

The Founding of God's Messianic Kingdom Versus the Destruction of Apostate Israel

Obstacle number eight is the problem or **obstacle of context**. Now, how many times have you heard that we need to interpret the Bible in context? Again, that's very good advice, and it's something that you're going to hear me repeat, but we need to think about what that means. **In a lot of cases, we hear the word "context," and we think of our own tradition; we think of the way we do things; we think of the way we're taught to do things.** The rude awakening that we all need to have, though, is that any other context besides the context in which the biblical writers lived and wrote and did their work—any other context than that—is foreign to the Bible. That means context like evangelicalism or Roman Catholicism or the Reformation period or the puritans, those are foreign contexts to the Bible. They are not the biblical context. **The biblical context is the context that produced this thing we call the Bible**¹ (Emphasis mine—bold)

HOW DO WE KNOW THAT CHRISTIANS ARE NOT NOW LIVING IN THE LAST DAYS?

In the earlier part of my ministry, I taught that the Christian Age, not the Mosaic Age, constituted the "last days" prophesied by the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms. In other words,

¹ Michael S. Heiser, ed., *BI101 Introducing Biblical Interpretation: Contexts and Resources* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013). See Segment # 9: "Obstacle # 8—Context." **Dr. Michael S. Heiser** is a Scholar-in-Residence for Faithlife Corporation, the makers of Logos Bible Software. His varied academic background enables him to operate in the realm of critical scholarship and the wider Christian community. His experience in teaching at the undergraduate level and writing for the layperson both directly contribute to Logos' goal of adapting scholarly tools for nonspecialists. Dr. Heiser earned his PhD in Hebrew Bible and Semitic languages and holds an MA in ancient history and Hebrew studies. He is the coeditor of *Old Testament Greek Pseudepigrapha with Morphology* and *Semitic Inscriptions: Analyzed Texts and English Translations*, and can do translation work in roughly a dozen ancient languages, including Biblical Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic, Egyptian hieroglyphs, and Ugaritic cuneiform. He also specializes in Israelite religion (especially Israel's divine council), contextualizing biblical theology with Israelite and ancient Near Eastern religion, Jewish binitarianism, biblical languages, ancient Semitic languages, textual criticism, comparative philology, and Second Temple period Jewish literature. In addition, he was named the 2007 Pacific Northwest Regional Scholar by the Society of Biblical Literature.

Planet Earth will be destroyed as well as the Universe itself, and then, we will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Another view, among many scholars today, is that God will create a New Heaven and a New Earth (physical Planet Earth and Universe), and then Christians will reign for one-thousand years in what is known as the millennium. This popular belief concerning the timeframe of the “last days,” in the twenty-first century, is still alive among Christians as a whole—See the various philosophies of amillennium, pre-millennium, and post-millennium theories.² **In other words the Christian world, as a whole, is still looking for the “last days” to arrive at any time.** In spite of this sincere belief among many of God’s people, this paper seeks to uncover the meaning of this phrase (“last days”) **within the context** of the whole of God’s written Revelation.

This essay is designed to assist God’s people in arriving at the truth about the “last days” as found in the Scriptures and as employed by the inspired writers of the whole of God’s written Revelation—Old Covenant and New Covenant writings. If one wishes to comprehend the use of the “last days” terminology in the Old Covenant writings, the place to begin with is with the New Covenant writers’ interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures. In fact, the New Covenant writings (twenty-seven books) are an excellent commentary on how to interpret the Old Covenant writings. **The thrust of this study is to demonstrate that the “last days,” in both Testaments, signaled the “last days” of apostate Israel, not the “last days” of the Christian Age.** This in-depth study will illustrate from the Scriptures that the Christian Age has no end.³ To set the stage for this study, I have chosen to begin this examination with Isaiah 2:2 since it begins with “**in the last days.**” Before reading the subject matter of this investigation of “How to interpret God’s Word,” I recommend that each reader refocus his or her attention upon the introductory citation by Michael Heiser concerning CONTEXT.

HOW TO INTERPRET GOD’S WORD

As we approach the study of Isaiah 2, we *are* introduced to the future founding of God’s “new heaven and earth” (Jesus’ Messianic kingdom and the destruction of the “old heaven and earth” (end of Judaism with its Temple and sacrifices)).⁴ As a young preacher, I learned the first four verses of Isaiah 2 by memory, but I never heard or delivered a message on

²See Joseph M. Vincent II, *The Millennium: Past, Present, or Future?: A Biblical Defense for the 40 Year Transition Period* (Ardmore, OK: JaDon Publishing, 2012). See also Don Preston, “Revelation 21:1f: The New Heavens and Earth—The Promise Made to Israel,” in Don Preston, *Who Is This Babylon?* (Ardmore, OK: JaDon Productions, 2006), 143-155. This book is a must read for those seeking a more accurate reading of the Book of Revelation, which events were foretold by the Hebrew Scriptures.

³ Earlier this year (2019), I was invited to speak at the Preterist Pilgrims Lectureship (Ardmore, OK., July 2019) on the timeframe of the “Last Days” in both testaments. Since I had to cancel my participation because of sickness, I decided to still write my thoughts on this most important subject. I highly recommend that the readers of my study purchase the DVDs of this seminar from Dr. Don Preston. The lectures are now available on UTube.

⁴ I am indebted to William Bell for his excellent study on God’s Kingdom: see William Bell, “Kingdom of God Established in Judgment: Isaiah 2:2” on YOUTUBE.COM. This study by William is about 30 minutes; yet, this message by him is an in-depth study as to the establishment of God’s Messianic Kingdom, which confirms that the “last days” ended in AD 70.

the whole of the second chapter of Isaiah along with Chapters 3—4. How can we, as the people of God, approach the Scriptures as we seek to understand the Word of God more accurately? Haddon W. Robinson,⁵ in his excellent book on *Biblical Preaching*, wrote that “perceptive application is accurate exegesis.”⁶ Since this study of Isaiah 2 is prophetic in nature, we must be on our guard that we do not find hidden meanings that are not buried in the text.

It is not uncommon for interpreters to find implications that are not in the Scripture under consideration. In other words, their preconceived ideas exist only in the mind of the interpreter. This is especially true with the study of eschatology (end times). In other words, particular “verses can become launching pads for the preacher’s own opinions.”⁷ As interpreters of the Scriptures, we must allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. It is in this vein that Louis Berkhof⁸ wrote the following admonition concerning Calvin’s (1509-1564) method of exegesis as he approached any given text: “**the first business of an interpreter to let his author say what he does say, instead of attributing to him what we think he ought to say.**”⁹ Berkhof also called attention to a distinction between what the Bible teaches versus the teachings of inherited traditions from the so-called authoritative interpretations by the so-called established ecclesiastical Church of one’s own historical background:

*The Reformers believed the Bible to be the inspired Word of God. But, however strict their conception of inspiration, they conceived of it as organic rather than mechanical. In certain particulars, they even revealed a remarkable freedom in handling Scriptures. At the same time, **they regarded the Bible as the highest authority, and as the final court of appeal in all theological disputes.** Over against the infallibility of the Church they placed the infallibility of the Word. Their position is perfectly evident from the statement that the Church does not determine what the Scriptures teach, but the Scriptures determine what the Church ought to teach.”¹⁰ (Emphasis mine—bold and underlining)*

CAREFUL READING OF THE TEXT: AUDIENCE RELEVANCE

⁵**Haddon Robinson** is the Harold John Ockenga Distinguished Professor of Preaching at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He received his ThM from Dallas Theological Seminary, an MA from Southern Methodist University, and a PhD from the University of Illinois. Robinson served as director of the Dallas Youth for Christ (1952–55), associate pastor of the First Baptist Church in Medford, Oregon (1956–58), and an instructor of speech at the University of Illinois (1960–62). He was president of Denver Conservative Baptist Seminary and taught homiletics at Dallas Theological Seminary for nineteen years. He is also the editor of *Biblical Sermons: How Twelve Preachers Apply the Principles of Biblical Preaching*.

⁶ Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1980), 90. Seventeen years ago (started on April 2002), I and another individual read this entire book together over a period of several weeks. We met once a week for ten weeks at IHOP in Montgomery, AL to discuss what we had read and our reactions to the each chapter (10 Chapters).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁸ **Louis Berkhof** (1873–1957) was a Reformed theologian whose works remain highly influential. He taught at Calvin Theological Seminary from 1906 and served as its president from 1931–1944.

⁹ Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation: Sacred Hermeneutics*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1950), 27.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

One of the most significant obstacles in interpreting the New Testament writings surrounds our ignorance of the Hebrew Scriptures in context.¹¹ Without an understanding of the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms, Christians will continue to fail in their reading and understanding of the New Covenant writings by the Apostles, Jesus's brothers (Jude and James), and one of Paul's companions (Luke). It is in this vein of deciphering the Hebrew Scriptures that Jesus discussed and explained to His disciples before His ascension following His Resurrection about the importance of the entire Hebrew Scriptures in understanding the "last days" of apostate Israel. Luke writes about this episode:

He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: **Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.**"⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.⁴⁶ He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,⁴⁷ and **repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.**"⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." (24:44-49)

Just a casual reading of this text reveals that Jesus cited from Isaiah 2:2-3. This final encounter of Jesus occurred with His disciples in AD 33. Remember, Isaiah began his ministry during the reign of Uzzah (792-740 BC, Isaiah 1:1). Following this time frame of his ministry, he then addressed Israel as "Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth" (1:2). "heavens" and "earth" were metaphors of Israel, not the physical Universe. As we approach Isaiah 2:2-4, we need to focus on "last days," "mountain," "established," "nations," and "the law will go out from Jerusalem." This prophecy was delivered about seven-hundred years before Jesus approached His disciples in Galilee:

In the **last days** the **mountain** of the LORD's temple will be **established** as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and **all nations** will stream to it.³ Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." **The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.**⁴ He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. (Isaiah 2:2-4)

Just a perusal of Chapter 2 opens with a vision of a restored Zion (the remnant) in the "last days," not the end of the Christian age, which is not the end of Planet Earth. God issued a **warning of judgment** to apostate Israel that He called "heaven" and "earth" in Isaiah 1:1, which judgment would take place in the first century. This same warning had been issued through Moses in 1406 BC concerning the restoration of a "remnant" as well as the destruction of Israel for its apostasy (see Deuteronomy 28—32). **God foretold the events that would**

¹¹See Don Preston for an excellent start in seeing or interpreting the New Testament Scriptures from the Hebrew Scriptures. I suggest that one begins his or her study with the following commentary on Revelation: Don K. Preston, *Who Is This Babylon?* (Ardmore, OK: JaDon Productions, 2006). This book made me aware of the importance of interpreting the New Testament in light of the Hebrew Scriptures.

transpire between **February AD 67 and August AD 70**, which period equaled forty-two months or 1,260 days, which time frame is also called “time, times, and half a time” (Deuteronomy 32:21; Daniel 12:7; Revelation 11:1-2; 12:4-6, 13-14). God revealed the following to Moses as he was about to complete his ministry of forty-years in the wilderness wanderings (1446 to 1406 BC):

“I will hide my face from them,” he said, “and see what their end will be; for **they are a perverse generation, children who are unfaithful**.²¹ They made me jealous by what is no god and angered me with their worthless idols. I will make them envious by those who are not a people; I will make them angry by a nation that has no understanding.²² **For a fire will be kindled by my wrath**, one that burns down to the realm of the dead below. It will devour the earth and its harvests and set afire the foundations of the mountains.²³ “I will heap calamities on them and spend my arrows against them.²⁴ I will send wasting famine against them, consuming pestilence and deadly plague; I will send against them the fangs of wild beasts, the venom of vipers that glide in the dust. (32:20-24)

Just a little over fourteen-hundred years later, John the Baptist appeared on the scene and spoke of this wrath in his confrontation with the Pharisees and the Sadducees who came to the place where he was baptizing. He asked them: “Who warned you to flee from the **coming wrath**” (Matthew 3:7). This section of Scripture (Deuteronomy 32:20-24) is an excellent commentary on the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24—25; Mark 13; and Luke 21). Just a little over fourteen-hundred years after this warning by God to Moses, Peter on the Day of Pentecost (AD 33) echoed the words of Moses: “With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, ‘save yourselves from this **corrupt generation**’” (Acts 2:40). When Christians compare Scripture with Scripture, we, immediately, perceive a correlation between “A **perverse generation**” in Dt. 32:20 and “**this corrupt generation**” in Acts 2:40. Because of the corruptness of Israel, Jesus, shortly before His crucifixion, foretold what would happen to the Jews of His day (“last days” of Israel): “Therefore I tell you that **the kingdom of God will be taken away from you** [the Jews] and given to a people [Gentiles] who will produce its fruit” (Matthew 21:43).

The prophetic events as foretold by the prophets were now in the beginning phase of the complete fulfillment of all Messianic prophecy—beginning with the Book of Genesis and ending with the Book of Malachi (English arrangement of the thirty-nine books in the Hebrew Canon. The full bloom of the Messianic kingdom came to maturity with the overthrow of apostate Israel in AD 70. It was then that John, one of the Twelve, wrote: “**Then** I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (Revelation 21:1; see also Isaiah 65:17). As Jesus was on His way to His crucifixion, He encountered “daughters of Jerusalem” who were weeping about the impending event. Yet, He took the time to warn them about the final state of apostate Israel’s “last days” and the horrors that would be experienced as a result of the carnage. **He echoed this warning by citing from Isaiah 2:10:**

Jesus turned and said to them, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children.²⁹ **For the time will come when you will say**, ‘Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ [See the Olivet Discourse—

Matthew 24-25]³⁰ Then “**they will say to the mountains, “Fall on us!” and to the hills, “Cover us!”**” (**Luke 23:28-30**); [See also Isaiah 2:10 and Revelation 6:12-17].

Apparently, Peter had **not** forgotten this admonition. In his Second Epistle, he encouraged the believers to saturate their minds with the Hebrew Scriptures. We, too, should listen and apply his admonition to our own study of God’s written Revelation. Within the following citation from Peter, we hear an echo of Luke 24:44 concerning Jesus’ final admonition:

We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and **you will do well to pay attention to it**, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. ²⁰ Above all, **you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation** [*ἰδίας ἐπιλύσεως, idias epilyseōs*, “own solution”] **of things**.²¹ For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:19-21)

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM: IN THE LAST DAYS OF JUDAISM

Just a perusal of the prophets reveal that they foretold the **coming of God’s Messiah**, the **establishment** of God’s new Messianic kingdom, the “**last days**” of Israel’s existence for its harlotry, its **rejection of God’s Messiah**, and the “**about**” to come judgment (**God’s wrath**) upon Israel in AD 70, which coming revealed that God’s foreordained eschatological judgment, as well as His prediction of the salvation for the remnant was about to take place. Once more, we should tune our ears to hear what Peter wrote to the believers in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1 Peter 1:1):

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us **new birth** into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God’s power **until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time** [“**last days**”]. ⁶ In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ **for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls**. ¹⁰ **Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, ¹¹ trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow**. ¹² It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, **when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven**. Even angels long to look into these things. (1:3-12)

In this same Epistle, Peter asserts that “the end [τέλος, *telos*] of all things is near” (1 Peter 4:7). Peter used the Greek word τέλος to draw attention to the final “**end**” of Judaism that has drawn near. Just before he made this statement, he alerted his readers to the fact of the Jews’ judgment: “But they will have to give account to him **who is ready** to judge the living and the dead” (4:5). In other words, the Jews were dead spiritually (see Ephesians 4:1-7). Peter states emphatically that “**the end has drawn near**” [ἤγγικεν, *ēngiken*, perfect tense],¹² which is the end [τέλος, *telos*] that the prophets foretold. As the “**end**” of apostate Israel was approaching, the author of the Book of Hebrews wrote: “By calling this covenant ‘new,’ he has made the first one obsolete and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear” (Hebrew 8:13).

The “**last time**” in First Peter 1:5 is equivalent to the “**last days**” (בְּאַחֲרֵי הַיָּמִים, *b’e’ ā·h’ā·rīt’ hāy·yā·mīm’*) of the Old Covenant world of Judaism. Peter, probably wrote this Epistle from Jerusalem about AD 65. His wording should grab our attention as he pens the following words to encourage those who trust in God about the upcoming “tribulation”: “who through faith are shielded by God’s power **until the coming of the salvation** that **is ready to be revealed in the last time.**” The words of Richard B. Hays¹³ captures this concept of the already/but not yet eschatological judgment:

Because Paul and his readers stand at **the turn of the ages**, they must envision their present experience both as the fulfillment of the scriptural figures and, at the same time, as a hint of the **eschatological consummation** that is still to come. Thus, Paul’s reading of Scripture is “**bifocal**,” corresponding to the dialectical (“already/not yet”) character of his eschatology.¹⁴

For a second time, “**The salvation**” (ἡ σωτηρία, *hē sōtēria*) should capture our attention. The early church was still waiting for the full bloom of redemption, which would come to full fruition with Christ’s Second Coming to execute judgment upon apostate Israel.¹⁵ Within fifteen years, from the time of the writing of First Corinthians (AD 55 from Ephesus), Paul penned the following words about the near destruction for Israel as a religious and political entity. We should listen carefully to his words:

What I mean, brothers and sisters, is that **the time is short** [only fifteen years left for the total destruction of the Old Covenant world of Judaism in AD 70]. From now on those who have wives

¹² ἤγγικεν, *ēngiken*, is from the Greek word ἐγγίζω (*engizō*), which carries the idea of “to be moving toward and not be far distant from a moment in time” (“I come near, approach”): verb, perfect, active, indicative, 3rd person, singular

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¹⁴ Richard B. Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel’s Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 11–12.

¹⁵ For an excellent work concerning the transition between the two covenant worlds, see Dan Dery, *The Transition Between Two covenants* (Ardmore, OK: JaDon Management, Inc., 2018) and Dan Dery, *The Case for the Second Coming of Christ: An Investigation into the Biblical Evidence* (Ardmore, OK: JaDon Management, Inc., 2019). I also recommend Dr. Jimmy Henry, *There Is A Better Way: The Biblical Transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant, A Study of Hebrews* (USA, 2018)

should live as if they do not; ³⁰ those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; ³¹ those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. **For this world in its present form is passing away** [the world of Judaism]. (1 Corinthians 7:29-31; see also Hebrews 8:13)

In Paul's Corinthian correspondence, he informed them that they were living at the "turning point of the ages."¹⁶ Again, Paul based his remarks about Israel's demise upon Israel's earlier history, which history presented a warning to the then present day nation: "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom **the culmination of the ages has come**" (1 Corinthians 10:11, AD 70). As stated earlier, Peter wrote: "The **end** of all things is near" (1 Peter 4:7). In 1 Peter 5:1, he spoke of himself as "one who also will share in **the glory to be revealed.**" The English translation ("to be revealed") does not give the force of the Greek text, which text reads: "the glory **being about** to be revealed" (τῆς **μελλούσης** ἀποκαλύπτεσθαι δόξης, *tēs **mellousēs** apokalyptesthai doxēs*).¹⁷ Approximately two years after Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, he penned the following words toward the conclusion of his Epistle to the Christians in Rome (AD 57) concerning the final fulfillment of Daniel 9:24-27.¹⁸ He encouraged them to understand the significance of the "present time" concerning the "nearness" of the full bloom of God's salvation that was about to appear. We who have ears to hear and eyes to see should reflect carefully upon the following words of Paul to the Christians in Rome:

And do this, understanding the present time: **The hour** has **already come** for you to wake up from your slumber, because **our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.** ¹² The night is nearly over; **the day is almost here** [the full bloom of the Messianic Kingdom—Daniel 2:44]. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. ¹⁴ Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh. (Romans 13:11-14)

The full bloom of **God's kingdom and glory was "about"** (μέλλω, *mellō*, "I am about to") **to be fulfilled** with the coming of Christ in judgment against the world of Judaism, which judgment (God's wrath—Matthew 3:7) began in February AD 67 and ended in August AD 70. "The author of Hebrews calls attention to "Mount Zion" as he brings his writings to a close concerning the "the **establishment** of God's Kingdom. This Messianic kingdom would take effect during the final "**last days**" of apostate Israel. God's eschatological judgment upon Israel in AD 70 is mentioned by Daniel also (12:7, "time, times, and half a time"). This Epistle was written before the destruction of Jerusalem (possibly about AD 64). The following remarks

¹⁶ Richard B. Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination*, 11.

¹⁷ **Μελλούσης**: verb, present, active, participle, feminine, singular, genitive; from μέλλω (*mellō*): "to be about to."

¹⁸ For a detailed study of the "seventy weeks," see Dallas Burdette, "Gabriel Discloses God's Prophetic Seventy Weeks," in Dallas Burdette, *Commentary on Daniel: An Unraveling of God's Messianic Kingdom* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2016), 330-346.

concern the Old Covenant World of Judaism passing away and the New Covenant World of Christianity assuming its full bloom:

But you have come to **Mount Zion**, to the city of the living God, the **heavenly Jerusalem**. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly,²³ to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,²⁴ to **Jesus the mediator of a new covenant**, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.²⁵ See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?²⁶ At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.”²⁷ The words “**once more**” indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.²⁸ Therefore, **since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken**, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe,²⁹ for our “God is a consuming fire.” (Hebrew 12:22-29)

CHURCH: A VISIBLE REPRESENTATIVE OF GOD’S KINGDOM

Let us not forget that before this end of apostate Israel, Jesus called attention to an event that would transpire before the end of Israel would materialize (AD 70). For example, Jesus made the following statement before He was arrested: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole **world** as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14. The Greek word for *world* (**κόσμος**, *kosmos*) is not in the Greek text. Jesus used the Greek word **οικουμένη** (*oikoumenē*), that is to say, the land that is being “inhabited, which is equivalent to the Roman world. In other words, the Gospel would be proclaimed within the parameters of the Roman Empire before God’s catastrophic judgment against a “perverse nation.”

This coming of Matthew 24:14 is a reference to His “Second Coming,” which “coming” occurred in AD 70. Remember, Jesus began His ministry in AD 30. When He called His Twelve disciples to evangelize the children of Israel, He told them: “You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to **the end** will be saved.²³ When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. Truly I tell you, **you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes**” [Second Coming] (Matthew 10:22-23). Toward the end of His ministry in AD 33, He mentioned His Second Coming again: “Truly I tell you, **some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom**” (16:28).

Do we have saints living today that are two-thousand years old? Luke reports a final question by His disciples concerning the kingdom: “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom of Israel” (Acts 1:6). This is the same kingdom that Jesus taught His disciples to pray for its coming as recorded from His Sermon on the Mount: “This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, **your kingdom come**’” (Matthew 6:9-10a; see also 3:2; 4:17). As Jesus and His disciples were on their last journey to Jerusalem (AD 33), He told His disciples that upon the truth that Peter confessed concerning His identity that not

even the “**gates of Hades**” could prevent its coming (Matthew 16:17-20). The apostate Jewish leaders could not prevent the establishment of His kingdom that the prophets foretold (Isaiah 2:2; Daniel 2:44). Is there a distinction between the “church” and the “kingdom”? To answer this question, we turn our attention, once more, to the prophecy of Isaiah.

Chapter two of Isaiah introduces the coming of God’s New Humanity, which today is referred to as the church (ἐκκλησία, *ekklēsia*, “**a community, congregation, assembly**”). This Scripture (Isaiah 2:1-4) is associated with Acts 2. Jesus referred to this section of Scripture as reported by Luke (Luke 24:44-49). The prophet Isaiah stated that “The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (2:3). With the coming of Jesus as presented in the New Covenant writings, the Jewish sect was transcended and superseded by the universality of the New Humanity in Christ. The ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia*) of Jesus is God’s people (2 Peter 2:4-10). As Jesus took His final journey to Jerusalem (AD 33), He told His disciples that upon the truth that Peter had confessed concerning the identity of Himself that He would build His ἐκκλησία, **which Greek word is translated with the English word “church.”** God has purchased to Himself a “new congregation.”

The Apostles constituted the first *ekklēsia* upon which the Christian community continued to build. The Old Heaven and Earth (*ekklēsia*) passed away (Hebrews 8:13; the World of Judaism). Within the Holy Scriptures, we are confronted with the words “kingdom” (βασιλεία, *basileia*) and “church” (ἐκκλησία, *ekklēsia*). The converts on the Day of Pentecost constituted the formation of the eschatological community of God’s redeemed that Jesus announced on His final journey to Jerusalem (Matthew 16:17-19). On the Day of Pentecost, Peter pointed to the formation of God’s new eschatological community as predicted by Joel (Acts 2:14-21; Joel 2:28-32). During Christ’s beginning ministry (AD 30), He taught His disciples to pray for the kingdom to come (Matthew 6:9-10), which both John the Baptist (3:2) and Jesus the Messiah (4:17) announce as each began his ministry. Again, we ask, **is there a distinction between the two** (kingdom and church)? In my judgment, I believe that Fenton John Anthony Hort¹⁹ is correct when he writes:

One large department of our Lord’s teaching, sometimes spoken of as if it directly belonged to our subject, may, I believe, be safely laid aside. In the verse following that which we have been considering, our Lord says to St Peter “I will give thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.” **Without going into details of interpretation, we can at once see that the relation between the two verses implies some important relation between the Ecclesia and the Kingdom of Heaven:** but the question is, what relation? The simplest inference from the language used would be that the office committed to St Peter and the rest with respect to the Ecclesia, would enable him and them to fulfil the office here described as committed to him, with respect to the Kingdom of Heaven. But the question is whether this is a sufficient account of the matter. **Since Augustine’s time the Kingdom**

¹⁹ **Fenton John Anthony Hort (1828-1892)** was an Irish theologian, editor, and Bible translator and commentator. He is best known for his critical edition of *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, assembled with Brooke Westcott. The great grandson of Archbishop of Tuam Josiah Hort, F.J.A. Hort was born in Dublin in 1828. He attended Rugby School, went on to Cambridge, and became a fellow there in 1852. In 1870, he was appointed a member of the committee for revising the King James New Testament, and in 1871 delivered his Hulsean lectures, later entitled *The Way, the Truth, the Life*. In 1878, he became Hulsean Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, and in 1887 became Lady Margaret’s Professor of Divinity. He died in 1892 in Cambridge

of Heaven or Kingdom of God, of which we read so often in the Gospels, has been simply identified with the Christian Ecclesia. This is a not [an] unnatural deduction from some of our Lord's sayings on this subject taken by themselves; but it cannot, I think, hold its ground when the whole range of His teaching about it is comprehensively examined. **We may speak of the Ecclesia as the visible representative of the Kingdom of God, or as the primary instrument of its sway, or under other analogous forms of language.** But we are not justified in identifying the one with the other, so as to be able to apply directly to the Ecclesia whatever is said in the Gospels about the Kingdom of Heaven or of God.²⁰

The New Testament *ekklēsia* is not an “it,” “a thing,” nor is it an “institution,” but rather, it is a unity of persons, that is to say, a communion of people. **How do we, in the twenty-first century view the “church”?** Do we view the “church” as a fellowship with Christ and a fellowship with the Holy Spirit? God has given to his New Humanity (the church) the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18). God’s New Israel is to proclaim the kingdom of God. Once more, have we reflected recently upon the words of Peter’s confession and the words of Jesus about His “church” as recorded in Matthew 16? Remember, it was upon the truth that Peter confessed that Jesus informed Peter that He would build His New Israel—the *ekklēsia*. James, our Lord’s brother, understood Jesus’ statement. We are blessed that Luke records a part of a conversation that took place during the Jerusalem conference (Acts 15) about the acceptance of the Gentiles into God’s New Commonwealth, that is to say, God’s New Israel. James relied upon the prophet Amos to substantiate his position:

The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. ¹³When they finished, **James spoke** up. “Brothers,” he said, “listen to me. ¹⁴Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. ¹⁵**The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:** ¹⁶“After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, ¹⁷that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things’ — ¹⁸things known from long ago [citation is from **Amos 9:11-12**]. ¹⁹“It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. ²⁰Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. ²¹For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.” (Acts 15:12-21)

²⁰ Fenton John Anthony Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia: A Course of Lectures on the Early History and Early Conceptions of the Ecclesia and Four Sermons* (London; New York: Macmillan and Co., Limited; The Macmillan Company, 1897), 18–19. I highly recommend this book!! I received my copy as a gift from Solon Whitehead (12-06-1969). Another excellent work on understanding the meaning of the word “church” is by Emil Brunner (1889-1966), *The Misunderstanding of the Church* (Lutterworth Press: London, 1952). Brunner was a Swiss Protestant Reformed theologian.

APOCALIPTIC LANGUAGE: SYMBOLIC/FIGURATIVE

Have we studied the prophecies of Amos (760 BC) and Joel (835 BC)? If not, we should read their prophecies because both men foretold the coming of the Messiah. For example, Peter, fifty days after the Resurrection of Jesus, cited from the prophet Joel concerning God's promise to pour out His Spirit in the "last days" (Joel 2:28-32). Ten days before Pentecost, Jesus reminded His disciples to stay in Jerusalem for the out pouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:6-9). Luke, reported the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy as it came to fruition (2:1-4). The following citation from Joel should cause us to also reflect upon the prophet Isaiah (739 BC) who predicted God's coming salvation by grace. We should read and reread the prediction of Joel as he reveals events that would transpire about eight hundred years after his prophecy. We should read Joel's prophecy along with the prophecy of Isaiah 2:

And **afterward**, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. ²⁹ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit **in those days**. ³⁰ I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. ³¹ **The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD**. ³² And everyone [both Jews and Gentiles] who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls. (Joel 2:28-32)

In the reading of this text, have we literalized the apocalyptic language to the heavenly bodies of our Universe? Was the sun literally turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD"? We cannot read Joel's language without a consciousness that he employed apocalyptic judgment language, which language the New Testament authors employed as future during their ministry (AD 70). Remember, Jesus, too, echoed this same sentiment in His Olivet (Add, "Discourse") (Matthew 24—25) as He described in great detail concerning the overthrow of apostate Israel. He, too, employed the same kind of apocalyptic language that Joel employed: "Immediately after the **distress of those days** **the sun will be darkened**, and **the moon will not give its light**; the **stars will fall from the sky**, and the heavenly bodies **will be shaken**" (Matthew 24:29).

Both Joel, Isaiah, and Jesus utilized apocalyptic language in describing the overthrow of nations, which language not only included apostate Israel but other nations. When Joel predicted the overthrow of Israel by the Assyrians in 721 BC, he described the devastation this way: "Before them the **earth shakes**, the **heavens tremble**, the **sun and moon are darkened**, and the stars no longer shine. ¹¹ The LORD thunders at the head of his army [the Assyrians]; his forces are beyond number, and mighty is the army that obeys his command. **The day of the LORD is great**; it is **dreadful**. Who can endure it? (Joel 2:10-11). If we fail to read the Hebrew Scriptures without the lens of an eschatological hermeneutics concerning the coming of Christ and the final demise of apostate Israel, we will utterly fail to interpret the New Testament authors accurately. Remember, Chapter 2 in Joel's prophecy is applied by Peter in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost to the nation of Israel. When the Holy Spirit was poured out on Jesus'

disciples as predicted by Jesus (Acts 1:7-8), the crowds accused His disciples of drunkenness (2:15). Peter's response to their accusations was to cite the **prophet Joel**:

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. ¹⁵ **These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning!** ¹⁶ **No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:** ¹⁷ "In the **last days**, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. ¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. ¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. ²⁰ **The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.** ²¹ And everyone [both Jews and Gentiles] who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (2:14-21)

GOD'S MESSANIC KINGDOM: NO END

Unfortunately, many Christians take this apocalyptic language literally, which view advances the notion that God will ultimately destroy Planet Earth along with the whole solar system and reestablish the nation of Israel with its Temple and animal sacrifices in Jerusalem. Yet, **there is not one thread of evidence that ever speaks of the end of Planet Earth**. For example, Isaiah, following the establishment of God's New Covenant and the demise of apostate Israel in AD 70, he states that God's New Humanity will never end:

For to us a child is born [virgin birth], to us a son is given [Deity], and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ **Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.** He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this. (Isaiah 9:6-7)

Daniel, too, spoke of the kingdom of Christ as having no end:

In the time of those kings, the **God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed**, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. ⁴⁵ This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces. "**The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future.** The dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy." (Daniel 2:44-45)

Once more, **how do we interpret the apocalyptic judgment language of Joel 2?** As stated above, Jesus employed the same type language as He, Himself, foretold the utter destruction of apostate Israel in AD 70 in His Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24—25). If we do not know the writings of the **Law**, the **Prophets**, and the **Psalms**, we will not correctly interpret the writers of the New Covenant writings. For instance, Isaiah, through the Holy Spirit, foretold the demise of nations, which language, too, sounds like the end of Planet Earth:

Come near, you nations, and listen; pay attention, you peoples! **Let the earth hear**, and all that is in it, the world, and all that comes out of it! ²The LORD is angry with all nations; his wrath is on all their armies. He will totally destroy them, he will give them over to slaughter. ³Their slain will be thrown out, their dead bodies will stink; the mountains will be soaked with their blood. ⁴**All the stars in the sky will be dissolved and the heavens rolled up like a scroll**; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree. (Isaiah 34:1-4)

Following this warning, Isaiah also then called attention to the destruction of Edom, which destruction sounds like the destruction of Judaism in AD 70. Once more we are introduced to apocalyptic language that is employed in the Olivet Discourse as well as the Book of Revelation:

For the LORD has a day of vengeance, a year of retribution, to uphold Zion's cause. ⁹Edom's streams will be turned into pitch, her dust into burning sulfur; her land will become blazing pitch! ¹⁰**It will not be quenched night or day; its smoke will rise forever**. From generation to generation it will lie desolate; no one will ever pass through it again. (Isaiah 34:8-10)

Is Edom still burning? This same kind of language is used to describe the complete overthrow of apostate Israel. **This language sounds like the same language used in the Book of Revelation to picture the complete annihilation of the Old Covenant World of Judaism**, which is also described by the author of the Book of Hebrews: "By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear (Hebrews 8:13). The language of Isaiah 34 is similar to the language of the Book of Revelation that addresses the overthrow of apostate Israel. For example, John penned the following words: "And the devil, who deceived them, was **thrown into the lake of burning sulfur**, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be **tormented day and night for ever and ever**" (Revelation 20:10).²¹ I call attention, once more, to the wording of Isaiah 34:4 in which the fall of Edom was pictured as "the starry host will fall like **withered leaves** from the vine, like **shriveled figs** from the fig tree." When the sixth seal, in the Book of Revelation, was opened, we observe similar imagery as mentioned in Isaiah:

I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, ¹³and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. ¹⁴**The heavens receded like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place**. ¹⁵Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. ¹⁶They called to the mountains and the rocks, "**Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!**" ¹⁷For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?" (Revelation 6:12-17)

We need to reread Joel 2:28-32 in context with Acts 2, Matthew 24—25, and Revelation 6:12-17. Joel uses apocalyptic language to describe first-century events. How do we read Revelation 6:12-17? The sixth seal is the fulfillment of what Joel foretold eight hundred years

²¹ See Chapter 1 (The Second Death) in this study for a more detailed concept of a supposed literal lake of fire in which people will be tormented forever and ever.

earlier. At the time John wrote his Apocalypse, the events recorded in 6:12-17 would occur shortly, not two-thousand years later or longer. How do we know that this episode occurred within the first century? The answer is to be found in the “prologue” (Revelation 1:1-3) and the “epilogue” (Revelation 22:10) of Jesus’ revelation to John. Also, the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24—25) is a miniaturized version of the Book of Revelation. On the other hand, the Book of Revelation is an enlargement of the Olivet Discourse. In Jesus’ description of the final overthrow of apostate Israel, He told His disciples that the “abomination of Desolation” prophesied by Daniel (12:11; Matthew 24:15) would occur in their generation (“**this generation**,” Matthew 24: 34):

So if anyone tells you, ‘There he is, out in the wilderness,’ do not go out; or, ‘Here he is, in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. ²⁷ For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ²⁸ Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather. ²⁹ “Immediately after the distress of those days “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’ ³⁰ “Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. ³¹ And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. ³² “Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. ³³ **Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door.** ³⁴ Truly I tell you, **this generation** will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³⁵ Heaven and earth [apostate Israel] will pass away, but my words will never pass away. (Matthew 24:26-35)

“When you [first-century people] see all these things” should alert the reader to read what came before the words of Jesus in 24:26-35. In this citation, He told His disciples that the happenings just numerated were “**near and right at the door.**” Jesus then informed His disciples that these catastrophic events would occur within “**this generation.**” Once more, we need to reflect upon the following remarks by Jesus as He discloses the “time of the end” of the Mosaic dispensation:

And **this gospel of the kingdom** will be preached in the whole world [Roman Empire] as a testimony to all nations, and **then the end will come [end of Judaism].** ¹⁵ “So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel [See Daniel 12:11]—let the reader understand—¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁷ Let no one on the housetop go down to take anything out of the house. ¹⁸ Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. ¹⁹ **How dreadful it will be in those days** for pregnant women and nursing mothers! ²⁰ Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. ²¹ For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. ²² “If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect [the remnant] those days will be shortened. ²³ At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or, ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. (24:14-23)

If Jesus(☺) words had to do with the end of Planet Earth, we wonder why the saints were told “flee to the mountains.” Again, what difference would it make if a woman was pregnant? Why did Jesus warn His disciples about not going back to get their “cloak” if He had

reference to the end of Planet Earth? Shortly after these words, Jesus said that these things would occur within the present generation of His disciples (“**this generation**”). Luke gives some additional information, which data adds more clarity to the impending judgment as recorded by Matthew:

When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. ²¹ Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. ²² **For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written** [Deuteronomy 28—32; Isaiah 2—4; 65:1-16; Daniel 12:1-13]. ²³ How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. ²⁴ They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. **Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles [forty-two months] are fulfilled.** (Luke 21:20-24); See also Daniel 12:3 and Revelation 11:1-3)

God assigned forty-two months for “**the time, times, and half a time of the Gentiles**” to complete their mission in the total destruction of the nation of Israel—God’s divorce announcement concerning the first covenant (Hebrews 13:8; Hosea 1—2). We now turn our attention, once more, to Isaiah, Chapter 2. In this chapter, Isaiah informs us that God not only foretold the coming of the Messianic Kingdom (2:1-4), but, at the same time, He also foretold the utter destruction of apostate Israel who played the harlot (2:10-21). This complete, utter, and consummate destruction of Israel, the Holy City, occurred in AD 70 according to the Book of Revelation and the Book of Daniel (9:24-27). Isaiah also reveals that this Messianic kingdom would have no end (Isaiah 9:6-7). In this section, he writes about Jesus and the increase of His government: “Of the increase of his government and peace **there will be no end**” (9:7). Just a little over seven-hundred years later, an angel appeared to Mary, the soon to be the mother of Jesus, and said:

“Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and **he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.**” (Luke 1:30-33)

GOD’S INTENT FOR THE CHURCH

Approximately sixty-two years after this announcement by an angel (Luke 1), Paul wrote to the Christians in Ephesus concerning the eternal nature of Christ’s kingdom and the purpose of the “church” in God’s scheme of redemption. Paul penned the following words that should resonate over and over in our minds” “... to him be glory **in the church** and **in Christ Jesus** throughout all generations, **for ever and ever!** Amen” (Ephesians 3:21). The Greek text “for ever and ever” is literally “of the age of the ages” (τοῦ αἰῶνος τῶν αἰώνων, *tou aiōnos tōn aiōnōn*). It was God’s intent that His church (ἐκκλησία, *ekklēsia*) should make known His kingdom (βασιλεία, *basileia*). Again, we should weigh carefully Paul’s words:

Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ,⁹ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.¹⁰ **His intent was that now, through the church,** the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,¹¹ **according to his eternal purpose** that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.¹² In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.¹³ I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory. (Ephesians 3:8-13)

Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome about house churches (Romans 16). As fellow-believers in the twenty-first century, we, too, unite in free association with one another to create a congregation. **As we reflect upon the nature of the church, we should keep in mind that the church is built from above, not from below.** The church did not have its origin or source in men and women, but in God. The church is not a denomination but a collective body of individuals designed to proclaim God's way of salvation "in" and "through" Christ. The Body of Christ consists of those who live by faith. Once more, how do we view the church? Are we conscious that the church is the divine vehicle of God's love (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19-20)? We are to make known the kingdom of God by words and deeds (2 Corinthians 5:14—6:1-2).

The church represents the reality of God's New Creation. As a result of our rebirth, God has ordained that the church is to carry forward the work of Christ our Savior. As we gather on Sundays, we represent a worshipping community and a new life in Christ. Worship is not just limited to the Sunday gathering of God's people, but worship represents the whole life of every believer who is a worshipper of the One True God. The church is the visible representation of God's New Messianic Kingdom. Each congregation of believers represent a sanctuary of God. The whole **ἐκκλησία** (*ekklēsia*) shares alike in that transmission of evangelism. In its relation to the world, the church is a missionary work.

As state above, Isaiah, following his announcement about God's New Messianic kingdom, he announced the future demise of the Jewish covenant tht God entered into with the Jewish people through Moses. Chapters 3 through 4 of Isaiah are a reiteration of God's promise to overthrow apostate Israel as foretold by Moses as it was revealed to him by God's Spirit (Deuteronomy 32). Isaiah describes the Day of the Lord at the consummation of the Last Days. It is significant that **not** one of the Old Covenant writers advanced the notion that they, themselves, were living in the Last Days. On the other hand, the writers of the New Covenant said that they were living in the Last Days. The author of the Book of Hebrews stated very clearly that Jesus appeared in the Last Days of the Old Covenant World of Judaism: "In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways,² but in these **last days** he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe" (Hebrews 1:1–2). It is in this same vein that James (our Lord's brother) wrote concerning the end times:

Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains.⁸ You too, be patient

and stand firm, because **the Lord's coming is near**.⁹ Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. **The Judge is standing at the door!** (James 5:7-9)

The first-century church is announcing that God's kingdom is near! The eschatological judgment is just around the corner, which judgment would inaugurate the full-blown kingdom that Daniel had foretold. John, one of the Twelve, penned the following words: "Dear children, this is the **last hour**; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. **This is how we know it is the last hour**" (1 John 2:18). Peter, as he closes his First Epistle writes: "For **it is time for judgment to begin with God's household**; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17). Over again, we need to reread the words of Jesus' revelation to John concerning the nearness (LAST DAYS) of Christ's Second Coming in the first century:

The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must **soon** take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,² who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.³ Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the **time is near**. (Revelation 1:1-3).

The Greek word for soon is **ἐν τάχει** (*en tachei*, pronounced: in *tä kāy*), which word means "with speed." Then, in verse 3, Jesus uses the Greek word **ἐγγύς** (*engys*, pronounced: *eng goose*), which word means "near." As Jesus concludes His forecast of the destruction of Babylon the harlot, which is none other than Jerusalem (Revelation 17-18), He, once more tells John that He is coming quickly (**ἐν τάχει** (*en tachei*) [Revelation 22:6]. In 22:8, He states emphatically that he is "coming quickly" (22:8). And, finally, as Jesus closes His Revelation to John, He states, "I am coming quickly" (**ἔρχομαι ταχύ**, *erchomai tachy*, pronounce: *ēr kō my tä kou*).

MIRACLES AND THE LAST DAYS

What place did miracles play in the establishment of the church? What relationship do miracles have with the Last Days? Miracles confirmed the ministry of Jesus and His Apostles (Hebrews 2:1-4). How could individuals know for certain that Jesus is the One that the prophets predicted to come in order to rescue men and women from "spiritual death" (Ephesians 2:1-10) and give them eternal life (John 3:16)? **It seems to me that God has never asked anyone to believe anything without first making it credible to the mind through the miraculous.** When John the Baptist was arrested, he sent some of his disciples to inquire of Jesus as to His true identity. John, apparently, was having a problem with reconciling his problems with accepting Jesus as the One the prophets foretold. Matthew, one of the Twelve, recorded this event by John the Baptist concerning the identity of Jesus. How could John know for certain that Jesus is the One that the prophets foretold? We should pay attention to how Jesus responded to John's question. Matthew writes:

After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee. ² When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples ³ to ask him, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” ⁴ Jesus replied, “**Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵ The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor**”. (Matthew 11:1-5)

Jesus’ response is an echo of Isaiah 35, especially verses 5 through 6. This chapter concerns the coming of the Messiah in which He will rescue the remnant. Isaiah, through the Holy Spirit, revealed the means whereby Israel could know for certainty the identity of the promised Messiah of Genesis 3:15. Isaiah pens the following confirmation:

Say to those with fearful hearts, “Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.” ⁵ **Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. ⁶ Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.** Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. (Isaiah 35:4-6)

Prior to this revelation concerning the coming of the Messiah, Isaiah also called attention to events that would occur during the Last Days of the Old Covenant World of Judaism: “**In that day** [last days] the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see. ¹⁹ Once more the humble will rejoice in the LORD; the needy will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel” (29:18-19). Once more, in Chapter 61 of the Book of Isaiah, he writes about the year of the Lord’s favor:

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has **anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.** He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, ² to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God [AD 70], to comfort all who mourn. (61:1-2)

We encounter this Scripture cited by Jesus as a reference to Himself as He read from Isaiah 61 in a Jewish synagogue. Luke records the following episode:

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. ¹⁵ He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. ¹⁶ He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, **he found the place where it is written [Isaiah 61]: ¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”** ²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. ²¹ He began by saying to them, “**Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.**” (Luke 4:14-21)

John, one of the Twelve, focused on the miracles in his Gospel. In Chapter 2, we read where Jesus turned water into wine (2:1-4). John stated that this event was the first of the miraculous signs that Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee (2:11). Sometime later, Jesus went to

Capernaum with His mother, His brothers, and His disciples (2:12). John then informs his readers that “While he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, **many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name**” (2:23). After this episode, Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council, came to Jesus by night and made this confession: “He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. **For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him**” (3:2).

On another occasion, Jesus teaches at the Feast of the Jews (7:14). Apparently, Jesus had performed many miracles, which events prompted some of the Jews to question other Jews concerning their animosity toward Him: “At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come. ³¹ Still, many in the crowd believed in him. They said, “**When the Messiah comes, will he perform more signs than this man?**” (7:30-31). In spite of all the miracles that Jesus performed, we still witness unbelief on the part of many Jews, especially the religious leaders. John records another episode in which Jesus entered into a conversation with Philip, one of the Twelve, concerning the certainty of His claims about His true identity. In this interchange, Jesus mentioned His miracles, which miracles proved beyond the shadow-of-a-doubt as to His correct uniqueness as both God and man. John writes:

Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” ⁹ Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰ Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. ¹¹ **Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.** (John 14:8-11)

Daniel (605 BC) was told that the day would come when God would “seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy” (Daniel 9:24). Daniel set the time parameters for the cessation of visions and prophecy in the last days of the nation of Israel. The time frame would occur within the “seventy sevens” that God decreed for His “people” and the “holy city” (9:24; see also 12:7).²² The prophet Zachariah (520 BC) also foretold that in the last days of Israel that God would remove “the prophets” (Zachariah 13:1-4). Paul, in his First Epistle to the Corinthians (written from Ephesus about AD 55), foretold that the miraculous would cease with the close of the last days of Israel (AD 70). When the “Old Heaven and Earth” passed away and the “New Heaven and Earth” came into full bloom, which is described as when that which is perfect [KJV] comes. Listen, once more, to the words of Paul:

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, **they will cease**; where there are tongues, **they will be stilled**; where there is knowledge [miraculous], **it will pass away.** ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when completeness comes [New Heaven and Earth—Revelation 21:1-4], **what is in part disappears** [Hebrews 8:13]. ¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. ¹² For

²² For a detailed study of Daniel 9:24-27, see Dallas Burdette, “Gabriel Discloses God’s Prophetic Seventy Weeks,” in Dallas Burdette, *Commentary on Daniel: An Unraveling of God’s Messianic Kingdom* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2016), 330-346.

now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. ¹³ And now **these three remain**: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:8–13, NIV)

The author of the Book of Hebrews warned his readers to not forget that God had spoken to their first-century generation. In this warning, he reminded them of God’s Gospel of salvation, which salvation had been confirmed through the miraculous. He goes right to the heart of God’s scheme of redemption:

We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. ²For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, ³how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? **This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. ⁴God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.** (Hebrews 2:1-4)

Earlier than this Epistle, Paul wrote his Second correspondence to the Christians in Corinth (written about AD 57 from Macedonia) concerning the subject of miracles among His Apostles. As he closed this Epistle, he reminded them of his status and the status of the other Apostles concerning miracles. He explained to them the method of determining who is or who is not a true Apostle: “I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior to the “super-apostles,” even though I am nothing. ¹²**I persevered in demonstrating among you the marks of a true apostle, including signs, wonders and miracles**” (2 Corinthians 12:11-12). In the early church, it was necessary that some individuals should have special gifts in order to teach and instruct the new converts concerning the fulfillment of the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms concerning the Christ. In his Ephesian Epistle, Paul labors this point:

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ⁸This is why it says: “**When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.**” ⁹(What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? ¹⁰He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) ¹¹So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers [teaching pastors], ¹²to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Ephesians 4:7-16)

Finally, the words of Peter on the Day of Pentecost should alert us to the place that the miraculous played in Jesus’ ministry. Fifty days after Jesus’ Resurrection, Peter addressed a large crowd with the following words: “Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man **accredited by God** to you by **miracles, wonders and signs**, which God did among you

through him, as you yourselves know” (Acts 2:22). As a result of the miraculous on the Day of Pentecost, approximately three thousand were baptized and added to their number. God’s New Community began on that eventful day. The church became the community of those who live by faith. Today, the church is still an indispensable society for the welfare of the world. The church is not an institution, but rather, it is a new life in Christ.

We should never forget that God’s intent for the church is to be the bearer of the Gospel of God’s forgiveness. We stand in awe as we contemplate that the church is the NEW RADICAL FELLOWSHIP OF LOVE! **Is the church real to us?** We should never forget that the church is a Christian community, that is to say, a fellowship of persons working together for the advancement of His kingdom, which kingdom reached its full bloom with the coming of Christ in Judgment in AD 70. **Every Christian is called to be God’s instrument for the advancement of His kingdom.** The Book of Revelation is about the downfall of the kingdom of Judah. When the seventh angel sounded his trumpet, he said, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and **he will reign for ever and ever**” (Revelation 11:15).

THE ULTIMATE OVERTHROW OF ISRAEL FOR HER APOSTASY

The beginning of this study focused on Isaiah 2:1-4 concerning the founding of God’s New Messianic community. Chapters 2 through 4 identify the ultimate fulfillment of Israel’s overthrow (fulfillment of the time of the Gentiles) as occurring with the coming of the Messiah in judgment (AD 70). This destruction of Jerusalem would not occur until God visited Israel through His Messiah (Daniel 9:24-27). “In the last days” should capture our attention. This phrase concerns the “last days” of Israel as a political entity, which “last days” reached its culmination in AD 70 (Daniel 12:7, 11; Matthew 24:14-15). The “last days” does not address the end of Planet Earth, but rather the “last days” of the Mosaic Dispensation (1446 BC to AD 70). Jesus began His ministry following His baptism by John the Baptist in AD 30. The inbreaking of God’s New Heaven and Earth was on the horizon, which the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms had foretold. God would replace the Old Covenant World of Judaism with the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31; Hebrews 8:13). Following God’s condemnation of Israel (Isaiah 1), Isaiah then addressed events that would transpire “in the last days” of the Mosaic Age (Isaiah 2:5).

Prior to Isaiah’s mentioning of the “last days,” Joel, too, wrote about the “last days.” Joel wrote his prophecy about one-hundred years (835 BC) before Isaiah addressed the “last days” (Isaiah 2:2). Just a little over eight-hundred years later (AD 33), Peter addressed several thousand Jews on the Day of Pentecost (fifty days after the Resurrection of Jesus). Some of the audience identified the events (miraculous) that were transpiring as associated with drunkenness on the part of His disciples. Peter’s response was to cite the prophet Joel:

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. ¹⁵ These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! ¹⁶ No, **this is what was spoken**

by the prophet Joel: ¹⁷ “**In the last days**, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. ¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. ¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. ²⁰ **The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord** [AD 70]. ²¹ And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ (Acts 2:14-21)

The “last days” of Judaism ended in AD 70. Joel used apocalyptic language to describe the complete overthrow of the Mosaic Age. Jesus, in His Olivet Discourse, employed the same apocalyptic language of Joel in describing the complete destruction of Judaism with its Temple, rituals, and sacrifices. Jesus identified the **end** of Judaism following the proclamation of the Gospel to the Jews:

At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, ¹¹ and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. ¹² Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, ¹³ but **the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.** ¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached **in the whole world** [*ἐν ὅλη τῇ οἰκουμένῃ*, *en holē tē oikoumenē*, “in all the inhabited land”—Roman Empire] as a testimony to all nations, and **then the end** [*τέλος*, *telos*, Jerusalem with its Temple—the Old Covenant world] **will come.** (Matthew 24:10-14)

“**Then the end will come**” is identified by Jesus as He continued to announce His judgment against Israel. He, like Joel, used the same kind of language that Joel used eight-hundred years earlier:

“So if anyone tells you, ‘There he is, out in the wilderness,’ do not go out; or, ‘Here he is, in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. ²⁷ For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ²⁸ Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather. ²⁹ “Immediately after the distress of those days “**the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.**” ³⁰ “Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. ³¹ And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. ³² “Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. ³³ **Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near** [*ἐγγύς*, *engys*], **right at the door.** ³⁴ Truly I tell you, **this generation** will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³⁵ Heaven and earth will pass away [Old Covenant World of Judaism], but my words will never pass away [the Christian Age: New Heaven and Earth]. (24:26-35)

Jesus identified Joel’s prophecy as taking place in the lifetime of His disciples: “this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.” Luke gives additional comments by Jesus in His Olivet Discourse:

“**When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies**, you will know that its desolation is near. ²¹ Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let

those in the country not enter the city. ²² **For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written.** ²³ How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. ²⁴ **They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.** (Luke 21:20-24)

The time of the Gentiles was given by Daniel (12:7) as lasting for forty-two months. He revealed a conversation that took place between two angels concerning the events foretold in this section of Scripture. Daniel penned the following after being told to close up and seal “**until the time of the end.**” Apparently, there were numerous events that God did not want disclosed in detail at this time. Yet, Daniel was allowed to give some details about the end of the Holy People (the Jews). For example, in 12:4, Daniel wrote: “The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him swear by him who lives forever, saying, “It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed” (12:7).

The “**time of the end**” is not the end of Planet Earth, but rather, “the time of the end” had to do with the power of the holy people and its ultimate demise (12:7). Once more, “The time of the end” is not associated with the end of Planet Earth, but is associated with “**the time that the daily sacrifices is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up**” (12:11).²³ The Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24—25) is an excellent commentary on Daniel 12. Listen to Jesus, once more, as He explained to His disciples about the “time of the end “spoken of by Daniel the prophet that had to do with the cessation of sacrifices and the Jewish Temple:

Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, ¹³ but **the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.** ¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and **then the end will come.** ¹⁵ “**So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—**¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁷ Let no one on the housetop go down to take anything out of the house. ¹⁸ Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. ¹⁹ How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! ²⁰ Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. ²¹ **For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again** [Daniel 12:1]. ²² “If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. ²³ At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or, ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. (Matthew 24:12-23)

In the Book of Revelation (an enlargement of the Olivet Discourse), Jesus revealed to John the same time frame for the Holy People. Chapters 1 through 3 contains the introduction to the Book as well as the letters to the seven churches. The second division runs from Chapter 4 through Chapter 11. The third division (Chapters 12 through 22) covers the same period of time that the second division covers. Following the opening of the “seventh seal” the “mystery of

²³I highly recommend the following book: William Bell, *Will Planet Earth Be Destroyed?* (USA: William Bell, 2010).

God” is about to be accomplished (Revelation 10:7). Within the seventh seal, there were “seven trumpets” that signaled the final END of the Holy People. Within the sixth seal, there were “seven thunders” (10:4), which the author (John) was told to “seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down.” Following the “seven thunders John writes:

Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven.
⁶ And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, “**There will be no more delay!**
⁷ But in the days **when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.**” (10:5-7)

Just a cursory reading of Revelation 10:1 through 11:1-19 reveals that the mystery spoken of by the prophets was coming to a close. Chapter 10 and 11 of Revelation is a direct echo of Daniel 12. Listen, once more, to Jesus’ revelation of the end for Jerusalem:

I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, “Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, with its worshipers. ² But exclude the **outer court**; do not measure it, because it **has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months.** ³ And I will appoint my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.” (Revelation 11:1–3).

In the third section of Revelation (12-22), the church fled into the wilderness to a place prepared by God “where she might be taken care of for 1, 260 days” (12:6). Then in 12:14, we have further confirmation of Daniel 12:7:

When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. ¹⁴ The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness, **where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time,** out of the serpent’s reach. (12:13-14)

When the end came for the apostasy of the Holy People as set forth in Revelation 11:1-3, John reports:

Then I saw “**a new heaven and a new earth,**” for the **first heaven and the first earth had passed away,** and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ [spiritual death] or mourning or crying or pain, for **the old order of things has passed away.**” (21:1-4)

At the time of the writing of the Book of Revelation (before June of AD 68—Revelation 17:9-11), Jesus asserted the swiftness of this destruction against the Holy People:

The angel said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that **must soon take place.**” (22:6)

“Look, **I am coming soon!** Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll.” (22:7)

Then he told me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this scroll, because **the time is near.**” (22:10)

“Look, **I am coming soon!** My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done”. (22.12)

He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, **I am coming soon.**” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. (22:20)

Even though I cited from the Book of Hebrews, earlier in this essay, it is appropriate that I, once more, for emphasis sake, call attention to this book, which was written before the destruction of Jerusalem (possibly about AD 64). The following remarks concern the Old Covenant World of Judaism passing away and the New Covenant World of Christianity assuming its full bloom. The following citation is a constant reminder of how Jesus concluded His revelation to John:

But you have come to **Mount Zion** [**not** Mount Sinai], to the city of the living God, the **heavenly Jerusalem.** You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly,²³ to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,²⁴ to **Jesus the mediator of a new covenant,** and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.²⁵ See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?²⁶ At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens” [Old Covenant World of Judaism]²⁷ The words “**once more**” indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain [God’s New Covenant/New Heaven and Earth].²⁸ Therefore, **since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken,** let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe,²⁹ for our “God is a consuming fire.” (Hebrews 12:22-28)