

The Day Of The Lord,
The Royal Appearing: Part 2

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In part one, we began to consider certain portions of the Olivet Discourse in relation to Christ's second advent & the Day of the Lord; and that these things had to do with 1st century events. I will begin part two by carrying on where we left off.

Heavenly Darkness & Shaking

Jesus went on to say in his prophetic discourse that *immediately after* the tribulation and distress of those days that were coming, the heavenly bodies would be darkened and shaken. In effect, he quoted from the Old Testament (OT) 'day of the Lord' texts that we considered in part one, particularly from the prophet Isaiah.

Immediately after the distress of those days
'the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light;
the stars will fall from the sky,
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' "

(Matthew 24:28-29 NIV)

"But in those days, following that distress,
'the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light;
the stars will fall from the sky,
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' "

(Mark 13:24-25 NIV)

"There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken (*...for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken* – CV).

(Luke 21:25-26 NIV)

Now this is where the problem arises for many when studying these things, because at face value, the words and the quotes that Jesus was using, if taken literally, appear to be describing a universal cataclysm in connection with His second advent.

In Matthew's account, the Greek word *eutheos* is used, which generally means 'immediately, straightaway.'

"**Immediately after** the distress (*tribulation or affliction*) of those days."

Therefore, what Jesus was about to say, he was connecting to '*the affliction of those days*,' and it was to follow straight away - not hundreds or thousands of years later! He was talking about 'the great tribulation' of the Jewish/Roman War in 66-70 AD, particularly the final months of the siege in 70 AD. Here's a reminder of what Jesus had said earlier.

How dreadful it will be **in those days** for pregnant women and nursing mothers...

...For then there will be great distress (or affliction or tribulation), unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. **If those days** had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect **those days** will be shortened.

So Jesus was talking about the time 'immediately after those days of tribulation.' And the 1st century setting to all these things is confirmed a few verses later in Matthew 24:34.

"I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened." (NIV)

Now evidently the physical sun, moon and stars didn't darken or collapse after 70 AD *in a wooden literalistic sense*, but they did in a figurative, symbolic sense! This kind of symbolic apocalyptic language is used in this way in the OT. In fact, Jesus was essentially quoting Isaiah 13:10 & 13, as well as alluding to some other prophetic texts that are similar, which were quoted earlier in part one.

Here's another one that wasn't quoted earlier, taken from the prophet Ezekiel.

" This is what the Sovereign LORD says:

" 'With a great throng of people I will cast my net over you, and they will haul you up in my net.

I will throw you on the land and hurl you on the open field. I will let all the birds of the air settle on you and all the beasts of the earth gorge themselves on you.

I will spread your flesh on the mountains and fill the valleys with your remains.

I will drench the land with your flowing blood all the way to the mountains, and the ravines will be filled with your flesh.

When I snuff you out, I will cover the heavens and darken their stars; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon will not give its light.

All the shining lights in the heavens I will darken over you; I will bring darkness over your land, declares the Sovereign LORD.

I will trouble the hearts of many peoples when I bring about your destruction among the nations, among lands you have not known.

I will cause many peoples to be appalled at you, and their kings will shudder with horror because of you when I brandish my sword before them. On the day of your downfall each of them will tremble every moment for his life.

(Ezekiel 32:3-10 NIV)

All these prophecies of judgment that we've been considering have been fulfilled a number of times in the ancient past in relation to Egypt, Babylon, Edom and other nations and empires. As we have observed, Isaiah 13 was prophesying the downfall of ancient Babylon, yet the poetic imagery was not all fulfilled in a literalistic manner, with stars falling from the sky. Throughout the bible, the heavenly

luminaries of the sun, moon and stars often symbolised the leaders of the world, particularly as it related to those who were God's representatives in the earth, those who represented His kingdom authority.

The nation of Israel in particular, as God's chosen holy nation, was symbolised as the sun, moon and stars in Joseph's dream (Genesis 37:9-11; cf. Revelation 12:1-6; also Judges 5:19-20). And in Daniel 8:9-12, 24, the priests and rulers of Judah were seen as stars of the heavenly host who were to be thrown down to the earth and trampled upon by the Little Horn (Antiochus IV Epiphanes). Spiritual 'angelic' messengers are also symbolised as stars (cf. Job 38:7; Revelation 9:1-2; 11:4, 9).

So, figuratively speaking, Jesus was prophesying the great shaking of the Jewish and Roman world, and the spiritual powers behind them, that would immediately follow the end of the old covenant system (cf. Isaiah 24:21-23). More importantly he was prophesying that the world of old covenant Judaism was about to be destroyed, with all the lights going out. The sun, moon and stars that gave light to ancient Israel were about to be destroyed, and the powers of the heavens, representing the spirit world, were going to be shaken also. Such a huge change was coming that nothing would be the same again. This would give way to a new creation, a new order – i.e. historically speaking, biblical Christianity. This officially took place in 70 AD.

By using these texts in this way, Jesus was essentially saying that Jerusalem, as representing the Jewish nation, was to be identified with Babylon and Egypt! This is, in fact, what was being prophesied in Revelation 17-18 concerning Mystery Babylon the Great (cf. Revelation 11:8). The faithful city had become a harlot, riding the Beast of Rome, and the time of its destruction was at hand.

In Luke's account these things are worded slightly differently (see quote above), but the overall meaning is the same. There would be signs in the heavens, men would be frozen with fear and apprehensiveness and great terror, wondering what was coming upon the world due to all the upheaval amongst the wicked nations (symbolised as the raging sea – cf. Isaiah 5:30; 23:11; 57:20; Jeremiah 50:42), and the powers of the heavens would be shaken.¹

Not only are these things spoken of in many OT prophecies in relation to this great Day of the Lord, such as Isaiah 13 & 34, and also Joel 2-3, but they are also referred to elsewhere in the NT. We shall see shortly that Peter described this 'shaking and dissolving of the elements' when he wrote about the Day of the Lord in his second letter. The writer to the Hebrews was also referring to this awesome Day when he wrote the following.

See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." **The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.** Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire."

(Hebrews 12:25-29 NIV)

This passage, in its original context, is clearly referring to the then-coming events of the Jewish War and the close of the old covenant system. Ultimately it was also describing the true inheritance of the spiritual kingdom of the heavens that the true Israel of God were about to inherit, which was to occur at the second appearing of Christ in power and judgment; when "once more" the power of God would shake the earth and the heavens resulting in the full establishment of the 'unshakable kingdom.'

The following passage, written to Jewish Christians, makes this even plainer, for "*in just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay*" because the Day was approaching (right then, in the 1st century).

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another —**and all the more as you see the Day approaching.**

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, **but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.** Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For,

"In just a little while,
he who is coming will come
and will not delay."

And,

"But my righteous one will live by faith.
And I take no pleasure
in the one who shrinks back."

But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.

(Hebrews 10:24-31, 36-39 NIV)

In 2 Thessalonians 1, Paul was describing these very things when he spoke of the flaming fire and the vengeance of God at Christ's revelation with his powerful angelic army.

God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. **This will happen when the Lord**

Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be **punished** with everlasting (*age-abiding*) **destruction** and shut out from **the presence of the Lord** and from the glory of his might on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

(2 Thessalonians 1:6-10 NIV)

This text has to be understood in light of Daniel 7 in relation to the vision of the beasts and the coming of the Son of Man. We shall briefly consider this subject later. (For further study, see *The Visions of Daniel: The Great Image and The Four Beasts*). In fact, this text is even clearer in the Concordant Literal NT:

...if so be that it is just of God to repay affliction to those afflicting you, and to you who are being afflicted, ease, with us, at the unveiling of the Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful messengers, in flaming fire, dealing out vengeance to those who are not acquainted with God and those who are not obeying the evangel of our Lord Jesus Christ -- who shall incur the justice of eonian extermination from the face of the Lord, and from the glory of His strength -- **whenever He may be coming to be glorified in His saints** and to be marveled at in all who believe (seeing that our testimony to you was believed) **in that day.**

(2 Thessalonians 1:6-10 CV)

This is typical prophetic language to describe God showing up on the scene, bringing judgment on the guilty ones of Israel, while rescuing the faithful ones who are in the Messiah Jesus, and then vindicating them in the process. This day of wrath and vengeance was to end the OT era of biblical Judaism by eradicating the temple services for good. Only then would the kingdom be officially handed over to the saints of the Most High, the Israel of God, the fledgling 'firstfruit' Christian church.

This whole event was described as the *coming* or *presence* or *royal appearing* or *revelation* of Christ and his kingdom – and all in accordance with Daniel 7 as shown in part one. Yet the ultimate fulfilment of these things evidently occurred in the spiritual, heavenly world (or what could be termed the spiritual dimension), where Israel was resurrected and judged before Christ resulting in open glorification and blessing for the chosen ones; while wrath, fury and affliction is given to those who were wicked and unbelieving, as they are shut out from the glory and power of God's presence (cf. Romans 2:5-11, 16). (I plan to deal with this topic of the judgment later in this series.)

It is also worth noting here that, in verse 9, Paul appeared to be echoing a repeated phrase from Isaiah 2 concerning the judgment of Jerusalem and Judah, which is certainly not without significance (though translations vary), where the arrogant rebels are pictured as fleeing from the powerful presence of Yahweh and the splendour of his majesty in the day of his judgment. Other aspects of this text are also echoed elsewhere in the New Testament (NT).

Go into the rocks, hide in the ground
from the fearful presence of the LORD

and the splendor of his majesty!

The eyes of the arrogant will be humbled
and human pride brought low;
the LORD alone will be exalted in that day...

...People will flee to caves in the rocks
and to holes in the ground

**from the fearful presence of the LORD
and the splendor of his majesty,**

when he rises to shake the earth (*or land*)...

...They will flee to caverns in the rocks
and to the overhanging crags

**from the fearful presence of the LORD
and the splendor of his majesty,**

when he rises to shake the earth.

(Isaiah 2:10-11, 19, 21 NIV. Cp. also Revelation 6:15-17; Luke 23:28-31)

In part one I considered some of the OT prophecies of Joel concerning the Day of the Lord, and in Joel 2 there was mention of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit that would occur *before* the Day of the Lord would arrive. So let's take a look at how the NT writers viewed this coming of the Spirit.

The Promised Holy Spirit and the Restoration

On that renowned Day of Pentecost in about 33 AD, when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the Jerusalem believers gathered in the temple courts, the apostle Peter quoted Joel 2:28-32 (cf. Acts 2:16-21). So let us see what Peter had to say about it.

Some of the Hebrew prophets had prophesied the pouring out of the Spirit of God upon the people, particularly the prophet Joel quoted earlier, and this was also a promised blessing contained in the New Covenant (cf. Joel 2:28-29; Ezekiel 39:29; Isaiah 32:15; 44:3-4; 59:21). Jesus had also promised the apostles that after His departure the Holy Spirit would come on them for power, so that, as His deputies, they could proclaim the message of the New Covenant with signs and miracles.

This evangelistic work was to be done during the time of Israel's probation, as an era of grace to allow for repentance, so that all the Jews would hear the gospel message. Not only so, but the gospel would eventually go out to all the nations (or Gentiles; cf. John 7:37-39; 14:25-26; 15:5-15; Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:4-5). During this era of transition, the gospel had priority to the Jew first, and then the Greek (i.e. Gentiles; cf. Romans 1:16; Acts 13:46-47).

This coming of the Holy Spirit was fulfilled in a powerful way at the feast of Pentecost while the small group of about 120 disciples were sitting in the temple courts, where they would often gather together. It caused quite a stir amongst the many Jews and proselytes from around the world who were in Jerusalem for the feast (Acts 2:1-41). In fact, this was the first time since the days of Solomon's temple that holy fire, representing the Presence or Glory of Yahweh, appeared in the temple courts to sanctify His dwelling place. This was the sign that the Jerusalem

church, as followers of Jesus, were now recognised by God as his dwelling place, taking the place of the physical temple for good.²

Here is what Peter quoted on that day.

"No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

" **'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.** Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' "

(Acts 2:16-21 NIV)

By quoting from Joel, Peter was declaring to the people in Jerusalem that the coming of the Holy Spirit on the small group of apostles and disciples of Jesus, to empower them as Christ's kingdom administrators, was the fulfilment of the pouring out of the Spirit on all flesh, prophesied by Joel. Up to that point in time, only chosen individuals, particularly prophets, priests and kings, were blessed with an anointing of the Holy Spirit, but through the promise of the New Covenant, the blessing was for *all* Israel, and also for the believers of the nations, both male and female.

Peter was also reminding them that the coming of the Day of the Lord would involve judgment for Israel as a nation (in blood, fire and billows of smoke), and this would occur *before* the coming of the great and glorious Day of the Lord, because judgment would begin from the house of God and move outward (cf. 1 Peter 4:17; Acts 2:40). Theologically speaking, from the Divine viewpoint, those days were to be 'the last days' of the age of biblical Judaism & the old covenant, and incredibly, all these things were fulfilled in the 1st Century AD, as Joel had prophesied. (For further study of the subject of the last days, see *The Last Days and Prophecy Fulfilled*).

A number of miracles or wonders had occurred in the sky and on the earth in connection with Christ's birth, death and resurrection, and most of these are recorded in the Gospel accounts. Even the sun was darkened, and the moon was turned blood red, on the day of Jesus' crucifixion, on 3rd April 33 AD. This was due to a supernatural darkness in the afternoon, and a lunar eclipse later.³ Earthquakes accompanied these things as well (cf. Matthew 27:51, 54; 28:2).

Also, during the era of the Roman/Jewish War in 66-70 AD, there were many great signs from heaven and fearful events, just as Jesus had predicted (cf. Luke 21:11), along with the '*blood, fire and pillars of smoke*' of Jerusalem's destruction. The fulfilment of all of these things is recorded in the writings of Josephus and others.⁴

On another occasion while in the temple courts, Peter declared to the people of Israel that times of spiritual refreshment would come (the 'spiritual refreshing' indicating a spiritual harvest) if they would only repent of their nation's rejection of

Jesus; and then Jesus, as the appointed Lord and Messiah, would return from heaven to rescue the remnant of His people. This would be the time when God would bring about *'the restoration of all things,'* the ultimate restoration and renewal of Israel and the whole world promised long ago through His holy servants the prophets. Peter also connected the prophecy of 'the Prophet like Moses' in Deuteronomy 18 with Jesus, and he indicated that the judgment of the law would fall upon those who rejected Jesus as the Messiah.

"Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people.'

(Acts 3:17-23 NIV)

I once believed that 'the restoration of all things' here was connected to a yet-future Second Advent and beyond, but I have since had to seriously re-think that popular view; and here is why.

During his ministry, Jesus had already confirmed that when the prophecy of the coming of Elijah had occurred (taken from the prophet Malachi), the restoration of all things would then follow. As we shall see, this had reference to the then-approaching new age of the new creation. Yet Jesus went on to not only confirm that the 'Elijah prophecy' would be fulfilled, but that it had *already* received its fulfilment in John the Baptist! That meant that the restoration of all things was near!

Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah comes **and will restore all things.** But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands."

(Matthew 17:11-12 NIV)

Jesus also went on to promise his apostles that at the coming of the Son of Man, when He sits on His glorious throne, the 12 apostles would also sit on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel. This clearly implied that the resurrection and judgment would also occur at this time – and the apostles of Christ would subsequently judge the whole of old covenant Israel.⁵ All of this would occur at 'the renewal (or regeneration) of all things,' which is another way of describing *'the restoration of all things'* – that is, at the beginning of the new creation order, which coincided with the official establishment of the Messianic kingdom.⁶

Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, **at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.**"

(Matthew 19:28 NIV)

“And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

(Luke 22:29-30 NIV)

At the time of Christ’s ascension, the apostles also asked Him, “*Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?*” Jesus’ reply was very revealing, as He didn’t say ‘yes’ and He didn’t say ‘no.’ He basically told them that the timing of it all was in the Father’s hands, and they were to focus on the task at hand, which was to evangelise the world. It becomes evident from the rest of the NT though that the restoration of Israel in the kingdom of God was to be very different to what the disciples had originally thought! This was to be revealed to them in the days and years ahead after Pentecost (cf. John 16:12-13).

Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

(Acts 1:6-9 NIV)

Therefore, when Peter spoke of ‘*the restoration of all things*’ in Acts 3, not too long after Pentecost, he was evidently referring to the soon-coming return of Christ in the Day of the Lord, when the new creation order would fully, and officially, begin – for as Peter was to later reveal, “*the end of all things has drawn near*” (cf. 1 Peter 4:7). Now this clearly didn’t mean that the physical, material world was to end, otherwise Peter was totally wrong! (And I for one do not accept the notion that the apostles of Christ, or for that matter any of the writers of the NT, were mistaken in any way whatsoever on this point). Moreover, this ‘*end of the age*’ or ‘*end of all things*’ also meant that this restoration would occur via judgment and wrath and cleansing fire in the Day of the Lord’s vengeance.

The Day of the Lord in 1 & 2 Thessalonians

Paul’s two letters to the Thessalonian believers were probably the earliest of all his epistles. Throughout both of them his focus was very much on the coming of Christ in judgment upon the Jewish community, a day of judgment that would also affect the Christian community throughout the Roman world – as well as ultimately affecting all humanity at the great judgment before Christ. Yet followers of Jesus were given the promise that Christ Himself would rescue them from the impending wrath.

They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead —Jesus, **who rescues us from the coming wrath.**

(1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 NIV)

For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. **In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last (or fully).**

(1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 NIV)

The last sentence here literally reads '*Yet the wrath (of God) moves ahead on to them to a finality*' meaning that God's judgment was already being prepared to be shortly poured out upon the Jews, for they had '*filled up their sins to the limit*' in their treatment of God's Son and His messengers. Paul wrote this in about 52 AD.

Jesus had warned the Jewish leaders that that generation would eventually become seven times more wicked than they were before the commencement of His ministry, due to them filling up their sins to the limit because of their treatment of God's Son and His prophets, and that that generation would be held responsible for all the righteous blood that had been shed since the very beginning of God's covenant people. And sadly His words were horrifically fulfilled by 70 AD, when the wrath of God came fully upon them.

"Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your ancestors who killed them. So you testify that you approve of what your ancestors did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs. Because of this, God in his wisdom said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.' Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. **Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all.**"

(Luke 11:47-51 NIV; also Matthew 23:31-32, 35-36)

"When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first. **That is how it will be with this wicked generation.**"

(Matthew 12:43-45 NIV)

We shall be considering 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 later in this series in relation to the resurrection/transformation for believers in that Day, so we'll leave that passage for now and jump to chapter five, where Paul's continuing focus was the then-approaching Day of the Lord.

Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, **for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.** While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. **For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

(1 Thessalonians 5:1-9 NIV)

Paul's language here is very much in line with some of the OT prophecies that were quoted earlier, particularly that of sudden destruction and 'labour pains' (cf. Jeremiah 6:4-5, 13-15, 22-30; 30:4-7). The phrase '*peace and safety*' in verse 3 has to do with the blessings of the covenant given to Israel through Moses. These conditions of peace and safety (or security) were blessings promised to Israel under the Law covenant to keep them safe from their enemies (e.g. Deuteronomy 12:10; Jeremiah 30:10). Paul was indicating that the Jews of his day would think that they were still blessed of God under the Law by saying '*peace and safety*,' yet the reality of their situation was the very opposite; and the destruction of God's wrath would fall upon them suddenly.

The 'thief in the night' motif, and the unexpectedness of it all, was taken from Jesus' teaching in his Olivet Discourse, and it is also mentioned in the vision of Revelation (and we shall shortly see how Peter used this motif as well).

"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known **at what time of night the thief was coming**, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

(Matthew 24:42-44 NIV)

"Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, **I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you...**"

"Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed."

(Revelation 3:3; 16:15 NIV)

In fact, much of Paul's teaching in his Thessalonian letters echoed the teaching of Jesus in His Olivet Discourse. The above text from 1 Thessalonians 5 is very much based on the latter portion of the Olivet Discourse. Take the following example.

"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and **that day will close on you suddenly like a trap.** For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth (or land). Be always on the watch, **and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen**, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

(Luke 21:34-36 NIV)

The above text is taken from Luke's account of the Olivet Discourse. Jesus was warning his followers that during the years ahead they would be tempted to fall away or fall asleep, leading to an unrighteous lifestyle that would prevent them from being watchful. In this state of mind 'that day' of judgment would close upon them suddenly like a trap and they would not escape, for the judgment would come upon the whole land of Palestine, and not just upon Jerusalem and Judea. In fact, the judgment upon the Jewish communities would spread much further, into all parts of the Roman Empire, affecting the Christians as well. Therefore, he encourages them to be always watchful, and to pray that they may be among those who would heed his words so that they would be able to escape all *that was about to happen* (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:1-9).⁷

The last portion about the disciples of Christ being able to stand before the Son of Man could be taken in two ways. It could've meant that they would be amongst the saved and redeemed remnant of Christians on the earth who would stand before Christ without shame after the judgment of 70 AD; or more likely it was referring to the coming judgment day itself when those who had followed Christ faithfully would be rewarded with recognition before the heavenly court of God the Father and the angels (cf. Matthew 10:32-33; Mark 8:38 & Luke 12:8-9).

Now it is worth emphasising at this point that I believe it is very evident that the ultimate focus of Jesus' teaching was upon the spiritual/heavenly 'dimension' that all humans will enter via resurrection – and these very things were about to occur in the 1st century AD with the full establishment of the Messianic reign! Therefore, not *all* the details of Christ's teaching was referring to earthly, worldly occurrences that were recorded in history, particularly in relation to the Jewish War itself; they ultimately had to do with what could be termed another dimension - a heavenly, spiritual one – and the judgment or rewards associated with it.⁸

That is to say, the event of the Second Advent, the Day of the Lord, would also result in the resurrection and judgment of Israel and the nations. Those who were ready as Christ's true followers would be able to stand before the Son of Man and receive their rewards; while those who were hypocrites and lawless unbelievers would be chastened, resulting in 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' due to the 'age-abiding fire.'

Here are a few key texts from the NT that teach this concept.

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

(Matthew 13:40-43 NIV; cf. Daniel 12:2-3)

"This is how it will be **at the end of the age**. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous **and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**"

(Matthew 13:49-50 NIV)

"Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, **where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**' "

(Matthew 22:13 NIV)

"The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, **where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**"

(Matthew 24:50-51 NIV)

"Then he will say to those on his left, '**Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal (Gr. *age-abiding*) fire** prepared for the devil and his angels'..."Then they will go away to eternal punishment (Gr. *age-abiding chastening*), but the righteous to eternal life."

(Matthew 25:41, 46 NIV; also 25:30) ⁹

These very things are being referred to in the vision of Revelation, where the kingdom reign of God and of His Christ is described as having begun at the time of the seventh trumpet; and the resurrection and judgment are also included, along with the destruction of those who were corrupting the land. Yet all these things were said to be near; that is, they were about to occur; and there would be no more delay, for "behold, He is coming soon!" ¹⁰

The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever."

And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying:

"We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign.

The nations were angry, and your wrath has come.

The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your people who revere your name, both great and small—

and for destroying those who destroy (or corrupt) the earth (or land)."

(Revelation 11:15-18 NIV)

Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven. And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who

created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, "**There will be no more delay! But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.**"

(Revelation 10:5-7 NIV)

The Man of Lawlessness & The Great Gathering

While we are on the subject of Paul's letters to the Thessalonian church, and the teaching they contain on the then-approaching Day of the Lord, let us briefly consider the well-known text about the 'man of lawlessness' or 'man of sin' in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, which is often regarded as one of the most difficult passages in the NT. So much so that some expositors have passed it by altogether. I'm not going to attempt a detailed exposition of this text here, so that will have to wait for another time, but I just want to show that it's primary meaning, I believe, is related to 1st century events.

In a sense, this passage is Paul's version of Jesus' Olivet Discourse; and in the same way as Jesus' discourse was largely based on the prophecies of Daniel, particularly in relation to the 'abomination of desolation' and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 'the great tribulation', so Paul also used language that was based on the prophecies of Daniel, as well as Jesus' discourse.

Concerning **the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him**, we ask you, brothers and sisters, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us—whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter —asserting that **the day of the Lord** has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for **that day** will not come until the **rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed**, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things?

(2 Thessalonians 2:1-5 NIV)

The apostle Paul begins by referring to the coming or presence of Christ and the gathering or assembling of the elect of God, which would occur in the Day of the Lord. Paul had spoken of these things in his first letter to them (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18); and Jesus had spoken of this 'gathering of his people' in his discourse, which was to occur at His Parousia (or Presence). As I have already established, these events were to happen before that generation had passed away.¹¹

"At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens."

(Mark 13:26-27 NIV)

In connection with the coming of the Son of Man (that is, the second advent), there is the sending out of Christ's messengers or 'angels' to gather the elect (or chosen) of God from the four winds of earth and heaven. Now from the perspective of the Hebrew prophets, this is clearly alluding to the theme of the restoration of all Israel from the four corners of the earth, as for example, Ezekiel 37:20-22; 39:27-29; Jeremiah 31:7-10. In Matthew's account, there is even the mention of the blowing of the trumpet, which was associated with many things, but in particular, the Jubilee (cf. Leviticus 25:8-13).

This NT 'gathering together' of the chosen remnant of God is firmly rooted in the OT prophecies of the gathering together of the chosen remnant of Israel from their places of exile.¹² One of the key OT texts that describes this gathering of the remnant of Israel is the prophecy of Isaiah 11:10-12. In this well-known messianic prophecy there is a hint that this 'gathering' would include the Gentiles (or nations) as well.

In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious. In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the surviving remnant of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the Mediterranean.

He will raise a banner for the nations
and **gather the exiles of Israel;**
he will assemble the scattered people of Judah
from the four quarters of the earth.

(NIV)

If there was any one prophecy that Jesus was alluding to in Matthew 24:31 then this was it. He was describing the gathering together of His chosen ones, at the time when the trumpet would sound for the ultimate Jubilee for all nations. This meant that all the elect of God would be gathered together as the One universal Church of the Living God, the true Temple of God, consisting of Jew and Gentile. And this restoration of all Israel would also include Gentiles.

And take note that this assembling together of the chosen ones at the coming of the Son of Man would include the extremities of heaven and earth; that is, through resurrection and 'living transformation' those in Christ would be united before His throne to stand before the Son of Man (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10; 2:1). This gathering could also be viewed as having an earthly fulfilment (in the continuation of biblical Christianity and the Christian church) and a heavenly fulfilment (in relation to the resurrection and the judgment before the throne of Christ in the spiritual dimension).

This is also what Jesus was talking about in Matthew 8:10-12.

When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, "Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. I say to you that **many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.** But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (NIV)

The 'four winds' of Matthew 24:31 is just another way of saying 'from the four corners of the earth;' from horizon to horizon; from the east and the west; from one end of the earth and heavens to the other. And this gathering of the chosen ones results in participation in the great messianic feast – elsewhere called the wedding supper of the Lamb (cf. Revelation 19:6-9). For those of Israel and the nations who rejected Jesus, there would be severe judgment resulting in 'darkness' and 'weeping and gnashing of teeth'. They would not inherit the kingdom with Christ, but would be thrown outside into a metaphorical Gehenna of fire.

Returning to 2 Thessalonians, there were some who had been saying that this Day of the Lord had already arrived, and this was troubling the Thessalonian church. They assumed that they had missed out on this really important event, and they were confused, particularly as they saw the Jews going about their religious business as usual! So Paul proceeds to calm their fears by reminding them that this Day would not arrive until the apostasy or rebellion occurs¹³, and the man of lawlessness is revealed – the son of destruction.

He then describes this man as one who would give himself divine honours, placing himself above God, and who would commit the ultimate act of idolatry by setting himself up in the temple of God as a demonstration of his 'divinity.' This is, of course, describing an 'abomination of desolation.' Jesus also spoke of an abomination standing in the holy place, and he also warned of apostasy and rebellion in the form of false prophets and false messiahs, wars and revolutions (cf. Matthew 24:4-16, 24-25).

The image that Paul is presenting in this text was known very well at that time. About 12 years previously, in 40 A.D. the emperor Gaius Caligula had attempted to erect a statue of himself in the temple at Jerusalem, to be an icon of worship, but he was assassinated before this action could be carried out. In fact, the 'restraining' of this action (of seeking divine worship in the Jerusalem temple, which behaviour could be described as 'the mystery of lawlessness,') could also have had something to do with the 'restrainer' that Paul goes on to talk about in this passage.¹⁴

A common 'preterist' interpretation of this 'man of lawlessness' is that it was fulfilled in Nero's rise to power to become the tyrant Caesar that he became. Those who hold to this position also view the first beast of Revelation 13 as the Roman Empire personified in Nero. I think it is very evident that the first beast of Revelation 13 is to be identified with the man of lawlessness; and the same person would also be the 'little horn' of Daniel 7. It is also highly probable that this figure is to be equated with 'the antichrist' that John wrote about in his letters (cf. 1 John 2:18; 4:3); *but* I don't believe that Nero was the man of lawlessness/antichrist/beast/little horn.

The main problem I see with the view that Nero was 'the man' is that he never actually seated himself in the physical temple in Jerusalem, either literally or in the form of a statue. If Paul was referring to the physical temple in Jerusalem, which was still standing at that time, then it would make more sense to view 'the man' as being one of the Jewish rebel leaders who took over the temple and turned the holy place into a military base; or one of the high priests. Nevertheless, if it were to be one of the Roman emperors, then it would have to be Titus, son of Vespasian, for *he* was the one who actually destroyed the temple; and *he* was the one who was actually worshipped within the temple precincts by his soldiers.¹⁵

On the other hand, this was probably Paul's first use of the phrase 'temple of God' in his letters, and this instance would be the only one where he refers to the physical temple. In all other occurrences of this phrase by Paul he is using it *figuratively* of the Christian community, either corporately or individually (e.g. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 2 Corinthians 6:16). Be that as it may, the figurative uses of this phrase are obvious, for Paul makes it clear that he was speaking metaphorically. Yet in 2 Thessalonians 2 there isn't even a hint that he was speaking metaphorically.

Therefore, it is most probable that he was talking about the actual temple of God in Jerusalem – that is, Herod's temple. Paul no doubt had Daniel 9:26-27 in mind here, which prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple after the arrival of the Messiah; and this desolation would also be accompanied by abominations.

It is also worth emphasising here that in verse 5 Paul reminded the Thessalonian believers that he had previously spoken to them about these things, and therefore it would follow that the things he had told them were things he was expecting them to be looking out for in their own generation.

The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

(2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 NIV)

In the remainder of the text, Paul talks about the spiritual satanic influence upon the people, which was ultimately sent by God as judgment, so that all those who had rejected the truth of Jesus, and delighted in wickedness instead, would be condemned. Again, this fits in with the teaching of Jesus in his discourse, where he talked about the powerful deception that would engulf the Jewish nation (Matthew 24:23-26, 48-51; also Matthew 12:43-45; Revelation 2:9; 3:9; 9:1-11; 18:1-2).¹⁶

Anyhow, let us back up a little to verse 8 and deal with the apex of this whole passage, which is the Day of the Lord itself; that is, the Parousia of Christ.

And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus **will overthrow with the breath of his mouth** and **destroy by the splendor of his coming**. (NIV)

In this portion, Paul was using some classic apocalyptic terms to describe the coming or presence of Christ in the Day of the Lord, which in turn would put an end to the works of the lawless one. A more accurate rendering of this verse, which brings out the Greek meanings a little more, would read,

"...whom the Lord Jesus will consume with the breath (or spirit) of his mouth and annul (or bring to nothing) by the brightness (or appearing) of his presence."¹⁷

There are a number of key prophetic texts from the OT that virtually use the same kind of language. Take note of the following:

He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him—
the dark rain clouds of the sky.
Out of the brightness of his presence clouds advanced,
with hailstones and bolts of lightning.
The LORD thundered from heaven;
the voice of the Most High resounded.
He shot his arrows and scattered the enemy,
with great bolts of lightning he routed them.
The valleys of the sea were exposed
and the foundations of the earth laid bare
at your rebuke, LORD,
at the blast of breath from your nostrils.

(Psalm 18:11-15 NIV)

He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.

(Isaiah 11:4 NIV)

See, the Name of the LORD comes from afar,
with burning anger and dense clouds of smoke;
his lips are full of wrath,
and his tongue is a consuming fire.
His breath is like a rushing torrent,
rising up to the neck.
He shakes the nations in the sieve of destruction;
he places in the jaws of the peoples
a bit that leads them astray...

...The voice of the LORD will shatter Assyria;
with his rod he will strike them down.
Every stroke the LORD lays on them
with his punishing club
will be to the music of timbrels and harps,
as he fights them in battle with the blows of his arm.
Topheth has long been prepared;
it has been made ready for the king.
Its fire pit has been made deep and wide,
with an abundance of fire and wood;
the breath of the LORD,
like a stream of burning sulfur,
sets it ablaze.

(Isaiah 30:27-28, 31-33 NIV)

It is highly probable that Paul had these texts in mind when he wrote these words in 2 Thessalonians 2, along with certain portions of Jesus' Olivet Discourse concerning Christ's Parousia or presence. Yet we need to bear in mind that the words and phrases used in verse 8 do not necessarily mean that Christ would physically kill 'the lawless one' at His coming; but what it does mean is that the spiritual heavenly powers behind 'the antichrist' would be defeated and come to nothing; that is, their authority would be nullified at the establishment of Christ's kingdom. In effect, the channels being used by the kingdom of darkness, such as 'the lawless one,' would be defeated and judged along with Satan and his cohorts.

In fact, the books of Daniel and Revelation confirm this interpretation and understanding. From both Daniel 7 and Revelation 11:7 & 19:11-21, the following details emerge: the Beast kingdom (the ancient Roman empire) and the Little Horn (Titus) ¹⁸ are seen from the point of view of the spiritual powers behind the earthly powers. The beast is said to ascend from the abyss, which is pictured as a demonic prison; and it is the beast itself that is thrown into the Lake of Fire, which is describing metaphorically the fiery judgment of Christ, which began at the establishing of His kingdom in the Day of the Lord in 70 AD – after the fiery destruction of Jerusalem and its temple.

2 Peter 3 and The Day of Fire

For a number of years, I was struggling with the well-known passage in 2 Peter 3, which is often understood to be describing the destruction of the physical universe at the yet-future Second Advent. During this interpretive 'struggle' I had to keep asking myself 'is this talking about a literal event or a spiritual, metaphorical one – or both? And is it referring to the Second Advent or something else?'

I eventually came to the conclusion that, in it's 1st century context concerning the Day of the Lord & Christ's Parousia, like so many other 'apocalyptic' NT texts, this had to be interpreted in a spiritual, metaphorical sense to remain consistent with the rest of the NT teaching. (Having said that, on a secondary level, I am not going to rule out a more 'literal' interpretation in relation to a future Consummation event.) It also became evident to me that initially this text had to do with the same Day of the Lord as the rest of the NT; that is, the Second Advent or Return of Christ; His Parousia.

I've studied this passage so many times, along with the original Greek words and other related texts; and I've also read a number of various articles and commentaries on the subject from differing viewpoints. I will now attempt to show what I have firmly come to believe is the most satisfactory way of interpreting this passage in light of all we've been considering so far in this series.

Although some scholars throw doubt on the authorship of this epistle being that of the apostle Peter, I am taking the view that the writer was in fact Peter.

When approaching this text, we must understand the 1st century context in which it was written, and the unique events that were transpiring in those days. I strongly believe that the exegetical key that unlocks the true meaning of this prophetic text is, again, the Olivet Discourse of Jesus, as well as the 'apocalyptic' symbolism used by the Old & New Testament prophets alike.

Above all, you must understand that **in the last days** scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water.

(2 Peter 3:3-5 NIV; cf. Jude 17-18)

Taking into account the 1st century context, the apostle begins by warning of scoffers who would question the coming of the Son of Man, the 'coming' or *parousia* that Jesus had promised. According to Acts 2:16-17, which we considered earlier, 'the last days' had begun on the day of Pentecost, or possibly sooner during Christ's ministry. In fact, in his first letter, Peter had already declared, "The end of all things has drawn near" and that it was 'the last times' due to the advent of the Messiah in Jesus of Nazareth (1 Peter 1:20; 4:7; also Hebrews 1:2).¹⁹

The early Christians understood correctly that Jesus had prophesied that these things would occur in 'this generation,' that is, within 40 years (as we have seen earlier in this series); yet there would be some Jewish-Christian apostates who would mock this 'coming' making the point that nothing had changed since the beginning of creation.

The whole emphasis on Jewish/Christian apostasy permeates the Olivet Discourse; and it was all spoken in the context of 'the coming of the Son of Man' to that generation. Peter was clearly prophesying along the same lines. I think it is evident that these 'scoffers' were essentially Jewish Christians who had once believed in Jesus and had become a part of the early Church, but who would begin to doubt Christ's words about the judgment that would soon come upon Jerusalem and all Jewry. Also these 'scoffers' are said to refer to their 'fathers' or 'ancestors,' as well as 'the beginning of creation,' indicating that they were Jewish.

Also, in verse 5, Peter goes on to say that 'they deliberately forget' about the ancient creation, when the heavens and the earth were brought into being by the commands of God, and, in the words of the Genesis account, the earth was formed out of water and by water. Again, this indicates that they were Jewish believers (possibly those who had once accepted Jesus as the Messiah), but now they scoffed at his promised 'coming.' It was this kind of apostasy that was being addressed in the letter to the Hebrews, particularly while the Jerusalem temple was still standing.

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, **but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.** Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

(Hebrews 10:26-31 NIV)

These Jewish Christians were being tempted to return to the Judaism of their day and the sacrificial rituals of the temple service, particularly when it appeared as though Jesus' words were not being fulfilled. Jesus had warned his followers about these very things and now his words were being forgotten or ignored, and were even being scoffed at. In essence, Christ had been saying that 'if the judgment is delayed, don't begin to think that it is not coming!' It is in this light that an often-misunderstood passage in Hebrews becomes much easier to comprehend.

Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity...

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace. Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. **In the end it will be burned.**

(Hebrews 6:1a, 4-8 NIV)

These Jewish-Christian apostates, who had experienced the spiritual things of the approaching kingdom but had now returned to the old covenant Judaism of the temple system, were bringing further disgrace upon Jesus, the Son of God, and were essentially crucifying Him all over again by rejecting the new covenant kingdom. Ultimately they were viewed as being a parched land that was producing thorns and thistles, as a symbol of the curse, and they were in danger of being burned in the fiery judgment of God that was about to be coming (cf. Matthew 13:22-23, 30, 37-43).

And in the same manner as the writer of Hebrews, it also makes sense that Peter was primarily talking about these Jewish apostates too, warning of the then-approaching judgment upon Jerusalem and Judea, for he was especially the apostle of the Circumcision (cf. Galatians 2:7-10).

James, the Lord's brother, also spoke of these things in his letter.

"Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth **in the last days**... Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, **until the Lord's coming (Gr. Parousia).** See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, **because the Lord's coming (Gr. Parousia) is near.** Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. **The Judge is standing at the door!**"

(James 5:1-3, 7-9 NIV)

Like Peter and the writer of Hebrews, James was primarily addressing the Jewish-Christian remnant of that generation, referred to as 'the twelve tribes in the dispersion' (cf. 1:1; 2:1). Some of these Jews were already in apostasy, walking in ways that they shouldn't have been, in contradiction of Jesus' teaching. They were beginning to ignore or take lightly the warnings of Christ in relation to His coming or Presence (Parousia) in the Day of the Lord. And take note that, like the other NT writers, James also declared that they were in the last days, and that Christ's Parousia was near. Moreover, this also meant that the fiery judgment of God was also near!

Judgments of Water and Fire

Continuing in 2 Peter,

By these waters also the world of that time **was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for (or stored with) fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.** But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

(2 Peter 3:6-9 NIV)

In the same way as Jesus had drawn attention to the divine judgments of the watery Flood of Noah's day, and the fiery destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, applying these typological judgments to the soon-approaching Day of the Lord & the revelation of the Son of Man (cf. Luke 17:20-37), so Peter does the same thing here. He had already mentioned these twin judgments earlier in the letter (cf. 2:5-9), but he now proceeds to focus on the watery judgment of the ancient Flood.

This episode of the great Deluge becomes a type and shadow of the destruction of the old world and the emergence of the new one, which Peter had already alluded to in his first letter (cf. 1 Peter 3:20-22). The ancient world of Mesopotamia had suffered a universal flood, particularly as a judgment upon God's covenant people of that era, and only Noah and his family, numbering eight in all, survived the judgment through the safety of the ark.²⁰ This story became a type for the coming salvation of those in the Messiah. The number eight symbolises resurrection and new beginnings, so Noah and his family coming through the judgment of the flood pictures the new covenant people of God entering a 'new creation.'

It's interesting to note that Peter refers to '*the world of that time*' that was destroyed by water, and then he speaks of '*the present heavens and earth*' that are reserved for a fiery destruction (verses 6-7). I do not believe that he was giving some kind of history lesson here about the physical properties of the earth before and after Noah's flood; or that his primary concern was telling his readers that the physical universe was going to be destroyed by fire. I am convinced that his focus was on the *spiritually significant things* of these judgments, rather than on the physical, without ignoring the fact that God's judgments affect the world of human affairs.

Physically speaking, the earth was still the same after the Flood as it was before it, but Peter was highlighting that, in accordance with the ancient types, a great covenantal change was about to take place, when the present 'heavens and earth' of the Old Covenant would be destroyed by fire to make way for a 'new heavens and earth' of a New Covenant in Christ. We shall consider this 'heavens and earth' motif shortly.

Then in verses 8-9, Peter uses Psalm 90:4 to emphasise that God's use of time, and how He fulfils His promises, are not always in accord with how humans understand time. We are subject to time, while God is not. God may look like He's

taking His time, but He is not slow in keeping His promises really. That's only how human understanding and experience perceive it. The reason why God was delaying His judgment in that 1st century generation was this:

"...he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."²¹

The God of Israel is slow to anger, abounding in love, grace and mercy. His patience has repentance as its aim, so that no one will perish in judgment, for He does not delight in the death of the wicked. Sadly, tens of thousands still eventually perished in the judgment of Jerusalem and Judea in the 1st century AD; yet thankfully many also repented and followed Jesus the Messiah's words to flee, so that, just as Noah and his family, and Lot and his daughters, escaped the judgments in their day, these Christians also escaped the fiery wrath of God and survived.

The Fiery Destruction and the Dissolving Elements

But **the day of the Lord** will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the **elements** will be destroyed **by fire**, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare (or be burned up).

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens **by fire**, and the **elements** will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

(2 Peter 3:10-13 NIV)

The writer now emphasises the fact that the Day of the Lord - prophesied by the Hebrew prophets and the ultimate Prophet, Jesus himself - *will* come like a thief in the night, suddenly and unexpectedly. As noted earlier, Jesus, in his Olivet Discourse, used the 'thief in the night' motif in relation to his 'coming' to that 1st century generation. Therefore, no matter how long the delay, that Day would soon arrive.

Peter then proceeds to describe the coming destruction in a typical 'apocalyptic' manner, just like the OT prophets had done. Using familiar OT symbolism, he talks of the heavens passing away or disappearing with a roar; the elements being dissolved by fire; and the earth and the works in it being found or laid bare. Some later manuscripts used the words 'burned up' instead of 'laid bare' or 'be found' but the earlier renderings are probably more accurate. Either way, the focus here is on *the works* in the earth being exposed in judgment, so if the phrase 'burned up' is to be used it is most probably to be taken figuratively.²²

In verse 12b, he repeats the details that 'that Day' will bring about the dissolving or destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat, yet this awesome event will bring about the Day of God in which a new heaven and a new earth (that is, a new creation) will be established in righteousness. Therefore, Peter encourages them to live holy and godly lives as Christians while they anticipate this Day of the new creation and hasten its arrival. It's interesting to note that as

followers of Jesus in the 1st century AD, it was said that they could speed or hasten the presence of God's Day.

It may not be too clear as to just how they did this, but it probably had to do with their witness and testimony to that generation, preparing themselves for what was coming. And I have to say, if this was supposed to be applied to every generation of Christians since then in relation to a yet-future *Second Coming*, the church must've delayed this coming rather than hastened it – because according to this view it still hasn't happened! Again, this seems to suggest very clearly that this Day of the Lord referred to the 1st century audience.

We shall consider the meaning of the passing away of the heavens and the earth & the establishing of a new creation shortly, but first let's consider what Peter had in mind when he spoke of the elements being dissolved by fire, which is at the heart of this fiery apocalyptic passage.

The Greek word translated *elements* in this text is *stoicheion*. It comes from the word *stoichos*, which means "a row, rank, series". The Greek *stoicheion* essentially means 'any first things from which others in a series stem from;' that is, an element or first principle, and this word was used to refer to the letters of the alphabet as elements of speech.²³ Even though it could be used to refer to the physical elements of the universe, it is not used this way in the NT. The passage in 2 Peter 3 would be the only instance of this meaning, *if* it were to be understood this way.

Here are the NT texts that use this word.

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the **elemental spiritual forces** (or principles) of this world rather than on Christ.

(Colossians 2:8 NIV)

Since you died with Christ to the **elemental spiritual forces** of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings.

(Colossians 2:20-22 NIV)

So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the **elemental spiritual forces** of the world. But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

(Galatians 4:3-5 NIV)

But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces (or elements)? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.

(Galatians 4:9-11 NIV)

In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the **elementary truths** of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!

(Hebrews 5:12 NIV)

If careful note is taken of the context in each of these passages, it will be found that in every instance *the elements are referring to the basic principles of religion and ritual*, particularly in reference to the Law of Moses and the religion of Judaism. This would've included, in particular, the temple sacrifices and the Levitical laws – in fact, everything to do with the temple services and its holy precincts and furniture.

Even the verb *stoicheo*, which generally means "to walk or march in rank" can have the literal meaning "*observing the elements*" (cf. Concordant Literal New Testament). In fact, The New English Bible translates *stoicheo* in this manner in Acts 21:24.

"...but that you are **a practicing Jew** and keep the Law yourself." (NEB)

"...but you also are **observing the elements** and you yourself are maintaining the law." (CLNT)

I think this very clearly shows that the 'elements' that 2 Peter 3 is describing as being destroyed by fire was the elements of the Temple and the basic principles of the old covenant religion of Judaism.

To provide further clarification of these things, in highlighting the words and phrases of this passage, here is a more literal rendering of the text.

Now the Day of the Lord will be arriving as a thief, in which **the heavens shall be passing by** with a booming noise, yet **the elements shall be dissolved** by combustion, and the earth and the works in it shall be found.

At these all, then, **dissolving**, to what manner of men must you belong in holy behavior and devoutness, hoping for and hurrying the presence of God's day, because of which the heavens, **being on fire**, will be **dissolved**, and **the elements decompose by combustion!** Yet we, according to His promises, are hoping for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness is dwelling.'

(2 Peter 3:10-13 CLNT or CV)

Now take note of this: the elements shall be dissolved; all these things will be dissolving; the heavens will be dissolved by fire; and the elements will decompose or melt with great heat or combustion.

I wish to highlight the fact that this kind of language was used in the Hebrew prophets, particularly Isaiah. The prophet Isaiah prophesied of three 'day's of the Lord' that are of great significance here. In chapter 13 we have the judgment against Babylon; in chapter 24 we have the judgment against Jerusalem and the whole land of Israel, which uses language that indicates a final destruction of the

land, covenantally speaking; and in chapter 34 we have the judgment against the nations, particularly Edom.

Here are the verses in question, and take special note of the description of Edom's destruction in Isaiah 34.

See, the day of the LORD is coming—a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger—to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it.

The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light.

(Isaiah 13:9-10 NIV)

All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree...

(Isaiah 34:4 NIV; cf. Revelation 6:12-17) ²⁴

The floodgates of the heavens are opened,
the foundations of the earth shake.
The earth (or land) is broken up,
the earth is split asunder,
the earth is violently shaken.
The earth reels like a drunkard,
it sways like a hut in the wind;
so heavy upon it is the guilt of its rebellion
that it falls —never to rise again.

**In that day the LORD will punish
the powers in the heavens above
and the kings on the earth below.**

They will be herded together
like prisoners bound in a dungeon;
they will be shut up in prison
and be punished after many days.
**The moon will be dismayed,
the sun ashamed;**
for the LORD Almighty will reign
on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem,
and before its elders—with great glory.

(Isaiah 24:18b-23 NIV)

Peter was evidently taking various elements (excuse the pun) of these texts and applying the symbolical apocalyptic language to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in the 1st century AD. He had good reason to do this because Jesus himself had done this very thing in his Olivet Discourse (cf. Matthew 24:29, 35). This Day of the Lord would bring about the ultimate reign of Yahweh from the true Mount Zion, the New Jerusalem, when the spiritual powers of the heavens would be conquered and punished (cf. Luke 21:26-27; Hebrews 12:22-24; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Colossians 2:15; Revelation 11:15; 14:1-3; 21:1-4; 22:3-5).

Revelation and The Lord's Day

Now when it comes to the book of Revelation, there are numerous OT parallels throughout this awesome vision (though of course they need to be interpreted in the light of the rest of the NT); and some of them have been observed above. Yet it's no surprise really as the main theme of the vision of Revelation is *the Day of the Lord & the unveiling of Jesus Christ*, and the full establishment of the kingdom of God.

This is not the time to begin a study of Revelation, but suffice it to say that this incredible vision is also related to our present topic – for John saw the Day of the Lord in spirit! I think this becomes the key to unlocking the meaning of the vision.

I came to be, in spirit, in the Lord's day, and I hear behind me a voice, loud as a trumpet...

(Revelation 1:10 CLNT)

This translation of Revelation 1 verse 10 seems to be one of the few versions that communicates the original meaning of John's words. Most bibles read '*I was in spirit on the Lord's day,*' which appears to give the impression that John was in a spiritual mood one Sunday while he was on Patmos. There are some commentators and scholars (e.g. J. S. Russell & Dr. Ken L. Gentry, Jr) who have seen something much more here.

The phrase 'the Lord's day' is clearly synonymous with 'the day of the Lord.' Besides, nowhere in the NT does it refer to a Sunday as the Lord's day. John was describing the unique experience of many of the Hebrew prophets who saw spiritual visions in spirit (whether in the body or out of the body), and he was saying that he himself had been caught up into a spiritual state or trance – in spirit – and found himself *in the Lord's day* or the Day of the Lord.

He was about to witness, in a prophetic vision, through signs and symbols, the unveiling of Jesus the Messiah as King and Judge, and the establishing in power of His kingdom. This Day would also include the divine wrath and vengeance of the curses of the Law that was to be poured out on Jerusalem and all Israel to bring an official end to the Old Covenant system, concluding with the utter destruction of the temple and the city. And the vision ends with the powerful symbolic description of the New Jerusalem coming down onto a New Earth – that is, the beginnings of a New Creation, a New Heavens and a New Earth being brought together.²⁵

And on that note, here's a reminder of what the closing chapter of Isaiah had to say about the judgment upon Israel that would introduce a New Creation and a New Jerusalem.

See, the LORD is coming with fire, and his chariots are like a whirlwind; he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke **with flames of fire**. For **with fire and with his sword** the LORD will execute judgment upon all men, and many will be those slain by the LORD...

"As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the LORD, "so will your name and descendants endure. From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and

bow down before me," says the LORD. "And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, **nor will their fire be quenched**, and they will be loathsome to all mankind."

(Isaiah 66:15-16, 22-24 NIV)

When these texts are compared with those in Revelation, 2 Peter and elsewhere, I think it becomes very evident that the NT writers were using this highly poetic and symbolic 'apocalyptic' language to reveal that the ultimate judgment of old covenant Judaism was about to be fulfilled in their generation; because the Messiah had already come in the form of Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, the coming of the Son of Man and his kingdom in a spiritual new creation, which Jesus had prophesied about, was about to occur, when Yahweh would suddenly come to His temple; but who could endure the day of His coming & the passing away of heaven and earth in a fiery ordeal?

Heaven and Earth: The Old & The New

So what are we to make of this language that speaks of the old creation passing away? In the Olivet Discourse, directly in relation to '*all these things*' occurring before '*this generation*' would pass away, Jesus had said the following,

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."

(Matthew 24:35 NIV; also Mark 13:31 & Luke 21:33)

He had said something similar to this earlier in His ministry during the 'sermon on the mount.'

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. **For truly I tell you, *until heaven and earth disappear* (or *pass away*), not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means *disappear* from the Law until everything is accomplished."**

(Matthew 5:17-18 NIV)

For those who believe that the New Testament writers (correctly) reveal that Jesus has already fulfilled the Law and the Prophets in every sense, and therefore, as a result of this, the 'old covenant' is no longer in force, then the point at which '*everything is accomplished*' is also the point at which '*heaven and earth passed away*.'

In essence, Jesus was saying here that when the Law and the Prophets (i.e. the Hebrew Scriptures) were fulfilled, then everything would be accomplished, and subsequently, heaven and earth would pass away (cf. Luke 24:27 & 44). There is a parallel here between '*until heaven and earth pass away*' and '*until everything is accomplished*.' The two are synonymous; when one occurs the other occurs also.

The full meaning of this is being brought out in the Olivet Discourse, particularly in the verses we are considering. In some sense or another, the old creation (i.e.

heaven and earth) would pass away, but the words of Jesus would continue on – indicating a new creation.

As tempting as it may be to take this in a literalistic manner, the meaning here has to be *figurative* and *spiritual*. In fact, as we have seen, only a little while earlier Jesus had spoken metaphorically of the heavenly bodies going dark and stars being shaken and falling, etc, which was describing the heavens and earth passing away through de-creation. Nevertheless, this is to be understood in the sense in which these texts are used in the OT prophets – that is, metaphorically, hyperbolically and poetically. They were used to describe major cataclysmic changes in political and/or religious power.

There are at least two key passages in the OT that reveal Israel to be 'the heavens and earth' that God created; that is, the nation of Israel, as God's chosen ones, were figuratively portrayed as 'the heavens and the earth' of whom Yahweh was the Maker.

Firstly, in Genesis 37:9-11 we have the account of the second of Joseph's dreams, where the founders of the nation of Israel are figured as the *heavenly* bodies of sun, moon and stars (cf. Revelation 12:1-2). (Incidentally, the first dream is connected with the *earth* where the 12 brothers are figured as sheaves of corn).

Secondly, in Isaiah 51:13 & 16 Yahweh said the following to Israel. (Some translations, such as the NIV, obscure the actual meaning here, so I'm quoting from Young's Literal Translation).

And thou dost forget Jehovah thy maker, Who is stretching out the heavens, and founding earth...

...And I put My words in thy mouth, And with the shadow of My hand have covered thee, **To plant the heavens, and to found earth**, And to say to Zion, 'My people [art] thou.'

In the Hebrew, it becomes clear that the description of God '*stretching out the heavens and founding earth*' are applied to His divine work with Israel, and that His work with Israel, along with His protection, was '*to plant the heavens and to found the earth*.' This is not talking about the original creation of the material heavens and earth. In fact, later on in Isaiah, the language of '*a new heavens and a new earth*' is used to refer to a new Israel, which nation is also described as a new Jerusalem (cf. Isaiah 65:17-25; 66:22-24).

Yet this 'new creation' would be created through a fiery coming of the Lord for judgment upon Israel that would cause many to be slain. That is to say, this Day of the Lord would bring salvation to some, while the rest would be destroyed. Sound familiar? Let's quote it again.

See, **the LORD is coming with fire**,
and his chariots are like a whirlwind;
he will bring down his anger with fury,
and **his rebuke with flames of fire**.
For with fire and with his sword
the LORD will execute judgment on all people,
and many will be those slain by the LORD.

"As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the LORD, "so will your name and descendants endure. From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me," says the LORD. "And they will go out and look on the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; the worms that eat them will not die, the fire that burns them will not be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind."

(Isaiah 66:15-16, 22-24 NIV)

**"See, I will create
new heavens and a new earth.**
The former things will not be remembered,
nor will they come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I will create,
**for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight
and its people a joy.**
I will rejoice over Jerusalem
and take delight in my people;
the sound of weeping and of crying
will be heard in it no more...

...Before they call I will answer;
while they are still speaking I will hear.
The wolf and the lamb will feed together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox,
and dust will be the serpent's food.
They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,"
says the LORD.

(Isaiah 65:17-19, 24-25 NIV)

Interestingly enough, Jesus quoted from Isaiah 66:24 in relation to his teaching on the 'Gehenna of fire,' indicating that a spiritual fire of fiery punishment awaits those who reject him and walk in evil ways (cf. Mark 9:42-49). Again, this reveals a metaphorical, spiritual meaning to these themes of the Day of the Lord and the New Creation.

This Day of the Lord for Jerusalem and all Israel, which was accomplished by 70 AD, officially established the kingdom of the Son of Man with power; the spiritual kingdom of God that cannot be shaken, of who's government and peace there will be no end.

As the writer to the Hebrews warned the believers of that generation,

See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire."

(Hebrews 12:25-29 NIV)

It is my strong conviction that these were the very things that the apostle Peter was writing about in the great apocalyptic passage of 2 Peter 3:3-13. And it is also very evident from the writings of the apostle Paul that the 'new creation' is viewed as having already begun, in spirit, due to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (e.g. 2 Corinthians 5:17 & Titus 3:5). Christ's immortality is the beginning of this renewal of all things, so that the new creation has already begun breaking into this old one – and continues even now. And all those who are His followers can also begin to experience something of this spiritual renewal even now in this life, before entering it fully upon death (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:1-10). (We shall consider the topic of the resurrection in part three).

The new creation also includes a new Jerusalem, a new Mount Zion, a new Covenant, a new Israel, a new Temple and a new Humanity. These are themes that are constantly being spoken of throughout the NT.²⁶ It is often spoken of in such terms as **regeneration** (or rebirth), **renewal**, **restoration** & **new creation**. The prophet Isaiah, as quoted above, had revealed this new creation in seed form; and the new heavens and new earth were intimately related to a new Jerusalem.

As I have mentioned earlier, the book of Revelation was also about this ultimate Day of the Lord and the unveiling of Christ's kingdom. That is why the whole vision ends with a glorious portrayal of the New Jerusalem & the New Creation – and yet all these events that were symbolically portrayed throughout the vision were said to be near.²⁷

It has been a common position within Christianity to view the 'millennial' reign of Christ in Revelation 20 as occurring before the New Heavens and the New Earth of Revelation 21-22; that is, the millennial reign is viewed as being temporary (particularly by those who see this period as taking place literally on earth), while the new heavens and earth are viewed as being eternal, following on from the millennial kingdom.

Although I once held to this view for many years (firstly as a dispensational futurist, and then as a partial-preterist), I now presently believe that this interpretation is incorrect. Instead, I propose that the millennial reign and the new Jerusalem/new heavens and earth are concurrent, and they are referring to the same thing from differing angles; that is, that the millennial kingdom is the spiritual, heavenly reign of the kingdom of Christ Jesus in the form of a new creation.²⁸

It is interesting to note that a popular dispensational position views the new Jerusalem as a literal city that will hang in the sky over the earth during a literal future 1000-year-reign, where immortal humans dwelling in the heavenly city will live alongside mortal humans on earth.²⁹ Although I disagree with this view, I do believe that something like this is already occurring. If these things are to be understood as spiritual symbols describing a heavenly reality, then it follows that since the Day of the Lord in 70 AD, while life has continued on earth as (church) history has progressed, it could be said that there exists a spiritual reality in another

dimension where inhabitants of 'the heavenly city' are already ruling over the earth; and Christ's 'millennial' kingdom has been operative for nearly 2000 years. Therefore, even now, members of the nations who accept the gospel of God and become followers of Christ are entering through the gates of the new Jerusalem to inherit the kingdom of God.

One of the primary reasons for my belief has to do with how the rest of the NT writers speak of the establishment of Christ's kingdom in the Day of the Lord as being a renewal of creation; that is, as a spiritual new creation, which is portrayed as being already in existence, which radically affects the world of space-time-and matter also. Only in the book of Revelation is there any distinction between a '1000 year' kingdom and a new creation.

In fact, a close reading of the new creation passages of Revelation 21-22 will reveal that it is essentially describing the New Jerusalem, the bride and wife of the Lamb; and both Paul and the writer of Hebrews describes this 'heavenly city' as being the dwelling place of all God's true covenant people right now.³⁰ This *is* the inheritance of eternal life in immortality and incorruption promised to those who are to become a part of the true covenant people of God. This was the ultimate inheritance promised to the Israel of God, which those in the 1st century AD were about to see fulfilled.³¹

Simply put, what I am saying here is that there is a spiritual heavenly reality that has existed since the Day of the Lord in 70 AD that involves a new order of existence for humanity (more specifically, for those who have died and been raised). It has to do with the spiritual rule of God through Jesus Christ and His 'new creation' people, a rule and reality that belongs to a spiritual dimension and is therefore invisible to us in the space-time universe. The whole of the NT writings are pointing in this direction for Jesus said that his kingdom was not of this world and that the kingdom would not come by careful observation.

Jesus said, "**My kingdom is not of this world.** If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. **But now my kingdom is from another place.**"

"You are a king, then!" said Pilate.

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

(John 18:36-37 NIV)

Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "**The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed,** nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst."³²

(Luke 17:20-21 NIV)

And the establishing of this spiritual kingdom, the coming of the Son of Man in power, was to include the resurrection and the judgment in the Day of the Lord.

The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:

“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever.”

And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying:

“We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, **because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign.** The nations were angry, **and your wrath has come.** The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your people who revere your name, both great and small— and for destroying those who destroy the earth.”

(Revelation 11:15-18 NIV)

In Part three we shall continue to consider in some detail this topic of the renewal of all things as it relates to the resurrection and the judgment in the Day of the Lord; that is, the Parousia of Christ & the establishing of His kingdom.

Endnotes

¹ It is no coincidence that during the era of 69-70 AD not only was the Jewish temple at Jerusalem destroyed but the greatest pagan temple in Rome, the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on the Capitoline hill, was also destroyed by the Roman civil wars (cf. Tacitus, *Histories*; Suetonius, *Vespasian*; quoted on <http://www.romereborn.virginia.edu/ge/TS-037-PA.html> - accessed 12/12/2012).

² It is commonly believed that the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost occurred while the disciples were in an upper room in Jerusalem. For many years now I have disagreed with this scenario and have instead taught that the disciples were in the temple courts, with the emphasis that this was a public event in the heart of Jerusalem on this special feast day.

In the days before Pentecost, the group of Jerusalem disciples, which included the apostles, numbered about 120 (cf. Acts 1:15). This number is not without symbolic significance, as there were 120 priests involved with the divine dedication of Solomon’s temple, when fire fell from heaven and the Glory of Yahweh filled the temple (cf. 2 Chronicles 5:12-14; 7:1-3). And now, in relation to the divine dedication of God’s new temple on the day of Pentecost, also accompanied by divine fire from heaven, there were 120 priests of a new order (cf. 1 Peter 2:5).

Even though there is mention of the upper room where the disciples were staying in Acts 1:13, where they gathered together after the Ascension, that was still over a week before Pentecost. When the day of Pentecost came, it would’ve been their custom to gather at the

temple. Acts 2:1-4 describes them *gathered together in one place* when the sound of a violent wind came from heaven and *filled the whole house where they were sitting*; and they saw what appeared to be tongues of fire separating, which then came to rest on each of them. This 'house' was evidently referring to the house of God, the temple courts, where they were sitting (cf. John 2:13-17; Acts 2:46). Other Jews heard the sound and a crowd gathered around the disciples, and then eventually Peter and the Eleven stood up to address the crowd (cf. Acts 2:5-15). How could all of this have occurred in an upper room!

³ This lunar eclipse is recorded in the book *Solar and Lunar Eclipses of the Ancient Near East from 3000 BC to 0* by Manfred Kudlek and Erich H. Mickler. I'm indebted to Dr Stephen E. Jones for this information (cf. Jones, *Secrets of Time*, 1996, God's Kingdom Ministries, 4th Printing, p.107).

Although the dating of Jesus' birth often appears highly speculative, with dates varying from 1 to 12 BC (!), I think a strong and balanced case can be made for accepting that 2 BC is the correct date. See Dr. Stephen E. Jones, *When REALLY was Jesus Born?* (a booklet available via his website God's Kingdom Ministries); Ernest L. Martin, *The Star That Astonished The World*, (ASK Publications, 1996); & Prof. Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology, Revised Edition* (1998, Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.).

I also accept the year of Christ's death and resurrection as 33 AD as opposed to the other most probable alternative of 30 AD. See Prof. Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology, Revised Edition* (1998, Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.) & Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of The Life of Christ*, (1977, Zondervan). I therefore see Christ's ministry as beginning in about autumn 29 to spring 30 AD, depending on whether one accepts a three-year ministry or a three-and-a-half-year ministry. For the date of Christ's crucifixion being 3rd April 33 AD, see the above works by Harold W. Hoehner & Dr Stephen E. Jones; in particular Prof. Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology, Revised Edition* (1998, Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.) pp. 359-369, especially sections 629 & 631.

"The result of this investigation is that the two most probable dates, astronomically and calendrically, are Friday, Apr 7, A.D. 30, and Friday, Apr 3, A.D. 33" (Finegan, p. 366)

⁴ For further details of this, see my article *The Olivet Discourse and The Second Advent*.

⁵ This promise of ruling with Christ, originally given to the twelve apostles, was later extended to all true followers and servants of Jesus who were termed 'overcomers' or 'conquerors' in fulfilment of Daniel 7 (cf. Revelation 2:26-27; 3:9,21; 5:10). And the judgment and/or reign of the people of God (i.e. the saints or holy ones), as those who are partakers of the First Resurrection, has been expanded to include authority over the whole world and even 'angels' (i.e. spirit beings) as co-rulers with Christ (cf. Revelation 20:4-6; 22:3-5; 1 Corinthians 6:2-3).

It is also worth noting here that throughout the NT there isn't any text that explicitly states that Christ's 'throne' and reign would be physically situated on earth. The whole focus is on the spiritual world or 'dimension.' The only text that clearly indicates some kind of reign on earth is Revelation 5:10 in reference to the 'Melchizedek' reign of the sons of God as priest-kings. Nevertheless, this appears to be referring to the authority of the people of God as co-rulers with Christ emphasising their authority in the earthly sphere (as also generations of the Church are still located on earth; cf. Ephesians 3:21). The NT speaks of 'those in heaven' (i.e. spirit beings) and 'those on earth' (human beings); and Christ's authority is exercised over both realms (Matthew 28:18-20; Colossians 1:15-20; Ephesians 1:10, 19-23). This doesn't mean that we should automatically conclude that Christ will never reign on a physical earth (a literal new earth?), but the emphasis of the NT is ultimately not on this world; the New Creation & the New Jerusalem already exist.

⁶ Throughout the NT, the apostles and prophets used various Greek terms to describe the 'restoration of all things;' in English these include *new birth, regeneration, restoration, renewal, and new creation*. The apostle Paul especially used the terms *new creation, new humanity and reconciliation of all things*. All these words are describing the spiritual 'new heavens and new earth' originally spoken of in Isaiah 65-66; and the basis for this renewal is the New Covenant that Jesus instituted through his sacrificial death and resurrection.

I believe that upon close examination of the appropriate texts this 'restoration' has to do primarily with the renewing of humanity into the image of God, bringing reconciliation and salvation from Sin and Death. I also believe strongly that a biblical case can be made for viewing this 'renewal' and 'reconciliation of all' as having universal consequences. Therefore, even though I believe that scripture teaches that this restoration of all things has already begun, I nevertheless still see this restoration as having far reaching implications for the future of humanity.

⁷ These warnings that Jesus gave about the wrath that was to come upon the Jewish people are really put into perspective when reading the writings of Josephus. At the Passover of 70 AD, Jews from all over the land and beyond came to Jerusalem for the feast – and they became suddenly trapped inside the city as the siege began under Titus' command.

Now the number of those that were carried captive during this whole war was collected to be ninety-seven thousand; as was the number of those that perished during the whole siege eleven hundred thousand, the greater part of whom were indeed of the same nation [with the citizens of Jerusalem], but not belonging to the city itself; for they were come up from all the country to the feast of unleavened bread, and were on a sudden shut up by an army, which, at the very first, occasioned so great a straitness among them, that there came a pestilential destruction upon them, and soon afterward such a famine, as destroyed them more suddenly.. Now this vast multitude is indeed collected out of remote places, but the entire nation was now shut up by fate as in prison, and the Roman army encompassed the city when it was crowded with inhabitants. **Accordingly, the multitude of those that therein perished exceeded all the destructions that either men or God ever brought upon the world;** for, to speak only of what was publicly known, the Romans slew some of them, some they carried captives, and others they made a search for under ground, and when they found where they were, they broke up the ground and slew all they met with.

(*Wars*, Book 6:9:3-4 emphasis mine)

⁸ For instance, many of the spiritual events recorded in the NT involving spiritual beings (i.e. angels), and in particular, those relating to Satan himself, were not seen by the world of men in general. Much of Jesus' teaching and revelation about 'heaven' has to be understood by pure faith alone. Evidence for these things are not readily available! Even the actual resurrection of Jesus from the dead has to be accepted by faith as no one actually witnessed it occurring; although, be that as it may, the circumstantial evidence surrounding the whole event points firmly in the direction of the whole thing occurring just as the NT writers said it did. They saw the resurrected Christ in a transformed body and became witnesses of what they heard and saw. Nevertheless, we can only accept their testimony by faith and spiritual revelation – yet their testimony was ultimately God's testimony (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 14-20).

⁹ For further references to this 'fiery' judgment, see also Matthew 3:10-12; 5:29-30; 7:19-23; 18:8-9; Revelation 20:13-15; 21:7-8; 22:12-15.

¹⁰ The book of Revelation opens and closes with statements such as 'the time is near' 'what must soon occur' and 'what is about to take place' (cf. 1:1, 3, 19; 22:6, 6-7, 10, 12, 20.)

¹¹ See Part One of this series, and also my article *The Olivet Discourse and The Second Advent*.

¹² Concerning the theme of the restoration of a remnant of Israel from the exile, see the following examples: Isaiah 11:12; 43:5-7; Jeremiah 23:3-4; 31:7-8,10; Ezekiel 20:34,41; 37:21-24; Micah 2:12-13; 4:6-7. This theme always focused on a remnant from all Israel that would be restored via the blessings and rule of the Messiah. Paul appears to refer to this collective remnant as 'all Israel' in Romans 11 (Cp. Romans 11:1,5,7,25-26; also Romans 9:6,24,27-28). Therefore, in the NT, we have Jesus referring to this gathering together of the elect at his coming, which Paul also speaks of in 2 Thessalonians 2:1. This seems to me to be the most appropriate way of understanding these texts.

¹³ The Greek word *apostasia* can refer to a religious apostasy or a political rebellion. In this case, Paul was probably referring to *both* meanings in relation to the 1st century Jewish nation.

¹⁴ It is possible that this 'restrainer' was a spiritual 'angelic' power holding back the coming of the lawless one. There are examples of angelic powers restraining or releasing earthly powers in Scripture (e.g. Daniel 10:12-14, 20-11:4; Revelation 7:1; 9:13-16). There have been a number of interpretations of this restrainer, but it's difficult to know for certain what Paul actually meant; therefore we can only make an educated guess really. In the Greek, the restrainer is spoken of as an impersonal force (neuter='it') and a personal figure (masculine='he'); yet whatever Paul meant by this, it had something to do with the negative spiritual power that he called '*the mystery of lawlessness*,' which was already at work in the world at the time he wrote this letter. It is also highly probable that this 'power' was to be equated with '*the spirit of antichrist*' mentioned by John (cf. 1 John 4:3); and John also revealed that the presence of this antichrist spirit in the 1st century was proof that it was 'the last hour' (cf. 1 John 2:18).

It is also evident from verse 6 that the Thessalonian church knew what & who this restrainer was because Paul had already told them; yet for some reason, he didn't want to write openly about it in this letter. It therefore becomes evident that Paul was preparing them for something that was to occur in their lifetime.

¹⁵ Note the following quotes from *The Jewish War* by Josephus.

AND now the Romans, upon the flight of the seditious into the city, and upon the burning of the holy house itself, and of all the buildings round about it, **brought their ensigns to the temple and set them over against its eastern gate**; and there did they offer sacrifices to them, and there did they make Titus imperator with the greatest acclamations of joy. (Book 6:6:1 emphasis mine)

Now Pilate, who was sent as procurator into Judea by Tiberius, sent by night **those images of Caesar that are called ensigns** into Jerusalem. This excited a very among great tumult among the Jews when it was day; for those that were near them were astonished at the sight of them, as indications that their laws were trodden under foot; for those laws do not permit any sort of image to be brought into the city. Nay, besides the indignation which the citizens had themselves at this procedure, a vast number of people came running out of the country. (Book 2:9:2 emphasis mine)

¹⁶ There is an alternative view of this passage in 2 Thessalonians 2 approaching it from another level of truth, often referred to as the 'historicist' view. I still believe that this view is valid, but only as a secondary interpretation. For further details of this interpretation, see the relevant section in my article *The Visions of Daniel: The Great Image and The Four Beasts*. And for another, slightly Idealist, view; see *The True Revival Versus The Apostasy* in the Archive section. I am presently planning on writing an updated study on *The Visions of*

Daniel: The Great Image and The Four Beasts from a preterist perspective to complement the present version.

¹⁷ For example, compare the following: Young's Literal Version, Concordant Literal NT and Interlinear Greek-English NT by George R. Berry.

¹⁸ In past articles, I had put forward the belief that Vespasian was the little horn/ruler of Daniel 7 and the first beast of Revelation 13, but I've since made some adjustments after reading the excellent two-volume series *The Antichrist and the Second Coming: A Preterist Examination* by Duncan W. Mackenzie. I very much agree with a large percentage of Mackenzie's position, and I hope to expound further on these things in the future. Some biblical scholars like J. S. Russell and Ken Gentry interpret these prophecies as being fulfilled in Nero. Nevertheless, I think Vespasian or Titus fulfils the details of these prophecies more than Nero does; and after re-examination of these things in 2012, I now believe that it is Titus. I have given some of my reasons as to why I disagree with the Nero view above in relation to the 'man of lawlessness' text.

¹⁹ For further study of the last days, see my article *The Last Days and Prophecy Fulfilled*.

²⁰ This is not the time to deal with the issue of the Flood, but I firmly believe that this flood was local to ancient Mesopotamia, and that it was not a global flood in the modern understanding of it. There isn't any hard evidence for a global flood, but there is good evidence for a huge cataclysmic flood in ancient Mesopotamia, largely due to the various flood stories available that are similar to the biblical account of Noah; and the most popular ones are concerned with ancient Mesopotamia in particular, such as The Gilgamesh Epic (sources: Richard James Fischer, *Historical Genesis*, 2008, University Press of America, Inc; & Hugh Ross, *The Genesis Question*, Second Edition, 2001, Navpress). The Genesis account has to be understood in its ancient Hebraic Near Eastern context where the focus was on the history of God's covenant people in the ancient civilisations of the Near East.

²¹ Those who believe in Universal Salvation, where the emphasis is placed on God's desire or will to save all, often use this text to support their position. Although I still believe in Universal Reconciliation, I do not accept the view that Peter was talking about the salvation of all in this text. In its 1st century context in particular, it is evident that not all would come to repentance before the Day of the Lord, even though God's patience was working towards the goal of saving more of them.

²² Compare Paul's use of this phrase in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 where he pictures the believer's judgment before Christ as a purifying fire. The focus here is on the *works* or *service* of the individual servant, and is not the same judgment as the Gehenna of fire for hypocrites and unbelievers (i.e. the Lake of Fire in Revelation); for in that metaphorical 'fire' the whole person is immersed. Nevertheless, God's righteous judgment is as a consuming fire, and that which cannot stand the fire is burned up.

²³ Source: *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (1985, Thomas Nelson, Inc.) & The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible.

²⁴ Carefully note the following text from Revelation.

I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The heavens receded like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.

Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! **For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?**"

(Revelation 6:12-17 NIV)

²⁵ In the first chapter of Revelation, and in the last, the apostle John was indicating very clearly that the prophecies contained within the vision of Revelation were about to be fulfilled, shortly after it was given to him. A sound interpretation of Revelation has to fit these criteria. (See also *The Last Days and Prophecy Fulfilled*).

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants **what must soon take place**. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, **because the time is near**...

...Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this scroll, **because the time is near**."

(Revelation 1:1-3; 22:10 NIV)

Dr. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr, in his excellent book *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating The Book of Revelation*, shows convincingly that the weight of evidence for the writing of Revelation, both externally, and in particular, internally, actually leans heavily toward the early date of c. 65 AD, during the reign of Emperor Nero, as opposed to the later date of c. 95 AD during the reign of Domitian.

It turns out that there were actually two early traditions in Church history for the composition of Revelation: a) during Nero's reign (c. 60's AD), and b) during Domitian's reign (c. mid-90's AD). It would appear as though the late date under Domitian's reign was essentially based on the writings of Irenaeus, yet his statement is open to question, both as to translation and interpretation. The strongest evidence for the early date is the internal witness of scripture itself, and the huge importance of the fulfilment of prophecy concerning Israel and Jerusalem in 70 AD.

Jesus did say that those '*days of vengeance*' and '*wrath*' and '*great tribulation*' would be the fulfilment of all that has been written (Luke 21:20-23). Also, speaking to the Jewish leaders of his day, Jesus declared a number of times that judgment would fall upon 'this generation,' that is, to those he was talking to (cf. Matthew 23:35-36; 24:34). Therefore, if Revelation was actually written *before* the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD, then the preterist view is correct.

The evidence also indicates that the whole New Testament canon was originally written and completed before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. John A. T. Robinson in his notable work *Redating the New Testament* (SCM Press, 1976) makes a strong case for placing *all* of the NT writings as being originally written before 70 AD.

There have been many respected biblical scholars who hold to this early date for the writing of Revelation (e.g. F. F. Bruce, Philip Schaff, Adam Clarke, F. W. Farrar, Milton S. Terry, F. J. A. Hort, Alfred Edersheim, etc). In fact, during the late 19th century it was the predominant position held by the majority of biblical scholars (see Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, pp. 27-38).

²⁶ For example: Galatians 3:26-29; 4:24-26; 6:15-16; Ephesians 2:14-22; 4:22-24; Colossians 3:9-12; 2 Corinthians 3:6-18; 5:17; 6:16-18. Also Hebrews 12:22-24; Revelation 14:1-5; 21:1-22:5.

²⁷ See notes 8 & 21 above.

²⁸ I am indebted to J. Stuart Russell and Duncan W. McKenzie for helping me to come to this conclusion.

²⁹ This is discussed in J. Dwight Pentecost's classic dispensational work *Things To Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Zondervan, 1964) in Chapter 33 *The Heavenly City New Jerusalem*, pp. 568-569, 577-580.

³⁰ See Galatians 4:24-29; Hebrews 12:22-24; 13:14; 11:16.

³¹ It is no coincidence that the NT writer of Hebrews made comparisons throughout the letter to the generation of Moses' & Joshua's day, for he was drawing parallels between that generation and his own in the 1st century AD due to the arrival of Jesus as the Messiah, the new Moses. In both cases there was to be a 40-year period from an Exodus (or salvation event) to the inheritance of the Promised Land for the true Israel.

³² The word translated 'observed' in this passage is the Greek word *parateresis*. The Concordant Literal NT translates it as 'scrutiny'. Vine's Expository Dictionary says it means 'attentive watching.' This word can be used negatively (as in Luke 6:7 to describe the negative critical eye of the Pharisees) or otherwise. It basically means to keep a close eye on something. In the context of Luke 17:20-37, I would say it is better to understand this as 'close human observation with the eyes.' Jesus' subsequent comments that people would not say 'Here it is' or 'There it is' confirms this view. The Jews were looking for a worldly, political kingdom, but Jesus tells them it would be otherwise; and its arrival would not be seen by normal human observation, no matter how much one looked for it.

The latter part of verse 21 reads more literally "*the kingdom of God is in the middle of you.*" This could be understood as 'within you' or 'in your midst.' It can apply both ways, with different versions using one or the other. Nevertheless, I believe the context leans more towards '*in your midst*' or '*among you*' as Jesus was addressing the Pharisees; and I don't believe he was telling them that the kingdom of God was within them! Yet the kingdom was definitely in their midst, for the King was already in front of them.