babylon is not yet identified. We’ll see additional representations of this later in Revelation. In Daniel’s visions of four kingdoms, the kingdom of God defeats them. Babylon’s defeat is insured by the resurrection. Prophetic literature sometimes uses what is called the “prophetic perfect tense”: a future event is spoken of in a past tense because it is “as good as done”. We’ll see this again in later chapters. Other terms used to describe this is “realized eschatology” or “already, but not yet”. Or, to use an American idiom, he’s dead but he just doesn’t know it yet. To take the tense literally requires the viewpoint of the passage to jump back and forwards.

3.3 Judgment (Revelation 14:9-12)

Rev 14:9 A third angel followed the first two, declaring in a loud voice: “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and takes the mark on his forehead or his hand, 14:10 that person will also drink of the wine of God’s anger that has been mixed undiluted in the cup of his wrath, and he will be tortured with fire and sulfur in front of the holy angels and in front of the Lamb. 14:11 And the smoke from their torture will go up forever and ever, and those who worship the beast and his image will have no rest day or night, along with anyone who receives the mark of his name.” 14:12 This requires the steadfast endurance of the saints – those who obey God’s commandments and hold to their faith in Jesus.

Note that the form and tense of the condition suggests that the point of time in view is not the end, but the beginning of the tribulation: “If anyone worships...”. It is looking forward to the 42 months of the beast.

1. Galatians 1:7-8

2. See “Angels” on page 188.

Their torture will extend forever. There is no room for universalism, annihilation, or any denial of Hell here. The saints will endure the tribulation of this world, but there is no endurance for the reprobate whether they suffer in this world or not.

The judgment here encompasses both the tribulation and the eternal state after death.

4.0 A Voice of Blessing (Revelation 14:13)

Rev 14:13 Then I heard a voice from heaven say, “Write this:
‘Blessed are the dead,
those who die in the Lord from this moment on!’”

“Yes,” says the Spirit, “so they can rest from their hard work, because their deeds will follow them.”

The wording “those who die in the Lord from this moment on” indicates that “this moment” is not the eschaton. Rather, it is the other end of the church age. The phrase marks the change in the divine economy marked by Christ’s redemption of the elect. We opened the chapter with the 144,000, the redeemed of ethnic Israel. Their redemption awaited the sacrifice of the Messiah throughout the Old Testament era. From the crucifixion and resurrection on, all who die in the Lord are redeemed. They may suffer some in the tribulation, at death they will find rest rather than torment.

5.0 The Harvests

5.1 Use of the “Harvest” Metaphor by Jesus

Matthew 9:36-38. “Harvest” is a metaphor for evangelistic activity. The “workers” who “are few” are the disciples.

Mt 9:36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were bewildered and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 9:37 Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. 9:38 Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest.”

Matthew 12:30. “Gathering” (a word often used for gathering crops in Greek) is the activity of those who are with Jesus. The sense is again one of evangelism.

Mt 12:30 Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

Matthew 13:18-23. A crop a hundred, sixty, or thirty times, is produced by seed sown in good soil. Elsewhere, we learn of the good works prepared for the Christian to do¹

1. Ephesians 2:10

and the fruits of the Spirit¹. Something like that is likely the crop produced (and hence harvested) by the seed taking root in the individual.

Mt 13:18 “So listen to the parable of the sower: 13:19 When anyone hears the word about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches what was sown in his heart; this is the seed sown along the path. 13:20 The seed sown on rocky ground is the person who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy. 13:21 But he has no root in himself and does not endure; when trouble or persecution comes because of the word, immediately he falls away. 13:22 The seed sown among thorns is the person who hears the word, but worldly cares and the seductiveness of wealth choke the word, so it produces nothing. 13:23 But as for the seed sown on good soil, this is the person who hears the word and understands. He bears fruit, yielding a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown.”

Matthew 13:36-43. The harvest is explicitly stated to be the end of the age, and the reapers “angels”. Weeds are collected from Christ’s kingdom and burned in fire.

Mt 13:36 Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.” 13:37 He answered, “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. 13:38 The field is the world and the good seed are the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, 13:39 and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. 13:40 As the weeds are collected and burned with fire, so it will be at the end of the age. 13:41 The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather from his kingdom everything that causes sin as well as all lawbreakers. 13:42 They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 13:43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. The one who has ears had better listen!

Matthew 21:33-41. The harvest is near when the landowner sends his slaves, and ultimately his son, to collect a portion of the crop. The tenants kill them. As the harvest is something that was supposed to happen at that time (when the slaves and the son — the prophets and Christ — were sent, it would have to be of something at that time. Either the ingathering of the repentant into the Kingdom, or their righteous deeds.

Mt 21:33 “Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a fence around it, dug a pit for its winepress, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenant farmers and went on a journey. 21:34 When the harvest time was near, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his portion of the crop. 21:35 But the tenants seized his slaves, beat one, killed another, and stoned another. 21:36 Again he sent other slaves, more than the first, and they treated them the same way. 21:37 Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ 21:38 But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and get his inheritance!’ 21:39 So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. 21:40 Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?’ 21:41 They said to him, “He will utterly destroy those evil men! Then he will lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him his portion at the harvest.”

Mark 4:26-29. The harvest is probably the end of the age, and the crop the elect.

1. Gal 5:22-23

Mk 4:26 He also said, “The kingdom of God is like someone who spreads seed on the ground. 4:27 He goes to sleep and gets up, night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. 4:28 By itself the soil produces a crop, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. 4:29 And when the grain is ripe, he sends in the sickle because the harvest has come.”

Mark 13:27. Discussed below.

Mk 13:27 Then he will send angels and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

John 4:35-38. The disciples are sent to reap a harvest among the fields ready for harvesting. The intent is clearly evangelistic.

Jn 4:35 Don't you say, 'There are four more months and then comes the harvest?' I tell you, look up and see that the fields are already white for harvest! 4:36 The one who reaps receives pay and gathers fruit for eternal life, so that the one who sows and the one who reaps can rejoice together. 4:37 For in this instance the saying is true, 'One sows and another reaps.' 4:38 I sent you to reap what you did not work for; others have labored and you have entered into their labor.”

Summary. Jesus used the harvest metaphor for a range of meanings. The harvest can be of a crop of righteousness that results when the elect are saved. It can mean the immediate results of evangelistic effort, the ingathering of the elect into the church. The difference between the two is subtle as only the members of the kingdom, by the grace of God, are capable of any truly good act. Or it can mean the end of the age separation of the elect from the reprobate in the resurrection and judgment.

5.2 Reaping by the Son of Man (Revelation 14:14-16)

Rev 14:14 Then I looked, and a white cloud appeared, and seated on the cloud was one like a son of man! He had a golden crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. 14:15 Then another angel came out of the temple, shouting in a loud voice to the one seated on the cloud, “Use your sickle and start to reap, because the time to reap has come, since the earth's harvest is ripe!” 14:16 So the one seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped.

The phrasing of verse 14 is an allusion to the Messianic passage in Daniel 7:13. The important thing to remember about that passage is that the son of man is coming to heaven not to earth. It is a reference to the resurrection of Christ. If that is the time frame of this vision, then the reaping would be the evangelistic use of the metaphor.

There is a very close parallel to this scene in the Olivet Discourse. In Mark 13:26, Jesus alluded to this very passage of Daniel. In Matthew 26:64, Jesus made it very clear that Daniel's passage is not about the parousia at the end of time: “*from now on* you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and *coming on the clouds of heaven*” [Emphasis added]. In the very next verse of the Olivet Discourse, Jesus said, “Then he will send angels and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.” The time frame of this gathering is limited by Mark 13:30: “I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass away until all these things take

place”. Thus an evangelistic intent seems most likely for the metaphor in the Olivet Discourse.

Given that Revelation here is putting the harvest metaphor adjacent to an allusion to the same passage from Daniel, and that the context so far seems to be the beginning of the church age, I believe that an evangelistic harvest is the intent of this passage as well.

5.3 Harvest of the Grapes (Revelation 14:17-20)

Rev 14:17 Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. 14:18 Another angel, who was in charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to the angel who had the sharp sickle, “Use your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes off the vine of the earth, because its grapes are now ripe.” 14:19 So the angel swung his sickle over the earth and gathered the grapes from the vineyard of the earth and tossed them into the great winepress of the wrath of God. 14:20 Then the winepress was stomped outside the city, and blood poured out of the winepress up to the height of horses’ bridles for a distance of almost two hundred miles.

The Grapes are harvested to be placed through the “winepress of the wrath of God”. One might be tempted to see this as eschatological judgment, but this is not necessarily so. Recall that from the beginning of the book, imminent judgment was threatened on certain of the churches. The whole sequence of seals and trumpets was one of judgments and tribulation being visited upon the earth. Given that context, this is more likely to be another symbolic representation of the tribulation, the whole church age. Note that the location of this winepress is not Hell, but “outside the city”. This judgment is something that happens on earth. It is the wrath of God seen in the seven trumpets and completed in the seven bowl judgments of Revelation 15-16.

6.0 Summary

We saw in the unsealing of the scroll and the trumpets that followed a representation of tribulation throughout the church age, but with men not responding to the warning (Revelation 6-11). Then we saw Israel (symbolized by a woman) giving birth to the Messiah and Satan trying to destroy him. Messiah was resurrected to heaven and Satan pursued to woman and her other children (the Gentile church) throughout the church age (Revelation 12). Then we saw two beasts that derive their authority from Satan persecuting the elect throughout the church age (Revelation 13).

Thus prior to this chapter we’ve seen three views of the church age. Revelation 14 is a view of the same age. It opens with the elect of Israel singing a “new song” celebrating their redemption by the risen Messiah. We then see a representation of the proclamation of the Gospel, the defeat of “Babylon”, and the threat of judgment on anyone who worships the beast. We then see a statement that all who die “from now on”, that is the Gentile church during the church age are blessed. Finally we see the harvest of the elect into the church, and a harvest of wrath that the unregenerate world receives throughout the church age.

7.0 Other Interpretations

7.1 Historicist

There is no small variability amongst the Historicist interpreters. The 144,000 are the church, or they are representatives of the church. The new song is the doctrines of the Reformation, coming at the end of the 42 months of the beast (1,260 days = 1,260 years of Papal rule). The proclamation of the “everlasting gospel” occurs after the fall of a great anti-christian power at the end of the age, or it is the Great Awakening: the preaching of the Wesleys, Whitefield, Edwards, and Finney. Babylon is equated with papal Rome. The judgments and harvests are the final judgment of the Eschaton.

7.2 Preterist

Preterists are split on whether Babylon represents Jerusalem (judged in 66-70 AD) or Rome (judged in the third century). There are no images here that stand out as being particular events. Babylon is obviously a symbol, an archetype for the idea of an oppressor. References to Rome in Revelation should generally also be seen as an archetype for an oppressor.

7.3 Futurist

Dispensationalists often distinguish between the gospel of the kingdom, taught up through John the Baptist, and the gospel of grace, taught in the church age; These interpreters believe “everlasting gospel” refers to the gospel of the kingdom that will apply again after the church is raptured. Other Dispensationalists and futurists rightly reject this approach as contradicting scripture about there being only one Gospel.

Babylon is seen as either the apostate church, a world government, or both. Both harvests are seen as harvests of judgment in the tribulation. This appears to be necessary since they believe the rapture has already occurred before tribulation. The text though has no indication of punishment associated with the first harvest, as it does with the second.

7.4 Idealist

The approach I took with this section was to regard it as a scene from the beginning of the church age in the first century recapitulating the previous scenes we have encountered. Other Idealist interpreters take it as taking place at the other end of the church age. In this approach, the 144,000 are the entire resurrected church and Zion stands for heaven. The sense of calling them firstfruits is that they are the portion of the eschatological harvest that is dedicated to God, the remainder of the harvest being the reprobate. This is contrary to Paul’s usage of the firstfruit metaphor in Romans 8:23 and 1 Corinthians 15:20, 23. Jesus is called the firstfruits of the resurrection, meaning the first of many. James 1:18 also refers to the early Jewish church as firstfruits.

This “futurist-idealist” approach must then shift back in time to just before the resurrection of the 144,000, treating the entreaties of the angels as “last chance” appeals. Then the time frame must shift further back to the resurrection of Christ to understand “from

now on” in Revelation 14:13, before shifting back to the eschaton for the remainder of the passage to represent the resurrection of the elect and reprobate.

Now it is true that time is somewhat nebulous in Revelation with its symbolism and tendency to recapitulate. But recapitulation occurs at boundaries between larger text units, and where time is non-linear, such as the seals trumpets not representing a specific sequence of events, it doesn’t jump back and forwards: the seals and trumpets each represent aspects, including repeating events, of the whole church age. Reading chapter 14 at the beginning of the church age makes for a more consistent understanding.

Revelation 15-16: The Seven Bowls of Wrath

“Then I saw another great and astounding sign in heaven: seven angels who have seven final plagues (they are final because in them God’s anger is completed).”

1.0 The Heavenly Scene (Revelation 15)

The Final Plagues

Rev 15:1 Then I saw another great and astounding sign in heaven: seven angels who have seven final plagues (they are final because in them God’s anger is completed).

15:2 Then I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had conquered the beast and his image and the number of his name. They were standing by the sea of glass, holding harps given to them by God. 15:3 They sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb:

“Great and astounding are your deeds,
Lord God, the All-Powerful!
Just and true are your ways,
King over the nations!

15:4 Who will not fear you, O Lord,
and glorify your name, because you alone are holy?
All nations will come and worship before you
for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

15:5 After these things I looked, and the temple (the tent of the testimony) was opened in heaven, 15:6 and the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple, dressed in clean bright linen, wearing wide golden belts around their chests. 15:7 Then one of the four living creatures gave the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God who lives forever and ever, 15:8 and the temple was filled with smoke from God’s glory and from his power. Thus no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues from the seven angels were completed.

Before the seven seals were opened, John saw a theophany scene in heaven. Chapter 15 is not strictly a theophany although it functions similarly. God is present in his temple

and his awesomeness is represented by the smoke from his glory and power filling the temple and keeping anyone from entering it.

If the temple represents the church, then the symbol of no one being able to enter the heavenly temple suggests that its resurrection has not happened yet. "Those who have conquered the beast" in verse 2 would be still disembodied souls.

Like in the previous theophany, here we have another doxology. This one is titled the Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb. Here we see yet another manifestation of the metanarrative: the two witnesses, Israel giving birth to the Gentile Church.

2.0 The Bowls of God's Wrath Compared to the Trumpets (Revelation 16)

The Bowls of God's Wrath

16:1 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple declaring to the seven angels: "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls containing God's wrath." 16:2 So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth. Then ugly and painful sores appeared on the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image.

16:3 Next, the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea and it turned into blood, like that of a corpse, and every living creature that was in the sea died.

16:4 Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and the springs of water, and they turned into blood. 16:5 Now I heard the angel of the waters saying:

"You are just – the one who is and who was,
the Holy One – because you have passed these judgments,
16:6 because they poured out the blood of your saints and prophets,
so you have given them blood to drink. They got what they deserved!"

16:7 Then I heard the altar reply, "Yes, Lord God, the All-Powerful, your judgments are true and just!"

16:8 Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was permitted to scorch people with fire. 16:9 Thus people were scorched by the terrible heat, yet they blasphemed the name of God, who has ruling authority over these plagues, and they would not repent and give him glory.

16:10 Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast so that darkness covered his kingdom, and people began to bite their tongues because of their pain. 16:11 They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their sufferings and because of their sores, but nevertheless they still refused to repent of their deeds.

16:12 Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates and dried up its water to prepare the way for the kings from the east. 16:13 Then I saw three unclean spirits that looked like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. 16:14 For they are the spirits of the demons performing signs who go out to the kings of the earth to bring them together for the battle that will take place on the great day of God, the All-Powerful.

16:15 (Look! I will come like a thief!

Blessed is the one who stays alert and does not lose his clothes so that he will not have to walk around naked and his shameful condition be seen.)

16:16 Now the spirits gathered the kings and their armies to the place that is called Armageddon in Hebrew.

16:17 Finally the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying: "It is done!" 16:18 Then there were flashes of lightning, roaring, and crashes of thunder, and there was a tremendous earthquake – an earthquake unequalled since humanity has been on the earth, so tremendous was that earthquake. 16:19 The great city was split into three parts and the cities of the nations collapsed. So Babylon the great was remembered before God, and was given the cup filled with the wine made of God's furious wrath. 16:20 Every island fled away and no mountains could be found. 16:21 And gigantic hailstones, weighing about a hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people, but they blasphemed God because of the plague of hail, since it was so horrendous

There are numerous parallels between the visions accompanying the bowls and the visions accompanying the trumpets. The parallels are not exact, but as can be seen in the table, the general trend is for an intensification of the trumpet judgments.

TABLE 1.

Bowls and Trumpets Compared

Bowls of Wrath	Trumpets
Revelation 16:2 Poured on the <u>earth</u> ; sores on people who had the mark of the beast & worshiped his image	Revelation 8:7 Hail and fire with blood thrown at the <u>earth</u> ; a third of the earth burned up.
Revelation 16:3 Poured on the <u>sea</u> ; it turned to <u>blood</u> ; every living creature in sea <u>died</u> .	Revelation 8:8-9 Mountain of burning fire thrown into the <u>sea</u> ; a third of the sea became <u>blood</u> ; a third of the sea creatures <u>died</u> .
Revelation 16:4-7 Poured on the <u>rivers and springs</u> ; they turned to blood.	Revelation 8:10-11 Burning star landed on the <u>rivers and springs</u> ; a third of them became wormwood.
Revelation 16:8-9 Poured on the <u>sun</u> ; it scorched people with terrible heat.	Revelation 8:12-13 A third of the <u>sun</u> , moon, and stars are darkened.
Revelation 16:10-11 Poured on the throne of the beast; <u>darkness</u> covered his kingdom.	Revelation 9:1-12 Locust plague (proverbial for swarming so thick they turn the sky <u>dark</u>).

TABLE 1.**Bowls and Trumpets Compared****Bowls of Wrath**

Revelation 16:12-16 Poured on the river Euphrates; river dried up to prepare way for kings of the east; three unclean spirits from dragon, beast, and false prophet bring kings of the earth together for battle at Armageddon.

Revelation 16:17-21 Pour on the air; “It is done!”; weather phenonoma and earthquake occur; Babylon split into three; cities of nations collapse; Babylon given cup filled with the wine made of God’s furious wrath; Gigantic hailstones; people blaspheme God.

Trumpets

Revelation 9:13-21 Four angels released from the Euphrates with 200,000,000 angels set free to kill a third of humanity.

Revelation 11:15-19 “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord”; temple in heaven opened; weather phenonoma and an earthquake occur.

For example, the first four of both involve the earth, sea, fresh water, and sky respectively. But whereas in the trumpets, only a third are effected, in the bowls, the effect is total. The effect isn’t always the same effect though. In the fourth ones, the trumpet darkens the sun and other celestial lights, but the bowl intensifies the sun.

Idealists in general take two approaches to understanding the finality of the bowls. One is that they represent a future intensification of the tribulation, and so represent a finality of history. Another is that they represent the finality of death for the unrepentant sinner. This latter approach is rather unconvincing. There is nothing in the vision to indicate that the scope is the individual rather than humanity, especially when compared to the scope of the trumpet judgments. People and other living creatures die in both sets of judgments, so it makes little sense to apply only the bowls judgments to an individual’s death and apply the trumpets only to warning judgments. This interpretation results more from a presuppositional bias against seeing anything resembling a futurist interpretation rather than allowing exegesis to lead where it leads.

We have some indication of an eschatological intensification of tribulation in the vision of the two witnesses (Revelation 11:1-14). They witness throughout the tribulation, the 1,260 days representing the church age, but then, in what could be described as in intensification of persecution against them, they are killed.

3.0 Armageddon

The name “Armageddon” is a transliteration of the Hebrew for “Mountain of Megiddo”. The region is an ancient battleground for Israel (Judges 5:19; 2 Kings 23:29-30; Zechariah 12:11).¹ Contrary to the usual Dispensational view, it is not at all clear that we

should see Armageddon as a literal “Word War 3” (or whatever number we are up to by then!). The fifth and sixth trumpets had images of demonic forces doing battle, so likewise here, we likely have a conflict at least in part in the spiritual or ideological realm.

The battle is describe in the future tense in Revelation 16:14. As a singular event at the culmination of the intensification, it should probably be linked the the events surrounding the death of the two witnesses at the end of 1,260 days (the church age) that we encountered in Revelation 11:7. In fact, “war” is also used to describe the conflict resulting in their deaths in that passage.

4.0 Other Interpretations

4.1 Historicist

The first six bowl judgments are events surrounding the downfall of Papal power in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, beginning with the French Revolution. The seventh bowl is still future.

4.2 Preterist

The preterist views see the judgments on either Jerusalem (70 AD) or Rome (476 AD). The early date preterists can site many parallels between the horrors of the bowl judgments and the catastrophes surrounding the fall of Jerusalem described by Josephus. As those events would be fresh on everyone’s minds in 95 AD, not only because of the recentness of the event, but because Josephus’ *Antiquities* was just published about five years earlier, the parallels are probably intentional. While the preterists are wrong about the bowl judgments being about the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in particular, those events are referenced as an archetype for the symbols in the vision.

4.3 Futurist

Speculation on what in particular various symbols mean in terms of specific future events is highly varied to the point that it should be clear it isn’t profitable. For example, does the water turning to blood mean a literal transubstantiation? Or is it a hyperbolic statement meaning the water is tinted red by the blood of the slain? Or is it an allegorical statement referring to water tinted red by algae blooms (red tide) or pollution? Or is it entirely a metaphor having nothing to do with water literally being actually colored red at all?

1. “Armageddon,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary*

Revelation 17-18: The Whore of Babylon

The seven headed dragon is Satan, the seven headed beast is anti-Christian government in the image of Satan, the two horned beast, anti-Christian religion in the service of the anti-Christian government, and the whore of Babylon is....

1.0 Who or What is the Whore of Babylon?

Numerous interpretations have been made of the Whore of Babylon:

- The Roman Catholic Church (Historicist, Futurist)
- The Imperial City of Rome in contrast to the Empire (late date Preterist)
- Jerusalem (early date Preterist)
- Coalition of apostate churches headquartered in Rome (Futurist)
- Human civilization (Futurist)
- Literal reconstructed city of Babylon (Futurist)¹
- Rome, but Rome itself being symbolic (Idealist)
- The world and its lusts (Idealist)

By carefully sifting through the text, I think we can come to a reasonably certain understanding. Recall first the other beasts we have seen. First, there was the red dragon that is Satan. Then there was the seven headed, ten horned beast (in Satan's image). It's symbolism came from the symbols Daniel used for four world empires, and represents political power in the service of Satan. Then came a two horned beast with the voice of a dragon that directed worship to the seven headed beast. Called a false prophet elsewhere, it represents false religion supporting the anti-christian political power. Now we see a whore whose name is Babylon. We will see that she represents materialism. She is the marketplace of the world, alluring the world into spiritual adultery with the false gods of greed and avarice.

1. Those that take this approach generally make a distinction between the Babylon of chapter 17 and of chapter 18. This interpretation only applies to chapter 18 then.

2.0 The Whore of Babylon

2.1 The Whore Introduced (Revelation 17:1-6)

The Great Prostitute and the Beast

Rev 17:1 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke to me. "Come," he said, "I will show you the condemnation and punishment of the great prostitute who sits on many waters, 17:2 with whom the kings of the earth committed sexual immorality and the earth's inhabitants got drunk with the wine of her immorality." 17:3 So he carried me away in the Spirit to a wilderness, and there I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. 17:4 Now the woman was dressed in purple and scarlet clothing, and adorned with gold, precious stones, and pearls. She held in her hand a golden cup filled with detestable things and unclean things from her sexual immorality. 17:5 On her forehead was written a name, a mystery: "Babylon the Great, the Mother of prostitutes and of the detestable things of the earth." 17:6 I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of those who testified to Jesus. I was greatly astounded when I saw her.

In the Bible, worship of false gods is likened to adultery. Recall, for example, the story of Hosea and his wife in Hosea 1-3. That is the meaning behind the whoredom here, which, while certainly includes illicit sex, is not limited to it.

The beast she sits on is the seven headed, ten horned beast we have previously encountered. A new detail is added: the beast is scarlet (a deep red) color, further linking its appearance to the appearance of the red dragon. Sitting on the beast represents the fact that economic activity depends on the stability of government.

Her clothing and jewelry are representations of ostentatious wealth.

Symbolism of the other beasts used Rome as an archetype, so why Babylon here? In reality, Rome is probably still the archetype. To the Jews, Rome was another Babylon and could be describe as such. When Peter refers the church in Babylon in his closing in 1 Peter 5:13, he almost certainly means Rome and not the literal Babylon.

She is drunk on the blood of the saints and of those who testified to Jesus. Economic concerns (that is, greed) can motivate persecution. There is much money to be made at immorality, and the Christian faith can threaten that livelihood. For a biblical example see Acts 19:23-41. Paul's impact on the trade in silver shrines for Artemis triggered a riot in Ephesus.

2.2 The Beast Interpreted (Revelation 17:7-14)

A common feature in apocalyptic literature, both canonical and cultic, is for a "guide" angel to provide some interpretation of the symbols, though often, somewhat cryptic terms.

2.2.1 The beast was, is not, and is to come (Revelation 17:7-8)

Rev 17:7 But the angel said to me, "Why are you astounded? I will interpret for you the mystery of the woman and of the beast with the seven heads and ten horns that carries

her. 17:8 The beast you saw was, and is not, but is about to come up from the abyss and then go to destruction. The inhabitants of the earth – all those whose names have not been written in the book of life since the foundation of the world – will be astounded when they see that the beast was, and is not, but is to come.

By themselves, these words are rather confusing. However, they would seem to echo back to Revelation 13 where the beast received a seemingly fatal wound to one of its heads, then recovered. This alluded to the fatal wound the Roman Empire seemed to receive when Nero died and it was plunged into a civil war in the year with four emperors.

Throughout history, every empire has eventually fallen. Yet the beast has not yet been defeated. From every fatal wound the beast comes back as yet another persecuting empire.

2.2.2 Seven Mountains (Revelation 17:9a)

Rev 17:9a (This requires a mind that has wisdom.) The seven heads are seven mountains the woman sits on.

The reference to seven mountains is ambiguously a reference to Rome, the “City on Seven Hills” of the ancient poets. But remember that Rome is an archetype. The idea is that of a world power, of which Rome was the immediate example.

2.2.3 Seven Kings (Revelation 17:9b-11)

Rev 17:9b They are also seven kings: 17:10 five have fallen; one is, and the other has not yet come, but whenever he does come, he must remain for only a brief time. 17:11 The beast that was, and is not, is himself an eighth king and yet is one of the seven, and is going to destruction.

This passage is very cryptic. Daniel slipped between referring to kings and kingdoms freely, and so here the seven kings are probably kingdoms. The five that were past would be the three from Daniel (Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece) and perhaps Egypt and Assyria from earlier. The one that is would be Rome. It is not clear what the seventh would be nor how the beast would be an eight, yet one of the seven. But the number of future kings are not limited to these...

2.2.4 Ten Kings (Revelation 17:12-14)

Rev 17:12 The ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but will receive ruling authority as kings with the beast for one hour. 17:13 These kings have a single intent, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. 17:14 They will make war with the Lamb, but the Lamb will conquer them, because he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those accompanying the Lamb are the called, chosen, and faithful.”

The ten horns are yet ten more kings. Trying to speculate which kingdoms of history correspond to each of these kings is a futile effort. We can get the general gist though. The beast will be active through many future kingdoms. In fact the numbers here are probably more symbolic than limiting the number of kingdoms to some specific number. Just when one seems to have died another will spring up in its place.

2.3 The Whore in the Hands of the Beast (Revelation 17:15-18)

Rev 17:15 Then the angel said to me, “The waters you saw (where the prostitute is seated) are peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages. 17:16 The ten horns that you saw, and the beast – these will hate the prostitute and make her desolate and naked. They will consume her flesh and burn her up with fire. 17:17 For God has put into their minds to carry out his purpose by making a decision to give their royal power to the beast until the words of God are fulfilled. 17:18 As for the woman you saw, she is the great city that has sovereignty over the kings of the earth.”

In spite of the fact that the Beast and Babylon are on the same side (that is, evil), the beast hates the whore. This is a reality we see in history. Economic prosperity creates an educated middle class and a powerful aristocracy of powerful business interests. Both are the enemy of despots everywhere. We saw this in Saddam Hussein executing anyone in his inner circle who showed any competence. We see this in Africa where governments institute poorly thought out “reforms” and actively resist outside groups helping to feed their own starving population. Verse 17 says this is God’s doing. Think also about what Jesus said about a house divided:

Mk 3:24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom will not be able to stand.
3:25 If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 3:26 And if Satan rises against himself and is divided, he is not able to stand and his end has come.
[NET]

3.0 The Destruction of Babylon

3.1 Fallen is Babylon (Revelation 18:1-3)

Babylon is Destroyed

Rev 18:1 After these things I saw another angel, who possessed great authority, coming down out of heaven, and the earth was lit up by his radiance. 18:2 He shouted with a powerful voice:

“Fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great!
She has become a lair for demons,
a haunt for every unclean spirit,
a haunt for every unclean bird,
a haunt for every unclean and detested beast.
18:3 For all the nations have fallen from
the wine of her immoral passion,
and the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality with her,
and the merchants of the earth have gotten rich from the power of her sensual behavior.”

We have another declaration of the fall of Babylon. If this means her destruction, it is a prophetic perfect. On the other hand it may indicate her moral fall. Note that the description of her effect on the nations is that they have fallen as well. This would parallel the fall of Satan as well. Regardless of the intention of this statement, it is clear that she is morally fallen and that she will fall into destruction as well.

3.2 Come Out (Revelation 18:4-8)

18:4 Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, “Come out of her, my people, so you will not take part in her sins and so you will not receive her plagues, 18:5 because her sins have piled up all the way to heaven and God has remembered her crimes. 18:6 Repay her the same way she repaid others; pay her back double corresponding to her deeds. In the cup she mixed, mix double the amount for her. 18:7 As much as she exalted herself and lived in sensual luxury, to this extent give her torment and grief because she said to herself, ‘I rule as queen and am no widow; I will never experience grief!’ 18:8 For this reason, she will experience her plagues in a single day: disease, mourning, and famine, and she will be burned down with fire, because the Lord God who judges her is powerful!”

God’s people are told to come out of Babylon. Jesus warning to leave Jerusalem before its destruction is an archetype for this figure of speech (Mark 13:14, Eusebius *Church History* 3.5.3). The meaning here is not to avoid physical co-location (“since you would then have to get of the world” as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 5:10). Rather it is to avoid the temptations and sins that she allures the world to.

Her destruction will be sudden, “in a single day”. Suddenness and unexpectedness of destruction are frequent in judgment prophecies.

3.3 The Grief of the Kings and Merchants (Revelation 18:9-20)

Rev 18:9 Then the kings of the earth who committed immoral acts with her and lived in sensual luxury with her will weep and wail for her when they see the smoke from the fire that burns her up. 18:10 They will stand a long way off because they are afraid of her torment, and will say,

“Woe, woe, O great city,
Babylon the powerful city!
For in a single hour your doom has come!”

18:11 Then the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn for her because no one buys their cargo any longer – 18:12 cargo such as gold, silver, precious stones, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth, all sorts of things made of citron wood, all sorts of objects made of ivory, all sorts of things made of expensive wood, bronze, iron and marble, 18:13 cinnamon, spice, incense, perfumed ointment, frankincense, wine, olive oil and costly flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and four-wheeled carriages, slaves and human lives.

18:14 (The ripe fruit you greatly desired
has gone from you,
and all your luxury and splendor
have gone from you –
they will never ever be found again!)

18:15 The merchants who sold these things, who got rich from her, will stand a long way off because they are afraid of her torment. They will weep and mourn, 18:16 saying,

“Woe, woe, O great city –
dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet clothing,
and adorned with gold, precious stones, and pearls –
18:17 because in a single hour such great wealth has been destroyed!”

And every ship's captain, and all who sail along the coast – seamen, and all who make their living from the sea, stood a long way off 18:18 and began to shout when they saw the smoke from the fire that burned her up, “Who is like the great city?” 18:19 And they threw dust on their heads and were shouting with weeping and mourning,

“Woe, Woe, O great city –
in which all those who had ships on the sea got rich from her wealth –
because in a single hour she has been destroyed!”
18:20 (Rejoice over her, O heaven,
and you saints and apostles and prophets,
for God has pronounced judgment against her on your behalf!)

When she is destroyed, the kings and merchants that had their “affairs” with her will mourn. It is here that we glean her identity as the economic lusts of materialism. See the list of precious cargoes that she led people to through her allurements in verses 12-14: gold, silver, precious stones, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth, etc. etc...

3.4 Destruction Symbolized by an Angel (Revelation 18:21-24)

Rev 18:21 Then one powerful angel picked up a stone like a huge millstone, threw it into the sea, and said,

“With this kind of sudden violent force
Babylon the great city will be thrown down
and it will never be found again!
18:22 And the sound of the harpists, musicians,
flute players, and trumpeters
will never be heard in you again.
No craftsman who practices any trade
will ever be found in you again;
the noise of a mill will never be heard in you again.
18:23 Even the light from a lamp
will never shine in you again!
The voices of the bridegroom and his bride
will never be heard in you again.
For your merchants were the tycoons of the world,
because all the nations were deceived by your magic spells!
18:24 The blood of the saints and prophets was found in her,
along with the blood of all those who had been killed on the earth.”

Finally an angel symbolizes the destruction of Babylon by throwing a huge stone into the sea, where it would vanish suddenly without a trace. This image may echo Daniel 2:44-45, but the symbolism is different. In Daniel the stone is what does the destroying, while in Revelation, it is the thing thrown down to disappear under the sea.

Revelation 19-20: The Millennium

This is the passage around which all Millennial issues orbit. A comprehensive discussion of all the issues surrounding this passage is not practical. Whole books have been devoted to the subject.

1.0 Definitions

This section is where controversy and interest in Revelation really centers: What and When is the Millennium? Surprisingly, one's answer to that question is largely independent of how Revelation 1-18 is interpreted. Nearly all combinations of Historicist, Preterist, Futurist, and Idealist with Premillennialist, Amillennialist, and Postmillennialist can be found in the commentaries. That said, a few combinations are the most common encountered today: Futurist-Premillennialist, Idealist-Amillennialist, and Preterist-Postmillennialist.

Before discussing this further, let's review the definitions of these Millennialist terms. The term Millennium means 1,000 years. "The" millennium refers to the 1,000 years Satan is bound in Revelation 20:1-6. There are interpreters of all three Millennial schools that acknowledge that the 1,000 years may be symbolic of a long period of time, and not be literally 365,242¹ literal 24-hour days, while others insist on such a literal understanding.

All three schools begin a historic era termed the church age with the resurrection of Jesus. This age extends through today and on into the future. The three schools differ regarding what terminates the church age and what comes afterwards.

The term "Amillennialist" is a misnomer. It means literally one who believes in no millennium. What Amillennialism actually holds is that the millennium is a symbol for the whole church age. Satan is bound now, and the church age AKA millennium will end when he is released a short time, then thrown into Hell and everyone is resurrected to be either cast into Hell or live with Christ forevermore.

1. Or 365,243 days if a third century leap year falls in the 1,000 years (Gregorian calendar)

Premillennialists and Postmillennialists believe that the millennium is in the future. The “Pre-” and “Post-” prefixes refer to the timing of the physical return (AKA the second coming) of Jesus Christ being either before or after, respectively, the millennium.

Thus premillennialists believe Jesus will return to earth, resurrect the saints, reign over a literal political kingdom for 1,000 years, then resurrect everyone else, sending the reprobate to Hell and dwelling with the redeemed eternally. Dispensational Premillennialists are a particular offshoot of this school that was begun in the 1830’s by John Nelson Darby. The main distinctions of this view are that there is a pre-tribulation rapture seven years before the beginning of the millennium, that the Jews are eternally separate from the Church, and that then the traditional Jewish worship with a temple and sacrifice will be restored. This Johnny-come-lately viewpoint is unfortunately the most common found in Evangelical Christianity today, popularized in large part by the Scofield Reference Bible of the early 20th century.

Postmillennialists believe that the millennium comes between the church age and the physical second coming of Jesus. Either by the gradual growth of the church or a great revival, a “silver age” will exist on a Christianized earth before Jesus returns, establishing the eternal “golden age”. The Puritans combined this view with the Historicist interpretation of Revelation 1-17, while the modern Reconstructionist movement combines it with the Preterist interpretation of those earlier chapters. My own view combines it with the Idealist view.

Some other variations exist. Some who identify the millennium with the church age like the amillennialists also believe in a gradual Christianization of the earth like post-millennialists. I prefer the term Optimistic Amillennialism for this school, but one finds this school referred to as Postmillennialism as well, which can be rather confusing.

The blatantly heretical Full Preterist interpretation of Revelation regards all of Revelation to have been fulfilled by 70 AD, and thus spiritualizes the references to resurrection. They don’t fit into any of the three Millennial views outlined above.

2.0 Literary Structure

Revelation 12-20 has a chiasmic structure. That is, after touching on A, B, C, and D, it then reverses the pattern and touches on D, C, B, and A. In this case, the points touched upon are the diabolical forces. First we are introduced to them acting out during the 3.5 year tribulation:

- The Red Dragon - Revelation 12,
- The Seven Headed Beast - Revelation 13:1-10,
- The Two Horned Beast - Revelation 13:11-18¹, and
- The Whore of Babylon - Revelation 17.

1. Revelation 14-16 are an interlude in this sequence. Interludes occur other sequences as well.

Then in unwinding the sequence, we see the destruction of each in reverse order:

- Babylon - Revelation 18,
- The Beast and False Prophet - Revelation 19:11-19, and
- The Dragon - Revelation 20.

We will look back at this structure when we discuss whether the binding of the dragon recapitulates the church age or deals strictly with the end of the church age.

3.0 Celebrations in Heaven (Revelation 19:1-10)

3.1 The Destruction of Babylon (Revelation 19:1-5)

Rev 19:1 After these things I heard what sounded like the loud voice of a vast throng in heaven, saying,

“Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,
19:2 because his judgments are true and just.

For he has judged the great prostitute
who corrupted the earth with her sexual immorality,
and has avenged the blood of his servants poured out by her own hands!”

19:3 Then a second time the crowd shouted, “Hallelujah!” The smoke rises from her forever and ever. 19:4 The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures threw themselves to the ground and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne, saying: “Amen! Hallelujah!”

19:5 Then a voice came from the throne, saying:

“Praise our God
all you his servants,
and all you who fear Him,
both the small and the great!”

The destruction of Babylon is celebrated in heaven. Since the “vast throng in heaven” is not identified, we should not speculate on their identity. They could be angels, or in a Dispensationalism, the resurrected church.

3.2 Wedding Celebration of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6-10)

The Wedding Celebration of the Lamb

Rev 19:6 Then I heard what sounded like the voice of a vast throng, like the roar of many waters and like loud crashes of thunder. They were shouting:

“Hallelujah!
For the Lord our God, the All-Powerful, reigns!
19:7 Let us rejoice and exult
and give him glory,
because the wedding celebration of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready.

19:8 She was permitted to be dressed in bright, clean, fine linen” (for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints).

19:9 Then the angel said to me, “Write the following: Blessed are those who are invited to the banquet at the wedding celebration of the Lamb!” He also said to me, “These are the true words of God.” 19:10 So I threw myself down at his feet to worship him, but he said, “Do not do this! I am only a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony about Jesus. Worship God, for the testimony about Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

Continuing the metaphor started by describing Babylon as a whore, the church is described here as a bride. She has made her self ready for her husband. The metaphor is mixed, creating some confusion. In verse 9, we read “Blessed are those who are invited to the banquet at the wedding celebration of the Lamb”. If the bride is the church, who are these others invited? Jesus used this wedding guest image (Matthew 9:15; 22:2-14) to represent those called to be part of the kingdom, that is, Christians. It would seem that both the bride and the guests both symbolize the redeemed. If some distinction between members of the redeemed is intended, it is far from clear what that might be, and so I will not speculate on that here.

It would appear that John misunderstood what the angel meant when he said “These are the true words of God”, thinking he was being spoken to by God. The angel quickly corrected John when he tried to worship the angel. This passage is apologetically significant. An admirer of John writing this as a forgery would hardly have invented such an episode about his beloved hero. Nor would it be likely that John would create such an episode about himself if he were writing a fiction.

4.0 Defeat of the Beast and False Prophet (Revelation 19:11-21)

The Son of God Goes to War

Rev 19:11 Then I saw heaven opened and here came a white horse! The one riding it was called “Faithful” and “True,” and with justice he judges and goes to war. 19:12 His eyes are like a fiery flame and there are many diadem crowns on his head. He has a name written that no one knows except himself. 19:13 He is dressed in clothing dipped in blood, and he is called the Word of God. 19:14 The armies that are in heaven, dressed in white, clean, fine linen, were following him on white horses. 19:15 From his mouth extends a sharp sword, so that with it he can strike the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod, and he stomps the winepress of the furious wrath of God, the All-Powerful. 19:16 He has a name written on his clothing and on his thigh: “King of kings and Lord of lords.”

19:17 Then I saw one angel standing in the sun, and he shouted in a loud voice to all the birds flying high in the sky:

“Come, gather around for the great banquet of God,
19:18 to eat your fill of the flesh of kings,
the flesh of generals,
the flesh of powerful people,
the flesh of horses and those who ride them,

and the flesh of all people, both free and slave,
and small and great!”

19:19 Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to do battle with the one who rode the horse and with his army. 19:20 Now the beast was seized, and along with him the false prophet who had performed the signs on his behalf – signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. Both of them were thrown alive into the lake of fire burning with sulfur. 19:21 The others were killed by the sword that extended from the mouth of the one who rode the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves with their flesh.

We’ve encountered the symbol of a white horse before. Here it is unambiguously clear that the one riding is the Messiah, the divine *Logos* of God. The White of his horse and his armies symbolize purity. The clothing dipped (or perhaps soaked or drenched) in blood may be a martial image. Ancient hand-to-hand combat was fought with swords, so the soldiers would be covered in blood. In fact, the weapon he strikes the nations with is a sword. On the other hand the blood could be the Messiah’s own.

The sword comes from his mouth. This indicates we are not dealing with a literal martial battle here, but one of theologies and ideologies. We’ve seen this sword referred to earlier as a double-edged sword. But, he also “stomps the winepress of the furious wrath of God”. We’ve seen this image explicitly in Revelation 14, and implicitly in the judgments of the seals, trumpets, and bowls of wrath.

We saw an intensification of the conflict and the battle of Armeggedon with the bowl judgments, and we saw the intensification of the conflict in the killing of the two witnesses at the end of the 1,260 days in chapter 11. Here we see again the kings and armies assembled for battle. The conclusion of the battle is revealed in greater detail: The beast (the anti-Christian political powers) and the false prophet (the anti-Christian religious powers) are cast into the lake of fire, that is, Hell, and their armies are killed. Since the weapon (the sword from his mouth) is likely a symbol, it is hard to tell to what degree the death and carnage here should be understood literally. The imagery here reflects that found in Ezekiel 38-39.

5.0 Defeat of the Dragon (Revelation 20:1-10)

Except perhaps for Genesis 1, more ink has been spilled on these ten verses than any other passage in the Bible. I have no delusions that I am going to settle the issue here. I will present what is frankly my opinion. That fact alone presents two strikes against this. First it’s mine, and second it’s an opinion. Good Christians of every age have had a variety of opinions on understanding this passage, and the various opinions have waxed and waned in popularity as though they were a brand of shoes or a hair style. Thus one should approach this passage with humility and only with “fear and trembling” approach any single interpretation.

I have made several rewrites of this section. The number of issues that it brings up is overwhelming. There is no simple way to arrange the information.

5.1 Satan Bound (Revelation 20:1-3)

The Thousand Year Reign

Rev 20:1 Then I saw an angel descending from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the abyss and a huge chain. 20:2 He seized the dragon – the ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan – and tied him up for a thousand years. 20:3 The angel then threw him into the abyss and locked and sealed it so that he could not deceive the nations until the one thousand years were finished. (After these things he must be released for a brief period of time.)

The Abyss. We see a downward trajectory for Satan. First he is in heaven, then cast down to the earth. Now he is relegated to the abyss. This would seem, then, to be in sequence after the tribulation. Recall the chiasmic structure discussed above. The first half deals with the dragon, beast, false prophet, and Babylon in their roles during the three and one-half year tribulation. Then, in reverse order, we deal with their final disposition at the end of the tribulation. This is contrary to the amillennial position, which equates the 1,000 years with the three and one-half years.

Recall in Revelation 11 the sequence of events after the two witnesses are killed. They lie dead for three and one-half days (that is, the public proclamation of the Gospel is silenced), then they are resurrected, 7,000 people are killed by an earthquake (a symbolic number chosen to be a negative image of the 7,000 remnant in Elijah's day), and finally something unique happens that doesn't happen after any of the other judgments: "the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven". Instead of a blaspheming of God, a massive revival occurs!

Deception. Satan is specifically said to be kept from deceiving the nations (not the church) during the 1,000 years. That is, a previous situation is brought to an end. Christ warned about deception in the Olivet Discourse (Mark 13:5ff and parallels). Paul said:

2 Co 4:3 But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing, 4:4 among whom the god of this age has blinded the minds of those who do not believe so they would not see the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God.

In Colossians 2:8 "deceitful philosophy" is attributed in part to "elemental spirits", that is, demonic forces. In Revelation itself, the role of the beast with two horns is to be a false prophet and deceive the nations into worshiping the image of the seven headed beast (Revelation 13:11-18, especially verse 14 "he deceived those who live on the earth"). Babylon also deceived the nations (Revelation 18:23) by her magic (Satanic) spells.

The straightforward reading of Revelation is that this deception ends with the destruction of Babylon, the false prophet, and the beast. Satan is effectively bound then (as spirit, we should understand the chains as figurative, of course), lacking the means through which he can deceive the nations. It is a common saying that if Satan is bound now (the amillennial position), then the chain is too long.

5.2 The First Resurrection and Second Death (Revelation 20:4-6)

Rev 20:4 Then I saw thrones and seated on them were those who had been given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. These had not worshiped the beast or his image and had refused to receive his mark on their forehead or hand. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. 20:5 (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were finished.) This is the first resurrection. 20:6 Blessed and holy is the one who takes part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

Introduction. If we could understand what the first resurrection is and who is resurrected, it would go a long way to determining what the millennium is. Alas a definitive answer escapes us. Gather ten scholars in a room, and you'll end up with twenty interpretations. I cannot hope to give a comprehensive overview of all the interpretations of this passage, nor a rigorous proof that my opinion is right. None the less, this is scripture, and so I shall wrestle with it as best as I can.

The Martyrs. Martyrs have already been encountered in Revelation. When the fifth seal was opened, John "saw under the altar the souls of those who had been violently killed because of the word of God and because of the testimony they had given" [Revelation 6:9]. They are described in almost identical words here.

The wording "souls of those..." indicates he is seeing disembodied souls. While the word "souls" can mean in-the-flesh "people", we cannot translate this as "people of those..."; that would make no sense. They are described both positively and negatively (that is, in terms of what they are and what they are not). ASV and NASB are in error here in that they transform the relative clause into a second object ("I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded ... and those who had not worshipped the beast"). See D. E. Aune's commentary, where he ponders whether one or two sets of martyrs (beheaded for two different reasons) is in sight here, not whether martyrs and someone else are listed:

One problem is whether two types of martyrs are in view in v 4bc, as Bousset ([1906] 437) claims, or just a single group. It is more natural to construe the text as referring to a single group of martyrs, who had been executed for both positive reasons (v 4b: their obedience to the commands of God and their witness to Jesus) and negative reasons (v 4c: their refusal to worship the beast or its image and to receive its brand on their foreheads and right hands).¹

A legitimate question is to ask who these martyrs represent. That is, might they be symbolic of more than literal martyrs? In both passages referring to martyrs, great emphasis is given to the violence of their execution. In Revelation 6, they are under an altar, representing a sacrificial death, and not just the death that comes to all men, and were "violently killed". In our current passage, a specific, unambiguous, mode of execution is called out (although it likely stands for all modes of execution). Absent strong evidence to the contrary, I'm inclined to think actual literal martyrdom is referred to here.

1. D. E. Aune. 2002. *Vol. 52C: Word Biblical Commentary : Revelation 17-22*. p. 1088

came to life. The Greek verb here can be ingressive (came to life)¹ or constative (lived).² That it is referred to as a resurrection in verse 5, in my opinion, pretty much settles the issue that we should read it as an ingressive, as most translations in fact do.

first resurrection. One doesn't usually describe something as first unless there is also a second. While the term second resurrection does not occur in Revelation, it is certainly implied. First we have the martyr come to life and reign with Christ for 1,000 years. Then we have the statement "The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were finished." Some writers have attempted to read this to indicate only that they didn't "come to life" during the 1,000 years, but doesn't say anything about their coming to life afterwards.³ This is essentially the same exegesis of Matthew 1:24b-25a that Roman Catholics use to argue for the perpetual virginity of Mary that Protestants, rightly, disparage: "He took his wife, but did not have marital relations with her until she gave birth to a son". Further since Revelation 20:13 specifically refers to a resurrection event that includes those who are judged and cast into the lake of fire, it is pretty clear that a second resurrection is implied at the end of the millennium.

second death. The second death is explicitly defined as being cast into the lake of fire in verse 24. It is often contrasted with the first death, the physical death that all but the last generation will experience, and so referred to as a spiritual or figurative death. This dichotomy is then often linked to the first and second resurrection to treat them as different in kind as well. I'm not convinced this distinction between the two deaths is as strong as often supposed.

First, it is important to note that the person does not cease to exist after either death. After the first death, the soul is torn from the body and the body then decays. But at the resurrection, body and soul are reunited. Even the reprobate become living, breathing, walking around live people. But then they are cast into the lake of fire. Is it unreasonable to describe what happens to the body in the second death then as a literal death? Whatever it is that happens to the body, chemically, physically, or otherwise, it certainly isn't experiencing anything reasonably called a life.

the rest of the dead. The dead are divided into two explicitly disjoint subsets: the martyred dead and the rest of the dead. The former comes to life in a resurrection at the beginning of the millennium, the later in a resurrection at the end of the millennium. Given those terms, it seems unreasonable to assume the two resurrections are different in nature, and given the doctrine of the physical resurrection from the rest of scripture (not to mention Revelation 20:13), that resurrection is physical in nature.

How does this fit in with the rapture, that is, the transformation of the living that Paul refers to in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17?

1. See note in NET.

2. James A. Hugues. 1973. "Revelation 20:4-6 and the Question of the Millennium". *Westminster Theological Journal* 35:3 Spring 1973. p. 289-290.

3. James A. Hugues. 1973. "Revelation 20:4-6 and the Question of the Millennium". *Westminster Theological Journal* 35:3 Spring 1973.

1 Th 4:13 Now we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest who have no hope. 4:14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, so also we believe that God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep as Christians. 4:15 For we tell you this by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will surely not go ahead of those who have fallen asleep. 4:16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 4:17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be suddenly caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord.

Those “who have died in the Lord” is broader than just martyrs, so the event that Paul refers to must correspond to the resurrection that happens at the end of the millennium.

reign. revelation does not explain what it means for the martyrs to reign with Christ. It does not tell us if the resurrected martyred are translated to heaven to reign with Christ there, or whether they are on earth, walking around like those who were resurrected when Jesus rose from the dead (Matthew 27:52-53). It is a mystery that will be resolved when it happens.

We do see, however, in Revelation 22:4-5, that reigning is something that the entire church does after the millennium (“and they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. Night will be no more, and they will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, because the Lord God will shine on them, and they will reign forever and ever”). I think we can safely conclude from this that the reigning is not a simple political reign as envisioned by Dispensationalists.

5.3 Satan Cast into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:7-10)

Satan's Final Defeat

Rev 20:7 Now when the thousand years are finished, Satan will be released from his prison 20:8 and will go out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to bring them together for the battle. They are as numerous as the grains of sand in the sea. 20:9 They went up on the broad plain of the earth and encircled the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and devoured them completely. 20:10 And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet are too, and they will be tormented there day and night forever and ever.

Deceive. The deception that had been interrupted for the thousand years is permitted again. The immediate result is opposition to Christ's saints. The target is the camp of the saints. No mention is made of Christ being physically present. Instead, rescue comes from heaven, and the devil is thrown into the lake of fire where the beast and false prophet had been cast at the beginning of the millennium.

Gog and Magog. There was already one allusion in chapter 19 to Ezekiel 38-39. Gog and Magog here is one. In Ezekiel, Gog is the prince of Magog who is prophesied to attack Israel and be miraculously and thoroughly defeated. While a detailed exegesis of the Ezekiel passage is beyond the scope of this study, we need to note that there are two interpretations of it in its own context. One is that predicts a historical conflict that has

already taken place, usually the conflict with Antiochus IV. The other is that it is identical to the eschatological conflict here.

If the Ezekiel passage refers directly to a historical conflict, as seems very likely as it makes no explicitly eschatological references, then the allusions in Revelation are invoking the memory of that conflict by using symbols derived from that passage for the purpose of assuring us of the power of God to defeat his saint's enemies. He accomplished his purpose in the past and can do it again in the future.

5.4 Amillennialism

I have present a post-millennial view above. Within Reformed churches, Amillennialism is actually more common. Amillennialism does not reach absolute consensus on every point of interpretation, so I'll touch on some of the main alternatives of exegesis by surveying a small handful of representative writers, as well as critique their views. I make no pretensions that this survey is comprehensive.

William Hendriksen¹. Hendriksen argues for chapter 20 being a recapitulation of the previous chapter. He writes, "the connection between chapters 19 and 20 is similar to that between chapters 11 and 12."² However, recall the structural relationships we noted within chapters 4-11 and how chapter 12 began anew with a representation of the incarnation. Such a break is not in fact obvious at chapter 20. In fact, we've noted the chiasmic structure of chapters 12-20 that links chapter 20 with events that specifically take place at the end of the 1,260 days.

Hendriksen draws a number of parallels between chapters 11-14 and chapter 20 that he believes illustrate that the 1,260 days and the millennium are the same time period, reproduced below:³

TABLE 1.

Revelation 11-14 Compared With Revelation 20

Revelation 11-14

12:5-12. In connection with Christ's birth, death, ascension, and coronation, Satan is hurled down from heaven. His accusations lose every semblance of justice.

11:2-6; 12:14ff. A long period of power and witness-bearing for the Church, which is nourished 'away from the face of the serpent (Satan)'. The devil's influence is curbed.

Revelation 20

20:1-3. Satan is bound and cast into the abyss; his power over the nations is curbed. Instead of the nations conquering the Church, the Church begins to conquer (evangelize) the nations.

20:2. A long period of power for the Church, Satan having been bound. He remains bound for a thousand years, that is, during this entire gospel age. (In heaven the souls of the redeemed are living and reigning with Christ, 20:4-6.)

1. William Hendriksen. 1967. *More Than Conquerors*.

2. p. 184

TABLE 1.

Revelation 11-14 Compared With Revelation 20

Revelation 11-14	Revelation 20
11:7ff; 13:7. A very brief period of most severe persecution. This is Satan's little season; the most terrible and also the final manifestation of the persecuting power of antichrist.	20:7ff. A very brief period of most severe persecution; Satan marshals the army of Gog and Magog against the Church. This is the Battle of Har-Megedon.
11:17,18; 14:14ff. The one and only second coming of Christ in judgment.	20:11ff. The one and only second coming of Christ in judgment.

We may critique these parallels by noting that most are more accurately contrasts. When Satan was “hurled down from heaven”, his domain was specifically cited as being the earth (Revelation 12:12 “But woe to the earth and the sea because the devil has come down to you”). When Satan is bound, it is in the abyss, a further removal downward. The separation between the church and Satan in Revelation 12:14ff is by means of the woman being translated away from Satan, but in Revelation 20, its by Satan being translated away from the earth. After the showdown in Revelation 11:7ff and the witnesses are killed, some sort of revival event happens that results in the survivors giving “glory to the God of heaven”. In Revelation 20, the final battle is cut short before it begins. Gog and Magog gather around the saints, and fire comes down from heaven and consumes them.

Hendriksen exegetes the participants in the first resurrection as two groups:

First of all, all the souls of the martyrs, ‘those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus’. Secondly, all other believers who died in their faith, ‘such as worshipped not the beast’, *etc.*

Hendriksen appears to be quoting the ASV, which we noted earlier, mistranslates the relative clause. Most other interpreters resort to spiritualizing the martyrs instead to achieve the same exegesis.

James A. Hughes¹. Hughes takes the common position that the first resurrection refers to the ascent of the elect souls to heaven to be with Christ at death. This of course requires expanding the reference to martyrs to include all the elect, a questionable exegesis in itself. But, he also proceeds to interpret numerous other references to resurrection in the New Testament to refer to this spiritual resurrection, and not the physical resurrection. Space and time do not permit examining each of these, but note that the effect of such unrestrained spiritualizing comes awfully close to full preterism.²

3. *ibid.* p. 184.

1. James A. Hugues. 1973. “Revelation 20:4-6 and the Question of the Millennium”. *Westminster Theological Journal* 35:3 Spring 1973.

2. See “1 Corinthians 15: Physical Resurrection” on page 1.

Hugues interprets the resurrection of the rest of the dead to be a non-event, using the exegesis discussed above that is analogous to the Roman Catholic exegesis for the perpetual virginity of Mary.

Norman Shepherd¹. Shepherd looks to Paul's use of resurrection as metaphor in Colossians 2:12, 3:1, and Ephesians 2:6 to interpret the first resurrection of Revelation 20:4 to represent the "raising up" the Christian experiences at baptism (which of course leads to an amillennial understanding of the thousand years). Seeking how symbols are used elsewhere in scripture is a good hermeneutic to use, so this is a quite attractive interpretation.

However, as we saw in the symbolism of the word "harvest", where we saw it used three different ways by Jesus, finding a symbolic use one place in scripture is not necessarily a guarantee of its interpretation in another. The big problem here, as I see it, is the questionable exegesis of the "rest of the dead" clause that we've already encountered. That is, Shepherd understands the clause "The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were finished" to have an implicit "nor did they do so afterwards either". We've already discussed the drawbacks of this approach.

Meredith B. Kline². Kline argues that just as the "first" and second deaths are not a sequence of like events, the first and "second" resurrections are similarly two things of a different nature. That is, one is spiritual and the other physical. What is a physical death for the unbeliever is a spiritual resurrection for the believer, and what is a spiritual death for the unbeliever is a physical life for the believer. This is based in large part on a rather tortured exegesis of what "first" means in scripture. Kline's general argument is that "first" is not used to indicate the first of a series of identical things, but is used in contrast to "new" or "last" in contexts where the "first" is the world that is passing while the "new" or "second" is the eternal world to come. Yes, "first" is used in contexts that refer to the current age that is passing, but it is too much to reach such a technical meaning into the word itself.³

R. Fowler White⁴. White makes a number of exegetical contentions that he believes demonstrate that the thousand years of Revelation 20:1-10 must recapitulate the three and a half years of the previous chapters in general and Revelation 19:11-21 in particular, hence arguing for Amillennialism. I shall discuss some of the more compelling here.

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1. Norman Shepherd. 1974. "The Resurrections of Revelation 20". *Westminster Theological Journal* 37:1 Fall 1974.
 2. Meredith B. Kline. 1975. "The First Resurrection". *Westminster Theological Journal* 37:3. Spring 1975.
 3. See also J. Ramsey Michaels. 1976. "The First Resurrection: A Response" *Westminster Theological Journal* 39:1. Fall 1976 for a premillennial response. Also Meredith G. Kline. 1976. "The First Resurrection: A Reaffirmation". *Westminster Theological Journal* 39:1 Fall 1976; and Philp Edgcumbe Hughes. 1977. "The First Resurrection: Another Interpretation". *Westminster Theological Journal* 39:2. Spring 1977.
 4. R. Fowler White. 1989. "Reexamining the Evidence for Recapitulation in Rev 20:1-10". *Westminster Theological Journal* 51:2 Fall 1989.

His first is that the destruction of the nations in Revelation 19:11-21 leaves no nations to be ruled in Revelation 20:1-10. This reads too much into the prophetic language of destruction (which is often hyperbolic) in Revelation 19:11-21. In verse 15, we read “From his mouth extends a sharp sword, so that with it he can strike the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod, and he stomps the winepress of the furious wrath of God, the All-Powerful”. If verses 11-21 are about the total extermination of the nations, it seems pointless to refer to the symbol of the sword coming from his mouth (symbolic of the Gospel) and to refer to him ruling. What are destroyed are the beast and false prophet, which we have seen stand for anti-christian political and religious institutions. If anyone is literal killed here, it is the instruments of these abstractions, and not the nations as a whole.

White’s second point is that Ezekiel 38-39 are alluded to in both Revelation 19:17-21 and after the thousand years in Revelation 20:7-10. He argues that this indicates that both conflicts must be the same conflict. If the events of Ezekiel 38-39 could be confidently identified as being identical to the eschatological events in Revelation 19-20, then this might carry some weight. However, even an ardent amillennialist such as Hendriksen understands Ezekiel 38-39 to predict a historical invasion of Israel that took place nearly three centuries before John’s visions. These visions are picking up symbols from that passage, the birds eating the flesh in chapter 19, and the names Gog and Magog in chapter 20. This does not require equating them any more than the elusions to the wilderness wanderings of Israel in Jesus’ wilderness temptations and the woman fleeing into the wilderness in Revelation 12 imply that they must be the same event.

White takes the cosmological upheavals as indicating the “cosmic dimensions of eschatological divine warfare”. This he thinks indicates they are all signifying the absolute end. Such hyperbolic cosmological language is used several times in the Old Testament, and even in the Gospels where it indicates not literal interstellar disturbances, but the upheaval of several different historical events. There is no justification for taking all such references in Revelation then to all signify one single eschatological literal upheaval.

5.5 Postmillennialism

There are many variations of the millennium views. For example H. B. Swete takes a late date preterist view of Revelation 4-18, seeing the destruction of pagan Rome in the destruction of the beast, then identifies the millennium as starting with that time.¹

If this or some similar interpretation be accepted, the question remains at what epoch the great chapter in history represented by the Thousand Years began. An obvious answer would be, ‘With the Conversion of Constantine, or of the Empire.’ If, however, the visions are to be regarded as following one another in something like chronological order (but see v. 1, note), St John has in view the moment of the overthrow of the Beast and the False Prophet, i.e. the final break up of the Roman world-power and its ally, the pagan system of priestcraft and superstition.

1. H. B. Swete. 1907. *The Apocalypse of St. John*. p. 263

Reconstructionist post-millennialists generally take the optimistic amillennialist approach. They thus interpret the beginning and extent of the millennium and the first resurrection much like amillennialist, usually seeing the first resurrection as the metaphorical resurrection of salvation.^{1 2}

Earlier post-millennialists to a different figurative approach to the first resurrection. Daniel Whitby they took the first resurrection to mean the revival of the martyr spirit, and thus represent the world-wide revival that inaugurates the millennium³. This suffers the same exegetical difficulty of taking the two resurrections to be different in nature when the objects of the resurrections are two explicitly non-overlapping groups.

5.6 Premillennialism

There are two popular flavors of premillennialism: historic and dispensational. They may also be described as post-tribulationist and pre-tribulationist respectively.⁴ The premillennial viewpoint holds that Christ's physical return comes before the millennium. The millennium is preceded by a seven year tribulation. The historical premillennial view places this second coming after the seven-year tribulation. This view would identify the raising of the martyrs here with the resurrection of the saints and rapture of the living church. The martyrs would then be a symbol for all the redeemed.

Dispensationalists believe in a pre-tribulation rapture and resurrection. This event is not specifically mentioned in Revelation. It basically happens before hand. In fact, Dispensationalists identify a number of eschatological resurrection events:⁵

- Resurrection and Rapture of the saints before the seven-year tribulation;
- Resurrection of the two witnesses (two literal prophets) in the middle of the tribulation;
- Resurrection of those who are saved and martyred during the tribulation at the end of the tribulation/beginning of the millennium
- Resurrection and rapture at the end of the millennium

Although the multiplication of resurrection events that aren't clearly enumerated in scripture should raise red flags, recall that there are a number of pre-eschatological resurrection/rapture events as well⁶:

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1. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. 1997. *He Shall Have Dominion*. Institute for Christian Economics. p. 428, 430. "the binding of Satan continues throughout the Christian era it refers to the spiritual resurrection of those who are born again through the grace of God."
 2. Keith A. Mathison. 1999. *Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope*. p. 156.
 3. Steve Gregg. 1997. *Revelation: Four Views*. Thomas Nelson.
 4. There is also a mid-tribulationist viewpoint, but space precludes interacting with it in detail here.
 5. Roy L. Aldrich. 1971. "Divisions of the First Resurrection". *Bibliotheca Sacra Volume 128 #510*.
 6. Roy L. Aldrich. 1971. "Divisions of the First Resurrection". *Bibliotheca Sacra Volume 128 #510*.

- Enoch
- Elijah
- Jesus Christ
- Those raised with Christ

The real problem is we see no indication of the physical descent of Jesus to earth to reign in Revelation. When we do see thrones, they are located in heaven, where Jesus sits reigning now at the right hand of God. Rather, we should probably see the parousia symbolized in chapter 21 in the descent of New Jerusalem to the earth.

6.0 Sorting Through the Confusion

We just covered several interpretive options of varying degrees of interdependence and independence in the first ten verses. We may summarize some of these options thusly to try to cut through some of the confusion.

The souls of those who had been beheaded:

- Literal martyrs; or,
- Relative clause “who had not worshiped the beast” describes not the martyrs but is independent clause indicating all Christians; or,
- Symbolic for all Christians.

Came to life:

- Should be translated “lived” (i.e., not a resurrection event); or,
- A Resurrection event that happens before the millennium; or,
- A figurative resurrection of the soul at salvation (like Paul’s metaphorical use); or,
- A spiritual resurrection at death, when the soul goes to heaven to await the resurrection.

The rest of the dead:

- Physical resurrection after the millennium; or,
- Figurative/spiritual resurrection that never happens, neither during nor after the millennium.

First Resurrection...Second Death. •

- Both refer to real resurrections and death; or,
- First death is literal and second death figurative/spiritual, while first resurrection is figurative/spiritual while second resurrection is literal.

7.0 White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15)

The Great White Throne

Rev 20:11 Then I saw a large white throne and the one who was seated on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. 20:12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne. Then books were opened, and another book was opened – the book of life. So the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to their deeds. 20:13 The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each one was judged according to his deeds. 20:14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death – the lake of fire. 20:15 If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, that person was thrown into the lake of fire.

In the judgment scene, there is a set of books with everyone’s deeds, which numerous passages in scripture make clear would send everyone to hell if we were judged solely by them. The other book is the book of life. By these everyone is judged. If your name is in the book of life, you’ll partake in the new heaven and earth of the following two chapters, else your deeds will result in your being cast into the lake of fire.

A general resurrection is in view here. This resurrection is a physical resurrection. Hades was the abode of the souls of the dead (Hades). The Sea and Death giving up the dead refers to the bodies to life, even those who received no proper burial. The resurrected bodies then are cast into the lake of fire here they experience a second death.

8.0 Isaiah

Pre- and Postmillennialists see hints of the millennial expectation in the Old Testament.¹ Amillennialists deal with these passages by spiritualizing the message to be something other than a literal hope. The problem with this is the genre of the passages in question is not apocalyptic, so the amillennial approach to these passages is hermeneutically questionable. Here we shall briefly examine a couple of the passages in Isaiah.

8.1 Isaiah 2:1-5

The Future Glory of Jerusalem

Is 2:1 Here is the message about Judah and Jerusalem that was revealed to Isaiah son of Amoz.

2:2 In the future
the mountain of the Lord’s temple will endure
as the most important of mountains,
and will be the most prominent of hills.⁵
All the nations will stream to it,

2:3 many peoples will come and say,
“Come, let us go up to the Lord’s mountain,
to the temple of the God of Jacob,
so he can teach us his requirements,

1. Mathison 1999 is a decent survey of these passages.

and we can follow his standards.”
For Zion will be the center for moral instruction;
the Lord will issue edicts from Jerusalem.
2:4 He will judge disputes between nations;
he will settle cases for many peoples.
They will beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks.
Nations will not take up the sword against other nations,
and they will no longer train for war.
2:5 O descendants of Jacob,
come, let us walk in the Lord’s guiding light.

In its context, Isaiah holds up to Israel a picture of an idyllic future. It is not referring to a post-consummation future in heaven as there are still nations. Premillennialists see the reference to a temple here as a prediction of the reestablishment of the temple worship in the future. But it is New Testament teaching that Jesus fulfilled the sacrificial requirements of the Old Testament law, and even goes further to teach that Jesus is the temple (John 2:19-21).

Isaiah then contrasts that idyllic picture with the (then) present reality in verses 6-9, and threatens God’s judgment in the remainder of the chapter. This parallels the development of events in Revelation 11 and 20. The present age is evil, and battles the two witnesses, even killing them. There are judgments against that evil and finally, after some number are killed when the two witnesses are resurrected, men praise God rather than blaspheming Him. After the beast and friends are thus defeated and Satan is bound, with have a millennial kingdom that would seem to conform to the idyllic picture of verses 1-6.

8.2 Isaiah 65:16-25

Is 65:16 Whoever pronounces a blessing in the earth
will do so in the name of the faithful God;
whoever makes an oath in the earth
will do so in the name of the faithful God.
For past problems will be forgotten;
I will no longer think about them.
65:17 For look, I am ready to create
new heavens and a new earth!
The former ones will not be remembered;
no one will think about them anymore.
65:18 But be happy and rejoice forevermore
over what I am about to create!
For look, I am ready to create Jerusalem to be a source of joy,
and her people to be a source of happiness.
65:19 Jerusalem will bring me joy,
and my people will bring me happiness.
The sound of weeping or cries of sorrow
will never be heard in her again.
65:20 Never again will one of her infants live just a few days
or an old man die before his time.
Indeed, no one will die before the age of a hundred,
anyone who fails to reach the age of a hundred will be considered cursed.

65:21 They will build houses and live in them;
they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
65:22 No longer will they build a house only to have another live in it,
or plant a vineyard only to have another eat its fruit,
for my people will live as long as trees,
and my chosen ones will enjoy to the fullest what they have produced.
65:23 They will not work in vain,
or give birth to children that will experience disaster.
For the Lord will bless their children
and their descendants.
65:24 Before they even call out, I will respond;
while they are still speaking, I will hear.
65:25 A wolf and a lamb will graze together;
a lion, like an ox, will eat straw,
and a snake's food will be dirt.
They will no longer injure or destroy
on my entire royal mountain," says the Lord.

Here, God promises to create a "New heavens and a new earth", but it is not the eschatological new heavens and earth of Revelation 21-22. That is, it is not the eternal state. It is an idyllic state that would seem to correspond with the millennium as people do still die eventually (verse 20). The amillennial view equates the two new heavens and new earth and must dismiss verse 20 as a poetic description of the eternal state.¹ Such symbolism strikes me as unlikely, even if the passage in question were apocalyptic in form (which it isn't). If such language is less than literal at all, it would more naturally be hyperbolic, exaggerating life spans, not short changing them.

1. Robert B. Strimple in Darrel L. Bock, ed. 1999. *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*. Zondervan.

Revelation 21-22: The New Heaven and New Earth

Whatever one's millennial view, the final result is the same.

1.0 The New Heaven and New Earth (Revelation 21:1-8)

A New Heaven and a New Earth

Rev 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and earth had ceased to exist, and the sea existed no more. 21:2 And I saw the holy city – the new Jerusalem – descending out of heaven from God, made ready like a bride adorned for her husband. 21:3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying: “Look! The residence of God is among human beings. He will live among them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them. 21:4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death will not exist any more – or mourning, or crying, or pain, for the former things have ceased to exist.”

21:5 And the one seated on the throne said: “Look! I am making all things new!” Then he said to me, “Write it down, because these words are reliable and true.” 21:6 He also said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the one who is thirsty I will give water free of charge from the spring of the water of life. 21:7 The one who conquers will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be my son. 21:8 But to the cowards, unbelievers, detestable persons, murderers, the sexually immoral, and those who practice magic spells, idol worshipers, and all those who lie, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur. That is the second death.”

A new heaven and a new earth. With the apocalyptic literary form, our default assumption regarding visual things is that they are symbolic. So we must ask what might the words of verse 1 “really” mean. To answer this, I think we need to look at the resurrection process.

Jesus’ resurrection body was a literal body. The New Testament goes to pains to emphasize this. See Luke 24:36-43 where Jesus invites the apostles to touch his wounds and eats with them to prove to them that he back in the flesh. Paul says that the transfor-

mation of our bodies will be like Jesus' in Philippians 3:20, and, in Romans 8:19-23, he links "the redemption of our bodies" (resurrection) with setting creation "free from the bondage of decay".

We should therefore probably conclude that John's description of the annihilation of the old heaven and earth and the appearance of a new one is not strictly literal, but a visualization of a hyperbole, much like Isaiah's hyperbole in Isaiah 65:17ff. It represents instead a renewing of all creation, a resurrection-transformation corresponding to the transformation of our bodies at resurrection into incorruptible "spiritual" bodies (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

No more sea. Similarly, the description of an absence of a sea has symbolic significance. The sea is where the beast came from (Revelation 13:1), and the whore of Babylon sat on "many waters" (Revelation 17:1) which are explicitly identified as "peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages" (Revelation 17:15). The absence of the sea here may symbolize the unity of the post-consummation church as one people, one multitude, one nation, and one language.

New Jerusalem. The new Jerusalem descends from heaven and is "like a bride", a symbol we've already seen as representing the church.

Literalism and Spiritualizing. We must avoid two extremes when interpreting this last passage. One is an extreme literalism often encountered in Dispensationalism. John is not getting a plain objective view of the after life (or more precisely, life after life after death¹). Symbolism is the rule, rather than the exception, in apocalyptic literature. If a symbol is used as such elsewhere in scripture, then it usually is being used in a similar way in Revelation. Even the most ardent literalists resort to identifying certain images as symbols here.

On the other extreme, uncontrolled spiritualizing can bend the passage to say most anything one wants. The most extreme example of this is full preterism, which denies any reality to a future resurrection, looking forward to only a disembodied "resurrection" at death. The best (and pretty much only) control on interpretation is scripture itself.

2.0 New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:9-22:5)

The New Jerusalem Descends

Rev 21:9 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven final plagues came and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb!" 21:10 So he took me away in the Spirit to a huge, majestic mountain and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. 21:11 The city possesses the glory of God; its brilliance is like a precious jewel, like a stone of crystal-clear jasper.²⁷ 21:12 It has a massive, high wall with twelve gates, with twelve angels at the gates, and the names of the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel are written on the gates. 21:13 There are three gates on the east side, three gates on the north side, three gates on the south side and three gates on the west side. 21:14 The wall of the city has

1. A favorite turn of phrase of N. T. Wright.

twelve foundations, and on them are the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

21:15 The angel who spoke to me had a golden measuring rod with which to measure the city and its foundation stones and wall. 21:16 Now the city is laid out as a square, its length and width the same. He measured the city with the measuring rod at fourteen hundred miles (its length and width and height are equal). 21:17 He also measured its wall, one hundred forty-four cubits according to human measurement, which is also the angel's. 21:18 The city's wall is made of jasper and the city is pure gold, like transparent glass. 21:19 The foundations of the city's wall are decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation is jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, 21:20 the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. 21:21 And the twelve gates are twelve pearls – each one of the gates is made from just one pearl! The main street of the city is pure gold, like transparent glass.

21:22 Now I saw no temple in the city, because the Lord God – the All-Powerful – and the Lamb are its temple. 21:23 The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, because the glory of God lights it up, and its lamp is the Lamb. 21:24 The nations will walk by its light and the kings of the earth will bring their grandeur into it. 21:25 Its gates will never be closed during the day (and there will be no night there). 21:26 They will bring the grandeur and the wealth of the nations into it, 21:27 but nothing ritually unclean will ever enter into it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or practices falsehood, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

22:1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life – water as clear as crystal – pouring out from the throne of God and of the Lamb, 22:2 flowing down the middle of the city's main street. On each side of the river is the tree of life producing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month of the year. Its leaves are for the healing of the nations. 22:3 And there will no longer be any curse, and the throne of God and the Lamb will be in the city. His servants will worship him, 22:4 and they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 22:5 Night will be no more, and they will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, because the Lord God will shine on them, and they will reign forever and ever.

New Jerusalem. The city is identified as “the bride, the wife of the Lamb”, that is, the church. A glorious picture is painted of it. The image of the church as a breath-taking city is a symbolic manifestation of the purified and redeemed church, much like a theophany is a symbolic manifestation of the glory of the invisible God. For the most part, we need to be satisfied with the overall impact of its architecture without identifying it as a literal place on the one hand or identifying deep significance to each individual little aspect of the images on the other, although sometimes we can identify, or at least suspect, symbolic meanings to the incidental details.

The twelve gates, and the twelve foundations (presumably of the wall segments connecting the gates together) are named for the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles. This again represents the two-fold witness: the Old and New Testaments, the two-edged sword.

The dimensions of the city (12,000 stadia) combine the symbolically significant number 12 (usually associated with divinely ordained administration) with the number 1,000. The number 12 also appears in the size of the walls (144 cubits, or the square of 12). The cubic shape may suggest the shape of the holy of holies. If so, it represents the fact

that the resurrected church is purified enough to be allowed to dwell where before only the high priest was allowed to enter only one day a year.

The sheer size of the city strongly suggests it is not a literal objective description of an actual future city as it could hardly fit on the earth (and certainly not within the earth's atmosphere!). The diagonal from one corner to the opposite would exceed the diameter of the moon.

No Temple. No temple is in the city because the literal temple had served as a sort of meeting ground between sinful man and a holy God where the former could obtain forgiveness. Since not only did Jesus pay the price for our sins, but in our transformed bodies we will no longer be sinful, such a “neutral territory” is superfluous.

No sun or moon to shine on it. The point the images regarding light is probably not that God will be a replacement for the sun, moon, and light bulbs in any literal sense. Rather, this is almost certainly imagery intended to invoke to common metaphorical usage of the word “light” for the understanding, knowledge, and wisdom that comes from God.

River of the water of life. Similarly, the river and trees of life are intended to invoke the metaphorical uses of water in the Bible as well as Eden. The later is especially in view in the reference to the curse being removed. Ezekiel 47 envisions a river coming from the temple as well. There it is clearly symbolic as it grows in size at an impossible rate and turns the sea to fresh water. In John 4:10-18, Jesus clarifies this metaphor by identifying the fountain of water as the message of salvation that he brings “springing up to eternal life”.

Nations. Some interpreters have, on the basis of the references to nations in verses 21:24 and 22:2, argued that 21:9-22:5, 14-15 are a recapitulation of the millennium.¹ However, Revelation 22:5 makes it clear that eternity, and not just the millennium, are in view (“... and they will reign forever and ever”). The use of the word nations here is more likely an abbreviated reference to “persons from every nation, tribe, people, and language” (Revelation 7:9). That is, it indicates the church as made up of people of all nations: Jews and Gentiles. The reference to healing in Revelation 22:5 need not indicate illness in the eternal state, but healing from the illnesses (figurative and literal) of the current age that is achieved when we are transformed (1 Corinthians 15:42, 51) into the eternal state.

3.0 Epilog (Revelation 22:6-20)

A Final Reminder

Rev 22:6 Then the angel said to me, “These words are reliable and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must happen soon.”

1. *Expositors* on Rev 20:1-6.

22:7 (Look! I am coming soon!

Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy expressed in this book.)

22:8 I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things, and when I heard and saw them, I threw myself down to worship at the feet of the angel who was showing them to me. 22:9 But he said to me, “Do not do this! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets, and with those who obey the words of this book. Worship God!” 22:10 Then he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy contained in this book, because the time is near. 22:11 The evildoer must continue to do evil, and the one who is morally filthy must continue to be filthy. The one who is righteous must continue to act righteously, and the one who is holy must continue to be holy.”

22:12 (Look! I am coming soon,

and my reward is with me to pay each one according to what he has done!

22:13 I am the Alpha and the Omega,

the first and the last,

the beginning and the end!)

22:14 Blessed are those who wash their robes so they can have access to the tree of life and can enter into the city by the gates. 22:15 Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the sexually immoral, and the murderers, and the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood!

22:16 “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star!” 22:17 And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let the one who hears say: “Come!” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wants it take the water of life free of charge.

22:18 I testify to the one who hears the words of the prophecy contained in this book: If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. 22:19 And if anyone takes away from the words of this book of prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city that are described in this book.

22:20 The one who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon!” Amen! Come, Lord Jesus! 22:21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all.

The speaker shifts rapidly in this section. It was confusing, even to John, who once again threw himself down to worship at the feet of an angel. The speakers are the angel, Jesus, and John.

The angel speaks in verse 6, but in verse 7 it is evidently Jesus who speaks. In verse 8, John addresses the reader directly. The angel speaks in verses 9-11. Jesus is speaking again in verses 12-13. It is not clear who is speaking in verses 14-15. etc.

Obey. In verse 7, we are told that those who keep the words of the prophecy are blessed, and in verse 9, the angel refers to “those who obey the words of this book. Prophecy is a different genre than law, but it demands a response of “how then should we live?”¹ We do not live in a “eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die” world. Actions have eternal consequences.

Do not seal up the words. Verse 10 contrasts with Daniel 12:4, 9, where Daniel is told “close up these words and seal the book until the time of the end ... for these matters are

1. I'm not sure where this quote comes from.

closed and sealed until the time of the end". However, what this sealing might actually mean is not certain.

The evil doer must continue to do evil. That the course of history is under God's control is a major theme of Revelation. Verse 11 would seem to be an expression of this — that history, with all its good and evil, is going to unfold as planned.

Alpha and Omega. Verse 14 reiterates the merisms found in Revelation 1:8 (spoken by God) and Revelation 1:17 (spoken by Christ). Spoken by Christ here, they are a clear claim to deity. Similarly, verse 16, in which Jesus claims to be the root and the descendant of David makes claim to his dual nature as both God (the root, or source, of David) and man (the descendant of David).

If anyone adds ... And if anyone takes away. It is tempting to ignore Revelation due to its difficulties. But to do so would be to effectively excise it from scripture. That would be to effectively call upon oneself the curse of verses 18-19. This is scripture and so we must study it.

Amen.

Revelation: Epilog

A brief review.

1.0 An Block Diagram of Revelation

Revelation is a bewildering array of visions of strange animals, beasts, and people. The block diagram below attempts to bring some order to the more significant literary structures within the book without getting bogged down in too many details. In it, the major divisions are broken out with bold lines:

- The Letters (Rev 1-3)
- The Seals and Trumpets (Rev 4-11)
- The Beasts (Rev 12-20)
- Eternity (Rev 21-22)

Within each of these, the patterns of seven with their interludes are shown as smaller boxes within. The sizes of the individual boxes are not proportional to the amount of scripture they represent. Some represent only a couple verses (to show the structure of

sevens) and others a couple of chapters. The later could have been broke out in more detail, but the result would have been confusion rather than clarification.

TABLE 1. Block Diagram of Revelation

Introduction to Letters (Rev 1)	to Ephesus (Rev 2:1-7)	Theophany (Rev 4-5)	Seal 1 (Rev 6:1-2) White Horse	Trumpet 1 (Rev 8:2-7) on Earth	The Dragon (Rev 12)	Eternity (Rev 21-22)
	to Smyrna (Rev 2:8-11)		Seal 2 (Rev 6:3-4) Red Horse	Trumpet 2 (Rev 8:8-9) on Sea	Seven Headed Beast (Rev 13:1-10)	
	to Pergamum (Rev 2:12-17)		Seal 3 (Rev 6:5-6) Black Horse	Trumpet 3 (Rev 8:10-11) on Rivers and Springs	Two Horned Beast (Rev 13:11-18)	
	to Thyatira (Rev 2:18-29)		Seal 4 (Rev 6:7-8) Pale Horse	Trumpet 4 (Rev 8:12-13) on Sky	Seven Short Visions (Rev 14-15)	
	to Sardis (Rev 3:1-6)		Seal 5 (Rev 6:9-11) Martyrs under Altar	Trumpet 5 (Rev 9:1-12) Locusts	Seven Bowls of Wrath (Rev 16)	
	to Philadelphia (Rev 3:7-13)		Seal 6 (Rev 6:12-17) Cosmological Signs	Trumpet 6 (Rev 9:13-21) Army	Whore of Babylon (Rev 17)	
	to Laodicea (Rev 3:14-22)		144,000 Sealed (Rev 7:1-8)	Small Scroll (Rev 10)	Babylon Destroyed (Rev 18)	
	Great Multitude (Rev 7:9-17)	Temple and Two Witnesses (Rev 11:1-14)	Beast and False Prophet Cast into Lake of Fire (Rev 19)			
	Seal 7 (Rev 8:1) Silence for Half Hour	Trumpet 7 (Rev 11:15-19) Kingdom of God	Dragon Bound 1,000 years & Cast into Lake of Fire (Rev 20)			

2.0 Interpretive Issues

We have seen that each of the four major sections presents its own unique interpretive difficulties and that there are multiple schools around each major section. Yet regardless of which school is right, the message that God is in control is still seen.

2.1 The Letters

While some interpreters have seen the seven churches as being symbolic for the church during seven sequential ages of church history, we saw that the letters were really written to seven actual churches in what is now Turkey. But, the problems of these seven churches are varied enough that any church of any age is likely to be able to see themselves somewhere in these. Thus, the reformers were not really that wrong in seeing the Roman church or the reformation church amongst their number.

2.2 The Seals and Trumpets

We saw on the basis of Revelation 12, and on the basis of the non-specific generality of the visions themselves, that the seals and trumpets represent the situation of the world all throughout the church age. The tribulation began with Christ's crucifixion, continues today, and will likely continue for some time to come.

This period was represented by 1,260 days/42 months/3 ½ years as that period of time had recurred several times in Israel's past as a period of particular suffering. We saw that the Preterists, who take this section as referring to the Jewish War and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD have made the mistake of mistaking the archetype for the type. That is, the destruction of Jerusalem, an event that took place about 25 years before Revelation was written, provided many of the images in this and the following section that are used to symbolize or typify the tribulation of this age, but those source-images are not themselves the things being predicted.

While the Historicist is right in seeing events of history and his own time in these passages, his mistake is in trying to find one-to-one correspondences between images in the visions and historical events, when the truth is that the correspondences are many-to-many. Each vision represents events that happen repeatedly and/or continuously in history. And they will continue to happen in the foreseeable future, and not just in some future seven year period as futurists hold.

2.3 The Beasts

We saw a chiasmic structure in the visions about the beasts. The Dragon is Satan and pursues Israel and her children, the church throughout the tribulation. It's agents are the seven headed beast, representing political power, the two horned beast, also called the false prophet, representing false religious power, and the whore, representing economic power (greed). Some of the symbolism comes from the manifestation of the beast of John's time, the Roman Empire, which some Preterists again mistake for the exclusive target of the prophecies rather than as the archetype for all evil political powers. Preterists are split regarding whether the whore is Jerusalem or Pagan Rome.

We saw that the tribulation will intensify until the showdown at Armageddon, which may not be a literal martial battle. The outcome is the destruction of Babylon (the whore), and the casting of the beast and false prophet into the lake of fire.

The binding of Satan for a thousand years is difficult. I think it represents a great revival that will be the outcome of the battle of Armageddon. Others think it happened at Christ's crucifixion (Amillennialists and some Postmillennialists), and others think it will happen when Christ returns to rule for a thousand years on earth. The end of the thousand years is marked by the final judgment, and, if Christ didn't return already at the beginning, the return of Christ to raise the dead (Amillennial and Postmillennial views, respectively).

2.4 Eternity

Finally, eternity is represented by a huge cubical city coming down from heaven. While some press the imagery as literally as possible, it is more likely images such as the huge city, the absence of a sea, streets of gold, etc. are more symbolic in nature. The true nature of our perfected bodies and restored creation is beyond what we can conceive of today, so any language used to describe it must be inadequate and abstract.

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