

The End

In this chapter we discuss the *Second Coming* of Jesus Christ. Eschatology is very simple. The New Covenant was established in Jesus' first coming and will have its climax in Jesus' Second Coming. There is no intervening rule of Christ in a Jewish state in earthy Jerusalem. This *Jewish State* is our eternal redemption in Christ, who sits on the throne of David, in which Gentiles are included.

Believers reign with Christ in His kingdom, now on the earth and believers who are with Him in heaven. This is *the regeneration*, the church age, in which Christ reigns over the nations. Believers share with Christ in this reign, at the present time in heaven.

You that have followed Me, in *the regeneration* when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory, you shall also sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Matt 19:28).

And he that overcomes and keeps My words to the end, I will give power over the nations. (Rev 2:26).

The reward for overcoming in this life is sharing Christ's reign in heaven before He returns. At the end of this current church age Jesus will return:

You men of Galilee, why stand gazing into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you to heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen Him go into heaven. (Acts 1:11).

The events that the Bible tells us are associated with the Second Coming are:

1. The resurrection.
2. The final judgement.
3. The removal of the curse and of corruption.

Peter explains that the fulfilment of all Old Testament prophecy was in Christ's first coming to put away sin, when the New Covenant began, which has its climax in the restitution of all things when He returns:

But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all His prophets, that Christ should suffer, He *has fulfilled*. Repent therefore and be converted, that *your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing (life) shall come* from the presence of the Lord. (This is not speaking of revival for believers, but of salvation for unbelievers.)

And He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached to you. Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. (Acts 3:18-26).

Peter explained all that the prophets said was fulfilled in the coming of Jesus and the New Covenant. This covenant would begin at Pentecost and have its final expression at the Second Coming in the restitution of all things.

The restitution of all things is the resurrection. It is what Paul spoke of in 1st Corinthians 15, when the curse is put down, corruption is swallowed up and Jesus Christ hands His kingdom to the Father. There is nothing here about the destruction of the planet or universe, but of a *restoration*.

Topics in this chapter include:

- The Revelation.
- Paul's end-times.
- The Second Coming of Christ.
- The Resurrection.
- The Judgement.
- The removal of the curse.

When

The Bible does not indicate a time frame for the end of this current world. Jesus did not predict the time. Paul and the apostles never predicted the time. They did not even predict the season. The seasons mentioned in Matthew 24, 1st Thessalonians 5 and 2nd Timothy 3 do not relate to the end of this world, but to the age they were then in. The Second Coming is totally in the hands of the Father. "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father has put in His own power." (Acts 1:7).

Speculations today about the last-days relating to the increase of evil or the increase of natural disasters have no bearing on the subject. Some of our current leaders may look bad, but there have been far worse in the past. Speculations about the end are fruitless. People talk about the Illuminati and various one-world government groups. They are just useless *boys clubs*. They have been with us since Babel and Christ will always defeat them.

The Revelation

The date of Revelation may have a great bearing on the meaning of the book. Throughout church history there have been two conflicting dates for the authorship of the book of Revelation. One theory is that it was written in the 90'sAD and the other theory is that it was written in the 60'sAD.

There are two basic reasons for the first view. One is that Irenaeus made an ambiguous comment that some interpret to mean that John received the Revelation when he was in his 90's. Not only is Irenaeus' comment ambiguous, but other comments he made cast doubt on him as a source. He claimed that Jesus was 50 years old when He was crucified (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 2).

The second reason for believing that John lived into his 90's is the comments of Eusebius in his early *Church History* (written in the 5th Century and readily available today.) There was a tradition in early times that John lived a long time. This was partly because of Jesus' comments at the end of John's Gospel (John 21:22). However, Jesus was not saying that John would live long, but just telling Peter to mind his own business. John himself noted this (John 21:23).

These traditions were also due to the politics in the early church. Each city church was vying for supremacy and claiming not only apostolic foundations, but also bolstering "their apostle's" reputation with great tales of their exploits. If you read Eusebius and other early sources, you will see that these tales were quite clearly myths. John's exploits were embellished in this way.

There was also confusion over two John's in Eusebius' writings. There was another John who was a pastor of the Ephesus church after the first apostle John had passed on. Sometimes these two Johns

are confused with each other so it appears that the first John lived longer than he did. So it is not certain that John the Apostle was alive in the 90'sAD.

There is evidence that John the Apostle was martyred by Jews in Jerusalem before 70AD. First, this would fulfil Jesus' prophecy that both John and James would "drink of the cup" that Jesus drank (Matt 20:20-23). Secondly, the very early church Father Papius claimed that John was martyred by the Jews before 70AD. So too does the ancient Syriac church calendar. Early compilations of names of apostles *not* martyred do not include John.

Phillip Schaff, a famous recent Christian historian, supported the ideas we express here and concerning John wrote, "Tertullian's legend of the Roman oil-martyrdom of John seems to point to Nero rather than to any other emperor and was so understood by Jerome." (*Adv. Jovin. 1.26. History 1:428*).

Also, the oldest Syriac Bibles include in their introduction to Revelation, "The Revelation which was made by God to John the evangelist in the island of Patmos, into which he was thrown by Nero Caesar.". Nero died in 68AD. This means the Revelation was received by John before 68AD.

Clement (150–215AD), seems to claim that all apostles had died before 68AD: "For the teaching of our Lord at His advent, beginning with Augustus and Tiberius, was completed in the middle of the times of Tiberius. And that of the apostles, embracing the ministry of Paul, end with Nero." (*Miscellanies 7:17*).

Epiphany (315–403AD) stated that the book of Revelation was written during the reign of Claudius (Nero) Caesar. Andreas of Capadocia, around 500AD, in a commentary on Revelation, dated the authorship in the time of Nero. Arethas around 540AD claimed that the Revelation was written before 70AD for the purpose of describing the siege and destruction of Jerusalem.

Internal Evidence

The main factor in determining the date of a document is its *internal evidence*. What clues within the text of Revelation indicate the date in which it was written? Many clues can be found, but we mention only three here. First, Revelation 11 states that the temple in Jerusalem was still standing as John wrote. This would put the date of Revelation before 70AD, when the temple was destroyed by the Roman general Titus. Rome laid a siege against Jerusalem for 3 ½ years, just as Rev 11:2 said would happen.

Secondly, Revelation said that at the time that it was given to John five kings had passed (Rev 17:10). If this is referring to the emperors of Rome, as many believe, then Nero was the emperor when the Revelation was written. This would put the date of writing in the 60'sAD, as Nero was the sixth emperor.

Thirdly, among other evidences is the cult of the Nicolaitans mentioned in Rev 2:6. This cult was a contemporary of Paul's ministry, whose practices are dealt with in Paul's epistles. There is nothing in Revelation that dates it later than Paul's latest epistles.

The most comprehensive work done on the date of Revelation is one by Kenneth Gentry. You can find this on the Internet and purchase it. Gentry favours a date in the 60'sAD, written before the destruction of Jerusalem.

Revelation Fulfilled

The first verse of Revelation gives the time frame in which it is fulfilled:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to Him, to show to His servants things which must shortly (*tachei*) come to pass; and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John. (Rev 1:1).

It says here that Revelation was about “the things which must shortly come to pass”. *Tachei* in Greek means *swiftly, haste, speedily* (Strong’s number 5034). Revelation was addressed to the 1st Century church and deals with things and events that would have immediate implications for the church at that time. The time frame in which these events were to be fulfilled is repeatedly mentioned throughout Revelation.

In Rev 1:3 “the time is near”; Rev 2:5 “I will come to you quickly”; Rev 2:26 “I will come to you quickly”; Rev 3:11 “I am coming quickly”; Rev 12:12 “He knows that he has a short time”; Rev 22:6 “Things which must shortly take place”; Rev 22:7 “I am coming quickly”; Rev 22:10 “For the time is at hand”; Rev 22:20 “I am coming quickly”.

The seven woes of Revelation correspond to the seven woes of Jesus in Matthew against Jerusalem. Without going into a detailed study of Revelation it seems it describes plagues in the lead up to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. General Titus of Rome laid siege against Jerusalem for 3 ½ years before raining down fire balls each weighing “one talent” (Rev 16:21). Josephus described the historical events later using the exact imagery of Revelation.

This means that the hypothesis of some today that Revelation describes an antichrist coming in the future who will come against Jerusalem for 3 ½ years has no warrant in scripture. Nero’s name spelt in the Hebrew alphabet has the numeric value of 666. There are “variant” Latin copies of Revelation that do not say 666 in Rev 13:18, but 616. The Latin form of *Nero Caesar* has the numeric value of 616.

This means that the 1st Century church was clearly able to identify this ungodly man without being further persecuted for using his name. Concerning the symbol of 666, John said, “Let the reader understand.” (Rev 13:18). They knew what this meant then and it was for their time. Furthermore, Nero was worshipped as “Almighty God and Saviour” according to inscriptions found by archaeologists. He was a chief blasphemer. Speculations in our times based on 666 are meaningless superstitions.

For a commentary on the whole of Revelation see Andrew Corbett, *The Most Embarrassing Book in the Bible*, available as an e-book on www.andrewcorbett.net.

Written Concerning Israel

Revelation is not about a future antichrist or a future Great Tribulation. It is about the abomination of desolation that Daniel the prophet spoke of, which according to Jesus in Matthew 24 was fulfilled in the first generation of the church. The book of Revelation is an expansion of Matthew 24 and Matthew 24 is an expansion of Dan 9:26-27.

Behold, He comes with clouds; and every eye shall see Him: and all kindred of the earth shall wail (mourn) because of Him. Even so, Amen! (Rev 1:7).

The word kindred in the Greek is *phule* and almost always is used in scripture for the tribes of Israel. Here it seems associated with the prophecy in Zech 12:10, “And they shall look upon Him whom they have pierced and they shall mourn for Him.”.

This was shown by Jesus’ statement to the women, when He carried His cross to Calvary:

And there followed Him a great company of people and of women, which also bewailed and lamented Him. But Jesus turning to them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me, but weep for *yourselves* and for *your children*.

For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bare and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. (Luke 23:27-30).

This last statement is repeated in Rev 6:16, 9:6. Jesus related it to Jerusalem and the tribulation that would befall that same generation. Zechariah had prophesied this. *They that pierced Him shall mourn for Him*, meaning those of the city of Jerusalem. "In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of...*Megiddon*." (Zech 12:11). This is Armageddon. This is the same statement as Jesus made in Matt 24:30 about the *phule* mourning.

Before this Zechariah said that God would protect Jerusalem and would pour out a Spirit of grace upon it. He protected the city before Christ came and when Christ came He poured out grace upon it through His ministry and His finished work on the cross and resurrection and in the sending of His Spirit at Pentecost.

Shift in View

In other sections of this book we have discussed the views of early fathers and some of the shifts that occurred. There was no monolithic view held by all, but a variety of views circulating. There was much syncretism in Greek/Jewish religion. In the 2nd Century in particular Montanists and other Christian groups, with mostly Greek converts, took a much less Hebrew view of scripture and a more Hellenist view.

See Gary DeMar's book *The Early Church and the End of the World* for a careful study of early views on the book of Revelation. A shift in eschatological views is apparent in the writings of Justin Martyr and Irenaeus in the 2nd Century. We have documented this in other parts of this book. Today it appears that the Western church holds a more Hellenized or Greek view of scripture and traditions passed down in part through Eusebius' *Church History*.

But the language of Revelation itself appears to be addressing contemporary churches when it was written. It was written to the *seven churches of Asia*, all of which were started by Paul and his team workers. The letter was telling these churches about something that was *near* and coming *quickly*.

To the church at Philadelphia the Lord said, "Because you have kept the word of My patience, I also will keep you from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." (Rev 3:10). The Greek word here for *world* is *oikoumene*, for Roman Empire. This appears to be a reference to the tribulation that Jesus spoke of on Matthew 24.

The seven churches do not represent periods of church history from the 1st Century till today. It is allegorizing scripture to suggest that they do. There is nothing in scripture that suggests this. The plain intention is that John was writing to the seven churches that existed in what was then called the province of Asia in the 60'sAD, telling them what was *near* and of the victory of Jesus Christ, just as the letter clearly states.

Revelation Themes

The book of Revelation had the purpose of encouraging the early church in what they were about to face at that time, “the hour of trial” that was about to come upon that whole region, in Israel and in the surrounding nations of the Roman Empire (Rev 3:10, where the Greek for *world* is *Roman world*). It was specific to the time in which it was written.

However, the overall themes of Revelation apply to the church in all ages. There will always be those who come against Christ and Christ’s kingdom will always be victorious. Therefore, Revelation has a way of speaking to and encouraging the church in the time of trial no matter the generation.

This is what we call *Preterist/Idealist*. *Preterist* for *past*: it was fulfilled in the 1st Century; *Idealist* for present and future: it has ongoing significance for the church in all ages. This is just normal hermeneutics, as we apply to all books of the Bible. Every book in the Bible was written to the people to whom it was addressed about their situation, but also has principles which we can apply today.

We are not giving scripture two meanings, but applying its principles to Christian life today. Christ conquered the earthly power, but the real deliverance of Christ is from sin. He did what Cyrus, the political deliverer, could not do. He overcame and removed the Old Covenant by overcoming sin in our heart.

Full-preterism focuses on 70AD as the fulfilment of prophecy, rather than on the death, resurrection, ascension, Pentecost and Second Coming of Christ. This is not Christian orthodoxy and we reject *full-preterism*. Rome did not end the law in Jerusalem, Jesus did on the cross. The *spirit of prophecy* is Jesus and so we look to Him as our *eschaton* and not to 70AD (Rev 19:10). We repeat, 70AD is not the *eschaton* of Israel, Jesus is.

Peter Leithart claimed, “The history of Jerusalem can be understood as a model for the history of the soul. Just as David conquered Jerusalem and set up the Lord’s throne there, so Jesus, His Son, conquers the inner city of the sinner and consecrates him as a saint, a holy one.” (Peter Leithart, *Ascent to Love*).

Behind the historical aspects of the Revelation there is a redemption and kingdom of Christ over sin that works. Jesus Christ is Lord and His reign is everlasting for us, if He reigns within us by the new birth. This was the view of the early Quakers, Swedenborgians, Noyes Bereans, John Owen, John Bunyan, Jonathan Edwards and many others in history, concerning Revelation.

But Revelation has no *Futurist* fulfilment, or no ongoing *Historicist* fulfilment. *Historicism* claims that Revelation is fulfilled throughout history and it matches specific verses with actual events throughout the centuries up until the present day. None of the historicist schools of thought can agree on which chapter of Revelation our current century is in.

Futurism claims that the Revelation will be fulfilled in the future, when an antichrist shall arise and bring about a 7 year or a 3½ year tribulation. In every generation people try to match the *beast* with a man on the world stage in their own day, in order to claim that the end of the world has come. We have no scriptural authorization for this. The themes of Revelation apply to events of our time, but were not written to tell us when the world would end. Revelation has one historical fulfilment in the 1st Century.

Currently many expect the leader of Iran to be the antichrist. Such speculations have always been wrong. The number 666 has nothing to do with current world events. The *mark of the beast* is compromise with the world, as it was in Dan 3:6, when all were told to bow to the *image of the beast*.

The world says, "You must believe as we believe." It is *doing political correctness* so you and your family can receive *the mark* and eat (Rev 13:7).

Paul's End Times

The epistles were mostly "occasional" by nature. This means that they were written in response to something going on in the church of which the reader today may not be aware. We have to ask, "What was happening in the church, why was this written, what was in their mind at the time, what was this saying in those days?". We have to answer the question, "*What did this mean then?*", before we ask the question, "*What does this mean now?*".

This is one of the biggest issues in reading the Bible. We have a default tendency in assuming that the scriptures were written to us, without first reading them as they would have been understood by the first recipients. This may be *devotional*, but it will always lead to presumptions.

The Resurrection

Before embarking on a discussion of 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, we admit that exegetical studies in these passages are difficult. We realise that we are reading letters written to others some 2,000 years ago. In these letters Paul addresses issues that he had spoken to the people about previously, while being present with them. Much of the *background content* is absent from these letters and we simply do not know it.

Epistles are in part "occasional", meaning they are responding to a given context about which little may be said. This makes it very difficult to be dogmatic about some of the content. Our attempts to put various passages together in a type of "jigsaw" arrangement can sometimes prove awkward, or even impossible.

In 1 Thes 4:14-18 Paul described the resurrection at the end of the world at the Second Coming of Christ. Today, this is still in the future. We know that Paul was speaking of a literal resurrection of the dead at the end of this current world, because he quoted from Jesus in John 11:25-26. (We spoke of this in the chapter on the *Kingdom of Christ*.)

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain to the coming of the Lord shall not go before them which are asleep.

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thes 4:14-18).

Paul did not indicate that he knew anything about when this resurrection would occur. Neither did he mention anything that would indicate its season.

The Situation Then

In 1 Thes 5:1 Paul spoke about the times and the seasons regarding that generation in which he and the Thessalonians were living. They were suffering serious persecution, just as the Jewish believers were (1 Thes 2:14-16). Paul said that the Thessalonians knew the times and the season that they

were then facing. They knew this because Jesus had taught it in Matthew 24 and Paul always taught the churches all that Jesus taught.

Imagine yourself in those days. Jesus had spoken about the greatest trouble that Israel and the regions around it had ever seen and that it would come in that generation, leading up to 70AD. How is it that people can then read the rest of the Bible without even thinking of this? This would have been foremost in their mind at that time. The day of this great trouble was at their door.

In 1st Thessalonians 5 Paul was speaking about this very thing: the destruction that was about to fall on the Roman Empire in general and the Jerusalem region in particular in their time. Nero was about to come to the throne. Nero was insane. Apart from the Jewish persecution against the church, Nero was the first Roman Emperor to persecute the Christians en mass. And the Lord brought swift destruction upon them all in that time. 1 Thes 5:1-3 is not about the Second Coming.

But of the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I write to you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction comes upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. (1 Thes 5:1-3).

It is wrong to read this as though Paul is speaking directly to us today. It has clear meaning and reference to their own time first of all. If this was referring to Christ's Second Coming why would Paul have said to the Thessalonians that they knew the times and seasons concerning their own day (vs. 4)?

We must see the distinction that Paul made between the resurrection in the unknown future and the times of their own generation then. 2nd Thessalonians may help to show the distinction once more.

2nd Thessalonians

Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians revealed a problem in the church. When Paul wrote on the bodily resurrection some thought that the resurrection would happen in their time. They left their jobs and became lazy. Paul wrote 2nd Thessalonians to correct them and to tell them to go back to work (2 Thes 3:10-12). Paul said in the 2nd epistle that the day of the resurrection *was not at hand*.

So in both of Paul's epistles to Thessalonica he wrote of two things:

1. Times and seasons that were at hand at that time. (In 1 Cor 7:26 Paul mentioned the "present distress" of his day.)
2. The resurrection that *was not at hand* at that time.

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and by our gathering together to Him, That you be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, *as that the day of Christ is at hand*. (2 Thes 2:1-2).

So we see here that this day of Christ, that is the resurrection, *was not at hand*. Paul did not say when it might be. He did not indicate the time. Paul knew nothing about when this would occur. He taught the resurrection to "comfort" the brethren about believers who had already died, not to start speculation as to when it would be. *That is how we must teach the resurrection today*.

The background is essential in understanding Paul's teaching. Paul always taught what Jesus taught when He was in the flesh. Paul did not get his teaching from special revelations. He often quoted the words of Jesus. God also revealed to him the gospel from the Old Testament. Jesus taught three things only about eschatology:

1. The coming of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. This was the coming of Christ through His Spirit to the church.
2. The destruction of Jerusalem fulfilled in 70AD. He claimed that this was the abomination that Daniel spoke of which would destroy Jerusalem. (Dan 9:27) Jesus gave many signs to show the early church when this day was approaching.
3. The end of all things at the resurrection of the dead and the last judgement. Jesus gave no signs to indicate when this would be and only said that the church would bring in the elect from the four winds before it would happen. This is what we are doing now.

This is all Paul knew and this is all he said in 1st and 2nd Thessalonians.

Paul said that the *mystery of iniquity* was already at work in his own time, possibly meaning that the signs that Jesus gave about the coming abomination spoken of by Daniel were already visible and would be fulfilled in that time. This is what Paul told the Thessalonians was coming, not just upon Jerusalem, but upon the Roman region in general. Not too long after this epistle was written, Nero came to the throne and began his Christian persecution.

But concerning the resurrection, Paul gave no clues as to when that would be. Paul wrote 2nd Thessalonians to correct their error with regard to the resurrection. Paul said in effect: "The resurrection is not now. I do not know when it will be. What is coming now is what Jesus said must be fulfilled in our generation. So do not think that the resurrection is at hand."

Paul's did not even hint in one of his epistles that the resurrection was at hand or near. He claimed the opposite, that it was far off (1 Cor 15:25). Coming back to 2nd Thessalonians 2:

Let no man deceive you by any means: *for that day shall not come*, except there come a falling away first and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sits in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

Remember not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now you know what withholds that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity does already work: only He who now restrains will restrain, until He be taken out of the way. And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming. (2 Thes 2:3-8).

We agree with Larry Pechawer's view of this passage, in his *book Leaving the Rapture Behind*:

Assuming that the Olivet Discourse was known by Paul and it almost certainly was, something important is missing here! (*i.e., in our interpretation*).

It is A.D. 52 and the Thessalonians are worried about missing the Day of the Lord (*the resurrection*). But remember, Jesus had given one clear sign that had to occur *before* He would return, which was the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem! Why have we missed this?

I guess because it's hard to think of ourselves on the other side of Jerusalem's fall. (*So Paul is saying...*) How could the Second Coming occur when Jerusalem's fall, a sign for that generation, had not yet happened? (Parenthesis added).

In 2nd Thessalonians 2 Paul is speaking of their generation. Paul called it the *coming of the Lord* (vs. 8), meaning judgement against the wicked. Paul said that the mystery was already at work then. This “son of perdition” could not have been connected to Christ’s Second Coming at our bodily resurrection, because the resurrection was not at hand, but the events concerning the temple were already happening in Paul’s day.

Considerable care needs to be taken with passages such as these. One must remember that they were written to the first generation church about events of their day. The Greek words used and biblical background must be carefully considered. Interpreting an epistle can be very subjective since we have very limited background information.

The Falling Away

The *falling away* (2 Thes 2:3) is not a falling away of the true church of Jesus Christ. There was a Jewish tradition of a Jewish apostasy from God and His Torah (Law) just prior to the appearance of the Messiah in judgement. Jesus also mentioned this in Matt 24:11-12, “Many false prophets shall arise...iniquity shall abound and the love of many shall wax cold.”. Josephus said this *falling away* happened in Jerusalem before its destruction. He said the Jews and priests:

...trampled upon the laws of man and laughed at the laws of God; and for the oracles of the prophets they ridiculed them as the tricks of jugglers...they occasioned the fulfilling of those very prophecies belonging to their own country: for there was a certain ancient oracle of those men, that the city should be taken and the sanctuary burnt, by right of war, when sedition should invade the Jews and their own hand should pollute the temple of God. (Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, 1:321, 4.7.3).

Josephus referred here to Dan 9:26-27. Even though the temple was already no longer the house of God, when they rejected Christ God gave them over to a reprobate mind, by which they brought about their own destruction and fulfilled what Jesus warned would happen in that generation. When Titus attacked the temple he set up the Roman ensign of emperor worship in the temple precinct.

There is no doubt that Paul was speaking of this event, because he spoke of the temple. There are only two possible temples he may have been referring to: the temple in Jerusalem in his day or symbolically the church. He did not say there would be another temple built at the end of our current era. The temple that Paul spoke of cannot mean the church, because the son of perdition cannot sit in Christ’s body and Christ’s body will not fall away.

Paul’s statements had to be fulfilled before the temple standing at Paul’s time was destroyed. Paul just repeated Jesus and Daniel. Pechawer wrote, “The *New International Version* got it right when it rendered it “rebellion”...The term *apostasia* and its twin *apostasis* are the words regularly used by Josephus to describe the Jewish revolt against Rome! They occur dozens of times. Commentators have missed the possibility that the term is being used here in its *political*, not religious sense.”.

Jesus never spoke of rebuilding a temple in Jerusalem for some futuristic event. The only other temple that Jesus spoke of was the temple of His body, which would be the church at His resurrection. This is the interpretation that Jesus gave to Ezekiel 47 (John 7:36-38). By the words of Jesus, Ezekiel 47 is not speaking of a physical temple. There is no temple in the New Covenant other than Christ and His body the church.

According to 2 Thes 4:8 Christ destroyed the wicked in Jerusalem and the Roman authorities and many in the wider region with His *parousia* (Dan 7:12). Paul was not referring here to the end of the

world, but the judgement of the Lord on that generation. The unbelieving Jews brought this upon themselves in that day. Their hearts hardened against Rome and Rome destroyed them for it.

He That Restrains

This is clearly God, not the church before it is taken in a future rapture. God is the *restrainer*. He restrains the sin of man by His general grace. Romans 1 to 3 explain this. Paul said that the iniquity is already working, but that God is restraining it till His time, then He will hand them over, give them up to their own devices, by which they shall bring destruction upon themselves.

God gave the people of Jerusalem a final period of grace, one generation, to hear the gospel and repent. Then the restraining influence of God was lifted and their sin ran its full course.

The Second Coming

And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. (Matt 24:31).

Angels here literally means *messengers*. The trumpet sound is the *gospel message*. It is the gospel message that gathers the elect from the four winds of the earth. The four winds mean the entire planet under heaven. It is the church that has this Great Commission. This verse is speaking of the gospel age we are now in.

Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God. (2 Cor 5:20).

We now live in the gospel age, in which the church takes the gospel to the ends of the earth in the Great Commission (Matt 28:19). The Second Coming will be at the end of this age, after God has gathered in all His elect throughout our generations. God has not shown us the events that will lead up to the Second Coming of Christ. Some claim that Israel becoming a nation is a sign of the Second Coming. We are not aware of any text in the Bible that says this, whether in the Old or New Testaments.

All texts in the scripture about the re-gathering of the nation of Israel were fulfilled in their restoration from Babylon to Jerusalem before Jesus' first coming. None of these passages indicate that they will be "double fulfilled" at the Second Coming of Christ. This "double fulfillment", as Dispensationalism interprets the passages, is not spoken of in scripture.

Israel was re-gathered from Babylon and the nations (*ethos* – people groups) around them before Jesus came. In that time *all nations* meant the many provinces, nations and kingdoms in that region of the world. After this re-gathering God said He would bring them into the New Covenant and Gentile believers with them (Ezek 36:24-25). That is all the Old Testament prophets say about Israel.

The church does not bring Jesus back by reaching all nations, or by maturing, by improving the world through social work, or by overcoming the devil. The time of God is not in the church's hands. Revelation 19 says *the bride has made herself ready*, but then adds, with the garments given to her by the Lord.

This picture is from a normal human wedding, but in the New Covenant it is the Lord who adorns the bride. The dress is a gift. Eph 5:26 says Christ has washed us in His blood, which alone makes us ready. The church is made ready throughout this age as each member is born of the Spirit.

The Parables of Judgement

We have already seen that many Jews believed that they were living at the end of their age, as foretold by their prophets. This would be the time when Messiah would come and set up His kingdom. It would include both a new era in the Messiah and a judgment upon the Israeli nation. This is what they called the *last-days*, or *consummation of the ages* (1 Cor 10:11).

We speak of the Jewish expectation of that time in other sections of this book. Israel as a nation was at an eschatological point, an apocalyptic period that was reflected in many of the writings of that day. This was their mind from their own prophets and is what John the Baptist and Jesus addressed in their ministries, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is *at hand*."

When we come to look at Jesus' parables we must remember two things:

1. They were spoken to Jews. This was the setting of the ministry of Jesus. The church has "high jacked" (Hellenized) these parables as if He spoke them to us. We have shifted the context. In a sense Jesus did speak these also to us. But Jesus came to address the Jewish nation first.
2. They were reflecting God's principles of judgement when Israel was purged and sorted between rebellious and righteous. The *sorting principle* was how they would individually respond to Christ. God's Son was the reference point for judgment. Daniel prophesied about this in Daniel 12 concerning the end of the Israeli theocracy. Jesus was warning the Jews about their individual response to His coming in the flesh.

Christ was sent for this purpose. "And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall ("A stone of stumbling." Is 8:14,15) and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against." (Luke 2:34). See Barnes of this verse:

The nation also rejected Him and put Him to death, and, as a judgment, fell into the hands of the Romans. Thousands were led into captivity, and thousands perished. The nation rushed into ruin, the temple was destroyed, and the people were scattered into all the nations.

See also Gill on this verse:

Accordingly the Jews did stumble at His birth, parentage and education; at the meanness of His person and the obscurity of His kingdom; at the company He kept and the audience that attended Him; at His doctrine and miracles and at His sufferings and death: they fell, through their unbelief and rejection of Him, as the Messiah.

Not only their outward privileges, civil, and religious; the gospel was taken away from them, the national covenant between God and them was broken and they ceased to be His people, their temple and city were destroyed and wrath came upon their nation to the uttermost; but they also fell into everlasting perdition, dying in their sins, through their disbelief of Jesus as the Messiah: this indeed was not the case of all of them; there was a seed, a remnant, according to the election of grace...

"And Jesus said, For judgement I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind." (John 9:39). He came to sort the harvest, just as John the Baptist said, to separate the wheat from the chaff in Israel.

Whose fan is in His hand and He will thoroughly purge His floor and will gather the wheat into His garner, but the chaff He will burn with fire unquenchable. (Luke 3:17).

This is a direct exhortation to Israel about the impending judgement on their nation. Brad Young, in *The Parables, Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation*, explains the Jewish expectation:

Both Jesus and the Pharisees believed in an impending divine retribution. Until the destruction of the temple in 70AD, the belief in the imminent judgment of God that would end the present world and its corruption gained great currency in Jewish thought.

Many did not understand that Jesus was the fulfilment of this expectation. Many saw the corruption in Rome, not in themselves and this was one of Jesus' points of correction. The coming of Messiah to Israel would accompany the end of that age. He would die and deliver His people from this *present evil age* into His kingdom (Gal 1:4, Col 1:13). Jesus had come to Israel to save them from judgement. This climax was *at hand*.

But the *last-days* they faced then are being faced today. Jesus' death brought judgment against sin and this world (John 12:31). The eschatological event of the end of *this evil age* is now past. All men abide in death and are one breath away from realizing it. Thus, "Now is the acceptable time. Now is the day of salvation. If you hear His voice today, do not harden your heart." (2 Cor 6:2, Heb 4:7). Everybody in this sense lives in the *last-days* or *end-times*. This natural world, *kosmos*, age of men, lies under the wrath of God.

How do we reconcile this clear eschatological event of Jesus' first coming with the continuation of sin in the world today? Some call this interim period the *last-days*. In a sense we are always in the *last-days* because this world is corrupt and passing away (1 Cor 7:31). This *present evil age* is not Rome, nor the Old Covenant, but sin, Satan and the nature of men of disobedience (Eph 2:2), as God allows. But Christ has delivered us, taken all authority for His church and will put down the curse fully when He comes.

The Greek term for *world* in scripture is often *aeon* or *kosmos*. There are two main *aeons*, one being the evil, sinful age of men and the other the age of the New Covenant. Jesus came to declare this *new age* had come and gave the prophetic proof of it: the casting out of demons (Matt 12:28), His signs and wonders (Matt 11:2-6, Is 35:4-6) and His resurrection (Dan 12:1-4), including those Old Testament saints raised up with Him. In this kingdom His saints already shine with Him as stars (Dan 7:27).

This age began in Christ's coming. We who believe have already entered this age. It is by the resurrection that we now live (1 Pet 1:3). We are born again by the resurrection of Christ and partake of it through His abiding faith. He calls us the children of the age of light, of the kingdom (Luke 16:8). The Spirit that raised up Christ lives in us (Rom 8:9). Pentecost is resurrection life. This is the age of *Christ in us*, the *first fruits* of resurrection. We now have the powers of the age to come (Heb 6:5). This age has already broken into our life, because the age is not a time/date, but a person Jesus, who lives in us.

Jesus spoke to the Jews of the immanence of this age. The former age was henceforth under judgement. Matthew quoted Is 42:3, "A bruised reed shall he not break...till He send forth judgement unto victory." (Matt 12:20). The judgement was firstly on that generation. There is also an immanent judgement today for all who die and also the *last judgement* at the end of this world. Most of Jesus' parables in this regard are not about His Second Coming, but about the immanency of judgment to all who do not accept Him.

The parable of the *tares and wheat* was given in this eschatological context (Matt 13:36, where the field is the *world [kosmos]* and that which ends is the *age [aeon]*). Malachi said Elijah would come *before the great and terrible day of the Lord*. In this context, Jesus said that this was John the Baptist, showing that this end had come (Matt 11:14). This was fulfilled nationally in 70AD, where Jerusalem was burnt with fire.

What was the judgment? It was that a greater than the temple (Matt 12:6) had come, a greater than Jonah (Matt 12:41), a greater than Solomon (Matt 12:42) and that generation did not repent, but called Him the mere son of Joseph (Matt 12:47, Matt 13:54-57). They were not awake. They did not recognize Him.

The parables build on the *parable of the vineyard* in Isaiah 5. Israel was blessed. God expected fruit, acceptance of His will in His Son, Jesus Christ. The *parable of the two sons* shows the son who said he would serve God (the Jews) but did not, while the ungodly son later did (Matt 21:31). The *parable of the prodigal son* shows the disobedient who later did the will of the father, while the other son was legalistic and his heart was wrong (Luke 15:11). He did not rejoice in the sinner saved, but persecuted him.

And what was the will of the Father? "That we believe on Him whom He has sent." (John 6:29). This was the point of most of the parables. In the *parable of the sower*, the good soil believed in the Son despite the political correctness against this in that day. The *unfaithful steward* did not, but succumbed to his private interests (Luke 16:1). Our stewardship is to do with our faith in Christ and what we do with it. This applies to us today.

The parables also show a wider judgment on the *last day*. This would be at the culmination, when His kingdom (the kingdom of heaven) would be brought to an end and handed to the Father. The Queen of Sheba would be there and Sodom. All the world, from every age, would be present.

In this judgement Jesus spoke of eternity (everlasting ages), where judgement is individual and where the worm does not die and *the fire does not quench* (Luke 3:16, Mark 9:44). This is Daniel's judgement theme, which began with Christ's coming and resurrection and made final when His kingdom is concluded. According to Daniel, when Christ came many in Israel would rise with Him and shine as stars.

Jesus was warning Israel about recognizing the day of His visitation in the flesh. God came in Christ to inspect the fruit of His vineyard and sort it out. He was looking for faith, "However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). Jesus was speaking of His coming to Israel in that day, not of the Second Coming. The answer was *no*, "and His own received Him not" (John 1:11).

And when He was come near, He beheld the city and wept over it, Saying, If you had known, even you, at least in this your day, the things which belong to your peace! But now they are hid from your eyes.

For the days shall come upon you, that your enemies shall cast a trench about you and compass you round and keep you in on every side and shall lay you even with the ground and your children within you; and they shall not leave in you one stone upon another; *because you knew not the time of your visitation*.

And He went into the temple and began to cast out them that sold therein and them that bought, saying to them, It is written, My house is the house of prayer: but you have made it a den of thieves. (Luke 19:41-46).

This was the fruit inspection and they failed:

And He began to speak to them by parables. A certain man planted a vineyard and set a hedge about it and dug a place for the wine vat and built a tower and let it out to husbandmen and went into a far country. And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen *of the fruit* of the vineyard. (Mark 12:1-2).

John the Baptist spoke of this inspection, in his ministry to Israel:

And *now* also the axe is laid to the root of the trees (was poised, ready, in John's day): every tree therefore which does not bring forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. (Luke 3:9).

This was His inspection of Israel before 70AD. The fire was both the fire of Rome and of eternity. In fact this fruit inspection was so important, the judgement so severe, that although the prophets warned about it, God did not use a prophet to make the final inspection. God sent His own Son to be the one who made the final inspection. Thus He came *suddenly to His temple*.

Jesus also explained that this fruit inspection applies to all people and that it can happen at any time of our lives. We do not know when the Son of man *shall come*, i.e. when we shall stand before Him. We do not know when we shall be called to account. When they told Him of those Pilate had killed, Jesus replied, "Except you repent, you shall also perish.". They did not die because they were more wicked, but because their time had come. Jesus then gave this parable:

Then said he to the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none: cut it down; why does it take up the ground? And he answering said to him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that you shall cut it down. (Luke 13:7-9).

There is patience with God. He sends another preacher. But the inspection will come again. The point is, "Will we have faith when that time comes? Will we have repented? Will we be in Christ?". None of us knows the time of His coming for each of us personally. It is appointed to each man once to die and after that the judgement (Heb 9:27).

The man who built bigger barns was unprepared when the Lord came. "*This night* your soul is required of you." He did not know. He was not watching. He was not rich towards God, but thought only of his own retirement. He was not in Christ (Luke 12:16-21). Jesus' main point to the Jews was would they receive the Son? What would their response to Him be? Would they recognize Him, or say we know His father Joseph...?

Watch therefore, for you do not know the hour your Lord shall come. (Matt 24:42).

The Jews were going on in their religion. Life went on as usual and the Son of God came and they rejected Him and killed Him. They did not know the hour. They did not recognize the visitation. They did not watch. They were not prepared when He came. The priests were fighting each other to sell the skins of the sacrificed animals at the temple. Jesus came and He went and they did not know. They did not repent. They did not believe.

The problem with those who do not watch (the unfaithful steward, the man who built his barns) is that they are not in Christ. Those who are in Christ do watch.

Parable of the Virgins

After describing the judgement on Jerusalem in Matthew 24, Matthew recorded some parables of Jesus. In Matt 24:42 He warned the disciples to watch in their duties. True children of God will do this and will serve faithfully. The *coming* Christ spoke of here is His calling of His servants to account.

What is this I hear...give an account of your stewardship... (Luke 16:2).

Jesus gave this parable of stewardship also in Luke 12:36-48, along with the parable of the man who built bigger barns (Luke 12:16-21). As Jesus opened speaking of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees (Luke 12:1), the *man and his barns* is clearly a parable of the Pharisee who was not rich toward God, not watching for Christ. He warned all that instead of seeking wealth, we should be faithful in our service, "For where your heart is there is your treasure." (Luke 12:34) and "Seek first the kingdom of God." (Luke 12:31).

It is clear here that Jesus is speaking of kingdom life and ethics, not of His Second Coming. He then gave a *mini parable of the virgins* in this context, "Let your loins be girded and your *lights burning*." (Luke 12:35). The context here is *Sermon on the Mount* kingdom ethics, not the Second Coming.

...will cut him asunder and assign him his portion with the unbelievers (Gentiles). And that servant (the Jew), which knew his lord's will (had the Old Testament witness) and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, will be beaten with many stripes. (Luke 12:47).

Jesus went on to say that He *had come* to send fire upon the earth. He said He had not come to bring peace, but division, in regard to how Israel takes His visitation. He concluded, "You hypocrites, you can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but you do not discern the times?" They had the scriptures about Christ, but would not come to Him. He said, "Go to your adversary before He delivers you to the magistrate and you pay your debt..." (Luke 12:49-59). The reference to 70AD is unmistakable

The context continues in Luke 13. Pilate killed some Galileans. Jesus said, "Except you repent you will likewise perish." (Luke 13:3). Jesus gave the parable of the fig tree without fruit and said enter the door (through Christ) before it shuts, or the Master will say "I know you not", while Gentiles come and sit down in the kingdom as they receive the gospel. "Many of the first (Jews) shall be last, many last (Gentiles) will be first." (Luke 13:30).

The message relating to that day is clear. The principles from it that relate to us today are also clear. This is how we interpret scripture. We start by interpreting scripture in its original setting. Then we apply the principles to our time. God expects us to be faithful to the revelation and call He has given to us. We do not boast against the Jews, *for if we believe not we also shall be cut off*. Many Jews did believe then and do believe today.

Returning to Matthew, Jesus began to speak of the kingdom of heaven in chapter 25. He spoke of preparedness again in the *Parable of the Virgins*. The details of this parable relate to a normal Jewish wedding in regard to the normal night time activities where they used lamps. These details are not to be allegorized. According to Jesus, the purpose of the parable is:

Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of man comes. (Matt 25:13).

The virgins depict the response of Israel to His coming in those days. Some would receive Him and some would not. The parable is not about believers backsliding before the Second Coming. The groom said to the five foolish virgins, "I know you not.". This can not be said to someone who has been born of the Spirit. Jesus knew His disciples and He knew they were chosen of the Father. He gave witness to this often, e.g. John 10, 13, 15 and 17.

Was Jesus speaking to the disciples who were already believers? Yes, in the same way as He told them to be faithful stewards, He is telling them here to not get tangled up in events of this life and forget their calling, but to watch and be ready to answer their Master. It is the same parable as the *seed sown in good ground*. *The ground* is patient and shows fruit when inspected. The message in each of these parables (the *seed sown on good ground*, the *faithful steward*, the *talents* and the *virgins*) is the same.

He is saying they should be found faithful whenever the Lord calls. This lesson applies to us. A true child of God will do this by God's grace. Those born again bring forth fruit. They resist the distractions of persecution, riches and trials and patiently continue in God's call and purpose. They are faithful. You shall "know them by their fruit". They invest their faith productively in God's kingdom, obeying rather than succumbing to fear of what others think, or of making mistakes, or of failure.

But the five foolish virgins were never believers. They did not have faith. They were not obedient. They may be nominal, but were never born again believers. The ten virgins do not collectively represent the real church. To say they do is to allegorize the parable. They were just actors in the parable drawn from normal Jewish life. Virgins were bride's maids. In that day, they waited at night for the groom to call, ready with their lamps. When he came five were ready and five were not. Five accepted Christ, five had not.

The disciples came to Jesus privately in Matt 24:3. There is no direct indication in Matthew 25 that the context is the same, i.e. that Jesus was speaking only to the disciples and not to a wider audience. Luke, put these same texts in the *Sermon on the Mount* setting. See also Matt 6:9, where the Lord's Prayer is given in an apparent setting of a wider audience, while in Luke 11:1 it is given to the disciples.

The five foolish virgins represent those in Israel who rejected Christ. They would not be ready for the judgement. They would not be in Christ. It is not correct to say that *virginity* here represents purity and so they must have been believers. The virgins (unmarried assistants) are just Jewish actors in a parable which is about preparedness by being found in Christ.

The 10 virgins are *bride's maids*. They cannot represent the church, because the church is the *bride of Christ*. If the *lamps* in the parable represents Jesus (light) and if the *oil* represents the Holy Spirit, then the parable means that new birth is not enough. We may be born again, but still not ready at the Second coming of Christ. This is how the church has *high jacked* the parables with a Greek ascetic context.

This view is sometimes compared with Rev 3:14-18, where Jesus would spew the lukewarm out of His mouth. This refers to nominal believers who claimed that because they were rich they had no need. Some of the churches mentioned in the Revelation already had cultic leaders (Rev 2:20). There were many that were not saved. If they were backslidden believers, *spewing out of the mouth* is not the same as saying "I know you not". It is discipline (Rev 3:19).

Some have extrapolated from the *Parable of the Virgins* that those who are not of a certain level of spirituality, who do not pray enough, or pray in tongues enough, who do not have enough *oil*, will miss the rapture and go through the *Great Tribulation* that they say is ahead. The parable does not say

this. Sometimes a whole *end-times programme* is written into this parable, of which Jesus said nothing at all.

The problem with this view is that it removes all assurance of salvation. It replaces assurance with fear and it makes salvation a product of works. We end up with a view that is contrary to the gospel and to the teaching of the epistles. How much is enough? The parable is about faithfulness to Christ, not topping up *leaky fuel tanks*, or *buying oil* through works. That is misplaced allegory.

The early church fathers' allegorizing of the parables did a disservice to the church. Their practice is still common today. It is a complete departure from the intention of Jesus and the Hebrew use of parables in that day. Irenaeus, Origen and many others led the church astray in this way, bringing out interpretations divorced from the original context.

In this case, Tertullian in the 3rd Century was correct:

We, however, do not take parables as the source of doctrine, but rather we take doctrine as a norm for interpreting the parables...Why a 'hundred' sheep? and why, indeed, 'ten' drachmas? and what does the 'broom' stand for? Well, when He wanted to show how pleased God is at the salvation of *one* sinner, He had to mention some numerical quantity from which *one* could be described as 'lost'.

And in view of the ordinary procedure of a woman who looks for a drachma in the house, He had to supply the assistance of the broom and lamp. Curious questions of this sort (*what do the broom and lamp mean allegorically?*) lead to conclusions which are suspect and, as a rule, they seduce men from truth through the subtleties of artificial exegesis. (Tertullian, *On Purity* 9.)

If we insist on an allegory, let us suggest one. The parable was spoken to Jews. The groom is Jesus. The bride is the New Covenant church. The bride's maids (servants) are Israel. Israel served the church through providing *the testimony of things to come*, that they provided in the Old Testament age, which was ending (Heb 3:5, 1 Pet 1:12). The oil and lamps represent the implements of worship in the Old Covenant tabernacle.

The question is will the Old Covenant members be watching when the Son of Man comes to them, receive Christ and become part of the New Covenant wedding festivities? Or are they unprepared and so will not recognize the day of His visitation.

Jesus is challenging the Jews directly regarding the eschatological wedding that their traditions were expecting, on whether they would be part of it, by recognizing the day of the Son of man and accepting Him when He came to His own.

And I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in judgment and in lovingkindness and in mercies. I will even betroth you to Me in faithfulness: and you shall know the Lord. (Hos 2:19-20).

The *wedding* is not of a sexual relationship, of course, but a symbol of love and of covenant. The Old Covenant relationship was broken, but the New Covenant relationship is based on *better promises* and is everlasting. This is the everlasting covenant Jeremiah spoke of (Jer 31). This was fulfilled when Christ came, as John the Baptist declared:

You yourselves bear me witness that I said I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before Him. He that has the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom,

which stands and hears Him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore *is fulfilled*. He must increase, but I must decrease. (John 3:28-30).

Notice this *is fulfilled!* The bridegroom has already come.

If this is how God can love us while we were sinners (unfaithful spiritual whores), then this is how we also should love others. God's love conquers all sin, removes sin and transforms us. Only the power of God does this. Our love does not do it. The Holy Spirit does, in Christ.

The Kingdom

In interpreting parables we do two things. Firstly, we look for the context in regard to the time in which Jesus was speaking and to whom He was speaking. Secondly, we do not allegorise the details, but look for the main point, or points, that the scripture makes. Some details of the parable will be significant to the point. Other times stretching the details of the parable will take us into allegory not intended by the original context.

The audience of Jesus did not at that time have any concept of the Second Coming. There was a sense of immediacy in the parables that Jesus gave about the end of the age. Biblical eschatology holds both immanency and the *occupy* themes in tension. Judgement is immanent for each one of us. But the kingdom age is not the end of the world. The church occupies until the end.

Jesus gave parables about His kingdom (Matt 25:14-30). He would give talents to His servants and then go away for a long time. Several early church fathers (see our chapter on the *Kingdom of Christ*) took this parable to mean that Christ would be gone for a long time. They saw this as His millennium, the time of His reign. During this time His servants would take the gospel to the four winds and occupy (Luke 19:13). They did not see His Second Coming as near.

When the Lord returns He would judge each servant for their fruitfulness. This *return* is not necessarily at His Second Coming, but as each one of us gives account and stands before the judgement seat of Christ. This is a parable, drawing on life experience of the day. Herod Archelaus travelled to Rome (4BC) to receive his reign and a delegation of prominent Jews went to Rome to object. Jesus is not giving an exact chronology on *end-times*, but speaking of faithfulness and accountability. He is simply reiterating Isaiah 5.

There is reward for serving Christ. Some are given cities, maybe not literal cities (this is a parable about a man, from which principles are drawn by Christ), but the reward entails responsibility and authority in the Lord's kingdom. This reward is now, during the reign and kingdom of Christ. It is not in a future millennium. Those who are with Christ now in heaven in some way judge and rule with Him and serve His kingdom over the earth (Dan 7:27, Rev 20:4). They also judge the angels (1 Cor 6:3).

The servant who buried His master's talent was not a true believer. He was a nominal servant, just as those who do not watch. They do not have the *lamp*, they are not born again. He had no faith. He would be like Judas. He was like the man who came to the wedding feast without the proper garments, i.e. the faith of Christ. This is the false brethren.

In these parables there is a mixing of themes. In Luke 19:11-27 He goes *to a far country* to receive His kingdom. His kingdom is not Zionist: He rules from heaven, not from Jerusalem as the Jews supposed. Citizens of the country sent a message that they would not have Him as their ruler (vs. 14, 27). He sent His armies to destroy their city. In the mind of the Pharisees who heard Him, this is clearly referring to 70AD (Matt 22:7). He also comes to reward those who served in His kingdom.

It might not be good to take too much eschatology from this parable, which is also found in Matt 25:14-30. The point Jesus is making is *stewardship*. He uses the culture of the day to express it. This parable is the same as the *sower sows the seed* parable, i.e. being *good ground*. It is the same as the *vineyard* parable, which spoke directly to the Jews. The *vineyard* parable is also in the prophets and related to Israel's faithfulness in those days (Is 5:1, Song Sol 8:11). We today should get all sin out of our lives.

It is doubtful that the *parable of the man receiving his kingdom* had anything directly to do with the church age (Luke 19:12). The ones who were faithful with their *pounds* were the Jews who received Him as Lord. When we understand that Jesus was speaking to the Jews of His day the meaning in that context is clear. The principles do apply to us, in our faith and service. But as always, hermeneutics has two steps: What did the passage mean then and what principles apply to us today? We interpret parables no differently.

God comes at any time to judge. Heb 6:7-8 says if He who dresses the ground finds no fruit, it is nigh to cursing. In the New Covenant those born again are not as Old Covenant Israel. We have faith to watch and fulfil God's purpose. We live in eschatology now. The principles of His coming, resurrection, kingdom, calling, presence and judgment are immanent today. "This day is the scripture fulfilled in your ears." (Luke 4:21). Do not say "the Lord delays His coming" and sleep through His purpose.

So according to Jesus' parables eschatology boils down to one thing. It is about *stewardship, faithfulness, accountability, judgement, reward*. This is the only point that Jesus made in His parables. It is not about a timeline of events to itch our ears. Jesus gave no such thing. In His first coming they expected a fanfare and did not see it and so rejected Him. Many portray the Second Coming the same way.

At the end of this world there is a judgement of all people who would not receive Him as king (Matt 25:31-46). This part is not a parable. Christ declares His Second Coming at the end to judge all nations. This is not the Jews only, but all *ethnos*, so this is not about 70AD. They are gathered together and He separates each person according to their works. This is not a judgement on how people serve the nation of Israel. "My brethren" are those who hear the word of God and do it (Matt 25:40, Luke 8:21, Heb 2:11).

Some say that the *sheep* are the church and the service they render is the fruit of faith. Or, this may be the *Great White Throne* judgement after the resurrection, depicted in Revelation 20. All the dead are raised and stand to give account for the deeds done in their body. Presumably this does not include the church, which according to Jesus has passed already from death to life and will not come into judgment (John 5:24).

Everyone whose name is not found in the Lamb's book of life is cast into *the lake of fire*. This is not an extermination of those people, but an eternal (*age long*) suffering; forever and ever; literally *age upon age*. Whether any of those who did not hear the gospel could be saved in this judgement it is not stated in Revelation 20. We can see the levels of judgement given according to the light people had:

Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgement, than for you. (Matt 11:21-22).

Unto whom much is given, much is expected (Luke 12:48). He that knew His Master's will and did not do it shall be beaten with many stripes, he that did not know shall suffer a lesser punishment (Luke 12:47). The last judgement is at the time of the bodily or *second resurrection* (Revelation 20).

The *first resurrection* is the new birth. After the *first resurrection* John saw the *souls* of some martyred saints reigning with Christ in heaven, not their bodies (Rev 20:4). This *first resurrection* is our reign with Christ during the church age (Rom 5:17). The gospel goes out to all nations and millions come to Christ, as Satan is not allowed to *deceive the nations*. Christ's victory brings in the multitude of the Gentile and Jewish believers in one body.

This reign of the saints with Christ, after Christ's ascension, is also mentioned in Dan 7:18, 27. The term *the books were opened* at Christ's ascension shows that Christ is given judgement in heaven (Dan 7:9-14). Kings are allowed to continue for a season, but their dominion is taken away and ultimately belongs to Christ and His servants.

When the 1,000 years are expired Satan is loosed and he gathers others against God (Rev 20:7). As the term *1,000 years* refers to Christ's reign, the term *σαν τελευσθη* (lit. *whenever are finished, indefinite future* [Robertson's *New Testament Word Pictures*]) refers to *whenever Christ allows*. It shows seasons of blessing and purging. Revelation 20 depicts Christ's reign and God's employment of Satan. It depicts gospel themes. It is not a chronology.

Satan gathers those who work against the gospel through the ages (church history) before the resurrection, i.e. *the goats*. "*Satan shall be loosed* i.e. permitted to rise up in open rage against the open professors of the truth and to make havoc of them, as he did of the Waldenses, Hussites, Huguenots, professors in Germany, Netherlands, Ireland and England." (*John Trapp's Commentary*).

Similar judgement themes are depicted throughout scripture, where Satan is employed by God to sort between the goats and the sheep, the wheat and tares. In Luke 6:46-49 the flood beats vehemently against our house to see what it is founded upon. This sorts out the type of ground we are, as *the parable of the sower* shows. In Heb 12:27 the earth is shaken so that which is corruptible is taken out.

In Psalm 1 those whose lives are not founded on scripture will not stand in the judgement or in the congregation of the righteous, but are like the chaff which the wind blows away. Trials blow them out of the church. This is analogous with Rev 21:8, *the dogs are outside*. Christ cleanses His church. In 1 Cor 3:13 and 1 Pet 1:7 the fires of life try our works.

Notice, trials offend the ungodly and drive the uncommitted away from the church and reveal the foundation of the heart. This is the ongoing judgment in daily life. The ungodly do not stand. "Having done all, stand therefore..." (Eph 6:13).

Blessed is the man that walks not in the counsel of the ungodly...but his delight is in the law of the Lord...and he shall be like a tree planted...the ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. (Ps 1:1-5).

So Satan is employed throughout this age to sort things out. It is a clear Psalm 2 scenario. Satan *rounds up the suspects* and God vexes them in His sore displeasure and rains down fire upon them. He does this through Christ His anointed. At the end of this age come the resurrection of all our bodies and the final judgement of God. Then the end of this world comes, when He hands over the kingdom to the Father (1 Cor 15:23).

The Age

The use of the term *age* is important in these parables. An explanation of the term given in Gerhard Kittel (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*) is helpful:

In its view of the two aeons (ages) the New Testament is in essential agreement with the 1st Century apocalyptic. (That is, the sinful Mosaic age passing away in the Messianic age.) The framework of eschatological notions is broken only by the fact that the *αἰὼν μέλλων* is no longer merely in the future. Believers are already redeemed from the present evil *αἰὼν* (Gal 1:14) and have tasted the powers of the future *αἰὼν* (Heb 6:5).

If, according to the teaching of Jewish and early Christian eschatology, the resurrection of the dead implies the transition from the one aeon to the other and the beginning of the new eternal creation, the new aeon has already begun, though as yet concealed from the eyes of men, in and with the resurrection of Christ (and many Old Testament saints with Him seen walking in Jerusalem), in as much as this is the beginning of the general resurrection.

There is an echo of the original Christian view of the two ages, or a bit of secularised eschatology, in the Western view that world history is split into two periods by the coming of Jesus Christ. (Brackets added.)

So *the end of the age* began with the coming of Christ and has its culmination at the end of this world at the resurrection of all saints. The parables fit into this eschatology: the coming of Christ to Israel, the judgement at the end of the world and the passing into eternity when each one of us dies. Christ Himself is our eschatology.

The age of the law and prophets is culminated in the first coming of Christ and this new age is culminated in the final resurrection of the church and all nations. We have the first fruits through Spirit baptism, the *first resurrection*, which is the power of Christ's resurrection in us (Phil 3:20-21).

The Restitution of All Things

In 1st Corinthians 15 Paul speaks of the resurrection at the end of the world:

But every man in his own order: Christ the first fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign, till He has put all enemies under His feet.

The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For He *has put all things under His feet*. But when He *says all things are put under Him*, it is manifest that He is excepted, which did put all things under Him. And when all things shall be subdued to Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject to Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all. (1 Cor 15:23-28).

The word of Paul here is clear. He is speaking of the climax of Christ's rule, to whom all things have been subjected by the Father. He said that at the end of this current church age, at the end of Christ's kingdom, there will be the resurrection of the dead and the kingdom shall be handed to the Father.

Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump. For the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed.

For this corruptible must put on incorruption and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, *Death is swallowed up in victory*. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. (1 Cor 15:51-58).

Here is the resurrection at the end of this current age. It is a bodily resurrection, not the new birth (Eph 1:14, Phil 3:21). This passage is not speaking of 70AD, as Preterists claim. Preterists claim that the *corruption* here is the Old Covenant and Paul was saying that when that is put away by the destruction of Jerusalem sin will be put away. The Old Covenant was destroyed by the cross, not by the fall of Jerusalem. They spiritualize the resurrection as the Platonist Origen did.

This passage deals with what occurs after the era of Christ's kingdom, after this current church age. It is what some call the *rapture*. This passage is about the *restitution of all things*, which our chapter on *The Cross of Christ* shows is to do with the curse that came in the Garden of Eden, or death, sickness and suffering. This is the subject of passages such as Rom 8:23 and Heb 2:8.

1 Cor 15:51-58 is analogous with 1 Thes 4:15-17 and John 11:25-26. This resurrection does not occur before the reign of Christ, but at the end of His reign. We go from this church age that we are now in, into eternity with the Father. There is no earthly reign of Christ in Jerusalem.

Also, Paul does not mention here a destruction of this earth. He says only that corruption shall put on incorruption and mortality shall be swallowed up in immortality. This is the *restitution* of all things (Acts 3:21). It is also spoken of in Rom 8:21, 1 Cor 15:25, Heb 1:13, Heb 2:8, Heb 10:13. It is the removal of the curse.

We are not sure that the prophets said anywhere that this earth will be destroyed at the Second Coming of Christ, when He hands the kingdom to the Father. We do not see plainly anywhere in the Old or New Testament that says this. We have already looked at texts that speak of new heavens and new earths and these have plain symbolic intent, to do with either new political orders, or with the New Covenant.

Jesus also said that heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall never pass away (Mark 13:31). This means that His word is the only sure thing. Everything that we see is temporal and is upheld by this word (2 Cor 4:18). It means anything else that we might trust in is sandy ground and will vanish away, like the lilies of the field that are "thrown into the oven", meaning dried up by the heat of the day.

It means that the fashion of this world, its rulers, its values, its rewards, its pleasures, its heroes, its accomplishments, its riches, its kingdoms, its times, shall all pass away. In its place will be put an everlasting world where God's will is done, where there is peace and truth. This is the eternal world, built by God and His truth, which will never pass away. In Christ, we are already partakers of this world and we look for its final day.

Whether Jesus meant by this that at His coming the planet shall be destroyed is conjecture. He did not say this. If we take Jesus' statement as literal, that heaven and earth shall pass away, which must be true at some point we presume, then Jesus did not say when this would occur. Heb 1:10-12 compares the certainty of Christ's divinity with the transience of the worlds. Worlds come and go, but He remains the same. This is not a proof text about the end of this planet at any particular time.

Probably the text most used to speak of a new planet being made is Revelation 21. Again, this passage is symbolic and cannot be used as a proof text. God uses symbolic language for the end of this world, because it is something that we have never experienced and therefore cannot appreciate. It might mean that this planet is destroyed, but we do not think that we can presume this interpretation on clearly symbolic narrative.

Revelation 21 is clearly about the church and the New Covenant and is not just a passage about the end of this world:

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men and He will dwell with them and they shall be His people and God Himself shall be with them and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And He said to me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And He said to me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcomes shall inherit all things; and I will be his God and he shall be My son. (Rev 21:1-7).

These are all the images that Jesus used to speak about salvation. This passage is descriptive of the church, which we have already entered by faith. This is about what Jesus did on Calvary and in His resurrection, where God made all things new. This passage is not only describing an eternal state to come, but the eternal life that we already have in Jesus Christ. This is a passage describing the New Covenant, in the same language that the prophets described it, "the fountain of water of Pentecost".

We do not see this passage as only about the end of the world. This is a description of the church, as Jeremiah said, "I will be their God and they shall be My people." (Jer 31:33). He said that this is the New Covenant. If we put this off we miss the *rest* that is now in Christ.

But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, says the Lord, I will put My law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts; and will be their God and they shall be My people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more.

Thus says the Lord, which gives the sun for a light by day and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divides the sea when the waves thereof roar; The Lord of hosts is His name: If those ordinances depart from before

Me, says the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before Me for ever.

Thus says the Lord; If heaven above can be measured and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, says the Lord. (Jer 31:33-37).

We are the seed of Israel, the seed of Abraham, the seed of faith, taken from the tribes of Israel and from the Gentile nations, called and redeemed together by the seed of David, the Lord Jesus Christ. We shall be a nation with our God forever and forever, in His church and in the New Covenant, which is an everlasting covenant.

In Christ there is no curse, for He has redeemed all things for us. He wipes away every tear from our eyes, even when we suffer. If we wait for this eternal state before we experience this then we have misunderstood Him. It is fulfilled by Christ, by a person and not by an event. The scripture speaks of His finished work, or His rest and our entering that through faith. This is the testimony of God in Christ.

Christ brings the eternal state into physical creation, when the curse is put away. The life that we have in Christ now goes on into eternity as God brings every enemy under the feet of Christ, at His appointed time, when He has gathered in all His elect. Physical death is swallowed up in victory.

Eschatology is Jesus coming 2,000 years ago to establish the New Covenant, which is sealed in us through faith by the Holy Spirit and has its climax in His Second Coming and the resurrection of our body. To quote our summary text from Calvin again:

Here the *world to come* is not that which we hope for after the resurrection, but that which began at the beginning of Christ's kingdom; but it will no doubt have its full accomplishment in our final redemption (resurrection). (Calvin, *Commentary on Hebrews 2:5*).

This is what is depicted in Revelation 21. This is the New Heaven and the New Earth.

The Curse Lifted

Some have said that this planet must be destroyed because of the sin and death that has filled it. This may be so, we do not know. The question is does the Bible say this. Is not the blood of Christ, shed on this earth, greater than all things? What can it not cleanse?

There is very little problem with this creation. We tend to blame the creation around us. We see the problem as *out there*. But it is really in us. Look around at this creation. It is almost perfect. There are beautiful views, rivers, streams, animals, birds, etc, that are filled with serenity. The earth is full of riches, pleasures, mysteries and wonder. This planet is very close to *paradise*. It is only one step away and in an instant it shall be changed.

The unrest is not in creation, it is in man. This is where the real issue is. There is ambition, disquiet, stress, hatred, insecurity and lust all within the bosom of man. This is where nature has really gone wrong. This is the only real problem that this planet has. Everything can be going well for man and he *shoots himself in the foot* through his own character, by the fears that come from within. This is what Christ came to heal.

Creation is good. Why abuse it? In Genesis 1 God said that creation was very good. We are neither for this creation, nor against it. It is God's and He will do with it that which is pleasing to Him. It will take one word from God and it will instantly be in its original state. But our *restitution* is better than the original state. For Adam did not have Christ within him. We are redeemed into the *glorious liberty of the sons of God*. We are already now far beyond where Adam started from.

Joy to the World

The hymn by Isaac Watts shows the kingdom of Christ which we are called into by faith.

Joy to the world! The Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And heaven and nature sing...

Joy to the world! the Saviour reigns;
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy...

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found...

He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love...