

THE OLIVET DISCOURSE  
&  
THE SECOND ADVENT

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(Formerly *The Prophecies of the Olivet Discourse*)

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## Introduction

Numerous writings exist today on the subject of Jesus' Olivet Discourse, and there are a number of differing interpretations concerning how we are to understand these prophetic words of Christ. The interpretations can be broken down into three major views, namely,

- a. It was all fulfilled in the 1st Century AD, including the Second Advent (commonly called the **Consistent/Hyper/Full Preterist** view, though the modern view believes that *all* prophecy has been fulfilled)
- b. Most of it is to be fulfilled at the very end of this present age, which is still future (the **Futurist** view, commonly linked to **Dispensationalism**), and
- c. Part of it has been fulfilled in the 1st Century, while the rest will be fulfilled at the Second Advent of Christ in the future (**Partial Preterist** and **Historicist** views)

Technically, there is a fourth view that appears as though it were a full preterist interpretation, but in reality it is a partial preterist view. This view believes that in its 1<sup>st</sup> century context, Jesus *was* primarily talking about the upcoming events that were to occur in that generation, BUT he was not *directly* talking about the Second Advent.

Another position similar to this, which is still technically a partial preterist view (though some would beg to differ on that), goes a step further and accepts that Jesus *was* talking about his Second Appearing or Parousia, which did, in fact, occur in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, yet there is still a Consummation event still to come that could rightly be called a final Day of the Lord. More will be said on all this as we progress.

Of course, whichever view one takes, this will decide how one interprets the vision of Revelation as well, as Revelation is intimately linked to Christ's Olivet prophecies and the book of Daniel (as well as *all* of the prophets really).<sup>1</sup>

Anyhow, the reason as to why these variant interpretations of the Olivet prophecies exist is because of the specific words and phrases that Jesus used. On the one hand, he clearly referred to the generation of his own day in the 1st century AD ('this generation'), yet on the other, he appeared to use language that referred to his Second Advent, which some believe hasn't occurred as yet (although that depends on how one understands the *nature* of that event). The usual problem, especially for partial-preterists, is where to draw the line between one and the other – and this would only be the case IF Jesus *were* actually referring to the events of his Return and not the events of the 1<sup>st</sup> century! Can you see how complicated it can be?

This has caused a lot of controversy over the years, particularly amongst academics, and Christians (e.g. C. S. Lewis) and non-Christians (e.g. Bertrand Russell) alike have accused Jesus of being mistaken because the events of his 'Second Advent' (as they understood it) did not occur in the 1<sup>st</sup> century generation as he predicted they would.<sup>2</sup> So this is an extremely important issue, and not just a minor point in someone's eschatology!

It could be argued that the full preterist view makes the mistake of limiting the whole prophecy to the 1st century AD, and because it understands the latter portion of the Discourse as referring to the Second Advent, this view believes that the Day of Resurrection and Judgment has already occurred. Some would go so far as to say that the full preterist view on the Second Advent is totally in error because it denies that there is yet a Second Advent of Christ, in the traditionally orthodox sense.

Nevertheless, the real issue should be about sound biblical interpretation, rather than creedal orthodoxy; where one is seeking to understand the true nature of this awesome event, rather than simply following popular opinion. In fact, I would now call myself a consistent preterist (a term I prefer), though I am not a 'full preterist' in the modern sense of that phrase, because I believe that there is yet to be a future Consummation event; (and yes, the various theological positions can be a little confusing for some, to say the least!)

Now as far as the futurist view is concerned, I think the mistake is made of placing these things in the distant future, which then makes it virtually irrelevant for all the preceding generations of the Church - until now, 2000 years later! It also ignores the 1<sup>st</sup> century context of 'this generation' and puts it all in the future, while giving the Greek word *genea* (generation) an abnormal, stretched meaning! This is not sound exegesis. I once held this view many years ago until I realised the error of it! I now, therefore, reject this view.

Be that as it may, I do agree with the common premillennial futurist position on the following points: Scripture clearly teaches a three and a half year tribulation; an antichrist/man of lawlessness figure; an abomination of desolation involving the temple in Jerusalem; a war in Israel and a battle over Jerusalem; a second advent of Christ, along with a first resurrection and judgment; followed by a 'millennial' kingdom reign of Christ, with the sons of God co-ruling with Christ from the new Jerusalem. *The big difference is that I believe these things have occurred in the past, with the 'millennial' reign now nearing its consummation!*

The preterist view appears to be the only reasonable and satisfactory explanation to the clear teaching of the New Testament (NT), nevertheless, there is a problem with the standard partial-preterist view, which I will deal with in more detail later. Briefly put, the main problem is that there isn't a clear line in the narrative where the '1st century fulfilment' ends and the 'Second Advent' portion begins. Some try to make this distinction but it just doesn't stand the test. I once did the same, but I have been forced to rethink it all.

I'm not going to laboriously delve into all the various interpretations here in depth, but instead I'm going to attempt to give a simple straightforward study on this subject (yes, I believe that's possible!), while touching on some of the issues mentioned above. Hopefully I will show that Jesus' words are quite simple to understand, without needing any fanciful interpretation to fit into some particular

scheme. Of course, everyone has their presuppositions when they approach Scripture, and this needs to be recognised and acknowledged. I believe that the preterist view has the evidence of history and the writings of some of the Church Fathers on its side here.

Nevertheless, I still think there is more to this than meets the eye, and there are notable biblical scholars (such as the renowned English scholar N. T. Wright) who are recognising more of the historical 1<sup>st</sup> century context without departing from a 'partial preterist' position completely. The real question, though, that gets right to the heart of the matter is "was Jesus really talking about his Second Advent or not throughout the discourse?"

I will now attempt to expound the view that the Second Advent was indeed the primary focus of the discourse, but that this is to be understood within the 1<sup>st</sup> century context of the end of the old covenant age, and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD. I have become convinced that the true nature of Christ's appearing & kingdom is very different from how it is usually perceived. My position is very similar to that of James Stuart Russell as laid out in his excellent book *The Parousia*.<sup>3</sup>

For a more in-depth study of these things, see my *The Day of the Lord, the Royal Appearing* series.

As an accompaniment to this article, I have provided a chapter from Philip Mauro's book ***The Seventy Weeks*** on the subject of *The Siege of Jerusalem As Described By Josephus*, which reveals the accuracy of many of Jesus' words having been fulfilled in the 1st century AD, available in this section.

## The Discourse and the Three Questions

So let us now take a look at the key passages that record these prophecies of Jesus in what has been called 'the Olivet Discourse.' The reason for this description is due to the fact that He spoke these things to His disciples on the Mount of Olives (or Olivet) overlooking the Temple in Jerusalem, only days before He was to die in about 33 AD, and it is the most detailed account that we have of Jesus' prophecies about the then-future destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and the desolation of Judea, to mark the end of the Old Covenant age.

There are three accounts of this actual discourse, which can be found in Matthew 24-25, Mark 13 and Luke 21, though Luke also records some similar teaching on the subject at other times in Luke 17 & 19. *We need to consider all of these accounts together to understand exactly what Jesus was saying.*

As I've already mentioned above, there are many 'dispensational' interpretations out there that teach that virtually all of the details of this discourse are still to be fulfilled in the future as part of 'a great 7-year (or 3 ½ year) Tribulation' involving a coming Antichrist. I was led astray by this very misleading interpretation for many years, but I firmly believe that the actual truth of the matter is a lot plainer than most people think. If you are presently influenced by this kind of 'dispensational thinking' then you will need to try and lay that aside for now if you really wish to be

open to what I'm going to say. Dispensational presuppositions will need to be suspended!

I shall quote the appropriate verses from each gospel account as we progress, using **Matthew 24** as the main text for clarity. All ***emphasis*** in text quotations is generally mine. Here is a brief overview of how I view the Olivet Discourse in its historical context.

I believe that the evidence is really strong to accept the view that the majority of Matthew 24 (and also Mark 13 & Luke 21) concerns things that were fulfilled in the 1st century AD, in relation to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and the end of the old covenant system, and of Israel's place as God's nation in the flesh. I'm not saying that a Gentile Church has replaced Israel, but it does mean that the true Israel of God is now made up of spiritual Jews and Gentiles in Jesus the Messiah, which is the true Church or Ecclesia of God. In God's eyes, it was the end of the religion of Judaism and the old covenant system of the Law of Moses, the latter having been fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah and the establishing of the new covenant.

Jesus also gave warnings about the general condition of the last days until His Return at the conclusion of the age. These 'conditions' would increase in frequency and intensity during this period, but they were not to be taken as specific signs of His Coming in and of themselves.

During His final week of teaching in Jerusalem, Jesus had already prophesied that the temple in Jerusalem would be totally destroyed, along with the city itself, and that this destruction would be witnessed by the generation living at that time (i.e. within about 40 years). *This was to be a pivotal and climactic event in the history of the Jewish people, and a fulfilment of all biblical prophecy concerning them.* That is, after a period of over 1500 years, Israel and the old covenant were to pass away, to be fully replaced by a new covenant Israel in Jesus the Messiah (i.e. biblical Christianity and the Christian Church).

Take careful note of these texts.

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

(Luke 19:41-44 NIV)

A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wept for him. Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' Then

" they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!"

and to the hills, "Cover us!" ' For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

(Luke 23:27-31 NIV)

"The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city."

(Matthew 22:7 NIV)

"And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. **I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation.**"

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. **Look, your house is left to you desolate.**"

(Matthew 23:35-38 NIV)

It was for this reason that the disciples drew Jesus' attention to the temple buildings, because they just couldn't believe that this magnificent holy structure was going to be completely destroyed in the very near future. Herod's Temple was a magnificent complex, even though parts of it were still under construction until about 64 AD. Ironically, Herod the Great's massive temple renovation/rebuilding programme took over 80 years to build, and it was completed just 6 years before it was totally destroyed! Yet Jesus tells them clearly that every stone was going to be thrown down, because God had left it desolate and He no longer dwelt there in any form whatsoever.

Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

(Matthew 24:1-2 NIV)

Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, "As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down."

(Luke 21:5-6 NIV)

Now take note here, because this is the key to correctly understanding this discourse of Jesus. It was in this context of Jesus' words about the destruction of the temple and the city that the disciples Peter, James, John and Andrew came to Jesus privately, while He was sitting on the Mount of Olives overlooking the city, to ask Him some questions.

They actually asked Him three questions:

1. When will these things happen?

2. What will be the sign that they are about to happen?

And

3. What will be the sign of your coming (or presence) and the end of the age?

All three Gospel accounts mention the first two questions, but only Matthew records the third question.

"Teacher," they asked, "when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?"

(Luke 21:7 NIV)

As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?"

(Mark 13:3-4 NIV)

As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

(Matthew 24:3 NIV)

The disciples' questions were essentially about the coming destruction of the temple and the city, but they also assumed that all of this was part of the great Day of the Lord at the end of the age. They were certainly right in thinking that this was the prophesied Day of the Lord for Israel and Jerusalem, mentioned in such prophecies as Joel 2:31-32; Isaiah 34; 61:2 & Daniel 9:26-27; 12:7 – and all in relation to the Messiah's coming into his kingdom.

Some commentators and teachers believe that the disciples were mistaken for thinking that this judgment on Jerusalem was then to be connected to the ultimate Day of Christ's Return in power and glory i.e. the Second Advent. I'm not convinced that they were mistaken, for the question could be asked, did the disciples correctly understand Jesus' words in some other sense?

In a very real sense, the 'end of the age' of the old covenant system was looming in the near future, and the disciples didn't know exactly what was to be beyond it. They had also heard Jesus prophesying about 'the coming of the Son of Man' in relation to this new age that lay in the near future, and he had made it very clear to them that some of them would live to see it occur, within that generation (cf. Matthew 10:23; 16:28).

So, the disciples may NOT have been mistaken, as some have suggested, when they saw a connection between the 'coming' of Christ and the end of the age, and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple within their generation. They did not necessarily need to understand these terms as referring to the Second Advent, though of course, it is possible that they may have understood it that way without realising the extent of God's plan ahead of them. As we shall see later, though, the



Greek word *parousia*, translated *coming* or *presence*, is not a blanket technical term that *always* applies to the Second Advent of Christ, as some teach. Having said that, most instances of Parousia in the NT are speaking of the Second Appearing of Christ.

I also think that it is highly probable that, at the time of the Olivet Discourse, the disciples would not have fully understood that there was to be an indefinite period of time after Christ's ascension in which God would be calling out His people from all nations during an administration of grace. This was to be more fully revealed to the apostle Paul some years later. Anyhow, this was not their concern at that time.

Jesus answered them by giving them details of the then-future events of the 1st century, revealing to them what was to come during the next 40 years, particularly as it applied to Jews and Christians in the land of Palestine, by the end of which time Jerusalem and the Temple would be destroyed in the Jewish/Roman War of 66-70 AD. These things are recorded in Matthew 24:4-25, Mark 13:5-23 and Luke 21:8-24.

So let us now consider these texts a step at a time.

### Deception, Wars and Upheavals - Birth Pangs of the Last Days

Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many."

(Matthew 24:4-5 NIV)

Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many."

(Mark 13:5-6 NIV)

He replied: "Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and, 'The time is near.' Do not follow them."

(Luke 21:8 NIV)

The first thing He warns them about is false messiahs or christs, saying that *many* would arise to deceive the people, claiming to be the promised deliverer. It is well documented in the writings of the Jewish historian, Josephus, and others, that many false messiahs and 'rebel leaders' arose in the land of Palestine alone in the decades that followed (e.g. The Jewish War, Book VI).<sup>4</sup> Even Acts 21:38 mentions one of these false messiah figures, an Egyptian, whom the Roman commander mistook Paul for.

And in accordance with the pattern of prophetic cycles repeating themselves, false messiahs and deceivers have continued to arise in this present age, not only in Palestine, but also throughout the whole world.

"You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, **but see to it that you are not alarmed.** Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. **All these are the beginning of birth pains.**"

(Matthew 24:6-8 NIV)

"When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. **These are the beginning of birth pains.**"

(Mark 13:7-8 NIV)

"When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away."

Then he said to them: "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven."

(Luke 21:9-11 NIV)

Jesus then warns them about wars, battles, revolutions and general upheaval in society and nature. He says that they should not be frightened or surprised when these things occur, and He made it very clear that these things were *not* signs of the end! There will be wars and news of wars, with nation fighting nation, and kingdom fighting kingdom, with revolutions and rebellions. This was particularly relevant to that era because the 'Roman Peace,' the *Pax Romana*, which had been established by Emperor Augustus before the birth of Jesus, was keeping relative peace throughout the Empire. Therefore, Jesus was essentially saying that this 'Peace' was going to be hugely disrupted (cp. Revelation 6:3-4).

There would also be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences (or diseases) throughout the Roman world, particularly affecting Palestine, as well as fearful events and great signs from heaven. All these things are said to be the beginning of birth pains, which increase in frequency and intensity over time.<sup>5</sup>

In relation to the Jewish/Roman war of 67-73 AD, there were many fearful events and great signs from heaven around this time. Josephus records about 7 signs that took place at this time in his *Jewish Wars: Book 6*.<sup>6</sup>

There were also great upheavals and rebellions throughout the Roman Empire, and even Rome itself was brought to the brink of collapse after the death of Nero Caesar, due to the civil wars during 'the year of the four Emperors' from 68-69 AD.<sup>7</sup>

And on another level, these 'birth pangs' could also be applied to this present age. Birth pains become more frequent and more intense as the actual birth becomes nearer, so in accordance with how Jesus used this metaphor, we could also expect to see more upheavals similar to these in the world as the consummation draws near. It is interesting to note that some of the greatest world wars and revolutions, atrocities and plagues, have occurred in the past 100 years or so. Surely the full manifestation of the kingdom of God is near.

[Persecution, Martyrdom and Trials of Faith](#)

"Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

(Matthew 24:9-14 NIV)

"You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit."

"Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved."

(Mark 13:9-13 NIV)

"But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict."

"You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. All men will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm you will gain life."

(Luke 21:12-19 NIV)

Jesus goes on to warn them of the coming persecution against His followers, who would be called Christians, and the consequences of these trials, which for many would mean martyrdom. Yet these persecutions would help bring God's true messengers before governors and kings, and cause the gospel to be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, including Rome itself, the capital of the world at that time. Only then would the end come for Jerusalem and Israel, and the full rejection/completion of the old covenant system. His disciples are encouraged to endure to the end of these trials as overcomers or conquerors, remaining loyal to their heavenly King and the faith they profess.

Yet Jesus warned that many would also fall away from the Faith, and there would be great hatred and betrayal against His disciples, even from friends and family. Lawlessness and wickedness would increase, with little regard for the true Faith once held by those who had rejected it. Many false prophets would also arise, leading many into deception.

We don't have to look very far to see how these things have been fulfilled. The book of Acts alone records something of the persecution and trials of the early

church, which initially was instigated by the Jewish leaders, and it is well documented in Roman history that from Emperor Nero onwards there were official persecutions against the Christians, causing many families and friends to betray their 'Christian' loved ones whom they believed to be rebels and heretics, defilers of 'the true faith' - whether pagan Romans or religious Jews. Many of the original disciples and apostles died well before AD 70 as a result of these persecutions.

Paul also revealed in his letters that the gospel of the kingdom was proclaimed to the whole world, including Rome, before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth....**This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven**, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

(Colossians 1:6, 23 NIV)

But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth.

(2 Timothy 4:17 NIV)

I've heard many bible teachers say that before Jesus can return this sign of the gospel being preached in the whole world needs to occur first. Some even recognise the 1<sup>st</sup> century context of this portion of the discourse, but they then apply Matthew 24:14 to the present time saying that every country needs to hear the gospel before Christ can return. It is evident from the context, though, that Jesus was referring to the 1<sup>st</sup> century generation and the end of the Jerusalem of the old covenant. The book of Acts reveals the unfolding plan of God for the gospel to be officially proclaimed to the whole world through his messengers and witnesses - beginning at Jerusalem and Judea, before spreading out to Samaria and all Palestine, and then on outwards to the whole civilized world of the Roman Empire (cf. Acts 1:7-8; 17:24-31). Therefore, this has already been fulfilled.

There is also ample evidence within the New Testament writings that there were many false prophets and teachers within the early church, particularly those who were Judaisers, as well as those who belonged to the Gnostic sects. These things only increased as the decades rolled by - and Jesus' words were fulfilled to the letter. On top of this, the overall state of the Jewish nation by the time of the Roman War in the late 60's AD was utterly appalling, as Josephus recounts in his Jewish Wars (see accompanying article by P. Mauro). It's no wonder that Paul said the following about the Jews of his day when writing to the Thessalonian believers.

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 them, for they had '*filled up their sins to the limit*' in their treatment of God's Son and His messengers.

Jesus had warned them that that generation would eventually become seven times more wicked than how they were before the commencement of His ministry - and sadly His words were horrifically fulfilled by 70 AD, when the wrath of God came fully upon them.

"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)

Jesus had also previously indicated that at the time of the coming of the Son of Man, when God would bring about justice swiftly for his chosen ones who were being persecuted and killed, the faith of his people on the land (or earth) would be severely tested (cp. Revelation 6:9-11). The Greek in this text reads '*the* faith' rather than just faith, implying that the true Christian faith would almost become extinguished!

And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. **However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find (Gr. *the*) faith on the earth (or land)?"**

(Luke 18:7-8 NIV)

## The Jewish War and the Temple's Destruction

As you read the following texts very carefully, notice the parallels between them all.

"So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath.

**For then there will be great distress (or affliction or tribulation), unequalled 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.

At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible. See, I have told you ahead of time."

(Matthew 24:15-25 NIV)

"When you see 'the abomination that causes desolation' standing where it does not belong—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the roof of his house go down or enter the house to take anything out. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers!

Pray that this will not take place in winter, **because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now—and never to be equaled again.** If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them.

At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect—if that were possible. So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time."

(Mark 13:14-23 NIV)

"Now whenever you may be perceiving Jerusalem surrounded by encampments, then know that her desolation is near. Then let those in Judea flee into the mountains, and let those in her midst be coming out into the country, and let not those in the country be entering into her, **for days of vengeance are these, to fulfill all that is written.** Yet woe to those who are pregnant, and to those suckling in those days; for there will be great necessity in the land **and indignation on this people.**

And they shall be falling by the edge of the sword and shall be led into captivity into all nations. And Jerusalem shall be trodden by the nations, until the eras of the nations (or times of the nations) may be fulfilled."

(Luke 21:20-24 Concordant Literal NT)

These texts are describing the horrific events of the Jewish/Roman War of 66-70 AD, particularly in relation to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and the region of Judea. Before we consider 'the abomination of desolation' and how all these things were fulfilled, let us perceive the overall picture that Jesus was painting.

Jesus described these days as 'days of great affliction or tribulation' – the Great Tribulation, as some call it – 'days of vengeance and wrath' upon Israel and Jerusalem. This war was primarily brought about by the rebellious violence of the various sects of Jewish Zealots, who even fought against one another, besides their Jewish brethren who wouldn't follow them. Jesus warned His followers to watch for the signs so that they could get out of Jerusalem and Judea when the time was near.

It's important to note at this point that the people would *not* know exactly when this 'great and terrible Day of the Lord' would occur – that is, **they did not know the day or the hour!** Therefore, Jesus warns them,

“...then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath.”

He tells them that when they see 'the sign' concerning Jerusalem's coming desolation they were to 'run to the mountains' (which meant head for the wilderness and the lands beyond), and they were not to even take the time to go and collect things from their houses! They needed to get out and get out fast! No hanging around like Lot's wife! He tells them to pray that this won't happen in the winter or on the Sabbath, because in both these instances their urgent travelling would be hampered greatly, particularly for those women who were pregnant or those with babies and young children. Jesus was clearly warning them that these things would happen very quickly 'like a thief in the night' and therefore they needed to keep watch because they wouldn't know the day or the hour. Bear this in mind for later.

In God's eyes, as well as humanly speaking, it was to be the worst time that Jerusalem and the people would ever experience, and there would only be survivors because the days would be numbered precisely as God intended, and those days would therefore be cut short, otherwise no one would survive the blood bath.<sup>8</sup> It was for the sake of the elect, the chosen followers of Jesus, that the days were shortened, for not only would this help the Christians to survive as refugees, but many other survivors would later become Christians after witnessing such an event.

Jesus also warned them again about false messiahs and prophets arising at this time, and the false signs and miracles that would accompany their leadership in order to try and deceive the true chosen ones of God - if that were possible to do, for the true chosen ones of God would not be tricked into following these charlatans anyway, for they would heed the words of their Master! Yet sadly, many others would be tricked, and would not heed the words of Jesus.

## The Abomination of Desolation and the Great Tribulation

Now Jesus essentially gave them two signs that would herald the coming desolation of the city and the temple, although it is possible that these signs were, in fact, one and the same!

1. Firstly, He said that 'the abomination of desolation' spoken by the prophet Daniel would be seen standing in the Holy Place or standing where it ought not.

In the original Greek grammar, the order reads like this: *the abomination of desolation, spoken by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place, (let the reader understand)* (cf. Interlinear Greek-English NT, George Ricker Berry).

Both Matthew and Mark include the words in parenthesis '*let the reader understand*' after mentioning this abomination '*standing in the holy place.*' So they

were emphasising the importance of the need to correctly understand Jesus' words of warning. Jesus was using a kind of code language so that only those with wisdom and scriptural knowledge would understand, while the rest of the people would just ignore Him and suffer the consequences due to their sin of rejecting Yahweh.

Therefore we need to understand two things here, namely,

a. What is 'the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel'

And

b. What or where is the holy place where this abomination would be seen standing?

There are at least three places in the book of Daniel where this phrase is mentioned, particularly in the Septuagint version, which is more likely the version Jesus was quoting from. Most commentators would agree that it is generally referring to the deeds of the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes in the 2nd century BC. The book of Maccabees also confirms this. For further study of this, see my article *The Vision of the Ram and the He-Goat*.

Briefly stated, Antiochus, as a foreign king, defiled the city of Jerusalem and the Temple via war, persecution and pagan customs. He changed the temple of God into a pagan shrine, and all sorts of detestable practices were committed there.

An 'abomination' in the Scriptures is something that is detestable to God, something disgusting, vile, defiling and unclean, and it also carries the thought of blasphemy. It is usually associated with idolatry. A 'desolation' is that which is ruined or empty due to destruction, usually because of the judgment of God.

So Jesus was saying that a specific idolatrous, defiling act (which could be a thing or a person - and in Daniel, this can be read in the plural) would bring destruction to the city and the temple, and it would be seen standing in the holy place. The 'holy place' was either the city of Jerusalem itself or the temple, or both! This 'abomination of desolation' did not have to be exactly the same as the previous one by Antiochus, but there is a similarity and a connection here. Simply put, the temple and the city would be defiled through blasphemous acts, either by foreign armies or rebellious Jews.

It is evident that Jesus was specifically referring to the prophecy of the Seventy Weeks in Daniel chapter 9, concerning the coming of the Messiah. In verses 26-27 of that chapter, the focus is very much on the city of Jerusalem and the sanctuary, and its final official destruction, or its desolations.

The final half of verse 27 has proven a bit of a problem for most translators, but it is in this portion of the text that 'the abomination of desolations' is mentioned in connection with Jerusalem's judgment due to the rejection of her Messiah. Here are a few renderings of this verse.

...and on the temple shall be the abomination of desolations; and at the end of time an end shall be put to the desolation.



(English Translation of Septuagint)

...and **by the wing of abominations he is making desolate**, even till the consummation, and that which is determined is poured on the desolate one.'

(Young's Literal Translation)

...**on a wing of the sanctuary shall be desolating abominations.** Till the conclusion of the era the decided conclusion will be poured forth on the desolation.

(Concordant Literal OT)

...and **for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate**, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.

(KJV)

The one thing that is clear from these renderings of Daniel 9:27b is that abominations and desolations were decreed for Jerusalem AND the temple as God's judgment upon the people (the desolate or desolate ones). This was to be the city's end (or conclusion or consummation) in accordance with the cessation of the Old Covenant system.

It's interesting to note that some translations mention 'the wing' of the temple, which could've been referring to one particular side of the temple courts. This has great significance if applied to the Tower of Antonia (a Roman fortress) adjoining the Temple courts or, as we shall see, to the advance of Cestius, and later Titus. The gentile Roman armies, with their idolatrous standards and 'divine' emperor, were most definitely viewed as an abomination to the Jews. (For further study of this prophecy, see the upcoming article on the visions of Daniel, *The Prophecy of The Seventy Weeks*).

We shall now see that this 'abomination of desolations' of Daniel 9 is 'the abomination' that Jesus was referring to that was spoken by the prophet Daniel that would stand in the holy place, which would serve to bring about the fulfilment of this prophecy.

Now if we go to Luke's account of Jesus' words, we are given the second sign.

"Now whenever you may be seeing Jerusalem surrounded by encampments, then know that her desolation is near."

2. So, secondly, army encampments would surround Jerusalem, and this would herald the nearness of her desolation.

Now take note here that where Matthew and Mark record only *'the abomination...standing in the holy place (let the reader understand)'* portion as the warning sign to flee, Luke's account blatantly says *'when you see Jerusalem surrounded by army encampments'* i.e. ready for an attack or siege, that is the sign to flee! So the two signs are intimately connected as one! Luke evidently gives us the parallel meaning.

The details of the whole Jewish/Roman War, which began with the Rebellion in 66 AD and lasted until 73 AD, with Jerusalem and the Temple being destroyed in 70 AD, are well documented in the writings of Josephus, and there are numerous resources available that can be used to research these things. So let us now proceed with outlining the fulfilment of all these things.

### The Fulfilment of Jesus' Words

The early stages of the rebellion involving Jerusalem began in the autumn of 66 AD, at the time of the feast of Tabernacles, though skirmishes had already begun earlier in the year. This Jewish rebellion was the greatest provincial uprising that the Roman Empire had faced at that time. Numerous Jews were in Jerusalem and Judea for the Feast so that they were able to witness the unfolding events. This is when the Roman Governor of Syria (notice the [Syrian](#) link to Antiochus Epiphanes), Cestius Gallus, and the Twelfth Legion, set up camp on Mount Scopus near Jerusalem in preparation to attack the Jewish rebels who had taken over the city and the Temple, including the Roman-occupied fortress of Antonia - which was situated on the northern wing of the temple! (Recall Daniel 9:27)

Josephus records (in Book 2 and 4 of his Jewish War) that these Jewish rebels were already polluting the sanctuary at this stage, and for the whole three and a half years of the war against Jerusalem, they continued to defile the temple with their murders and their blasphemies, using the temple as their military base! This, in itself, constituted an abomination of desolation! Adding to this, they later invited the Idumeans (descendants of Esau) to join their murderous ranks, as they continued to multiply their abominations! The temple courts became soaked in human blood, with piles of corpses everywhere. Not only that, but even Lake Galilee, the river Jordan and the Dead Sea became as rivers and lakes of blood, full of decomposing bodies, during the War (Wars, Book 3:10:9; Book 4:7:5-6; Book 6:8:5).

As Jesus had said, *'Wherever there's a dead body, there the vultures (or eagles) will gather.'* I'm sure it is no coincidence either that Jesus mentioned the birds of prey, the eagles, gathering around Jerusalem as a symbol of the Roman armies, which were represented by the eagle.

Cestius then attacked Jerusalem and set up camp within the city near Herod's palace. The Romans then besieged the temple wall on the north for a number of days. Here is what Josephus said of this attack.

"...so the soldiers undermined the wall, without being themselves hurt, and got all things ready for setting fire to the gate of the temple....It then happened that Cestius was not conscious either how the besieged despaired of success, nor how courageous the people were for him; and so he recalled his soldiers from the place, and by despairing of any expectation of taking it, without having received any disgrace, he retired from the city, without any reason in the world."

This Syrian/Roman general and his army, complete with their idolatrous standards or ensigns, which represented their pagan gods, were standing in the holy city attacking the holy temple - with their encampments around, and in, the city. This also was the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place. Yet this was not

the moment of desolation - it was a warning sign, hence, miraculously, and for no good reason - the Romans subsequently withdrew!

In fact, it is recorded by the church historian, Eusebius, that the Jewish Christians understood these events to be the signs that Jesus had predicted, and therefore they subsequently fled into the Judean wilderness and mountains to travel across the Jordan to Pella (Ecclesiastical History 3:5:3). As for the rest of the Jews, they were deceived by the messages and fear tactics of the self-proclaimed prophets and messiahs who said that God would fight for them and rescue them, especially as Rome (under Cestius) had already turned away once! Instead of seeing this as a warning sign, they viewed it as a sign of coming victory! Such was their blind zeal – and this was the kind of deception that Jesus had warned his disciples about!

As the war progressed, things just grew worse, until the Roman general, Titus, in the spring of 70 AD, surrounded the city with encampments and laid siege to it, until they broke through the walls. This would've been the moment for every Christian to finally flee the city immediately without looking back, as Jesus had told them!<sup>9</sup> After about 5 months, the Romans finally entered the temple and then burned it (so say accidentally). Amidst the ruins, the Romans raised their standards and sacrificed to their gods and to Titus.

Many thousands of Jews perished and the rest were taken captive and sold as slaves within the Empire. These things fulfilled Jesus' words completely.

"Now whenever you may be perceiving Jerusalem surrounded by encampments, then know that her desolation is near. Then let those in Judea flee into the mountains, and let those in her midst be coming out into the country, and let not those in the country be entering into her, **for days of vengeance are these, to fulfill all that is written.** Yet woe to those who are pregnant, and to those suckling in those days; for there will be great necessity in the land **and indignation on this people.** And they shall be falling by the edge of the sword and shall be led into captivity into all nations.

(Luke 21:20-24 Concordant Literal NT)

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

(Luke 19:41-44 NIV)

As we have established, the Great Tribulation or Great Affliction (or Distress) mentioned in these texts is referring to the horrific days of the siege of Jerusalem, which was unlike anything that had previously happened in that city. It was a horrific bloodbath - and yet most of the suffering and carnage had been caused by the Jewish warring factions within the city, and not just by the Romans! If these days had not been shortened, no flesh would've survived at all. The writings of Josephus

in his **Jewish War** make it very plain how bad things actually were in those days. All of Jesus' words were fulfilled exactly as He had said.

Eventually, all the stones of the temple were taken apart and demolished by the Romans, who were trying to get the melted gold out of the cracks. This fulfilled the words of Jesus to the letter concerning the stones of the temple. Many of the Christians, as well as some of the wiser Jews, escaped into the mountains, but those who remained were either slaughtered or taken into captivity and scattered throughout the Roman Empire.

All the Old Testament prophecies concerning Jerusalem and Israel were fulfilled at that time, particularly those that spoke of the terrible Day of the Lord, for Jesus had stated unequivocally "...for these are days of vengeance, **to fulfill all that is written.**" This is especially true in relation to the prophecies of Daniel. It is evident that a number of Jesus' words quoted above were alluding to the prophecies of Daniel, including the following.

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

"...It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed."

(Daniel 12:1,7 NIV)

And after the sixty-two weeks, the anointed one shall be destroyed, and there is no judgment in him: and he shall destroy the city and the sanctuary with the prince that is coming: they shall be cut off with a flood, and to the end of the war which is rapidly completed he shall appoint *the city* to desolations.

And one week shall establish the covenant with many: and in the midst of the week my sacrifice and drink-offering shall be taken away: and on the temple *shall be* the abomination of desolations; and at the end of time an end shall be put to the desolation.

(Daniel 9:26-27 LXX)

The divine timing of these events was remarkable in their accuracy. On the day of Passover, in the spring of 70 AD, the Roman armies began to encamp around Jerusalem in preparation for the coming siege. This was 40 years from when Jesus began His ministry.<sup>10</sup> After 5 months, the Temple was burned and the city destroyed. The temple was destroyed on the 10th of the Jewish month Ab. This was the very same day that the temple of Solomon had been burned in 587/586 BC. Certainly not a coincidence! Both the First and Second Temples were divinely judged and destroyed on the same day! (Herod's Temple was essentially the Second Temple that was built after the Babylonian captivity, only enlarged and beautified.)

Then on the Passover of 73 AD, the Romans defeated the last group of Jewish Zealots as they made their final stand in the fortress of Masada. They committed mass suicide rather than allow the Romans to kill them. This officially ended the Jewish/Roman War of that period. It occurred exactly 40 years from the crucifixion

of Jesus (33-73 AD) - **to the very day!** Again, certainly not a coincidence! The pivotal moment from the point of view of biblical prophecy was the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in August/September 70 AD.

These prophetic fulfilments heralded something of great magnitude - the end of an official divine transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant; from Israel after the flesh to the spiritual Israel of God.

The official, legal beginning of the War, when the Emperor Nero sent Vespasian to subdue Palestine, occurred in February/March 67 AD. The city of Jerusalem was finally subdued, and the temple destroyed, under Titus by August/September 70 AD. This was a period of 3 years and a half - or put another way, 'time, times and half a time.'

"...It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed."

Be that as it may, Luke's account goes on to record the words of Jesus concerning the consequences of this Great Affliction for the Jews, which would then go on to last the whole of this present age, which Jesus called '*the times of the nations*' (or times of the Gentiles), as opposed to the previous Times of the Hebrews. Take careful note of the words in this text.<sup>11</sup>

"And they shall be falling by the edge of the sword and shall be led into captivity into all nations. **And Jerusalem shall be trodden by the nations, until the eras of the nations (or times of the nations) may be fulfilled.**"

(Luke 21:24 CV)

This War was truly a pivotal, and a hugely significant, event in Jewish and biblical history. Jesus made it clear that it would be unparalleled, because these '*days of vengeance*' would fulfil **all** that is written concerning Israel and Jerusalem.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the era of ancient Israel under the Old Covenant, which had lasted for over 1500 years, officially ended in 70 AD. The focus is now on a New Jerusalem, a New Mount Zion, a New Creation, a New Covenant, a New Promised Land - even a New Humanity that is not based on fleshly ties - that which is the New Temple of God.

## The Coming of the Son of Man - Like Lightning

It is at this point in the accounts where many believe Jesus starts to talk about His Coming or Presence at the end of the age (that is, the Second Advent), to answer the disciples' 3rd question. This view believes that Jesus begins to bridge the gap, so to speak, between the judgment of Jerusalem in the 1st century AD, and the ultimate judgment of the world at His Return, which is still in the future (the Second Advent). So allegedly, this is where the transition begins between the two events. Inevitably, this is also where some obvious problems begin to arise.

I once held to this view when I originally wrote *The Prophecies of the Olivet Discourse*, hence the need to re-publish it under a new name. I believe there are a number of good exegetical reasons to continue interpreting the discourse as primarily prophesying the events of the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Now if one believes that Jesus

was talking about his Second Advent, then it follows that the end of the age he was referring to was in the 1<sup>st</sup> century! And here's why.

Firstly, there isn't any good reason to think that Jesus was all of a sudden jumping ahead to the very distant future at verse 26 or 27 (using Matthew's text). The context is still the events of the temple's destruction in *'this generation.'*

Secondly, in verse 29, Matthew's account reads, ***'Immediately*** after the distress of those days', which is followed in verse 30 by *'and then'* or *'at that time.'* This is a continuous narrative. Also, the phrase *'in those days'* occurs in verses 19, 22 & 29 and they all clearly refer to the same time period. In fact, in verses 33-34 the phrase *'all these things'* occurs twice, where *'all these things'* is referring to all that Jesus had been talking about previously. As we shall soon see, verse 34 states that *'this generation'* (i.e. the generation of the disciples) will not pass away until *'all these things'* have happened!

So everything that has been said, up to this point at least in verses 34-35, had to have occurred in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD or Jesus was totally wrong (which some have incorrectly assumed)! I don't think there is any honest way of getting around this. (Therefore, contrary to what I've said in the past, I now believe that Jesus WAS in fact talking about his Second Advent; and that Advent was to occur in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. And yet I also believe that the nature of this event is often totally misunderstood!)

Only a little earlier, while he was in the temple courts, Jesus had pronounced the covenantal curse upon the leaders of Jerusalem with the following words,

"So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Go ahead, then, and complete what your ancestors started!

"You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? Therefore I am sending you prophets and sages and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. **Truly I tell you, all this will come on this generation.**"

(Matthew 23:31-36 NIV)

It is even clearer from this text that Jesus was declaring that the judgment of God was going to fall upon those living at that time in *'this generation.'*

So what *was* Jesus referring to when he talked about *'the coming of the Son of Man?'* Let us find out.

"So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. For as lightning that comes from the east is visible (Gk. 'appearing') even in the west, so will be the coming (Gk. 'parousia') of the Son of Man. Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather."

(Matthew 24:26-28; see also Luke 17:24 NIV)

Firstly, in this text Jesus begins by declaring that His Presence or Coming (the Greek word used here is *parousia*) as the Son of Man will be just like the lightening flashing (or appearing) across the whole sky. Lightening was very much a symbol and sign of heavenly judgment, so this would be an event that involved sudden judgment in the heavens. Yet the event itself was not going to involve his visible bodily presence on earth, in the sense of being open to normal human sight, for if anyone said, "There he is" or "Here he is" they were told not to believe it! So as much as it may appear that Jesus was saying that his coming would be visible to the whole world, he was actually saying the opposite! Many would witness this event, but not in the way most people thought it would occur; it was to be a spiritual, heavenly occurrence.<sup>13</sup>

So Jesus was again confirming that many false prophets would come declaring the deliverer was 'out in the desert' or 'here in the inner rooms', but the followers of Jesus, the true Messiah, were to ignore these false claims (cf. Matthew 24:23-26). His 'coming' to that generation would be very evident – yet not in a normal observable sense (cf. Luke 17:20-25). It was truly to be a heavenly occurrence.

And, of course, there were such false messiah figures declaring such things in the decades that followed! They proclaimed that God would deliver Jerusalem from the Romans, but they did not heed the words of Yahweh Himself spoken through His Son. There wasn't to be any deliverance for the city or the temple or the land. Judgment and wrath was coming, and it was firmly decided, as Daniel had foretold (*...desolations have been decided* - Daniel 9:26-27).

Before we consider the lightening metaphor in more detail, we need to understand the meaning of 'the coming of the Son of Man' and its relation to the 1<sup>st</sup> century events.

## The Greek Words

There are primarily four Greek words that are used throughout the New Testament to refer to the 'coming' of Christ in one sense or another. The words themselves do not automatically carry the meaning of 'the Second Advent' for that is a matter of context and interpretation; nevertheless, the overall picture presented throughout the NT is that these words are generally referring to the Day of the Lord, the coming of the Son of Man, the Return & Second Appearing of Christ.

The following word meanings are primarily taken either from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, or the Keyword Concordance of the Concordant Literal New Testament.

1. The first is the Greek word **epiphaneia**. This is usually translated as **Advent** or **Appearance**. In virtually every instance in the NT where this word is used, it is in the context of Christ's Second Advent. There is at least one instance where it is referring to his First Advent (2 Timothy 1:10). This word essentially means 'a visible appearance due to the shining of light' that is, a manifestation of some kind, whether physically, metaphorically or spiritually. Apparently in classical Greek it was sometimes used in a special sense to describe the

appearances of the Greek Gods. This is where the English word 'epiphany' has its roots. It could also describe the appearance of an enemy to an army on the field of battle.

The root word *phan\_* signifies *shining*, and it is used in a number of Greek words, including variations of the Greek words for *manifest*, *appearing* and *revealing*.

2. The Greek word **erchomai** is the common word for **come** or **coming**, meaning 'to move nearer from another location.' It is used a number of times in the context of Christ's Coming at the end of the age, but it is also used of other 'comings of Christ' that were in spirit or in vision. There are three examples of this that stand out in the NT:

- a) The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was a 'coming of Christ' because He promised the disciples that He and the Father would come to them and make their home in them (John 14:23).

- b) Christ appeared to Paul a number of times, and the first appearance was in great glory that blinded him. These were personal post-resurrection 'comings of Christ' that occurred *after* the Ascension.

- c) The Apostle John saw the Day of the Lord and the Coming of Christ in a spiritual vision recorded in the book of Revelation. Jesus had previously indicated that John would remain alive to see His coming, which must've occurred in the 1<sup>st</sup> century (cf. John 21:21-24). John was evidently one of the living believers who would remain alive till the coming of the Lord (cf. Matthew 16:27-28; 1 Thessalonians 4:15).

Therefore, even though there are other 'comings of Christ,' the NT clearly teaches that there was to be a Coming of the Son of Man (or Advent or Appearance) at the end of the old covenant age.

There are some who teach that the NT doesn't actually say anything about a Second Advent or Coming of Christ - but I would beg to differ on that one. For instance,

But now he has appeared (*phaneroo*) once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; **and he will appear (*opsomai*) a second time**, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

(Hebrews 9:26-28 NIV)

In this passage, the writer of Hebrews (writing in the 60's AD) was saying that Jesus the Messiah is the ultimate Chief Priest who has made atonement for the people by sacrificing Himself, and thereafter He has entered heaven itself, the Holy of Holies, to appear in the very presence of God. He will yet be seen a second time, by coming out of the Holy of Holies, to bring salvation to those who are faithfully waiting for Him. This text is clearly talking about Christ's First Advent *and* His



Second Advent.<sup>14</sup> The Greek word *phaneroo* translated 'appeared' in this text is another word sometimes used in relation to Christ's Second Advent, and it carries the meaning of 'manifestation.'

3. The Greek word **parousia** is usually translated as the Coming or **Presence** of Christ. The word essentially means 'to be beside' or 'presence,' that is, it is the opposite of absence. It is used of Paul in this way in Philippians 1:26-27. The word **parousia** is used of Paul's presence with the believers upon his planned arrival, and it is contrasted with the word **apousia** which was describing his absence from them at that time.

The Parousia of Christ is essentially describing the royal presence of the King himself in establishing God's kingdom in the earthly realm with power and judgment. Hence, it refers to the Day of the Lord, the Second Appearing, and the 'coming of the Son of Man.' It is especially describing Christ's manifestation in power, glory and might in relation to the spiritual messianic kingdom.

The word *parousia* was often used in the ancient world for describing a royal visit, where, for example, the emperor would go on a state visit to make an appearance to the people, often being met by an official 'welcoming committee' first to escort him to the city. This imagery is possibly being used by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, though with a little ironic twist to it.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, the word itself can either be understood as describing a spiritual presence or a visible bodily presence, depending on the context; that is, it is not restricted to just the physical realm of flesh and blood.

There are many OT texts that speak of God's 'presence' or 'coming' in the form of historical judgments, even though He did not physically or bodily appear in a worldly, fleshly sense (e.g. Isaiah 19:1; Psalm 68:1-2, Micah 1:3-4; Nahum 1:5-6). In many of these texts, the Hebrew word often translated as 'presence' (*paniyim*) is literally 'the face of' - and yet they have nothing to do with the physical, bodily presence of God at all that is normally observable to the human senses! It is therefore biblically correct to apply this meaning to the 'royal presence' or parousia of Christ.

4. The Greek word **apokalupsis** is used a number of times to describe the **Unveiling** or **Revelation** of Christ in the Day of the Lord. It is often rendered as revelation or manifestation. It essentially means 'that which is uncovered or made known, having been previously hidden.' The English word 'apocalypse' comes from this word. It is used of things and people, and particularly the uncovering (or revelation) of spiritual things. It is ultimately used of Christ's unveiling or revealing or manifestation at the coming of the Son of Man, in the Day of the Lord.

It is also used in Romans 8:19 to describe 'the unveiling of the sons of God,' which was to coincide with the time of Christ's Unveiling at the full establishment of his kingdom. The book of Revelation is just that - the revealing or uncovering or unveiling of Jesus Christ and His kingdom.<sup>16</sup>

All of these Greek words are used interchangeably in the New Testament to describe the Second Advent of Christ and the judgment-coming of the Son of Man in

the Day of the Lord. And the primary Old Testament text that prophesies about this coming of the Son of Man is in the Vision of the Beasts in Daniel 7.

### The Son of Man in Daniel 7

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

(Daniel 7:13-14 NIV)

Earlier in this chapter, in verses 9-10, Daniel was introduced to a heavenly courtroom scene where Yahweh, as the Ancient of Days, was seated on His chariot-throne of judgment, with fire issuing from before Him. On the face of it, it appears as though this scene is ultimately depicting the Judgment of the Great White Throne of Revelation 20, the ultimate judgment day for all mankind. In fact, I am now persuaded that this is indeed the case.<sup>17</sup> In accordance with the context of the coming of the Son of Man, it is declaring the judgment of God revealed in the momentous events of the 1st century AD. This is confirmed by what follows in verses 13-14.

The vision reveals the coming of a human, a son of man, the Messiah, being surrounded by the clouds of heaven, that is, the glory clouds of God, often called the Shekinah Glory. He is seen to be approaching the Father, the Ancient of Days, and is led into God's Presence in the heavenly court. He is then granted the authority and power and glory of God to rule over *all* nations, resulting in people from *all* nations worshipping (or serving) Him. This worship is not just confined to Israel, but it engulfs the whole world.

Unlike those kingdoms before Him, His kingdom will never be destroyed nor will it be passed on to another. This is the universal kingdom of God, the kingdom of the heavens, established by the Messiah as the Son of David and the Son of Man. This event is described as 'the coming of the Son of Man' - and this particular 'coming' is not in the direction of earth but of heaven. Take a look at the text again and see - this particular 'coming' is the heavenly coronation of the King of kings before the throne of the Ancient of Days. At this time, His kingdom is fully established and the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, would be vindicated through the events of Jerusalem's judgment. This is, in fact, '*the sign of the Son of Man in heaven,*' which we will take a look at later (cf. Matthew 24:30).

Now it is very evident from the writings of the New Testament that these things were fulfilled in Jesus Christ, Yeshua the Messiah. He received all authority and power after His resurrection when He ascended to the right hand of the Majesty on high. Jesus Himself, when He was before the Sanhedrin, applied Daniel 7:13 to Himself, and He often spoke of 'the coming of the Son of Man' applying it to Himself. Here are some scriptures that testify to this.

After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. **There he was transfigured**

**before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light...**

...While he was still speaking, **a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"**

When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, **until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.**"

(Matthew 17:1-2, 5-9 NIV)

This event of the Transfiguration of Christ highlights certain aspects of the Son of Man vision in Daniel, particularly in the description of Christ's appearance and the Glory cloud. The voice from the cloud, which was representing God the Father, alluded to at least two messianic texts - Psalm 2:7 and Deuteronomy 18:15. These things were identifying Jesus as the Son of Man, as well as the greater Son of David.

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

(Matthew 16:27-28 NIV)

The first sentence here appears to be referring to the Second Advent of Christ and the judgment associated with that Day (and that is, in fact, the case), yet Jesus goes on to emphasise to his disciples that *some* of them would not experience death before they would see the coming of the Son of Man in his kingdom! The parallel passage in Mark 9:1 says that they would see '...the kingdom of God come with power.' That means that the Second Advent of Christ and the judgment, along with the coming of Christ's kingdom in power, was to occur in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD! This is one of the strongest passages in the NT that forces the interpreter to this conclusion, especially in light of Daniel 7.<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, Jesus was clearly telling his disciples that some of them (at least two), but not all of them, would witness the coming of the Son of Man and his kingdom in power and glory in their generation while still living! That is, this 'Coming' was to occur in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD within the lifetime of the apostles. This was a clear allusion to the vision of Daniel – and the fulfilment must've occurred in 70 AD when the Old Covenant officially ended. There isn't any other event in the 1<sup>st</sup> century that satisfies the fulfilment of these words of Jesus in line with Daniel 7.<sup>19</sup> The historical, worldly sign was the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and everything involved with that; but many of the other 'heavenly' details evidently occurred in the spirit dimension, which was not observable to normal human sight.

In the above text, Jesus was also alluding to Isaiah 40:10, which speaks of the Lord coming with power to rule and to judge, bringing his reward with him to repay

his covenant people for what they had done, whether those deeds be good or evil (cf. Isaiah 62:11; Revelation 22:12). Now if this coming of the Son of Man and his kingdom, spoken above, was one and the same as the arrival of the kingdom of God with power, then it follows that this is one and the same event as the Son of Man coming in his Father's glory with his angels, and then rewarding each person for their deeds. That is to say, this *is* describing the second appearing of Christ, followed by the resurrection and judgment of Israel and the nations. And some of the disciples of that generation were told that they would remain alive until that day came!

On that same theme, here is what Jesus said to the Jewish Sanhedrin while he was on trial before them.

The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

"Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. **"But I say to all of you: In the future (lit. *from now on*) you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."**

(Matthew 26:63-64 NIV)

Jesus was alluding to two powerful messianic texts here: Psalm 110:1 & Daniel 7:13. This declaration was loaded with meaning, and obviously if it wasn't true it would be the height of blasphemy; and that is how the high priest understood it, as blasphemy. Jesus was also declaring to the Jewish leaders of his day that *they* themselves would see the fulfilment of Daniel's vision of the heavenly enthronement of the Son of Man – and *He* would be the one to fulfil it! Jesus' messianic mission would be vindicated for all to see.<sup>20</sup> The kingdom of God would be established, and the Jewish leaders couldn't prevent it.

Here are a few more texts that are proclaiming the same thing, *after* Christ's resurrection had occurred. And take careful note that the first text is recorded as having occurred *before* the Ascension.

Then Jesus came to them and said, **"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.** Therefore go and make disciples **of all nations**...

(Matthew 28:18-19 NIV)

But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, **"I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."**

(Acts 7:55-56 NIV)

That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead **and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.** And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

(Ephesians 1:19-23 NIV)

THIS is what Jesus was talking about when he spoke of His coming as the Son of Man within 'this generation.' His kingdom would be established with great power and glory, and this power would be manifested in accordance with the curses of the covenant of the Law, dealing out vengeance to those who had rejected the covenant and who were filling the land with lawlessness and murder, wickedness and blasphemy. The Great Shepherd was going to begin His rule with 'a rod of iron' (cf. Psalm 2; Revelation 19:14-16) and those who were corrupting the land would be destroyed by the wrath of God, and the dead would be judged (Revelation 11:17-18).

As a stark reminder, here are some portions of the curses of the Law to show the reader that the Olivet prophecies of Jesus, as well as the vision of Revelation, were based on these covenantal curses – and hence the fulfilment of them in the events of the Jewish War with Rome in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD leading to the full establishing of Christ's kingdom in the Day of the Lord.

However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you...

...The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You will come at them from one direction but flee from them in seven, and you will become a thing of horror to all the kingdoms on earth. **Your carcasses will be food for all the birds and the wild animals, and there will be no one to frighten them away...**

...All these curses will come on you. They will pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the LORD your God and observe the commands and decrees he gave you. They will be a sign and a wonder to you and your descendants forever. Because you did not serve the LORD your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity, therefore in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and dire poverty, you will serve the enemies the LORD sends against you. He will put an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you.

The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down, a nation whose language you will not understand, a fierce-looking nation without respect for the old or pity for the young. They will devour the young of your livestock and the crops of your land until you are destroyed. They will leave you no grain, new wine or olive oil, nor any calves of your herds or lambs of your flocks until you are ruined. They will lay siege to all the cities throughout your land until the high fortified walls in which you trust fall down. They will besiege all the cities throughout the land the LORD your God is giving you.

Because of the suffering your enemy will inflict on you during the siege, you will eat the fruit of the womb, the flesh of the sons and daughters the LORD your God has given you. Even the most gentle and sensitive man among you will have no compassion on his own brother or the wife he loves or his surviving children, and he will not give to one of them any of the flesh of his children that he is eating. It will be all he has left because of the suffering your enemy will inflict on you during the siege of all your cities. The most gentle and sensitive woman among you—so sensitive and gentle that she would not

venture to touch the ground with the sole of her foot—will begrudge the husband she loves and her own son or daughter the afterbirth from her womb and the children she bears. For in her dire need she intends to eat them secretly because of the suffering your enemy will inflict on you during the siege of your cities...

...Then the LORD will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other. There you will worship other gods—gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your ancestors have known. Among those nations you will find no repose, no resting place for the sole of your foot. There the LORD will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing, and a despairing heart. You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life. In the morning you will say, "If only it were evening!" and in the evening, "If only it were morning!"—because of the terror that will fill your hearts and the sights that your eyes will see. The LORD will send you back in ships to Egypt on a journey I said you should never make again. There you will offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no one will buy you.

(Deuteronomy 28:15, 25-26, 45-57, 64-68 NIV)

We shall now see how the Roman/Jewish War ultimately fulfilled these things, along with the heavenly occurrences.

### Storm Clouds & Eagles

In the Hebrew Prophets, lightening and thunder, as well as clouds, were common signs of God's judgment upon Israel and the nations.

Then the LORD will appear over them; his arrow will flash like lightning. The Sovereign LORD will sound the trumpet; he will march in the storms of the south, and the LORD Almighty will shield them.

(Zechariah 9:14-15 NIV; see also Psalm 18:9-15)

These passages indicated that Yahweh and the heavenly hosts were actually fighting for Israel, but those present at the battle did not usually see these spiritual sights. So God could be present with his angelic armies, etc, having come down to do battle with his enemies, but no one saw anything except the result of the battle or war – that is, victory for his people, Israel. There were occasional exceptions when certain individuals (usually prophets) did see the spiritual manifestation from what is evidently another dimension. Take the following example about the prophet Elisha and the Arameans.

When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?" the servant asked. "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And Elisha prayed, "Open his eyes, LORD, so that he may see." **Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.** As the enemy came down toward him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, "Strike this army with blindness." So he struck them with blindness, as Elisha had asked.

(2 Kings 6:15-18 NIV)

Here is a classic instance where the angelic army of Yahweh was only visible to Elisha until he prayed for his servants eyes to be opened; then he too saw the heavenly army as horses and chariots of fire situated on the earth as a protection for Elisha. Also, even the false prophet Balaam's donkey was able to see the heavenly messenger of Yahweh standing in the way until Balaam's eyes were opened to see him too (cf. Numbers 22:21-35). In fact, most of these biblical 'sightings' of heavenly spiritual beings were only shown to certain individuals or groups in connection with a prophet or apostle.

This is precisely what Jesus was predicting would happen when his vindication would occur for all to see during the judgment of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Yet the difference in the events of the 1<sup>st</sup> century compared to Israel's previous history was that Yahweh was now no longer fighting for the Jews as His covenant nation, as they thought He was, but He was fighting *against* them instead, using the Roman armies as His instrument for bringing the covenantal curses. Well, in some measure this *had* occurred in the past when Israel and Judah had been exiled from the land, but in the events of 70 AD things were much more final.

"He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time." Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:

"The stone the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone;  
the Lord has done this,  
and it is marvelous in our eyes?"

**"Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed."**

"...The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city..."

(Matthew 21:41-44 & 22:7 NIV)

Concerning the lightening motif, the Roman historian Tacitus records that lightening actually flashed over the city of Jerusalem during the siege, and Josephus records the following signs, even mentioning clouds and angelic armies.

Besides these [signs], a few days after that feast, on the one- and-twentieth day of the month Artemisius, [Jyar,] a certain prodigious and incredible phenomenon appeared; I suppose the account of it would seem to be a fable, were it not related by those that saw it, and were not the events that followed it of so considerable a nature as to deserve such signals; for, before sun-setting, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armour were seen running about among the clouds, and surrounding of cities. Moreover, at that feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner [court of the] temple, as their custom was, to perform their sacred ministrations, they said that, in the first place, they felt a quaking, and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound as of a great multitude, saying, "Let us remove hence" (Wars, VI-5-3)

Tacitus, writing of the same events, said:

"In the sky appeared a vision of armies in conflict, of glittering armor. **A sudden lightning flash from the clouds lit up the Temple.** The doors of the holy place abruptly opened, a superhuman voice was heard to declare that the gods were leaving it, and in the same instant came the rushing tumult of their departure" (*Histories*, 5:13).

I'm not saying that these things actually fulfilled the biblical prophetic data in every sense, but these were most definitely 'signs from heaven' that had great significance; and what's more, these signs were witnessed by many people and recorded in history. This is not without significance, particularly the mention of clouds and lightening. In fact, there are a number of instances in scripture where one (or more) saw and heard a heavenly vision or occurrence, while others who were there did not witness the whole event, yet they still experienced something strange or 'other-worldly'.

For example, in his final vision, Daniel saw the heavenly visitor while those around him didn't, but they felt such an overwhelming fear that they all ran away and hid themselves leaving Daniel alone (Daniel 10:4-9). And during Jesus' ministry a voice was heard from heaven, but the majority of the crowd around him thought it had thundered or that an angel had spoken to him (John 12:27-30). And on the road to Damascus, a flashing light from heaven blinded Saul and he heard the voice of Jesus talking to him. Yet his companions only saw the light, but were not blinded, and yet they didn't hear or see anything else (Acts 9:3-9; 22:6-11; 26:12-18).

It is instances such as these that, I believe, is the key to understanding the nature of Christ's second appearing in the Day of the Lord.

It is also interesting to note that the prophecy of the temple's destruction in Daniel 9:26 refers to the end coming '*like a flood,*' which has the connection of *storm clouds of judgment* and *lightening* bringing about the end of the city and the sanctuary with *war* and *desolations* (for the flood motif and invading armies, cp. Daniel 11:10 & 40).

Jesus also indicated how great the carnage would be at Jerusalem's judgment by referring to the dead bodies and the eagles or vultures - a very literal Gehenna.

"For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures (or eagles *Gr. aetos*) will gather."

(Matthew 24:27-28; see also Luke 17:24 NIV)

The Greek word *aetos* in the era of the 1<sup>st</sup> century would generally mean a vulture or bird of prey, like an eagle, and people did not usually differentiate between species in the same way as we do today. This has greater significance though if the word is translated as *eagles*. The overall picture that Jesus is painting here is that of huge amounts of corpses scattered everywhere due to war, which the birds of prey gather around to squabble over and eat.<sup>21</sup>



Jesus appears to be alluding to the following texts: Deuteronomy 28:49-57 & Isaiah 34:15. Both speak of judgment in the great Day of the Lord, but the first prophecy views the foreign army (ultimately Rome) as an eagle, while the second refers to the gathering of vultures after the destruction of Edom. Also, in Ezekiel 17 the kingdoms of Babylon and Egypt are symbolised as eagles in the allegory.

Be that as it may, the significance of the Roman army being portrayed as eagles holds even greater meaning, for it is common knowledge that the eagle was a sacred symbol of Rome carried before the legions on their standards.

Dr Ken Gentry says the following,

Josephus records the act that lies behind the imagery here: "The Romans, now that the rebels had fled to the city, and the sanctuary itself and all around it were in flames, carried their standards into the temple court and, setting them up opposite the eastern gate, there sacrificed to them, and with rousing acclamations hailed Titus as imperator" (*Wars* 6:6:1). The Roman ensigns bear the eagle as the symbol of Rome: "Next [came] the ensigns surrounding the eagle [*aetos*], which in the Roman army precedes every legion, because it is the king and the bravest of all the birds; it is regarded by them as a symbol of empire" (*Wars* 3:6:2; cf. Suetonius, *Galba* 13).<sup>22</sup>

The carnage of this war is also being described in Revelation 19:17-21. Josephus described the extent of the bloody carnage in quite some detail. For further information about this, see the accompanying article in this section entitled *The Siege of Jerusalem as Described by Josephus* written by Philip Mauro.

## Heavenly Darkness & Celestial 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 was quoting from the Old Testament (OT) 'day of the Lord' texts, particularly from 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, 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 Old Testament. In fact, Jesus was essentially quoting Isaiah 13:10 & 13, as well as alluding to some other prophetic texts that are similar.

Let us consider the relevant prophetic texts that Jesus was clearly alluding to, which were primarily from Isaiah and Ezekiel.

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

**The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light.** I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless.

I will make man scarcer than pure gold, more rare than the gold of Ophir. **Therefore I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the LORD Almighty, in the day of his burning anger.**

(Isaiah 13:6-13 NIV)

Come near, you nations, and listen; pay attention, you peoples! Let the earth hear, and all that is in it, the world, and all that comes out of it! The LORD is angry with all nations; his wrath is upon all their armies. He will totally destroy them, he will give them over to slaughter. Their slain will be thrown out, their dead bodies will send up a stench; the mountains will be soaked with their blood.

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

...For the LORD has a sacrifice in Bozrah  
and a great slaughter in Edom...

...For the LORD has a day of vengeance, a year of retribution, to uphold Zion's cause...

...there also the falcons (vultures) will gather...

(Isaiah 34:1-4, 6, 8, 15 NIV)

" '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)

These prophecies of judgment have been fulfilled a number of times in the ancient past in relation to Egypt, Babylon and other nations and Empires. 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). 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 especially the spiritual powers behind them, that would immediately follow the end of the old covenant system. More importantly it was prophesying that the world of 'old covenant' Judaism was about to be destroyed, with all the lights going out as it were. 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 spiritual 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 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. As we saw earlier, the fulfilment of these signs and social upheavals were even described by the Roman historian Tacitus, and the Jewish historian Josephus – and they were not Christians with an axe to grind (cf. notes 5-7 below).

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 1<sup>st</sup> 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.

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 also 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. 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 Concordant Literal NT)

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 above. Yet the ultimate fulfilment of these things occurred in the spiritual, heavenly world or dimension, where Israel was resurrected and judged before Christ resulting in glorification and blessing for the chosen ones; and wrath, fury and affliction to those who were wicked and unbelieving (cf. Romans 2:5-11, 16). (I plan to deal with this topic in *The Day of the Lord* series.)

## The Presence of the Son of Man

Returning to the Olivet Discourse, Jesus continues with the events of that Day.

**"At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."**

(Luke 21:27-28 NIV)

**"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)

**"At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth (or tribes of the land) will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other."**

(Matthew 24:30-31 NIV)

This passage is probably the toughest one to accept in its 1<sup>st</sup> century context, particularly in the way it reads in most translations. Jesus begins with 'at that time,' that is, at the climax of these events when the great apocalyptic shaking will occur (cp. Matthew 24:23). This leads to the sign of the Son of Man in heaven and His coming with power and great glory, associated with the Glory cloud of God. The coming of the Son of Man here, in accordance with Daniel 7, is the Presence (Parousia) of Christ, and the sign of His presence was the judgment upon Jerusalem followed by a heavenly sign. This would herald the end of the age (cf. Matthew 24:3, 27, 37 & 39). And again, the context of this event is in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, as only a few verses later, it reads,

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

(Matthew 24:34 NIV)

Instead of saying 'the sign of the Son of Man shall appear in the sky,' verse 30 should read "*And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven*" (*Interlinear*, George R. Berry). Many partial preterists would say that it is *the sign* of the Son of Man that is appearing, and not the Son of Man visibly appearing Himself. That is to say, that generation of Israel would see (or perceive or recognise) the coming of the Son of Man of Daniel 7 – and the Son of Man would be in heaven judging Jerusalem and its temple.

I'm not so sure if this is the intended meaning of this text (at least not the fullness of it), though I once held that view for some time. It is difficult to know exactly what the sign was, and only Matthew's account mentions it. It could've been the Glory cloud itself, symbolising the Presence of Yahweh. Nevertheless, Jesus did say that people would see his coming in power and glory, and at the same time there would be mourning and lamentation evidently due to God's judgment and wrath.

This is in line with what some heavenly messengers were later to tell the apostles at the ascension of Jesus on the Mount of Olives.

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of

Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? **This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.**" Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city.

(Acts 1:9-12 NIV)

This text is often used to validate the teaching that Jesus will come back visibly in the sky. Yet the question should be asked, "Visible to whom?" Recently I've come to realise that most Christians assume that the ascension event described above was visible to the general public, that is, visible to everyone in the vicinity. But was it? Was it really visible to all? Apart from the biblical accounts in the NT, there isn't any hard evidence that anyone in the local area of Jerusalem or the surrounding villages near the Mount of Olives saw the figure of a man rising into the sky in a cloud on that day! The only witnesses were the chosen apostles.

This was evidently a spiritual 'heavenly' sight only observable to those whose eyes had been opened to witness it. This wasn't a natural sight for all to see. Yes, it was visible; and yes, people saw it happen; but it was not a public, worldly event in the sense of, using a modern example, seeing an aeroplane in the sky (cf. Luke 17:20-21)! In fact, the only ones who saw all of Christ's post-resurrection appearances recorded in the NT were evidently his chosen followers. The world at large did not see Him again (cf. John 14:19; 16:16-22; 1 Corinthians 15:5-8)! There are numerous cases of such happenings throughout Scripture, some of which have been mentioned earlier.

Hence, at His return, a similar thing to the ascension would occur, as the angels had prophesied. Jesus would come back for His disciples, so that at His Presence, He would descend from heaven to the vicinity of the earth to gather His followers and take them to be where He is (cf. John 13:36; 14:1-4; Hebrews 9:28).

Here is another text that is referring to the same event.

"Look, he is coming with the clouds,"  
and "every eye will see him,  
even those who pierced him";  
and all peoples on earth "will mourn because of him."  
So shall it be! Amen.

(Revelation 1:7 NIV)

This text was not only based on the Olivet Discourse, but was a fusion of echo's from OT prophecies such as Daniel 7:13 and Zechariah 12:10-14. Literal translations, such as Young's, render Revelation 1:7 and Matthew 24:30 as '*the tribes of the land*' will wail or mourn instead of '*the nations of the earth.*' This translation has greater relevance in light of the 1<sup>st</sup> century judgment upon Israel and the connection to the '*seeing*' or '*looking*' & '*mourning*' of Zechariah 12. (I'll say a little more on this topic shortly.)

"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will **look on me**, the one they have **pierced**, and they will **mourn** for him as one **mourns** for an only child, and



**grieve bitterly** for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. On that day the **weeping** in Jerusalem will be as great as the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo."

(Zechariah 12:10-11 NIV)

This mourning and weeping of Judah is definitely related to the events surrounding the death of Jesus as the Messiah, yet there is clearly another connection in relation to his appearing in power and glory to establish his kingdom. In other words, Jesus was indicating that the judgment of Israel would take place at his coming or Parousia. Christ himself would be the One to fulfil 'the coming of the Son of Man' in Daniel and elsewhere. And this 'coming' would involve judgment and wrath.

This is also what Jesus meant when He said the following to the Jewish leaders of the Sanhedrin while He was on trial, as we considered earlier,

The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

"Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. **"But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."**

(Matthew 26:63-64 NIV)

Jesus was not telling them that they would literally see him sitting on a giant hand up in the sky floating on clouds! What he was saying was that they would be raised up to stand before him as Judge in fulfilment of the Hebrew texts such as Daniel 7:13 and Psalm 110:1. Jesus had spoken of these things during his ministry.

**The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it;** for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here. **The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it;** for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now something greater than Solomon is here.

(Matthew 12:41-42 NIV)

**"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him,** and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats."

(Matthew 25:31-32 NIV)

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

(Matthew 16:27-28 NIV)

This resurrection and judgment was also in accord with the prophecies of Daniel.

“At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. **Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.** Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.”

(Daniel 12:1-3 NIV)

In quoting from Joel 2 on the Day of Pentecost, Peter was also confirming that the fulfilment of these ‘signs and wonders’ would include the devastating judgment of Jerusalem with ‘blood, fire and billows of smoke.’

**‘I will show wonders in the heavens 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 2:19-21 NIV; cf. Joel 2:28-32)

This event would also be accompanied by the great mourning of ‘the nations of the earth.’ Now we must remember that all these things need to be understood in accordance with the Hebrew Scriptures, letting scripture interpret scripture. As I’ve already mentioned, this phrase ‘the nations of the earth’ can also be translated as ‘the tribes of the land’ (cf. Revelation 1:7 also). In its 1<sup>st</sup> century context, this rendering is more suitable.

In both Hebrew and Greek, *land* and *earth* are interchangeable, depending on the context. In relation to AD 70, all the tribes of the land of Judah and Israel, all those who pierced Him, mourned at the sight of God’s judgment upon them. This is a clear allusion to the prophecy of Zechariah 12:10-14 as shown above. Nevertheless, in a greater sense, Jesus was saying that all the tribes or nations of the earth would mourn when they are raised to stand before the judgment seat of Christ at His Second Advent.

## The Restoration & The Judgment

In connection with this judgment, 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 (for example, Ezekiel 37:20-22; 39:27-29; Jeremiah 31:7-10). There is even the mention of the blowing of the trumpet, which was associated with many things, but in particular, the Jubilee & the Feast of Trumpets (Leviticus 25:8-13; 23:23-24).

Jesus had already confirmed that when the prophecy of the coming of Elijah had occurred, the restoration of all things would follow. As we shall see, this had reference to the then-coming new age of the new creation. Yet Jesus went on to say that the 'Elijah prophecy' had been fulfilled 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 had also promised 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.<sup>23</sup> 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 establishment of the Messianic kingdom.

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 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)

After Pentecost, Peter had a better understanding of these things. On one occasion, while in the temple courts, Peter declared to the people of Israel that times of spiritual refreshment would come if they would repent (indicating a spiritual harvest), and then Jesus the appointed Lord and Messiah would return from heaven to rescue 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.

"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."

(Acts 3:19-21 NIV)

Returning to the theme of the gathering of Israel associated with the restoration, Scripture reveals that ultimately this 'gathering' would also include the Gentiles, in accordance with the prophecy of Isaiah 11:10-12.

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.

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. 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 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 will not inherit the kingdom with Christ, but will be thrown outside into a metaphorical Gehenna of fire.

In verse 28 of Luke’s account, some additional words of Jesus are given to encourage the Jewish disciples of that era to remain faithful, for when they begin to see all these things happening they are to ‘*stand up and lift up your heads*’ (implying that they would be on their knees in prayer, being watchful), because this will mean that ‘*your redemption is drawing near.*’ The new era of the heavenly messianic kingdom (resulting in Christianity on the earth), and the true redemption of Israel, was about to come to fruition (in 70 AD; in the year Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed). These additional words are very similar to what is said a few verses later, as we shall soon see.

Nevertheless, as I’ve already touched on earlier, the Second Advent 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 texts 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) <sup>24</sup>

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!" <sup>25</sup>

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)

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 Fig Tree and the Kingdom of God

Jesus continued by using the simple parable of the Fig Tree to show His disciples that, in the same way as fig trees would begin to bud and sprout leaves in the spring, heralding the nearness of summer, so all these things that He had been

telling them in advance would herald the nearness of the kingdom of God and it's King.

"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. **Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door.**"

(Matthew 24:32-33 NIV)

"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. **Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door.**"

(Mark 13:28-29 NIV)

He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. **Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.**"

(Luke 21:29-31 NIV)

In Luke's account 'the lesson of the fig tree' is called a parable. Now I believe, along with many others, that there is a deeper meaning to this parable. It is not just about the signs that the 'summer' of the kingdom of God was coming, for Jesus had already cursed a fig tree not many days before, and this evidently had something to do with the 'lesson' of the fig tree. Be that as it may, at this point I don't wish to detract too much from our present course, so if the reader wishes to look into this matter further, see the chapter **The Parable of the Fig Tree** in my online book *The Secrets of the Parables*.

Again, as in Luke 21:28, Jesus is encouraging them to be watchful so that when they see all these things occurring they will know that 'it' - the kingdom of God - is near, right at the door. The Greek word *engus* translated **near** commonly means 'close to' as in something that is soon to occur, just like saying in springtime that summer is near. The wording here is indicating that the coming of the Son of Man is one and the same as the arrival of the kingdom of God - and the door into that kingdom was 'near' when the disciples saw 'all these things' taking place. 'All these things...' has to include everything that Jesus had been telling them so far - from verse 1 to at least this point in the discourse. And 'all these things' were to occur in their generation - 'this generation.'

**"This Generation Will Certainly Not Pass Away Until..."**

Jesus then continued,

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

(Matthew 24:34; also Mark 13:30 & Luke 21:32 NIV)

So what did He mean by saying that **'this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened?'**

Firstly, it is important to note that in the Greek, all three synoptic gospel writers record the same thing. Jesus begins by saying 'amen' or 'truly' and 'I tell you' to emphasise the importance and truthfulness of what He was about to say. He then uses a double negative 'by no means' or 'definitely not' to emphasise strongly that this generation 'will *certainly not* pass away' until all these things have occurred. He was emphasising how soon these things were actually going to take place! To make it mean something else in the distant future empties it of its true import.

Many times throughout His ministry to Israel, Jesus spoke about "*this wicked and adulteress generation,*" and this always referred to those who were alive at that time in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. A generation was usually understood to be anywhere between 20 and 40 years, 40 being the upper limit due to the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness for ancient Israel, until that 'exodus' generation had died having failed to enter the Promised Land (cf. Numbers 14:29-35). The number forty also symbolises probation or testing.

For **forty years** I was angry with **that generation**;  
I said, 'They are a people whose hearts go astray,  
and they have not known my ways.'  
So I declared on oath in my anger,  
'They shall never enter my rest.'"

(Psalm 95:10-11 NIV)

All of these themes are being tied together in Hebrews 4:1-11, where the writer, quoting from Psalm 95, is preparing and encouraging the Jewish Christians of 'this generation' to enter the Sabbath-rest of Christ's coming kingdom. This letter would've been written well before 70 AD, probably during the early-to-mid-60's. Elsewhere in Hebrews these Jewish Christians were being warned about falling back into the temple worship of Judaism because its days were numbered and the fiery judgment of God was about to fall upon Jerusalem and the temple – exactly as Jesus had prophesied (cf. Hebrews 10:19-39; 12:25-29).

As we noted earlier, Jesus had already pronounced judgment upon that generation during His final week of ministry, just before the Olivet Discourse. It was 'this generation' who were about to reject the true Messiah and His Apostles.

"And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. I tell you the truth, all this will come upon **this generation**."

(Matthew 23:35-36 NIV)

Now some bible versions put 'race' in as a footnote for 'generation' in these texts indicating that the Greek word *genea* can mean 'race' as well. This is rather misleading, and one of the apparent reasons for this 'interpretive' footnote is that the translators are clearly following the popular 'futurist' interpretation that is often the view of Dispensationalists.

Even the New Bible Commentary in its notes on Matthew 24 says the following:



"The NIV mg. offers 'race' as an alternative to *generation*. This suggestion is prompted more by embarrassment on the part of those who think v 30 refers to the *parousia* rather than by any natural sense of the word *genea*!" (21<sup>st</sup> Century Edition, P. 937)

Although I agree with what is said here about the 'natural sense of... *genea*' being that of *generation*, nevertheless, there appears to be a little confusion over the use of *parousia*. The writer clearly believes that the Greek word *parousia* refers to the Second Advent in this discourse, although a little earlier in the commentary text it is admitted that this word doesn't always refer to the Second Coming.

From the comment above it is evident that the writer believes that because the word *parousia* isn't mentioned in verse 30, it then follows that if one thinks that this verse *does* refer to the Second Advent then one is clearly mistaken; and it then becomes an embarrassment because (according to this view) the Parousia didn't happen in 'this generation!' Nevertheless, a few verses earlier, in v 27, the word *parousia* *is* used of this 'coming' of Christ, which, in the context, is clearly referring to the same 'coming' of verse 30 that was to occur in 'this generation!' (I hope that's clear enough!)

This is a good example of the kind of confusion that arises when commentators try to give the word *parousia* the sole meaning of 'Second Advent' only; after which they then proceed to interpret the Second Advent in accordance with popular (mis) conceptions of it. The ensuing result is that, even by partial-preterist standards, the Olivet Discourse gets contextually broken up, leading to a compartmentalising of the 'coming of Christ' to 'this generation' and the yet-future 'coming of Christ' of 'the Second Advent!'

The 'genea=race' view teaches that in some contexts the phrase "*this generation*" is referring to the whole wicked generation of unbelieving Israel, beginning many centuries before Christ and continuing right through to the end of the age (cf. Matthew 12:39-45). This gives the word '*genea*' the meaning of 'race' in the broader sense.

So, according to this view, the phrase '*this generation*' can have a wider application, depending on the context, so that it can carry the meaning of 'race' and not just a particular 'generation.'

It is also true (as some contend who use this view of 'race') that Jeremiah had prophesied that the descendents of Israel would continue as a nation until the end of this age, until the physical laws of this old creation would pass away.

This is what the LORD says,  
he who appoints the sun  
to shine by day,  
who decrees the moon and stars  
to shine by night,  
who stirs up the sea  
so that its waves roar—  
the LORD Almighty is his name:

"Only if these decrees vanish from my sight,"  
declares the LORD,

"will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before me."

(Jeremiah 31:35-36 NIV; see also Jeremiah 33:19-26)

And it is also true that God made it clear that there would always be a spiritual remnant of Israel, a remnant of grace, (who are the true Israel of God), that would continue to exist before Him, for He would not completely reject all of the descendents of Israel because of their sins.

This is what the LORD says:

"Only if the heavens above can be measured  
and the foundations of the earth below be searched out  
will I reject all the descendants of Israel  
because of all they have done,"  
declares the LORD.

(Jeremiah 31:37 NIV)

Now although these prophecies are declaring that a spiritual Israel will continue until the coming of Christ and the establishing of the new creation, it is equally evident that for this to occur, there also needs to be a physical nation of Israel after the flesh, out of which comes the spiritual remnant. And that's exactly how it is to this day. Not only does this have specific relevance to the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD events related to the first coming of Christ and the end of the old covenant age, but they also have relevance to the present time. This is what the apostle Paul appears to be referring to in Romans 11. Nevertheless, this idea of the Jewish 'race' continuing on to the end has nothing to do with the texts that use the phrase 'this generation.'

Nowhere in Matthew's gospel does the phrase 'this generation' mean anything else but the generation then living, yet according to the futurist view, in the context of Matthew 24:34 quoted earlier, '*this generation*' is referring to the final generation of unbelieving Israel who will see all these things unfold (that is, the various signs and events of Christ's Return), and they will not completely pass away until all these things have occurred - which includes the visible return of Christ Himself. Only then will the wicked generation 'pass away' and be no more.

This view only makes sense if the whole discourse is removed from its original context and then superimposed onto a foreign interpretive grid such as Premillennial Dispensationalism. If this were true then Jesus' emphatic statement about 'this generation' not passing away would become a little redundant. If He meant to say that the *race* of Israel would not pass away until all these things occurred at the end of the age (over 2000 years later), then not only is this irrelevant for the disciples of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, whom He was talking to, but it would also imply that the race of Israel will pass away in the end, after the events - yet according to dispensationalists, Israel will continue on forever!

No, this is not good exegesis. The only viable interpretation of 'this generation,' as stated above, in accordance with sound exegesis, would be that this refers to the generation of Jews living at that time in the first century, from 30-70 AD, who would experience all these things coming upon Judah and Jerusalem via the Jewish/Roman war of that period.

The Greek word *genea* translated as *generation* is widely recognised in most concordances as denoting the generation of people living at that time. If Jesus had meant to say 'generations' in the plural, or 'race' even, then the gospel writers, under inspiration of the Spirit, would've recorded it that way, but they didn't! Jesus clearly meant that judgment was going to arrive on the generation living at that time in the 1st century, and all these things were going to occur before 'this generation' had passed away.

Here is what Wayne Jackson says in his *Study of Matthew 24*.<sup>26</sup>

Genea is found forty-three times in the New Testament. In seventeen of these cases, the expression is "this generation." In Matthew's record, for example, "this generation" is found in 11:16; 12:41,42,45; 23:36, and 24:34. A careful consideration of these passages provides a clear sense of the significance of the expression.

For instance, Jesus, surveying the Jewish wickedness of his day, warned of an impending punishment. He said:

All these things [the consequences of the Jews's rebellion] shall come upon **this generation** (Matthew 23:36).

Why is it millennialists contend that "this generation" in 23:36 is the generation devastated by the Romans in A.D. 70, but allege that "this generation" in 24:34 refers to a far-away "future day" (Barbieri 1983, 75,78)?

Arndt and Gingrich suggest that genea denotes "basically, the sum total of those born at the same time, expanded to include all those living at a given time generation, contemporaries" (1967, 153).

McClintock and Strong state that the phrase "this generation" in Matthew 24:34 denotes "the generation of persons then living contemporary with Christ" (1969, 776).

Therefore, Jesus was clearly stating that judgment was going to fall on the generation of Jews that He was talking to (that is, His contemporaries) - and it did, within 40 years!

"...so that **on you** should be coming all the just blood shed on the earth, from the blood of just Abel until the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murder between the temple and the altar. Verily, I am saying to you: **All these things will be arriving on this generation**... Jerusalem!... Lo! **your house is left to you desolate**. For I am saying to you: You may by no means be perceiving Me henceforth, till you should be saying, 'Blessed is He Who is coming in the name of the Lord!'"

(Matthew 23:35-39 Concordant Literal NT)

'This generation' would receive the ultimate generational curse of the Law of Moses, connecting them with all of their murderous forefathers of previous generations. Their ultimate sin would be murdering the Messiah, the Son of God. Even at that time, Jesus pronounced a curse upon the temple, telling Jerusalem that '*your house is left to you desolate.*' Hence, "*All these things will be arriving on **this generation.***"

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, **because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you.**"

(Luke 19:41-44 NIV)

As Jesus had approached Jerusalem a week earlier during His 'triumphal entry' He'd uttered these fateful words, which were fulfilled almost 40 years later when the Roman armies under Titus surrounded the city of Jerusalem in 70 AD and laid siege to it for 5 months. They eventually built a wall of wooden stakes around the whole city using all the trees in the vicinity for miles around, cutting it off completely, to starve the inhabitants. Thousands of Jews were slaughtered in the process, and the whole city and the temple complex was totally destroyed, and not one stone was left on another, particularly in the sanctuary area.

All these things came upon 'this generation' just as Jesus had forewarned them. He had come to cast fire on the land – and now the time had arrived to cast this fire of God's wrath and vengeance upon the city and its environs.

**"I have come to bring fire on the earth (*or land*), and how I wish it were already kindled!** But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed!"

(Luke 12:49-50 NIV)

This was a clear reference to Deuteronomy 32:22 where the fire of God's wrath would fall upon Israel to destroy the land – like heaven and earth passing away.

**For a fire will be kindled by my wrath,**  
one that burns down to the realm of the dead below.  
It will devour the earth and its harvests  
and set afire the foundations of the mountains.

(NIV)

I looked at the earth,  
and it was formless and empty;  
and at the heavens,  
and their light was gone.  
I looked at the mountains,  
and they were quaking;  
all the hills were swaying.  
I looked, and there were no people;  
every bird in the sky had flown away.  
I looked, and the fruitful land was a desert;  
all its towns lay in ruins  
before the LORD, before his fierce anger.

This is what the LORD says:

"The whole land will be ruined,  
though I will not destroy it completely.  
**Therefore the earth will mourn  
and the heavens above grow dark,**  
because I have spoken and will not relent,  
I have decided and will not turn back."

(Jeremiah 4:23-28 NIV)

## Heaven and Earth Will Pass Away

Directly in relation to 'all these things' occurring before 'this generation' would pass away, Jesus also 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 is saying here that when the Law and the Prophets (i.e. the Hebrew Scriptures) are fulfilled, then everything will be accomplished, and subsequently, heaven and earth will pass away (cf. Luke 24:27 & 44). There is a parallel between '*until heaven and earth pass away*' and '*until everything is accomplished*.' The two are synonymous (see note 12).

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) will pass away, but the words of Jesus will 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 is 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 Old Testament prophets – that is, metaphorically, hyperbolically, and poetically; that is, apocalyptically.

There are at least two key passages in the Old Testament 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; also Genesis 26:4; 28:14). 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 says 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' are used to refer to a new Israel, which is also described as a new Jerusalem (Isaiah 65:17-25; 66:22-24; also Revelation 21:1-8). Yet this 'new creation' would be created through a fiery judgment upon Israel that would cause many to be slain. Sound familiar?

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)

It appears to be these very things that the apostle Peter was writing about in the great apocalyptic passage in 2 Peter 3:3-13, nevertheless, an exposition of this text

will have to wait for another time, otherwise I will be in danger of digressing far too much! This study is already long enough!

## That Day & Hour

Up to now, we have seen that the whole of the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24:1-35 was a prophecy of 1st century events, where Jesus had clearly stated that 'all these things' would occur within 'this generation.' Now it is at this point in the discourse that most partial-preterists begin applying the text to a yet-future Second Advent (that is, it did not occur in the 1<sup>st</sup> century). I did so for a number of years, but I then came to realise that the flow of the discourse would be greatly interrupted if this were the case, and I also came to see that the emphasis that many place on the phrase 'that day or hour' doesn't hold up, particularly in light of Luke 17:20-37. Let me explain by highlighting a number of points that are usually raised to allegedly show that the discourse moves to the future Second Advent at this juncture.

Ken Gentry, whose teaching I greatly respect, gives about eight reasons as to why he believes that the discourse changes its focus at this point.<sup>27</sup> However, I don't believe that these reasons are in any way conclusive. Firstly, here's how the discourse continues.

**"No one knows about that day or hour,** not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

"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 24:36-44 NIV; also Luke 12:38-40; 17:26-27)

Two of the reasons Gentry gives, which are related to each other, are that (a) by all appearances, verse 34 seems to conclude the preceding prophecy so that only the first section belongs to 'this generation', and that (b) the grammatical structure of the new section suggests a change in subject (points 1 & 3).

Yet these are just that - appearances or suggestions, and nothing concrete. There may be a change of gear, if you will, for now the discourse focuses in on the danger of that day occurring unexpectedly, like a thief, and hence the need to keep watch, but this doesn't then automatically mean that the discourse is now jumping to the far distant future! This would unnaturally break up the flow of the discourse. This kind of break in the discourse is not unlike the 'break' or 'gap' that dispensationalists put into their interpretation of the 70 Week prophecy of Daniel 9!

Then, more convincingly, Gentry highlights the contrasts of the near demonstrative of *'this generation'* with the far demonstrative of *'that day'* (point 2). This appears to be one of the stronger arguments put forward for splitting the discourse into the *'this generation'* coming of Christ and the *'that day'* of the yet-future Second Advent. Nevertheless, this view doesn't hold up on closer examination.

It is evident that the reason why Christ used the *'near demonstrative'* is because he was talking to his disciples who belonged to *'this generation'* at the very time when he was speaking - that is, he was referring to the generation of people who were alive right then. Yet when he turns his focus to the specific *'day or hour'* of his coming, Christ uses the *'far demonstrative'* because *'that day or hour'* was still a number of decades away at that time. There isn't any sound reason for accepting a gap here of over 2000 years!

Also, Luke 17 contains a passage that is clearly another parallel account of the same theme as the Olivet Discourse - the coming of the Son of Man and His kingdom via a judgment upon Jerusalem and Judea. Almost exactly the same words and phrases are used here as in the Olivet Discourse, although the setting was different.

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." <sup>28</sup>

Then he said to his disciples, "The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. People will tell you, 'There he is!' or 'Here he is!' Do not go running off after them. For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other. But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by **this generation**.

"Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.

"It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.

**"It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. On that day** no one who is on the housetop, with possessions inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. Remember Lot's wife! Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it. I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left."

"Where, Lord?" they asked.

He replied, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather."

(Luke 17:20-37 NIV)



After answering the Pharisees' question about the coming of the kingdom, Jesus then turns to his disciples and begins by telling them that although they will long for the days of his coming, the days of the Son of Man (NB. both *days* and *day* are used here for the same period), they will not see it, meaning that their longing won't be fulfilled immediately. Many false deliverers and prophets would arise saying that the kingdom had arrived, but Christ's followers were to ignore their false claims. Jesus' teaching here is very similar to the beginning of the Olivet Discourse.

Now take note of verses 25 & 31. Jesus refers to 'this generation' again as the ones who would reject him, and then he proceeds to describe the judgment of the Son of Man upon that generation. He uses the stories about the judgments of Noah's day (which is also recorded in the Olivet Discourse) and Lot's day as types and examples of what Jerusalem and Judea would soon suffer. Then in verse 31 he refers to this Day of the Son of Man as '*that day*' – just like we have it in the Olivet Discourse.

And to show that he was talking about '*that day*' of Jerusalem's judgment in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, he warns his followers to 'get out quickly' when the time suddenly arrives – just as Lot and his family had to flee Sodom, though his wife hesitated and lost her life because of it! Christ is speaking of a 1<sup>st</sup> century situation and he warns them that if they are on the housetop (or flat roof) when the time comes, they are not to go down into the house to get their possessions because there just won't be enough time – just flee! Also, if they are working out in the fields when the time arrives, there won't be enough time to go back to the house to get anything – again, just flee! It was common for people to sleep on the flat rooftops during the warmer parts of the year, and to work out in the fields; hence the reference to two people on a couch (or in a bed) and two grinding grain. Notice also that '*that day*' is also called '*that night*' – both being metaphors for this period of judgment that would become the siege of Jerusalem.

Figuratively speaking, there would be a division within the nation, where one out of every two people would heed Jesus' words and be saved from this judgment (i.e. the one who'd be taken), while the other would be destroyed (i.e. the one who'd be left). Just like Noah and Lot, those who are left behind are destroyed, while the others are taken to safety. It would appear as though the disciples question of 'where?' was aimed at those left behind, for Jesus answers them by saying 'where there is a carcass, there the vultures (or eagles) will gather.'<sup>29</sup>

Apart from the addition of the story of Lot and his wife, these details are virtually identical to the Olivet Discourse. Therefore, when these passages are laid side by side, I believe it is very convincing to accept that they are all referring to the 1<sup>st</sup> century events of the judgment of Jerusalem and Judea in the Day of the Lord – and calling it '*that day*' does not in any sense make it refer to a distant Second Advent. This was all about the one Day of the Lord that the apostles were expecting in their generation.

Some of the other reasons Gentry gives are related to the '*signs*' that are given in the first section of the discourse in apparent contrast to the suddenness and unexpectedness of '*that day*' in the latter portion. He indicates that time is given to flee in the first section, but in the second section there isn't time to flee; and in the first section they will know the time of the judgment, but in the second section no one can know the time. On closer examination, this is not actually the case.

Jesus may have given them general signs to watch out for, as well as a specific sign of 'the abomination of desolation' in relation to the temple and the city, but it is also evident that no one knew the precise day or hour of the siege of Jerusalem, when anyone found to be within the city at that time would be trapped inside. This was one of the main reasons why Jesus was warning his followers to beware of certain things and to be vigilant. The primary focus was on the temple, the city of Jerusalem and the land of Judea.

Jews from all over the Roman world would come to Jerusalem and the temple at least three times a year for the festivals of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. In fact, Josephus records that just before the siege of the city took place, Jerusalem was filled with Jewish pilgrims from all over the world who had come to the temple for the feast of Passover – and they became caught up in the sectarian infighting that was taking place as well as the horrors of the siege (see *Wars*, Book 5). It was for this very reason that Jesus was warning his disciples beforehand to save them from the judgment that was to fall.

Also, it is evident from verses 19-20 (of Matthew 24) that no one would know even the time of year that the siege would occur, let alone the literal day or hour, for Jesus encourages them to pray that their escape from the city would not happen in the winter or on the Sabbath! Now if it was to occur in the winter, then travelling would become much more difficult for the Christian 'refugees,' particularly for pregnant women and mothers nursing their babies. And if it were to occur on a Sabbath day, then there would be problems leaving the city quickly due to Sabbath regulations such as the gates being shut or travelling restrictions. So, if Jesus was urging them to pray for the conditions to be more favourable for them when the day of judgment for the city was to arrive, they clearly didn't know when the event was going to occur – and neither did Jesus himself! That is, they didn't know 'the day or hour' of his coming, exactly as Christ said!

There isn't any contradiction or difficulty with accepting the fact that both sections of the discourse are talking about the same event(s) – the great tribulation, the day or days of the Son of Man; the coming of the Son of Man in his kingdom with power, all of which was to occur at the time of Jerusalem's fall. In retrospect, as we now know how it was all fulfilled, the first section provides many details about the general signs and conditions of the subsequent 40 year period, from around 33-70 AD, as well as a more specific sign concerning the temple. On the other hand, the second section focuses on being prepared and being watchful because the actual day or hour of the 'coming' would be unknown; and as the years rolled by, there would be a temptation to 'fall asleep' or listen to the many deceivers all around; or apostatise by slipping back into the old, familiar way of old covenant Judaism - hence the warnings about Noah's day and the judgment of the Flood.

## The Days of Noah

Now if we take note of what the world was like in the days of Noah, we will better understand what Jesus was saying to his disciples concerning the then-coming days of the Son of Man. Genesis 6 tells us the following,

Then the LORD said, "My Spirit will not contend with man forever (*for the age*), for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years."...The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that

every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time...**Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence.** God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth."

(Genesis 6:3, 5, 11-13 NIV)

The Book of Jasher, an ancient scroll that is mentioned a few times in the Old Testament, confirms what the Scriptures tell us.<sup>30</sup>

But in the latter days of Methuselah, the sons of men turned from the Lord, they corrupted the earth, they robbed and plundered each other, and they rebelled against God and they transgressed, and they corrupted their ways, and would not hearken to the voice of Methuselah, but rebelled against him.

(Jasher 4:4)

The land of that day was full of everyday violence and wickedness of all kinds, including robbery and muggings, in open rebellion against the most basic tenets of God's laws. It was totally corrupt in every way. Most were living for their own selfish pleasure, in a corrupt manner, in defiance of the Creator. Yet in general they were living in abundant prosperity, surrounded by worldly pleasures.

It is later revealed that both Noah and Methuselah preached the Word of God to the world of that time for 120 years. Towards the end of that time, Noah and his family, along with Methuselah and his family, built the Ark over a period of 5 years. Then in the year of the Flood, Methuselah died.

Now this is what amazes me the most. *The only ones who believed God and obeyed His Word were 8 people out of the whole Mesopotamian world!* After 120 years of preaching the word and warning the people about the judgment to come, only the 8 souls of Noah and his family believed God and boarded the Ark to be saved! (Others had believed previously, but they had all died before the Flood came, including Methuselah).

The typological picture here is truly fascinating. This small remnant symbolised the remnant of 'overcomers' who would be saved at the coming of the Son of Man in 70 AD to be spared the wrath of fire, as well as ultimately typifying all 'overcomers' who will be saved from the ultimate judgment of fire. The number eight symbolises New Creation or New Beginnings, and in the same way as Noah and his family rose above the waters of judgment in the Ark to be kept alive to enter 'a new creation' after the waters had subsided, so the true followers of Christ would be saved by the Ark of Christ Jesus himself, rising above the judgment, to eventually inhabit 'the new earth' as the firstfruits of a new humanity, to then begin ruling over a new creation.

Noah essentially means 'rest' and he prefigures the Rest of God, which is the inheritance of salvation in, and through, Christ - the entering into the true Promised Land, the spiritual Kingdom of God. God always uses the minority as His servants, those who belong to the remnant of grace. It has always been this way - whether it be Noah and his family, Lot and his family, Joshua and Caleb, Gideon's 300 men, or the disciples of Jesus, etc, etc.

As we have seen with the parallel passage in Luke 17, Jesus also made it clear in the discourse quoted above that there would be a judgment of separation at this time, so that whether one was asleep or at home or out working or whatever one may be doing on that Day, one would be taken, while another would be left behind. The whole pattern is in the account of Noah and the Flood.

It is also worth mentioning here that the Book of Jasher also gives us some extremely interesting information about the events that began the Great Flood, which ties in perfectly with what Jesus was revealing about the Day of his Coming and the typological similarities with the days of Noah.

And on that day, the Lord caused the whole earth to shake, and the sun darkened, and the foundations of the world raged, and the whole earth was moved violently, and the lightning flashed, and the thunder roared, and all the fountains in the earth were broken up, such as was not known to the inhabitants before; and God did this mighty act, in order to terrify the sons of men, that there might be no more evil upon earth...

...And all the sons of men that were left upon the earth, became exhausted through evil on account of the rain, for the waters were coming more violently upon the earth, and the animals and beasts were still surrounding the ark. And the sons of men assembled together, about seven hundred thousand men and women, and they came unto Noah to the ark.

And they called to Noah, saying, Open for us that we may come to thee in the ark--and wherefore shall we die? And Noah, with a loud voice, answered them from the ark, saying, Have you not all rebelled against the Lord, and said that he does not exist? and therefore the Lord brought upon you this evil, to destroy and cut you off from the face of the earth.

Is not this the thing that I spoke to you of one hundred and twenty years back, and you would not hearken to the voice of the Lord, and now do you desire to live upon earth?...

...And the sons of men approached in order to break into the ark, to come in on account of the rain, for they could not bear the rain upon them. And the Lord sent all the beasts and animals that stood round the ark. And the beasts overpowered them and drove them from that place, and every man went his way and they again scattered themselves upon the face of the earth.

And the rain was still descending upon the earth, and it descended forty days and forty nights, and the waters prevailed greatly upon the earth; and all flesh that was upon the earth or in the waters died, whether men, animals, beasts, creeping things or birds of the air, and there only remained Noah and those that were with him in the ark.

(Jasher 6:11, 16-20, 24-26)

## The Days of Lot

As we saw earlier from Luke 17, Jesus also drew similar parallels with the days of Lot and the judgment that fell upon Sodom and Gomorrah and the other cities of the

Plain. This time the judgment was by heavenly fire and it destroyed all within that vicinity.

"It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed."

(Luke 17:28-30 NIV)

Let us repeat that last line.

**It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed.**

In the same way as fire and sulphur rained down from heaven in divine judgment on the day Lot and his family left Sodom, and destroyed all who remained, so the fiery judgment of God would fall upon Jerusalem and all the land at the coming of the Son of Man, after the sons of God had had opportunity to escape.

The people of Sodom and that whole area (in what is now the Dead Sea) were also full of barbaric violence and corruption and all manner of wickedness, mistreating the poor and needy, robbing and mugging, and they practiced all manner of sexual lusts and perversions (cf. Genesis 18-19 and Jasher 19). Yet even though they had been given time to repent, no one believed God and obeyed. So on the very day Lot left Sodom, to go up to higher ground for safety, the divine fire fell! Yet even Lot had to be virtually dragged out of there by heavenly messengers! And even then, Lot's wife stopped and contemplated going back, which led to her sudden death!

On that very day, everyone in Sodom and the other cities were carrying on as normal, living life as usual, some sleeping, some working, others buying and selling, building and planting, eating and drinking, etc. But as soon as God's chosen ones of the family of Abraham had left Sodom, the fire fell and destroyed them all!

The parallels are as clear as day between Noah's day and Lot's day, and the days of the Son of Man in the 1<sup>st</sup> century that would close out the old covenant age. The divine type and pattern is unmistakable. Just a cursory reading of the central books of *The Jewish War* by Josephus will show beyond a doubt that these same conditions were present in the era of 66-70 AD – and that Israel was truly ripe for judgment! In fact, due to the light that they had received through Christ's ministry and that of the apostles, that generation was in a far worse state at its end than it had been previously (cf. Matthew 12:38-45).

Peter and Jude also used these early examples of divine judgment that Jesus used about Noah and the Flood, and Lot and Sodom, to warn the early Christians, Jewish Christians in particular, about the approaching judgment of the Day of the Lord, and to remind the true disciples of Jesus that God rescues His righteous ones out of trial and wrath, while the unrighteous receive His justice (cf. 2 Peter 2:4-9; Jude 5, 7).

### Stay Awake & Keep Watch

Matthew's account of the Olivet discourse concludes with about five parables. The first two highlight the need to keep watch; to be vigilant; to stay spiritually

awake and to remain faithful servants in the face of a delay in Christ's coming – a delay that would tempt many to fall away. Jesus states clearly that the majority would find that this Day would occur suddenly and unexpectedly, like a thief in the night, and they would be caught completely off their guard – and this would include some of his followers who had apostatised (cf. Matthew 24:42-51).

The 'thief in the night' motif is also used elsewhere in the New Testament to warn the 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians of these impending events of the Day of the Lord (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 3:3; 16:15).

These parables are summed up in Mark's account as follows.

"But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. **Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.** It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

**"Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back**—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"

(Mark 13:32-37 NIV)

Then in Matthew 25, there are three lengthy parables, each emphasising something different. Each of these parables would've had greater significance for the 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians, but of course the principles they contain reach much further than merely the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

The parable of the Ten Virgins or Maidens is again about watchfulness and preparedness, also indicating that the coming kingdom was to be a wedding feast and Jesus is the Bridegroom (Matthew 25:1-13). Of course, in accordance with the Law, the marriage to the new bride could only take place after the divorce of unfaithful Israel – the prostitute (cp. Revelation 17-19; Romans 7:1-4).

The parable of the Talents is really about his people continuing to be faithful servants to Christ in his absence in light of a coming judgment in which all must give an account (Matthew 25:14-30).

And finally, the parable of the Sheep and the Goats is essentially portraying Christ as Ruler and Judge of all nations in fulfilment of the Son of Man vision in Daniel 7, in which everyone is judged in accordance with how they respond to the true servants and brothers of Christ, resulting in two distinct destinies in the then-coming age of the new order (Matthew 25:31-46).<sup>31</sup>

I think it is evident that these parables, along with Christ's entire teaching ministry really, were primarily for the 1<sup>st</sup> century audience in Israel; that is, the prophetic elements at least had an application to the events of the Day of the Lord and the coming of the Son of Man in that era. Nevertheless, having said that, I believe that it is also evident that the spiritual principles of Christ's teaching can be applied to every generation throughout this present age until the great Consummation.

However, all of the prophetic details in the Olivet Discourse clearly applied to the 1<sup>st</sup> century events; and that would have to include the Second Advent.

To wrap up this study on the Olivet Discourse, let us consider the last few verses of Luke's account in relation to these parables.

"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)

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 warning went out to all Jews and Christians throughout the Roman world for the event of Christ's coming would affect all. Therefore, he encourages them to be always watchful, and to pray that they may be among those who heed his words so that they may be able to escape all that was about to happen (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:1-9).

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 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).

It is 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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; they ultimately had to do with what could be termed another dimension - a heavenly, spiritual one – and the judgment or rewards associated with it.

In closing, I just wish to emphasise that although the interpretation of the discourse as laid out in this article appears to be a full preterist position, such is not the case (not in the modern sense anyhow). As explained at the beginning, the view expressed here still accepts that there is a future Consummation, while viewing the resurrection and judgment as a continuing process *in the spirit realm*. However, there are many passages in the NT, including portions of the Olivet Discourse, which are commonly accepted as referring to a yet-future Second Advent. We have considered some of these above; and yet I have attempted to show that I am no longer convinced of this 'futurist' position.

Right now, for those among the nations who accept the gospel and become disciples of Jesus, we can enter into the gates of the New Jerusalem and join the celebration of the wedding feast.

For further details of my present position, see *A Further Introduction To Prophetic Studies*; and for a more detailed study of the whole subject of the Second Advent, see my series *The Day of The Lord, The Royal Appearing*.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> In recent years, it has come to my attention, through reading the excellent work of Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr, *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating The Book of Revelation* (American Vision, Revised Edition 1998) that the weight of evidence for the writing of Revelation, both externally and internally, actually leans heavily toward the early date of c. 65 AD, during the reign of Emperor Nero. The evidence also indicates that the whole New Testament canon was 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 19<sup>th</sup> century it was the predominant position held by the majority of biblical scholars (see Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, pp. 27-38).

Even though there are four major views of Revelation (Preterist, Historicist, Futurist and Idealist) I strongly believe that the preterist interpretation is the best way (dare I say, the correct way) of understanding the vision of Revelation. There are a number of criteria that need to be met when attempting to interpret Revelation. The primary one is that of the time statements. For example, the book 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.)

Another key criterion is that of specific events in time being prophesied. For instance, the holy city of Jerusalem was to be trampled for a specified period of time (if taken literally, three and a half years). There would also be a specific war in heaven ending with the defeat of Satan, and there would come a day when the Lord would take his great power and begin to reign (cf. Rev. 11:2, 8, 15, 17; 12:7-9). Many other judgments and events were prophesied in a similar manner to the book of Daniel that were to have a specific historical fulfilment.

After examining all the four major views (having held to two of them previously - Futurist & then Historicist) it is the Preterist view that meets all of the criteria. I don't completely rule out the Idealist & Historicist views, but I would emphasise that these are *secondary* interpretations on differing levels of truth. For me, the *primary* interpretation is the Preterist one.

For further information, see my *Introduction To Prophetic Studies & A Further Introduction To Prophetic Studies!*



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<sup>2</sup> Sources: R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According To Jesus* (Baker Books, 1998) pp. 11-15; and David B. Currie, *Rapture, The End-Times Error That Leaves The Bible Behind* (Sophia Institute Press, 2003), pp. 147-149.

<sup>3</sup> J. Stuart Russell was a British Congregational minister in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and he is best known for his renowned book *The Parousia: A Critical Inquiry into the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord's Second Coming*, first published anonymously in 1878, and then with his name added in 1887. It has been re-published by Baker Books in 1983 & 1999. In the 1999 edition, the respected Bible teacher, R. C. Sproul, added a Foreword. Sproul had published a book in 1998 entitled *The Last Days According To Jesus* in which he assessed the conclusions of Russell's position. Here is an extract from Sproul's Foreword to *The Parousia*.

"I am persuaded that, in the main, Russell is essentially correct. I do not endorse his work entirely because I think he goes too far, as does "full preterism." As Russell himself acknowledges, there remains a blessed hope for the people of God... My views on these matters remain in transition, as I have spelled out in *The Last Days According To Jesus*. But for me one thing is certain: I can never read the New Testament again the same way I read it before reading *The Parousia*. I hope better scholars than I will continue to analyze and evaluate the content of J. Stuart Russell's important work."

When I first read Russell's book, like Sproul, I too thought that Russell's position went too far, into what appeared to be a full preterist position (though in actuality it is still technically a partial preterist position). But now, after a lot of thought, meditation and some re-reading of the book, I too have 'gone too far' for I am now convinced that Russell's position is essentially correct. There is one particular interpretation of a text where I strongly disagree with Russell, and that is his view of 1 Corinthians 15:22-28 where he understood 'the end' as referring to the end of the old covenant age in 70 AD. In this particular instance, I believe he was in error. I see the End or Consummation that Paul is talking about here as being the end of Christ's reign and the 'order's' of the resurrection. This is still future.

I find it very interesting, though, that Sproul stated openly that his views remain in transition. Therefore, he must still be open to go further!

Kenneth L. Gentry Jr. has also been greatly influenced by Russell's book. The 1999 edition of *The Parousia* contains the following entry by Gentry on the back cover.

"Although I do not agree with all the conclusions of *The Parousia*, I highly recommend this well-organized, carefully argued, and compelling written volume. It is one of the most persuasive and challenging books I have read on the subject, and has had great impact on my thinking."

<sup>4</sup> "There was also another body of wicked men gotten together, not so impure in their actions, but more wicked in their intentions, which laid waste the happy state of the city no less than did these murderers. These were such men as deceived and deluded the people under pretense of Divine inspiration, but were for procuring innovations and changes of the government; and these prevailed with the multitude to act like madmen, and went before them into the wilderness, as pretending that God would there show them the signals of liberty. But Felix thought this procedure was to be the beginning of a revolt; so he sent some horsemen and footmen both armed, who destroyed a great number of them...

...But there was an Egyptian false prophet that did the Jews more mischief than the former; for he was a cheat, and pretended to be a prophet also, and got together thirty thousand men that were deluded by him; these he led round about from the wilderness to the mount

which was called the Mount of Olives, and was ready to break into Jerusalem by force from that place..." (*Wars, Book 2, chapter 13*)

"A false prophet was the occasion of these people's destruction, who had made a public proclamation in the city that very day, that God commanded them to get upon the temple, and that there they should receive miraculous signs of their deliverance. Now there was then a great number of false prophets suborned by the tyrants to impose on the people, who denounced this to them, that they should wait for deliverance from God; and this was in order to keep them from deserting, and that they might be buoyed up above fear and care by such hopes. Now a man that is in adversity does easily comply with such promises; for when such a seducer makes him believe that he shall be delivered from those miseries which oppress him, then it is that the patient is full of hopes of such his deliverance."

"Thus were the miserable people persuaded by these deceivers, and such as belied God himself; while they did not attend nor give credit to the signs that were so evident, and did so plainly foretell their future desolation, but, like men infatuated, without either eyes to see or minds to consider, did not regard the denunciations that God made to them." (*Wars, Book 6, chapter 5*)

<sup>5</sup> Dr Ken Gentry says the following:

"Classical writers testify to the widespread, recurring famines of the era of the A.D. 50s through the 60s, as we discover in the works of Suetonius, Dio Cassius, Eusebius, and Orosius... Tacitus mentions earthquakes in Crete, Rome, Apamea, Phrygia, Campania, Laodicea and Pompeii during the time just before Jerusalem's destruction..." (Gentry, *Perilous Times*, CMP 1999, pp. 49-50)

<sup>6</sup> In the autumn of 62 AD, a Jew called Joshua (Jesus) begins prophesying Jerusalem's doom. Then in late 65 or early 66 a star like a sword appears in the night sky, along with a comet (sign 1). Then in the spring of 66 a brilliant light is seen over the altar and the sanctuary (sign 2); a lamb is born to a cow in the temple (sign 3); and the massive doors of the Eastern Gate of the Temple open on their own (sign 4). In early summer of 66, angelic chariots and armies are seen in clouds throughout Judea (sign 5); and a voice is heard by many priests in the inner court of the temple saying, "We are leaving here" (sign 6). Then during the siege of Jerusalem by Titus in the autumn of 70 AD, just before the city and the temple are destroyed, the 'prophet' Joshua dies (sign 7). See Josephus, *The Jewish War*, Book VI, chapter 5.

<sup>7</sup> Below is a quote from the Roman historian Tacitus from his *Histories* (1:2-3) concerning the era after the death of Nero.

"I am entering on the history of a period rich in disasters, frightful in its wars, torn by civil strife, and even in peace full of horrors. Four emperors perished by the sword. There were three civil wars; there were more with foreign enemies; there were often wars that had both characters at once. There was success in the East, and disaster in the West. There were disturbances in Illyricum; Gaul wavered in its allegiance; Britain was thoroughly subdued and immediately abandoned; the tribes of the Suevi and the Sarmatae rose in concert against us; the Dacians had the glory of inflicting as well as suffering defeat; the armies of Parthia were all but set in motion by the cheat of a counterfeit Nero. Now too Italy was prostrated by disasters either entirely novel, or that recurred only after a long succession of ages; cities in Campania's richest plains were swallowed up and overwhelmed; Rome was wasted by conflagrations, its oldest temples consumed, and the Capitol itself fired by the

hands of citizens. Sacred rites were profaned; there was profligacy in the highest ranks; the sea was crowded with exiles, and its rocks polluted with bloody deeds. In the capital there were yet worse horrors. Nobility, wealth, the refusal or the acceptance of office, were grounds for accusation, and virtue ensured destruction. The rewards of the informers were no less odious than their crimes; for while some seized on consulships and priestly offices, as their share of the spoil, others on procuratorships, and posts of more confidential authority, they robbed and ruined in every direction amid universal hatred and terror. Slaves were bribed to turn against their masters, and freedmen to betray their patrons; and those who had not an enemy were destroyed by friends.

... Besides the manifold vicissitudes of human affairs, there were prodigies in heaven and earth, the warning voices of the thunder, and other intimations of the future, auspicious or gloomy, doubtful or not to be mistaken. Never surely did more terrible calamities of the Roman People, or evidence more conclusive, prove that the Gods take no thought for our happiness, but only for our punishment."

<sup>8</sup> Even Josephus used words that were very similar to Jesus' words when he described the desolation and horror of those days.

"It is therefore impossible to go distinctly over every instance of these men's iniquity. I shall therefore speak my mind here at once briefly: - That neither did any other city ever suffer such miseries, nor did any age ever breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness than this was, from the beginning of the world." (Wars, Book 5:10:5)

<sup>9</sup> Josephus records something of great significance that occurred at Passover of 70 AD (Wars, Book 5:3:1-2). At this time a Jewish rebel leader, John of Gischala, and his gang took over the inner courts of the temple, murdering fellow Jews in the process. This constituted an 'abomination.' At the same time, the Roman general Titus moved his army nearer the city of Jerusalem ready to begin the siege. Although there were preliminary events and 'abominations' taking place before this time, these two incidents appear to be the final warning signs to flee the city before its final doom; these being the very things that Jesus had prophesied about.

<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> It is possible, in fact highly probable, that Jesus was referring to the three-and-half-year period of the war when he spoke of Jerusalem being trodden down by the nations (i.e. the Roman armies) until the times of the nations were fulfilled (cf. Revelation 11:1-2).

Nevertheless, even if that were the case, I believe that this is also referring to something much greater that encompasses the whole of this present age until the Consummation. It probably has a connection to 'the fullness of the nations' referred to by the Apostle Paul in Romans 11:25.

Putting these two texts together, we have the following probable scenario: On a larger scale, the city of Jerusalem will continue to be trampled down by the Gentile nations throughout this age while the Jews are in a worldwide Diaspora, yet before the consummation, Israel will again awake to hear the good news of Jesus as the Messiah. This age will be characterised by the Gospel going out to the Gentiles until the full number of the Gentile believers are complete. Consequently, at the consummation, all Israel will be saved. These things have so far been largely fulfilled in the history of Christianity amongst the nations; & even now there are already a large number of Jews becoming followers of Jesus the Messiah.

<sup>12</sup> Jesus himself had indicated that the writings of the Hebrew prophets (OT) would be fulfilled by, and in, the events of 70 AD (cf. Luke 21:22; "*These are days of vengeance to fulfil all that is written.*") This was based in particular on Daniel 9:24 ("*to seal up vision and prophecy*") and 12:7 ("*When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed.*") The apostle Paul also spoke of 'the ends of the ages' as having already arrived on the Christians of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:11; see also Hebrews 9:26-28).

<sup>13</sup> It has to be admitted that the few texts that talk of Christ's Parousia being seen by humans do have their difficulties when attempting to expound these things from a preterist perspective (e.g. Matthew 24:30; 26:64; Revelation 1:7.) I will consider this issue later. As far as the lightening motif is concerned, though, every other instance in the NT that refers to 'lightening' is referring to spiritual, heavenly occurrences. Note especially Luke 10:18 and Matthew 28:2-4; the first refers to the fall of Satan due to Christ's victory, and the second has to do with an angel (or heavenly messenger) that appears at the tomb of Jesus at His resurrection. The book of Revelation also contains many references to lightening, usually referring to heavenly judgment. Cf. also Ezekiel 1:1-4, 13-14. It would appear that Jesus was getting this imagery from texts such as Psalm 18:9-13.

<sup>14</sup> I used to understand this text as saying that in the same way as Jesus was *manifest* in His first advent, so shall he be *seen* a second time; that is, a future public appearing in a worldly sense. I have since had to seriously re-think this common understanding of the nature of Christ's 'second advent.' In fact, this text in Hebrews is the only place in the NT that explicitly refers to a 'second appearing' of Christ, though others clearly imply a 'return'. Yet the one thing that dawned on me recently when examining this text afresh was that the only people who could see Jesus a second time were those who had seen him the first time! Only the 1<sup>st</sup> century generation that witnessed Christ's first advent (i.e. the apostolic generation) would truly see him a second time, as he'd promised to come back for them (cf. John 14:3). Even those of that generation who hadn't actually seen Jesus the first time would've known of someone who had; and that was the only generation who had heard the gospel via the original apostles and early Christians who had seen Him.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of The Son of God*, (SPCK, 2003), pp. 217-218; & *Surprised By Hope* (SPCK, 2007), pp. 141-145. N. T. (Tom) Wright suggests quite strongly that Paul was using the 'visiting emperor' metaphor in 1 Thess. 4:16-17. He thus interprets the 'meeting' of God's people with Christ at his *parousia* as the first stage of a process that involves the people escorting Christ back to earth from whence they came. I disagree with Wright here, as I do not see this whole scenario clearly expressed in the biblical text; and I therefore think that he is pushing this particular metaphor too far. The irony here is that Christ is actually being viewed as visiting, and rescuing, his people so as to 'escort' *them* back to *his* 'place' via an 'ascension' of their own (hence, 'the clouds' motif)! (Cf. John 14:3; Acts 1:9-11; Revelation 11:12).

<sup>16</sup> This 'revelation' or 'unveiling' of Christ at his Second Appearing would be seen by the vast majority of humanity in the form of *those who had already died*, for all would be raised to give an account before God (cf. John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15). And at this time, the true people of God are given glory and honour by inheriting the kingdom and eternal life *for all to see* (e.g. Romans 2:5-11, 16; 8:18; 1 Peter 5:1, 4; Revelation 20:11-15). The ultimate focus of these things is viewed as occurring in what could be termed another dimension; that is, a spiritual heavenly one. I am convinced that this is the key to understanding these things correctly. The book of Hebrews, the most Hebraic/Jewish book in the NT, upon careful reading makes this abundantly clear.

<sup>17</sup> J. Stuart Russell, in his book *The Parousia*, made a good case for connecting the reign of 'the first resurrection' saints in Revelation 20:4-6 with the judgment scene in 20:11-15 (pp. 519-525). I didn't accept this view at first, but after further re-examination, I now believe Russell was correct. Duncan W. MacKenzie, along the same lines, makes a strong case for interpreting the judgment scene of Revelation 20 as being one and the same as the judgment scene in Daniel 7 (*The Antichrist and the Second Coming: A Preterist Examination – Volume II: The Book of Revelation*, pp. 362-380, Xulon Press, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> In the quote from Matthew 16, the Greek word *mello* is used in verse 27. The word *mello* refers to an action or event that is 'about to be;' 'on the verge of' occurring. Even though the word is essentially describing an intention or purpose, in virtually every place in the NT it is referring to something on the verge of happening, which generally did occur at some point in time, whether almost immediately or sometime later (I've personally checked all these occurrences). There are many places in the NT where *mello* is used, but some translations have obscured its true meaning in certain instances.

Matthew 16 is a perfect example. The NIV, quoted above, reads 'going to' come, which doesn't signify a time frame, whereas the Interlinear Greek-English New Testament by George Ricker Berry reads correctly 'about to come' (as do some literal versions). This indicates that this event was on the verge of happening, though no one knew the day or the hour. This translation & interpretation is confirmed by what follows when Jesus indicated that some of the disciples would remain alive to witness the event. There are other similar instances to this in the NT. See also Revelation 2:10 where *mello* is used twice; and it's interesting to note how some versions inconsistently translate this verse, either rendering the first usage correctly but not the second; or neither correctly! Moreover, if the NT writers had wished to say that something was 'going to happen' or 'will happen' at some time in the distant future there were other Greek words that could've been used to express this without using *mello*.

<sup>19</sup> The more common interpretations of the fulfilment of Matthew 16:27-28 are the Transfiguration and Pentecost. Neither of these are satisfactory interpretations of Jesus' words when examined closely; and neither of these events truly fulfilled the 'coming of the Son of Man in his kingdom with power' in accordance with Daniel 7. The Transfiguration occurred shortly after these words were spoken, and *none* of the apostles had died at this point. Jesus had clearly indicated that some of them *would* die before the time of his coming (because he clearly stated that some of them would *live* to see it, hence it follows that some would also die before his coming).

And the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost occurred when *only one* of the apostles had died, Judas Iscariot, whom Matthias had replaced (cf. Acts 1:15-26). Also according to Matthew 10:23 the apostles/disciples would suffer persecution and would still be evangelising the cities of Israel when the coming of the Son of Man would occur. When Pentecost occurred the disciples hadn't even begun their evangelistic mission, and the persecution was only just about to begin. There is only one event that fits all of the criteria – the destruction of the Temple and the city of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

<sup>20</sup> The heavenly enthronement of Jesus occurred almost immediately after His resurrection, which was confirmed in a more visible sense later at His Ascension before the Apostles (cf. John 20:17; Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 1:6-12; 2:31-36; Revelation 12:5). The following years saw a transition from the old covenant age to the new covenant age. This was completed by 70 AD in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, just as the prophecies of Daniel had indicated (cf. Daniel 9:26; 12:7). This transitional era leading up to 70 AD was also the time when Satan had been dethroned and 'hurled to the earth' to eventually cause 'the great tribulation' (cf. Revelation 12:7-13; 20:1-3). Many of the NT epistles refer to this initial defeat of the spiritual powers of darkness, which had been caused by the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, while a few texts refer to the then-approaching 70 AD victory (e.g. Romans 16:20; Hebrews 12:27-29).

This coming of Christ in judgment on His enemies in 70 AD was the official public declaration on earth of the verdict of the heavenly court, which vindicated Jesus' ministry and spiritual position. The kingdom was then given into the hands of the saints (lit. *holy ones*), establishing the Christians as the new Israel of God. It was also at this time that Satan, the spiritual adversary, was 'bound' and the 'millennial' reign of Christ officially began (Revelation 20:1-6; 11:15-18). This marked the official beginning of the messianic kingdom reign in the earthly sphere, and the new creation order of the resurrection and judgment.

<sup>21</sup> In fact, Josephus described something very similar to this.

"And now, as the city was engaged in a war on all sides, from these treacherous crowds of wicked men, the people of the city, between them, were like a great body torn in pieces." (Wars, Book 5:1:5)

<sup>22</sup> Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *Perilous Times: A Study in Eschatological Evil* (Covenant Media Press, 1999) P. 75.

<sup>23</sup> 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 fulfillment of Daniel 7 (cf. Revelation 2:26-27; 3:9,21; 5:10). And the judgment 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 extended 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 (for 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 new earth?), but the emphasis of the NT is ultimately not on this world; the New Creation & the New Jerusalem already exists.

<sup>24</sup> 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.

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<sup>25</sup> 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.)

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.christiancourier.com/articles/19-a-study-of-matthew-24> - accessed 28/02/2012.

<sup>27</sup> Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *Perilous Times: A Study in Eschatological Evil* (Covenant Media Press, 1999) pp. 90-91.

<sup>28</sup> 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.' The 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 think 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 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!

<sup>29</sup> It is highly probable that '*those who are taken*' was referring to the image of the saved being raised above the wrath of God, like Noah escaping in the ark and Lot escaping to the mountains. If this is the case, then '*those who are left behind*' are the ones destroyed. In the parallel portion in Matthew 24, it is interesting to note that Young's Literal Version reads '*the one is received*' rather than '*one shall be taken*;' and the Concordant Literal NT reads '*one is taken along*' implying a similar meaning of God leading 'the one' to safety. Either way, this is a picture of some being saved, while the rest are destroyed in judgment. Cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:15-5:11; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10.

<sup>30</sup> Quotations taken from *Book of Jasher*, translated by J. H. Parry & Co. 1887, published by NuVision Publications, 2004.

<sup>31</sup> These parables are dealt with in more detail in my online book *The Secrets of the Parables*. I plan to publish a revised edition of this book in the near future.