

Making sense of end times prophecy in the Bible

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The time of trampling. My starting point is a passage that might not be the first one many would choose to talk about end times, but is a crucial one:

Luke 21:5-24 And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said, "As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." And they asked him, "Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?" And he said, "See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and, 'The time is at hand!' Do not go after them. And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things 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. But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name's sake. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives.

"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that kits desolation has come near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written. Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people. They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

In this passage, Jesus makes two main points. The first is that the church should not be constantly on the edge expecting that the end will come at once. Many dramatic and bad things will happen, including wars, earthquakes, famines, persecutions, false prophets, and false messiahs, but these are just precursors, not the end.

The second point Jesus makes is in regard to his statement at the beginning of the passage that "there will not be left here one stone on another that will not be thrown down."¹ It is very clear from this passage that what Jesus is prophesying here is the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, which occurred in 70 A.D. This was a momentous event, because it effectively ended the Mosaic covenant forever. Not only was the Temple destroyed, the records of the genealogies of the priests were lost, so that even if the Temple was rebuilt,

the sacrificial system could not be legitimately restarted. In response, Jews of the day either had to become Christians, accepting Jesus as the fulfillment of the sacrificial law, or redefine their religion, to make “good works” equal to their sacrifices. This latter path has been the way of all modern Jews, so that one may say that present day Judaism is as different a religion from the law of Moses, with its intricate sacrificial system at the center of the religion, as Christianity is.

There are many other passages in which Jesus prophesies the immediate destruction of the nation of Israel, sometimes in veiled language, sometimes not so veiled:

Matt. 21:43 “Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.”

Matt. 22:1-7 And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. Again he sent other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.’ But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

Luke 13:34-35 “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’ “

The apostle Paul also refers to the “time of the Gentiles being fulfilled” in Romans 11:25:

Rom. 11:25 Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

The apostle John’s Revelation also refers to this time period of “trampling” by the Gentiles, or “nations”:

Rev. 11: 1-3 Then 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 the holy city for forty-two months. And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.”

Rev. 12:1-6 And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her

child he might devour it. She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.

Rev. 13:5 And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months.

Revelation is highly symbolic, but not impossible to understand. It is clear in the Rev 12 passage above that the “woman” is the nation Israel, who gives birth to the Messiah who “rules the nations with a rod of iron” (cf. Psalm 2), and then is sent into the “wilderness,” that is, exile, while the devil has a limited time of limited authority. This is equated with the time of “trampling” of the Temple in Rev 11:3, which is also referred to in Luke 21:14, above. The “two witnesses” in Rev 11 most likely refer to the church; a legal witness in the law of Moses required a minimum of two witnesses.

In Revelation, the time period of trampling by the Gentiles is called the “1260 days,” which is equal to 42 months of 30 days. This number is symbolic, as are many numbers in Revelation; the symbolism comes from the time period before Christ when Antiochus Epiphanes “desolated” the Temple in Jerusalem for 3½ years (42 months = 3×12 + 6). The prophet Daniel predicted this period in several places:

Dan 8:13-14 “For how long is the vision concerning the regular burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled underfoot?” And he said to me, “For 2,300 evenings and mornings. Then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state.”

2300 evenings and mornings equals 1250 days. In a later passage in Daniel, this event is clearly connected with Antiochus by the preceding, fairly detailed history, which ends with

Dan 11:31 Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate.

Later on in Daniel 12 we encounter a time period called “a time, times and half a time,” which can be taken as 3½ years (Dan 12:7) which is also called 1290 days:

Dan. 12:11 And from the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there shall be 1,290 days.

The slight differences between 1250, 1260, and 1290 may relate to different types of calendars being used, rounding, or possibly different symbolic intent.²

What we have then is the following: in 168 B.C., Antiochus Epiphanes sacked Jerusalem and desecrated the Temple for 3½ years, putting pagan idols there. This was an extremely significant event for the Jews, known as the “abomination that makes desolate,” or “the abomination of desolation.” In the New Testament, a time of trampling, or desolation,

of the Temple is predicted. This time of trampling is referred to by the symbolic numbers of 1260 days and 42 months, which are close to the actual number of days of the desolation by Antiochus Epiphanes, referred to in the book of Daniel, which was well known to the early Christians. This time period refers to all the years of desolation of the Temple in Jerusalem, up to the present day, in which the Temple is still “trampled” by the Gentiles and the Mosaic sacrificial system of the Temple cannot be restored. This time of trampling is clearly connected with the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., when the Temple was torn down, as Jesus predicted.

Coming with the angels. We are now in a position to look carefully at another passage of prophecy by Jesus, which is partly in parallel with the Luke 21 passage we started with above. This is the long passage in Matthew 24 and 25. Here I will exposit it in sections.

Matt. 24:1-22 Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?”

And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you dare not be 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 these are but the beginning of the birth pains. 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. 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 lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

“So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.”

This section is highly parallel to the Luke 21 passage given at the beginning (and also to Mark 13:1-23), and is very likely recording the same speech by Jesus.³ As discussed above, Jesus makes two points: first, that the church should not be in a tizzy thinking every bad thing means Jesus is returning, and second, that Jerusalem will be trampled and they should watch out for it. Luke 21:24 is not repeated here, which specifically talks of Jerusalem and the Gentiles, but there is no doubt that this passage is talking of the same

event as Luke 21. Jesus specifically mentions the abomination of desolation of Daniel as occurring, which means the destruction of the Temple worship.

There is evidence historically that early Jewish Christians knew this prophecy and indeed did flee to the hills in 70 A.D. when the Romans surrounded Jerusalem. Some Jews were angry with them for not being courageous to stand with other Jews. It was wise, however, because essentially everyone in the city was killed, with incredible suffering during the siege.

Jesus then goes on:

Matt. 24:23-35 “Then 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 arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. So, if they say to you, ‘Look, he is in the wilderness,’ do not go out. If they say, ‘Look, he is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, 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.

“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out 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 until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”

The last two paragraphs are in close parallel with the succeeding passage in Luke 21:

Luke 21:25-33 “And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

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. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”

This is also parallel with the succeeding paragraphs in Mark 13:24-31. Our questions are: when do these things happen, and to what do they refer? There are three main viewpoints: preterist, futurist, and partial preterist.

Preterism. The “preterist” viewpoint says that these events occur at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. In this viewpoint, Jesus is using symbolic language for natural events. As we have seen, there are lots of reasons to take part of Jesus’ earlier discussion as referring to the destruction of Jerusalem, and church fathers such as Calvin have taken it this way. But these later paragraphs seem to be pretty clearly talking of the end of this world, and final judgment. The preterist rejects this and says that all of this later discussion is symbolic.

The preterist view is not without any merit. They argue that even something as dramatic as the stars falling from the sky can be taken as symbolic, and give examples from the Old Testament. Although these examples are not overly persuasive,⁴ one might accept this image as symbolic. However, the later discussion by Jesus in the same narrative, in which he again refers to “coming with his angels,” seems clearly to refer to the final judgment:

Matt. 25:31-34. “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.... And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

The preterist can argue, however, that the “coming” of Jesus can refer to more than one thing. The following passages are all parallel accounts of discussion Jesus has with his disciples after Peter identified him as the Christ:

Mat. 16: 26-28 “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

Mark 8:36-9:1 “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? For what can a man give in return for his life? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” And he said to them, “Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.”

Luke 9:25-27 “For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. But I

tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.”

All of these passages end with Jesus saying that something is very immanent, which is recorded as “coming in his kingdom” by Matthew, “the kingdom of God...with power” in Mark, and “the kingdom of God” in Luke. Some scholars have identified this event with the glorification of Christ in the next chapter, when a few of the apostles see him on the mountain being “transfigured,” but this seems a stretch because these passages clearly focus on coming judgment, and it makes no sense to refer to the disciples still being alive for an event that occurs just a few days later. The same arguments speak against taking this prediction as referring to his Ascension, which was only about half a year later. Therefore, unless we believe someone has been alive for 2000 years, we must take this event as referring to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., which makes sense as near the limit of the life span of those alive at the time of Christ, around 30 A.D.

The question then becomes, is the discussion by Christ in the previous sentence in these passages, in which he talks of coming with his angels in glory to judge the world, the same event, or a different one? The preterist would say it is the same event, but there is reason to take these as not the same. First, the “kingdom” is discussed by Jesus in many places as already starting while he was with them, e.g. Mat. 12:12, Luke 17:21. As many theologians have discussed, there is a sense in which the “kingdom” is with us already, from the time of Christ, and a sense in which it is still not yet, and we wait to enter it in its fullness. It is not hard to argue that the kingdom started with Christ, then came “with power” once the kingdom of Israel was swept away in 70 A.D., and will come “in glory” in the future. This view is supported by the different of terminology in the language of Jesus; he talks of the coming of his “kingdom” on earth, which is already with us, while when talking of the final judgment, he speaks of his coming in “glory.”

In this view, then, in the above three parallel passages, Jesus is giving the apostles a warning that they must fear him more than man, because he is in charge, and he gives two examples of how he will exert his power: in the final judgment, and very soon in the judgment of Israel and destruction of the Temple, which as we have seen, is a very important theme in the Gospels.⁵

Returning to Matthew 24, the only thing that causes some problem for this interpretation is the word “immediately” in Matthew 24:29. One can read this as saying that immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem, which Jesus has discussed, his coming with the angels will occur. A liberal theologian might say indeed that this is what Jesus predicted, and that he was wrong, and a false prophet. I am often surprised to find many evangelicals seem to think the same thing, that all the apostles thought Jesus had predicted a very early return.

There are several arguments against this liberal view, and against the preterist view, which would say the same thing but argue that the coming of Jesus with his angels refers to an earthly historical event, not the final judgment. (A variation of this is “hyper-preterism,” which says that there is no Second Coming other than the symbolic one in 70 A.D. In other

words, this view denies the historic Apostle's Creed and Nicene Creed which say that we look forward to the day when Jesus comes again to judge the living and the dead.)

The first argument is the context of Matthew 24-25. Jesus follows his discussion with several parables that all refer to a "long" time to wait:

Matthew 24:42-25:19 "Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

"For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.... Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

In each of these stories, the theme is that the master (who represents Christ) is gone a *long* time, and people become lazy while waiting. They must wait for him to come at any moment, because they do not know when he will come. This lesson would seem to contradict the "very soon" and "at hand" aspect of the coming of kingdom which Christ preaches in many other passages (e.g. Mat. 3:2, 4:17, Mark 1:15), if everything is to happen immediately within their lifetime.

Note also that Jesus in Mat. 24:21 says that such a suffering as the time of the abomination of Jerusalem never has been, and "never will be." This seems to imply a long time afterwards.⁶

Also, in the same speech, in Mat. 24:36, Jesus says “But concerning that day and hour, no one knows.” Yet if we take this events as happening at the same time as the destruction of the Temple, he has essentially told them a date: before all of them have died.

A basic question in interpreting this passage is what “tribulation” which Jesus was referring to, which he said would be followed “immediately” by his coming with angels. Calvin and others have argued that he did not refer specifically to the destruction of Jerusalem discussed in Mat. 24:15-22, but to the general tribulation discussed in the paragraphs preceding and following, in which Jesus makes precisely the point that many bad things will happen over a long time that will *not* be the end of the world. Note that Jesus calls the general persecution of the church “tribulation” in Matthew 24:9. Calvin argued that Jesus meant that he would come immediately after this general period of time which we have called the “trampling of the Gentiles.” Note also that in between the discussion of the destruction of Jerusalem and the coming in glory, Jesus discusses not being led astray by false christs. Why give this warning if the coming in glory occurs immediately at the same time as the destruction of the Temple? There would seem to be hardly any time to be led astray.

An argument against the preterist who says that the trumpets and angels of Mat. 24:31 can be viewed as symbolic of an earthly historical event is the fact that the apostle Paul clearly connects the trumpet and the angels with the final judgment:

1 Thess 4:16-17 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

A final argument against seeing the coming in glory as happening right after the destruction of Jerusalem is that there is no historical record *either* of the church bewailing the fact that Jesus had not come at the time he promised, as liberals would have us believe, *or* the church widely proclaiming that Jesus had, in fact, come at that time, as preterists would have us believe. The church continued to proclaim the statement of the Apostle’s Creed, that they looked forward to his coming in judgment in the future.

Dispensationalist futurism. At the opposite extreme from preterism, the dispensationalist agrees that the “immediately” in Mat. 24:29 implies that Jesus comes in glory immediately after the “abomination of desolation” events of Mat. 24:15-22, but instead of putting the coming in glory of Jesus in the first century, this view puts the abomination of desolation and the destruction of the Temple in the future. In this view, at some future point the Jews rebuild the Temple and restart sacrificial worship (it is unclear how they solve the problem of the loss of the priesthood) and then a future tyrant conquers this Temple and desecrates it.

There are many problems with this view. First, it ignores the Luke 21 passage which we started with, above, which clearly associates the destruction of the Temple with “the time

of the Gentiles,” which Paul clearly says is now, in Romans 11:25. The hugely important event in 70 A.D. is ignored and substituted for an unknown future event. The context of the prophecy of Jesus about the desolation of the Temple is clearly the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem at the time, which he pointed to, at the start of the whole speech. The futurist view also has no explanation for what Jesus was referring to when he said certain events of the kingdom would happen within the lifetime of his listeners (except for the dubious hypotheses that he referred to his transfiguration in the next chapter, or the Ascension).

Some dispensationalists use the following passage to make their argument. To make the argument, we must use the NIV translation, because the ESV translation we have been using it does not support this view.

Dan. 9:25-27 (NIV) “Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy. 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.”

Many commentators have pointed out that this can be taken as a prediction of the date of Christ if one takes these “sevens” as periods of seven years. $7+62 = 69$ sevens, and $69 \times 7 = 483$ years, which is quite close to the time period between the building of the Temple after the Exile and when Jesus lived, depending on the date one picks for the decree to build the Temple. Cyrus gave a first decree in 539 B.C., while Artaxerxes gave the final decree to Nehemiah in 444 B.C. Adding these up, we get $444+30 = 474$, which is close to 483.

In the dispensationalist view, the final “seven” occurs after Christ, and therefore cannot refer to the desolation by Antiochus Epiphanes in 168 B.C., discussed above, although this might seem a natural interpretation, since that event was still in the future for Daniel, and as we have seen, lasted $3\frac{1}{2}$ years, or “half a seven” in this accounting.

Even using the NIV translation, one could take the second paragraph as referring to events before Christ, since it is not necessarily linked in time to the first paragraph. Alternatively, the ESV translation supports putting all these events before Christ, the first part referring to the anointing of Zerubbabel, the heir of David (Ezra 3:2, Hag. 2:23, Zech. 4:1-14) and the rebuilding of the Temple, which takes 62 real weeks of seven days (the word “seven” is the common word for a week in Hebrew), and the second part to its desolation by Antiochus Epiphanes:

Dan. 9:24-27 (ESV) Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing.

And the people 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. And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.”

One could also take the NIV translation and agree with the dispensationalist that the 69 sevens refer to the date of Christ, and take the second paragraph as referring to the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. That destruction did not last only 3½ years, however, and also was separated from Christ by 40 years. Dispensationalists therefore take the first 69 sevens as taking us to the time of Christ, and then suspend the last seven-year period (or, half of this period) until at least 2000 years into the future, when a new Israel will build a new Temple, and a new tyrant will do exactly as Antiochus Epiphanes did, for exactly the same period of time.

Partial preterism. To conclude this section, the view that seems most natural is to take neither of these extremes, either putting the return of Christ at 70 A.D. (either really or symbolically) or putting the destruction of the Temple in the far future. Instead, it is not a leap to take Jesus as discussing two separate events, which are connected by the fact that he is saying that many bad events will occur which are *not* the end of time, and one of these, which is quite significant to his listeners, is the destruction of the Temple.

Essentially, Jesus first gives a list of a number of things which do not indicate the end: wars, famines, persecution, false christs, and even the destruction of the Temple. He advises the church to save themselves from that siege, to live again for another day—why would he say that if the end of all things was to happen right away? Then he gives them a list of things that *do* indicate the end: stars falling from the sky, the trumpet call of the angels, the Son of Man (Jesus) visible like lightening from one end of the sky to the other. In other words, “you can’t miss it.” When such signs appear, we know the time is really at the end, as we know the figs are ripe when the fig tree spreads its leaves.

The rapture and the antichrist. We have not yet discussed a passage in Matthew 24 which we skipped over:

Mat. 24:36-41 But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of

Man. Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding oat the mill; one will be taken and one left.

This has a parallel passage in Luke 17, which, significantly, is not part of the Luke 21 discussion we have quoted above, but occurs on a different day, indicating that this teaching is not intrinsically connected to the event of the destruction of Jerusalem:

Luke 17:20-35 Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."

And he said to the disciples, "The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. And they will say to you, 'Look, there!' or 'Look, here!' Do not go out or follow them. For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day.

But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot—they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all— so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed.

On that day, let the one who is on the housetop, with his goods in the house, not come down to take them away, and likewise let the one who is in the field not turn back. Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it. I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left. There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left."

In the Luke passage, the destruction of Jerusalem is not in view at all—so it is reasonable to assume it is not in view in the parallel passage in Matthew either. In the Luke passage, Jesus on one hand says that the kingdom has already started and is in their midst (since he is the king) but goes on to discuss what they really want to know, which is the signs of the end times. His main points are, as in the later parts of Matthew 24, that no one knows the day, which will catch everyone by surprise, and that our response should be to be faithful at all times. He uses two images of that surprise judgment: the sudden flood at the time of Noah, and the sudden fire from heaven at the time of Sodom.⁷

Dispensationalists take the next couple of verses, which talk of one person being taken and another left, to argue for a "rapture" event, by which they mean that Christians will be mysteriously taken away from the world, to heaven, while the rest of the world goes on as usual.

This is an odd view of the passage, to say the least. In the context, the warning is that judgment may fall suddenly. People who are not expecting it will be destroyed suddenly, as in Sodom. In this context, one would expect that the one "taken" would be the one *destroyed*, or judged, not the Christian. The Christian is taken to heaven, losing his life,

while the non-Christian goes on blithely as before, unaffected and unjudged? It is much more natural to take the passages as saying that as in the Passover, when the angel of death killed a firstborn in one bed while leaving the others alive, God's judgment will seek out whom he will destroy no matter where people are.

Paul's discussion of the "day of the Lord" supports the view that it is the non-Christians who are destroyed, not Christians who are removed:

1 Thess. 5:2-3 For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

Peter also says much the same:

2 Pet. 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

Both of these passages associate the "thief in the night" image with the "day of the Lord" which is clearly a time of dramatic destruction and judgment. This same image is used by Jesus in Matthew 24:43-44 in connection with the "one will be taken" image:

Mat. 24:40-43 Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding oat the mill; one will be taken and one left. Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into.

The "surprise" in view is clearly seen in 1 Thess. 5:2-3 to be a judgment on those who reject Christ and ignore him, not an event that leaves them untouched, going on as they always had in the world.

The dispensationalist concept of the rapture is also based on a discussion by Paul in 2 Thessalonians:

2 Thess. 2:1-12 Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. The coming of the lawless one is by the

activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

In this passage, Paul gives the following teaching: 1) as Jesus taught, we should not in general be alarmed by all manner of things, thinking that the end is near; 2) among the unmistakable things which will presage the Second Coming, in addition to the things mentioned by Jesus which we discussed earlier, is the revealing of the “man of lawlessness,” commonly called the “antichrist,” who proclaims himself to be God; 3) the power of this lawless one is already at work in the world, but is restrained until a future time when he is revealed and released, and 3) God will quickly destroy this man once he is revealed.

Dispensationalists argue, first, that this evil man proclaiming himself to be God corresponds to the time of the future desolation of a rebuilt Temple. We have discussed problems with this view above; as we have seen, there are many reasons to view the passages on the desecration of the Temple in the Gospels as referring to 70 A.D. Although this passage in 2 Thessalonians mentions “the temple of God,” it is not a stretch to take this as generic, not necessarily a rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem, since the lawless one proclaims himself to be God, i.e., demands worship in a temple; he takes the place of God.

In addition, dispensationalists argue that the one restraining the antichrist is the Holy Spirit; they then argue that the only way for the Holy Spirit to be taken out of the way is for the church to be taken out of the world. From this they then argue for the removal of Christians from the world while the rest of the world goes on as always, in the “rapture” discussed above.

To put it mildly, the chain of this logic is tenuous. If at any point it breaks down, the whole chain fails. How do we know that removing the restraint of God against lawlessness means removing the Holy Spirit from the whole world? How do we know that this implies removing the church and leaving the non-Christians behind? To put it simply, the well-known doctrine of the “rapture,” which removes Christians from the world which otherwise goes on as usual, is not taught explicitly anywhere in Scripture.

To summarize this section, the most natural reading of Scripture is that there is *one* “day of the Lord” which coincides with the Second Coming of Christ, when he will come unmistakably on the clouds with great trumpet sound and angels, believers in Christ will meet him in the air, the dead will rise, and the final judgment of all people will commence. For a *very* short period of time before that, Satan will be unshackled and reveal his antichrist who will demand worship. Revelation 13 says that some Christians will have to endure that time, and some will be slain for refusing to worship the beast (Rev. 13:15). This time period is to be accompanied by striking signs in the heavens (Luke 21:25) and “the sign of the Son of Man” in the heavens (Mat. 24:29-30), so that at the very end, just before

Christ returns, we will indeed have signs like the “fig leaves” that the end is upon us. But before that very clearly marked time, we should not jump to conclusions.

The book of Revelation and the millennium. We have not yet discussed Revelation much, largely because it is so symbolic, and other passages in the New Testament are clearer. The discussion of the antichrist above, however, brings us naturally to this book.

Revelation is not completely impenetrable, especially if one follows what it says about itself in order. Revelation 1-3 gives letters of instruction to the churches. Revelation 4-5 describe a vision of worship in heaven in which the Lamb (Jesus) is presented as the one to open the “seals” of the “scroll”. Revelation 6 presents the opening of these seals as the unfolding of history. The first five are events which Jesus says are normal to history, not the end, but rather the “birth pangs,” such as earthquakes, famine, persecution, etc. The sixth seal opens the final stage when there are dramatic signs in the heavens, the stage mentioned above at which the “fig leaves” are visible and people know the day of the Lord is at hand.

Revelation 7 brings us back to a picture of worship in heaven, reminding us that God is in charge of history and will protect his people. (The sealing of the 12 tribes of 12,000 people is symbolic of his protection of the church, since 12 is the number symbolic of the people of God everywhere in Scripture.) Revelation 8-11 gives us an expanded view of the events of the seventh seal, which are the seven trumpets of the angels (which, as we have seen above, are clearly the markers of the day of the Lord). In the latter stages of this process, evil Satanic forces are released, as discussed above, as a form of judgment in themselves, and the church endures through this (Rev. 11:7-10). Finally, at the seventh trumpet, the victory of God is proclaimed.

Revelation 12-13 gives us the vision of the “evil trinity,” which is a new vision, not something which sequentially follows after the events of Rev. 6-11. In this vision we are presented with Satan (the “dragon” in Rev. 12), the “beast of the sea” of Rev. 13:1-10, of whom it is said “all on earth will worship it” (Rev. 13:8), and the “beast of the earth” of Rev. 13:11-17, who is also called the “false prophet” (Rev. 16:13, 19:20, 20:10). Satan sets himself up as rival to God the Father, the second person, known as “the beast” or the “antichrist,” sets himself up in opposition to the Son of God, and the third, who “gives breath to the image of the [first] beast” (Rev. 13:15) and makes people worship it, plays the role of an evil “spirit”. All three are treated in Revelation as restrained and bound in the present age, yet still dangerous.

In Revelation 14-16 we return to a vision of heaven and God’s sovereignty, and seven “final plagues,” which echo in many ways the plagues of Egypt which finally set God’s people free.

Revelation 17-19 presents another new vision, that of the “woman on the beast” and her destruction. It is not absolutely clear that this beast is the same as the beast of the sea of Rev. 12-13, since this is a new vision. It is abundantly clear in this passage, however, that the woman on the beast is the Roman Empire. Rev. 17:9 says that the woman sits on the city of seven hills, and this was a well-known name for Rome. The description of the city, which runs the world and its merchant business, e.g. Rev. 17:18, also clearly describes

Rome in that day. It is also possible to identify the seven kings mentioned in Rev. 17:10 as the seven emperors in Rome before the destruction of Jerusalem.⁸

It makes sense that a special vision would be given to the destruction of Rome, because Rome was the main power and oppressor at the time. The Roman Empire is also clearly indicated in prophecies in the book of Daniel, as the “fourth” empire ruling over Israel after Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece (see, e.g., Dan. 2:31-44 and Dan. 7). Many Reformation scholars took this passage to refer to the Roman Catholic church, which technically was the descendent of the Roman empire. One can also take Rome as typological of God’s sovereign judgment over all empires which seem invincible.

In Revelation 20, just before the final judgment and vision of heaven in Rev. 21-22, a new vision is given, in which it is said that Satan and his minions will be released for a short time, fight against God, and be quickly defeated:

Rev. 20:1-10 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that she might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while...

And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

This last battle coincides with the picture we have been discussing above, a short time just before the end when the forces of evil are released and quickly defeated. The thousand year period mentioned here (and only here, in all of Scripture) brings us to another debate. What time period does this 1000 year “millennium” correspond to? In particular, when does it occur in relation to the “day of the Lord” when Christ returns? There are three views: premillennial, postmillennial, and amillennial.

Premillennial. This view says that the 1000 year period corresponds to a golden age that occurs after Christ returns (in other words, Christ returns pre-millennium). In this view, Christ does not defeat Satan or judge the nations for quite some time, and releases Satan a long time after his return.

In the dispensationalist premillennial view, if you have kept track, there are then *three* “comings” of Jesus. First, the “secret” coming in which he “raptures” believers away but leaves everything else the same. Then, another coming when he defeats many forces of evil and sets up the millennium, but does not raise the dead or judge the world yet. Then, finally, a third coming in which he finally defeats Satan and judges the world and sets up the final heaven.⁹

This complicated scenario is never given in any direct teaching in Scripture. One of the main motivations for it is the attempt to equate the millennium with the promises of a physical kingdom given to Israel in the Old Testament, e.g. Zechariah 8-10. But when we realize that heaven will be a very concrete and real place, with cities and highways, gardens, etc., it is natural to see these promises as fulfilled in heaven, i.e., Rev. 21-22.

Dispensationalists draw a very strong line between the nation of Israel and the people of God, however, and therefore see a need for a separate period just for the fulfillment of the promises to Israel. Yet the apostle Paul clearly says that there is no division between the church and Israel, and we in the church are the inheritors of the promises to Israel:

Eph. 2:11-15 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace.

Ephesians 3:6 This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Gal. 3:29 And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.

All these promises can be seen as fulfilled in a very concrete and real heaven and earth after the final judgment, described in Rev. 21-22.

Postmillennial. This view sees Christ returning after a golden age in which the church rules the earth. Part of the motivation for this view is the assumption, as in the premillennial view, that the physical pictures of rule of the earth in the Bible cannot be equated with heaven. Postmillennialists also point to a number of “conquest” verses in the Bible, which give a view of the kingdom of God expanding and growing in this world, e.g. Daniel 2:44, Mat. 13:31-33, 1 Cor. 15:25, and even Mat. 24:14, which says that the Gospel will be preached to all the nations.

It is legitimate to see the kingdom of God as growing and conquering, in a way, in this world. As we discussed above, the “kingdom” starts with the advent of Christ and even “comes with power” within the lifetime of the apostles. But the postmillennial view does not adequately deal with an equal number of “persecution” verses which we have seen above, which continue to the end of time. It also does not deal well with the “other worldly” nature of the kingdom which is stressed in several verses:

Luke 17:20-21 Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!'"

John 18:36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."

2 Cor. 10:3-4 For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.

Col. 3:22 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

1 John 2:15-17 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Heb. 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

We are to set our minds on things "above," not conquering in this world.

Amillennial. This view takes the 1000 years of Rev. 20 as symbolic of the whole time period in which we now live. It is not a golden age, but the church still conquers and grows in many ways. Both the advance of the Gospel being preached throughout the world and persecutions increase.

Some have argued against this view because Rev. 20:4 talks of Christians who were martyred coming to life and reigning during this time. But this agrees with the view that people who die go to be with God in heaven right way, and are not just "sleeping" in an unconscious state.

Some also argue that Rev. 20:3 talks of Satan being restrained during this time so that he does not deceive the nations any longer, and that cannot be true now. But we have already seen, in 1 Thess. 2, that Paul says that evil is being "restrained" even now. We also know that Jesus is reigning at present, at the right hand of the Father: "For God has put all things in subjection under his feet" (1 Cor. 15:27). Furthermore, Jude says that the evil angels have been put "in chains," in the past tense:

Jude 6 And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day.

The basic picture is then that of the evil angels, i.e. demons, in chains now, i.e., restrained but with some limited ability to act. In support of this view, we can note that Rev 20 appears to recapitulate the story told earlier in Rev. 9:

Rev. 9:1-3 And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit. He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth.

Here we have Satan already fallen, being released at the end time. At that end time his release is described with the image of him being given the key to his prison, to escape. In Rev. 20:1, we have the angel with the key, who throws Satan down. This corresponds to the picture in Jude, Rev. 9, and elsewhere in the Bible, of the devil and his demons being restrained in the present age. Then in 20:7, Satan is released, at the end of the age.

A similar picture is given in Rev. 12:

Rev. 12:7-12. Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”

The devil is here presented as defeated, still active in pestering, but not conquering. This is the time in which we live, as we have seen in the discussion of the time of “trampling.”

Summary

Despite the complicated imagery of Revelation and some other passages, we have a relatively simple understanding of the prophecy of the New Testament:

- 1) The “kingdom of God” existed in seed form in the nation of Israel, began in open form when its king (Jesus) arrived, took a step to advance in power to reach the nations when the Mosaic covenant of Israel was destroyed in 70 A.D., and will burst forth in glory when Jesus returns to judge the nations.
- 2) Jesus predicted that Jerusalem would be destroyed, and threatened many times to the Jews of his day that their nation with its Mosaic covenant was near its end, and the

kingdom of God would be given to other people. The church is now that kingdom; there is one story of the people of God including both Jew and Gentile, not two parallel stories.

3) From that time to this, Jesus said that there would be many bad things, such as wars, famine, poverty, persecution of the church, etc., which are not signs of the end but just “birth pangs” of the eventual birth of the full kingdom in heaven. During this time evil is restrained, although still active. Christians should be active in good works during this time and expect that the Gospel will advance in all nations.

4) For a very short time, Satan and his minions will be released, and literally “all hell will break loose” with signs in the heavens and rampant evil. Some Christians will live through this time and be martyred. We will be justified at that time in expecting the near return of Christ.

5) Christ will return once, as victor and judge, will defeat Satan and his minions and immediately turn to judge all the living and the dead, who will be resurrected for judgment.

6) After the judgment, a very concrete and real society will be set up in heaven, in which we will have “spiritual bodies” (1 Cor. 15:44) and live forever with God. It will be like earth in many ways, but more “real” and eternal.

Footnotes

¹ Those who have seen the “wailing wall” in Jerusalem may wonder if this is hyperbole, because a few stones in that wall are still on each other. Calvin, in his commentary on this passage, remarks that Jesus was most likely referring to the “noble stones” also mentioned by Josephus, which were huge blocks.

² Dan. 12:12 refers to waiting until “1335” days. This may simply be a way of saying wait just a little beyond the time of desolation, or it may have additional symbolism which is lost on us. This passage in Dan. 12:7-12 may refer to the desolation of Antiochus Epiphanes, which was in the immediate future for Daniel, or it may refer to the later time of “trampling by the Gentiles” after 70 A.D., which we have discussed in the text. This latter view is supported by Dan. 12:7, “when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things will be finished.”

Earlier, Dan. 12:1-2 gives a prediction that “at that time,” there will be a general resurrection and judgment. The phrase “at that time” is a generic prophetic term for the end of time, which seems deliberately vague. It could be referring back to Dan. 11:36-45. The passage which clearly refers to Antiochus Epiphanes seems to end in 11:35, which says “and some of the wise shall stumble, so that they may be refined, purified, and made white, until the time of the end, for it still awaits the appointed time.” Dan. 11:36-39 then begins with “The king shall do as he pleases” and describes a new king who honors new gods, which may be taken as the Roman empire, which figures so prominently as the “fourth” empire in the book of Daniel (Dan. 2:40-44 says that the kingdom of God comes during this fourth empire, which is different in nature from the other three; Dan. 7:19-25 also discusses this fourth kingdom different from others, and Dan. 7:9-10 and 13-14 also talk of the kingdom of God being set up at this time. This kingdom is to have power over the people of God

for “a time, times and half a time” (7:25) which seems to refer to the time of trampling by the Gentiles discussed in the text. We may then say we are in the “age of Rome.”

Dan. 7:6 calls the third empire a beast with four heads and four wings. This image of fourfold division is repeated in Dan. 8:8, and is clearly a reference to the division of the Greek empire of Alexander into four; one of these became the kingdom of Antiochus Epiphanes who desecrated the Temple. This empire is explicitly called Greece in Dan. 8:21, while the earlier kingdom is explicitly called Medo-Persia in 8:20. This leaves no choice but to identify the fourth kingdom as Rome.

Dan. 11:40-45 can be taken to say that the two kings of north and south from the remainder of Greece will attack Rome and be defeated as Rome “overflows” over them and conquers the whole world including Egypt, Libya and Ethiopia. This king will eventually be sucked into troubles from the “east” and “north” (the northern barbarians?) and will have “great fury to destroy.”

³ Jesus often said similar things on different occasions, so it is not always obvious when a speech is the same in different Gospels. The Gospel writers vary at times in how they present his speeches, sometimes leaving out parts, or summarizing parts, so that parallel accounts of the same speech usually have some differences or wording.

⁴ Is. 13:10-11 says “For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light. I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant.” This comes within an “oracle concerning Babylon” but could also be taken as referring to the final judgment, of which the judgment on Babylon is symbolic. Is. 34:2-4 says “For the LORD is enraged against all the nations, and furious against all their host; he has devoted them to destruction, has given them over for slaughter. Their slain shall be cast out, and the stench of their corpses shall rise; the mountains shall flow with their blood. All the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a scroll. All their host shall fall, as leaves fall from the vine, like leaves falling from the fig tree.” Like the Is. 13:10 passage, this can be taken as a prophesy of the final judgment in the midst of a more local judgment, as a general warning, especially since Is. 34:2 talks to “all” the nations. Ezek 32:7 says to Egypt, “When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens and make the stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud and the moon shall not give its light.” This could be referring to a miracle of darkness as in the plagues of Moses, or it could be referring to the final judgment in which Egypt is judged. Finally, Joel 3:12-15 says “Let the nations stir themselves up and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nation...Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.” This also can be taken pretty easily as referring to the final judgment. None of these passages clearly can only be talking of earthly historical events.

⁵ Preterists also argue that Jesus statement in Mat. 24:34 and Luke 21:32, “this generation shall not pass away until all these things have happened” refers to events that will happen within the lifetime of his listeners. But the word “generation” can also be translated as “race,” i.e., those born of the same blood. This usage is favored in Mat. 16:4 (“an evil and adulterous generation”), Luke 9:41 (“oh evil and twisted generation”), Luke 16:8 (“the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light”).

⁶ Ezekiel 5:5-11 uses the same formula of never as bad before, and never as bad afterward, in discussing what is clearly the destruction of Jerusalem. This passage may be referring to the

desolation by Antiochus Epiphanes, but some aspects seem more related to the siege of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., such as the cannibalism of children, and the subsequent “scattering to the winds.”

⁷ As an interesting aside, this Luke 17 passage uses phrases which come in the context of the destruction of Jerusalem in Matthew 24, namely “let the one who is on the housetop, with his goods in the house, not come down to take them away, and likewise let the one who is in the field not turn back.” In that context, it sounds like good advice: run for the hills as fast as possible, to save your life. In the context of the final judgment, it is less obvious—why does it matter where you run to? The connection can be seen in the reference to Lot’s wife. Lot’s wife was judged for “looking back”—having mixed motives, wanting her old life. Jesus seems to be using these statements as generic statements along the lines of “do not love the world.” On other words, do not cling to the things of this world; instead, be found obedient to the very end.

⁸ The commonly accepted dates for the emperors of Rome are: Augustus (27 B.C.-14 A.D.), Tiberius (14 -37 A.D.), Caligula (37-41 A.D.), Claudius (41-54 A.D.), and Nero (54-68 A.D.) These five can be taken as the “five of whom have fallen” (Rev. 17:10). The next is Galba (68-69 A.D.), who can be taken as the one who “is,” meaning that Revelation was written just before the fall of Jerusalem. The next was Otho, who ruled for only three months in 69 A.D., and can be taken as the one who “has not yet come and when he does come he must remain only a little while.” Rev. 17:11 talks then of an eighth king, which can be taken as Vitellus, who reigned for eight months in 69 A.D. and then went “to destruction.” Jerusalem was destroyed the next year under Vespasian.

⁹ The “classical” premillennial view which was known throughout church history removes the “rapture” event and has just two “comings.” The dispensational premillennial view, or “pre-trib rapture” view, is relatively recent, appearing in the 1800’s, largely through the teaching of John Darby.