

When will These Things be?

**An In-Depth Study of
the Olivet Discourse**



Geoff Barnard

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Abbreviations:

ASV = American Standard Version
NIV = New International Version
KJV = King James Version
NKJV= New King James Version
RSV = Revised Standard Version
NRSV = New Revised Standard Version

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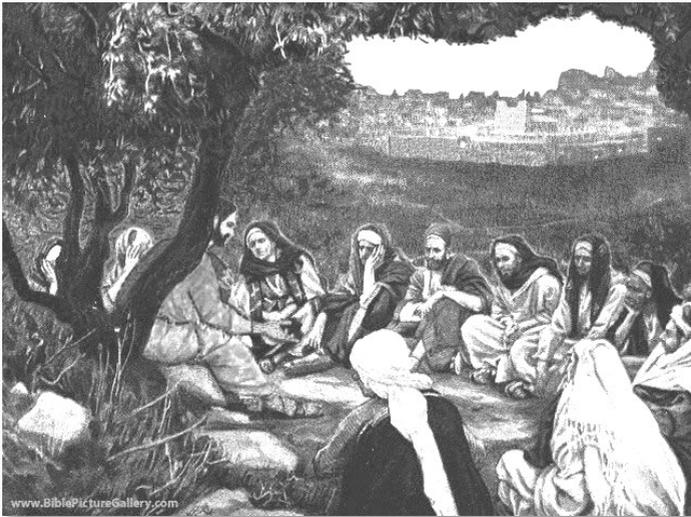
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When will These Things be?

The Olivet discourse is the name generally given to the systematic teaching that Jesus gave to his disciples on the Mount of Olives. It is found in the three synoptic gospels: in Matthew chapter 24, Mark chapter 13, and Luke chapter 21. We shall have occasion to look at all three passages because there are details in each that are not contained in all. They are the clearest statements that Jesus made regarding the immediate future of the Temple buildings and their destruction. Jesus is warning his disciples well ahead of time to prepare for the momentous events to come. In particular, Jesus is telling his disciples to anticipate tribulation and persecution before the ultimate triumph of the Kingdom of God.



The Olivet Discourse ¹

¹ http://www.secondtree.net/2_prophecy/olivet/olivet.html

As we shall see, the discourse was spoken, and subsequently written, in a very enigmatic way. It is unclear whether the tribulation that Jesus describes is past, present or future. This has to be deliberate on the part of Jesus because his words resonate throughout the ages. They are as relevant for us as they were relevant for the disciples who were listening to him on the Mount of Olives. Unfortunately, because of the enigmatic nature of these passages, it has led to widely divergent interpretations and significant schisms within the Christian community.

Eschatological Interpretation

The three major schools of eschatological interpretation are as follows.

Preterism² is a Christian eschatological view that interprets some or all prophecies of the Bible as events which have already happened in history. For example, Daniel is interpreted as events that happened in the second century BCE, while the book of Revelation is interpreted as events that happened in the first century CE.

There is great strength in this view of prophecy because it encourages us to appreciate historical context. On the other hand, there is great weakness because devout but rigid preterists fail to appreciate the repetitive nature of Biblical prophecy. More often than not, Christians who are a-millennialist³ and hold to replacement theology are rigid preterists.

² Taken from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Preterism>

³ A-millennialism, as its name suggests, does not believe in any literal reign of Jesus on planet Earth in the future. It is an eschatology that is espoused by perhaps the majority of the Christian world. For them our eternal destiny is “in heaven”. This is where believers go when they die and it is a spiritual rather than a physical existence.

At the opposite end of the eschatological spectrum is **Futurism**.⁴ This is a Christian eschatological view that interprets much (sometimes all) prophecy as depicting future events in a literal, physical, apocalyptic, and global context. Futurist beliefs usually have a close association with Premillennialism, Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism.

The strength in this position is the recognition that much prophecy both in the Tanach and the New Testament has relevance for us today, with many prophecies still awaiting complete fulfillment. In other words, the instructions that Jesus gave in the Olivet discourse, for example, are also to prepare us for the days to come leading to the establishment of God's kingdom on earth.

The irony is the fact that many dispensationalists do not anticipate persecution but expect a "rapture" event that is going to lift them out of tribulation before the going gets too tough. The weakness of this position is that sometimes Christians who are devout but rigid futurists have little regard, or even ignorance of, the historical context of prophecy.

For the sake of completeness, there is another approach to eschatology that is described as **Historicism**.⁵ This approach to eschatology combines some features present in Preterism with other features present in Futurism. Historicists see the unfolding of Biblical prophecy throughout history. In any age, prophecy is seen to have relevance as historicists see prophecy revealing the entire course of history of the church from the close of the first century to the end of time.

⁴ Taken from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Futurism>

⁵ Taken from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicism>

A clear example of this approach is the way the letters to the seven churches (Revelation chapters 2 and 3) are interpreted. The church at Ephesus is the early church that loses its “first love”, the church at Laodicea is the lukewarm church in the last days.

Some of the great weaknesses of the historicist approach include much inconsistency, conjecture and speculation. There is, neither can there ever be, any agreement about the various outlines of church history. This is because centuries pass and new figures emerge on the world stage. For example, the Protestant reformers were convinced that the Roman Catholic Church and the Pope in particular, was the Antichrist. Some still hold the same opinion. Another weakness of this approach is the temptation to predict the date of the end of the world (age). For example, Charles Wesley predicted that the end of the world would occur in 1794 based on his analysis of the Book of Revelation. Remarkably, Adam Clarke, whose commentary was published in 1831, proposed a possible date of **2015** for the end of the papal power.

In nineteenth century America, William Miller proposed that the end of the world would occur on October 22nd 1844, based on a historicist model used with Daniel 8:14.⁶ This spawned a national movement in the United States known as “Millerism”. Of course, October 22nd 1844 came and went leading to much disappointment and disillusion. It is very interesting to note that out of this disappointment, some Millerites established the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Others established the Jehovah's Witnesses. Both of these groups continue to hold to historicist interpretations of Bible prophecy.⁷

⁶ **Daniel 8:14 (NIV)** He said to me, "It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be re-consecrated."

⁷ Taken from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicism>

It is this author's firm conviction that there are elements of truth to be found in all three approaches. Like the preterists, it is essential that we see Biblical prophecy in its historic setting and context. For example, it is certainly true that the initial focus of the book of Daniel finds its fulfillment in the second century BCE.

In addition, some (although not all) of the prophecy in the book of Revelation was fulfilled in the years leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem in both the first and second centuries CE. But I wish to maintain that, in many cases, biblical prophecy is generally repetitive. There is always an initial fulfillment and there may be ongoing fulfillments of various prophetic motifs. The "abomination of desolation" written about in the book of Daniel and in the Olivet discourse is a particular case in point.⁸ Inevitably, there will be a final fulfillment where every feature of the biblical prophecy is fulfilled. The difficult question, that we will consider in due course, is to know when and if the final fulfillment of any particular prophecy may have already taken place.

Before we look at the Olivet discourse in detail, it is interesting to note its geographical setting which is the Mount of Olives on the eastern side of Jerusalem. This is where the final battle will take place. This event is described in the final chapter of the book of Zechariah.

⁸ **Daniel 9:27 (NIV)** He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing [of the temple] he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.

Matthew 24:15-16 (NIV) So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel - let the reader understand - then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

Zechariah 14:3-5 (RSV) *Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle. On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives which lies before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley; so that one half of the Mount shall withdraw northward, and the other half southward. And the valley of my mountains shall be stopped up, for the valley of the mountains shall touch the side of it; and you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD your God will come, and all the holy ones with him.*

The geological changes described in this passage have yet to happen. The mountain valley through which some (perhaps half) of the population of Jerusalem will be able to flee to safety from the approaching enemy has yet to be created. Nevertheless, the return of Jesus to this very place was predicted by those standing next to the disciples on the day of Ascension.

Acts 1:10-12 (RSV) *While they [the disciples] were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.*

Let us now turn to the Olivet discourse.



The Olivet Discourse

Matthew 24:1-2 (NIV) *Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."*

This is relatively straight forward. From the Mount of Olives there is, to this day, a panoramic view of the Temple Mount. In the days of Jesus, an unparalleled view of the Temple buildings was available from this vantage point. The sight may well have been breathtaking. It has been suggested that they would be looking at one of the wonders of the world at this time. Herod's Temple was magnificent. Jesus, however, was not impressed. He begins his discourse by preparing his disciples for the days when the Temple Mount would be "wiped clean" of its buildings.

This was to be fulfilled both in the days leading up to the Roman destruction in 70 CE (the first Jewish-Roman war) and, even more so, in the days of Bar Kokhba (the final Jewish-Roman war) which took place between the years 132 to 136 CE.

This latter conflict was against the armies of the Roman Emperor Hadrian. The city was completely rebuilt at this time as Aelia Capitolina, a Roman city in the province of Syria Palæstina. The Temple Mount remained (and may even have been extended) but temples and pagan monuments were built on it. The prophetic significance of both these periods will be considered in due course.

The words of Jesus regarding the destruction the Temple hit the disciples hard. They were extremely perplexed. There were lots of questions.

Matthew 24:3 (NIV) *As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"*

The response of the disciples in Matthew's gospel is very interesting. They are asking two or perhaps three questions. Firstly, when will **this** happen? This has to refer to the destruction of the Temple buildings. This is confirmed by the parallel passages in Mark and Luke.

Mark 13:4 (NKJV) *"Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?"*

This is interesting because this verse in Mark also seems to imply that there is more than one question. When will these things (plural) be? What will be the sign (singular) when all these things (plural) will be fulfilled? Luke puts it much the same way.⁹ And, as we will see, it may also be very significant to note that it is only Matthew's account that includes the words *"and of the end of the age"*.

Accordingly, the reply that Jesus gives encompasses all of these questions. The conditions that he describes will have relevance in the years leading up to 70 CE (Preterism), 136 CE (perhaps as an example of Historicism) and in the days leading up to the Second Coming (Futurism). The one answer addresses all the questions. The obvious conclusion is that Jesus is giving us prophetic motifs that are going to be repeated throughout history – past, present and future.

The greatest danger facing the disciples will be deception.

⁹ **Luke 21:7 (NIV)** "Teacher," they asked, "when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?"

Deception

Matthew 24:4-5 (NKJV) *And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many.*

Without doubt, the primary concern that Jesus has is that his disciples are going to face deception. Messianic fervor was not about to end with Jesus. In fact, one has to conclude that the early disciples anticipated that Jesus would return in their lifetime. Seen in this light, Luke adds some interesting additions.

Luke 21:8-9 (NIV) *He replied: "Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and, 'the time is near.' Do not follow them.*

Perhaps the most significant point in Luke's version is that some would suggest that "the time is near". The Greek word εὐθέως (eutheos) is used and this is translated "near" in the NIV and "by and by" in the KJV. It generally means "immediately" as we will see in later verses of the discourse. There was an expectation in the early church that Jesus would return to establish his kingdom. In his letters to the Thessalonians, Paul addresses his concern that believers were becoming unsettled by suggestions that the "day of the Lord" had already happened.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 (NIV) *Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction.*

2 Thessalonians 2:4 (NIV) *He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.*

The “signs” that Paul describes that are prerequisite are, firstly, rebellion and, secondly, revelation. The Greek word that is translated as “rebellion” in the NIV is **ἀποστασία** (transliterated apostasia). Thus from the Greek we get the English word “apostasy”. I believe that this has a much deeper meaning than just “rebellion” although this might also be very significant. In the KJV, the Greek word is translated “falling away”.

As we will see, Jesus anticipated this “falling away” even worldwide apostasy. Furthermore, I believe that the Apostle Paul is very mindful of what Jesus said in addressing this issue. This fact alone indicates that early writings of all that Jesus had said were available to him. All of Paul’s letters were written during the 50s CE and, it is generally thought, that Paul died in Rome during the reign of the Emperor Nero perhaps around 62-64 CE.



The second “sign” indicated by Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians, is revelation of the “man of lawlessness” as translated in the NIV or, perhaps more accurately, the “son of perdition” as translated in the KJV and RSV.

Perdition speaks of eternal damnation. Like Antiochus IV in the second century BCE, this person exalts himself as God. Antiochus took the title “Epiphanes” which means “God made manifest”. As we will see, Jesus anticipates this recurring motif as well.

Mark 13:5-6 (RSV) *Jesus began to say to them, "Take heed that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray.*

One assumes that this deception was true in the lead up to the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE and, perhaps even more so, at the time of Bar Kokhba in the second century CE. In particular, it has been suggested that it was the insistence, particularly by Rabbi Akiva ben Joseph, that Simon Bar Kokhba was the Messiah that led to an increasing schism between what was becoming Rabbinic Judaism and the emergent Messianic community.

As I will argue, it is my opinion that we have not considered this second century historic event sufficiently in our understanding of the Olivet discourse. Needless to say, the final events of this age will also be characterized by great deception both within and without the believing community. The specific signs accompanying this deception are given by Jesus in the following passage.



Signs of the Times

Matthew 24:6-8 (RSV) *And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: all this is but the beginning of the birth-pangs.*¹⁰

Again Luke makes some additions.

Luke 21:9-11 (RSV) *“And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified; for this must first take place, but the end will not be at once.” Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences; **and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven** [emphasis added].*

One assumes that all of these signs were present in the early centuries CE to a greater or lesser extent. Much has been written, however, about the increasing magnitude of each of these signs throughout history to the present day. Today we are experiencing more wars, more volcanic activity, and more viral epidemics than ever before. Nevertheless, I believe that we are still awaiting the extreme cosmic phenomena described in this passage in Luke. These words are probably looking into the distant future to the end of the age. But what happens next in the collective description of the Olivet discourse as described in the three Gospels is very interesting.

¹⁰ Also **Mark 13:7-8 (NIV)** When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.

Persecution

Matthew 24:9 (RSV) *Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and put you to death; and you will be hated by **all nations** for my name's sake [emphases added].*

Matthew says “then”. This seems to suggest that the inevitable persecution will follow the “signs”, which are defined in this Gospel as **the beginning** of the birth pains. This is reinforced by the fact that Matthew describes the disciples as being hated by “**all nations**”. For this to be true, the Gospel must have reached the ends of the earth.¹¹ It is my opinion, therefore, that Matthew’s account of Jesus’ words is perhaps more relevant to believers in every age and, particularly, at the last. On the other hand, Luke expresses this inevitable persecution somewhat differently.

¹¹ This is alluded to in the Tanach in many places. See, for example, **Psalm 22:27-28** All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations. **Psalm 65:5-8** You answer us with awesome deeds of righteousness, O God our Savior, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas, who formed the mountains by your power, having armed yourself with strength, who stilled the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, and the turmoil of the nations. Those living far away fear your wonders; where morning dawns and evening fades you call forth songs of joy. **Psalm 98:3** He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. **Isaiah 11:10-11** In that day the Root of Jesse [the Messiah] will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious. **Micah 5:4** He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth
All quotations from the NIV.

Luke 21:12-19 (NIV) *But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. **All men** will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm you will gain life [emphases added].*

Unlike the account in the Gospel of Matthew, I believe the words in Luke are primarily given to the earliest disciples. They were going to experience severe persecution **before** any of the major global signs were to take place. This was to be their immediate experience and Jesus was warning them. Rather than the “all nations” it was going to be “all men” that were going to hate them including close family. The Gospel was yet to go to the ends of the earth.

I am reminded of the words of Jesus:

John 16:33 (KJV) *These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

The Gospel of Mark does not speak of “then” or “before all this”. His approach is different again.

Mark 13:9-10 (RSV) *But take heed to yourselves; for they will deliver you up to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them. **And the gospel must first be preached to all nations** [emphasis added].*

This passage seems to be somewhat intermediate between Luke (which is closer in time) and Matthew (which is more distant in time). Mark's account alludes to the fact that, as the Gospel travels out from Jerusalem, the disciples will be called to give an account to governors and kings in many regions and nations. It is probable that Mark and certainly Matthew are writing *primarily* to believers in the second century onwards. Thus a combination of the three synoptic accounts of the Olivet discourse encompasses the entire "Gospel age" and, secondly, these words have relevance for the early disciples, for believers throughout history, and for us. Matthew's account continues.

Apostasy

Matthew 24:10-13 (RSV) *And then many will fall away, and betray one another, and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold. But he who endures to the end will be saved.*

The focus of Matthew continues to be towards the end of the age. Through this account, Jesus seems to be predicting future ecclesiastical chaos in the last days. I am reminded of the words of Paul in his letter to Timothy:

2 Timothy 3:1-5 (NIV) *But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good¹², treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God - having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.*

¹² Perhaps more accurately, "despisers of the good" (see NKJV)

The word “love” seems to feature several times in this passage. People at this time will be lovers of themselves, of money and of pleasure. But they will not be lovers of the good, not lovers of God. In fact they will be without love.

Moreover, the love that Jesus speaks about in Matthew 24 is the Greek word “*agape*” which is the love which is the essence of God¹³ and that only God can provide.¹⁴ Agape is the selfless love that does not ask for anything in return. The prediction that Jesus is making is that the “agape” of the majority will grow cold. He is not speaking about the world because the world cannot know that kind of love.¹⁵

Thus one might conclude that Jesus (through Matthew’s account) is predicting end-time worldwide apostasy.¹⁶ This is clearly reinforced by the statement that “at that time many will turn away from the faith”. In other words, this is exactly what Paul describes in his second letter to the Thessalonians and which we have already discussed. It is a call for endurance on behalf of the saints. This becomes extremely relevant in the last days.

¹³ **1 John 4:8-12** Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love (agape). This is how God showed his love (agape) among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him ... No one has ever seen God; but if we love (agapoomen) one another, God lives in us and his love (agape) is made complete in us.

¹⁴ **Galatians 5:22-23** But the fruit of the Spirit is love (agape), joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

¹⁵ **1 John 2:15-17** Do not love (agapate) the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

¹⁶ Note the rhetorical question that Jesus asks, namely in **Luke 18:8** “However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” All quotations from NIV.

Revelation 13:8-10 (RSV) *And all who dwell on earth will worship it, every one whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain. If any one has an ear, let him hear: If any one is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if any one slays with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.*

and

Revelation 14:11-12 (RSV) *They have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name. Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.*

[emphases added].

The Gospel

In the midst of this great tribulation and apostasy, there is the extreme and urgent need for the saints (those faithful to Jesus) to endure to the end. As Matthew's account tells us, these disciples still have a work to do.

Matthew 24:14 (NIV) *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.*

This provides further evidence that Matthew's account of Jesus' words is looking beyond the immediate to the end of this present age. Those that endure to the end (Greek: **τέλος** transliterated telos) are required to preach the gospel of the kingdom as a testimony to all nations and then the end (**τέλος**) will come. This is also consistent with the fact that it is only in Matthew's gospel that the following words are placed into the disciple's mouths:

Matthew 24:3 (NIV) "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming **and of the end (τέλος) of the age** [emphasis added]?"

The fact that those faithful to Jesus have to remain to the end also means that there is the opportunity for salvation to everyone who believes - even at the last.¹⁷ Mark re-iterates the point although he does not speak of the end of the age.

Mark 13:10 (RSV) *And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.*

Without doubt, Jesus' words as expressed in Matthew and Mark are looking across time. It is interesting to speculate, however, whether there is a difference between Matthew's "this gospel of the kingdom" and Mark's "the gospel". Does the addition of the words "of the kingdom" have any significance? Although I cannot be dogmatic, I nevertheless think they might be prophetic. I am reminded of another question the disciples ask on the Mount of Olives.

Acts 1:6 (RSV) *So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"*

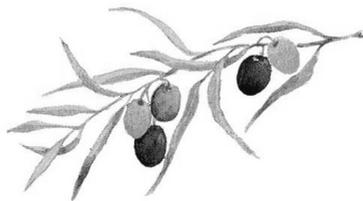
It is noteworthy that Luke is the author of the book of Acts. He is the one who records this final question that disciples get to ask before the Jesus' ascension from the Mount of Olives. The book of Acts is the companion to the gospel of Luke. Thus, his selection of material for the rendering of the Olivet discourse in his gospel account may be consistent with this final question.

¹⁷ This also demonstrates the total deceptive falsehood of any so-called pre-tribulation rapture theory that is so prevalent in dispensationalism. The church needs to be prepared for the last days. Jesus clearly states that wickedness will abound and the love (agape) of the most will grow cold.

The fact is this: Jesus does not castigate his disciples for asking this question, even after being with them and teaching for approximately 40 days.¹⁸ They will have had a unique opportunity to understand the prophetic scriptures from the word of God incarnate himself. Everything that Jesus would have taught them did not suggest that the question was going to be meaningless. In fact, it had to be totally consistent with everything that Jesus has previously said about the Kingdom of God. And this is how Jesus responded to this final question.

Acts 1:7-8 (RSV) *He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."*

Jesus points out that their question has relevance but the times that the Father has already set for the restoration of the kingdom to Israel were not going to be their experience and should not be their concern. Through the writings of Luke, Jesus is preparing his disciples for the immediate days ahead and the fact that the Gospel would be moving out from Jerusalem ultimately to go to the ends of the earth. Thus we can see the significance of Luke's account of the Olivet discourse within this context.



¹⁸ **Acts 1:3 (NIV)** He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.



Jerusalem Surrounded by Armies ¹⁹

Luke 21:20-24 (NIV) *When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. 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; for this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. 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. 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.*

For the first century disciples, no words could be more relevant. It was absolutely vital that these disciples took note of what Jesus was saying. He is speaking of the events leading up to the destruction of the Temple.

¹⁹ The Siege and Destruction of Jerusalem, by David Roberts (1850)

The siege began in February 70 CE and would last for seven months. As we will discuss later, the Temple was destroyed in August of that year on Tish b'Av. The arrival of the Roman armies, even prior to the siege, was the signal for the disciples to flee and there was obviously time to do so. Only those who had taken note of Jesus' preparatory words would have been able to respond at this time. Presumably, they were already prepared to leave. And what did they take apart from a few personal belongings? They took the Gospel.²⁰ Why was this? The answer is simple.

John 3:16 (KJV) *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

The Destruction of Jerusalem

The destruction of Jerusalem was, according to Jesus, “*the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written*” (Luke 21:22). He is referring to various prophetic passages in the Tanach. Here is an example:

Jeremiah 19:7 (RSV) *And in this place I will make void the plans of Judah and Jerusalem, and will cause their people to fall by the sword before their enemies, and by the hand of those who seek their life. I will give their dead bodies for food to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the earth.*

²⁰ **Romans 11:11-12 (NKJV)** I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! **But through their fall**, to provoke them to jealousy, **salvation has come to the Gentiles**. Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness [emphases added]!



The Time of Punishment ²¹

Of course, this passage speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem at the time of Babylon. However, it is also an example of repetitive prophecy. In other words, the judgment that came through Babylon would be repeated by the armies of Rome. This is an inevitable consequence of disobedience. As it says in the Torah:

Deuteronomy 28:25-26 (RSV) *The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you shall go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them; and you shall be a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth. And your dead body shall be food for all birds of the air, and for the beasts of the earth; and there shall be no one to frighten them away.*

²¹ Destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem by Francesco Hayez

Note the mention of carcasses as food to the “birds of the air and the beasts of the earth” in both of the above passages. In other words, Jeremiah is re-iterating the dire consequences of disobedience that are recorded in the Torah. And as we will see, Jesus also uses this imagery as recorded in Matthew’s account.²²

Another very important passage, however, regarding coming judgment is recorded in the prophecy of Ezekiel chapter 5. It begins with the Lord encouraging Ezekiel into prophetic action.

Ezekiel 5:1-4 (NIV) Now, son of man, take a sharp sword and use it as a barber's razor to shave your head and your beard. Then take a set of scales and divide up the hair. When the days of your siege come to an end burn a third of the hair with fire inside the city. Take a third and strike it with the sword all around the city. And scatter a third to the wind for I will pursue them with drawn sword. But take a few strands of hair and tuck them away in the folds of your garment. Again, take a few of these and throw them into the fire and burn them up. A fire will spread from there to the whole house of Israel.

The explanation for this prophetic action is given a little later in the same chapter.

Ezekiel 5:11-12 (NIV) Therefore as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, because you have defiled my sanctuary with all your vile images and detestable practices, I myself will withdraw my favor; I will not look on you with pity or spare you. A third of your people will die of the plague or perish by famine inside you; a third will fall by the sword outside your walls; and a third I will scatter to the winds and pursue with drawn sword.

²² And in Luke chapter 17

It appears that judgment is broken down into thirds. One third clearly perishes either by plague or famine during the siege, another third perishes by the sword. The final third are scattered to the winds but even then their lives are in great peril. This judgment of thirds is repeated both in the Tanach and in the New Testament.²³ Perhaps the most notable passage is in the prophecy of Zechariah.

Zechariah 13:8-9 (RSV) *In the whole land, says the LORD, two thirds shall be cut off and perish, and one third shall be left alive. And I will put this third into the fire and refine them as one refines silver and test them as gold is tested.*

Without doubt, this controversial passage is a re-working of the prophecy recorded in Ezekiel chapter 5. How are we to understand it? Again it is an example of repetitive prophecy as indeed is this verse in Zechariah chapter 12.

Zechariah 12:10-11 (RSV) *And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of compassion and supplication, so that, when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a first-born.*

It is important that we appreciate that the looking on the one who was pierced was fulfilled in part during the crucifixion of Jesus.

John 19:37 (RSV) *And again another scripture says, "They shall look on him whom they have pierced."*

²³ For example, see Revelation chapter 8



Grieving for a First-born Son²⁴

²⁴ Jesus in the arms of Mary - Pencil drawing by Rick Wienecke

It is interesting to note that, most often, the New Testament usage of the prophetic scriptures often takes verses out of context.²⁵ The crucifixion of Jesus took place during the time of the Roman occupation of Judea and, within years, Jerusalem was to be destroyed. Accordingly, the context of Zechariah chapter 12 demands a future fulfillment when every word is set within its right context.²⁶

Another important example is Jesus' usage of the prophecy in Zechariah chapter 13.

Zechariah 13:7 (RSV) "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me," says the LORD of hosts. "Strike the shepherd, that the sheep may be scattered; I will turn my hand against the little ones.

Matthew 26:31 (RSV) Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of me this night; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'

It is apparent that Jesus applies these words in the prophecy of Zechariah chapter 13 to himself. He is, after all, the Good Shepherd.²⁷ Consequently, we may surmise that the very next words will have been fulfilled at that time, namely:

Zechariah 13:7-8 (RSV) I will turn my hand against the little ones. In the whole land, says the LORD, two thirds shall be cut off and perish, and one third shall be left alive.

²⁵ Another clear example is the use of Hosea's prophecy in Matthew's gospel (Matthew 2:15)

²⁶ I have written about this in more detail in a booklet entitled "Is it Safe?".

Please contact the author on: gjrb2@aol.com

²⁷ John 10:11



The Good Shepherd ²⁸

²⁸ The Good Shepherd by Alfred Soord (1868-1915). Note the birds of prey hovering in the background.

These are terrible words that describe the suffering of the Jewish people, particularly at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Josephus writes that 1,100,000 Jewish people perished at the hands of the Romans at that time.²⁹ Furthermore, Milman has written:

*"The slaughter within was even more dreadful than the spectacle from without. Men and women, old and young, insurgents and priests, those who fought and those who entreated mercy, were hewn down in indiscriminate carnage. The number of the slain exceeded that of the slayers. The legionaries had to clamber over heaps of dead to carry on the work of extermination."*³⁰

As we have seen, Jesus anticipated this and warned his disciples.

Luke 21:24 (RSV) *They will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led captive among all nations; and Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.*

It is highly likely that two-thirds of the population perished at the time of the Roman-Jewish wars in the first and second centuries CE. I also believe that throughout history, these terrible words will have been repeated. Maybe two-thirds of all the people of Israel have perished violently when one also considers the Crusades, the Inquisition, the expulsions from Christian nations, the pogroms and the massacres.

Only God knows, but one thing we do know, two thirds of European Jewry perished in the Holocaust.³¹

²⁹ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Jerusalem_\(70\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Jerusalem_(70))

³⁰ Milman HH The History of the Jews, book 16

Defeat, death and dispersion, these are the essential elements that Jesus describes as “the time of punishment of all that has been written”. But there is hope. The diaspora would not last forever. Luke reports the words of Jesus that Jerusalem would be trampled by the Gentiles but only until the times of the Gentiles would be fulfilled.

The question for us, which is probably outside the scope of this essay, is this, have the times of the Gentiles now been fulfilled? It would be very tempting to say “yes”, particularly since 1967 when the entire city of Jerusalem was recovered by the IDF. I have an open mind on this because the “Holy Place” is still in the hands of Islam. Since the 7th century, Islamic edifices have been literally standing in the Holy Place. They are an ongoing abomination that causes desolation.

In Matthew and Mark, there is no mention of the siege of Jerusalem by the Roman armies. There is only reference to the prophetic motif of the abomination that obviously has more than one fulfillment and it is to this particular motif that we now turn.

³¹ The Holocaust (called Shoah in Hebrew) refers to the period from January 30, 1933, when Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany, to May 8, 1945 (V-E Day), when the war in Europe ended. During this time, Jews in Europe were subjected to progressively harsh persecution that ultimately led to the murder of 6,000,000 Jews (1.5 million of these being children) and the destruction of 5,000 Jewish communities. **These deaths represented two-thirds of European Jewry** and one-third of world Jewry. The Jews who died were not casualties of the fighting that ravaged Europe during World War II. Rather, they were the victims of Germany's deliberate and systematic attempt to annihilate the entire Jewish population of Europe, a plan Hitler called the “Final Solution” (Endlösung). Taken from: <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/history.html>

The Abomination of Desolation

Matthew 24:15-22 (NIV) So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel - let the reader understand - then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now - and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.

and

Mark 13:14-20 (NIV) When you see 'the abomination that causes desolation' standing where it does not belong - let the reader understand - then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the roof of his house go down or enter the house to take anything out. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that this will not take place in winter, because those will be days of distress unequaled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now - and never to be equaled again. If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them.

These parallel passages, perhaps more than any other, provide further evidence that certain aspects of biblical prophecy are repetitive.

As already mentioned, preterist eschatology interprets the book of Daniel as having been fulfilled (perhaps entirely) at the time of Antiochus IV Epiphanes with the rise of the Maccabees (Daniel 29:7). Nevertheless, Jesus' use of this prophetic motif points to at least one further fulfillment, perhaps more. Thus, it is possible for us to see the three synoptic gospels as complementary. Jesus' concern (as expressed by Luke) is directed towards the early disciples and it may be significant to note that Luke does not mention the sign of the abomination of desolation. For the first century disciples, they had to leave when the city of Jerusalem was surrounded by armies even prior to the siege. On the other hand, the account of Jesus' words in Matthew and Mark are looking into a more distant future. Something is going to be standing in the Holy Place for centuries.



An Abomination of Desolation Standing in the Holy Place

So what or where is the Holy Place? The first mention of the Holy Place is to be found in the book of Exodus.

Exodus 26:33 (RSV) *And you shall hang the veil from the clasps, and bring the ark of the testimony in thither within the veil; and the veil shall separate for you the holy place from the most holy.*

The Most Holy Place was the Holy of Holies in which the Ark of the Covenant was located, firstly in the Tabernacle and then in the Temple. Outside the curtain was the Holy Place which originally contained three items: the seven-branched Menorah, the Table of Consecrated Bread and the Altar of Incense. From a physical perspective, with the destruction of the Temple buildings, the Holy Place remains somewhere on the Temple Mount.

The Abomination in the Days of Ahaz

It might be surprising to some that I mention this as an example of an abomination of desolation since it takes place centuries before Antiochus. Nevertheless, I believe that it satisfies all the necessary criteria. There are differing opinions regarding the actual years of Ahaz's reign in the eighth century CE.³² We know, however, that Ahaz was 20 years old when he became king and that his reign lasted for 16 years.³³

As soon as he became king, Ahaz was at war with the northern kingdom of Israel whose king (Pekah) had formed an alliance with Rezin, king of Damascus. The reason for this internal conflict was an attempt by the two northern kings to compel Ahaz to join forces with them to oppose the might of Assyria whose king was Tiglath-Pileser III.

³² See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahaz>

³³ **2 Kings 16:2 (NIV)** Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years.

In an act of familial betrayal, Ahaz called for support from the Assyrians against this northern confederacy. It is worth noting that Assyria went on to sack Damascus, deporting its population and executing Rezin. More particularly, Tiglath-Pileser then attacked Israel. Initially, the Assyrian forces took Gilead and Galilee, including all the land of Naphtali, and deported its people to Assyria. As we will see, this historic act is remarkably prophetic. In his attempts to appease Assyria, Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser.



Tiglath-Pileser III receiving Homage ³⁴

2 Kings 16:10 (RSV) *When King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, he saw the altar that was at Damascus. And King Ahaz sent to Uriah the priest a model of the altar, and its pattern, exact in all its details.*

³⁴ http://www.cristoraul.com/english/readinghall/UniversalHistory/Ancient_History/Tiglath-Pileser-III.html

The Assyrian altar was built by Uriah even before Ahaz returned from Damascus. The bronze altar was removed from its place to make way for it. Ahaz instructed that all the sacrifices were to use the new pagan altar. He did many other rearrangements and perhaps this is summed up in the following verse.

2 Chronicles 28:24 (RSV) *Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of God and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and he shut up the doors of the house of the LORD; and he made himself altars in every corner of Jerusalem.*

The prophet Isaiah writes about this dark period in the early chapters of his book. This reaches a climax at the end of Isaiah chapter 8.

Isaiah 8:22 *They will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish; and they will be thrust into thick darkness.*

It is into this darkness that the people would see “a great light”. It is worth noting the territory that is specified at the beginning of Isaiah chapter 9.

Isaiah 9:1 (NIV) *Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan.*

The humbling of Zebulun and Naphtali took place in the early days of the Assyrian conquest. Isaiah looks into this future describing Galilee as being occupied by Gentiles (initially Assyrians). The great light was to be the birth of a child. The initial fulfillment of this prophecy was the birth of Hezekiah who was to succeed his father Ahaz.

However, Hezekiah would not and could not fulfill every aspect of Isaiah's prophecy, namely,

Isaiah 9:7 (NIV) *Of the increase 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.*

Clearly, this prophecy demands a future fulfillment and, of course, it is Jesus who will sit on David's throne forever. The Angel Gabriel brought this message to Mary.

Luke 1:31-33 (NIV) *You [Mary] will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. 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, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.*



His Kingdom will Never End ³⁵

³⁵ <https://www.tes.com/lessons/yfApFkIGhNf7w/an-angel-visits-mary>

Up to that point in history, Hezekiah was the best king that Judah ever had.³⁶ He removed the pagan altars and high places although, sadly, this restoration was not going to last very long.

After Hezekiah's death, his son Manasseh was to go even further into paganism than his grandfather Ahaz.³⁷ The sins of Manasseh, perhaps more than anything else, would eventually lead to the destruction of the Temple by the Babylonians in 586 BCE.

³⁶ **2 Kings 18:5 (NIV)** Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him.

³⁷ **2 Chronicles 33:1-9 (NIV)** Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-five years. He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, following the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had demolished; he also erected altars to the Baals and made Asherah poles. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped them. **He built altars in the temple of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "My Name will remain in Jerusalem forever."** In both courts of the temple of the LORD, he built altars to all the starry hosts. He sacrificed his sons in the fire in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, practiced sorcery, divination and witchcraft, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD, provoking him to anger. **He took the carved image he had made and put it in God's temple,** of which God had said to David and to his son Solomon, "In this temple and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my Name forever. I will not again make the feet of the Israelites leave the land I assigned to your forefathers, if only they will be careful to do everything I commanded them concerning all the laws, decrees and ordinances given through Moses." **But Manasseh led Judah and the people of Jerusalem astray, so that they did more evil than the nations the LORD had destroyed before the Israelites** [emphases added].

The Abomination in the Days of Antiochus Epiphanes

In fulfilment of the prophecy given to Jeremiah in 605 BCE and in response to the intercession of Daniel in the year 539 BCE, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus to allow Jewish people to return to the land of Israel.³⁸ While Daniel was praying, the Angel Gabriel came to give him a prophetic outline of the future.

Daniel 9:20-22 (RSV) *While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy hill of my God; while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice. He came and he said to me, "O Daniel, I have now come out to give you wisdom and understanding.*

Gabriel tells Daniel that the seventy years of exile would become multiplied seven times over. Why was this? Although God had heard Daniel's prayer, there was to be extended punishment according to the words given to Moses.³⁹ What follows is one of the most misunderstood passages in Scripture. This is largely due to mistranslation in many English Bibles. In order to understand this, we will look at the passage in two different translations.

³⁸ **2 Chronicles 36:22-23 (NIV)** In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing: "This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: "'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you-may the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up.'"

³⁹ **Leviticus 26:17-18 (NIV)** I will set my face against you so that you will be defeated by your enemies; those who hate you will rule over you and you will flee even when no one is pursuing you. If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over.

Daniel 9:25-27 (NIV) *Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing [of the temple] he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him."*

In this translation, there are so many inaccuracies. We have the words "the issuing of a decree"; we have the words "the Anointed One" with capital letters. We have added punctuation that combines the seven sevens and the sixty two sevens into one period. "The Anointed One" is the cut off and has nothing. Why is this passage so mistranslated? We will come to consider this in due course. However, let us look at another version, the New Revised Standard Version.

Daniel 9:25-27 (NRSV) *Know therefore and understand: from the time that the word went out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the time of an anointed prince, there shall be seven weeks; and for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with streets and moat, but in a troubled time. After the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing, and the troops of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. He shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall make sacrifice and offering cease; and in their place shall be an abomination that desolates, until the decreed end is poured out upon the desolator.*

Exactly when does this time period begin? The significant words in Hebrew are these:

מִן־מִצָּא דָבָר לְהָשִׁיב וּלְבַנוֹת

This may be transliterated “min-mo’tzah davar layhashiv v’livnot” As far as English translation is concerned, there have been various suggestions. However, a more accurate translation of the Hebrew is “from going forth of a word to return and to build” rather than “the issuing of a decree”. In fact, the Complete Jewish Bible suggests:

*And you shall know and understand that from the **emergence of the word** to restore and to rebuild Jerusalem until the anointed king [shall be] seven weeks, and [for] sixty-two weeks it will return and be built street and moat, but in troubled times [emphasis added].*

It is this author’s opinion that “the word” actually refers to the prophecy of Jeremiah that is recorded in Jeremiah 25.

Jeremiah 25:1 (NIV) *The word [הַדָּבָר] transliterated ha’davar] came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, which was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.*

The year that the word came to the prophet was 605 BCE. I believe that this hypothesis is confirmed by the following:

Daniel 9:2 (NKJV) *I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the LORD through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem [emphasis added].*

The First Time Period

The first time period is seven ‘weeks’ or ‘sevens’ or 49 years. 49 years from 605 BCE takes us to 556 BCE. By this time, Cyrus the Great had ascended the throne of Persia. This person to come is described “*an anointed prince*” in the NSRV not “*The Anointed One*” as described in the NIV.

The words in Hebrew are:

מָשִׁיחַ נָגִיד

This maybe transliterated “mashiach nagid”. There is no definite article; consequently, there is no justification for the use of any capital letters in English. The words simply describe an anointed leader or ruler. Could Cyrus be that person? Yes, according to the Bible.

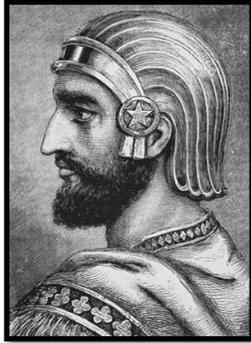
Isaiah 45:1 (RSV) *Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and ungird the loins of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed.*

The context of this verse is the last verse of the previous chapter.

Isaiah 44:28 (NIV) *[I am the Lord] who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; **he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt,"** and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid"'* [emphasis added].

This is reiterated again in Isaiah chapter 45.

Isaiah 45:13 (NIV) *"I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. **He will rebuild my city** and set my exile free but not for a price or reward, says the LORD Almighty"* [emphasis added].



Cyrus the Great ⁴⁰

The implications of these verses alone are enormous. Many eschatological schemes require that the king who “commanded” the rebuilding of Jerusalem was Artaxerxes II and the permission given to Nehemiah in 445/444 BCE.

Nehemiah 2:4-5 (RSV) *Then the king said to me, "For what do you make request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may rebuild it."*

One of the arguments used by advocates of these highly contrived eschatological schemes is that Cyrus never suggested the building of the city in his edict. This is a rather weak argument since Isaiah clearly prophesied that it would be Cyrus who would rebuild the city on God’s behalf. The main reason that this date is chosen by so many is the perceived need to build Jesus into the prophecy of the 70 weeks. Surely, Jesus is the “The Anointed One” that is “cut off”? It is this writer’s opinion that this is totally unnecessary and biblically unjustified.

⁴⁰ <http://www.iranchamber.com/history/cyrus/cyrus.php>

The Second Time Period

Daniel 9:25-26 (NRSV) ... and for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with streets and moat, but in a troubled time. After the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing ...

As I have already mentioned, preterists argue, and we have to accept, that the primary focus of this angelic prophecy (and many of the prophecies in Daniel) is the second century BCE. The prophecies are so historically accurate that liberal scholarship cannot accept that the book of Daniel was actually written in the sixth century BCE. Whatever else these prophecies might mean, and there is no shortage of interpretations, it is important, at the very least, that we seriously consider the historical context.

Furthermore, the biblical context of Daniel chapter 9 is chapter 8. In other words, an appreciation of Daniel chapter 8 is the key that unlocks at least an initial understanding of chapter 9. We, therefore, have to look at this chapter in some detail.

Daniel's Vision in Chapter 8

Daniel 8:3-6 (NRSV) I looked up and saw a ram standing beside the river. It had two horns. Both horns were long, but one was longer than the other, and the longer one came up second. I saw the ram charging westward and northward and southward. All beasts were powerless to withstand it, and no one could rescue from its power; it did as it pleased and became strong. As I was watching, a male goat appeared from the west, coming across the face of the whole earth without touching the ground. The goat had a horn between its eyes. It came toward the ram with the two horns that I had seen standing beside the river, and it ran at it with savage force ...

Daniel 8:7-8 (NRSV) *I saw it approaching the ram. It was enraged against it and struck the ram, breaking its two horns. The ram did not have power to withstand it; it threw the ram down to the ground and trampled upon it, and there was no one who could rescue the ram from its power. Then the male goat grew exceedingly great; but at the height of its power, the great horn was broken, and in its place there came up four prominent horns toward the four winds of heaven.*

We do not need to speculate on the meaning of this vision. The interpretation is given to us (and to Daniel) by Gabriel.

Daniel 8:20 (NRSV) *As for the ram that you saw with the two horns, these are the kings of Media and Persia. The male goat is the king of Greece, and the great horn between its eyes is the first king. As for the horn that was broken, in place of which four others arose, four kingdoms shall arise from his nation, but not with his power.*



Alexander the Great Mosaic ⁴¹

⁴¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_the_Great

The king of Greece mentioned in this prophecy as the “great horn” is undoubtedly Alexander the Great (born in July 356 BCE). He conquered the Medes and the Persians through several battles and sieges over a seven year period between the years 334 to 327 BCE. He died at the age of 32 in Babylon in June 323 BCE possibly of malaria.

However, from the age of 13, Alexander was tutored by the Greek philosopher Aristotle. It is impossible to overstate the significance of this. As Alexander conquered the then known world, Greek philosophy travelled with him. As we shall see, Hellenization was to be imposed on all conquered lands including the nation of Israel.

After the death of Alexander, his empire was divided into four. These kingdoms were: (i) the Seleucid dynasty (aka the king of the North); (ii) the Ptolemaic dynasty (aka the king of the South); (iii) the kingdom of Cassander in Macedonia and Greece; and (iv) the kingdom of Lysimachus in Thrace and Asia Minor.

Daniel’s vision continues.

Daniel 8:9-12 (NRSV) *Out of one of them [i.e. out of one of the four horns] came another horn, which started small but grew in power to the south and to the east and toward the Beautiful Land. It grew until it reached the host of the heavens, and it threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them. It set itself up to be as great as the Prince of the host; it took away the daily sacrifice from him, and the place of his sanctuary was brought low. Because of rebellion, the host [of the saints] and the daily sacrifice were given over to it. It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground.*

Again we do not have to speculate as to who this “little horn” might be. The angel Gabriel tells us:

Daniel 8:23-25 (NIV) *In the latter part of their reign, when rebels are completely wicked, a stern-faced king, a master of intrigue, will arise. He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy the mighty men and the holy people. He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes. Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power.*

The “little horn” arose out of one of the four kingdoms, namely, the Seleucid Dynasty (aka the king of the North).

The relevant list of kings in this dynasty is as follows:

KING	DATES
Seleucas I Nicator	312 to 281 BCE
Antiochus I Soter	281 to 261 BCE
Antiochus II Theos	261 to 246 BCE
Seleucus II Callinicus	246 to 225 BCE
Seleucus III Soter	225 to 223/2 BCE
Antiochus III the Great	223/2 to 187 BCE
Seleucus IV Philopater	187 to 175 BCE
Antiochus IV Epiphanes	175 to 164 BCE

Antiochus known as Epiphanes (God made manifest) was a younger son of Antiochus the Great. He became a political hostage of the Roman Republic following the Peace of Apamea in 188 BCE. When Antiochus the Great died in 187 BCE, Seleucus IV Philopater, who was the older son, succeeded his father as king. Seleucus had at least two sons. The oldest, named Demetrius was now heir apparent. However, Demetrius was exchanged with Antiochus (Epiphanes) as the political hostage.

Seleucus IV was assassinated in 175 BCE. Since Seleucus' legitimate heir, Demetrius was still a hostage in Rome; the now free Antiochus usurped the throne, proclaiming himself co-regent with another son of Seleucus, an infant named Antiochus, whom he was to murder a few years later.

Antiochus (Epiphanes) is described in other prophecies in the book of Daniel.

Daniel 7:24-25 (NIV) *The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings. He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time.*

Let us rework our list of the Seleucid kings to see the amazing accuracy of this prophecy.

KING	DATES
Alexander the Great	Died in 323 BCE
Seleucas I Nicator	312 to 281 BCE
Antiochus I Soter	281 to 261 BCE
Antiochus II Theos	261 to 246 BCE
Seleucus II Callinicus	246 to 225 BCE
Seleucus III Soter	225 to 223/2 BCE
Antiochus III the Great	223/2 to 187 BCE
Seleucus IV Philopater	Assassinated 175 BCE
Demetrius	In prison and murdered
Young Antiochus	Murdered
<i>after them another king will arise ...</i>	
Antiochus IV Epiphanes	175 - 164 BCE

The three kings that Antiochus subdued to usurp the throne was Seleucus IV and his two rightful heirs, Demetrius and Young Antiochus. Added together, these make nine kings but it becomes ten when we include Alexander the Great. Antiochus IV becomes the king after the former ten. As we will see this amazing sequence was to be repeated and may yet be repeated again. Antiochus IV Epiphanes was the master of intrigue mentioned in Daniel 8:23.

This personality is also described in Daniel 11.

Daniel 11:21-23 (NRSV) *In his place shall arise a contemptible person on whom royal majesty had not been conferred; he shall come in without warning and obtain the kingdom through intrigue. Armies shall be utterly swept away and broken before him, and the prince of the covenant as well. And after an alliance is made with him, he shall act deceitfully and become strong with a small party.*

Daniel 11 describes the conflicts between the kings of the North (Seleucid Kingdom) and the kings of the South (Ptolemaic Kingdom). Historically, it is very accurate although it is possible that there are certain aspects of these prophecies that were only partially fulfilled.

From the above passage in Daniel 11, Antiochus makes an agreement (covenant) which does not last because of deception. It is also stated that a “prince of the covenant” will be destroyed. Who is this person? Onias III was the legitimate and anointed high priest in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes. He was assassinated in 171 BCE.

There is no doubt in my mind that Onias III is also the anointed one who is “cut off” as described in the angelic prophecy recorded in Daniel 9 verse 26.

It is very interesting to note that between 605 BCE and 171 BCE there are exactly 434 years. This is the 62 ‘weeks’ or ‘sevens’.⁴² It also means that the 49 years and the 434 years are not sequential but concurrent. I believe that this is also the plain reading of the text. There is no literary justification to combine the 49 years and the 434 years into one period of 483 years.

The Third Time Period

Daniel 9:26-27 (GB) And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and has nothing, and the people of the prince (or ruler) who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary (literally “the holy”). Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. He shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall make sacrifice and offering cease; and in their place shall be an abomination that desolates, until the decreed end is poured out upon the desolator” [emphases added].

As I have already suggested, the sixty-two “weeks” is a separate (although concurrent) time period to the initial seven “weeks”. The final seven years of this prophecy, however, follows directly from the end of the sixty-two weeks. This is indicated in the above passage by the words “and after” (Hebrew: **וְאַחֲרַי**) and “and” (Hebrew: **וְ**) which have been highlighted in the text.

Antiochus and the Rise of the Maccabees

It is important to have the correct historical perspective on Antiochus IV. After usurping the throne, he greatly increased the process of Hellenization in order to bring unity to his divided empire.

⁴² QED (quod erat demonstrandum) that which had to be proved

Furthermore, after 169 BC, he encouraged his people to worship him as the Greek god Zeus, taking the title “Theos Epiphanes”, meaning “the manifest God” believing that he truly was an incarnation of the pagan god. Nevertheless, his enemies called him “Epimanes”, meaning “mad-man”. Later in his reign, he even issued coins on which he proclaimed himself to be god. He was portrayed as Zeus enthroned with the inscription, “King Antiochus. God Manifest, Bearing Victory”.



Gold Coin of Antiochus Epiphanes ⁴³

Hellenization

Unlike the Seleucids, the Ptolemies in the south had given the Jewish people substantial religious freedom. In 198 BCE, however, the Ptolemies were defeated by Antiochus III. Israel now came under his control and the process of Hellenization was increasingly enforced. This created intense internal division among the Jewish leadership. There were those who embraced Greek ideals but this was rejected by the conservative Hasidim (“pious ones”) who wished to remain faithful to the Torah.

⁴³ A Greek Gold Stater of the Seleucid King, Antiochus IV Epiphanes [taken from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/antiquitiesproject/4869987484>]

It is interesting to note that over time the pro-Greek faction became the Sadducees whereas the conservative Hasidim became the Pharisees. This internal division became a battle for the high-priesthood.⁴³ As already mentioned, the legitimate high priest was the conservative Onias III. Onias had a brother Joshua who changed his name to its Greek equivalent (Jason) and who was supported in his efforts to introduce Greek culture by Menelaus. In an act of familial betrayal, Jason offered a large bribe to Antiochus IV in return for the high-priesthood. Antiochus agreed and deposed Onias III in 174 BCE.

With his appointment as high priest, Jason began the conversion of Jerusalem so that it would become a model Hellenistic city. In particular, he constructed a gymnasium which was adjacent to the Temple.⁴⁴ After three years, however, Menelaus himself offered an even larger bribe to buy the high-priesthood.⁴⁵ Jason fled across the Jordan. Onias III was executed (171 BCE) after he objected to Menelaus plundering the temple treasury to pay for the bribe.⁴⁶ The death of Onias brought the hereditary high-priesthood to an end. From that time on, high priests were political appointments made by the Seleucid rulers.

⁴³ **2 Maccabees 4:7-10 (RSV)** Later, when King Seleucus died and Antiochus (known as Epiphanes) became king, Jason the brother of Onias became High Priest by corrupt means. He went to see the king and offered him 27,000 pounds of silver with 6,000 more pounds to be paid later. Jason also offered him an additional 11,250 pounds of silver for the authority to establish a stadium where young men could train and to enroll the people of Jerusalem as citizens of Antioch. The king gave his approval, and just as soon as Jason took over the office of High Priest, he made the people of Jerusalem change to the Greek way of life.

⁴⁴ **1 Maccabees 1:14 (RSV)** So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom .

In 170 BCE, Antiochus invaded Egypt. However, while Antiochus was in Egypt, trouble broke out in Jerusalem. The people were rioting in protest because the Temple was still being plundered by Menelaus.

In addition, a rumor began to circulate that Antiochus had been killed in Egypt and, armed with this thought in mind; Jason led a rebellion of 1000 men and retook the high-priesthood.⁴⁷ Antiochus, however, was not dead and saw this uprising as an attack on his own authority. He stormed the city, massacring thousands to restore Menelaus to the high-priesthood.

Antiochus with the support of Menelaus continued to plunder the Temple, removing much gold and silver to finance his second invasion of Egypt. This was also foretold by Daniel.⁴⁸ Accordingly, in 168 BCE, Antiochus marched into Egypt for a second time.

⁴⁵ **2 Maccabees 4:23-25 (RSV)** After a period of three years Jason sent Menelaus, the brother of the previously mentioned Simon, to carry the money to the king and to complete the records of essential business. But he, when presented to the king, extolled him with an air of authority, and secured the high priesthood for himself, outbidding Jason by three hundred talents of silver. After receiving the king's orders he returned, possessing no qualification for the high priesthood, but having the hot temper of a cruel tyrant and the rage of a savage wild beast.

⁴⁶ **2 Maccabees 4:34 (RSV)** Therefore Menelaus, taking Andronicus aside, urged him to kill Onias. Andronicus came to Onias, and resorting to treachery offered him sworn pledges and gave him his right hand, and in spite of his suspicion persuaded Onias to come out from the place of sanctuary; then, with no regard for justice, he immediately put him out of the way.

⁴⁷ **2 Maccabees 5:5 (RSV)** When a false rumor arose that Antiochus was dead, Jason took no less than a thousand men and suddenly made an assault upon the city. When the troops upon the wall had been forced back and at last the city was being taken, Menelaus took refuge in the citadel.

Daniel 11:29-30 (RSV) *At the time appointed he shall return and come into the south; but it shall not be this time as it was before. For ships of Kittim shall come against him, and he shall be afraid and withdraw, and shall turn back and be enraged and take action against the holy covenant. He shall turn back and give heed to those who forsake the holy covenant.*

The “ships of Kittim” foretold by Daniel were the Roman forces led by Popillus Laenas who handed Antiochus an ultimatum telling him to leave Egypt immediately. Literally, a line was drawn in the sand and Antiochus had no choice. Humiliated, he returned in rage to plan another attack on Jerusalem which took place under the leadership of Apollonius in 167 BCE.^{49,50}

The Syrian forces of 22,000 men initially pretended to come in peace but attacked the city on the Sabbath believing that the orthodox would not fight on this day. Many inhabitants were slaughtered during this invasion.⁵¹ This battle sets the historical context of the following prophecy.

⁴⁸ **Daniel 11:25 (NIV)** With a large army he will stir up his strength and courage against the king of the South. The king of the South will wage war with a large and very powerful army, but he will not be able to stand because of the plots devised against him.

⁴⁹ **1 Maccabees 1:20-24 (RSV)** After subduing Egypt, Antiochus returned in the one hundred and forty-third year. He went up against Israel and came to Jerusalem with a strong force. He arrogantly entered the sanctuary and took the golden altar, the lampstand for the light, and all its utensils. He took also the table for the bread of the Presence, the cups for drink offerings, the bowls, the golden censers, the curtain, the crowns, and the gold decoration on the front of the temple; he stripped it all off. He took the silver and the gold, and the costly vessels; he took also the hidden treasures which he found. Taking them all, he departed to his own land.

⁵⁰ **Daniel 11:28 (NRSV)** The king of the North [Antiochus] will return to his own country with great wealth, but his heart will be set against the holy covenant. He will take action against it and then return to his own country.

Daniel 11:31-32 (RSV) Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the continual burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate. He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant; but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action.

From that moment on, there was a dramatic increase in the imposition of Greek culture and ideals. The observance of the Sabbath and all the festivals was made illegal, as was circumcision. Copies of the Torah were destroyed and pagan altars were set up all over the land. The Temple was rededicated to Zeus. The climax of the desecrations came on Chislev 25 167 BCE, when Antiochus erected a statue of Zeus (actually of himself) in the Temple. Then, in something of a reprise of the days of Ahaz and Manasseh, a pagan altar was erected on which pigs were offered as burnt offerings.⁵²

⁵¹ **1 Maccabees 1:31-35 (RSV)** He plundered the city, burned it with fire, and tore down its houses and its surrounding walls. And they took captive the women and children, and seized the cattle. Then they fortified the city of David with a great strong wall and strong towers, and it became their citadel. And they stationed there a sinful people, lawless men. These strengthened their position; they stored up arms and food, and collecting the spoils of Jerusalem they stored them there, and became a great snare.

⁵² **1 Maccabees 1:54-61 (RSV)** Now on the fifteenth day of Chislev, in the one hundred and forty-fifth year, they erected a desolating sacrilege upon the altar of burnt offering. They also built altars in the surrounding cities of Judah, and burned incense at the doors of the houses and in the streets. The books of the law which they found they tore to pieces and burned with fire. Where the book of the covenant was found in the possession of any one, or if any one adhered to the law, the decree of the king condemned him to death. They kept using violence against Israel, against those found month after month in the cities. And on the twenty-fifth day of the month they offered sacrifice on the altar which was upon the altar of burnt offering. According to the decree, they put to death the women who had their children circumcised, and their families and those who circumcised them; and they hung the infants from their mothers' necks.

The desecration led to the Jewish Revolt which was led by Mattathias and his five sons (The Maccabees) who lived in the village of Modi'in. In response to the uprising, Antiochus sent Lysias to put down the rebellion and exterminate the Jewish people but they were decisively defeated by Judas the Maccabee and his freedom fighters. The defeat was repeated a year later. After three years of intense fighting, the Maccabees recaptured Jerusalem and regained control of the Temple. The rededication of the Temple took place on Chislew 25 164 BCE, exactly three years to the day after its desecration. This event is remembered annually at Chanukah (the Feast of Dedication).⁵³

The Abomination in the First Century CE

I have taken some time to describe this historic conflict with Antiochus because this event, more than any other, sets the pattern for the repeating nature of the prophecy referred to by Jesus in the Olivet discourse. Let us remind ourselves as to what Jesus actually said.

⁵³ **1 Maccabees 4:52-59 (RSV)** Early in the morning on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, which is the month of Chislew, in the one hundred and forty-eighth year, they rose and offered sacrifice, as the law directs, on the new altar of burnt offering which they had built. At the very season and on the very day that the Gentiles had profaned it, it was dedicated with songs and harps and lutes and cymbals. All the people fell on their faces and worshiped and blessed Heaven, who had prospered them. So they celebrated the dedication of the altar for eight days, and offered burnt offerings with gladness; they offered a sacrifice of deliverance and praise. They decorated the front of the temple with golden crowns and small shields; they restored the gates and the chambers for the priests, and furnished them with doors. There was very great gladness among the people, and the reproach of the Gentiles was removed. Then Judas and his brothers and all the assembly of Israel determined that every year at that season the days of the dedication of the altar should be observed with gladness and joy for eight days, beginning with the twenty-fifth day of the month of Chislew.

Matthew 24:15-16 (NIV) *So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel - let the reader understand - then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.*⁵⁴

Matthew and Mark add something rather significant in this passage. They both state that it is important that the “reader understand”. This is further evidence that they are writing to believers across the ages rather than to those in the first century. Luke’s emphasis is somewhat different and it is interesting that he does not write about the “abomination of desolation” as such. Let us remind ourselves about what he says.

Luke 21:20-21 (NIV) *When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains ...*

Perhaps more than the other two synoptic writers, Luke is initially concerned with the events that were to take place in the days leading up to the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. Is it therefore very significant that he does not mention specifically any “abomination of desolation”? We need to understand the history of these fateful days since I believe that the seven years leading up to the destruction were to be a repeat of the final seven years of Daniel’s prophecy that was certainly fulfilled in the second century BCE. Let us remind ourselves of this:

⁵⁴ **Also Mark 13:14 (NIV)** *When you see 'the abomination that causes desolation' standing where it does not belong - let the reader understand - then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.*

Daniel 9:26-27 (GB version) *And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and has nothing, and the people of the prince (or ruler) who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary (literally “the holy”). Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. He shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall make sacrifice and offering cease; and in their place shall be an abomination that desolates, until the decreed end is poured out upon the desolator”.*

What are the characteristics of this seven year prophetic motif that we can glean from this passage?

1. Representatives of the people make a covenant with the enemy. It is possible that the covenant in its original form was to allow the people to continue to follow their own religion with its sacrifices and offerings.
2. An anointed person is killed. In the days of Antiochus, this was Onias III who was the legitimate (and anointed) high priest. He was executed in the year 171 BCE (after exactly 62 weeks or sevens from 605 BCE). The leaders who were anointed included both kings and priests and, as an example, I have argued that Cyrus was an “anointed ruler” as described in Daniel 9:25.
3. After 3.5 years, the covenant is revoked. In the days of Antiochus, this was because of the rebellion led by Jason after he believed that Antiochus had been killed in Egypt.
4. All sacrifices and offerings were made illegal and the climactic event was the imposition of the abomination of desolation which I have written about previously. The statue of Zeus which represented Antiochus himself was situated in the Holy Place.

5. This began a period of a further 3.5 years of great tribulation which in the days of Antiochus took place during the Jewish revolt led by the Maccabees.

6. A climatic event which in the days of Antiochus was the re-dedication of the Temple and his subsequent death.

I believe that this seven-year motif was repeated in the days leading up to the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE and also in the second century during the days of Hadrian and Bar Kokhba.

So who was the “Enemy” in the First Century CE?

In Revelation chapter 17, it is recorded that John had a terrifying vision.

Revelation 17:3-7 (NIV) *The angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns ... I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished.*

Like Daniel before him, John needed an angel to explain to him the meaning of the vision.

Revelation 17:9-11 (NIV) *This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. **They are also seven kings.** Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction [emphasis added].*

Initially, seven “kings” are mentioned. They are represented by the seven heads of the “beast”. They are also seven hills and it is clearly appropriate to identify the “beast” with the city of Rome which was the dominant political power in the first century. Accordingly, I believe that these seven kings are easily identifiable.

CAESAR	DATES
Julius	Died 44 BCE
Augustus	27 BCE to 14 CE
Tiberius	14 to 37 CE
Caligula	37 to 41 CE
Claudius	41 to 54 CE
Nero	54 to 68 CE
Galba	68 to 69 CE

If we include Julius, who was never crowned emperor, although he is, without doubt, the “father of the dynasty”; we have a list of seven “kings”. The fact that the seventh, the emperor Galba, remained for only “a little while” supports the amazing accuracy of this prophetic vision and places its origin perhaps towards the end of Nero’s reign.

In addition, it identifies Nero as the “current” emperor since “five have fallen, one is”.⁵⁵ We need, therefore, to know much more about the emperor Nero.

⁵⁵ I am perfectly aware that for this to be true, this particular prophetic vision that was to be included in the book of Revelation **must** have been in circulation during the reign of Nero (54 to 68 CE). This is perfectly consistent with the publication of many “letters” that are contained in the New Testament.

The Emperor Nero

Nero was born on December 15th 37 CE. His given name was Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus. His mother was Agrippina, who was the great-granddaughter of the emperor Augustus. He was extremely well-educated under the tutelage of Seneca who taught him Greek philosophy and culture. His father (Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus) died in 48 CE after which his mother Agrippina married the emperor Claudius. Through intrigue, Agrippina persuaded Claudius to make Nero his successor rather than his own son Britannicus.⁵⁶ Octavia who was the daughter of Claudius became the wife of Nero in 50 CE.

Claudius died in 54 CE and it is possible that he was poisoned by Agrippina. Nero was just 17 years old when he became emperor taking the name Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus. Agrippina remained the dominant influence in Nero's life until he had her murdered in 59 CE. Without question, this event changed Nero's behavior dramatically.

Prior to the death of his mother, although self-indulgent, Nero was regarded as a generous leader. For example, he eliminated capital punishment and lowered taxes. Like Antiochus IV, he supported Greek culture including the arts and athletics. But after the murder of Agrippina, his lifestyle was marked by tyranny and excessive self-indulgence. As an example of self-indulgence, he began giving public performances both of poetry and playing the lyre.

⁵⁶ Compare **Daniel 8:23** In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a stern-faced king, **a master of intrigue**, will arise [emphasis added].

In 62 CE, Nero divorced Octavia and then had her murdered. He married Poppaea Sabina, a noblewoman who had been married to a member of the Roman aristocracy. This created a significant crisis among the ruling classes and the Senate. Nero would not tolerate any criticism and executed many of his opponents. In 64 CE, the Great Fire of Rome devastated three quarters of the city. Many Romans believed that Nero started this fire to make room for his own personal villa. Nero, however, blamed the emergent Christian community and this began a period of over three years of great tribulation.⁵⁷

Vast numbers of believers were slaughtered at this time, many in the Roman Coliseum as “entertainment” for the blood thirsty crowd.⁵⁸

After the Great Fire, Nero needed money to build his villa. Consequently, he sold positions in public office, increased taxes and extracted money from the pagan Roman temples. He even devalued the currency.

⁵⁷ Christian writer Tertullian (c. 155–230) was the first to call Nero the first persecutor of Christians. He wrote, "Examine your records. There you will find that Nero was the first that persecuted this doctrine". Lactantius (c. 240–320) also said that Nero "first persecuted the servants of God" The first text to suggest that Nero ordered the execution of an apostle is the apocryphal Ascension of Isaiah, a Christian writing from the second century. It says, "the slayer of his mother, who will persecute the plant which the Twelve Apostles of the Beloved have planted. Of the Twelve, one will be delivered into his hands." Eusebius (c. 275–339) was the first to write explicitly that Paul was beheaded in Rome during the reign of Nero. He states that Nero's persecution led to Peter and Paul's deaths, but that Nero did not give any specific orders [taken from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nero>].

⁵⁸ **Revelation 17:6 (NIV)** I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.

These excessive measures were to lead to a conspiracy led by Gaius Calpurnius Piso together with many senators, artisans and even Nero's former mentor Seneca. They planned to assassinate Nero but the conspiracy was discovered and the leaders executed.

In 68 CE, another governor (Gaius Julius Vindex) led a second conspiracy together with Servius Sulpicius Galba. Even Nero's own bodyguards defected in support of Galba. Realizing that his time was up, Nero fled. When he received word that the Senate had condemned him to death, Nero decided to commit suicide. Unable to do this himself, his secretary (Epaphroditos) killed him with the sword. It is important also to note that Nero was the last hereditary emperor after the line which began with Julius.

Did Nero ever go to Jerusalem?

According to the Talmud, Nero came to Jerusalem around 66 CE. This was at the time when there was increasing conflict between the Greeks and the Jewish people both in Jerusalem and Caesarea. Apparently, he shot four arrows in four different directions all of which landed within the city limits. According to Talmudic tradition, Nero became terrified that God intended to destroy the Temple but would then lay the blame on Nero himself.

He fled and, according to the same tradition, converted to Judaism. It is interesting to note that the Talmud also indicates that the Rabbi Meir Baal HaNess, who was a prominent supporter of Bar Kokhba in the second century CE, was actually a descendant of Nero. This is highly unlikely. Furthermore, there is no Roman or Greek source that reports Nero's alleged visit to Jerusalem.

Was Nero sympathetic towards Judaism?

This is another subject altogether. It has been suggested that Nero's wife Poppaea Sabina whom he married in 62 CE was actually Jewish. Although this has also been disputed, it is possible that she was a convert to Judaism. If this is true, her influence on her husband might have been significant.⁵⁹

So was Nero the Antichrist?

Although, as has become obvious, I am very sympathetic to preterist eschatology, it would be a profound mistake to think that Nero is the **final** incarnation of the one we call the Antichrist. Nevertheless, preterists are right to think that Nero fulfills many aspects of the prophetic vision about the beast in the book of Revelation. Furthermore, this was accepted by many in the early centuries of church history.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Poppæa, like many members of prominent Roman families, inclined to Judaism, and her last wish, that she might be buried according to Jewish customs, was granted by Nero [taken from <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/11445-nero>].

⁶⁰ The Sibylline Oracles written in the second century speak of Nero returning and bringing destruction. Within Christian communities, these writings, along with others, fueled the belief that Nero would return as the Antichrist. In 422, Augustine of Hippo wrote about 2 Thessalonians 2:1–11, where he believed Paul mentioned the coming of the Antichrist. Though he rejected the theory, Augustine mentioned that many Christians believed that Nero was the Antichrist or would return as the Antichrist. He wrote, "so that in saying, 'For the mystery of iniquity doth already work' he alluded to Nero, whose deeds already seemed to be as the deeds of Antichrist." Some modern biblical scholars such as Delbert Hillers (Johns Hopkins University) of the American Schools of Oriental Research and the editors of the Oxford & Harper Collins Study Bibles, contend that the number 666 in the Book of Revelation is a code for Nero, a view that is also supported in Roman Catholic Biblical commentaries [taken from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nero>].

In particular, many believed that either Nero was not actually dead or that he would be raised to life and return as the Antichrist.⁶¹ In other words, he was the beast that had a fatal wound which was healed (Revelation 13:3). The other aspect was that the beast would exercise authority over the saints for 42 months (Revelation 13:5). This was exactly true after the Great Fire of Rome in 64 CE. Thus we begin to see an emerging pattern that fulfills a repeat of the last week (or seven years) in Daniel's prophecy as recorded in Daniel chapter 9. Let's remind ourselves of this once again.

Daniel 9:27 (NIV) *He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing [of the temple] he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him."*

Covenant

We do not know for certain whether there was an actual covenant between the Jewish leadership and Nero. We do, however, get the impression that Nero allowed the Temple sacrificial system to continue unhindered, perhaps with the mediation of his wife.⁶²

⁶¹ *ibid*

⁶² During the procuratorship of Festus, a dispute arose between the population of Jerusalem and Agrippa II., who in his Hasmonean palace built a dining-hall which overlooked the courts of the Temple. In order to hide the Temple from this profaning view, the Jews erected a high wall on its western side. When they refused the order of Procurator Festus to tear down this wall, the case was brought before Nero, who, influenced by his second wife, Poppæa, decided in favor of the people [taken from <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/11445-nero>].

Three events were to change the status quo. I believe that the first occurred in 62 CE and involved the assassination of an anointed leader. As we have discussed, in the days of Antiochus, the legitimate high priest Onias III was executed by Menelaus in 171 BCE. So which leader was executed in 62 CE?

Assassination

The leader of the Jerusalem believers was James, the earthly brother of Jesus. It is somewhat remarkable that within a very short period, he was turned from being a skeptic to the accepted (and anointed) leader of the community. Why was this? I think the apostle Paul gives us the answer.

1 Corinthians 15:7-8 (RSV) *Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.*

Josephus writes "the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James" met his death after the death of the procurator Porcius Festus (62 CE) but before Lucceius Albinus had assumed office. In the interim, the Sadducean high priest [Hanan II] took advantage of the situation and arranged the execution of James along with others on charges of Torah violations.⁶³

James was executed by stoning. It is interesting to note that in the second century BCE, the proto-Sadducean high priest was Menelaus. Onias III was a Torah observant Jew as indeed was James, the brother of Jesus. History repeats itself.

⁶³ Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews 20:9



Ossuary bearing the name Yaacov, Son of Yosef, Brother of Yeshua⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Michael Ireland *James Ossuary Surfaces in Jerusalem* The discovery of an inscription which seems to mention James, the brother of Jesus Christ, was announced at a news conference in Washington DC October 21, 2002. "It may not change the way most of us perceive the personalities of early Christianity, but a University of Wisconsin-Madison archaeologist calls it a major discovery, nonetheless," said Gordon Govier, executive producer and host, *The Book and the Spade* radio program. The inscription is in Aramaic, one of the languages of the New Testament period, and says, "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus." It is etched on the side of an ossuary, a box carved out of soft limestone, typically used as a bone container in the tombs of the first century AD Jews [taken from: <http://www.galaxie.com/article/bspade15-4-08>].

The second event to change the status quo was the Great Fire of Rome in 64 CE. As I have written previously, this led to more than three years (perhaps 42 months) of intense persecution for the Christian community in Rome.⁶⁵ Almost certainly, Paul and Peter were executed in Rome during Nero's persecution of the Christian community which came to an end with his death (suicide) in 68 CE. I am, therefore, reminded of these words of Jesus in the Olivet discourse.

Mark 13:20 (NIV) *If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them.*

After Nero

Let us remind ourselves of the angelic interpretation of John's vision as recorded in Revelation chapter 17.

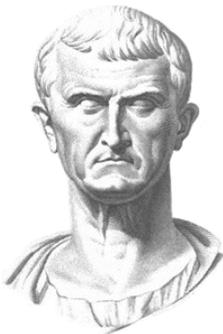
Revelation 17:9-11 (NIV) *The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction.*

After Nero died in 68 CE, there was a power vacuum in Rome as the hereditary line of Caesars had come to an end. After, the second conspiracy against Nero, it was Galba who was proclaimed emperor but he only remained in office for "a short time". He was murdered by the Praetorian Guard in coup led by Otho on January 15th 69 CE. He had been emperor for just seven months and seven days.

⁶⁵ **Revelation 13:5-7** The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them

Otho was then proclaimed emperor by the Praetorian Guard but he only remained in office for 91 days. He committed suicide on April 16th 69 CE after losing the Battle of Bedriacum to Vitellius who was then proclaimed emperor with the support of the German Legions who were opposed to both Galba and Otho. However, Vitellius only remained in office for 8 months. He was murdered on December 20th 69 CE by Vespasian's troops.

Thus, in the year 69 CE, there were no less than four emperors: Galba, Otho, Vitellius and, finally, Vespasian who was to remain in office for the next ten years. It is very interesting to speculate whether Galba, Otho and Vitellius were the first century equivalent of the three kings who were to be “subdued” in Daniel’s prophecy (see Daniel 7:24). If this is valid, I am not being dogmatic, then Vespasian might be regarded as the eighth king of Revelation 17:11.



Galba



Otho



Vitellius

Three ‘Subdued’ Roman Emperors? ⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Images from www.galba.net; <http://fineartamerica.com/products/marcus-salvius-otho-granger-greeting-card.html>; <https://www.yooniqimages.com/images/detail/102029668/Creative/vitellius-caesar-roman-emperor-murdered>

The Rebellion

In the days of Antiochus, the event that ultimately led to the assault on Jerusalem was the initial rebellion that was led by Jason. In the first century CE, the rebellion was the great revolt which began in 66 CE. The Roman-Jewish tension was exacerbated by the taxation laws imposed on the Jewish people largely to fund Nero's excesses.

In response to increasing protest, the Romans plundered the Temple and executed up to 6000 people. This prompted a full-scale rebellion and the Roman garrison was quickly overrun. The pro-Roman king Agrippa II together with many other Roman officials fled the city. Remarkably, at the Battle of Beth Horon, the Jewish rebels defeated the Syrian forces that were led by Cestius Gallus.

Nero gave the task of crushing the rebellion to his most experienced general, Vespasian. Titus, the son of Vespasian, was appointed as second-in-command. They were in charge of four legions and were also assisted by the forces of King Agrippa II.

Accordingly, Vespasian invaded Galilee in 67 CE and launched a campaign to systematically eradicate rebel strongholds.⁶⁷ In addition to the Roman advances, there was also bitter and bloody infighting between the Sadducees and the Zealots.

⁶⁷ It is also interesting to note that the famous Roman historian Josephus was originally a Jewish priest who led a revolt against Roman oppression in the Galilee. He was captured at the defeat of Yotapata in 67 CE and held prisoner at Caesarea until 69 CE. During this time, he defected to the Romans and returned with Titus to Jerusalem in 70 CE to become perhaps the most important eye witness to the final siege and destruction. He was made a Roman citizen by Vespasian.

After Nero died in 68 CE, Vespasian was re-called to Rome and eventually appointed Emperor in 69 CE. His son Titus was now in charge and he moved to crush the rebel resistance in Jerusalem in early 70 CE. The city was under siege for seven months and the walls were finally breached in the summer of that year.

It is important for us to realize that destroying the Temple was not actually one of Titus' objectives.⁶⁸ Titus had wanted to transform it into a temple dedicated to the Roman emperor and the Roman pantheon. However, the fire spread quickly and was soon out of control. The Temple was destroyed on Tisha b'Av at the beginning of August on the same day in the biblical year that the Babylonians destroyed the Temple of Solomon.

Since Titus' ambition to convert the Temple for pagan use was thwarted, it is interesting to speculate whether or not a specific abomination took place at this time.

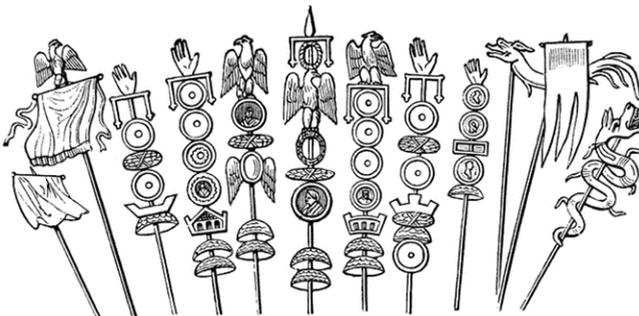
The very fact that the Roman armies entered and plundered the Temple may, of course, serve this purpose and we have, as evidence, the famous panel on the Arch of Titus in Rome depicting the removal of Temple treasures, and the Menorah in particular. The Menorah was one of the items that occupied the Holy Place.

⁶⁸ In a speech to the Jewish defenders of the city he [Titus] said, "I appeal to my own army, and the Jews that are now with me, and even to you yourselves, that I do not force you to defile this sanctuary; and if you will but change the place whereon you will fight, no Roman shall either come near your sanctuary, or offer any affront to it; nay, I will endeavor to preserve you your holy house, whether you will or not." (Josephus *The Wars Of The Jews*, 6:2:4).



Relief from the Titus Arch in Rome ⁶⁹

Others have suggested that the Romans brought their ensigns (signa militaria) into the Holy of Holies. Many of these symbols would have had profound pagan significance. Nevertheless, the destruction of the Temple was rapid.



Roman Ensigns (Signa Militaria) ⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Reproduction of the Arch of Titus Relief [taken from <http://www.bible-history.com/archaeology/rome/arch-titus-menorah-1.html>]

⁷⁰ http://etc.usf.edu/clipart/16900/16919/signamil_16919.htm

We remind ourselves of Jesus' words.

Matthew 23:37-39 (NIV) *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. **Look, your house is left to you desolate.** For I tell you, you [Jerusalem] will not see me again until you [Jerusalem] say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord [emphases added]'.*

The “house” was to remain desolate for another 60 years. There is a strong possibility that the ruins of the Temple continued to stand on the Temple Mount during this period as there is an ancient tradition that Rabbi Akiva saw a fox emerging from what was once the Holy of Holies.⁷¹ The complete destruction of the ruined buildings with the removal of every stone probably took place in the second century.

The Abomination in the Second Century CE

Let us return to the prophecy recorded in Revelation chapter 17.

Revelation 17:12-13 (RSV) *And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. These are of one mind and give over their power and authority to the beast.*

⁷¹ http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/296637/jewish/The-Laughter-of-Rabbi-Akiva.htm

This is a second set of kings and in the first and second centuries CE; they must initially be a list of Roman emperors who were to follow.⁷² The list includes Nero who was still alive when the vision was given and was expected to return to power.⁷³

CAESAR	DATES
1. Nero	54 to 68 CE
2. Galba	68 to 69 CE
3. Ortho	69 CE
4. Vitellius	69 CE
5. Vespasian	69 to 79 CE
6. Titus	79 to 81 CE
7. Domitian	81 to 96 CE
8. Nerva	96 to 98 CE
9. Trajan	98 to 117 CE
10. Hadrian	117 to 138 CE

As I have mentioned, I do not believe that Christians (preterists or futurists) have considered the events of the second century sufficiently in our understanding of the Olivet discourse. In particular, the preterist insistence that all prophecy in this discourse was fulfilled with the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE fails to do justice to the immediate aftermath leading up to the Bar Kokhba rebellion in the second century. We need, therefore, to look briefly at the life of the “tenth king”, the emperor Hadrian.

⁷² We will consider another fulfillment of this passage later.

⁷³ The Talmud echoes a legend that Nero was still alive and would return to reign. Indeed, some pretenders availed themselves of this legend and claimed to be Nero. Oracles prophesying Nero's return from beyond the Euphrates were current among the Jews; and an apocryphal book of the second century, Ascension of Isaiah, declares that in the last days "Belial shall appear in the form of a man, of the king of unrighteousness, of the matricide" [taken from <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/11445-nero>].

The Emperor Hadrian

Hadrian (Publius Aelius Hadrianus) was born in January 76 CE. He was made emperor in 117 CE and his reign lasted 21 years until 138 CE. During his reign, he travelled to every part of the Roman Empire including the British Isles.⁷⁴ Like Antiochus before him, he was an admirer of Greek philosophy and culture. In fact, he sought to make Athens the cultural capital of the Empire. Prior to his accession, he had a successful military career. When his predecessor Trajan died, with the support of the military, Hadrian was appointed emperor. Nevertheless, even here it is possible that intrigue was involved. The Senate's endorsement followed when the possibly falsified papers of Hadrian's adoption by Trajan were presented.

The history of Hadrian's life and his achievements are well beyond the scope of this essay. For our purposes, we only need to consider the events that surround his visit to Jerusalem that took place in 130/131 CE. The city of Jerusalem had lain in ruins for sixty years and, according to some ancient traditions, it appears that Hadrian was initially sympathetic to the plight of the Jewish people. It has been suggested that Hadrian wished to rebuild the city (and the Temple) as a positive gesture towards them. Nevertheless, it soon became clear that Hadrian only wished to rebuild the city as a Roman colony and as a center for pagan religion.

⁷⁴ In the British Isles, Hadrian is remembered for his coast-to-coast wall across northern Britain. It was begun in 122 CE and ran between the River Tyne and the Solway Firth on the Irish Sea. It had a stone base and a stone wall. There were mile castles with two turrets in between. There was a fort about every five miles. Overall it was 80 Roman miles in length, ten feet thick and twenty feet high. It was built by the occupying legions in just eight years. Hadrian was one of the greatest builders in history, building monuments (including many pagan temples) the length and breadth of the empire [taken from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hadrian>].

Although this has been disputed, Cassius Dio, the second century Roman historian, states unequivocally that Hadrian built a pagan temple to Jupiter on the Temple Mount.

*At Jerusalem, Hadrian founded a city in place of the one which had been razed to the ground, naming it Aelia Capitolina, and **on the site of the temple of the god he raised a new temple to Jupiter.** This brought on a war of no slight importance nor of brief duration, for the Jews deemed it intolerable that foreign races should be settled in their city and foreign religious rites planted there [emphasis added].⁷⁵*

Hadrian built other temples in Jerusalem including one to the goddess Venus. Eusebius tells us more:

*Jerusalem ... is even now like a quarry, all inhabitants of the city choosing stores from its ruins as they will for private as well as public buildings. And it is sad for the eyes to see **stones from the Temple itself, and from its ancient sanctuary and holy place, used for the building of idol temples, and of theatres for the populace**" [emphasis added].⁷⁶*



Gold Coin of Hadrian also depicting his Equestrian Statue ⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Cassius Dio (164-c.235), Roman History, 69.12.

⁷⁶ Eusebius, *Demonstratio Evangelica*, 8.3. (405) (circa 314 - 318 AD).

⁷⁷ <http://www.romancoins.info/VIC-Buildings.html>

Like, Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century BCE, Hadrian made himself an object of worship. In an ultimate act of arrogance, Hadrian set up a statue of himself riding a horse on the Temple Mount at a spot which is today the Islamic El-Kas fountain. Several archeologists, including Tuvia Sagiv,⁷⁸ believe that Hadrian placed this statue at the precise location of where the Holy of Holies once stood.⁷⁹

Indeed, Hadrian was to rename the rebuilt Jerusalem as Aelia Capitolina after himself and Jupiter Capitolinus, the chief Roman deity. It is very significant for us to note that the Romans regarded Jupiter as the equivalent of the Greek Zeus.⁸⁰ In other words, what Zeus was to Antiochus, Jupiter was to Hadrian. History was repeating itself. Accordingly, I need to return to the Olivet discourse.

Matthew 24:15-16 (NIV) *So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation' spoken of through the prophet Daniel - let the reader understand - then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.*

Mark 13:14-15 (NIV) *When you see 'the abomination that causes desolation' standing where it does not belong - let the reader understand - then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.*

⁷⁸ Tuvia Sagiv The Temples of Mount Moriah [available on <http://www.templemount.org/mtmoriah.html>].

⁷⁹ The Malbim commentary to the book of Daniel comments how Hadrian erected a statue of himself at the site of the Bet HaMikdash on a day marking the anniversary of the Temple's destruction by Titus [taken from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hadrian>].

⁸⁰ Taken from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jupiter_%28mythology%29

There is no doubt in my mind that these verses (and Mark's parallel account in particular) are written *primarily* for believers in the second century. The gospel writers interject "*let the reader understand*". These words would not have the same significance for the earliest disciples of Jesus. For them, Luke encourages them to leave when the city is surrounded by the Roman Legions.

In Luke's account, there was clearly no need to speak of "*an abomination of desolation*". In a sense, it would have been too late to wait for this sign to occur and one might even argue that no such abomination took place at this time. Titus never intended that the Temple would be destroyed, perhaps fearing, like Nero did before him, that God would hold him accountable. Titus never proclaimed himself "the manifest god" in Jerusalem. He never instituted pagan worship on the Temple Mount, in the Holy Place. On the other hand, Antiochus did and so did Hadrian.

However, like the first century, the excesses imposed on the Jewish population led to revolt. This was the final Jewish-Roman war led by Simon Bar Kokhba. Again the second century disciples would have been prepared for this by these words that they would also be reading.

Matthew 24:23-25 (NIV) At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it for false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect - if that were possible. See, I have told you ahead of time [emphasis added].

Mark 13:20-23 (NIV) At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it; for false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect - if that were possible. So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time [emphasis added].

Simon bar (ben) Koseva was the Jewish leader of the revolt against the Roman Empire in 132 CE. Under his leadership, he established an independent Jewish state which he ruled for over two years. His state was conquered by the Romans in 135 CE at the end of the final Jewish-Roman war.⁸² It was Rabbi Akiva who gave Simon the surname "Bar Kokhba" meaning "Son of the Star" in Aramaic. This was based on Numbers 24:17.⁸³

Bar Kokhba punished any Jew who refused to join his ranks. This included the very many Messianic Jews who believed that Jesus was Messiah. According to Eusebius' *Chronicon*, he severely punished the Messianic Jews (Christians) with death by different means of torture for their refusal to fight against the Romans.⁸⁴ Most certainly, Simon bar Kokhba was a false Messiah, Rabbi Akiva was also a false prophet. Those who understood what they were reading in the gospels of Matthew and Mark were prepared for these days which were mercifully cut short.

For many other Jews of the time, however, this turn of events was heralded as the long hoped for "Messianic Age". There was extreme messianic fervor within the Jewish community after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE that intensified in the second century. There were several groups that anticipated the rebuilding of the Temple, seventy years after its destruction. This was triggered by a futurist interpretation of Jeremiah's prophecy.

⁸² This rebellion is known as the third Jewish–Roman War though some historians relate it as the second Jewish Revolt, not counting the Kitos War (115–117 CE). There was no "Josephus" to act as an eye witness. This is why we have relatively little information and perhaps the main reason that this very important period gets little mention in our understanding.

⁸³ **Numbers 24:17 (NIV)** I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.

⁸⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chronicon_%28Eusebius%29

Accordingly, these groups anticipated this event taking place around the year 140 CE.⁸⁵ The coming of Hadrian with his initial promises to rebuild the city and a third Temple would have inflamed this messianic pre-millennial fervor. It is easy to see the total disillusion when it became clear that Hadrian had no such intention. An abomination was to stand in the Holy Place where it did not belong.

Ultimately, the Jewish fighters were outnumbered and were taking heavy casualties. Furthermore, the Romans adopted a scorched earth policy which reduced and demoralized the Judean populace, slowly grinding away at the will of the Judeans to sustain the rebellion.⁸⁶

Describing this slaughter of the Jewish inhabitants of the land at the time of the Bar Kokhba revolt, Cassius Dio, the second century Roman historian wrote:

Five hundred and eighty thousand men were slain in the various raids and battles, and the number of those that perished by famine, disease and fire was past finding out [emphasis added].⁸⁷

Hadrian's army eventually put down the rebellion in 135 CE. The most famous battle took place in Beitar where Bar Kokhba himself was killed. This fortified city was 10 km. southwest of Jerusalem. The city only fell after a lengthy siege **of three and a half years**, during which time Hadrian prohibited the Jews from burying their dead.

They were eventually afforded burial when Antoninus (Pius) succeeded Hadrian as Roman Emperor. Like Antiochus before him, Hadrian was to die shortly after the revolt perhaps in another fulfillment to these words.

⁸⁵ Taken from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hadrian>

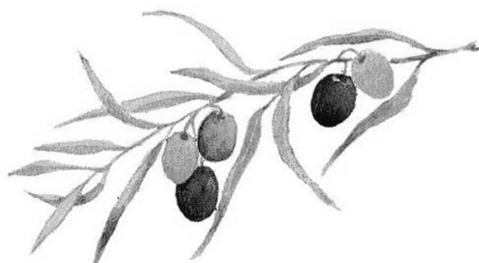
⁸⁶ Taken from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simon_bar_Kokhba

⁸⁷ *ibid*

Daniel 11:45 (NIV) *He will pitch his royal tents between the seas at the beautiful holy mountain. Yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him.*

Yes, Hadrian died in 138 CE at the age of 62. It is noteworthy that this was seven years after his initial visit to Jerusalem. Rabbinical sources suggest that Hadrian attempted to root out Judaism, which he saw as the cause of continuous rebellions, prohibited the Torah, the Hebrew calendar and executed Judaic scholars. According to this tradition, a sacred scroll was ceremonially burned on the Temple Mount. In an attempt to erase the memory of Judaea, Hadrian renamed the province Syria Palaestina (after the Philistines), and barred Jews from entering its rededicated capital. When Jewish sources mention Hadrian it is always with the epitaph "may his bones be crushed", an expression never used either of Vespasian or Titus who actually destroyed the second Temple.⁸⁸

If one considers the two main Jewish-Roman wars (first and second centuries CE), it is likely that something well in excess of two million Jewish people lost their lives. I believe that collectively this was the fulfillment of the words of Jesus as recorded in the three Synoptic Gospels. Let us look again at the relevant verses.



⁸⁸ *ibid*

Matthew 24:15-21 (NIV) So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel - let the reader understand - then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now-and never to be equaled again.

Mark 13:14-19 (NIV) When you see 'the abomination that causes desolation' standing where it does not belong - let the reader understand - then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the roof of his house go down or enter the house to take anything out. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that this will not take place in winter, because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now - and never to be equaled again.

Luke 21:20-24 (NIV) When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. 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 for this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. 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. 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.

Let us look, in some cases again, at the similarities and the distinctive differences between the three synoptic accounts.

1. Matthew and Mark mention the specific sign of the abomination of desolation standing in the Holy Place whereas Luke only mentions the fact that Jerusalem would be surrounded by armies. In Matthew and Mark, a reader is specified and on reading about this coming event, it was necessary for that person to await the abomination of desolation before fleeing the city. This might have been appropriate in the second century. It would have been too late in the first.
2. All three accounts specify that those in Judea should flee to the mountains.
3. All three accounts specify that those who live in the city (presumably Jerusalem on the basis of Luke's account) should get out. Matthew and Mark specify those who are on the roofs of their homes and for those in the fields, they should not return. Luke describes this as being in the country.
4. All three accounts describe how dreadful this time would be for pregnant women and nursing mothers. Why is this? During the various sieges, parents would eat their own children.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ **Deuteronomy 28:55-57** The most gentle and sensitive woman among you — so sensitive and gentle that she would not venture to touch the ground with the sole of her foot — will begrudge the husband she loves and her own son or daughter the afterbirth from her womb and the children she bears for she intends to eat them secretly during the siege and in the distress that your enemy will inflict on you in your cities.

5. Matthew and Mark add that the people should pray that this will not take place in winter or on a Sabbath day. Luke has no need to include this because he knows that the disciples will have sufficient time to leave when Jerusalem is surrounded by the Roman armies in 70 CE. Matthew and Mark are obviously looking into the second century (at the very least). The sign of the abomination of desolation that these disciples need to look for could take place at any time.
6. Matthew and Mark suggest that the distress at this time would be unparalleled. It would be worse than any thing that has happened before or after. Luke, on the other hand, only states that there will be great distress in the land and wrath against the people. This was to be the time of punishment of ALL that has been written.
7. Luke alone speaks of Jerusalem being trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

The question for us now is this: do the events of the first and second centuries fulfill the words of Jesus, namely, *“there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now - and never to be equaled again”*? Personally, I think the answer is yes and no. As I have mentioned previously, according to Jesus, the death of so many and the destruction of Jerusalem in both these centuries was *“the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written.”*⁹⁰ Furthermore, Luke is the only one of the synoptic writer’s to include the words *“There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people.”*⁹¹

⁹⁰ Luke 21:21

⁹¹ Luke 21:23

Consequently, if one is speaking of distress **within** the land of Israel, then I am quite sure that the suffering at this time eclipsed the suffering that took place at the time of Nebuchadnezzar and also at the time, in the second century BCE, during the Maccabean revolt. I also believe that there will never be such distress in the land again.⁹²

Following the destruction of Jerusalem, the people of Israel were taken into captivity and they would remain in the diaspora until the re-establishment of the nation of Israel in the twentieth century. Jerusalem was to be *“trodden down by the Gentiles”* for nearly 2000 years.⁹³

The nation of Israel has been born out of the ashes of the Holocaust. At least 6 million Jewish people were murdered by the Nazis. Did Jesus have this in mind when he spoke of the distress that would come against this people? Did Jesus have this in mind when he indicated that the times of the Gentiles would eventually come to an end? That a day would come when the Father would restore the kingdom to Israel?⁹⁴

The Abomination in the 3rd and 4th Centuries CE

There is difference of opinion as to whether Hadrian actually built a temple of Jupiter on the Temple Mount. The main reason for this is simply because there are no remains of such a temple existing today. The controversies do not end there.

⁹² I have written about this in a booklet entitled “Is it Safe?” which is available on request. Contact the author on: gjr2@aol.com

⁹³ Luke 21:24

⁹⁴ **Acts 1: 6-7 (NIV)** So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority".

The Mishnah states that the measurements of the Temple area were 500 by 500 cubits (approximately 220 meters by 220 meters, or 50 dunams) and, according to Josephus, the size of the area was "Ris by Ris" (approximately 190 meters by 190 meters, or 40 dunams).⁹⁵ The current Temple Mount is approximately 300 by 500 meters (150 dunams). In other words, the size of the present Temple Mount is considerably larger than the size of the Temple area described in the ancient sources.

The suggestion by some is that the Temple Mount that we know today was significantly extended by Hadrian in the second century. The question that needs to be asked is why would he do this? According to Tuvia Sagiv:

*In the second century of the Common Era, the Roman Empire was strengthened, its borders were settled and vast resources were directed toward the building of monumental public structures. The areas occupied by Roman temples were expanded and often varied in size from 40 to 150 dunams.*⁹⁶

Hadrian was perhaps the greatest builder in history, easily eclipsing Herod the Great. He was totally dedicated to the worship of the pagan gods and imposed this throughout his empire through building and extending many temples. An example of such a temple in the ancient world is the temple of Jupiter complex in Baalbek, the remains of which can be seen in Lebanon today. An artistic reconstruction of this temple is shown opposite.

⁹⁵ In other words, the ancient sources describe the Temple compound as a square. This is not true today of the Temple Mount.

⁹⁶ <http://www.templemount.org/mtmoriah.html>



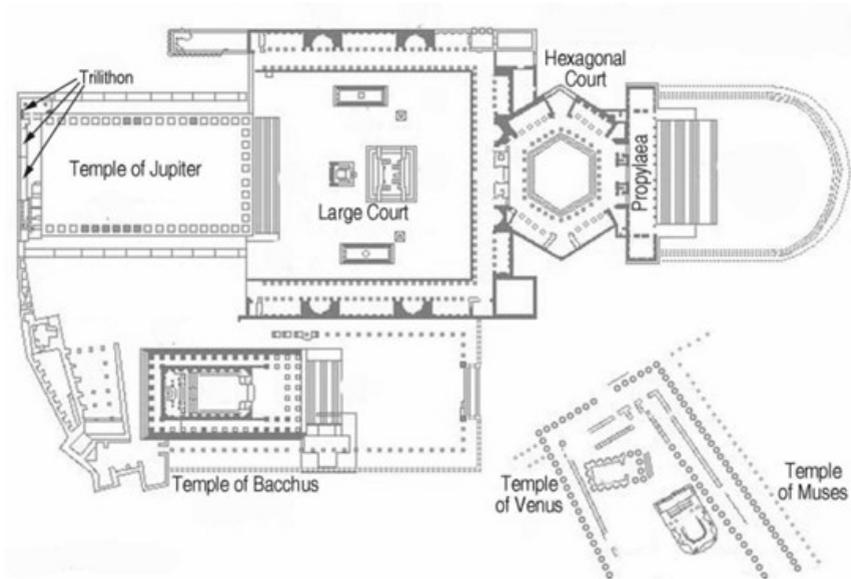
The Temple of Jupiter Complex in Baalbek [1] ⁹⁷

It is interesting to note that the Roman construction in Baalbek involved creating an immense raised plaza on which the buildings were placed. The western and tallest retaining wall has a second course of monoliths containing the famous trilithon.⁹⁸ These weigh approximately 800 tons each.⁹⁹ The comparison to the western wall in Jerusalem is remarkable. The floor plan of the temple complex in Baalbek is shown overleaf.

⁹⁷ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baalbek>

⁹⁸ A group of three horizontally lying giant stones which form part of the podium of the Roman Jupiter temple of Baalbek, Lebanon, go by the name "trilithon". Weighing ca. 800 tons each, they are among the largest ancient monoliths and even of the whole of history. The supporting stone layer beneath features a number of stones which are still in the order of 350 t. In the quarry nearby, two Roman building blocks, which were intended for the same podium, even surpass 1,000 t, lying there unused since their extraction in ancient times [taken from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trilithon>].

⁹⁹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baalbek>



The Temple of Jupiter Complex in Baalbek [2] ¹⁰⁰

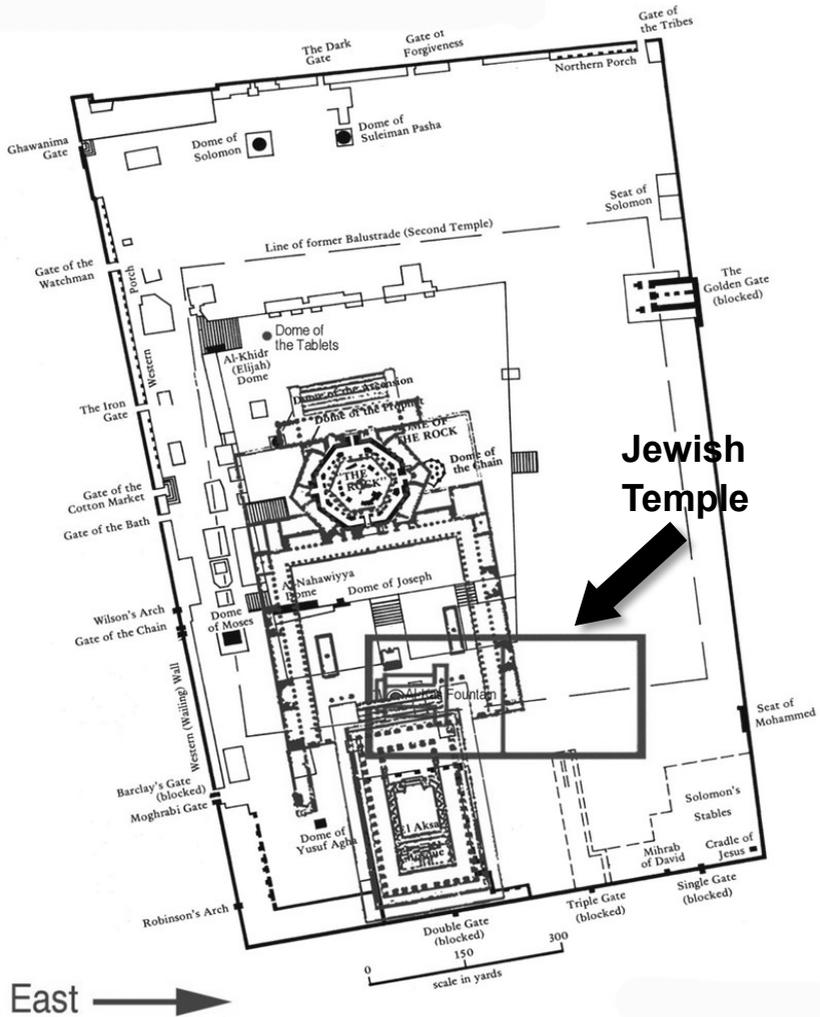
The suggestion is that Hadrian extended the Temple Mount in order to build a temple to Jupiter and other pagan gods in Jerusalem based on this design.¹⁰¹ Tuvia Sagiv suggests the layout shown opposite.¹⁰²

According to this scheme both the temple of Jupiter and the giant statue of Hadrian on horseback were exactly located in the Holy Place.

¹⁰⁰ Modified from: <http://www.bible.ca/archeology/bible-archeology-jerusalem-temple-mount-threshing-floor.htm>

¹⁰¹ <http://www.bible.ca/archeology/bible-archeology-jerusalem-temple-mount-threshing-floor.html>

¹⁰² <http://www.templemount.org/mtmoriah.html>



Floor plan of the Temple of Jupiter (Baalbek) overlaid on the existing Temple Mount ¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Modified from <http://www.bible.ca/archeology/bible-archeology-jerusalem-temple-mount-threshing-floor.html> (colored version).

The Emperor Constantine

Constantine the Great was born on 27th February 272 CE. He was the son of a military officer and his mother's name was Helena. His father became deputy emperor in the west in 293 CE. It is interesting to note that Constantine was proclaimed emperor in the city of York in 306 CE when his father died. It was after his several battles with the "other" emperors (Maxentius and Licinius) that he became the sole ruler by 324 CE.

It was at the battle of Milvian Bridge in his fight against Maxentius (28th October 312 CE) that led to his "conversion" to Christianity. Eusebius of Caesarea recounts that Constantine and his soldiers had a vision of Jesus promising victory if they daubed the sign of the Chi-Rho, the first two letters of Christ's name in Greek, on their shields.

According to Eusebius, Constantine looked up at the sun and saw a cross of light above it. Initially, he was not sure of the meaning of the vision, but the following night he had a dream in which, apparently, Jesus explained to him that he should use the sign against his enemies.¹⁰⁴

Following his victory against Maxentius, Constantine played an influential role in the proclamation of the edict of Milan in 313 CE which decreed tolerance for Christianity in the empire. As soon as he became sole emperor, he convened the first council of Nicaea in 325 CE which exacerbated the parting of the ways between the Jewish people and the now institutional Christian Church.

¹⁰⁴ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Milvian_Bridge

In 324/325 CE, Constantine initiated the destruction of some of Hadrian's pagan structures in Jerusalem. One was the temple of Venus thought to be over the site of Golgotha. In the words of Hunt:

*Hence Constantine gave orders for the demolition of the Hadrianic temple, clearing of the site and the ensuing excavation ... The news from Jerusalem of the revelation of the Tomb from which Christ was raised from the dead determined Constantine on a fitting gesture of imperial munificence to adorn this holiest of places. The area around the now exposed rock tomb was stripped of any vestiges of paganism.*¹⁰⁵

Eventually this was to become the church of the Holy Sepulcher, perhaps the most venerated place in Christendom. We cannot be absolutely certain whether Constantine ordered the demolition of the temple of Jupiter on the Temple Mount. Nevertheless, we have the well-attested "travelogue" of the person known as the Bordeaux Pilgrim who visited Jerusalem in 333 CE.

He (or she) mentions two statues of Hadrian and a "building" in the place where the Jewish Temple stood on the Temple Mount. There is no suggestion, however, that this building was a pagan temple. It is possible, therefore, that by this time, the temple of Jupiter had been demolished and that a building was erected in its place. Perhaps Constantine allowed the statues of Hadrian to remain as a triumphalist declaration over the demise of the Jewish people and their holy site. Here is the text of the Bordeaux Pilgrim from 333 CE:

¹⁰⁵ ED Hunt (1997) *Constantine and Jerusalem* Journal of Ecclesiastical History 48 (1997) 405-424

*Here is also the corner of an exceeding high tower, where our Lord ascended and the tempter said to Him, 'If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence'. And the Lord answered, 'Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God, but him only shalt thou serve.' There is a great cornerstone, of which it was said, 'the stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner.' ... **And in the building itself, where stood the temple which Solomon built, they say that the blood of Zacharias which was shed upon the stone pavement before the altar remains to this day** ... There are two statues of Hadrian, and not far from the statues there is a perforated stone, to which the Jews come every year and anoint it, bewail themselves with groans, rend their garments, and so depart [emphasis added].¹⁰⁶*

We also have the testimony of Eusebius who wrote in 325 CE:

*Nor did the emperor's zeal stop here; but he gave further orders that the materials of what was thus destroyed, both stone and timber, should be removed and thrown as far from the spot as possible; and this command also was speedily executed. The emperor, however, was not satisfied with having proceeded thus far: once more, fired with holy ardor, he directed **that the ground itself should be dug up to a considerable depth**, and the soil which had been polluted by the foul impurities of demon worship transported to a far distant place [emphasis added].¹⁰⁷*

Did Constantine ever advance or instruct for the building of a church or shrine on the Temple Mount? There is nothing to suggest that he did although this has been claimed by some.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ The Bordeaux Pilgrim (333 CE) quoted in <http://www.bible.ca/archeology/bible-archeology-jerusalem-temple-mount-threshing-floor.htm>

¹⁰⁷ Eusebius, The Life of the Blessed Emperor Constantine, book 3, ch 27

¹⁰⁸ <http://www.bible.ca/archeology/bible-archeology-jerusalem-temple-mount-threshing-floor.htm>

If he did, almost certainly it would have been octagonal in structure. This was true for what is known as the Domus Aurea in Antioch which was begun by Constantine in 327 CE and dedicated in 341 CE. Another octagonal structure was part of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. The first basilica on this site was initiated by Helena, the mother of Constantine, under the supervision of Bishop Makarios of Jerusalem.

This work was also begun in 327 CE and was completed in 333 CE. As part of the church complex, an octagonal rotunda was constructed over the area believed to be where Jesus was born. Another octagonal church was built on the supposed home of Peter in Capernaum and, as we will see shortly, in the fifth century, the Byzantines built yet another octagonal church near Bethlehem known as the Kathisma.

What we do know, however, is that in 361 CE, the emperor Julian (the Apostate) tried to reverse Constantine's anti-pagan, pro-Christian influence and he gave permission to the Jews to rebuild the Jewish Temple on the Temple Mount.

Sozomen (375-447 CE) writes in his Ecclesiastical History Book V, Chapter XXII as follows:

*They [the Jews] sought for the most skillful artisans, collected materials, **cleared the ground**, and entered so earnestly upon the task, that even the women carried heaps of earth, and brought their necklaces and other female ornaments towards defraying the expense. The emperor, the other pagans, and all the Jews, regarded every other undertaking as secondary in importance to this.*

Although the pagans were not well-disposed towards the Jews, yet they assisted them in this enterprise, because they reckoned upon its ultimate success, and hoped by this means to falsify the prophecies of Christ. Besides this motive, the Jews themselves were impelled by the consideration that the time had arrived for rebuilding their temple.

When they had removed the ruins of the former building, they dug up the ground and cleared away its foundation; it is said that on the following day when they were about to lay the first foundation, a great earthquake occurred, and by the violent agitation of the earth, stones were thrown up from the depths, by which those of the Jews who were engaged in the work were wounded, as likewise those who were merely looking on. The houses and public porticos, near the site of the temple, in which they had diverted themselves, were suddenly thrown down [emphases added].¹⁰⁹

Whatever might have been removed or destroyed at this time, it appears that the statue of Hadrian riding on horseback was still standing in the Holy Place. In 398 CE, Jerome in his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew wrote:

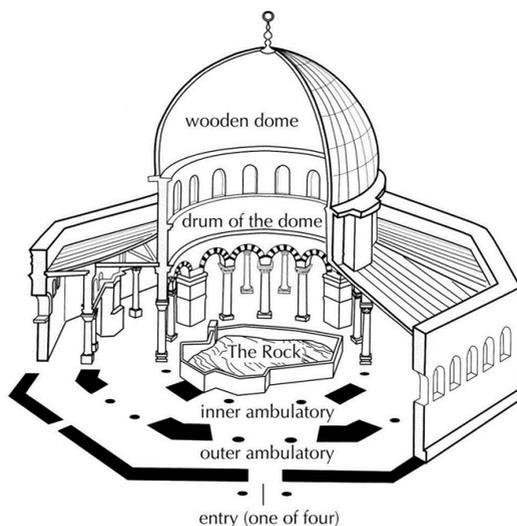
“So when you see standing in the holy place the abomination that causes desolation: or to the statue of the mounted Hadrian, which stands to this very day on the site of the Holy of Holies” [emphasis added].¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ <http://www.fisheaters.com/juliantemple.html>

¹¹⁰ Jerome, Commentaries on Isaiah 2.8: Matthew 24.15 quoted in <http://followinghadrian.com/2014/11/05/exploring-aelia-capitolina-hadrians-jerusalem/>

The Abomination from the 7th Century to the Present

The Islamic siege of Jerusalem took place in 637 CE. Fifty years later, the Islamic shrine, known as the Dome of the Rock was constructed on the Temple Mount by Abd al-Malik between 689 and 691 CE. The al-Aqsa mosque was originally a small prayer house but was rebuilt and expanded by al-Malik and finished by his son al-Walid in 705 CE. After an earthquake in 746 CE, the mosque was completely destroyed and rebuilt by Caliph al-Mansur in 754 CE, and again rebuilt by his successor al-Mahdi in 780 CE. Another earthquake destroyed most of al-Aqsa in 1033, but two years later Caliph Ali az-Zahir built another mosque which has stood to the present day.¹¹¹ The layout of the Dome of the Rock is shown below.



Layout of the Dome of the Rock ¹¹²

¹¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Aqsa_Mosque

¹¹² <https://www.studyblue.com/notes/note/n/final-/deck/13170768>

For further detail of the significance and history of the Dome of the Rock, please refer to https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dome_of_the_Rock

When the Crusaders captured Jerusalem in 1099, they used the mosque as a palace and the Dome of the Rock as a church, but its function as a mosque was restored after its recapture by Saladin in 1187. It is “officially” suggested that the architecture and mosaics of the Dome of the Rock were patterned after Byzantine churches and palaces. The octagonal plan of the structure may have been influenced by the Byzantine Chapel of St Mary (also known as Kathisma and al-Qadismu) that was built between 451 and 458 CE on the road between Jerusalem and Bethlehem.¹¹³

The ruins of this church were discovered by accident in 1992 when the Jerusalem-Bethlehem road was widened. In 1993, the top of a stone was uncovered. Rina Avner, the archaeologist in charge of the dig has said that the church was the largest of **three similar octagonal churches in the area**, and that its mosaic flooring, which features floral and abstract geometric designs, is more elaborate than in previous finds from the same era [emphasis added].¹¹⁴

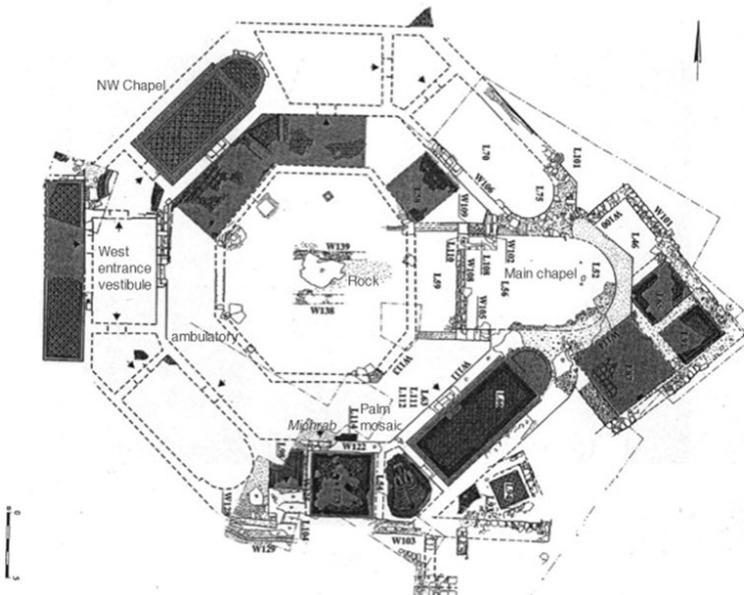
The Kathisma church is an octagon with three concentric layers. It was designed in order to highlight its precious treasure: a rock, the sacred traditional seating place of Mary which is located in its center. An internal octagon ring around the center was a walkway from which worshippers could view the stone seat. The outer ring around the inner ring had four rooms, with chapels between them. The floors are covered with mosaics and marble. The structure's total area is 52 x 43M.¹¹⁵ It is extremely interesting to realize that the Kathisma and the Islamic Dome of the Rock are both octagonal and similar in size.

¹¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dome_of_the_Rock

¹¹⁴ <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/archaeologists-say-they-have-found-rock-associated-with-the-virgin-mary-1.124834>

¹¹⁵ <http://www.biblewalks.com/Sites/Kathisma.html>

As their names suggest, they are both built over exposed rock. An outline of the church is shown below.

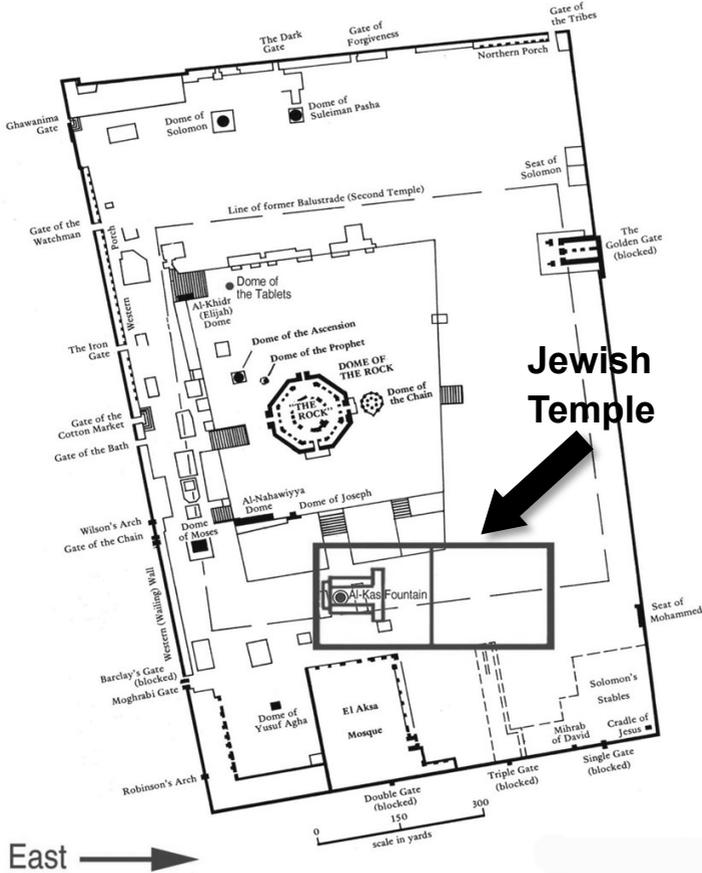


Layout of the Kathisma Church near Bethlehem ¹¹⁶

Following the Islamic invasion in the seventh century, the Kathisma church was converted into a mosque and, although we cannot be dogmatic, it is quite possible that the Dome on the Rock was built on similar octagonal foundations that were built centuries earlier by the Byzantines. This would explain why earlier structures such as a putative temple of Jupiter have never been found. The archeological excavations necessary would inevitably start World War III.

¹¹⁶ <http://israel-tourguide.info/2011/12/15/kathisma-church/>

Nevertheless, Tuvia Sagiv is convinced that the location of the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa mosque are built exactly where the Hadrianic temple of Jupiter complex would have been situated. This is shown below.



Plan of the Temple Mount Today ¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Modified from <http://www.bible.ca/archeology/bible-archeology-jerusalem-temple-mount-threshing-floor.html>

Will there be Future Abomination in Jerusalem?

Now I am going to be dogmatic! In my opinion, there is absolutely no chance for there to be another abomination of desolation standing in Holy Place while one is already standing there! The Islamic edifices that have stood on the Temple Mount since the seventh century preclude any such possibility. I am perfectly aware that there is a desire among certain branches of ultra-orthodox Judaism to see another (third) Temple standing on the Temple Mount. In fact, the Temple Institute is dedicated to this end.¹¹⁸ For example, a quick look at their website will inform us that many of the Temple artifacts have already been prepared. We also have the possibility of donating money to assist in the development of a pure-bred red heifer.¹¹⁹

I am also perfectly aware that one of the major tenets of Dispensationalism is the building of a “third” Temple on the Temple Mount. The reason for this expectation is the perceived need for a future antichrist to proclaim himself as God within this Temple. After all, did not the Paul write?

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 (NIV) Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come **until the rebellion occurs** and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in **God's temple**, proclaiming himself to be God [emphases added].

As I have mentioned previously, the word “rebellion” is perhaps more accurately translated as “apostasy”. Jesus predicted that towards the end of the age:

¹¹⁸ <https://www.templeinstitute.org/>

¹¹⁹ <https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/raise-a-red-heifer-in-israel#/story>

Matthew 24:10-12 (RSV) *And then many will fall away, and betray one another, and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold.*

So what faith are we talking about here? It is not a generic faith in God; it is faith in Jesus as Messiah, Savior and Lord. The “church” in the last days will be an apostate church. And is this not what Paul is saying?

And what is **God’s Temple** after all?

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 (NIV) *Don't you know that you yourselves are **God's temple** and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys **God's temple**, **God will destroy him**; for **God's temple** is sacred, and you are that temple* [emphases added].

I do not think you could have two verses that spell out this fact more clearly. The word “temple” is used four times. In three of these four times, it is God’s temple that is specified. For Paul, God’s temple was and is the elect people of God. They could be destroyed but whoever would destroy them, God would destroy him. He is the man doomed to destruction. In no way is he talking about a building.

Although I continue to have an open mind on the subject, I am not at all sure if there will ever be a so-called “third Temple”, as dispensationalists understand it, built on the Temple Mount. It has been interesting to note in our survey, that there were two distinct historical periods when messianic fervor broke out for the rebuilding of the Temple.

The first one took place in the second century CE when many Jewish people anticipated the restoration of the Temple, 70 years after its destruction in 70 CE.

These were the days of Bar Kokhba and Rabbi Akiva. This expectation was crushed in the final Jewish-Roman war with the loss of many 100,000's of lives. The second event was in the fourth century in the days of Emperor Julian the Apostate. He positively commanded the Jewish people to rebuild a third Temple. It ended in disaster. According to eyewitnesses and commentators, there was earthquake, fire and brimstone to bring this latter effort to an abortive end.

But doesn't the Bible speak about Another Temple?

The answer is a definite yes! There are nine chapters in the book of Ezekiel that describe this Temple. It has never been built. It is my definite opinion that this temple can and will only be built at the specific time when the kingdom is restored to Israel. Jesus said:

Acts 1:7 (NIV) *It is not for you [i.e. the disciples on the Mount of Olives] to know the times or dates **the Father has set by his own authority** [emphasis added].*

The Father has already established his timetable of future events. It is no wonder, therefore, that all human efforts to rebuild another Temple have been thwarted. Furthermore, I sincerely believe that the presence of the Islamic edifices on the Temple Mount is **God's preventative measure** to preclude any premature attempt to erect any such third Temple. I also hope, with great respect to my Jewish brethren, that the efforts of those in the Temple Institute, for example, will come to nothing. Let me explain.

Along with many others in the ultra-orthodox community, I believe that the Bible makes it abundantly clear that only the Messiah can build this Temple. Perhaps the most explicit text regarding this fact is found in the prophecy of Zechariah.

Zechariah 6:11-13 (NIV) *Take silver and gold and make a crown, and set it on the head of the high priest, Joshua son of Jehozadak. Tell him this is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the LORD. It is he who will build the temple of the LORD and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. He will be a priest on his throne and there will be harmony between the two' [emphasis added].*

The “Branch” is a term used for the Messiah. We also read about the Branch in the prophecy of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 33:14-16 (RSV) *Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfil the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring forth for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'*

The righteous Branch imputes his own righteousness to the people. In other words, he becomes “*the Lord **our** righteousness*” and in his days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. However, in the passage in Zechariah chapter 6, the Branch is actually given a name. He is likened to Joshua son of Jehozadak who was the legitimate high priest and who returned with Zerubbabel after the Babylonian captivity.

However, we have a serious problem here! If Joshua is the **legitimate** high priest, he has to be a Levite. He is not from the tribe of Judah. But, remarkably in this passage, the high priest is actually crowned king of Israel. What are we to make of this? Fortunately, Zechariah has already come to our aid.

Zechariah 3:8 (NIV) Listen, O high priest Joshua and your associates seated before you, **who are men symbolic of things to come: I am going to bring my servant, the branch**" [emphasis added].¹²⁰

Joshua is being used as a visual aid. A day will come when the true Branch of the Lord, a descendant of Jesse,¹²¹ of the house of Judah will become the Lord our Righteousness [יְהוָה צְדִיקֵנוּ] transliterated YHWH¹²² Zidkenu. The verses that immediately follow the passage in Jeremiah 33:14-16 are in accord with the vision of Zechariah. These verses are as follows:

Jeremiah 33:17-18 (RSV) For thus says the LORD: David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, and the Levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to burn cereal offerings, and to make sacrifices for ever.

¹²⁰ It is worth re-iterating that in this verse we can clearly see that the branch is also **my** servant. This passage clearly indicates that Joshua the High Priest is THE symbol of another individual who will come in the future. God, who is speaking, is GOING to do this.

¹²¹ **Isaiah 11:1-4** A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him - the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD - and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.

¹²² The unpronounced name of God also known as the Tetragrammaton

The Branch who is “my” servant is also the Lord, our righteousness, and he will be both king and priest. Remarkably, Joshua the son of Jehozadak is called by a slightly different name in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Ezra 3:2 (NIV) *Then Jeshua son of Jozadak and his fellow priests and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and his associates began to build the altar of the God of Israel to sacrifice burnt offerings on it, in accordance with what is written in the Law.*

Nehemiah 12:26 (NIV) *They served in the days of Joiakim son of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor and of Ezra the priest and scribe.*

The name Jozadak [יֹזָדָק] or Jehozadak [יְהוֹזָדָק] consists of two elements, namely, Jo¹²³ or Jeho¹²⁴ which is an abbreviated form of the Tetragrammaton [יְהוָה]. The second element is the Hebrew root [צַדִּיק] which includes the meaning of righteousness. We have noted that the Lord our righteousness [יְהוָה צַדִּיקֵנוּ] is based on this root.¹²⁵ Thus the name Jozadak or Jehozadak could legitimately be translated YHWH is righteous or maybe the righteous God. As explicitly stated in Ezra and Nehemiah, the son of Jozadak [the righteous God] also has the name Jeshua [Yeshua; יֵשׁוּעַ]. The implications of this are very profound.

Accordingly, I sincerely believe that any effort to pre-empt the biblical truth that it is only the Messiah who is qualified to build the “next” Temple may lead to total disaster. It did at the time of Julian the Apostate and I believe that it could happen again. Dispensationalists need to note this.

¹²³ Other examples include Jonathan, Joseph, Josiah, Jotham etc.

¹²⁴ Another example includes Jehoshaphat

¹²⁵ Jeremiah 33:16

Jesus said in the Olivet discourse:

Matthew 24:26-27 (NIV) *So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man [emphasis added].*

I re-iterate, while the Islamic abomination of desolation stands in the Holy Place, there is absolutely no possibility of building another Temple. It would start World War III. One only has to look at the news. All Islamic eyes are on the Temple Mount. Anything that they perceive to be undermining this place drives the Islamic world wild. I will give you an example. On September 13th 1993 (Elul 27), a handshake took place on the White House lawn.



A Handshake with the Enemy No.1

¹²⁶ One assumes that these describe inner rooms in the Temple [see **1 Chronicles 28:11 (NIV)** Then David gave his son Solomon the plans for the portico of the temple, its buildings, its storerooms, its upper parts, its **inner rooms** and the place of atonement].

This “covenant” also began a seven-year cycle. Within that seven year prophetic motif, Prime Minister Rabin was assassinated (November 4th 1995). The seven years were completed on September 28th 2000 (Elul 28) when Ariel Sharon made his highly publicized visit to the Temple Mount. It sparked the second intifada.

Nevertheless, I do believe that something is going to happen to disempower the principality of Islam. I think it will be the outworking of the following prophetic psalm.

Psalm 83:1-4 (NIV) O God, do not keep silent; be not quiet, O God, be not still. See how your enemies are astir, how your foes rear their heads. With cunning they conspire against your people; they plot against those you cherish. "Come," they say, "let us destroy them as a nation, that the name of Israel be remembered no more."

I am reminded of another handshake with the enemy.



A Handshake with the Enemy No.2

John Kerry and Javad Zarif, the foreign minister of Iran, shook hands in July 2015 in the city of Vienna when the nuclear accord (“covenant”) was signed. Will this be the beginning of another seven-year cycle? Will John Kerry survive? Psalm 83 goes on.

Psalm 83:5-8 (NIV) *With one mind they plot together; they form an alliance against you the tents of Edom [1] and the Ishmaelites [2], of Moab [3] and the Hagrites [4], Gebal [5], Ammon [6] and Amalek [7], Philistia [8], with the people of Tyre [9]. Even Assyria has joined them [10] to lend strength to the descendants of Lot [who are Ammon and Moab already listed].*

Thus, we have another list of 10 “Kings”.¹²⁷ They are given ancient names but probably encompass the current Islamic world in the Middle East. In this list, the 10th king is Assyria (modern day Syria, Iraq and Iran). This plot may result in the outworking of the Gog/Magog war which definitely lists Iran (Persia) has one of the main protagonists.¹²⁸ Whatever the future holds, God will continue to intervene on behalf of the people of Israel. He will do more than intervene.



¹²⁷ **Revelation 17:12-14** The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. **They have one purpose [see Psalm 83:5]** and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings - and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.

¹²⁸ Ezekiel 38:5 Persia, Cush and Put will be with them.

Ezekiel 39:7-8 (RSV) *And my holy name I will make known in the midst of my people Israel; and I will not let my holy name be profaned any more; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel.*

Chapter 39 of Ezekiel concludes with this amazing promise.

Ezekiel 39:28-29 (RSV) *Then they shall know that I am the LORD their God because I sent them into exile among the nations, and then gathered them into their own land. I will leave none of them remaining among the nations any more; and I will not hide my face any more from them, when I pour out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, says the Lord GOD [emphasis added].*

According to this promise, the house of Israel (all 12 tribes) will come to faith during this period.¹²⁸ This will also be the final outworking of Zechariah 12:10 with its entire context fulfilled.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ **Romans 11:25-27 (NIV)** I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

¹²⁹ **Zechariah 12:8-10 (NIV)** On that day the LORD will shield those who live in Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the Angel of the LORD going before them. On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem. And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.

It also fulfills another prophecy that we have already referred to previously because Psalm 83 goes on.

Psalm 83:9 (NIV) *Do to them as you did to Midian ...*

Isaiah 9:2-6 (NIV) *The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder. **For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.** For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders [emphasis added].*

The part of this passage that is highlighted can never be found on Christmas cards. The Christian world has no idea what to do with them. This is because this prophecy is awaiting its final fulfillment. The nation of Israel will have the revelation of Jesus as did the Apostle Paul on the Damascus Road.

Acts 22:6-9 (RSV) *As I made my journey and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' And I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.' Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me.*

Paul's eyes were eventually opened and this ultra-orthodox Pharisee became the apostle to the Gentiles. We need also to recognize that Israel's gifts and calling are irrevocable (Romans 11:29). They will yet be the "light to the Gentiles". I believe that they will also be the ones fulfilling these words spoken by Jesus in the Olivet discourse.

Matthew 24:14 (RSV) *And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come.*

Consequently, I do not believe that this revelation of Jesus as described in these prophetic passages is the return of Jesus to planet earth. It might, however, be this.

Matthew 24:30 (NIV) *At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn [emphasis added].*

ALL the nations of earth will mourn when this sign is seen. The mourning that will take place in the land of Israel, however, is described in Zechariah 12 following the revelation of the one who was pierced.

Zechariah 12:11-14 (RSV) *On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. The land shall mourn, each family by itself; the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Levi by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the Shimeites by itself, and their wives by themselves; and all the families that are left, each by itself, and their wives by themselves.*

The realization that Jesus is Messiah will begin a process of reflection and deep repentance. It will take time.

The Apostle Paul was secluded for more than three years to try to come to terms with this revelation (see Galatians 2:17-18) and I do not think it will any different for the people of Israel. However, of this we can be sure.

Zechariah 13:1-2 (RSV) *On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness. And on that day, says the LORD of hosts, I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, so that they shall be remembered no more; and also I will remove from the land the prophets and the unclean spirit.*¹³⁰

Over time, there will be no more idols, no more abortion, no more abominations, and no more false prophets. The nation will be cleansed physically and spiritually. Whatever happens in the Gog and Magog war, there will be work to do. It will take at least seven years.

Ezekiel 39:9 (RSV) *Then those who dwell in the cities of Israel will go forth and make fires of the weapons and burn them, shields and bucklers, bows and arrows, hand-pikes and spears, and they will make fires of them for seven years.*

¹³⁰ See also ***Isaiah 4:2-6 (RSV)*** In that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and glory of the survivors of Israel. And he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, every one who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem, **when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning.** Then the LORD will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory there will be a canopy and a pavilion. It will be for a shade by day from the heat, and for a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain. [emphasis added].

I have no idea exactly how this ancient prophecy will be fulfilled. It is written in the archaic language that was appropriate for the days of Ezekiel. But seven years is seven years. The physical cleansing of the land is paralleled by the spiritual cleansing described in the opening verses of Zechariah chapter 13. There will also be a major earthquake in the land of Israel during this conflict (Ezekiel 38:19). This will be one of the methods the Lord uses to destroy the invading forces on the Mountains of Israel. And it will not just be earthquake.

Ezekiel 38:22 (NIV) *I will execute judgment upon him with plague and bloodshed; I will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones and burning sulfur on him and on his troops and on the many nations with him.*

Enormous global devastation may take place at this time. Perhaps this passage is paralleled by a similar prophecy in the book of Revelation.

Revelation 16:17-21 (RSV) *The seventh angel poured his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" And there were flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as had never been since men were on the earth, so great was that earthquake. The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered great Babylon, to make her drain the cup of the fury of his wrath. And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found; and great hailstones, heavy as a hundred-weight, dropped on men from heaven, till men cursed God for the plague of the hail, so fearful was that plague.*

This prophecy is explicit. Whatever is taking place at this time, it is a global phenomenon. This, I believe exactly fulfills the words of Jesus given in the Olivet discourse.

Matthew 24:21-23 (NIV) For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now - and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.

Mark 13:19-20 (NIV) Those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now - and never to be equaled again. If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them.

Jesus through Luke specifically speaks of global anguish.

Luke 21:25-27 (NIV) There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.

God is going to shake the earth. We need to be prepared for these days. This is why the Olivet discourse was given in the three synoptic gospels.

Haggai 2:6-9 (NIV) This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD Almighty. 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the LORD Almighty. 'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the LORD Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the LORD Almighty.

The desired of all nations is the Messiah. It is he who will fill the Ezekiel Temple with glory.

Ezekiel 43:4-7 (NIV) The glory of the LORD entered the temple through the gate facing east. Then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. While the man was standing beside me, I heard someone speaking to me from inside the temple. He said: "Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet."¹³¹ This is where I will live among the Israelites forever.

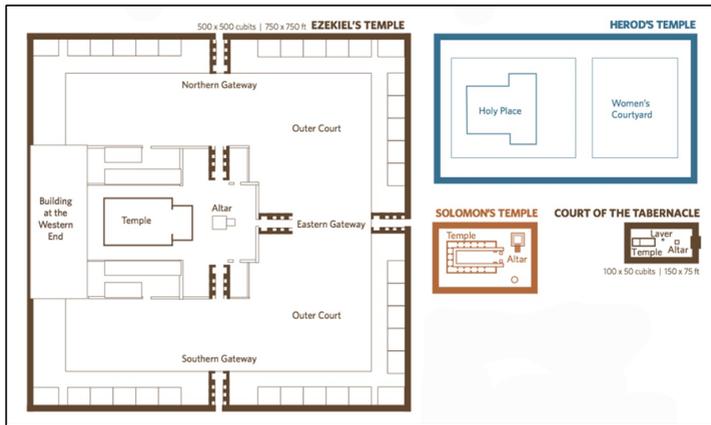
The simple fact is this: Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39 precede the description of Ezekiel's Temple which begins in chapter 40. In nine chapters, Ezekiel describes in great detail a temple in Israel that is much too large to fit on the present Temple Mount site. In the words of Lambert Dolphin:

*The Temple of Ezekiel proper measures about 875 feet square, and it sits in the middle of a large consecrated area. Ezekiel's temple is also very different in many details from any previous temples that have existed in Israel (or elsewhere). Ezekiel also describes the reapportionment of the land in specific lots during the millennial kingdom. The temple and the temple district are not part of the rebuilt city of Jerusalem according to the details of this reapportionment. Note that the Temple area will be located to the north of rebuilt Jerusalem.*¹³²

In addition, Lambert Dolphin lists many features that are unique to this Temple.

¹³¹ Apparently, God has feet

¹³² <http://www.templemount.org/ezektmp.html>



Temple Size Comparisons ¹³³

In addition, Lambert Dolphin lists many features that are unique to this Temple. They include:

1. No wall of partition to exclude Gentiles (compare Ephesians 2:14)¹³⁴
 2. No Court of Women (compare Galatians 3:28)
 3. No Laver (Ezekiel 36:24-27, John 15:3)
 4. No Table of Shewbread (Micah 5:4, John 6:35)
 5. No Lampstand or Menorah (Isaiah 49:6, John 8:12)
 6. No Golden Altar of Incense (Zechariah 8:20-23, John 14:6)
 7. No Veil (Isaiah 25:6-8, Matthew 27:51)
- and, perhaps most significantly,*
8. No Ark of the Covenant (Jeremiah 3:16, John 10:30-33).

¹³³ Adapted from www.catholic-convert.com/wp-content/uploads/Screenshot-2013-12-13-at-12.08.30-PM.png

¹³⁴ Dolphin notes that Gentiles were previously welcome in the outer courts, but excluded from the inner courts on pain of death.

Lambert Dolphin continues:

During the thousand years reign of Yeshua over a restored earth, with Satan locked away in the abyss (Rev. 20:2), sinners will be born on the earth and will need to be instructed in matters of God's grace and mercy. For this reason most commentators on Ezekiel believe that this Temple will be Memorial in nature, looking back in time to the cross of Jesus, just as the Tabernacle and First and Second Temples pointed ahead in time to the cross. The prescribed worship services of Ezekiel's temple are also described for us in great detail by the Prophet. The priests presiding over the temple services will be of the line of Zadok (44:15) who proved faithful after the failure of the Levitical priests in the line of Eli (1 Samuel 2:35, 1 Kings 2:26-27,35). The Millennial Temple will not have a separate High Priest. Instead the previously separate offices of King and Priest will be combined in the Messiah (Zechariah 6:9-15).¹³⁵

Lambert Dolphin, like many believers, however, still anticipates the building of a “third” Temple, presumably on the Temple Mount. I am open to this possibility but it could not happen before the demise of Islam. However, as I have argued, the demise of Islam will occur during the same events that bring the nation of Israel to faith in Jesus. In fact, the entire Middle East will be “turned upside down” and it may be that the many thousands of Muslims who are coming to faith at this time through dreams and visions are a preparation for this. The question that I ponder is this: would the nation of Israel that has come to faith in Jesus **and has entered into the New Covenant**¹³⁶ want to build a “third” Temple on the Temple Mount?

¹³⁵ <http://www.templemount.org/ezektmp.html>

¹³⁶ see **Jeremiah 31:31-34** (see also Appendix 2)

The other issue worth considering is the fact that many of the Temple artifacts that are currently being prepared by the Temple Institute are actually not required in Ezekiel's Temple. We have to conclude that the Temple Institute is dedicated to re-create temple worship that belongs to the first and second temples - including the breeding of a pure-bred red heifer. Thus the danger for building such a temple for these obsolete practices is that it actually becomes "an abomination that causes desolation" in the sight of God. In other words, we are not talking about God's Temple at all. I recognize that these words are somewhat direct and I sincerely apologize for any offence caused. However, I am only repeating what the Bible says. For example,

Hebrews 8:13 (NIV) By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear [emphasis added].

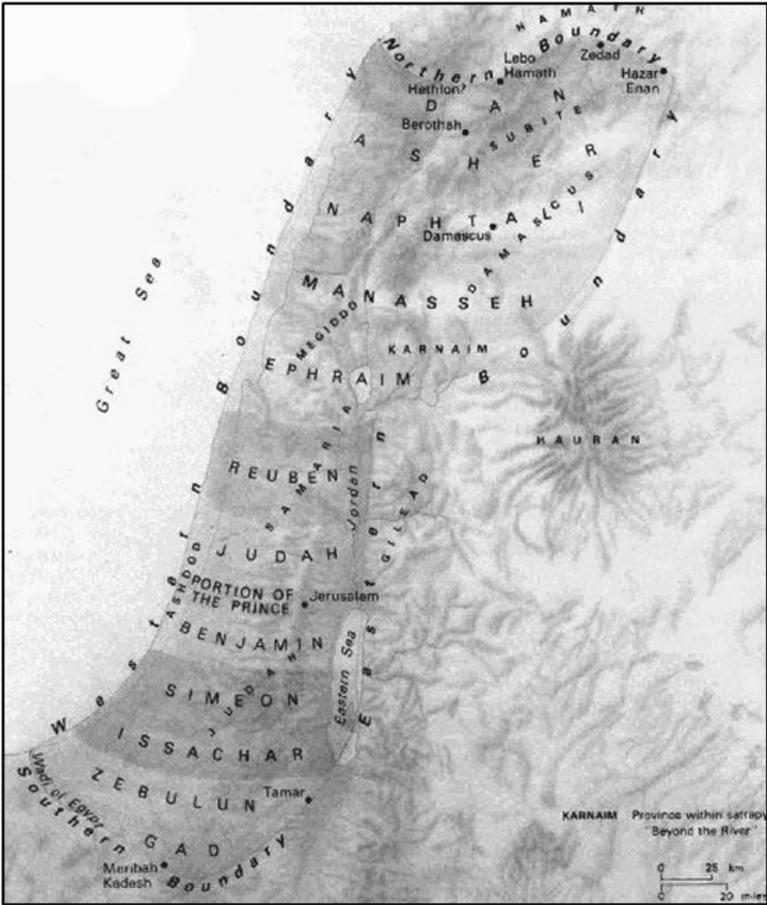
These words were written in the first century. The Temple was destroyed in 70 CE. I do not believe that restoring first or second temple worship is part of the Lord's agenda. Unlike Lambert Dolphin, I do not see any explicit mention of another temple being built before the Lord returns.

The reader is referred to Appendix 1.

Furthermore, the Ezekiel Temple cannot be built until there are significant geological changes in the land of Israel and in Jerusalem, in particular.

Redistribution of the Land

The other very interesting piece of information that we can read in these final chapters in Ezekiel is the redistribution of land to the 12 tribes of Israel. This is shown overleaf.



Redistribution of the Land of Israel ¹³⁷

It is very interesting to recognize the borders of Israel at this time. This territory actually encompasses the ancient land of Canaan. We are reminded of the words of Psalm 105.

¹³⁷ <http://www.templemount.org/ezektmp.html>

Psalm 105:8-11 (NIV) He remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac. He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting covenant: ***"To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion you will inherit"*** [emphasis added].

Nothing could be clearer; Canaan is the specific portion of Middle Eastern land promised to Israel. Although this is beyond the scope of this study, suffice to say that this is only a part all the land promised to Abraham and his descendants.¹³⁸

The Borders of Canaan

There are two primary passages of Scripture that clearly delineate the borders of Canaan. These are found in Numbers 34 and Ezekiel 47. It is very important therefore to look closely at these passages.

Numbers 34:1-5 (NIV) The LORD said to Moses, "Command the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter Canaan, the land that will be allotted to you as an inheritance will have these boundaries: "'Your southern side will include some of the Desert of Zin along the border of Edom. On the east, your southern boundary will start from the end of the Salt Sea, cross south of Scorpion Pass, continue on to Zin and go south of Kadesh Barnea. Then it will go to Hazar Addar and over to Azmon, where it will turn, join the Wadi of Egypt and end at the Sea ...

¹³⁸ **Genesis 15:18-21 (NIV)** On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates - the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites."

Numbers 34:6-12 (NIV) *Your western boundary will be the coast of the Great Sea. This will be your boundary on the west. For your northern boundary, run a line from the Great Sea to Mount Hor and from Mount Hor to Lebo Hamath. Then the boundary will go to Zedad, continue to Ziphron and end at Hazar Enan. This will be your boundary on the north. For your eastern boundary, run a line from Hazar Enan to Shepham. The boundary will go down from Shepham to Riblah on the east side of Ain and continue along the slopes east of the Sea of Kinnereth. Then the boundary will go down along the Jordan and end at the Salt Sea. This will be your land, with its boundaries on every side.*

We need to highlight some features of this passage. Firstly, it is the Lord who is doing the speaking. This is Torah. This is not this author's speculation, neither is it the declaration of any human agency such as the Peel Commission in the 1930's or the United Nations in 1947. Secondly, the eastern boundary is the Jordan River. It encompasses part of the Negev but not the whole. It includes land to the north that currently is modern day Lebanon.

The second passage is in Ezekiel chapter 47.

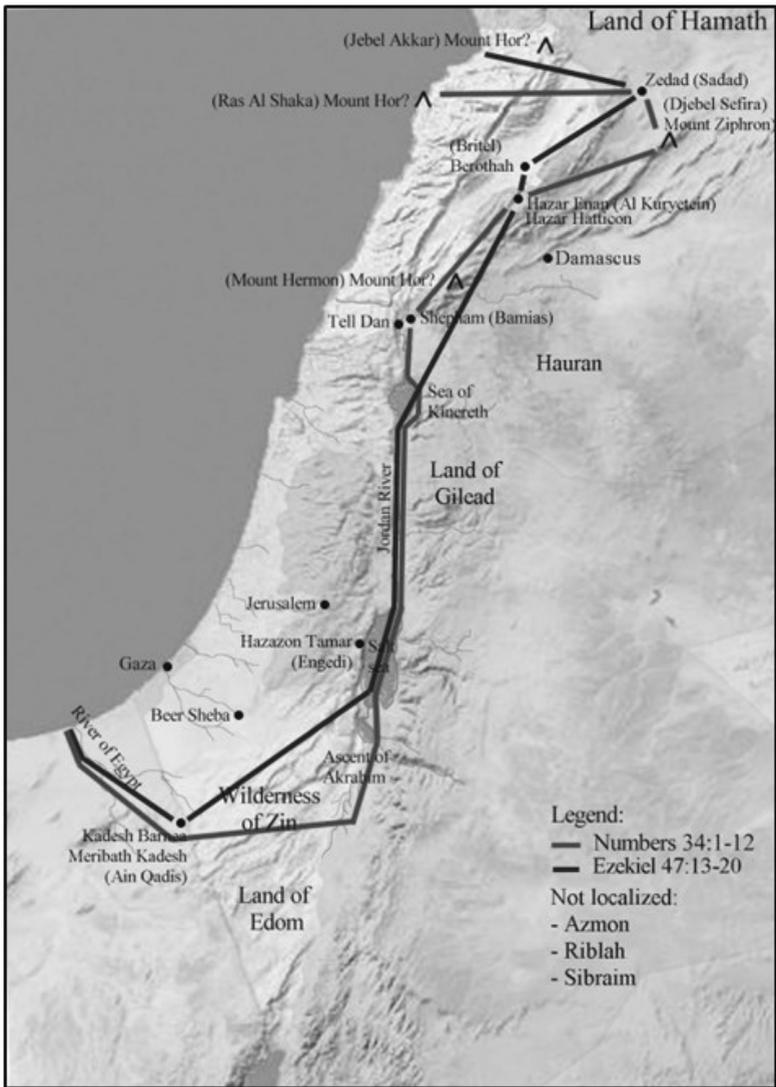
Ezekiel 47:13-16 (NIV) *This is what the Sovereign Lord says: "These are the boundaries by which you are to divide the land for an inheritance among the twelve tribes of Israel, with two portions for Joseph. You are to divide it equally among them. Because I swore with uplifted hand to give it to your forefathers, this land will become your inheritance. "This is to be the boundary of the land: "On the north side it will run from the Great Sea by the Hethlon road past Lebo Hamath to Zedad, Berothah and Sibram (which lies on the border between Damascus and Hamath), as far as Hazer Hatticon, which is on the border of Hauran ...*

Ezekiel 47:17-20 (NIV) *The boundary will extend from the sea to Hazar Enan, along the northern border of Damascus, with the border of Hamath to the north. This will be the north boundary. "On the east side the boundary will run between Hauran and Damascus, along the Jordan between Gilead and the land of Israel, to the eastern sea and as far as Tamar. This will be the east boundary. "On the south side it will run from Tamar as far as the waters of Meribah Kadesh, then along the Wadi [of Egypt] to the Great Sea. This will be the south boundary. "On the west side, the Great Sea will be the boundary to a point opposite Lebo Hamath. This will be the west boundary.*

There is good correlation between the two passages and this is shown on the map overleaf. There are some slight differences but this might be expected, particularly taking into account that the passage in Ezekiel, almost certainly, is describing the land during the Millennium. What is abundantly clear, however, is that the Lord means what he says and he has not changed his mind.

There are also some significant differences between this land and the borders of modern-day Israel. As already mentioned, the biblical borders of Canaan go further north including land that is currently modern Lebanon together with some of Syria (near to Damascus). It does not go as far south. For example, it does not include Eilat on the coast of the Red Sea. However, the land includes all of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and a portion of the Sinai up to the Wadi of Egypt.

One day, the land that is now Lebanon will be part of Israel. When will this annexation take place? I think it could happen following the inevitable confrontation with Hezbollah. It might take place during the Gog/Magog war. Maybe the two events are the same. I believe that the Bible promises that Lebanon will be part of Israel in days to come.



The Biblical Borders of Canaan ¹³⁹

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see the color figure

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Map_Land_of_Israel.jpg

Deuteronomy 1:6-8 (NIV) *The LORD our God said to us at Horeb, "You have stayed long enough at this mountain. Break camp and advance into the hill country of the Amorites; go to all the neighbouring peoples in the Arabah, in the mountains, in the western foothills, in the Negev and along the coast, to the land of the Canaanites and to Lebanon, as far as the great river, the Euphrates. See, I have given you this land. Go in and take possession of the land that the LORD swore he would give to your fathers - to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and to their descendants after them"* [emphasis added].

Joshua 1:4 (NIV) *Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates - all the Hittite country - to the Great Sea on the west* [emphasis added].

Isaiah 35:1-2 (NIV) *The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. **The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendour of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendour of our God*** [emphasis added].

Isaiah 60:13 (NIV) *The glory of Lebanon will come to you, the pine, the fir and the cypress together, to adorn the place of my sanctuary;¹⁴⁰ and I will glorify the place of my feet* [emphasis added].

Zechariah 10:10 (NIV) *I will bring them back from Egypt and gather them from Assyria. I will bring them to Gilead and Lebanon, and there will not be room enough for them*

¹⁴⁰ Ezekiel's Temple

I believe that this also explains something that we have yet to mention in the following famous prophecy.

Isaiah 9:2-3 (NIV) *The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. **You have enlarged the nation** and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder [emphasis added].*

The nation will be enlarged when the glory of Lebanon is given to it but we need to move on in our discussion of the Olivet discourse. We need to look at a verse that is mentioned in Matthew's account.

Matthew 24:28 (NKJV) *For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.*

Who are the Eagles?

The Greek word that is translated "eagles" in the NKJV and "vultures" in the NIV is the word **ἄετοί**. It is only used twice in the New Testament. The other passage is in Luke.

Luke 17:31-37 (NKJV) *In that day, he who is on the housetop, and his goods are in the house, let him not come down to take them away. And likewise the one who is in the field, let him not turn back. Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left. Two women will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left. Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left." And they answered and said to Him, "Where, Lord?" So He said to them, **"Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together"** [emphasis added].*

This passage in Luke is not formerly part of the Olivet discourse in this Gospel although it encompasses themes that are repeated in Matthew 24 and Mark 13. The fact is this; in the passage in Luke, Jesus is describing the judgment that is coming to Jerusalem. In fact, he is likening it to what took place at the judgement on Sodom and Gomorrah. Don't look back, just get out and keep going. Obviously, those that remembered Jesus words would run for their lives. We have discussed this already.

But now, in Luke chapter 17, Jesus is speaking of those that carry on oblivious of the signs. People are asleep, women are working at home; men are working the fields. Jesus is clearly saying that these people are in deadly peril. They are like a dead carcass and the eagles are on their way.^{141,142} We have already considered the fact that many within the population would be taken into captivity.¹⁴³ Most notably,

Luke 21:24 (NIV) 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 [emphasis added].

¹⁴¹ **Deuteronomy 28:25-26 (NIV)** The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You will come at them from one direction but flee from them in seven, and you will become a thing of horror to all the kingdoms on earth. **Your carcasses will be food for all the birds of the air** and the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten them away [emphasis added].

¹⁴² Compare **Revelation 11:8 (NIV)** Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.

¹⁴³ It is amazing to me that dispensationalists would use this verse to support their ideas of pre-tribulation rapture.

The suggestion in these passages in Luke is that half of the remaining population would be taken into captivity and half would be left. Where would they be taken? It is then that Jesus says in Luke's account, "Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together." So who are the eagles who are coming? It is really very simple.

An aquila, or eagle, was a prominent symbol used in ancient Rome, especially as the standard of a Roman legion. A legionary known as an aquilifer, or eagle-bearer, carried this standard. Each legion carried one eagle. In addition, Aquila is a constellation in the northern sky and represents the bird that carries Zeus/Jupiter's thunderbolts in Greco-Roman mythology. Zeus was the god of Antiochus; Jupiter was the god of Hadrian.



The Eagle of Rome ¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ <https://georgekokkos.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/legion-standard.jpg> SPQR is an acronym of a Latin phrase, Senātus Populusque Rōmānus "The Senate and People of Rome";

Here are some other eagles that are national symbols of nations.



The Eagle of Nazi Germany ¹⁴⁵



The Great Seal of the USA ¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ https://p2.liveauctioneers.com/21/48162/22251751_1_l.jpg

¹⁴⁶ <http://www.statesymbolsusa.org/symbol-official-item/national-us/state-seal/united-states-seal>

The Days of Noah

Matthew also includes this material later in his account of the Olivet discourse but he only puts the words about being “taken” and “left” into a very different historical context which I think is very significant in our understanding of his target audience.

Matthew 24:36-41 (NIV) *No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. **As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.***¹⁴⁷ *For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. **That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left** [emphases added].*

The fact is this global judgment is coming and people are asleep. The vast majority of believers are totally oblivious to all that is happening in the world. The apostle Paul puts it like this:

1 Thessalonians 5:1-3 (RSV) *But as to the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When people say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as travail comes upon a woman with child, and there will be no escape.*

¹⁴⁷ Luke also mentions the days of Noah (Luke 17:26-27) but Matthew does not mention the days of Lot.

Paul is reiterating the words of Jesus as recorded in Matthew's Gospel. Women and men are going about their daily lives oblivious to the signs of the times. Jesus' exhortation to them is:

Matthew 24:42 (RSV) Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

Jesus is saying "be alert" because sudden destruction is on its way. It is also important to realize that he is speaking to believers – not to the unbelieving world. Paul is also speaking to believers:

1 Thessalonians 5:4-7 (NIV) But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, **who are asleep**, but let us be alert and self-controlled [emphasis added].

Let us not be asleep, let us keep watch. Global judgment is coming. Matthew is looking towards the end of the age. Just as the flood of Noah was global judgment so will it be at the coming of the Son of Man. So what does it mean here? Are those to be taken, going into captivity? Possibly not.

Matthew 24:30-31 (NIV) They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

If there is a passage that describes a "rapture" event, it is this. It is the gathering of the elect at the coming of Jesus. People are not raptured into heavenly places.

I believe this “rapture” is simply angelic transportation to the city of Jerusalem when the Lord’s feet will one day stand on the Mount of Olives.¹⁴⁸ It will be **after** the resurrection of the believing dead. He is coming in the clouds and all the living believers will be caught up into the clouds.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 (NIV) *For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. **After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever** [emphasis added].*

In concluding this section, I wish to re-iterate the fact that Luke’s target audience is primarily the disciples in the first century. The judgment that Luke speaks of is focused on Jerusalem. He set the immediate biblical context as the judgment that came to Sodom and Gomorrah. Remember Lot’s wife. Luke then moves immediately to the end times when he speaks of global anguish.

Matthew, on the other hand, is far more concerned with the end of the age. He is speaking in terms of global catastrophe and, accordingly, only sets the biblical context as the days of Noah. So what about Israel in these future “days of Noah” what will be their experience?

¹⁴⁸ **Zechariah 14:3-4** Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south.

Isaiah 54:9-10 (NIV) “To me this is like **the days of Noah**, when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth. **So now I have sworn not to be angry with you, never to rebuke you again.** Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you [emphases added].

Extreme Cosmic Phenomena

Luke 21:25-26 (RSV) *There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.*

Luke take us immediately past the “times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24) to the end of the age. In other words, for Luke, the tribulation and the “times of the Gentiles” coincide. Matthew’s account, however, is much more focused on the end of the age.

Matthew 24:29 (NIV) *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.'*¹⁴⁹

This prophetic motif is described throughout scripture but there is little doubt in my mind that, in the Olivet discourse, Jesus is referring to the prophecy of Joel.

¹⁴⁹ See also **Mark 13:24-25 (NIV)** But in those days, following that distress, "the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'

Joel 2:31-32 (NIV) *The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And everyone 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, among the survivors whom the LORD calls.*

Joel 3:15-16 (NIV) *The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. The LORD will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the sky will tremble. But the LORD will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel.*

Consistent with the verses in Luke's gospel, however, this cosmic event HAS to occur after the "times of the Gentiles" are fulfilled. Why do I say this? It is actually very simple.

1. In Jerusalem there will be deliverance (Joel 2)
2. The Lord will be roaring from Jerusalem when he is both a refuge and stronghold for the people of Israel (Joel 3)

Accordingly, there has to be another "Pentecost" in the land of Israel before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.¹⁵⁰ This lends support to my firm belief that Israel must have come to messianic faith in Jesus before the actual second coming. He will have restored to them "the years that the locust has eaten" (Joel 2:25-27).

¹⁵⁰ **Acts 2:17-21 (NIV)** "'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. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood **before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.** And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'" This is another example of the New Testament usage of prophecy in the Tanach where the actual context is ignored.

The cosmic phenomena are also described as the sixth seal in the book of Revelation.

Revelation 6:12-14 (RSV) *When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale; the sky vanished like a scroll that is rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.*

Consistent with all we have considered thus far, we see again the great global shaking that will occur at this time. The response of the nations is recorded also in this passage.

Revelation 6:15-17 (RSV) *Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the generals and the rich and the strong, and every one, slave and free, hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand before it?"*

But we need also to consider this. Jesus speaks of this tribulation, immediately after the distress of those days. So what is this distress? Within the context of the book of Revelation it is the opening of the fifth seal (see also Appendix 1).

Revelation 6:9 (RSV) *When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne.*

Needless to say, the fifth seal is opened BEFORE the sixth seal. So who are the martyrs here? Is it Jew or Gentile or both? It has to be believers who have **“who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne”**. This is not tribulation coming to non-believers. If Israel only comes to faith at the return of Jesus, as many messianic teachers believe, the great tribulation as expressed in the fifth seal CANNOT refer to them.

So what is the time scale of the opening of the sixth seal? According to Jesus in the Olivet discourse, it occurs **immediately after** the distress (aka Great Tribulation). When does this tribulation begin and when does it end? Is it one day, a week, seven years, or three and one half years? Or is it even 2000 years? How long does it last? This is not a trivial question. Why do I say this?

Revelation 6:10-11 (RSV) *They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?" Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been [emphasis added].*

So what does “immediately after the distress of those days” actually mean here? As I have mention previously, the Greek word for “immediately” is εὐθέως (transliterated eutheos). It can also be translated “soon”. It does not tell us how long the tribulation period is. What we do know is that the Lord is totally sovereign in the timing for we have already noted the following.

Matthew 24:22 (RSV) *And if those days had not been shortened, no human being would be saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.*

If all these words mean anything, it is crystal clear that the last period in human history before the return of Jesus is going to be “hell on earth” for all believers. This period is of limited duration and it is a global phenomenon. Those who will be judged at this time will be the unbelieving inhabitants of the earth. It is in this context, we read what happens next.

Matthew 24:30-31 (RSV) *Then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

So the order of events is clearly:

1. Global persecution of believers (Jew and Gentile)
2. Global cosmic phenomena
3. Global revelation of Jesus
4. Global mourning
5. Global resurrection of dead believers (Jew and Gentile)
6. Global translation of living believers (Jew and Gentile)
7. Global transportation of all the elect to Jerusalem



Conclusion - When will These Things be?

Luke 21:28 (RSV) *Now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.*

How can we know where we are within the timetable that the Father has established by his own authority? Every generation (including the earliest disciples) believed that Jesus could come within their lifetimes. We are no different, or should I say, more pointedly, I am no different. However, the older I have become, the less certain I am that this is going to happen before I die. There seems to be too much prophecy to fulfill. And yet didn't Jesus say:

Revelation 22:20 (RSV) *"Surely I am coming soon."*

In fact, these are the last words that Jesus speaks to us in Scripture. Furthermore, this is the next to last verse in the entire Bible. I suppose this encourages us to live a life that is holy and prepared for whenever these momentous events will take place. This expectation of imminence has led dispensationalists to believe that Jesus will actually return twice. The first return is in secret and it is to take his bride through "rapture" into heaven itself. Many believe that this will occur before or halfway into the final great tribulation which is usually equated as "the time of Jacob's trouble".

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to deal completely with this eschatology. I hope that by now, if you have read this study thus far, you will already have concluded that I reject this theology. Yes, I do believe in a "rapture" moment but I believe that it is simply angelic transportation from 'wherever' to the city of Jerusalem so that we can take part in the actual moment when Jesus returns to establish his kingdom on earth. In other words, we will have a ring-side seat and, more than that, we will also reign with him.

At this time, he will answer the age-long prayer of the saints throughout history, namely, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”.

The “rapture” will occur at the return of Jesus, when he is coming in the clouds. The dead will be raised first, and, if we remain alive at this time, we will be changed “in the twinkling of an eye” to be caught up into those very same clouds. Our feet will also stand with his on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem. But it does not answer the question, “when will these things be”?

Mark 13:32-37 (NIV) *No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back - whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"*

The Father has determined that the timing of the return of his Son will remain an absolute secret. By his own authority, he has already established the time but no-one else can know. It is obviously important for him to keep the secret from the angels. He knows that they would “let the cat out of the bag”. But just think for a moment, what if we actually knew the time of his return. Just think how differently we would live our lives. We would be totally carefree in our behavior knowing perfectly well we would still have the opportunity to repent at the last minute.

The fact is, as believers in Jesus, we understand this truth:

1 John 1:9 (NIV) *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

We know that it is all grace. We know that we can never be good enough. We know that Jesus has done it all. If we knew the timetable of events, we would never attempt to live a holy life until the very last minute. Of course, we would be very careful to avoid accidents. We would try to keep healthy by eating all the right foods. But we would never think to “*be holy even as the heavenly father is holy*”. But this is what Peter says:

2 Peter 3:11-12 (RSV) *Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire!*

Keeping everything secret makes total sense. It is also very challenging. We have work to do, work that can actually hasten the day of his coming. Didn't Jesus say this in the Olivet discourse?

Matthew 24:14 (NIV) *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.*

To do this, we have to endure to the end. And it is going to be tough. The last days are going to be very difficult for believers. Every creature comfort will be taken away in the shaking that is coming to the world for the Lord is going to devastate the earth.

Isaiah 24:1-6 (NIV) See, the LORD is going to lay waste the earth and devastate it; he will ruin its face and scatter its inhabitants - it will be the same for priest as for people, for master as for servant, for mistress as for maid, for seller as for buyer, for borrower as for lender, for debtor as for creditor. The earth will be completely laid waste and totally plundered. The LORD has spoken this word. The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the exalted of the earth languish. The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt. Therefore earth's inhabitants are burned up, and very few are left.

Actually, there will be a third left.¹⁵¹ The book of Revelation describes much of this devastation and it is mainly described in thirds.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ **Zechariah 13:8-9 (NIV)** In the whole earth," declares the LORD, "two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is our God.'"

¹⁵² **Revelation 8:7-12 (NIV)** The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down upon the earth. A **third** of the earth was burned up, a **third** of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A **third** of the sea turned into blood, a **third** of the living creatures in the sea died, and a **third** of the ships were destroyed. The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a **third** of the rivers and on the springs of water - the name of the star is Wormwood. A **third** of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter. The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a **third** of the sun was struck, a **third** of the moon, and a **third** of the stars, so that a **third** of them turned dark. A **third** of the day was without light, and also a **third** of the night.

A further third of mankind perishes in an event described in Revelation chapter 9.

Revelation 9:18 (NIV) *A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulphur that came out of their mouths.*

This terrible devastation of the earth will occur, in my opinion, after the salvation of Israel. It is during a period that will last for at least seven years. It may correspond to that final seven year period so often discussed in eschatological circles. It will be a time of great tribulation but it will be focused over the whole earth. Jesus said this in Luke's account of the Olivet discourse.

Luke 21:34-36 (NIV) *Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap; **for it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth.** Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man [emphasis added].*

It is for this time that we need to be prepared. It is for this time that we must be alert. We can endure to the end. Jesus would not have said it if it were not true.

Psalm 46:1-3 (RSV) *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult.*

We will be able to escape all that is about to happen because God is our refuge and strength.

Nations will be in anguish at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Our unbelieving friends and family will have hearts that are failing them for fear, they will be apprehensive of what is coming to the world. Even the heavenly bodies will be shaken. Don't you think this is going to be the most wonderful opportunity to share the Gospel? Don't you think that this is why we should be patient and endure to the end? This prophecy awaits its final fulfillment and it will be the most exciting time in history.

Joel 2:28-32 (NIV) *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. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And everyone 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, among the survivors.*

The Last Generation has to Happen Sometime

Luke 21:32 (RSV) *Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all has taken place.*

Every generation believes that it will be the last. The early disciples were no different. They could not believe that Jesus would go away without restoring the kingdom to Israel.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ **Acts 1:6 (NIV)** So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

No, they were going to be witnesses, firstly in Jerusalem, then in Judea and Samaria and ultimately to the ends of the earth. God so loves the world that he gave his only Son. The Gospel has to go to every nation, kindred and tongue before the end comes. When I am driving home after a long day away, I tend to get faster and faster. In fact, I have to be careful that I don't go too fast and get stopped for speeding.

So it is at the end of the age, because the Spirit will be poured out on all flesh, there will be an unparalleled opportunity for the Gospel, wherever we live. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord (who is Jesus) WILL be saved. But can't you see where it is all focused? The focus is Jerusalem. Jerusalem must be back on center stage at this time. This was not going to be true for the early disciples; they were the ones who had to flee Jerusalem when they saw the signs. For Jerusalem, in the first and second centuries CE, this was going to be the time of punishment to fulfill everything that has been written in the Tanach. Paul puts it like this in his letter to the Romans.

Romans 11:12 (RSV) *Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!*

The destruction of the Temple and the fall of Jerusalem was the time of punishment. Jerusalem was going to be trampled down by the Gentiles but not forever. Jesus foretells that one day; Jerusalem would be back on center stage. This is totally consistent with these verses in the Psalms.

Psalms 102:3-7 (RSV) *My days pass away like smoke, and my bones burn like a furnace. My heart is smitten like grass, and withered; I forget to eat my bread. Because of my loud groaning my bones cleave to my flesh. I am like a vulture of the wilderness, like an owl of the waste places; I lie awake, I am like a lonely bird on the housetop ...*

Psalm 102:8-11 (RSV) *All the day my enemies taunt me, those who deride me use my name for a curse. For I eat ashes like bread, and mingle tears with my drink, because of thy indignation and anger; for thou hast taken me up and thrown me away. My days are like an evening shadow; I wither away like grass.*

This has been the history of Jerusalem and the Jewish people throughout two millennia. The culmination of this tribulation was the Holocaust in which at least 6 million Jewish people were murdered by the Nazis. But out of the ashes of the Holocaust, the nation of Israel has been reborn. And in 1967, the IDF recovered the city of Jerusalem. The psalmist goes on.

Psalm 102:12-14 (RSV) *But thou, O LORD, art enthroned for ever; thy name endures to all generations. Thou wilt arise and have pity on Zion; it is the time to favor her; the appointed time has come. For thy servants hold her stones dear, and have pity on her dust.*

One of the features of modern Israel is the commitment to archeological excavation. It is happening everywhere in the land and most particularly in the city of Jerusalem. The history of that city is the history of the Jewish people. This is in stark contrast to the efforts of ISIS to destroy archeological remains. The world is aghast that they would do this. The very opposite is true in modern Israel. The stones are very precious. The dust moves them to pity.

It is a **sign** but the psalmist goes on

Psalm 102:15-17 (NIV) *The nations will fear the name of the LORD, all the kings of the earth will revere your glory. For the LORD will rebuild Zion and appear in his glory. He will respond to the prayer of the destitute; he will not despise their plea.*

The Gospel had to go to the ends of the earth. It had to be possible that all nations would be able to fear the name of the Lord. Jerusalem would be trodden down by the Gentiles but only UNTIL. We are living in the days when the Lord is rebuilding Zion. Take note of the word “rebuilding”. He is rebuilding what was devastated over millennia. We are living in these days.

It is a **sign** but the psalmist goes on

Psalm 102:18-22 (NIV) *Let this be written for a future generation, that a people not yet created may praise the LORD: "The LORD looked down from his sanctuary on high, from heaven he viewed the earth, to hear the groans of the prisoners and release those condemned to death." So the name of the LORD will be declared in Zion and his praise in Jerusalem when the peoples and the kingdoms assemble to worship the LORD.*

Oh, this is such a poor translation in the NIV. Why do they (and most English translations) do these things? A future generation, what does this mean? The words in Hebrew are these:

לְדוֹר אַחֲרוֹן

This may be transliterated L'Dor Acharon. This simply means the LAST generation. We are living in the days when the Lord has heard the groans of the prisoners and released them from their bondage. The final solution of the Nazis was devised to condemn every Jewish person on the planet to death. 6 million died but out of the ashes, a nation was born in a day.

It is the sign.

And Jesus said

Luke 21:28 (RSV) *Now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.*

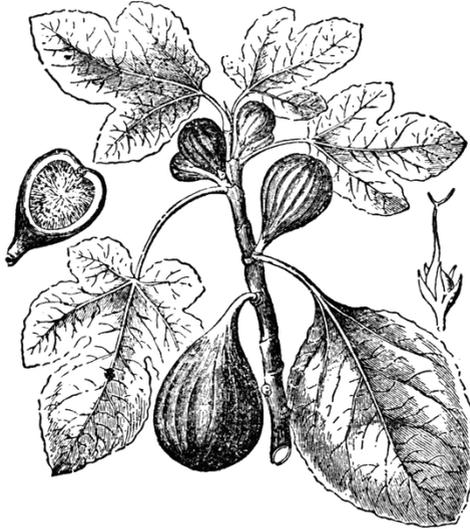
We are the generation that began in 1948. I believe that representatives born at this time will still be alive when Jesus returns. I am not saying it will be today or tomorrow. Will I be living when Jesus returns? My birthday was in October 1947. I hope I stay alive to see these things. But then again whether we live or die, we will either be raised from the grave, or we will be changed in the “twinkling of an eye”. If our faith is in Jesus and in all that he has done for us, we are not going to miss it. We are going to have a ring-side seat.

The last generation is going to see it all. Every seal will be opened. The earth will be totally shaken. But I also believe that it will be during this time that Israel begins to flourish and blossom. Israel is the biggest sign of all. Israel is the fig tree.

Luke 21:29-31 (RSV) *And he told them a parable: Look at the fig tree, and all the trees; as soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.*

As we will see in the epilogue, all three synoptic writers speak of the fig tree at the end of the Olivet discourse. The story of the fig tree describes the history of Israel, past, present and future.

Epilogue - The Fig Tree



The Branch of the Fig Tree ¹⁵⁴

Matthew 24:32-35 (RSV) *From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.*

Jesus is giving the Olivet discourse in the final week that will lead to the crucifixion and resurrection. Just days earlier, he had ridden of the colt of a donkey into Jerusalem to the acclamation of crowds waving palm branches. Arriving at the Temple, he drove out the money changers and healed many people.

¹⁵⁴ <http://www.clipartkid.com/fig-clipart-etc-sNx7pb-clipart/>

Matthew 21:15 (RSV) *But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant.*

The disciples saw all of these things including the indignation of the religious leaders. They left with Jesus to spend the night in Bethany. The following morning we read these words.

Matthew 21:18-19 (RSV) *In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he was hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the wayside he went to it, and found nothing on it but leaves only. And he said to it, "May no fruit ever come from you again!" And the fig tree withered at once.*

The Passover takes place in early spring. The full crop of ripe figs is harvested much later in the year after the long hot summer. So why did Jesus expect to find edible fruit on a fig tree at Passover? The fig tree is a very unusual tree. It can have two crops in the year.¹⁵⁵ Jesus was looking for the early breba crop of figs that grows on the previous season's wood. But there were only leaves and presumably no evidence that any figs would grow later the same year. Jesus curses the fig tree. It withered immediately. It is not petulance on behalf of Jesus, it was a prophetic action. The indignation of the religious leadership was still ringing in his ears.

¹⁵⁵ A breba is a common fig that **develops in the spring** on the previous year's shoot growth. In contrast, the main fig crop develops on the current year's shoot growth and ripens in late summer or fall. Breba figs of certain varieties don't always develop the rich flavor that the main crop has. Growers of those varieties frequently discard the brebas before they ripen to encourage growth of the main crop because the main crop is generally superior in both quantity and quality to the breba crop [taken from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Breba>].



The Early Fruit ¹⁵⁶

The fig tree is a picture of the nation of Israel and Jesus knew it.

Hosea 9:10 (NIV) *When I found Israel, it was like finding grapes in the desert; when I saw your fathers, it was like seeing the early fruit on the fig tree* [emphasis added].

The religious leadership should have been walking in the footsteps of the fathers of Israel. But they were not. I also believe that Jesus is mindful of the last verse written by the prophets in the Tanach.

Malachi 4:6 (NIV) *He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse* [emphasis added].

¹⁵⁶ Breba fig ripening on last season's wood with main crop figs just forming on new growth [taken from <http://blog.countrytradingco.com/2014/01/10/ripe-figs-in-january-what-to-do-with-them/>].

John the Baptist was the one who was going to fulfill the calling of Elijah prior to the three years of Jesus' ministry.¹⁵⁷ But we read these words when John was also confronted with the indignation of the religious leadership.

Matthew 3:7-10 (RSV) *When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit that befits repentance, and do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*

A fruit tree that does not produce good fruit is good for nothing but firewood. This could be any tree and Luke in his account of the Olivet discourse speaks of the fig tree and all the trees. In other words, any nation that does not produce good fruit will be good for nothing and I am reminded of these words in Isaiah.

Isaiah 60:12 (NIV) *For the nation or kingdom that will not serve you will perish; it will be utterly ruined.*

Whether we like it not, the "you" in this verse is the nation of Israel.¹⁵⁸ I believe this verse accurately describes the history of Great Britain, certainly since 1945. No nation on earth tried harder to prevent the re-establishment of the nation of Israel. The USA is walking a similar path.

¹⁵⁷ **Luke 1:17 (NIV)** And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous - to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

¹⁵⁸ See the context of this prophecy. For example, **Isaiah 60:10 (NIV)** Foreigners will rebuild your walls, and their kings will serve you. Though in anger I struck you, in favor I will show you compassion.

Consistent with everything we are currently considering; Luke does more than the other synoptic writers. He gives us another parable regarding the fig tree.

Luke 13:6-9 (RSV) *He told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, 'Lo, these three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down; why should it use up the ground?' And he answered him, 'Let it alone, sir, this year also, till I dig about it and put on manure. And if it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"*

Jesus gave this parable to his disciples well before the triumphal entry. The very significant context is about those that perished in war or natural disaster.¹⁵⁸ Jesus had been with them for three years but there was still no fruit on the fig tree. The man pleaded to have more time – another year. If it still bore no fruit, then it should be cut down.

The destruction of the Temple in 70 CE and the destruction of the city in the days of Hadrian was effectively the cutting down of the fig tree. Jerusalem was to be made desolate. The religious system that required the Temple was no more.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ **Luke 13:1-5 (NIV)** Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them-do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

¹⁵⁹ It is a little obscure but I wonder if this verse might be relevant here, namely, **Matthew 3:12 (NIV)** "His winnowing fork is in his hand, **and he will clear his threshing floor**". After all, the Temple was built on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite (see 1 Chronicles 21).

Not one stone was to be left on another and a pagan abomination of desolation would be standing in the Holy Place for centuries.

And during this time, the Gospel was being taken to the ends of the earth. And Jesus said

Luke 21:24 (NIV) *Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.*

Jesus could see far into the future. There was going to be an “until”. There was still hope. Jeremiah puts it like this.

Jeremiah 31:17 (NIV) *“So there is hope for your future,” declares the LORD. “Your children will return to their own land.*

Job puts it like this.

Job 14:7-9 (RSV) *For there is hope for a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its shoots will not cease. Though its root grow old in the earth, and its stump die in the ground, yet at the scent of water it will bud and put forth branches like a young plant.*

Isaiah puts it like this.

Isaiah 11:1 (RSV) *There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.*

What the nation could not do, Jesus, who is the Branch, has done. But what we have to do is to keep our eyes on the fig tree. Mark puts it like this in his account of the Olivet discourse.

Mark 13:28-31 (RSV) *From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away before all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.*

The fig tree is THE sign above all signs. What was dead for centuries is coming alive.

Romans 11:15 (KJV) *For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?*

Without doubt, the twigs have become tender and the leaves are beginning to come out. There can still be no early fruit, because there was no last season's growth. But we have been through the long hard summer of 2000 years. Will the tree yet produce a harvest of ripe figs? Yes, according to the book of Revelation.

Revelation 6:13 (NKJV) *And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind.*

By the time the sixth seal is opened and those extreme cosmic events take place, the nation of Israel which is the fig tree will have produced ripe fruit. Israel will yet fulfil its calling and destiny of being a light to the Gentiles. It will stand up in the last days as the model nation in terms of morality and service. I know that it is not there yet neither can it be so before the Spirit of grace and supplication is poured on them (Zechariah 12:10).



Ripe Figs on the Tree ¹⁶⁰

Israel needs to recognize the one who was pieced and the Fountain must be opened to cleanse them from sin and impurity (Zechariah 13:1). But it is going to happen and I cannot wait for this day to dawn.

When will these things be? We must watch and pray.



¹⁶⁰ <http://www.hgtvgardens.com/trees/twig-newton-how-to-grow-a-fig-tree>

Appendix 1: The Vision of the Temple in the book of Revelation Chapter 11

The book of Revelation is written in a very enigmatic way. It has relevance for believers in every age. The structure of the book is interesting and I have often likened it to waves coming into the coast. The main reason for this is because at regular intervals throughout the book, the climax of the ages is repeatedly given. This enables us to divide the book into sections that probably overlap. The climax of the ages, of course, is when the kingdoms of the world become the kingdoms of Jesus, for example:.

The Prologue

Revelation 1:7 (NKJV) *Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.*

The conclusion to the prologue is the second coming of Jesus. Every eye will see him. The entire earth will be in mourning. I believe that this lamentation will have already occurred within the nation of Israel as recorded in Zechariah chapter 12.¹⁶¹ The next section in the book of Revelation is:

The Seven Letters

Revelation 3:21-22 (NIV) *To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. He, who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

¹⁶¹ **Zechariah 12:10** And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.

Historicists see the entire course of church history in the progression from the early church that lost its first love¹⁶² to the “final” church that is more dead than alive.¹⁶³

The Seven Seals

Revelation 7:16-8:1 (NIV) *Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.*

If the Apostle John wrote the book of Revelation, then the seven seals is his perspective on the Olivet discourse.

1st Seal	White Horse	Deception
2nd Seal	Red Horse	Wars and Rumors of Wars
3rd Seal	Black Horse	Famines and Earthquakes
4th Seal	Pale Horse	Disease and Death
5th Seal	Persecution of Believers	
6th Seal	Cosmic Phenomena and Global Judgment	
7th Seal	The Lamb is on the Throne	

Before the opening of the seventh seal, there is a vision describing the entire believing community which is both Jew¹⁶⁴ and Gentile.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² **Revelation 2:4 (NIV)** Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.

¹⁶³ **Revelation 3:17 (NIV)** You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked'.

¹⁶⁴ **Revelation 7:4 (NIV)** Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.

¹⁶⁵ **Revelation 7:9 (NIV)** After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language.

The latter group is wearing white robes and has come out of great tribulation.¹⁶⁶ This fact alone probably means that the vision fits during the opening of the fifth seal. It also provides evidence that the sealing of 144,000 Jewish people which I take to be representative of the entire nation of Israel takes place BEFORE the end of the age.¹⁶⁷

It is interesting to note that we see these Israeli evangelists again at the beginning of chapter 14.¹⁶⁸ They are the ones who will be taking the “Gospel of the Kingdom” to every nation, kindred and tongue.

Revelation 14:6-7 (NIV) Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth - to every nation, tribe, language and people.

In other words, we CANNOT read the book of Revelation as a chronological sequence.

The Seven Trumpets

Revelation 10:7 (NIV) 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.

¹⁶⁶ **Revelation 7:14 (NIV)** And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

¹⁶⁷ **Jeremiah 31:34 (NIV)** No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because **they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,**" declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more" [emphasis added].

¹⁶⁸ **Revelation 14:1 (NIV)** Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.

Revelation 11:15 (NIV) *The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."*

Each of the trumpet judgments must take place during the period delineated by the seven seals which is the course of this age. During the sounding of the trumpets, three woes are also given. The first two seem to refer to the final battle.¹⁶⁹ This includes the fact that two hundred million troops are marching from the east presumably to Jerusalem.¹⁷⁰ At the end of chapter 10, we get another break in this sequence of judgments.

Revelation 10:9-11 (NIV) *So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, "Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey." I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. Then I was told, "**You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings**" [emphasis added].*

So at the beginning of chapter 11, we get the first of several visions that are very difficult to place in time.

¹⁶⁹ See Zechariah chapter 14. I also wish to refer the reader to the booklet "Is it Safe?" which is available on request. Please contact the author on: gjrb2@aol.com

¹⁷⁰ **Revelation 9:15-16 (NIV)** And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind. The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. I heard their number.

The Seven Visions

1. The City of Jerusalem and the Two Witnesses (11:1-13)
2. The Woman and her Child (12:1-5)
3. The Angelic Battle in Heaven (12:7-9)
4. The Seven-headed Beast and Persecution of the Saints (13:1-18)
5. The Lamb and His Followers on Mount Zion (14:1-7)
6. A Vision of Heaven (15:1-8)
7. The Destruction of Babylon (Chapter 16 onwards)

It is very difficult to put these in any sort of chronological order. For example, the battle in Heaven definitely took place BEFORE the creation of the world.^{171,172} The woman might be Mary but equally she might represent the nation of Israel as she has a crown of 12 stars which presumably represent the 12 tribes.

Without doubt, however, the child is Jesus.

Revelation 12:5 (RSV) *She brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron,¹⁷³ but her child was caught up to God and to his throne.*

It is interesting to note that Jesus was chosen before the creation of the world.¹⁷⁴ It is also interesting to note that the woman is given the “wings of an eagle”.¹⁷⁵ This might be another allusion to the Roman armies. If it is, it provides a different perspective.

¹⁷¹ **Isaiah 14:12 (NIV)** How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations!

¹⁷² **Luke 10:18 (NIV)** He [Jesus] replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.

¹⁷³ **Psalms 2:9 (NIV)** You will rule them with an iron scepter.

¹⁷⁴ **1 Peter 1:20 (NIV)** He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

So how do we understand the first vision? When does it take place? If the above series were chronological, logically, it would have taken place before the creation of the world. This seems highly unlikely. Are there any clues to help us locate this vision in time?

Revelation 11:1-2 (RSV) *I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told: "Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will **trample** over the holy city for forty-two months [emphasis added].*

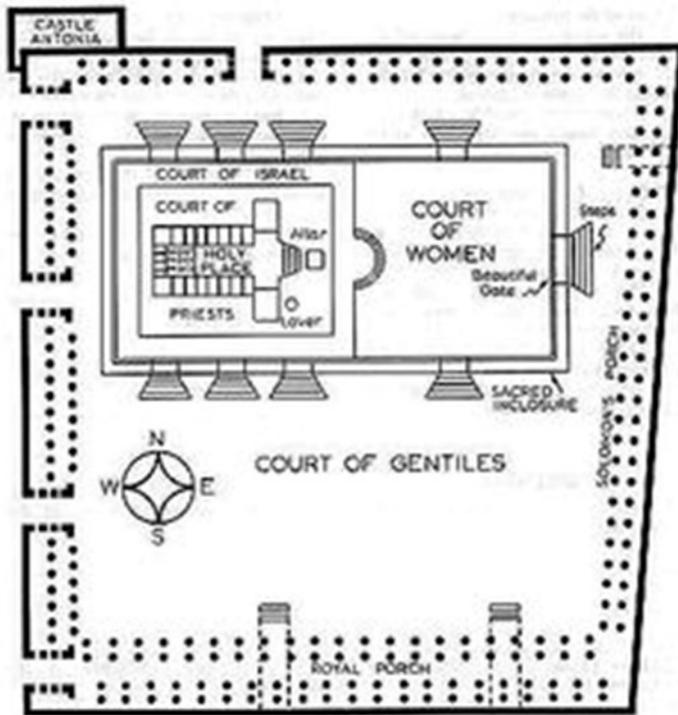
From these two verses, it is clear that there is a Temple in the city. Moreover, it is described as the Temple of God. Consequently, for the reasons I have argued previously, it cannot refer to either a putative "third" Temple or Ezekiel's Millennial Temple. The only Temple that it can refer to is the Temple that existed in Jerusalem before its destruction in 70 CE. In particular, there is a court of the Gentiles. Consequently, we have to conclude that this is referring to Herod's Temple. Furthermore, the streets of Jerusalem are being trampled by Gentiles for 42 months. This historic setting is confirmed by the words of Jesus in the Olivet discourse.

Luke 21:24 (NIV) *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 [emphasis added].*

¹⁷⁵ **Revelation 12:14-15** The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach.

¹⁷⁶ There will be no court given over to the Gentiles in the Ezekiel Temple.

¹⁷⁷ http://www.bible-history.com/jewishtemple/JEWISH_TEMPLEThe_Court_of_the_Gentiles.htm 178



Herod's Temple ¹⁷⁸

If the vision in Revelation chapter 11 is still future, there is no way that we could ever know when the times of the Gentiles will be fulfilled. So what do we make of the 42 months? Presumably this is describing a period prior to or during the first Jewish-Roman war. It might also possibly refer to the final Roman-Jewish war that took place between 132 and 135 CE. I believe the earlier conflict is the more likely for the simple reason there is still a Temple in the holy city. This was not true in the second century. ¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/240027855117201483/>

¹⁷⁹ It is possible that the ruins of Herod's Temple remained on the Temple Mount until the time of Hadrian and the final Jewish revolt at the time of Bar Kokhba.

The Two Witnesses

Revelation 11:3-6 (RSV) *And I will grant my two witnesses power to prophesy for one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands which stand before the Lord of the earth. And if any one would harm them, fire pours out from their mouth and consumes their foes; if any one would harm them, thus he is doomed to be killed. They have power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.*

Towards the end of the 42 months of Gentile trampling, the two witnesses are killed.

Revelation 11:7-12 (RSV) *And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that ascends from the bottomless pit will make war upon them and conquer them and kill them, and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which is allegorically called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified. For three days and a half men from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth. But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up hither!" And in the sight of their foes they went up to heaven in a cloud.*

So who are the two witnesses? Firstly, they are described as two olive trees and two lampstands. This is referring to the prophecy in Zechariah chapter 4.

Zechariah 4:1-3 (RSV) *And the angel who talked with me came again, and waked me, like a man that is wakened out of his sleep. And he said to me, "What do you see?" I said, "I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps which are on the top of it. And there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left."*

Zechariah 4:11-14 (RSV) *Then I said to him, "What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?" And a second time I said to him, "What are these two branches of the olive trees, which are beside the two golden pipes from which the oil is poured out?" He said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" I said, "No, my lord." Then he said, "These are the two anointed who stand by the Lord of the whole earth."*

One of the possible interpretations of this is to see the two witnesses as Jew (natural olive branch) and Gentile (wild olive branch).¹⁸⁰ Jew and Gentile are also to be witnesses. For example, Jesus said this in the Olivet discourse.

Luke 21:12-13 (NIV) *You will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them.*

But the question for us now is this: were there two individuals in the days leading up to the destruction of the Temple who could be identified as the two witnesses? Many commentators interpret them as Enoch and Elijah.¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ **Romans 11:17,24 (NIV)** *If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others ... After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!*

One of the reasons is that they were both caught up to heaven.¹⁸² Enoch is also referred to in the letter of Jude.

Jude 14-15 (RSV) *It was of these also that Enoch in the seventh generation from Adam prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord came with his holy myriads, to execute judgment on all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness which they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him."*

Jude is quoting from the apocryphal book of Enoch.¹⁸³

*And behold! He cometh with ten thousands of His Saints to execute judgment upon all, and to destroy all the ungodly: and to convict all flesh of all the works of their ungodliness which they have ungodly committed, and of all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.*¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ Early Christians, such as Tertullian, Irenaeus, and Hippolytus of Rome concluded that the two witnesses would be Enoch and Elijah, prophets who did not die because God "took" them. Others have proposed Moses as one of the witnesses, for his ability to turn water into blood and the power to plague the earth [taken from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two_witnesses].

¹⁸² **Genesis 5:23-24 (NIV)** Altogether, Enoch lived 365 years. Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away. **2 Kings 2:11 (NIV)** As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.

¹⁸³ The Book of Enoch is an ancient Jewish religious work, ascribed by tradition to Enoch, the great-grandfather of Noah, although modern scholars estimate the older sections (mainly in the Book of the Watchers) to date from about 300 BC, and the latest part (Book of Parables) probably to the first century BC. It is now regarded as scripture by only the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Eritrean Orthodox Church [taken from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Enoch]

¹⁸⁴ **Enoch 1:9** translated from Ethiopic found also in Qumran scroll 4QEnoch^c

So was it actually Enoch who was one of the two witnesses? This is unlikely. However, it could well have been an individual who was prophesying “in the spirit and power” of Enoch. Like Enoch, this individual was warning about the coming judgment. Other commentators suggest that it was Moses rather than Enoch who is one of the two witnesses. Moses is also mentioned in the letter of Jude.

Jude 9 (RSV) *But when the archangel Michael,¹⁸⁵ contending with the devil, disputed about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a reviling judgment upon him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you."*

It is thought that Jude is quoting from another apocryphal book. Origen (185–254 CE), an early Christian scholar and theologian, mentions the book “*The Assumption of Moses*” as being extant in his time. This contains the account of the contest between Michael and the devil about the body of Moses.¹⁸⁶ This book is now lost. One of the powers possessed by the two witnesses was the ability, like Moses, to turn waters into blood and to strike the earth with plagues. On the other hand, Elijah, through his prayers, had the ability to “shut up the sky so that it will not rain”. Is there anywhere else in Scripture, when Moses and Elijah are together? Yes, of course and we know the story well.

Matthew 17:1-3 (RSV) *And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain apart. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.*

¹⁸⁵ The only other mention of the archangel Michael in the New Testament is Revelation 12:7

¹⁸⁶ <http://www.gotquestions.org/Michael-Satan-Moses.html>

When you think about, this was a life-changing moment in the life of the three disciples that Jesus took with him up the mountain. Mark mentions that they were all alone when this took place. It was both stunning and unexpected. Peter mentions this event in his letter.

2 Peter 1:17-18 (RSV) *For when he received honor and glory from God the Father and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we heard this voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.*

The question that I have pondered many times is this: how did they know it was Moses and Elijah? I have no doubt that Jesus would have explained it to them but you get the impression that they somehow knew who it was for the Gospel account continues:

Matthew 17:4 (RSV) *Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is well that we are here; if you wish, I will make three booths here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah."*

Of course, Peter is rebuked but that still doesn't answer the question about how he knew who was there. Maybe Peter heard them speaking and this "gave the game away". Maybe they expected to see Moses and Elijah to appear at some point. Two prophetic witnesses were expected. Moses had said:

Deuteronomy 18:15 (NIV) *The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. **You must listen to him** [emphasis added].*

This is interesting. Perhaps Peter was confused. Perhaps that is why he wanted to build three shelters, one for Jesus, one of Elijah and one for Moses. Perhaps this is why there was a voice from heaven.

Matthew 17:5 (RSV) *He was still speaking, when lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; **listen to him**" [emphasis added]!*

Maybe the rebuke is saying, "Peter, you are confused, the prophet that would be like Moses is not Moses. He is my Son and he is the one you must listen too". However, maybe there was this first century expectation that Moses would be involved. Certainly Elijah was expected to appear.

Malachi 4:5 (RSV) *I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes.*

The disciples are very perplexed as they walk down the mountain.

Matthew 17:9-13 (RSV) *And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of man is raised from the dead." And the disciples asked him, "Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?" He replied, "Elijah does come, and he is to restore all things; but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not know him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of man will suffer at their hands." Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.*

I also believe that John alludes to the transfiguration in his Gospel.

John 1:14 (NIV) *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

Consequently, if John the apostle was the same John who wrote (or compiled) the book of Revelation (or even if he wasn't), this would have been in the author's mind when he writes chapter 11 in the book of Revelation. They were the two witnesses on the Mount of Transfiguration after all.

Moses and Elijah also personify the law and the prophets. Jesus had previously stated:

Matthew 11:11-15 (RSV) *Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John; and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*

And the law is a witness:

Deuteronomy 31:26 (RSV) *Take this book of the law, and put it by the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there for a witness against you.*

And as a witness, both the law and the prophets testify:

Romans 3:21 (RSV) *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it*

The Coming Judgment

Let us remind ourselves of the description of the judgment coming to Jerusalem as recorded in Luke 17.

Luke 17:28-37 (NKJV) Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. "In that day, he who is on the housetop, and his goods are in the house, let him not come down to take them away. And likewise the one who is in the field, let him not turn back. Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left. Two women will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left. Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left." And they answered and said to Him, "Where, Lord?" So He said to them, "Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together."

In particular, we have previously noted that Luke's primary target audience is the disciples in the first century. They are the ones who have to flee when Jerusalem is surrounded by armies. The streets of Jerusalem were to be trampled by the Gentiles.

We have also considered the above verses and have noted the biblical context regarding Sodom that only Luke uses. Thus, it is significant that we read these words in Revelation chapter 11.

Revelation 11:7-8 (NIV) Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them. Their bodies will lie in the street of **the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt**, where also their Lord was crucified [emphasis added].

Earthquake

Following this incident described in Revelation chapter 11, there was a severe earthquake in Jerusalem.

Revelation 11:13 (RSV) *And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.*

Unfortunately, this is not an unusual occurrence. For example, there was an earthquake in the days of Uzziah (759 BC).¹⁸⁷

Amos 1:1 (RSV) *The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah and in the days of Jero-boam the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.*

There was an earthquake which took place at the Crucifixion.¹⁸⁸

Matthew 27:54 (NIV) *When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"*

¹⁸⁷ N. Ambraseys *Historical earthquakes in Jerusalem* Journal of Seismology (2005) 9:329–340

¹⁸⁸ Geologists Jefferson B. Williams, Markus J. Schwab and A. Brauer examined disturbances in sediment depositions to identify two earthquakes: one large earthquake in 31 B.C.E., and another, smaller quake between 26 and 36 CE [taken from: <http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/crucifixion/jesus%E2%80%99-crucifixion-reflected-in-soil-deposition/>].

There was an earthquake which took place at the Resurrection.

Matthew 28:2-3 (NIV) *There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.*

There will be an earthquake during the Gog and Magog conflict.¹⁸⁹ There will be an earthquake at the return of Jesus.¹⁹⁰ As I have mentioned previously, there was an earthquake in the fourth century when the Jewish people were encouraged to build a third Temple by the emperor Julian the Apostate.¹⁹¹ There were two earthquakes in the eighth century which damaged the al-Aqsa mosque. In 1033 CE, the mosque was severely damaged by a violent earthquake. In other words, earthquakes in Jerusalem have occurred at frequent intervals (see figure opposite).

Conclusion

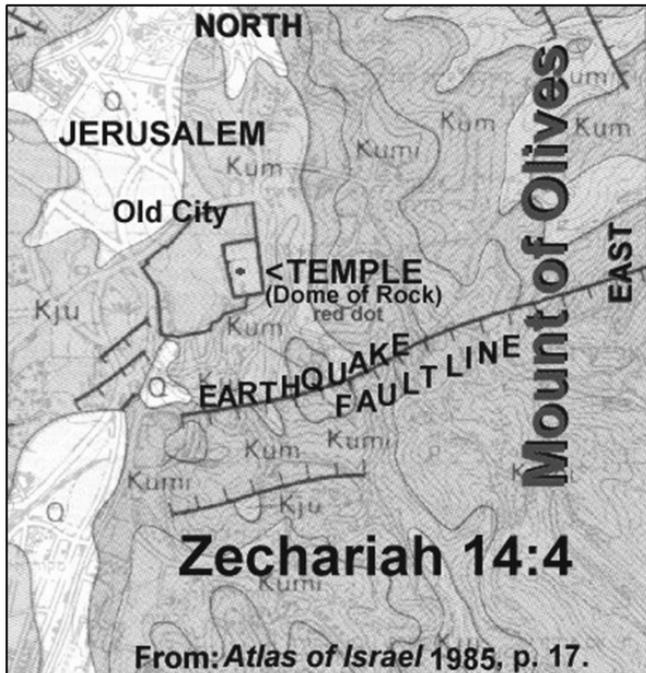
The description of Jerusalem and its Temple in the vision leads me to conclude that the events described in Revelation chapter 11 take place in the months leading up to the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. This is because the Temple, described as God's Temple,¹⁹² has a court given to the Gentiles. This was undoubtedly true of Herod's Temple.

¹⁸⁹ **Ezekiel 38:19 (NIV)** In my zeal and fiery wrath I declare that at that time there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel.

¹⁹⁰ **Zechariah 14:3-5 (NIV)** Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah.

¹⁹¹ https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0011_0_10482.html

In addition, the streets of Jerusalem were being trampled by Gentiles and, on the basis of the words in Luke's gospel; this was the situation in the first century. The biblical context given by Jesus about this specific time of judgment by the Roman armies as recorded in the Gospel of Luke alludes to the destruction of Sodom and this is also alluded to in Revelation chapter 11.



The Earthquake Fault Line ¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² God's Temple is now the body of believers. It is no longer a building (1 Corinthians 3:16-17).

¹⁹³ Luke 21:24 (NIV) Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

¹⁹⁴ <http://philologos.org/bpr/files/e006.htm>

Appendix 2: Post-Holocaust Eschatology and Jeremiah's Timeline

The basic premise of my approach to the future is to embrace the concept that the Holocaust (Shoah) specifically during the years 1938 to 1945 was the "time of Jacob's trouble". This is in sharp contrast to widely-held Messianic and Christian Zionist eschatologies that consider the "time of Jacob's trouble" as a future event.

Furthermore, these dispensational expectations anticipate a coming holocaust that could be twice as horrific as the Shoah. For example, Avner Boskey (a Messianic leader in Israel) has recently updated a book that he originally wrote in 1999 entitled "Israel the Key to World Revival". In it he describes a future war.

*This war will certainly be a high water mark for world-wide anti-Semitism. Two-thirds of all Jewish people in the land of Israel (or quite possibly in the whole world – the Hebrew word *eret* allows either interpretation) will be murdered. In other words, **this future holocaust will be twice as horrific as the Nazi slaughter** [emphasis added].¹⁹⁵*

The reasoning behind this expectation is the verifiable historic fact that *only* one-third of world Jewry perished in the Shoah and, according to Zechariah's prophecy

Zechariah 13:8 (NIV) In the whole land (or earth), " declares the LORD, "two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it.

¹⁹⁵ Avner Boskey (2014) *Israel the Key to World Revival* page 248 The book is available for download from: <http://davidstent.com/product/israel-the-key-to-world-revival/>

That this could **still** be regarded as a future event, in its entirety for Jewish people, betrays the fact that many choose to ignore any historic fulfillment of prophecy as having any relevance. For many dispensationalists, the “time of Jacob’s trouble” is also equated to “the great tribulation”. According to much futurist eschatology, this will only occur after the “rapture of the church”.

In other words, this time of wrath is primarily focused on the Jewish people to force them into submission. One might even argue that this eschatology is somewhat anti-Semitic. Furthermore, it is totally contrary to God’s intention to create one new man where the historic schism between Jew and Gentile is brought to an end.¹⁹⁶

It is worth noting that the exact term “the great tribulation” is only found in one place in scripture.

Revelation 7:13-14 (NIV) *Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes - who are they, and where did they come from?” I answered, “Sir, you know.” And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb [emphasis added].*¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ **Ephesians 2:14-17** For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

¹⁹⁷ It is also worth noting, however, that there is no “the” in the original Greek. This is reflected in the KJV translation, namely, **Revelation 7:14 (KJV)** And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of **of great tribulation**, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb [emphasis added].

We need to identify who these people dressed in white actually are. It is not difficult.

Revelation 7:9-10 (KJV) *After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.*

Whenever “*the great tribulation*” takes place, it is obviously a global phenomenon. It is also of interest to note that this particular passage begins with the words “After this”. This is rather straightforward whether or not “this” is actually describing a sequence of events or perhaps a co-existence.

Revelation 7:2-4 (KJV) *And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads. And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel.*

In my opinion, “*the great tribulation*” **cannot** occur until the seal of God (the Holy Spirit¹⁹⁸) is put on 144,000 Jewish people which I take, at the last, as being representative of the entire nation of Israel.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ **Ephesians 4:30** And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

¹⁹⁹ **Romans 11:25-26 (NKJV)** For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. **And so all Israel will be saved.**

These people are certainly not Jehovah's Witnesses! That is not to say that Jewish believers will be untouched by whatever is to come eventually on the earth. They will also be martyred, perhaps even more so, for they will be totally committed to Jesus,²⁰⁰ the one from whom they have been estranged for millennia.

This vision, in Revelation chapter 7, supports my firm conviction that the salvation of Israel must take place many years before the actual return of Jesus to the earth. In particular, the nation of Israel will be involved in the final evangelization of the world.²⁰¹

Matthew 24:14 (RSV) *And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come.*

Accordingly, on the basis of the above exegesis, it becomes rather straightforward to equate the "time of Jacob's trouble" not with any future "great tribulation" but with the Shoah itself.

If this is justifiable, then we are already working through a chronology that is recorded for us in Jeremiah chapters 30 and 31 and which ultimately leads to the salvation of the entire house of Israel. Let us look at this passage in detail.

²⁰⁰ **Revelation 14:1 (NIV)** Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.

²⁰¹ **Romans 11:29 (NIV)** For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

An Introductory Overview

Jeremiah 30:1-3 (RSV) *The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Write in a book all the words that I have spoken to you. For behold, days are coming, says the LORD, when I will restore the fortunes of my people, Israel and Judah, says the LORD, and I will bring them back to the land which I gave to their fathers, and they shall take possession of it."*

The first three verses of chapter 30 are clearly an overview of God's intentions. In the days of Jeremiah, the nation of Israel had been split into the northern kingdom, sometimes called Ephraim, sometimes called Israel. The southern kingdom was Judah. The promise here is that representatives of all 12 tribes would eventually return to the Land. This may have some limited application in the return from Babylon (and perhaps Assyria) but the greater fulfillment, as we will clearly see from these two chapters, is from the ends of the earth. What initiates this final restoration?

Holocaust (1938 to 1945)²⁰²

Jeremiah 30:4-7 (RSV) *These are the words which the LORD spoke concerning Israel and Judah: "Thus says the LORD: We have heard a cry of panic, of terror, and no peace. Ask now, and see, can a man bear a child? Why then do I see every man with his hands on his loins like a woman in labor? Why has every face turned pale? Alas! that day is so great there is none like it; it is a time of distress for Jacob; yet he shall be saved out of it."*

²⁰² The fact that this is a seven-year period delineated by two Shemitah years is probably very significant. I will develop this theme on another occasion.

Again these verses apply to all twelve tribes as Jacob is specified. The verses are describing an awful event that has no comparison in history. None will be like it.

Personally, I believe the Shoah is indicated here. This was the climax of nearly two millennia of hatred against the Jewish people. The reason this author is convinced that these verses refer primarily to the Holocaust in the Second World War, is what is described subsequently in Jeremiah chapter 30.

Liberation of the Camps (1945-48)

Jeremiah 30:8 (RSV) And it shall come to pass in that day, says the LORD of hosts, that I will break the yoke from off their neck, and I will burst their bonds, and strangers shall no more make servants of them.

Putting “two and two together”, we can conclude that out of Holocaust, the remnant of Israel that survived would no longer be in captivity. There was freedom to return to the Promised Land. We need, of course, to appreciate that the British Government stood in the way in the immediate aftermath of the war. Their despicable behavior ultimately led to the mandate being returned to the United Nations, formerly the League of Nations. Out of the ashes of the Holocaust, the nation of Israel was declared in May 1948.

Jeremiah 30:9 (RSV) *But they shall serve the LORD their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.*

In this verse, we get a small glimpse of God’s ultimate intention for the nation of Israel. I am reminded of that question that the disciples asked Jesus on the Mount of Olives before his ascension into heaven.

Acts 1:6 (RSV) *So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"*

The fact is this: As I have mentioned previously, Jesus does not castigate his disciples for asking this question, even after being with them and teaching for approximately 40 days.²⁰³ They had a unique opportunity to understand the prophetic scriptures from the word of God incarnate himself. Everything that Jesus would have taught them did not suggest that the question was going to be meaningless. In fact, it had to be totally consistent with everything that Jesus has previously said about the Kingdom of God. And this is how Jesus responded to this final question.

Acts 1:7-8 (RSV) *He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."*

Jesus points out that their question has relevance but the times that the Father had already set for the restoration of the kingdom to Israel were not going to be their experience and should not even be their concern. But one day this will happen. In the verse in Jeremiah, the suggestion is that David will be raised from the dead. Should we actually be surprised by this?²⁰⁴ He might be a king but the nation will also serve the Lord, who is, most certainly, the King of kings.

²⁰³ **Acts 1:3** He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

²⁰⁴ **1 Corinthians 15:50-52 (NIV)** Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed - in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet for the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

Modern Israel since 1948

Jeremiah 30:10 (RSV) *Then fear not, O Jacob my servant, says the LORD, nor be dismayed, O Israel; for I, I will save you from afar, and your offspring from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return and have quiet and ease, and none shall make him afraid.*

Now, without question, this is also a prophetic overview and events that encompass many years are condensed here into one single verse. In addition, we clearly see that salvation for the people of Israel (and perhaps for everyone for that matter) has a physical as well as a spiritual dimension. The physical dimension is expressed in the fact that no longer will foreigners enslave them; that their long exile will end from the distant places where they had been scattered. They will be “saved out of a distant place”. Furthermore, Jacob (i.e. Israel) will have peace and security and no-one will make them afraid.

I submit that this describes modern day Israel rather well. Some might argue that we are not there yet as there have been wars and conflicts throughout Israel’s modern history. Israel has come through these conflicts, however, and I am confident that they will continue to do so. I believe that we are living in the days when “foreigners will no longer enslave them”. The Israel Defense Force (IDF) is one of the strongest armies in the world. Was this foretold by Ezekiel in the valley of dry bones?

Ezekiel 37:10 (NIV) *So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet - a vast army.*

Inevitably, conflicts will continue and, in every one, Israel will lose members of the IDF. They will also suffer some civilian losses.

Notwithstanding, the state will continue to receive vehement international on-going criticism for what is perceived to be disproportionate losses suffered by the aggressor who blatantly seek Israel's destruction. Is this disproportionality hinted at in the next verse in Jeremiah?

Jeremiah 30:11 (RSV) *For I am with you to save you, says the LORD; I will make a full end of all the nations among whom I scattered you, but of you I will not make a full end. I will chasten you in just measure, and I will by no means leave you unpunished.*

Let us remember that these are the words of God. I believe that whatever and whoever comes next against the nation of Israel will likewise suffer very heavy losses which will certainly be disproportionate. There are so many prophetic passages that I could quote here. Let us go back to the prophecy of Ezekiel for just one example.

Ezekiel 39:4 (RSV) *You shall fall upon the mountains of Israel, you and all your hordes and the peoples that are with you.*

Iran has openly declared their apocalyptic desire and intention to see Israel eradicated. Although I am sure that the prophecy in Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39 might be interpreted in several different ways, one thing is clear, Persia (modern Iran) is listed among the protagonists.²⁰⁵ It is also worth noting that these chapters describe a future conflict that takes place after the re-establishment of Israel together with its "vast army". I also believe that by the end of this conflict, spiritual revival will have come to the nation.

²⁰⁵ **Ezekiel 38:5-6 (NIV)** Persia, Cush and Put will be with them, all with shields and helmets, also Gomer with all its troops, and Beth Togarmah from the far north with all its troops-the many nations with you.

Ezekiel 39:7-8 (RSV) *And my holy name I will make known in the midst of my people Israel; and I will not let my holy name be profaned any more; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel. Behold, it is coming and it will be brought about, says the Lord GOD. That is the day of which I have spoken.*

Ezekiel 39:28-29 (RSV) *Then they shall know that I am the LORD their God because I sent them into exile among the nations, and then gathered them into their own land. I will leave none of them remaining among the nations any more; and I will not hide my face any more from them, when I pour out my Spirit²⁰⁶ upon the house of Israel, says the Lord GOD."²⁰⁷*

The Holocaust Remains the Open Wound

The following verses in Jeremiah chapter 30 describe an open wound and the subsequent supernatural healing of Israel.

²⁰⁶ The sealing of 144,000 as described in Revelation chapter 7.

²⁰⁷ Compare **Zechariah 12:6-10 (NIV)** On that day I will make the leaders of Judah like a firepot in a woodpile, like a flaming torch among sheaves. They will consume right and left all the surrounding peoples, **but Jerusalem will remain intact in her place.** The LORD will save the dwellings of Judah first, so that the honor of the house of David and of Jerusalem's inhabitants may not be greater than that of Judah. **On that day the LORD will shield those who live in Jerusalem,** so that the feeblest among them will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the Angel of the LORD going before them. **On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem. And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication.** They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son [emphases added].

Jeremiah 30:12-15 (RSV) *For thus says the LORD: Your hurt is incurable, and your wound is grievous. There is none to uphold your cause, no medicine for your wound, no healing for you. All your lovers have forgotten you; they care nothing for you; for I have dealt you the blow of an enemy, the punishment of a merciless foe, because your guilt is great, because your sins are flagrant. Why do you cry out over your hurt? Your pain is incurable. Because your guilt is great, because your sins are flagrant, I have done these things to you.*²⁰⁸

If the “time of Jacob’s trouble” was the Shoah, it is very easy to conclude that this event, more than any other, continues to be **the** open wound that still requires healing. For those of us who live in Israel, this is a statement of the obvious. The memory of the Holocaust casts a very long shadow over this nation. I would also maintain that you cannot understand modern Israel without appreciating the significance of the Shoah in the life of this people. These verses also lead us to the theological necessity of recognizing that God allowed the Holocaust at the very least. However, Jeremiah tells us that he continues to be a God of grace.

Jeremiah 30:16-17 (RSV) *Therefore all who devour you shall be devoured, and all your foes, every one of them, shall go into captivity;²⁰⁹ those who despoil you shall become a spoil, and all who prey on you I will make a prey. For I will restore health to you, and your wounds I will heal, says the LORD, because they have called you an outcast: 'It is Zion, for whom no one cares!'*

²⁰⁸ **Isaiah 40:1-2 (NKJV)** "Comfort, yes, comfort my people!" says your God. "Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned; **for she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins**" [emphasis added].²⁰⁹

Is the migration of so many people currently taking place reflected in this verse? Many of these desperate people are coming from states that are openly hostile to Israel.

Furthermore, God is withdrawing all foreign support for the nation of Israel at this time.²¹⁰ Anti-Semitism has made way for anti-Zionism to emerge. It has to be so because God is going to do something quite remarkable in the days to come. He is going to reveal the holiness of his great name in the sight of many nations (Ezekiel 39:27). In addition, the open wound of the people of Israel will be healed by him.

Isaiah 61:1-3 (NIV) *The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me ... to proclaim ... the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion - to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.*

Jesus chose not to read these words in the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:18-19). The time was not right then. Nevertheless, I believe that we will live to see the fulfillment of these words.²¹¹



²¹⁰ See, for example, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disinvestment_from_Israel

²¹¹ **Romans 15:8-9 (NIV)** For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy.

The Restoration of the Nation

Jeremiah 30:18-20 (NIV) *"This is what the LORD says: "I will restore the fortunes of Jacob's tents and have compassion on his dwellings; the city will be rebuilt on her ruins, and the palace will stand in its proper place. From them will come songs of thanksgiving and the sound of rejoicing. I will add to their numbers, **and they will not be decreased**; I will bring them honor, **and they will not be disdained**."²¹² Their children will be as in days of old, and their community will be established before me; I will punish all who oppress them [emphases added].*

For the first time in history, over 6 million Jews live in Israel. Certainly, since the fall of the "Iron Curtain" in 1989, there has been a rapid increase in population with the necessary increase in building programs to accommodate the new immigrants. Accordingly, cities have been vastly expanded and new roads have been built.

Unlike what is happening in Syria in these days, there is also a profound interest in archeology. One area that has been recently excavated is the City of David, near the Old City of Jerusalem. The palace is literally standing again in its proper place. I am reminded of the words of the psalmist.

Psalms 102:14-16 (RSV) *For thy servants hold her stones dear, and have pity on her dust. The nations will fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth thy glory. For the LORD will build up Zion, he will appear in his glory.*

²¹² This totally refutes the claim of any coming holocaust in the land that will eclipse the Shoah.

The word in this psalm is “rebuild” exactly the thought in the mind of Jeremiah. He is rebuilding Zion in our day. In other words, we are living in Jeremiah 30:18-20 right now. And of this we can also be certain, one day he will appear in his glory.

The Establishment of Democracy

Jeremiah 30:21-22 (NIV) *Their leader will be one of their own; their ruler will arise from among them. I will bring him near and he will come close to me, for who is he who will devote himself to be close to me?’ declares the LORD “so you will be my people, and I will be your God.”*

It is a simple fact. Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East. Unfortunately, because of the particular nature of proportional representation that is used in Israel, there can never be a strong government. A complicated patchwork of coalition partners is always required after any general election in order to obtain a viable working majority. Inevitably, it is an inherently unstable government. Consequently, the prime minister is under enormous pressure both at home and abroad. The prayer for him, in particular, is that the Lord will bring him close. I believe that the current prime minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, is a man of faith.

He holds regular bible studies in his home²¹³ and his children do rather well in the national bible competition. Furthermore, the day after the last general election, “Bibi” was at the Western Wall, thanking God for an unexpected outcome that no-one could have predicted.

²¹³ See, for example, <http://www.jpost.com/Features/In-Thespotlight/Reporters-Notebook-Studying-Bible-with-Bibi>

A Summary of Chapter 30

Jeremiah 30:23-24 (NIV) *See, the storm of the LORD will burst out in wrath, a driving wind swirling down on the heads of the wicked. The fierce anger of the LORD will not turn back until he fully accomplishes the purposes of his heart. In days to come you will understand this.*

I think these two verses sum up rather well what we have considered thus far. As with all prophecy, the suggestion here is that we will really only understand the full content of what is being said in the day that the prophecy is fulfilled. I am reminded of the words of the Apostle Paul.

1 Corinthians 13:12 (NIV) *Now we see but a poor 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.*

The Reclamation of the Land

Jeremiah 31:1-2 (NIV) *"At that time," declares the LORD, "I will be the God of all the clans of Israel, and they will be my people." This is what the LORD says: "The people who survive the sword will find favor in the desert; I will come to give rest to Israel."*

Obviously, the "at that time" refers to the "days to come" described at the end of chapter 30. The people who survived the sword have found favor in the desert. Only a remnant has returned to the Land but here they have found rest. Prior to Aliyah which began in modern times in the late 19th century, Israel was a desolate waste. Let us remind ourselves of the words of Mark Twain who visited Palestine in 1867.

*“...[a] desolate country whose soil is rich enough, but is given over wholly to weeds—a silent mournful expanse....A desolation is here that not even imagination can grace with the pomp of life and action.... We never saw a human being on the whole route.... There was hardly a tree or a shrub anywhere. Even the olive and the cactus, those fast friends of the worthless soil, had almost deserted the country.”*²¹⁴

Although this historical perspective has been challenged by some Arab Palestinian historians,²¹⁵ there is no doubt that the restoration of Israel’s homeland was largely undertaken by Jewish pioneers. Prior to this, the land of Israel had become a desert. Through hard labor and the loss of many lives, the remnant who had survived the sword found favor in the desert.

Jeremiah 31:3-5 (RSV) *the LORD appeared to him from afar. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel!*²¹⁶ *Again you shall adorn yourself with timbrels, and shall go forth in the dance of the merrymakers. Again you shall plant vineyards upon the mountains of Samaria; the planters shall plant, and shall enjoy the fruit.*

Since its re-establishment as a nation, Israel has become a major exporter of fruit, vegetables and flowers. The Jaffa orange has become known world-wide.

²¹⁴ Source: Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*. London: 1881 (New American Library, 1997).

²¹⁵ <http://www.palestineremembered.com/Acre/Articles/Story845.html>

²¹⁶ The harlot will one day become a virgin (see Isaiah 4:4)

Wherever you go, in the Land, there is now an explosion of grape vines. This is all the more remarkable when we appreciate that, not so many years ago, the land was an odd mixture of desert and malarial swamps, particularly in the Galilee. To dry up the swamps, vast numbers of eucalyptus trees were imported from Australia by the early pioneers. Furthermore, the Ottoman Turks had imposed a tree tax which persuaded all the Palestinian inhabitants to cut down its trees. This, perhaps more than anything else, denuded the land and brought in a much harsher climate. It is therefore notable that Israel has the world's leading reforestation program. I am reminded of the words of Isaiah.

Isaiah 27:6 (NIV) *In days to come, Jacob will take root, Israel will bud and blossom and fill all the world with fruit.*

The Development of Christian Tourism

Jeremiah 31:6 (RSV) *For there shall be a day when watchmen will call in the hill country of Ephraim: 'Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to the LORD our God.'*

This might be surprising to some but this verse clearly indicates that Christians would come from all over the world to visit Israel. Tourism is now a major source of national income. How can we be sure that this is actually what this verse means? The Hebrew word translated “watchmen” here in Jeremiah is unusual.

The common Hebrew word for watchmen is:

שֹׁמְרִים

This is transliterated “Shomrim”. It is used in many places including this verse in Isaiah.

Isaiah 62:6-7 (NIV) *I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the LORD, give yourselves no rest, and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.*

However, this is not the Hebrew word that is used in Jeremiah 31:6. This word is

נְצֻרִים

This may be transliterated “Notzrim”. So who are the “Notzrim”? Amazingly, if you were to ask any Israeli this question, they would simply reply, “the Notzrim are the Christians”. This is the actual word that is used for the followers of Jesus of Nazareth. The Lord anticipated these days and inspired Jeremiah to speak words that the prophet would not be able to fully understand. We can understand them because they are being fulfilled before our very eyes.

But the question is: why would the Lord encourage Christians to come to Israel? It is because they are the ones who are commissioned to pray and participate in the fulfillment of all God’s purposes for the nation of Israel and for the establishment of his Kingdom on earth.²¹⁷

Along with Isaiah (as quoted above), Jeremiah encourages us as follows:

²¹⁷ It is also that we might appreciate this mystery, namely, **Ephesians 3:6 (NIV)** This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

Jeremiah 31:7 (NKJV) For thus says the LORD: "Sing with gladness for Jacob, shout among the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, 'O LORD, save Your people, the remnant of Israel!'"

So how does God indicate that he has heard the prayers of believers in the nations? The next verse tells us how.

The Increase in Aliyah

Jeremiah 31:8-9 (NIV) See, I will bring them from the land of the north and gather them from the ends of the earth. Among them will be the blind and the lame, expectant mothers and women in labor; a great throng will return. They will come with weeping; they will pray as I bring them back. I will lead them beside streams of water on a level path where they will not stumble, because I am Israel's father, and Ephraim is my firstborn son.

Thus, again it is consistent to see that the salvation of Israel has a physical as well as a spiritual dimension. This verse describes the increase in Aliyah that took place after the establishment of the nation in 1948 gathering momentum, after 1989, with the collapse of communism. Almost by definition, they must return in unbelief because it is in the Land that God will reveal himself to the nation. We shall return to this theme shortly.

Jeremiah 31:10-11 (RSV) Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands afar off; say, 'He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock.' For the LORD has ransomed Jacob, and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.

This verse clearly states that it is God who takes the initiative in bringing Israel back to the Land. He will watch over them as a shepherd.

Those that return, however, can only be a remnant which is certainly historical but may also be geographical.²¹⁸ As we have already seen Ezekiel makes it abundantly clear that not one of this remnant will be left behind.²¹⁹ We have to conclude, therefore, that only God knows who the remnant actually is. For example, if there is no desire to make Aliyah, one has to assume that many Jewish people will remain in great peril in the diaspora.²²⁰ The world needs to be prepared for all that is going to happen in the days to come. Life is going to become increasingly difficult. Believers across the world are required to prepare for these days and also to assist in helping Jewish people back to the Land. Isaiah foretold this.

Isaiah 49:22 (NIV) *This is what the Sovereign LORD says: "See, I will beckon to the Gentiles, I will lift up my banner to the peoples; they will bring your sons in their arms and carry your daughters on their shoulders".*

Who are the Gentiles that can respond to the Lord's beckoning? Are they not the Notzrim? Are they not the believers, from across the world, who have come to know Jesus? Furthermore, it is obviously important to the Lord to involve all of his people in this great undertaking. Why? I will give you two reasons. Firstly, Israel is now the only safe place for Jewish people, and, secondly, as we will see, it is in the land of Israel that Jewish people will come to know him. Jeremiah tells us why.

²¹⁸ **Isaiah 10:21-22 (NIV)** A remnant will return, a remnant of Jacob will return to the Mighty God. Though your people, O Israel, be like the sand by the sea, only a remnant will return.

²¹⁹ **Ezekiel 39:28 (NIV)** Then they will know that I am the LORD their God, for though I sent them into exile among the nations, I will gather them to their own land, not leaving any behind.

²²⁰ Sadly, I think these words may be relevant here, namely, **Romans 9:6 (NIV)** It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.

Jeremiah 31:12-14 (RSV) *They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall be like a watered garden, and they shall languish no more. Then shall the maidens rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow. I will feast the soul of the priests with abundance, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, says the LORD.*

If the “time of Jacob’s trouble” is still future, however, one has to conclude that the re-establishment of modern Israel is simply a political accident. Furthermore, the current state of Israel would have to be totally dismantled, the people sent again into exile and the land returned to its desert state. This is a totally illogical conclusion to make although several messianic teachers are inclined to do so.²²¹

The Voice of Rachel

Jeremiah 31:15 (NIV) *This is what the LORD says: "A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because her children are no more."*

This verse describes a prophetic motif that has been repeated throughout history. The words were fulfilled at the Babylonian exile, at the time of Herod, and throughout Jewish history. It is also evocative of the fact that the nation is still weeping.

²²¹ See, for example, Fruchtenbaum AG (2005) *The Modern State of Israel in Bible Prophecy*. www.arielm.org/dcs/pdf/mbs189m.pdf; also <http://artkatzministries.org/articles/the-necessary-death-and-resurrection-of-israel/>

However, the time has come for verses 16 and 17 to be fulfilled in their entirety.

Jeremiah 31:16-17 (NIV) *This is what the LORD says: "Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work will be rewarded," declares the LORD. "They will return from the land of the enemy. So there is hope for your future," declares the LORD. "Your children will return to their own land."*

It is worth noting that the national anthem of Israel is HaTikvah (The Hope). The return to the Land out of the Holocaust is prerequisite for all that the Lord is doing in the Land and all that he will do in the lives all those that have returned. God has heard their cries. He says so.

Jeremiah 31:18 (RSV) *I have heard Ephraim bemoaning, 'Thou hast chastened me, and I was chastened, like an untrained calf; bring me back that I may be restored, for thou art the LORD my God.'*

Like the prodigal son, the remnant of Israel must return to the Land the Father has given them. I believe that this return is the physical manifestation of repentance. The next verse seems to indicate this.

Jeremiah 31:19 (RSV) *For after I had turned away I repented; and after I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed, and I was confounded, because I bore the disgrace of my youth.'*

But repentance is not just a physical return. It evokes a spiritual reality. And this is surely going to happen in the Land. They have to be here for this event to take place. And why will it happen? The next verse in Jeremiah states what is on God's heart.

Jeremiah 31:20 (RSV) *Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he my darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I do remember him still. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the LORD.*

Can you not feel the heartbeat of God for his people? Like the father in the parable of the prodigal son, he cannot rest. He is constantly looking for their return.

Luke 15:20 (NIV) *While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.*

Through Jeremiah, God is pleading with his people to return to the Land. He knows what is ahead and that it is only here that they will find safety.

Jeremiah 31:21-22 (NIV) *“Set up road signs; put up guideposts. Take note of the highway, the road that you take. Return, O Virgin Israel, return to your towns. How long will you wander, O unfaithful daughter? The LORD will create a new thing on earth - a woman will surround a man.”*

In these verses, he also says something a little obscure. Who is this woman that will surround a man? Well, one way of looking at it is to see that, although very often God speaks of Israel as a woman (e.g. unfaithful daughter; O Virgin Israel), he also speaks of him as a man – even a male child.²²² Ephraim is his dear son. Although I cannot be dogmatic, I wonder if the “woman” that surrounds this “man” is collectively the Notzrim. As we have already mentioned, and as clearly stated in Isaiah 49:22, the Lord is beckoning to believing Gentiles to bring the children (sons and daughters) of Israel back in their arms.

²²² Also **Hosea 11:1 (NIV)** When Israel was a child, I loved him ...

As it has often been said, Jesus has no arms but our arms.²²² But it is him that is taking the initiative.

Jeremiah 31:23-26 (RSV) *Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Once more they shall use these words in the land of Judah and in its cities, when I restore their fortunes: 'The LORD bless you, O habitation of righteousness, O holy hill!' And Judah and all its cities shall dwell there together, and the farmers and those who wander with their flocks. For I will satisfy the weary soul, and every languishing soul I will replenish." Thereupon I awoke and looked, and my sleep was pleasant to me.*

The visions that God gave Jeremiah in his dream must have been amazing. He was catching a glimpse of the distant future.²²³ The fulfillment of these visions was well beyond Babylon which was a return of a small remnant of the southern kingdom of Judah. This is not the case with all that Jeremiah was seeing here. It was a return that would encompass representatives of all the 12 tribes from the four quarters of the earth.

Jeremiah 31:27-28 (NIV) *"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will plant the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the offspring of men and of animals. Just as I watched over them to uproot and tear down, and to overthrow, destroy and bring disaster, so I will watch over them to build and to plant."²²⁴*

²²² **Isaiah 40:11 (NIV)** He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

²²³ **Joel 2:28 (NIV)** Your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.

²²⁴ **Ecclesiastes 3:1-3 (NIV)** There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build.

Towards a New Covenant

The return to the Land is absolutely prerequisite for all that the Lord intends to do for this people in the eyes of many nations.

It is therefore interesting that Jeremiah now goes on to quote an ancient proverb that is greatly expanded in the book of Ezekiel.

Jeremiah 31:29-30 (NIV) "In those days people will no longer say, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.' Instead, everyone will die for his own sin; whoever eats sour grapes - his own teeth will be set on edge [emphasis added].

This seems a little obscure until we look at the expanded version of this proverb in Ezekiel chapter 18. We will not look at it all because it is well beyond the scope of this study but maybe just the beginning and the end.

Ezekiel 18:1-4 (NIV) The word of the LORD came to me: "What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel: "'The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'? "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, **you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel.** For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son - both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die [emphasis added].

The Mosaic Covenant dealt with the entire community of the house of Israel. An aspect of this was the consequences of sin that could be passed down from one generation to another.

Numbers 14:18-19 (NIV) *The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; **he punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.**' In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, **just as you have pardoned them** from the time they left Egypt until now [emphasis added].*

As we can see from this passage, punishment and pardon were collective. God was dealing with a community. In other words, the Torah was given to Moses on Mount Sinai as instruction for the life of a community of God's people.

But this was not going to last forever, what was collective would eventually become individual. This is how the prophecy in Ezekiel chapter 18 ends.

Ezekiel 18:30-32 (NIV) *Therefore, O house of Israel, I will judge you, **each one** according to his ways, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, **and get a new heart and a new spirit.** Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live [emphases added]!*

According to Jeremiah 31:29-30 (as in Ezekiel 18), we are living in the days when the Lord has moved from one covenant to another. From now on, there is to be individual responsibility for one's own actions. As believers in Jesus, we have entered into the same New Covenant but we need to recognize that God has not made that covenant with the Gentiles or even the "church"; he has made it with the twelve tribes of Israel.

The New Covenant

Jeremiah 31:31-32 (NIV) *"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant **with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah**. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took **them** by the hand to lead **them** out of Egypt, because **they broke my covenant**, though I was a husband to **them**," declares the LORD [emphases added].*

No wonder Jeremiah only gives us an abbreviated version of the prophecy in Ezekiel chapter 18. He wants to get to the bottom line. For individuals to take responsibility for their own actions there has to be a different type of covenant. And as much as many messianic believers would like it to be a "renewed" old covenant, it is not like the covenant that God gave Moses on Mount Sinai.²²⁵ Essentially, God is saying that this old covenant was just impossible to keep.

It simply didn't work.

The main reason for this has to be the fact that the Old Covenant was a corporate covenant which, almost by definition, could not and did not touch the individual. As a classic example of this, Achan's individual sin was sufficient to affect the entire community.²²⁶ Accordingly, something has to happen within each individual life and this is how Jeremiah explains it.

²²⁵ **Hebrews 8:13 (NIV)** By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.

²²⁶ **Joshua 7:1 (NIV)** But the children of Israel committed a trespass (**corporate responsibility**) in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing (**individual action**): and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel (**corporate punishment**).

Jeremiah 31:33 (NIV) *“This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people”.*

This is the new heart and the new spirit described in the book of Ezekiel. We read about it again in chapter 36.

Ezekiel 36:24-28 (RSV) *I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you,²²⁷ and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. You shall dwell in the land which I gave to your fathers; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.*

It is in the Land that God will sprinkle clean water on those that have returned. This is why they have to get back. The people of Israel have to be cleansed from all their idols and all their impurities. I am also reminded of the words of Zechariah.

Zechariah 13:1 (NIV) *On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.*

What day are we speaking of here? It is the day that their eyes are opened and they see the one who was pierced.

²²⁷ **Zechariah 12:10** And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem (east and west) a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.

They need to remember that every covenant has to be sealed in blood. The new covenant is sealed with the blood of Jesus.

Luke 22:20 (RSV) *This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.*

By God's grace, we have already entered into this new covenant. By God's grace, the entire nation of Israel will enter into it. Why do I say that? I can give you two reasons. Firstly, the covenant is made with the entire house of Israel. Secondly, they will all know him.

Jeremiah 31:34 (NIV) *No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more" [emphasis added].*

These are not my words, these are God's words. He is going to do this in the sight of many nations and it will be marvelous in our eyes. As I have often thought, Israel will be the ultimate apologetic to an unbelieving world. The nations will know that he is the Lord when he shows himself holy through the nation of Israel.

Ezekiel 39:26-27 (NIV) *They will forget their shame and all the unfaithfulness they showed toward me when they lived in safety in their land with no one to make them afraid. When I have brought them back from the nations and have gathered them from the countries of their enemies, I will show myself holy through them in the sight of many nations [emphasis added].*

This is a truly remarkable prophecy. You get the impression from this passage that today modern Israel is totally reliant on its own resources. This is even intimated in the passage that we have read in Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 30:10 (NIV) *I will surely save you out of a distant place, your descendants from the land of their exile. Jacob will again have peace and security, and no one will make him afraid* [emphasis added].

This is modern Israel today but something is going to happen that will change the status quo. Israel will come to know the God of Israel who makes this following declaration.

Jeremiah 31:35-37 (RSV) *Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar - the LORD of hosts is his name: "If this fixed order departs from before me, says the LORD, then shall the descendants of Israel cease from being a nation before me for ever." Thus says the LORD: "If the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth below can be explored, then I will cast off all the descendants of Israel for all that they have done, says the LORD.*

Replacement theology is an abomination in the eyes of God. It is basically saying that God has rejected his ancient people because of all they have done. This is the total opposite of the above and is basically saying that God does not mean what he says. God has made eternal promises to this people. He will fulfil every one. No, they do not deserve this, but this is what grace is all about.

Conclusion to the Timeline of Jeremiah

Jeremiah 31:38-40 (RSV) Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when the city shall be rebuilt for the LORD from the tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. And the measuring line shall go out farther, straight to the hill Gareb, and shall then turn to Goah. The whole valley of the dead bodies and the ashes, and all the fields as far as the brook Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, shall be sacred to the LORD. **It shall not be uprooted or overthrown any more for ever** [emphasis added].

These words are very profound. Today the city of Jerusalem is being rebuilt and I, for one, believe that it will never again be uprooted or demolished – whatever may come. One day, this city will be the praise of the earth. Accordingly, I wish to make this commitment to the Lord and to any who might read this study.

Isaiah 62:1-2 (NIV) For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch. The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.



