



# The Sword & The Plow

Newsletter of the Bimillennial Preterist Association

Vol. XIX, No. 1 – January 2015

## What is the “Gathering” in Matt. 24:29-31?

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Matt. 24:29-31 describes the coming of Christ in the events culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem, AD 70. Verse 31 says *"And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."* What is this "gathering"? There are several views, but the one that we have settled upon at this time is that this is Christ's gathering the saints unto rest by *martyrdom*.

### **New Testament Imagery and Sources**

The term "gather" is used in several parables to describe agricultural activity associated with harvest. John the Baptist thus opened his ministry saying that

the Messiah would "gather" the wheat into his garner, but the chaff he would burn up with unquenchable fire (Matt. 3:12). The imagery of gathering and sorting the wicked from the just is tied to the end of the world/age, and the second coming of Christ. We see this, for example, in the parable of the net and fishes:

*"Again the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 13:47-50).*

The word "gather" in these passages is from the same Greek word in Matt. 24:31 (Grk. episunacousiv). Another passage setting forth this same lesson is the parable of the wheat and tares (Matt. 13:24-32). In that case, both are allowed to "grow together until harvest" (v.30). At harvest, the tares are gathered and burned, while the wheat is gathered into the barn. How was the burning up of the wicked accomplished in all these cases? Answer: by the cataclysmic judgments that overtook the Jews and witnessed the nation's destruction. Since the harvest of the wicked contemplates the DEATH of the unbelieving Jews (and Romans), it follows that the harvest of the wheat was also accomplished by death; viz., MARTYDOM.

That the gathering of the saints involves their martyrdom is reasonably clear from the context of II Thess. 2:1-9. There the church in Thessalonica was frightened and unsettled, supposing the end time was upon them. Paul told them the time was not yet at hand, and would arrive only after the "man of sin" and "son of perdition" was revealed. Most Preterists recognize that the revealing of the man of sin describes the persecution under Nero. Notice, however, that Paul describes the crisis that would overtake the saints as a "gathering":

*"Now we beseech you, brethren by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind...for that day shall not come except...that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition" etc. (II Thess. 2:1-3).*

Thus, the gathering unto Christ is clearly connected with the revealing of the man of sin. The argument may be stated thus: The saints would be gathered at the revelation of the man of sin (Nero). The revelation of the man of sin was the persecution under Nero. Therefore, the saints would be gathered in the persecution under Nero. This is confirmed by Rev. 14:9-16.

Rev. 14 describes the persecution under the beast, and warns believers against yielding to the pressure to obey the civil authority by denying Christ:

*"And the third angel followed them, saying, with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb" (vv. 9-10).*

The passage then promises the saints rest if they abide faithful, dying for their Lord:

*"Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (vv. 12,13).*

We believe the "rest" promised here is depicted by the martyrs reigning with Christ a thousand years in Hades Paradise in Rev. 20:4-6. But in any event, immediately following the assurance of reward if they abide faithful unto death, Jesus is portrayed seated upon a cloud, harvesting the wheat of the earth. The implication is that the harvest is accomplished by martyrdom under the beast:

*"And I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth: and the earth was reaped" (vv. 14-16).*

Here then is the eschatological harvest of the saints: The parables in the gospel foretold the harvest, but did not explain how it would be accomplished. Here, however the answer is provided. The closing verses of the chapter portray the harvest of the grapes of wrath (Jews) tread "without the city" (vv. 17-20). It is interesting that wheat harvest occurs about June, but the vintage is not ripe until fall. Thus, chapter fourteen follows established agricultural facts. The symbolism also follows the history of the persecution and the Jews war with Rome. The persecution under Nero lasted from AD 64-68; the Jewish war lasted from AD 66-70. Thus the two overlapped for a time, with the war beginning and ending later. More to the point, however, the imagery is identical with the parables of the end time, when the righteous would be gathered home, but the wicked burned up like chaff. The imagery of Rev. 14: 14-16 is identical with Matt. 24:29-31. Both portray the Lord coming in the clouds, exacting vengeance upon his enemies, but gathering the saints into the eternal kingdom.

#### **Old Testament Sources - Jubilee Trumpet**

Matt. 24:29-31 and Isa. 27:13 are very similar, and many commentators believe that both speak to the

same event. However, this is wrong. Here is the text of Isa. 27:13:

*"And it shall come to pass in that day, that the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem."*

The passage in Matthew also mentions a trumpet, and on this basis it is supposed the same events in view. We agree that Jesus appropriates the language of Isaiah, but this is because the theme is the same, not the subject matter. Isaiah is talking about the return of the captivity out of Assyria and Egypt. The imagery of the trumpet is from Jubilee, when the law required the Jews to announce the release of the 50th year by trumpet blast, and everyman was loosed from his debts and bondage and returned to his paternity:

*"In the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land. And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee unto you: and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family" (Lev. 25:9, 10).*

This is clearly the source of Isaiah's imagery, when the Jewish captives in Assyria and Babylon, and the exiles in Egypt would "return every man unto his possession." Jesus employs the like language to describe the gathering home of his saints at the eschaton by death under Nero.

### **After the Tribulation of those Days**

Here is the whole text of Matt. 24:29-31; notice when the gathering would occur:

*"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 the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather*

*together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."*

The tribulation here is not talking about the tribulation that would overtake the Christians in the persecution under Nero or the Jews in the war with Rome. Rather, the tribulation here is talking about the intermediate troubles that would precede Christ's return and the events of the end-time. All sorts of famines, wars, and troubles led up to the fall of Jerusalem and the Roman civil wars that marked the coming of Christ. Jesus thus told the disciples

*"And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places, all these are the beginning of sorrows" (Matt. 24:6-8).*

When Jesus says "immediately after the tribulation of those days" it is to these events, preceding his return and the fall of Jerusalem, that he refers. We see this in Revelation where there were intermediate judgments in the form of seals and trumpets that preceded the final cataclysm that saw the destruction of Christ's enemies. It should also be borne in mind that Jesus' coming was not a one day or even one year event: Jesus' return stretched over the whole period of the Jewish war with Rome (AD 66-70), and the Roman civil wars that broke out at the death of Nero (AD 68-70). When a kingdom comes in power, it comes *in force* to make war and assert its right and dominion. This obviously entails a sufficient time to subdue the enemy. The same is true here: the day of the Lord and coming of Christ was fulfilled in the world events culminating in the Roman civil wars and destruction of Jerusalem. His coming would avenge the saints, who were gathered home in martyrdom where they received the crown of life.

### **Conclusion**

The gathering of Matt. 24:29-31 refers to the end-time harvest of the saints, when they were gathered home to Christ in death under the Nero and the Jews.

# St. Irenaeus of Lyons

## Chapter IV.-Answer to Another Objection, Showing that the Destruction of Jerusalem, Which Was the City of the Great King, Diminished Nothing from the Supreme Majesty' And Power of God, for that This Destruction Was Put in Execution by the Most Wise Counsel of the Same God.

1. Further, also, concerning Jerusalem and the Lord, they venture to assert that, if it had been "the city of the great King," it would not have been deserted. This is just as if anyone should say, that if straw were a creation of God, it would never part company with the wheat; and that the vine twigs, if made by God, never would be lopped away and deprived of the clusters. But as these [vine twigs] have not been originally made for their own sake, but for that of the fruit growing upon them, which being come to maturity and taken away, they are left behind, and those which do not conduce to fructification are lopped off altogether; so also [was it with] Jerusalem, which had in herself borne the yoke of bondage (under which man was reduced, who in former times was not subject to God when death was reigning, and being subdued, became a fit subject for liberty), when the fruit of liberty had come, and reached maturity, and been reaped and stored in the barn, and when those which had the power to produce fruit had been carried away from her [i.e., from Jerusalem], and scattered throughout all the world. Even as Esaias saith, "The children of Jacob shall strike root, and Israel shall flourish, and the whole world shall be filled with his fruit." The fruit, therefore, having been sown throughout all the world, she (Jerusalem) was deservedly forsaken, and those things which had formerly brought forth fruit abundantly were taken away; for from these, according to the flesh, were Christ and the apostles enabled to bring forth fruit. But now these are no longer useful for bringing forth fruit. For all things which have a beginning in time must of course have an end in time also.

2. Since, then, the law originated with Moses, it terminated with John as a necessary consequence. Christ had come to fulfill it: wherefore "the law and the prophets were" with them "until John." And therefore Jerusalem, taking its commencement from David, and fulfilling its own times, must have an end of legislation when the new covenant was revealed. For God does all things by measure and in order; nothing is unmeasured with Him, because nothing is out of order. Well spake he, who said that the immeasurable Father was Himself

subjected to measure in the Son; for the Son is the measure of the Father, since He also comprehends Him. But that the administration of them (the Jews) was temporary, Esaias says: "And the daughter of Zion shall be left as a cottage in a vineyard, and as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers." And when shall these things be left behind? Is it not when the fruit shall be taken away, and the leaves alone shall be left, which now have no power of producing fruit?

3. But why do we speak of Jerusalem, since, indeed, the fashion of the whole world must also pass away, when the time of its disappearance has come, in order that the fruit indeed may be gathered into the garner, but the chaff, left behind, may be consumed by fire? "For the day of the Lord cometh as a burning furnace, and all sinners shall be stubble, they who do evil things, and the day shall burn them up." Now, who this Lord is that brings such a day about, John the Baptist points out, when he says of Christ, "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire, having His fan in His hand to cleanse His floor; and He will gather His fruit into the garner, but the chaff He will burn up with unquenchable fire." For He who makes the chaff and He who makes the wheat are not different persons, but one and the same, who judges them, that is, separates them. But the wheat and the chaff, being inanimate and irrational, have been made such by nature. But man, being endowed with reason, and in this respect like to God, having been made free in his will, and with power over himself, is himself the cause to himself, that sometimes he becomes wheat, and sometimes chaff. Wherefore also he shall be justly condemned, because, having been created a rational being, he lost the true rationality, and living irrationally, opposed the righteousness of God, giving himself over to every earthly spirit, and serving all lusts; as says the prophet, "Man, being in honour, did not understand: he was assimilated to senseless beasts, and made like to them."

# Matthew Twenty-four

## And The Destruction of Jerusalem

by

*Foy E. Wallace Jr.*

Before going into the details of Matthew 24 to show that the signs of that chapter refer to the fall and destruction of Jerusalem, a look into some Old Testament passages leading up to it will lay a foundation upon which to stand and at the same time answer some questions which some will be sure to ask. Let us take a look at the background.

(1) In the Old Testament - Zech. 14.

We shall not here read the chapter, but rather refer to its contents verse by verse. Zechariah 14 is almost universally used as "a second coming of Christ chapter" but it is a "destruction of Jerusalem chapter" instead.

Verse 1: "Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee."

The symbolic "day of the Lord" here is the same expression precisely that is used in Isa. 13:9 in reference to the destruction of Babylon. If the destruction of Babylon could be called "the day of the Lord," why not the destruction of Jerusalem? That expression does not mean the second coming of Christ in either of these passages. Compare Isaiah 13 as a prophecy against Babylon, Isaiah 17 as a prophecy against Damascus, Isaiah as a prophecy against Ethiopia, Isaiah 19 as a prophecy against Egypt, with Zechariah 14 as a prophecy against Jerusalem, and it can be seen that the assertions of the Millennialists that Zechariah is prophesying the second coming of Christ and the millennium are wrong.

Verse 2: "For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken,

and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city."

The historical accounts of the siege of Jerusalem by Josephus, Pliny, Horne and Clarke fulfill Zechariah's descriptions.

Reference to "nations gathered for battle" is a description of besieged Jerusalem, the houses rifled and the women ravished. The same description is found in Isaiah 13, verses 15 and 16, concerning the fall and destruction of Babylon. The comparison is forceful.

Verse 3: "Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle."

Factually, all the nations were represented in the Roman army, and God afterward fought against them by means of the Northern nations. Read Zech. (14-15): "And the Lord shall be seen over them, and his arrow shall go forth as the lightning; and the Lord God shall blow the trumpet, and shall go with whirlwinds of the south. The Lord of hosts shall defend them; and they shall devour, and subdue with sling stones." The visitations are figurative, of course, but nevertheless significant of the fact that all the nations referred to "against" whom the Lord "fought" were destroyed.

Verse 4: "And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall

remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south."

The prophetic declaration that "his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives which is before Jerusalem," does not refer to the second coming of Christ but rather to the siege of Jerusalem. Jesus Christ stood with his feet on the mount of Olives when he uttered the doom of the city. The Roman general stood on the Mount of Olives when Jerusalem was besieged. The formations of the battle lines, entrenchments and redoubts, the circumvallations of the Romans, all enter into the graphic description and portrayal of the prophet that the mount should "cleave in the midst" and "toward the north" and "toward the south."

Verses 5-7: "And ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah: and the Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with thee. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark: but it shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light."

Obviously, these verses are a metaphorical description of the mixture of divine mercy with justice. After the visitation there would be light - the diffusion of divine knowledge. This did follow the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Jewish state.

Verses 8-9: "And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and winter shall it be. And the Lord shall be King over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one."

The only consistent application of this language is a spiritual fulfillment in the gospel of Christ and the church. Who is ready to deny that the clause "in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one," refers to the present dispensation? There is one Lord, his name is one, and the Lord is "king over all the earth." It finds its fulfillment in the church of Christ where there is neither Jew nor Gentile, but all one in Christ, and one Lord over all.

Verses 16-17: "And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem, shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, and Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain."

If these verses are not figurative, if they are to be taken literally, then all nations and families must literally go up to Jerusalem and literally offer animal sacrifices and keep the Passover, restore Judaism with all of its literal ceremonies, in order to fulfill the prophecy. That would be a complete reestablishment of old Judaism and everything that characterized it, all of which was taken away. But if these verse are not literal, then the application made of the whole chapter by the Millennialists loses its force. These last verses refer to the expansion of the blessing of the gospel dispensation after the destruction of Jerusalem. Upon all who received the gospel, its blessings descended as rain; but to the unbelievers who rejected the gospel "upon them shall be no rain" - all such are barred from its promises and privileges.

The simple truth of the matter is that as Isaiah 13 is a prophecy on the destruction of Babylon, Zechariah 14 is a prophecy on the destruction of Jerusalem. It does not teach millennialism in a sentence or a syllable.

(2) In the New Testament. - Matt. 24

Each sign listed on this chart has special application to the then impending destruction of Jerusalem.

When Matthew 24 is taken away from the Premillennial preachers their argument on the imminent return of the Lord based on "the signs of the times" is torn away from them, and their sources of speculative supply is cut off. A verse by verse study will do it:

1. False teachers - verse 5. "For many shall come in my name, saying I am Christ; and shall deceive many." Jesus simply warned the disciples that false teachers would be numerous, more than ever before. Josephus, the historian, verifies the fact that near the time of Jerusalem's fall, many false Messiahs appeared, claiming to

be the Christ. He says these became more numerous before the sieges of Titus. Luke, the historian, records such pseudo-signs and false wonders as the magical deceptions of Simon Magus - Acts 8 - which were employed on the professional deceivers mentioned in the Lord's predictions.

2. Wars and rumors of wars - verse 6: "And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars." Many smaller nations were at war with the Romans at that time, enemies at war with each other and rumors of war in abundance on every hand, and from every quarter as the destruction of Jerusalem drew near. Josephus verifies the fact that from every part of the empire wars followed in succession, and in waves of revolt, like the swells of the ocean, to the final dissolution of the empire.

3. Famine and pestilence - verse 7: "For nations shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places." In the days of Claudius Caesar, before the destruction of Jerusalem, there was a unparalleled famine - the greatest famine the world ever knew occurred. The record of Matthew 24 is corroborated by the Spirit in Agabus, the prophet, as reported by Luke in Acts 11:28: "And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar."

Again Josephus testified that the famine actually occurred before the destruction of Jerusalem, and the fulfillment is a matter of historical record.

4. Earthquakes - verse 8: "All these are the beginning of sorrows." That great earthquakes occurred during the reign of Nero is a historical fact, and the testimony of Jesus is added to that of Josephus of an unusual number of earthquakes occurring in various countries, before the destruction of Jerusalem. Many cities of Asia Minor were destroyed by earthquakes.

5. Delivered to death - verse 9: "Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake." Paul, Peter, and James, and James the Less were all put to death before the destruction of Jerusalem.

6. Apostasies - verse 10: "And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another." This is the Lord's warning of many apostasies, when the faith of the disciples would fail, as under pressure of persecution many should become offended. Such apostasies were everywhere in evidence prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, the evidences of which are not only mentioned in the sacred text, but in parallel secular history. The most valuable of such historical evidence is the testimony of Josephus, who was an eye-witness to the destruction of Jerusalem.

7. The gospel to all the world - verse 14: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations: and then shall the end come." Within this period of gospel history the sound of the messengers' feet had been heard all over the Roman world - Rom. 10:15 - and the gospel was, in fact, preached to the whole creation before the destruction of Jerusalem. Read Col. 1:23: "If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; for which I Paul am made a minister." Hence, before the death of Paul this "sign" was actually fulfilled - literally enough, indeed, to satisfy the most exacting literalist. Eusebius says "The gospel was like the sun, enlightening the world at once." It was universally published; the Gentile nations were illuminated with Christianity, providing the events to correspond with the prophecies, a fact so striking as to be convincing without disputation.

8. The end of the Jewish world - verse 14: "Then shall the end come." Here, at once, with one accord, the Millennialist jumps to the conclusion that this "end" means the end of the world - "then shall the end come" - but the end of what? The end of Jerusalem; the destruction of the temple and the end of the Jewish state and the end of Judaism. Please turn the chart.

9. The abomination of desolation - verse 15: "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand.)" This description refers to the heathen symbols and Roman standards raised in the temple. When the Romans conquered the city, and entered it, the Roman soldiers marched

into the temple, and raised instead the symbols and standards of paganism and Romanism. That is what was called the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place. The “abomination of desolation” was fulfilled when those Roman standards and pagan symbols were seen in the holy place “where they ought not to be.”

10. The disciples flee – verses 16-18: “Then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains: let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house; neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes.” The destruction of Jerusalem was regarded by all pious Jews as pestilence and desolation and was taken as a sign at the time for them to escape had come – to do what Jesus had warned them to do – to flee to the mountains. The disciples did as Jesus said – they heeded the warnings and fled. From the flat roofs of their houses in the city or from their fields in the country, they saw the Roman army in full march, there was no time to go inside for goods or raiment. Life was more than personal property. When they saw the sign of the standards and symbols of the Romans in the temple, they remembered that Jesus had warned them of that very thing, and at the news of the Roman approach they fled to Pella, the northern boundary of Perea.

It is a remarkable but historical fact that Cestius Gallus, the Roman general, for some unknown reason, retired when they first marched against the city, suspended the siege, ceased the attack and withdrew his armies for an interval of time after the Romans had occupied the temple, thus giving every believing Jew the opportunity to obey the Lord’s instruction to flee the city. Josephus the eye-witness, himself an unbeliever, chronicles this fact, and admitted his inability to account for the cessation of the fighting at that time, after a siege had begun. Can we account for it? We can. The Lord was fighting against Jerusalem Zech. 14:2: “For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city.” The Lord was besieging that city. God was bringing these things to pass against the Jewish state and nation. Therefore, the opportunity was offered for the disciples to escape the siege, as Jesus had

forewarned, and the disciples took it. So said Daniel; so said Jesus; so said Luke; so said Josephus.

As so it was – it was left for Titus, the Roman general, to execute the siege, after the faithful disciples had fled. Verses 19-22: “And woe unto them that are with child, and them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day: For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.” These verses deal with the hindrances to flight from the besieged city, the tribulation of the sieges, and the lifting of the sieges for the escape of the disciples.

11. Pseudo-signs - verses 23-26: "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." Here was the Lord's warning against deceivers, fake prophets, false alarms and fraudulent signs - the forewarnings to tenable the disciples to discriminate between the spurious and the genuine. "Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not." These warning observed by the disciples of the Lord enabled them to escape the traps incident to the approaching siege.

12. The eagles and the carcass - verses 27-28: "For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together."

The coming here refers to the approach of the Roman armies. The Jewish nation was the carcass which the Roman eagles were sent to devour.

These verses describe the swiftness of the events and the suddenness of all the occurrences connected with the siege of Jerusalem. The illustration of the eagles gather where the carcass is found, is a figurative description of the Romans as the eagles swarming over Jerusalem



and Judea as the carcass, to loot and spoil the city and all the land of Judea.

13. After the tribulation - verse 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 the heavens shall be shaken.' After the tribulation of these days - that is, after the things that occurred during the siege. The siege began August 10, A.D. 70, six hundred year after Nebuchadnezzar's siege and destruction of first temple. All of the houses and underground chambers were filled with putrefied corpses. One million one hundred thousand people perished, and the remnants were scattered. Think of it - in only two months with only two armies fighting in the limited areas around Jerusalem, one million one hundred thousand people perished. Every building was filled with perishing bodied; famished people ate the putrefied flesh of human carcasses; mothers at the flesh of their own babies. And outside the besieged city the families of the expatriated race of Jews in many places throughout the empire were slaughtered. Josephus, the historian, verifies the fact that there was never anything like it before or since, nor ever shall be.

The signs in the heavens, the darkening sun and falling stars, refer to the falling of Jewish dignitaries, casting down of authorities and powers, long established, and signified the darkness that settled upon the Jewish state.

The sun of the Hebrew temple was darkened, the moon of the Jewish commonwealth was as blood, the stars of the Sanhedrin fell from their high seats of authority. Isaiah and Joel describe the ruin of both ancient Babylon and Jerusalem in similar description, in Isa. 13 and Joel 2.

14. The coming of the Son of Man - verse 30: "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory."

The sign of the Son of man in the heaven was a signal, the evidence of divine visitation and intervention in the downfall of the Jewish authorities and in all the transpiring events. The mourning of the tribes of the earth refers to the lamentations of the Jewish families all over the

world because of the destruction of their city and their temple and their state. The coming of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven is not a reference to the second coming of Christ but to the coming foretold by Jesus to Caiaphas in Matt. 26:24: "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven." Jesus told Caiaphas that he could see, it, he would be a living witness to these events. The reference to the Son of man coming "with power and great glory" and "sitting on the right had of power" is emphasis on the magnitude of the things that occurred. The Son of man came in power in the transpiring events.

15. Sending forth his angels - verse 31: "And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." Here is the grand announcement of the world-wide success of the gospel, the universal expansion of the Christianity after the destruction of Jerusalem. The angels of this verse were messengers, emissaries of the gospel. The gathering of the elect from the four winds meant that these messengers would carry the gospel to every nook and corner of the inhabited world. This is the history of what occurred. With the downfall of Judaism the greatest foe of the church was removed, and path cleared of the chief obstacle, resulting in the universal sweep of Christianity. The knowledge of God covered the earth as waters cover the sea.

16. The signs that it was near - verse 32-33: "When the branch is yet tender...ye know that summer is nigh...so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors." The signs of the approaching events would serve as portents to all faithful disciples that the things of which they were being warned would be near. The disciples would recognize these signs up to the time of the siege, and would know that it was "near, even at the doors." It is here that Luke's account says: "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" - Luke 21:28. The providential means for the escape of the faithful was divinely prearranged and when they should see these things "begin to come to pass" they were told to "look up" and "lift up" their heads in full confidence that their redemption, their deliverance, was at hand. This redemption extended beyond the mere escape

from the siege - it was a greater deliverance from the persecutions of the Jewish authorities and the oppositions of Judaism, brought to an end by the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Jewish state.

To say that the expression "it is near" refers to the end of the world, the end of time, or a "rapture" theory is contrary to the context of Matthew 24. When these signs appeared the Lord said, "Let them which are in Judea flee" - and they did. "And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof nigh" - and they did know it. I fit meant the end of the world, why say "let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains"? and why say, "let them which are in the midst of Jerusalem depart out of it"? and why say, "let not them that are in the country enter thereinto" - into Jerusalem? These sayings show clearly that the whole thing is a description of the destruction of Jerusalem. Reverting in verses 41 and 42 to these surrounding the Lord said that where two would be "in the field," or "grinding at the mill" - one would be taken and the other left - that is, the believing disciples would recognize the signs and take flight, while the unbelieving companion would remain and perish in the siege.

The statement that all the tribes of the earth shall mourn, as has been previously explained, is a reference to the Jewish families scattered all over the Roman empire - they would mourn the downfall of Jerusalem and the end of their Jewish commonwealth.

17. All these things fulfilled - verse 34: "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." In Lk. 21:31-32, the Lord said: when YE see, and know Ye, and I say unto YOU - so here is the Lord's won statement of the period to which "these things" belonged and during which they would all be fulfilled. All of the "signs" mentioned in Matt. 24 are mentioned above verse 24. After having mentioned these signs, Jesus then said, "this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." Notice - "all these things" - not some of them - all of them would be fulfilled before that generation passed. But we are told that "this generation" meant that race - meaning only that the race of the Jews would not pass till all this

was fulfilled. The Lord would not be guilty of such a truism - telling the Jews what would happen to their race, and then saying the race will not pass away until everything that will happen to the race happens to it! A truism would not be the word for that. It is sheer nonsense to have Christ say that certain things would happen to the Jewish race, but the Jewish race would not pass away until what would happen to the Jewish race happened to it! No, Jesus said "this generation" - the generation living \then - would not pass "till all these things be fulfilled." The Lord's use of the same language after pronouncing the woes on the Pharisees in the previous chapter of Matthew shows clearly the reference was to their own time. There are nine woes pronounced upon these Jewish officials in Matthew 23, which are followed by verse 36: "verily I say unto you, all these things shall come upon this generation." Immediately following this statement is the pronouncement on Jerusalem in verse 37, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem," and the verdict of verse 38, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." there is but one conclusion, and it is clear - all the woes of Matthew 23 and all the signs of Matthew 24 referred to that generation of time and span of life, and were all fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem, and immediately thereafter.



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# Letters from our Readers

**Question:** Thanks!!! I've really used Kurt's books in my studies of Daniel and Revelation!! Studying about The Lake of Fire now.....I do think Satan , is an actual being that God created. so I guess Kurt and I defer on that point . My studies on this subject , have really confirmed this viewpoint to me . Anyway Kurt is a wonderful Bible man who is also excellent on his historical facts; which has been very helpful to my studies!!! Thanks Again!!! Isn't God's TRUE WORD'S wonderful!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

**Question:** Hi Kurt. Thanks for your reply. I guess the way I see the matter temptation in that the flesh is one of three levels humans receive it. The lust of the eyes and the pride of life are two other areas that I don't see as being related to our physical flesh, especially the pride of life. I see the Scriptures speaking of sin also in the terms of rebellion and disobedience, which to me both have the root of pride. So I guess I would have to say that pride is essentially the root of all sin. This seems to be something that angels definitely could partake of, which would allow for a natural interpretation of 2 Peter 2:4. I'm going to guess that you don't think too much of the book of Enoch, but it does to me correlate well with several otherwise seemingly out of place or difficult passages in our Canonical Scriptures.

Again, thank you so much for your web site and writings which I am finding tremendously helpful. I am very grateful for the obvious large amount of time in research you have put in to it. I'm sure your work is a labor of love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Answer:** This is a huge topic, and one that I usually avoid, but since it has come up, perhaps it won't hurt to toss it around a bit.

I am not convinced that "pride" is something spiritual (heavenly) beings are susceptible of. The whole concept of our salvation is that we will not be susceptible of falling/sin/ temptation in heaven. If angels can fall, and if we are to be as angels in the resurrection, it then follows that we can fall and our salvation is not eternal or sure. In fact, there would then be nothing we escape in heaven that we are not susceptible to here on earth, for the same basic temptation of pride may still beset us and make us subject to yet another fall. (This also raises questions about blood atonement for sin. Why are angels exempted from salvation? If man can be reclaimed,

why not angels? Does not the fact that blood is the price of atonement show that sin is uniquely human?)

The narrative of II Pet. 2, matches the chronology in Genesis (angels/flood/Sodom/Lot). The fallen angels in II Pet. 2:4 are generally equated with the "sons of God" in Gen. 6 who married the daughters of unbelieving men. There is a long tradition in some quarters that these "sons of God" were angels. Of course, angels cannot marry or copulate with mankind, so this is clearly a wrong assumption. The better view is that these "sons of God" were the faithful or sons of Seth, who left their first estate (birthright) in a manner similar to Esau, choosing to marry unbelieving women to the destruction of their faith and apostasy from God. This is the interpretation generally placed upon the passage by Jews and many others.

Similar interpretative issues exist with Lucifer (the king of Babylon (Isa 14) and the "anointed cherub" in Ezek. 28 (the King of Tyre). These passages are frequently appropriated to prove a fallen angel, but the texts clearly show them to be human actors upon the stage of life who lift themselves up in pride against God. As we thus begin our survey of passages used to prove the fall of angels and a rebellion in heaven, we find that many of the proof texts do not mean what they are alleged to say. When we add to this the fact that words like "satan" (adversary) "angel" (messenger) and "diabolos/devil" (slanderer/gossip) are applied in many instances to men (Paul says an elder's wife must not be a "diabolos" slanderer - I Tim.3:11), we are compelled to take a fresh look at the whole topic of "demonic beings."

Many of the NT examples are easily explained by madness or insanity, or by epilepsy, or other organic diseases. We certainly do not see anything today that people of normal intelligence would attribute to demonic possession, which is not better explained as mental disease. If there were ever demons, where did they go? Why do they not exist today? Or is it that they never really existed at all?

During the inter-testamental period, Palestine was totally dominated by Greeks. Matthew even calls Galilee "Galilee of the Gentiles," signifying that they were the dominate ethnic group in the region. It seems plain that many of the superstitions and terminology of the Greeks were appropriated by the Jews of the region during our Lord's time. Thus, where a superstitious Greek would describe an epileptic as being possessed by a demon, Jews came to use similar terminology and

embrace similar views. This explains why there is almost a total absence of demonic possession in the OT, with the exception of King Saul, whose fits of rage and melancholy are also easily explained in terms of emotional instability and an evil conscience. In short, the NT opens with a historical situation where the people of God are living in a culture immersed with Gentile superstitions and ideas and therefore the language of the NT reflects that difference. This difference is testified to by Bishop Lightfoot, who says the Jews described physical and mental ailments in terms of being possessed by an "unclean spirit":

“There were divers diseases, which, in their own nature, were but natural diseases, which yet the Jews did, commonly, repute as seizure and possessing by the devil; especially those that distempered the mind, or did in more special manner convulse the body: and, according to this common language and conception of the nation, the language of the gospel doth speak exceeding frequently. Examples of this kind of dialect among the Jews, we might produce divers, as that in Maimonides: ‘A man, which is troubled with an evil spirit, and saith, when the sickness begins upon him, Write a bill of divorcement to my wife, he said as good as nothing, because he is not ‘compos sui’: and so likewise a drunken man, when he comes near the drunkenness of Lot,’ etc. he calls the evil spirit, or ‘a sickness;’ and by it he means lunacy, or distractedness, that had its ‘lucida intervalla.’ So the Jews speak of a man ‘that is possessed by Cordicus:’ which they interpret to be, ‘a spirit that seizeth on him, that drinketh too much wine out of the wine-press.’ And, to spare more; because the story in hand is of a child, take but this example of an evil spirit, which, when conceived, did seize upon children: ‘Shibta (say they) is an evil spirit, that seizeth upon children by the neck, even upon the sinews behind the neck, and drieth them up from their use and strength, till it kill him. And the time of it is from the child’s being two months old, and the danger of it is till the child be seven years old.’ Which seemeth to mean nothing else but convulsion-fits, or shrinking of the sinews, or some suchlike thing; a natural malady.” John Lightfoot, *Harmony of the Gospels, Complete Works* (1684) Vol. 3, pp.. 102, 103

Thus, according to Bishop Lightfoot, the common vernacular of the time attributed to demons what we generally associate with physical or mental illness today. We are generally unfamiliar with the extra-biblical writings of the era, so we are unaware of this fact and thus assume that the usage is God's endorsement of this view, when in fact it is simply the terminology of the time and not intended to affirm the actual existence of devils.

Anyway, it is definitely a topic that reasonable minds can differ and where we need to afford each other the grace to make up his or her own mind. "In all things love."

**Question:** I know you are a very busy and I thank you for your info. I'm just trying to learn the preterist view in order to share it with others when they question me, because this school makes more sense than any other that I have studied.

Why is it that when some things are fulfilled they are no longer valid... example: old covenant customs, statues, etc., yet Jesus gave the apostles the Great Commission in the last days of the old covenant and said he would be with them until the end of the old covenant, and Paul says it was fulfilled in the last days of the old covenant. Why would this still be valid to us today if it was fulfilled in the last days? (mission accomplished) How can we continue to fulfill the commission when it was already fulfilled? When did Jer.31:31-34 come into effect? It says that God would put His law **within** them and they shall **not** teach again each man his neighbor or his brother, saying, know the Lord, for they shall all know Him. I can't see this being fulfilled after we get to heaven. Thanks and have patience with me ha

I know Jesus fulfilled the law, and it became obsolete. I was wondering why when some things are fulfilled they are no longer valid, yet, when other things were fulfilled they are still valid. I hope you can understand what I am trying to ask.

**Answer:** I suppose the answer lies in the intent with which things are instituted. The Old Testament laws and rituals were provisional in nature and were intended to point out our fallenness, our need for a blood sacrifice to obtain atonement, and thus prepare us to receive Christ. On the other hand, the charge to share the gospel with our fellow man will last as long as earth and mankind remain. Paul told Timothy to teach others who were capable of teaching others (II Tim. 2:2). The charge to appoint elders has the like object in view; viz, to instruct men in righteousness and salvation. So, some things pass because they were intended only to serve a provisional need or purpose, others remain because they are timeless. Blessings,

**Question:** Dear Kurt, A few challenging thoughts for your pondering generated from your latest newsletter:

1) Re: Are the Jews still God's chosen people? They all never were -- only the remnant, the by-faith seed of Abraham, the Israel within Israel were (Rom. 9:6, 8, 27; 11:5).

**Answer:** I agree that true Israel has always been a spiritual people identified by the obedience of faith. However, it is also true that national Israel held a provisional place in God's economy for purposes of bringing Christ into the world. It is the latter notion that I address in the article, viz., whether national Israel still occupies some special place in the divine economy.

2) The "free gift" -- it was never "free" for God or for us, even Jesus said to "count the cost." That phrase is a mistranslation. The word "free" is not in the original Greek (Rom. 5:15, 16, 18; 6:23; Rev. 22:17). It was wrongly added by the translators.

**Answer:** Agreed, the gift requires response on our part, and that includes being faithful even unto martyrdom. However, I note that Paul says we are "justified freely" by his grace (Rom. 3:24). Thus, the idea that justification is a gift is clearly scriptural, even though there is a cost to us. The cost is inherent in choosing and living faithfully, but it does not purchase our redemption. The blood of Christ alone does that, and it was the gift of God.

3) You seem to contradict yourself re: the law: p-4 "But the law of Moses is now abrogated and annulled . . . the law has been annulled by Christ." p-6 "The moral laws of God are timeless . . . they apply now." p-10 "Today, moral law still exists." ALL THE LAW OR ONLY PART OF IT ???

**Answer:** The contradiction is only apparent. Moral law has always existed and always will. The moral law antedated Moses and is essentially timeless. Moses merely codified it; he did not create or decree it. The moral law survives the abrogation of the Mosaic law. It was wrong to commit adultery in the Patriarchal age, it was wrong under Moses and it is wrong now.

Also p-6 "the addition of grace." p-10 "Law and grace are not mutually exclusive. They have always existed together . . . but the addition of Grace. Under the Mosaic economy grace did not exist." WHICH IS IT ???

**Answer:** I see your point. Perhaps it would have less confusing and more correct to say that the Mosaic law did not provide for man's ultimate atonement, than to say there was no "grace" under the old law. Paul says that grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began (II Tim. 1:9). As I understand the apostle, he is saying that during former ages God overlooked the sins of men based upon the blood of Christ that would one day be shed. Adam, Noah, and the Patriarchs all lived under law (the moral law), all were guilty as sinners, but all found grace with God. This

was equally true during the period of the Mosaic law. God has always devised means for those that seek him to find grace. Thus, while the law of Moses did not provide a means of atonement (the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins), grace was prospectively applied to the faithful remnant based upon the work Christ would do upon the cross. They died righteous men and went to Paradise to wait for the actual shedding of Christ's blood and the resurrection. They were deemed righteous even though they died under the law of Moses -- a system that did not provide man's atonement - based upon the blood of Christ, although it was not yet shed. However, the point I was trying to make to the questioner is that law and grace are not mutually exclusive. They can and do exist together. We live under law today (the moral law) but we find grace in Christ for our failings where we repent and confess our faults before God. We are not saved by the subtraction of law, but the addition of grace. When a judge acquits a man of crime, he does not take away the law; rather he adds a judicial decree of justification; he adds grace, not takes away law.

Thanks for calling my misstatement to my attention. It is good to know someone is paying attention!

**Question:** Kurt, in your view, what is the "beloved city" of Rev 20:9? Thinking. Thx.

**Answer:** The "beloved city" is the church. The battle of God & Magog is the persecution under Nero and the Jews. They Jews and Romans, including others nations of the Roman Empire, lay siege to the church ("surround the beloved city") in the persecution under Nero, but God delivers them in the judgments of AD 66-70, including the destruction of Jerusalem and Roman civil wars.

**Q:** Hi Kurt, can you help me please, about this - "salvation was accomplished on the cross, but the end of age was consummated on 70 with the destruction of the temple, am I right Kurt?

**A:** Salvation, redemption, atonement - everything - to do with conquering sin occurred at the cross. See Col. 2:14 - "triumphing over them (sin, death, etc) in it (the cross)." AD 70 had nothing to do with salvation from sin, redemption or atonement. The OT law also ended at the cross ("the priesthood being changed, there is of necessity a change also in the law" Heb. 7:12; cf. Eph. 2:15). The legal termination of the mosaic age occurred at the cross, though the outward forms of Judaism lingered for a while, finally being taken away in AD 70. So, yes, the end was concluded in AD 70.

# Restored Israel

## and the Kingdom of the Messiah

by

Kurt Simmons

One does not have to move in dispensationalist circles long before he hears that the establishment of modern state of Israel in Palestine fulfills prophecies that mark the imminent return of Christ. Underlying this doctrine is the belief that modern state of Israel has a continuing claim upon God's special favor and occupies an important place in future pages of redemption's story. However, this view is sorely mistaken. The modern state of Israel is antichrist; it is a cursing and execration; its very existence stands in denial of the Sonship, Kingdom, and Priesthood of Christ, and has no further role to play in the sacred history of salvation. It is not the *political* restoration of Israel the prophets spoke to, but the *spiritual* restoration of man in Christ.

### The Tower of Babel and the Call of Abraham

Scripture records that, early into the history of the race, God was required to divinely intervene to save mankind. The first such instance was the flood of Noah. The circumstance bringing on the flood was a general turning away of men from God, but, more especially, the apostasy of the world's few believers, called the "sons of God," by profanely marrying the daughters of unbelieving men. The children of these unions grew up to be "giants" (Heb. *Nephil*, a "tree-feller" *e.g.*, a tyrant or despot, *cf.* Isa. 14:8 where the like term is used of the king of Babylon), who filled the earth with violence and oppression. (Gen. 6:1-4, 11) By their marriages to unbelieving women, the existence of a righteous seed was threatened, requiring God's divine intervention lest the righteous perish from the earth. The absolute necessity for the flood may be seen in the fact that, out of all mankind, only eight

souls were brought through its waters. (I Pet. 3:20; II Pet. 2:5)<sup>1</sup>

After the flood, scripture records that the earth was of one tongue and lived and dwelt together in the plain of Shinar. (Gen. 11:1, 2)<sup>2</sup> The people's manner of life at this juncture can only be described as one of disbelief and disaffection from God, epitomized by the erection of a tower whose height they intended to reach to very heaven itself. (v. 4) Like weeds choking out the goodly herbs and vegetables of a garden, the commingling of the righteous and the wicked in a single social and political organization threatened extinction of the godly seed. Hence, God divinely intervened to save mankind a second time by confounding their language, causing them to part asunder and populate the remote places of the earth and the isles of the sea in order that, by scattering abroad mankind, the goodly seed might have room to grow unaffected by the habits and customs of the wicked. (Gen. 11:1-9) It is against this background that we are introduced to Abraham.

The call of Abraham is given in Gen. 12:1-3:

*"Now the Lord had said unto Abram, get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy*

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<sup>1</sup> These same men are probably the "angels" that sinned and were cast down to tartarus under chains of darkness to be reserved unto judgment. (II Pet. 2:4)

<sup>2</sup> The crisis requiring confounding the people's tongue came only 101 years after the deluge. This is seen from the genealogies in Gen. 11:10-16 tracing the offspring of Shem unto Peleg, in whose days the earth was divided. (Gen. 10:25)

*name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed."*

The evil manners of the wicked are transmitted more readily than the righteousness habits of the believing are learned. The commingling of the righteous and wicked, whether by marriage before the flood or in a single social structure after the flood, had threatened the existence of a righteous seed altogether. The significance of our introduction to Abraham at this juncture of sacred history is to show God's work in preserving a goodly seed in the earth by making of Abraham a *separate* nation unto himself. However, this work would not culminate in the founding of national Israel under Moses, but in the *church* of the Lord Christ. National Israel was merely *provisional*; it served to nurture and keep alive a righteous seed until the kingdom of the Messiah, into which people of *every* race and language would be gathered. This is the meaning of the promise that in Abraham *all nations* of the earth would be blessed. (Gen. 12:3) Under the Mosaic economy, one's ability to participate in the blessings of Israel depended upon his status under the law; to inherit a paternity and be enrolled in the congregation depended upon whether one was slave or free, male or female, Jew or Greek. In Christ, none of these distinctions affect one's hope of salvation. Through obedience to the Gospel, every race and language of men are made heirs of the promise to Abraham: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heir according to the promise." (Ga. 3:27-29; cf. Jno. 1:13; 3:3-5)

No nation can exist as a separate entity without laws defining its borders, organizing its powers, and enforcing its decrees. God instituted Israel as a nation separate from the heathen by the ordinances of the Mosaic law, which served as a "wall of partition" between Jew and Gentile. (Eph. 2:14; cf. Isa. 5:1-7) However, in Christ, the wall of partition was broken down that he might create in himself one new man, and reconcile both Jew and Gentile to God in *one body* by the cross. (Eph. 2:14-16; cf. 1:10) If all soteriological distinction between Jew and Gentile is abolished in Christ, what basis is there for believing that national Israel occupies some favored place in the divine scheme after the institution of the church?

Nationhood consists in the sum total of the laws and institutions which mark a people off from the rest of

mankind. Abolition of the law separating Jew from Gentile of necessity meant the termination of fleshly Israel as a nation before God. To be a Jew, if such is to have any Biblical meaning at all, must find its origin in the sacred scriptures. Therefore, if the law was abolished under scripture, so was Biblical Judaism. Having been thus dissolved like so many grains of salt in the sea, Judaism can only be restored by reinstatement of the Mosaic law. But the temple service and sacrifices of the law pointed to Christ; they were merely the types and shadows of which Christ is the body and substance. (Col. 1:19; 2:16, 17; Heb. 10:1-4) Hence, reversion to the law of Moses is an implicit *denial* of the Sonship and priesthood of Christ. And this is nothing if not apostasy.<sup>3</sup> "For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor." (Gal. 2:18) Indeed, it was their obstinate adherence to the temple and its service that marked the Jewish nation for destruction in A.D. 70 by the hand of Rome:

*"He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations. I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not. Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word; your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed. A voice of noise from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice of the Lord that rendereth recompence to his enemies." (Isa. 66:3-6)*

Jesus made the like prophecy regarding destruction of Jerusalem and Judea (Matt. 23:34-24:34; Lk. 19:41-44; 23:27-31), as did both Peter and Stephen. (Acts 2:20, 40; 6:14) God was pleased to destroy the nation for rejecting Christ; the Old Covenant is abolished, the Jews have *no* covenantal relationship with God today. The modern state of Israel is founded in very denial of the Lordship of Christ. Far from being a token of God's continuing favor toward the Jews, the reestablishment of the modern state of Israel is a token of their continuing rebellion against Christ and God.

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<sup>3</sup> Apparently some accommodation was made for Jewish Christians living in Palestine during the transition period, permitting them to continue certain customs and observances associated with the Mosaic law that Gentiles were prohibited to keep as denying the truth of the Gospel. (Cf. Acts 21:20-25; Gal. 5:1-4; Col.2:14-17)

We may fairly assume that, in God's own time, they will again suffer wrath and destruction.

### Restored Israel in the Prophets

So much for the big picture of Israel's provisional place in God's redemptive purpose, how does this picture bear out in the prophets? Does the image given in the prophets accord with the one we have just sketched? Listen to Isaiah:

"And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea." Isa. 11:10, 11

The Messianic context of this prophecy is seen in the reference to the "root of Jesse," which points to the promise that Christ would spring from the fruit of David's loins. (II Sam. 7:12-14) The catalogue of nations mentioned reflect the places where Israel and Judah were scattered in the desolations suffered under Assyria and Babylon and show that a modern-day fulfillment is beyond the contemplation of the text. The point of the prophecy is that, as God gathered his people a *first* time in the return of the captivity under Ezra and Nehemiah, so he would gather them a *second* time into Christ. Jesus is the standard or ensign around which all men would rally, a beacon to give light to those in darkness, providing glorious rest from the labor and anguish of sin. John the Baptist spoke to the gathering of Israel by the Messiah when he said: "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." (Matt. 3:11, 12) The "garner" is Christ's kingdom-church, into which are gathered all who obey the gospel message; the "chaff" consisted of unbelieving Jews who were consumed in the conflagration ("baptized with fire") that enveloped the nation in A.D. 70.

In Hosea we read concerning the restoration of Israel:

*Now when she had weaned Loruhamah, she conceived, and bare a son. Then said God, Call his name Loammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God. Yet the number of the children of Israel*

*shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God. Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel. (Hos. 1:8-11)*

This prophecy spoke to the Assyrian invasion and carrying into captivity of the northern tribes. For their abominations they "were not God's people" and hence were cast away. However, in time to come, God would gather his people together again from all the places where they had been scattered. Although presumably this began to be fulfilled in the return of the captivity from Babylon, the prophecy looks beyond national restoration unto the spiritual restoration of *all* mankind in Christ. We may be certain of this inasmuch as the New Testament writers, by the Holy Ghost, apply this passage unto the conversion of the Gentiles. (Rom. 9:25, 26; I Pet. 2:10) "For they are not all Israel which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed." (Rom. 9:6-8) The children of "Israel" who would be united with the children of Judah were not the *physical* descendants of Abraham carried away by the Assyrians. The children of Israel were the *spiritual* seed and progeny of Abraham, the children of the Promised Seed, Jesus Christ. Thus, the prophecy of Hosea did not have in view the political restoration of national Israel at all, but the gathering together of earth's peoples under the "one head" of Christ. (Eph. 1:10; 2:16)

Ezekiel made the like prophecy of Israel's restoration:

*"Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: and I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all...And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them...and I will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore." Ezek. 37:21-26*

Ezekiel is not saying that Christ would be an earthly king over restored Israel in Judah. Indeed, when Jesus perceived that the people would come to take him by



force to make him king, he hid himself apart in a mountain alone (Jno. 6:15) – conduct inconsistent with one appointed to reign from an earthly throne. The Jews wanted a national liberator to free them from the yoke of Rome, but Jesus came to free men, not from political or military rule, but from the bondage of *sin and death*. Having brought his people back from Babylon and the places they were scattered, their true King would reign over them *spiritually*, not nationally or politically. Thus, when Christ was conceived in the womb of the Virgin, Gabriel said “He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.” (Lk. 1:32, 33) The angel’s prophecy was fulfilled in Christ’s resurrection and ascension. At his ascension, Jesus received coronation as King of kings and Lord of lords, and was given the throne of David. Peter makes this plain in the very first gospel sermon preached after the Lord’s ascension:

*“This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we are all witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.” (Acts 2:32-36)*

Thus, by the plain statement of Peter by the Holy Ghost, Jesus sat down upon the David’s throne in *heaven*, thenceforth to await his enemies to be made a stool beneath his feet.

Amos provides the following picture of restored Israel and the Davidic throne:

*“In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the Lord that doeth this...and I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God.” Amos 9:11-15*

The Davidic throne had been thrown down in the captivity under Babylon and the Gentiles ruled over God’s people. Amos thus looks to a time when the Davidic throne would be restored and its occupant rule over the Gentiles in restored Israel. Although this prophecy may well have begun to be fulfilled in the return of the captivity from Babylon, it is clear that the idealized picture it represents looks beyond national restoration unto spiritual restoration in Christ. Hence, James indicates fulfillment of this prophecy by the bringing in of the Gentiles into the *church*. (Acts 15:13-17)

The union of men from every race and language under the kingship of Christ bespeaks a reversal of the division made at Babel. Hence, we may expect language pointing to a time when a common tongue would be restored to mankind. Just such a picture is given in Zephaniah: “For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent.” (Zeph. 3:9) The first, faint glimmerings of the fulfillment of Zephaniah’s prophecy occurred on Pentecost after Christ’s resurrection, when people from the whole inhabited world heard the apostles speak to them the wonderful works of God in their own tongue. (Acts 2:1-11) Of course, Zephaniah’s prophecy is merely poetic and not intended to indicate that all languages would one day vanish and single tongue obtain again among mankind. The “pure language” the prophet mentioned is better understood as the *word of the gospel*. Rather than the babble of confused religious profession that formerly obtained, the nations would be turned the pure faith of the gospel, and Jew and Gentile “with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Rom. 15:6)

### **The Destruction of Jerusalem**

The destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 marked the final earthly scene in the restitution of all things. This is because the kingdom of the Messiah had to be purged of all who refused to serve Israel’s King before it could properly be deemed restored. “And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.” (Acts 3:21-23) Hear Isaiah:

*“And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin: and I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness. And the destruction of the transgressors*

*and of the sinner shall be together, and they that forsake the Lord shall be consumed.” (Isa. 1:25-28)*

The restoration of Israel’s judges and counselors would be effected by the purging of her dross and the destruction of her sinners. Then would the kingdom be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city. But this never happened in national Israel’s history. Even after the return of the captivity the people never recovered their national piety and devotion. Malachi speaks to the apostasy of the children of the captivity and prophesies the coming of a second “Elijah” (John the Baptist) to restore the spiritual foundations of the kingdom and prepare a people for the Lord. (Mal. 3:7-4:6; cf. Matt. 11:14) It is therefore manifest that Isaiah’s prophecy looks beyond national restoration from the captivity unto the kingdom of the Messiah. (Cf. Isa. 2:1-4) Numerous parables of Jesus make plain this aspect of Israel’s restoration.

*“A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return...But his servants hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us. And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having receive the kingdom, then he commanded...those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither and slay them before me.” (Lk. 19:12-27)*

This parable speaks directly to the destruction of Jerusalem. The King’s enemies were the Jews who did not want to live under Christ’s reign. Having received the church-kingdom, Jesus caused the unbelieving Jews to be slain. “Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never save suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?” (Lk. 23:28-31) Jesus was the green tree, the disbelieving Jews were the dry tree. If Jesus suffered such things, what would the Jews suffer? “Trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots” (Jude 12), the disobedient were cut down and cast in the fire. (Matt. 3:10)

*“As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of his world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” (Matt. 13:40-42)*

The “end of the world” (*Gk., aion*) is the end of the Mosaic age and dispensation. At the end of the age, Jesus would cause all the rebellious and unbelieving servants to be gathered out of his kingdom and cast into a “furnace of fire.” The furnace here answers to the “unquenchable fire” that John the Baptist said would consume the chaff. (Matt. 3:12) The angels are the ministers of God’s wrath, the Romans: “For he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.” (Rom. 13:4) The Lord of the vineyard came and destroyed the husbandmen, and gave the vineyard to others. (Lk. 20:9-16) The kingdom would be taken from the Jews and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. (Mat. 21:43)

### Conclusion

The restoration of Israel was spiritual, not national or political. National Israel’s place in the divine economy was merely provisional. They were “vessels of wrath” (Rom. 9:22) fitted for destruction, which God bore with over long centuries of rebellion and disobedience. They filled up the measure of their national sin when they crucified the Lord of Glory and persecuted his church and, hence, were destroyed. Today, the church is the Israel of God. (Rom. 9:6; Gal. 6:16) It consists of men of every race and language who men are gathered into the Messianic kingdom where they worship and adore their Saviour.

