

## The Last-days

In this chapter we are looking at two main issues: what does the term *last-days* mean; and how do we interpret Matthew 24. To start with we want to make it clear that nothing in this chapter should be taken to mean that we do not believe in the Second Coming of Christ at the end of our current age. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the biblical context in which the apostles wrote. The next chapter shall discuss the Second Coming.

The term *last-days* gives us a problem. It was commonly used by the apostles for the day in which they lived, but that was almost 2,000 years ago. How should we interpret this? Does this mean that the *last-days* started in the days of the apostles and are still going on today? Or does the term refer to a short period at the end of the world just before the Second Coming of Jesus. If this latter view is the case then the apostles were mistaken, for Jesus did not return near to their own time.

We believe that the term *last-days* does not refer to either of these two possibilities. In this chapter we look at the term as it is used in the New Testament context.

The other main issue that we look at is to do with Matthew 24. The disciples asked Jesus a question in relation to the temple. Our options here are to see that either Matthew was writing only about the disciple's question, or he was also addressing issues beyond their intention that would relate to Christians living at the end of the world.

That is, does Matthew 24 relate only to the siege of Jerusalem leading up to 70AD, which this passage and the corresponding passages in Luke 21 and Mark 13 clearly portray, or does it also by extension, symbolism or double fulfilment relate to the end of this world and Second Coming of Christ? What was in Matthew's mind when he wrote the passage? Can we give the passage a meaning that Matthew may not have intended when he wrote it?

After a brief survey of these issues we look at implications for interpreting scripture in relation to the New Covenant. Topics in this chapter include:

- The end of the age.
- Matthew 24.
- The coming of the Lord.
- Sun, moon and stars.
- The New Heaven and the New Earth.

### Last-days

The term *last-days* does not normally refer to the Second Coming of Christ and the end of the world. Just like any other term, its meaning depends on its use, or on its context. We must read scripture as it was written then.

We often assume that when the scripture uses the term *last-days* that it is referring to the Second Coming of Christ. We are not entitled to assume a meaning of a text based on our views. We are obliged to be directed by the context, which means the Old Testament background and the understanding of the apostles at the time that they wrote. We do not mean to say that our findings are necessarily the correct ones, but are stating that this is the task that we face.

### The Consummation

The term in the Greek for "last" is *eschaton* and can refer to common things as well as theological. We can have the last-days (*eschaton*) of a school term for example. The term can apply to any use.

In prophecy it can mean three things:

1. The end of the Old Covenant Jewish age as expected by the Old Testament prophets.
2. The kingdom of Christ, in which we now live, as the *eschaton* expected by Israel.
3. Or the end of the world which is yet ahead of us.

How did the apostles use the term?

God...has in these *last-days* spoken to us by His Son...(Heb 1:1-2).

This verse is referring to the end of the Old Testament age, when all the law and prophets were fulfilled by the coming of Christ. It is the last-days of the Jewish age and the beginning of the age of Messiah. It is the time of the *consummation* (fulfilment of the types, shadows and prophecies), the establishment of the New Covenant through Christ's work.

But now once at *the end of the world* has He appeared to put away sin...(Heb 9:26).

This cannot be referring to a literal end of the world, for Hebrews was written some 2,000 years ago and the world has not yet ended. This is not said to scoff, but to have a sensible look at the meaning of the apostle, while we believe in the inerrancy of scripture.

The Greek word for *world* here (KJV) does not mean this planet, but it means *ages*. A better translation is *the end of the ages*. The term refers to eras, ages, or order of things. This term *the end of the world* literally means *the consummation of the ages*.

Heb 9:26 is speaking of the consummation where a new age replaces the Old Covenant. Jesus did not appear to put away sin at the end of the *whole world*, but at the end of the Old Covenant age. In Heb 9:26 the *end of the age* means the fulfilment and end of the Old Testament law and prophets, when Christ came to put away sin.

The book of Hebrews was written before the destruction of Jerusalem and temple. While the Old Covenant had ended with the cross, resurrection and ascension of Christ, the temple was still functioning when Hebrews was written. Heb 8:13 refers to its soon demise.

Heb 9:26 says that Christ appeared to put away sin at the end of the ages. The results of this were:

1. The end of the Old Covenant through the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ.
2. The beginning of the New Covenant on the Day of Pentecost, with the gift of the Spirit.
3. A time of gospel proclamation to that generation of Jews.
4. An end of the old age structures by a removal of the temple and judgment on Jerusalem.

This is what John the Baptist and Jesus both said in the Gospels, "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand." (Mark 1:15). They were moving out of one era and into the next era. It was the time of the fulfilment of all the prophets had foretold. Paul said the same,

...they are written for our admonition, upon whom *the ends of the world* are come. (1 Cor 10:11).

This term again literally means *the consummation of the ages*. Paul was not referring to the end of this planet or the Second Coming of Christ. Many have accused Paul of thinking that the Second Coming of Christ was at hand in his time. None of the authors of the New Testament said that. Paul was referring to the transition from the Old to the New Covenant age, which occurred in their day.

### Matthew 24

In Matt 24:1-3 the disciples asked Jesus about the “end of the age”. Some translations put it “the end of the world”. At that time the disciples did not know anything about the Second Coming of Christ. They did not even understand that Jesus would die for sin and rise again. They did not understand that He would ascend to heaven and one day come again.

This should be apparent without listing the Bible references. The disciples did not then know why Jesus had come. Peter told Jesus not to go to the cross. John and James’ mother wanted her sons to reign with Jesus in Jerusalem. Judas Iscariot was trying to make this happen. Even after the resurrection Jesus rebuked them for still not understanding why He came. It was not until they were filled with the Spirit at Pentecost that they understood.

So what did their question in Matt 24:3 mean?

And Jesus went out and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to Him to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, See all these things? Truly I say to you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

And as He sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the world? (Matt 24:1-3).

The context is the destruction of the temple. Jesus said the buildings would be totally destroyed. The disciples asked one question in three phrases, when would this be, what would be the sign of Your coming and the end of the world, or age? Mark and Luke also record this incident and show it was only one question about the destruction of Jerusalem.

And Jesus answering said to him, See these great buildings? There shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down...Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled. (Mark 13:2-4).

So the end of the world they asked about was the “end of the age” that Jesus said would be signified by the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem. The Strong’s Greek dictionary defines the word used here for *world* as “age”:

Strong’s 165...properly, an age...

This was the end of the Mosaic age and the end of the political nation of Israel. John the Baptist had already warned the Jewish nation of this, saying “The axe is already laid to the root of the tree.” (Luke 3:9). Malachi had called this *the great and terrible day of the Lord* (Malachi 4:5). Jesus said that John the Baptist was Elijah, whom Malachi said would come before this day (Matt 11:14).

Donald Hagner (*Fuller Theological University*) claimed in his *Matthew Commentary*, “The conceptual unity of the Parousia (coming) and the end of the age is indicated by the single Greek article

governing both (Sharp's Rule). The disciples thus were unable to separate the two events in their minds: the destruction of Jerusalem must entail the end of the age and the Parousia of Jesus...".

This shows that the disciples were asking only one question: "When was the current age going to end in the messianic fulfilment?".

### Context

The wider context of Matthew 24 is important. In Matt 21:33-46 Jesus gave the parable of the vineyard about those who killed the prophets and the Son. The elders of Israel agreed that the Lord "will miserably destroy those wicked men and let out His vineyard to another husbandman, which shall render Him the fruits in their season."(vs. 41).

Jesus then said, "The stone that the builders rejected is become the head..." (vs. 42). Here He is referring to Dan 7:13-14. The one they crucified ascended, sat down, was given a kingdom and dominion and returned in judgement and glory against that generation. The theme continues in Matt 23:33-36:

You serpents, you generation of vipers, how can you escape the damnation of hell? Wherefore, behold, I send to you prophets and wise men and scribes: and some of them you shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall you scourge in your synagogues and persecute them from city to city:

That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom you slew between the temple and the altar. Truly I say to you, *All these things shall come upon this generation.*

Jesus said that the generation He was then speaking to would have a visitation of the judgement of God. Matthew 24 then described this visitation in detail. Jesus spoke of earthquakes, famines, false Christ's, wars and rumours of wars. He said all the *tribes* of the land shall *mourn* (Matt 24:30). The Greek word used here for tribes is *phule* and the Greek word for land is *ge*.

The *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* claims that apart from rare exceptions *phule* is used for the tribes of Israel. (See its use in Matt 19:28, 24:30, Luke 22:30, Acts 26:7, James 1:1, Rev 7:4, 21:12.) Stuart Russell claimed, "The restricted sense of the word *ge* in the New Testament is common; and when connected, as it is here with the word "tribes" (*phulai*), its limitation to the land of Israel is obvious." (Stuart Russell, *The Parousia*).

Jesus spoke to those that He was addressing face to face and told *them* to take the warning from the fig tree. Just as they know the season by the leaves of a fig tree, so *they* shall know when these troubles begin that the time of the destruction of Jerusalem was at hand. He told them to flee the city in that day.

This fig tree has nothing to do with our own day and has nothing to do with Israel becoming a nation again in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Jesus spoke this only in regard to the Roman advance on Jerusalem.

### Josephus

Flavius Josephus was a Jewish historian alive when Jerusalem was destroyed in 70AD. He may not have been a Christian, but he gave a graphic detail of events, showing that everything Jesus said in Matthew 24 was fulfilled in the period when Rome destroyed Jerusalem.

About the period 53-60AD Josephus said, "The country was full of...false prophets, false messiahs...who deluded the people with promises of great events." (Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 20.8.5-6.). Many Jews followed these false messiahs and lost their lives. Josephus described the blasphemy and punishment of Jerusalem during that period as a direct fulfilment of Daniel, i.e. the abomination that made desolation (Dan 9:26-27).

These men, therefore, trampled upon all the laws of man and laughed at the laws of God; and for the oracles of the prophets they ridiculed them...for there was a certain ancient oracle...that the city should be taken and the sanctuary burnt, by right of war, when a sedition should invade the Jews and their own hand should pollute the temple of God. Now while these zealots disbelieved these predictions, they made themselves the instruments of their accomplishment. (Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, 1:321. 4.7.3.).

According to Jesus and Josephus the prophecy about an *abomination* in Jerusalem has been fulfilled and is not a future event. Rome laid siege against Jerusalem for 3 ½ years, before destroying it in 70AD, just as Revelation 11 stated would happen.

Josephus recorded many signs in the heavens that signified God's judgement, such as a sword that stood over the city, a comet that continued a whole year, a light that lit the area at night, chariots and housemen seen on the clouds around the city, as well as shakings and noises from heaven. As the high priest offered a heifer, it gave birth to a lamb (Josephus, *The War of the Jews*, 1:453-54 6.5.3., 1:454 6.5.3).

When Roman stones began to destroy the city, some cried out, "The Son is coming.". James, brother of Jesus, had publicly testified in the temple that the Son of man was about to come in the clouds of heaven to destroy Jerusalem and the Jews mocked this (Stuart Russell, *Parousia*). See also Eusebius, *Church History* for James' testimony, which according to Eusebius occurred when he was martyred.

Historians of the period speak of wars in the whole region of the Roman Empire. Ancient writings referred to provinces within the Empire as *nations* and *kingdoms*, for kings ruled over each of them, such as Herod and Agrippa. Millions of people died between 55-70AD, including millions of Jews. Millions more Jews went into slavery. History records a great increase in earthquakes, famines and false christs in those days.

Jesus said that there would be *trouble such as there never was before or ever shall be again* (Matt 24:21). Whether this is literal in terms of the number of deaths we do not know for certain. But this is a Hebrew idiom used to lay emphasis, such as when both Hezekiah and Josiah were said to have served God *more than any before them or after them* (2 Kings 18:5, 23:25). See also Ex 10:14, 11:6, Ezek 5:9, Dan 12:1 and Joel 2:2.

For a full description of the terrible events in Jerusalem and Roman region in the decade leading up to 70AD see the *Full Works of Flavius Josephus*, available on the Internet and in libraries. See relevant extracts from Josephus in *The Last-days According to Jesus* by R. C. Sproul. This book is an examination of issues raised in Matthew 24.

See also *The Most Embarrassing Verse in the Bible* for a commentary on Matthew 24, by *Assemblies of God* pastor and president of the *International Correspondence Institute, Australia*, Andrew Corbett. You can buy this as an e-book at [www.andrewcorbett.net](http://www.andrewcorbett.net).

## That Generation

The context tells us that Jesus was speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem. He said that all this would come upon that generation:

Truly I say to you, This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be fulfilled.  
(Matt 24:34).

Notice that this verse is recorded late in the chapter, after the advent of Jesus on the clouds of heaven. Jesus said that everything He spoke of in Matthew 24 would be fulfilled before that generation passed away.

Was Jesus speaking about His Second Coming? Some have said that He was mistaken, because that generation passed away and His Second Coming has not yet taken place. If everything that Jesus spoke of had to be fulfilled in that generation then He could not have been speaking of His Second Coming. He must have been speaking of the destruction of the temple in 70AD.

A generation is about 40 years. Matthew used this word *generation* many times in this Gospel and it always meant the people who were alive at that time. (See Matt 1:17, 11:16, 12:39, 12:41, 12:42, 45, 16:4, 17:17, 23:36, 24:34.) We cannot change the meaning of the word to refer to some future generation that Jesus was not addressing then.

Jesus was speaking to a group of people face to face and said, "This generation.". The plain meaning of the text is that He was referring to the generation that He was speaking to. The passage says nothing to indicate a different meaning. We have to assume a different meaning if we wish to interpret the passage some other way.

Jesus spoke this about 30AD. This puts 70AD well within the time frame that Jesus was speaking of.

## Coming of the Lord

Now we look at another part of the disciple's question; "What would be the sign of Your coming?". Today we think of this language as referring to the Second Coming of Christ. Is this what the disciples had in *their* mind? Did they know about His Second Coming then? They had no idea about that.

What then was their context or mind? We answer this by looking at the word they used – *parousia*. *Parousia* is a Greek word meaning *coming, presence or appearing*. It is used many times in the Old (Septuagint) and New Testaments and it rarely refers to the Second Coming of Christ. The Strong's Greek Dictionary defines *parousia*;

Strong's 395: from the present participle of 3918; a being near, i.e. advent (often, return; specially, of *Christ to punish Jerusalem*, or finally the wicked)...

## Old Testament

*Parousia* is also used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. It is translated "come" in English:

The burden of Egypt. Behold, the Lord rides upon a swift *cloud* and shall *come* into Egypt...(Is 19:1).

In this verse we have the *parousia* of the Lord on a *cloud* to judge Egypt. This is the same language that Jesus used about His coming on a cloud. The disciples would have thought about such Old

Testament texts when they asked their question about the judgement on Jerusalem. This was the disciple's mind.

He bowed the heavens also and *came down*: and *darkness was under His feet*...yes, He sent out His arrows and scattered them; and shot out *lightening* and discomfited them. (Ps 18:9, 14).

This is exactly the language that Jesus used in Matthew 24 about His *coming on a cloud with lightening*. Why should we interpret Matthew 24 literally when the clear indication of the Old Testament is that this language is *symbolic in prophetic literature of judgement*?

For, behold, the *Lord comes* forth out of His place and will *come down and tread upon the high places of the earth*. And the *mountains shall quake* under Him and the *valleys shall cleft*...(Mic 1:3-4).

When these same terms are used in Revelation some people interpret them literally. Again, why when in the Old Testament these terms are clearly symbolic of judgement, should we interpret them literally when they appear the same way in the New Testament? To literalise these terms is clearly not biblical.

See also a few other examples; Gen 11:5, Ex 3:8, 1 Chron 16:33, Ps 50:3-4, Is 31:4, Ezek 32:7-8, Zeph 1:15. These all speak of a *parousia* of the Lord. In each case it is referring to judgement.

In all of these texts *clouds, lightening* and *coming down* are all symbolic language for *storms of judgement*. Judgement is obviously portrayed by storms: thick, black clouds coming from the horizon, showing that strong wind, lightening and destruction are on their way. The symbolic intention is plain.

In none of these texts was there a physical appearing of Christ. If that is how the scripture is interpreted then why should we interpret the same words that Jesus used in Matthew 24 differently?

To show what Jesus meant, the theme is repeated in Luke 17. Here the lightening from one side of the sky to the other is mentioned (vs. 24), then the revelation of the Son of man, followed by calamity. Jesus warns those on housetops to flee, meaning to get out of Jerusalem. In this context Lot's wife is remembered, meaning, "Do not tarry but move out hastily".

Why would they be fleeing Jerusalem after the Second Coming of Jesus? This is plainly speaking of the Christian Jews fleeing Jerusalem before 70AD. This is the context of two men or women and one taken and one left (vs. 34-36). It has nothing to do with a rapture. It means that one is taken in death by the calamity and one is left. It is a warning.

When Jesus spoke about His coming on the clouds and that every eye shall see Him, He was answering the disciple's question about Jerusalem, expressing the severity of the judgement and not speaking about His Second Coming. Matthew 24 is not about the end of this world. It is about the end of the Old Covenant era.

### The Roman World

In Matt 24:14 Jesus said that the gospel shall be preached in all the world and then the *end* shall come. The *end* Jesus was referring to was the age His disciples asked about – the temple era. The *world* He referred to was the Roman world.

Jesus used the Greek word *oikoumene* for *world*. This means a region. When Joseph and Mary were taxed, Caesar sent out a decree to "all the world." (Luke 2:1). This is the Roman world. See *Strong's Greek Dictionary* for *world* in Matt 24:14:

3625: Land, i.e. the (terrene part of the) globe; *specially, the Roman Empire*.

On the Day of Pentecost people were present from “every nation under heaven.” (Acts 2:5). This is not literal, it does not include Australia! Paul said a few times that in his day the gospel had been preached in *all the world* and to every creature under heaven. Again, he was referring to the Roman Empire.

...your faith is spoken of throughout *the whole world*. (Rom 1:8).

Obviously Paul did not mean the whole planet. He was using a figure of speech referring to the region in which they lived. In Col 1:6 and 23 Paul said that the gospel in his day had been preached in “all the world” and to “every creature which is under heaven”. Again, he was talking of the Roman world.

These verses show that Jesus’ prediction was fulfilled exactly. Before that generation expired the gospel had gone to the whole Roman world. It appears that God gave the Diaspora of the Jews throughout the Roman Empire one generation after the Lord’s coming to hear the gospel and repent. When the gospel was preached to the world Jesus spoke of, all that Jesus said about that generation came to pass.

This is just as Peter said, the Lord is patient, not willing that any should perish (2 Pet 3:9).

### Troublesome Texts

Further texts that describe the Lord’s coming follow. Consider what these mean:

But when they persecute you in this city, flee into another: for truly I say to you, You shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come. (Matt 10:23).

Jesus said that His disciples (them, not us) would not have reached all the villages of Israel before He would come. Some have said Jesus was crazy, that He predicted His soon Second Coming and was wrong. The *parousia* Jesus was speaking of here was with reference to Jerusalem in that generation. This scripture was fulfilled.

J.W. McGarvey, Albert Barnes, F.F. Bruce, D.A. Carson, R.C.H. Lenski, Theodor Zahn, W.W. How and J. Barton Payne are among the many commentators who claim that the “coming” in Matt 10:23 is the *Roman invasion of Palestine*, which occurred in 66-70AD.

Truly I say to you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom. (Matt 16:28).

Jesus said that there were some that He was speaking to, who would not die before He would come. This cannot be fulfilled by His glory being revealed on the *Mount of Transfiguration* or by His coming at Pentecost, because the transfiguration was a few days later and Pentecost was within a few months. None of the people Jesus addressed had died by then (except Judas).

The normal meaning of this statement is, “Among you lot standing here, many will have died in the normal cause of events, but some of you will still be alive.”. This is about the time of one generation. To interpret this some other way is to change its natural meaning. Jesus said that He would come before that generation had all expired. Like it or lump it, this is what He said.

Again the high priest asked Him, Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am: and you shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven. (Mark 14:61-62).

When the high priest slapped Jesus, Jesus answered that he would see His coming of in glory. *Coming in the clouds of heaven* are the exact words used in the Old Testament for judgement against a city. The meaning to the priest was clear. The priest was judging Jesus, but it was the temple and priesthood that was about to be judged.

Jesus here made a clear reference to Daniel 7, about the Son of man ascending and given authority. The priest knew it. It was an answer to his question, "Are you the Son of God." Jesus said, "Yes, I am the one in Daniel." The biblical meaning is as plain as day. This is why the priest rent his clothes are cried, "Blasphemy."

### What Others Say

Because this is new to many Christians, we will list a few statements from other believers. We will get a bit ahead of our topic with these quotes, which include a few matters that we will discuss further below.

John Owen, in his sermon to the British Parliament (*The Advantage of the Kingdom of Christ in the Shaking of the Kingdoms of the World*, available at [www.ccel.org/ccel/owen](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/owen)) commented on Matt 24:29:

*Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened and the moon shall not give her light and the stars shall fall from heaven and the powers of heaven shall be shaken.* The Judicial state, in all the height and glory of it, was utterly consumed; so that all flesh, all the Jews, were in danger of utter destruction. (Referring to 70AD).

John Gill, famous Evangelical commentator and mentor of Charles Spurgeon, wrote much on these matters. We have just a line here. On Mark 13:26 Gill noted:

*And then shall they see the Son of man, etc.* Not in person, but in the power of His wrath and vengeance; of which the Jews then (in 70AD) had a convincing evidence. (Commentary on Mark).

The well known Evangelical commentator Adam Clarke said on Matt 24:30:

*Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man.* The plain meaning of this is, that the destruction of Jerusalem will be such a remarkable instance of divine vengeance, such a signal manifestation of Christ's power and glory, that all the Jewish tribes shall mourn and many will, in consequence of the manifestation of God, be led to acknowledge Christ and his religion.

By 'land', in the text, is evidently meant here, as in several other places, the land of Judea and its tribes, either its then inhabitants, or the Jewish people wherever found. (Commentary on Matthew).

Bishop John Lightfoot (not the liberal Lightfoot, but John of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century) was a signatory of the *Westminster Confession* and he held to the same view on Matthew 24. You can find his works easily on the Internet. He wrote much on the topic.

There are many more authors in our current day that could be listed here, including Kenneth Gentry and Gary DeMar. See DeMar's books *End Times Fiction* and *Last-days Madness*. Jay Adams is a

respected Christian author today. He has written two books on these issues that are worth reading; *Time Is At Hand* and *Preterism: Orthodox or Unorthodox?*

*Preterism* comes from the Latin root for *past*. Preterists claim that prophecy has been fulfilled. We hold to *partial preterism*, meaning some prophecies are fulfilled, but the final prophecies about Christ Second Coming and the resurrection have not yet been fulfilled. We write more on this in our next chapter.

Marcellus Kik, John Lightfoot, Jay Adams, Kenneth Gentry, Andrew Sandlin, C. Jonathin Seraiah, Richard Pratt, David Chilton, Gary North, Rousas Rushdoony, Lorraine Boettner, Adam Clarke all interpret Matt 24:31 as the destruction of Jerusalem, none of whom are full preterists.

### The Old World

Peter spoke of the *last-days* in Acts 2:17. He referred to Joel's prophecy about the *last-days*, when God would pour out His Spirit. Peter said "this is that", meaning that the events of Acts 2 were those that were to occur in Joel's *last-days*.

Peter referred to Joel's prophecy about the sun and moon turning red and said it was fulfilled in his time then. These were not the *last-days* before the Second Coming of Christ, but the *last-days* of the law and the prophets and the *last-days* of the nation of Israel as a nation under the Old Covenant.

The prophecies about the sun and moon are again symbolic. We can see this in many Old Testament texts. They refer to earthly kingdoms, rulers and princes. The symbolic language means that one kingdom, era, order, rule, dynasty or nation is about to come down and a new order arise in its place.

This is the time when the Old Covenant was ended by Christ and the New Covenant established. A whole new order had been brought in.

### Sun, Moon and Stars

Take Babylon for example. When Isaiah prophesied of its destruction this is the language that he used:

For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light; the sun shall be darkened in his going forth and the moon shall not cause her light to shine...Therefore I will shake the heavens and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord and in the day of His fierce anger. (Is 13:10, 13).

If we read the whole chapter in Isaiah we will see that Isaiah was speaking about the coming judgement on Babylon. Isaiah used symbols to show that the destruction would be complete. All the leaders fell and the empire was overturned. A whole new order in terms of earthly dominion was established.

God said that the stars, sun and moon would be darkened and the earth would be removed. The heavens also would shake. We read this and know that it is symbolic. The earth was not literally removed out of its place. The stars, sun and the moon still gave out their light.

If it is clear that this did not literally happen in Babylon's time and that it was symbolic, then why would we interpret New Testament verses like this literally? Why would we go to the same statements that Jesus made in Matthew 24 and say that these must be literal? Why the distinction?

### All Nations to Battle

Prophets such as Joel and Zechariah spoke of the “latter days”. By this they meant the end of the nation of Israel under the Old Covenant or Mosaic era. The period was definitely in the *latter days of Israel’s nationhood*, hundreds of years after those prophets wrote. Our mistake is that we do not read the Bible from the *perspective* at the time that it was written.

They spoke about all nations coming against Israel. Nations means *ethnos*, Gentile people groups. This was fulfilled by Rome which gathered the nations in that region into its army (much as a UN army would today) and destroyed the state of Israel. This is where the rulers of Israel fell, its governors and priests, as stars and the sun from heaven. Any historical commentary would show us this.

The prophets also referred to many battles that would precede this last event, such as Ezekiel’s reference to Gog and Magog. Historical commentaries show that these were tribes in that region that came against Israel in the Intertestamental period.

The prophets then spoke of a *restoration* of Israel in the New Covenant after its destruction in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. This restoration was fulfilled by the gospel. This is what John the Baptist declared in the opening of his ministry. The nation was about to be thrown into the fire, but there was an escape through the Son of God.

God has not cast off His people, but has called them into His Son, where all His promises are fulfilled. This is how Paul and the early apostles interpreted the prophets and these events.

### Idumea

So we are speaking about the fall of the nation state of Israel, as declared by the prophets and the restoration of those called to salvation through the Seed of David. The language used to depict this fall was the same language used concerning the judgement of Idumea;

And all the host of heaven shall be *dissolved* and the heavens shall be *rolled together as a scroll*: and all their host shall *fall down*, as the leaf falls off from the vine and as a falling fig from the fig tree. For my sword shall be bathed in heaven: behold, it shall *come down* upon Idumea and upon the people of my curse, to judgement. (Is 34:4-5).

Here again is a *parousia* (*come down*). It is used in terms of judgement. The Lord said that the heavens would be *dissolved*. All the stars would fall down and the heavens would be rolled up as a scroll.

This is the same language that Peter used in his second epistle. Peter said, “The heavens being on fire shall dissolve (2 Pet 3:12). We read this and suppose that Peter was speaking literally. But was he? Are we not interpreting his words according to pagan chiliasm (spoken of in our previous chapter) and not according to the Hebrew literary intention?

If the heavens were not literally destroyed in the reference to Idumea, but it referred to their leaders and kingdom being completely removed and dissolved, as it was, then why should we apply a different principle of interpretation to Peter’s prophecy? Again, why the distinction? We will address this prophecy of Peter further below.

### New Heaven/Earth

God applied the same language to the removal of Israel and the Old Covenant and the bringing in of the reign on His Son in the New Covenant. This is the *greatest establishment of a New Order in prophetic history*.

And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, says the Lord. For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before Me, says the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain. And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before Me, says the Lord. (Is 66:21-23).

This is about the New Covenant, as the Gentiles worship the Lord. God said that He will take of the Gentiles and make us Levites and priests. The term *Levites* here means that God will make priests of the Gentiles through the New Covenant. *Levites* is not used literally, but symbolically for priests.

Imagine the outrage of the early Jews over this. "How could those Gentiles be made priests?". We are made priest through Jesus Christ, through new birth and by the gift of the Spirit. This is the only priesthood now and it includes believing Jews also.

Then God said that this *New Heaven* and *New Earth* would remain before Him forever. That is, the new order, the New Covenant, is an eternal covenant in His Son. There is no doubt that the *New Heaven* and *New Earth* are symbolic of the New Covenant, the everlasting covenant where there is an eternal remission of sin by one sacrifice.

Heb 9:10 claimed that the Old Covenant was "ordinances imposed on them until the time of *reformation*", meaning *correction* or *perfection*. Kittel, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, commented on the Greek word *διόρθωσις* (*reformation*), saying that the Old Covenant:

Lasted until the setting up of the order of the fulfilled time...when the Law and the Prophets were replaced by the *διόρθωσις*...the time of the true order...From this time on there is in force the order of the dawning time of consummation in the fashioning of the relation between God and man. Thus *διόρθωσις* is a witness to the fulfilment of Judaism in Christianity and an expression of the eschatological faith of primitive Christianity.

*Eschatology* in the mind of early Christendom meant the fulfilment of the Old Testament expectation in Christ. Is 66:23 also uses the term *Sabbath* symbolically for *worship*. Paul said that the literal Sabbath was abolished forever in Christ (Col 2:16). The literal Sabbath will never return. To say it will return in a future dispensation opposes the finished work of Christ.

Hag 2:5-7 and Heb 12:26-28 together also show that the *New Heaven* and *New Earth* refer to the New Covenant. This is the contextual meaning of the passages. (We discussed in the previous chapter.)

### Not a Temple of Stone

Dispensationalism claims that the above passage (Is 66:21-23) is about Jesus returning to Jerusalem and setting up the temple and making Gentiles literal Levites in the temple. This is wrong for several reasons:

1. Jesus never said this and neither did any apostle in the New Testament.
2. It denies the clear intention of prophetic language.
3. It is literalism.
4. It denies the New Covenant in Christ.

The clear interpretation of these passages by the apostles cannot be denied:

To whom (Jesus) we come, as to a living stone, disallowed indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious. You also as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believes on Him shall not be confounded. (1 Pet 2:4-6).

True Zionism is Jesus Christ and His church. So how can it be said that we are spiritualizing the texts? This is what Peter said: "A spiritual house."

### Former Sins

Jeremiah showed that in the New Covenant God would forget *former sins*, remove sin altogether and forever sanctify His people. The purpose of the New Covenant was, "I will put your sin from Me, as far as the east is from the west." (Ps 103:12). This would make us *New Creations*. This gives us a new heart. Because of this new heart we do not forsake the Lord. This is the whole reason that Jesus came.

God's problem with the Old Covenant was that the people broke it, "Which...covenant they broke..." (Jer 31:31-33) There was a continual cycle of sin, captivity, prophet, repentance, blessing, sin...(See the book of Judges.) This is not the life of one who is born again.

In Christ He has put all those former things away, "For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sins no more." Jeremiah continues in chapter 31 to say that God has not cast off His people despite their sin, but will bring them into this New Covenant of renovation and change of heart. This is what the book of Hebrews describes.

Isaiah also showed that *former things* are gone:

...because the *former troubles* (sins) are forgotten and because they are hid from mine eyes (through Christ's blood). For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.

But be glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing and her people a joy. (Is 65:16-18).

The gospel is such *good news*.

### A New Heart

A New Jerusalem is a new heart. We have something to sing about! Why would we be dragged back under an Old Covenant religious mindset, as if Jesus Christ did not prevail in fulfilling these prophecies? Hebrews describes this New Jerusalem:

But you are come to mount Zion, to the city of the living God, to the heavenly Jerusalem...to the general assembly and church of the Firstborn, which are written in heaven and to God the judge of all and to the spirits of just men made perfect and to Jesus...(Heb 12:22-23).

We have come to this now. We are in this New Creation that God has made in Jesus Christ. This is what the gospel is. This new order is our redemption. "For if that first covenant had been faultless,

then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, He said, Behold, the days come when I will make a New Covenant..." (Heb 8:7-8).

Passages such as 2 Chron 7:14 do not apply to the church:

If My people who are called by My name shall humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their evil ways: then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

This was the problem of the Old Covenant. The people did not know God and did not continue in His ways. God kept sending them deliverers and they would go back into sin. Considering the state of their heart under the Old Covenant God cried out, "Behold, I make all things new.". We are not saying that we never sin, but God's people who are in Christ are not repeatedly brought down into a cycle of sin and deliverance and should not expect to be, nor should they pray like that.

A backslidden nation needs to pray this prayer and the people of that nation given a new heart. Then our nation's lands will be healed.

### Perilous Times

We are saying that the term *last-days* was primarily about this transition for Israel, between the Old and the New Covenants. Many resisted this transition and still tried to live as though under the law, even as Christians. But when the temple was removed in 70AD they could no longer do this. This transition occurred during what the Bible called *perilous times*. In other places it was called *great tribulation*.

(We do not say that *last-days* only refers to that period. It can refer more generally to *this present evil age*, which is under God's judgement, in which the lives of people are but a vapour [brief]. We speak of this in the next chapter. The principles that the 1<sup>st</sup> Century met still apply.)

Israel had entered this messianic age that they were expecting and that which the Essenes were preparing for. It was only that this messianic age was not as many of them had expected. Instead of ruling from Jerusalem in the Middle East, Jesus was ruling from the heavenly Jerusalem.

We will now look at how Peter used the term *last time*, or *the end*. Peter spoke of the salvation ready to be revealed at the *last time*. He spoke of the *appearing* of Jesus Christ. He said that the *end of all things* was at hand (1 Pet 4:7). What could he have meant by this?

1. The end of the whole world, in which case he was wrong. It is 2,000 years since Peter said this and the world has not ended.
2. He meant that the end was "at hand" or *near* from God's perspective. But Peter was not speaking of God's perspective here. He was speaking to those he wrote to and said to them plainly that the end was at hand.
3. By "at hand" Peter meant that we could die at any time and must be ready for judgement. That is, the end is always at hand for all of us. It is difficult to show that Peter meant this. He was referring to the historical events the people of that time were passing through.
4. Or was Peter referring to the *perilous time* of that generation, leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem?

It is clear that they were living in exceptionally perilous times. Paul had said perilous times would come in “the last-days”, while addressing how Timothy should conduct himself, meaning that Paul was referring to their own time (2 Tim 3:1).

In 1 Cor 7:26 Paul recommended not marrying, if any had the gift, due to the “present distress”. Paul addressed this in 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5, when speaking of the approaching trouble. Paul said that the Thessalonians (a mixture of Jew and non-Jewish believers) should be prepared for this, intimating that this was to happen in their own time.

Jay Adams, a respected Evangelical author, wrote in *Trust and Obey: A Practical Commentary on First Peter*:

In six or seven years from the time of writing, the overthrow of Jerusalem, with all its tragic stories, as foretold in the Book of Revelation and in the Olivet Discourse upon which that part is based, would take place.

Titus and Vespasian would wipe out the old order once and for all. All those forces that led to the persecution and exile of these Christians in Asia Minor—the temple ceremonies (outdated by Christ’s death), Pharisaism (with its distortion of O.T. law into a system of works-righteousness) and the political stance of Palestinian Jewry toward Rome—would be erased.

The Roman armies would wipe Jewish opposition from the face of the land. Those who survived the holocaust of A.D. 70 would themselves be dispersed around the Mediterranean world. “So,” says Peter, “hold on; the end is near.” The full end of the Old Testament order (already made defunct by the cross and the empty tomb) was about to occur.

We fully agree with Adam’s appraisal expressed here.

#### Appearing of Christ

That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, be found to praise and honour at the appearing of Jesus Christ. (1 Pet 1:7).

If we remember what was happening in these days it brings a lot of meaning to the context. Christians were being burnt by Rome. Not only was Jerusalem against the church, but in Nero’s time Rome had become an enemy of the gospel. Nero demanded emperor worship, which the Christians would not give.

Rome burnt many Christians. Nero used them for human candles to light the streets of Rome at night. They were tortured and killed by gladiators and lions in Nero’s games as he tried to please the multitudes with entertainment, as Nero’s temperament grew worse and worse.

It is hard to imagine how we could read the New Testament without reflecting on the impact that these things made on its context. If today’s Christians were commonly burnt as street lamps and if a despotic and insane ruler was tearing down the fabric of society, our writings would comment on the trouble. This is exactly the context of the much of the New Testament. But with a Dispensationalist outlook, we shift our mind’s attention from their day to our day. This is not genuine exegesis of scripture.

Suetonius Tranquillus, a Roman government official, described Nero's behaviour, which was not too dissimilar to what may happen in our own time:

He castrated the boy Sporus and actually tried to make a woman of him; and he married him with all the usual ceremonies, including a dowry and a bridal veil, took him to his home attended by a great throng and treated him as his wife. And the witty jest that someone made is still current, that it would have been well for the world if Nero's father Domitius had that kind of wife.

This Sporus, decked out with the finery of the empresses and riding in a litter, he took with him to the courts and marts of Greece and later at Rome through the Street of the Images, fondly kissing him from time to time.

Tacitus described the persecution of Nero against Christians:

An immense multitude was convicted...of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. (Tacitus *Annals* XV.44).

Tacitus wrote generally of this period:

The history on which I am entering is that of a period rich in disasters, terrible with battles, torn by civil struggles, horrible even in peace...there were civil wars, more foreign wars and often both at the same time.

He went on to describe distress all over the empire, natural catastrophes and the many people who died and concluded:

Besides the manifold misfortunes that befell mankind...never was it more fully proved by awful disasters of the Roman people or by indubitable signs that the gods care not for our safety, but for our punishment. (Tacitus, *The Histories*).

### Great Tribulation

Though trouble was widespread in the Roman Empire from 60-70AD, the greatest blow would come to Judea. This is the period that Jesus spoke of in Matt 24:21. Jesus called this the time of the *abomination and desolation* spoken of by Daniel the prophet. (Matt 24:15) In Luke, Jesus said that this was when the armies of Rome would encircle and destroy Jerusalem (Luke 21:20). See also Mark 13:14.

How is it possible that such a momentous season of trouble, that Jesus so clearly warned about, would not be in the apostle's mind in some way and referred to in their writings in the New Testament? When the siege of Jerusalem finally occurred, Jews from the whole known world were there, for the siege began at Passover (Josephus, *Wars*, 6, 9, 3.). "Accordingly, the multitude of those that therein perished exceeded all the destructions that either men or God ever brought upon the world." (*Wars*, 6 9, 4.).

And the people of the prince that shall come (Rome) shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and *the end* shall be with a flood and to the end of the war desolations are determined...And for the overspreading of abominations He shall make it desolate;

even until the consummation (end) and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate. (Dan 9:26-27).

### The Appearing

It is in such a climate that Peter encouraged the church concerning the appearing of Christ. We repeat the text:

That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, be found to praise and honour at the appearing of Jesus Christ. (1 Pet 1:7).

What might this term *appearing* mean in this context? It is referring to His kingdom, His intervention in the affairs of men at His appointed time, for the vindication of our faith and the comfort of the church with days of peace. Those who remain faithful to the Lord during the day of trial will be vindicated at the appearing of Christ's authority. Our trials are not in vain, not only for our own souls, but also for the blessing and heritage we leave.

We see this meaning portrayed in Luke, where Jesus stated that He was speaking about the siege of Jerusalem:

And when you see these things begin to come to pass, then look up (be encouraged) and lift up your heads, for your redemption draws near...So likewise you, when you see these things come to pass, know you that the kingdom of God is near at hand. Truly I say to you, this generation shall not pass away until all be fulfilled. (Luke 21:28, 31-32).

Could it be put any plainer? Jesus was not speaking to us, but to His disciples. He said that *they* would see all of this. He repeated it, saying that their generation would not pass away until all this was fulfilled. It is clear in the context that the *redemption* and the *kingdom* were the deliverance of the saints from their persecution by the Jews and Rome.

The Jewish and Roman persecution stopped. Roman persecution did not start again until the mid 3<sup>rd</sup> Century. There was sporadic persecution in the Roman Empire, but persecution did not become a state policy again until the reign of Decius in the mid 3<sup>rd</sup> Century and more so in the reigns of Diocletian and Galerius in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> and early 4<sup>th</sup> Centuries.

*Parousia* means coming and appearing. It is not limited to one event at the end of the world, at the resurrection of the dead. The word relates to the kingdom of Christ. It means Christ rules and He appears to the church, through the church and in history.

His kingdom and authority reign through the New Covenant. He comes to save, to fill with His Spirit, to vindicate His saints, to take to heaven when saints die, to bring down earthly kingdoms and to raise up new ones and He comes to end the curse at the resurrection, when corruption puts on incorruption.

There is no doubt that the apostles used the term *Christ's appearing* to exhort the disciples in the perilous times that they were then going through, without meaning that the end of the whole world was at hand. They did not think that the whole world was about to end.

It is likely that references to *last-days* in Acts 2:7, 2 Tim 3:1, James 5:3, 1 Pet 1:5, 1 Pet 1:20, 2 Pet 3:3, 1 John 2:18 and Jude 18 do not refer to the end of this whole world. References to the *last day* in

John 6:40, 44, 54, 11:24, 12:46 and 1 Cor 15:23 do refer to the end of this age at the second resurrection and final judgment. We discuss this in the next chapter.

However, Peter was not speaking of the end of the world, but of the fulfilment of the Jewish prophets, the time of consummation, when Jesus came to redeem us:

Who (Jesus Christ) truly was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these *last times* for you. (1 Pet 1:20).

### Hebrews

So Christ was offered to bear the sins of many; and to them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin to salvation. (Heb 9:28).

Christ's *appearing* mentioned in Heb 9:28 refers to Pentecost. The context is about the Old Testament high priest who went into the holy of holies once a year to offer blood for sin. The worshippers remained outside waiting for the priest's return. If he returned it was a token that the blood had been accepted, that the worshipper's sins were forgiven. This meant they were "saved", at least for a year, when blood would have to be offered again.

Heb 9:28 says that in the same way Christ appears the second time without sin. This is His coming out of heaven (the true holy of holies) after the blood was accepted, to announce the Covenant is accepted. This is what happened on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was sent to consummate our salvation and was given to all who believe (look for Him). Pentecost is the evidence of the acceptance by God of Christ's atonement for us and therefore of our salvation.

Hebrews does not speak of the Second Coming. Heb 10:25 tells us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves, but to exhort one another, especially as we see *the day* approaching. This *day* is not the Second Coming. It is mentioned later in the chapter, in verse 37, in reference to Habakkuk, who said it was the day of God's vindication. This *exhorting one another while the day of salvation remains* is also mentioned in Heb 3:13.

### Peter in Jerusalem

It is likely that Peter wrote his epistles from Jerusalem in the 60'sAD, which would make his statement about the *end of all things at hand* clear (1 Pet 4:7). Soon after he wrote this epistle, all believers fled Jerusalem.

Peter was the resident apostle of Jerusalem, as Paul made clear in Galatians. At the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter, Peter said, "They of Babylon greet you", which could mean Jerusalem, for the Jews were then the main persecutor of the church and had killed the Lord and the prophets. Babylon is the apostate bride who was unfaithful: Jerusalem. (See Is 1:21, Jer 2:20, 3:1-11, Ezek 16:15-18; Ezek 23.) Compare Matt 23:34-37 and Luke 11:47-51, with Rev 17:6 and 18:20, 24.

Peter could even have written his epistles from Jerusalem at the very time Roman forces were gathering against it. The Catholics say *Babylon* was symbolic of Rome, to support their claim that Peter was writing from Rome as their first Pope, but the Roman church was started by Paul's team workers, which is why Paul wrote the epistle of Romans. There is no evidence that Peter was ever in Rome.

When Peter wrote 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter, the forces of Rome were about to begin their three and half year siege of Jerusalem, which ended in its total destruction.

## Second Peter

In 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3 Peter speaks of this earth being destroyed and a new earth. We will look at two alternative views on this passage. Was Peter speaking about the total destruction of this planet, assumed to occur at the Second Coming of Jesus, or was he speaking of the destruction of the Jewish state? Whichever one of these is correct, the implications for Christian faith and lifestyle remain the same: we live by the values of the kingdom of God and not by the values of this world.

Remember that Peter was the apostle to the circumcised. Remember also that Peter and all the apostles then were Jews. They were all conscious of the demise of their former state. Peter was writing to Jewish believers. In 2 Pet 3:3-15 Peter speaks of the *day of the Lord*:

Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God...

We start by looking at the term *day of the Lord*. It is used many times in the prophets of the day in which God's end purpose shall be fulfilled. Until then God waits patiently, working out His plan in righteousness. In particular it means the *day of judgment* against Israel:

Woe to you that desire the day of the Lord! To what end is it for you? The day of the Lord is darkness and not light. As if a man did flee from a lion and a bear met him; or went into the house and leaned his hand on the wall and a serpent bit him.

Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness and not light, even very dark and no brightness in it? I hate, I despise your feast days and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. (Amos 5:18-22).

See also Zephaniah 1, where the *day of the Lord* is *near* and is the destruction of Judah, a day of darkness, clouds and blackness, when with fire God will destroy the "whole earth". Historical commentators show that this was fulfilled in 589BC, 30 years after Zephaniah prophesied, using the same language that Peter used.

Deuteronomy describes the judgement of Israel if they turned away from their covenant. This was in Peter's mind as an obedient Jew who followed the law:

For a fire is kindled in My anger and shall burn to the lowest hell and shall consume the earth with her increase and set on fire the foundations of the mountains. (Deut 32:22).

Isaiah told us not to set our heart on the things that perish:

Lift up your eyes to the heavens and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke and the earth shall wax old like a garment and they that dwell there shall die in like manner: but My salvation shall be forever and My righteousness shall not be abolished. (Is 51:6).

This chapter starts by telling the Jews to look to Abraham, who was justified by faith. Then Isaiah showed that a New Covenant shall go forth, that will include the Gentiles. "For a law shall proceed from Me, for a light of the people...My salvation is gone forth and My arm shall judge the people; the isles shall wait upon Me and on My arm shall they trust." (Is 51:4-5).

This covenant is not based upon the law, for Abraham was justified without it, but on the faith of Jesus Christ. Isaiah says that the Old Covenant is passing away and those who live in it shall die by the law. In this passage there is no doubt that the *heaven and earth passing away* is the passing of the Old Covenant and the establishment of everlasting righteousness. Isaiah continues by saying that Christ makes a *New Earth, a new body and community in Christ*:

I have put My words in your mouth and I have covered you in the shadow of My hand, that I may *plant the heavens and lay the foundations of the earth* and say to Zion, you are My people. (Is 51:16).

So when Peter said that the order of the Jews was being destroyed, he encouraged them to look for God's salvation in Christ, in the *New Heaven* and New Earth.

We now turn back to our text in Peter:

...wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that you look for such things, be diligent that you may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless. (2 Pet 3:12-14).

Peter wrote 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter just before the siege of Jerusalem which started in 66AD. John Owen believes that this passage is about the destruction of Jerusalem. (See *The Works of John Owen Vol. 9.*) Owen claimed that Peter was not speaking of a literal destruction of the planet.

What are some reasons for this view?

1. The world destroyed in Noah's day, which Peter used as a comparison, meant a judgment upon men, not a destruction of the planet.
2. The symbolism of the heavens dissolving and the earth being destroyed are used in scripture to mean the end of a nation, not the end of the world.
3. Peter was addressing scoffers of his own generation, the Jews who scoffed at Jesus' prediction of the destruction of Judaism. This is what the Jews were aware of concerning Jesus' teaching. They persecuted the Christians because of this.
4. The New Heaven and New Earth Peter spoke of are said in Is 65:17, 66:21-22, Hab 2 and Heb 12:26-28 to be the gospel age.
5. Peter said that they were to expect the fulfilment of this in their own generation.
6. Looking for salvation in a new physical heaven and new physical earth would not solve anything. The problem is the hearts of men and the solution is in Jesus. The *New Heaven* and *New Earth* merely depict His salvation.
7. The Greek word used twice in 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3 for *elements*, which shall melt with fervent heat, is used seven times in the New Testament and refers to the elements of the Jewish Old Covenant state (Gal 4:3, 4:9, Col 2:20, Heb 5:12, 6:1).
8. Peter uses similar language here that Jesus uses in the *Olivet Discourse* in Matthew, Luke and Mark (the *sun* the *moon* and the *stars*) for that which occurs *immediately* after the tribulation of those days, which Jesus expressly said was the fall of

Jerusalem (Matt 24:29). Peter used the same language also in Acts 2 when describing the fulfilment of Joel's prophecy *in his day*.

But one of the main reasons that we believe that 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3 is about the destruction of the Jewish state, is that it is possible that the Bible does not say that the earth will be destroyed at the end, at the resurrection, when Jesus hands over the kingdom to the Father. Paul speaks of this in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15 and he says nothing about the earth being literally destroyed.

We will look at this in the next chapter, from texts in Revelation and the prophets. It is often assumed that these texts say that the earth will be destroyed, but do they say this? Is the idea of the total destruction of this planet a pagan myth that we read into 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3 unwittingly? You may not agree with this, but we should be able to challenge our views, while holding to the inerrancy and intended meaning of scripture.

It does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him. (1 John 3:2).

Peter said that the reason that this event was delaying in his time, was that the Lord was longsuffering. The *1,000 years being one day* that Peter mentioned is not a definition of a day. Peter's purpose is to show that God is patient. This was also mentioned by Jesus in Matt 10:23 and 24:14 in showing that this judgment would wait until the gospel had gone to the Jews, i.e., it would wait for that generation to hear the gospel.

When Peter said that we look for *new heavens* and a *new earth* he meant that our hearts and lives are not of this world, but we are in Christ. We are not looking in the sense that we do not have it yet, but maintaining our focus and view in Christ. We are also expecting Christ's vindication in history and in eternity.

Peter's exhortation has relevance to every generation. The fashion of this earth is always corrupting and passing away and will do until Jesus finally returns at the resurrection at the end of this age. Then we have the final manifestation of that which began at Pentecost. Once again we quote Calvin's view of this:

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 the *New Heaven and New Earth*, fulfilled in new birth and in the redemption of our bodies. We look at the Second Coming of Jesus and resurrection in the next chapter.

### Realized, Non Realized

There is a tension between *realized* and *non-realized* eschatology. There is an *already, not yet* tension. We have already come to the city of the living God (Heb 12:22), not as Abraham who saw it afar off. We have already passed from death into eternal life. But we still await the full manifestation of His kingdom when He puts down all enemies (Heb 13:14).

Peter's admonition that we *look for the new heavens and new earth* means that we should give diligence to live by the values of the redemption that God has already brought us into. We are not of this world. We live by the values of the kingdom of God and by this hope we purify ourselves in this

world (1 John 3:1-3). Peter's admonition is just like the many admonitions in Hebrews, or in Paul's epistles. We have not yet arrived. We have not yet finished our race.

Heb 6:5 says that the powers of the world to come are already present. We are in the *New Heaven* and *New Earth* now, which will be fully manifested at the end of this world, when God removes the curse. This full manifestation is the *New Heaven* and *New Earth* that Revelation 21 speaks of. It is the church, which we have entered now through Christ and which is eternal.

We do not use this *already/not yet* concept wrongly, to suggest:

1. Sin is not yet overcome.
2. Satan is not yet overcome.
3. That we are still under the Old Covenant.

Heb 12:22-23 says we that *have* come to the heavenly Jerusalem and Heb 13:14 says that we seek the city *to come*. This seeking is the full vindication of our faith, *our hope* fulfilled in the resurrection and not the fulfilment of the New Covenant *rest* which we already entered (Rom 8:24-25). The same can be said for 2 Pet 3:13 where we have already entered the New Covenant but actively await the full vindication of Christ's authority for the church on earth and in eternity.

### Realised Eschatology

Clement Dodd wrote on *realised eschatology*, as did others like him. They make many good points. Most of what Dodd says is correct, in seeing that the kingdom of Christ came when Jesus came 2,000 years ago. The critical truth to see is that Jesus is our *eschaton*. In Him all God's promises are realised and He lives in us. This is what Paul taught in Gal 2:20. We are already at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

In Luke 11:20 Jesus said, "If I cast out demons by the finger of God then is the kingdom come to you.". The kingdom is present in the person of Jesus, the King. But then Jesus said at the Last Supper that the kingdom would come before He would next drink wine, meaning it was coming very soon (Luke 22:18). This is Christ coming to live in us at Pentecost. He is the kingdom and He has come to His church.

Dodd showed from the New Testament, especially from John's Gospel, that that apocalyptic kingdom is already present in the ministry of Jesus and the apostles. Dodd claimed that the apocalyptic prophecies of the kingdom have already been fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus.

There is no doubt that the early disciples believed that the kingdom came at Pentecost. Pentecost was definitely a *parousia* of Christ. However, *over-realised eschatology* does not recognize the resurrection at the end of this world as the final consummation of the kingdom and is contrary to scripture and the main church creeds.

### Summary

This chapter has reviewed three themes:

1. The term *last-days* should be understood in its Hebrew biblical context and not in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century mindset. The term *end-times* does not describe the Second Coming of Christ but the transition from the Old to New Covenants.

2. Matthew 24 should be interpreted according to the same texts and phrases found in the Old Testament and not by a Hellenized mindset foreign to the disciples at the time.
3. The terms *New Heaven* and *New Earth* speak of the gospel era which now is, climaxing at the end of this age with the Second Coming of Christ and eternity.