"There are perhaps no chapters in the Bible as crucial to the study of eschatology as Matthew 24, 1 Corinthians 15, 2 Peter 3, and Revelation 20. To understand these chapters is to understand the limits of biblical prophecy. They are the four corners of eschatology, and I have found none of them to speak of any events that would take place after the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70." -- Vernon

Matthew 24
Part 1

1) Jesus left the temple and was going away when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple.

The buildings of the temple stood on the Temple Mount, an elevated platform which covered about 35 acres. The western foundation wall of this platform remains to this day, and the largest stone discovered in it is estimated to weigh 570 tons.

The buildings on this mount included the temple itself and its surrounding chambers, porches, and courts. According to Josephus, a first-century Jewish priest and historian, these buildings were made of gold-plated marble stones, many of
which were greater than the foundation stone mentioned above, measuring 68 feet long, eight feet high and nine feet wide (Wars 5.5.6). The temple was the tallest of these structures, standing at a height of about 150 feet (Wars 5.5.5).

2) 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."

In response to the disciples marveling at these great buildings, Jesus prophesied that not one stone would be left on another. Later in this discourse, He told them that this would take place before the passing of their generation (Mt 24:34). These words were fulfilled in a truly remarkable manner. As Josephus informs us, the Romans completely dismantled the Herodian temple, stone for stone, about 40 years after the Lord gave this prophecy, during their war with the Jews (Wars 7.1.1; 7.8.7; 7.9.4). The Romans made this extraordinary effort not only to demonstrate their power but also to retrieve the gold that had melted from the temple stones into the ground, as the structure had caught fire during the siege (Wars 6.4.7; 7.5.2).

3) 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 end of the age?"

After Jesus stood near the great temple and made His prediction about its destruction, He journeyed with His disciples to the Mount of Olives. This mountain was about a mile away from the Temple Mount and overlooked it. Here, the disciples questioned Jesus further about these things.
The Gospels of Mark and Luke contain parallel accounts of the question of the disciples and the Lord’s response to it, a response commonly referred to as the Olivet Discourse (Mk 13; Lk 21). These other Gospel accounts will be referenced throughout this commentary as they will help illuminate the text before us.

While Matthew records the disciples asking Jesus when the temple would be destroyed and what would signify His coming and the end of the age, Mark records them asking Jesus for a sign that all these things would take place (Mk 13:4). This reveals that the disciples considered the destruction of the temple, the Lord’s coming and the end of the age to be closely related events, for they believed that a single sign could demonstrate that all these things were about to happen. The disciples also apparently expected these things to take place during their lifetime, for they asked Jesus to give them a sign of when these things would be near.

Throughout His discourse, Jesus never corrected these assumptions of His disciples. To the contrary, Jesus responded to them using the second-person plural (you) numerous times to tell them what some of them would see before the desolation of the temple, His coming and the end of the age. He then assured His disciples that all these things would take place before the passing of their generation (Mt 24:34).

When the disciples asked Jesus about the end of the age (Gr. aionos), it should be evident that they had in mind the end of the Jewish dispensation. After all, it was the Lord’s prophecy of the temple’s destruction that had prompted their question. They
were therefore undoubtedly asking about the end of the age for which that temple stood.

The modern reader should also consider that when the disciples asked about the Lord’s coming, they did not have the concept of a second coming that most Christians hold today. This is because they did not understand that He was going away (Jn 12:34; 13:33-36). The Greek word that the disciples used for His coming is "Parousia," which means "arrival" or "presence." The disciples were asking Christ when He would present Himself as the King of Israel to reign in righteousness.

The Old Testament contains a remarkable prophecy that affirms the belief of the disciples that the destruction of the temple, the coming of the Messiah’s reign and the end of the Jewish age were all closely related and would arrive in their lifetime. This oracle is recorded in Daniel 9 and is commonly referred to as the prophecy of the 70 Weeks. In this prophecy, Daniel recorded that 70 "sevens" were decreed for the Jewish people. He foretold that the end of this period would involve an abomination that would lead to the desolation of Jerusalem and its temple, and the Messiah would establish righteousness on the earth before this end (Dn 9:24-26). Daniel’s prophecy therefore spoke of all the events that the disciples were asking Jesus about in Matthew 24: the destruction of the temple, the coming of the Messiah and the end of the Jewish age.

To observe how this prophecy placed all these things in the generation of the disciples, it is important to adopt a proper understanding of these 70 "sevens." These "sevens" were understood by the Jews to be periods of seven years. The 70 "sevens" would therefore equal 490 years. The Jews would have
reckoned these as solar years, for although they observed a lunar calendar with a 360-day year, they were aware of the solar calendar and added months to their calendar during various leap-years according to a 19-year cycle to keep their calendar synchronized with it.

This understanding enables us to see that the first 69 weeks would lead to the anointing of Jesus to begin His earthly ministry. According to Daniel, the 70 weeks would begin with a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. (Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Babylonians and was in ruins at the time of Daniel’s prophecy.) The decree that provided for Jews to rebuild Jerusalem was issued by King Artaxerxes in 457 BC (Ezr 7:12-26; cf. 4:7-16). This is therefore when 70 weeks began. The prophecy then states that after the decree, there would be seven weeks and 62 weeks, for a total of 69 weeks (Dn 9:25). The first seven weeks, that is 49 years, are mentioned distinctly because this period would be a troublesome time that would conclude with the restoration of the Jewish nation (Dn 9:25). This describes the period following the decree mentioned above. After this decree, the nations began vehemently opposing the rebuilding of Jerusalem, even convincing Artaxerxes to revoke his order to rebuild the city before it could be completed (Ezr 4:7-23; Neh 1:3; 2:3). However, God worked in the heart of Artaxerxes to renew his decree, and despite continuing opposition from the nations, Nehemiah finished rebuilding Jerusalem and restoring its theocracy (Neh 2:5f; 13:30). According to Scripture, Nehemiah completed this work at the close of his governorship of Judah (Neh 12:26). The Elephantine Papyri informs us that Nehemiah ceased to be governor in 408 BC. This is exactly 49 years after the decree of 457 BC. Thus the first seven weeks were fulfilled. The following 62 weeks, that
is 434 years, would therefore extend from 408 BC to AD 27. (There is only one year between 1 BC and AD 1.) Daniel prophesied that this period would conclude with the appearance of the anointed Prince, that is the Messiah (Dn 9:25). In Luke, it is recorded that John the Baptist began his ministry during the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius, and Jesus was anointed by the Spirit for ministry not long afterward (Lk 3:1, 21-22).

Tiberius began reigning with Augustus in AD 11, which places the 15th year of his reign and the start of John’s ministry in AD 26. This points to the anointing of Jesus taking place in AD 27. Thus the seven and 62 weeks, that is the 69 weeks were fulfilled.

This brings us to the 70th week of the prophecy. To understand the fulfillment of this week, it is important to recognize that it involved the Messiah’s work of establishing the New Covenant. As the prophecy records, after the 69 weeks, the Prince would confirm a covenant with many for one week (Dn 9:27). The Prince in this prophecy is identified as the Messiah (Dn 9:25), and the only remaining week would be the 70th week. Daniel was therefore prophesying that Jesus would establish a covenant during the 70th week. The Lord began this work immediately after His anointing, for His teaching revealed the doctrine of the New Covenant, and His work on the cross was its central element (Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25). The 70th week therefore began at His anointing.

However, Daniel recorded that the Messiah would be cut off after the 69 weeks, that is during the 70th week when He would be establishing the New Covenant (Dn 9:26). This undoubtedly spoke of the Lord’s crucifixion. Christ celebrated four Passovers during His ministry and was crucified during the time of the fourth (Jn 2; 5:1; 6:4; 12:1). (This places His
crucifixion at AD 30.) His ministry therefore lasted three and a half years. This means that the break in His covenant work would take place in the middle of the 70th week. Consequently, the first half of the 70th week spoke of the Messiah's first visitation to offer the New Covenant. Correspondingly, the second half of the 70th week would refer to the Lord's second visitation to finish His work of establishing the New Covenant (Dn 9:27). According to the Hebrew writer, who was likely Paul and will be referred to in this work accordingly, the New Covenant would be established at the abolishment of the old (Heb 10:9). In Daniel's prophecy, it is recorded that the Prince would put an end to Jewish sacrifices for half a week (Dn 9:27). This means that the Messiah would put an end to the Old Covenant during a period of three and a half years and thus finish His work of establishing the New Covenant. This prediction was fulfilled in a truly remarkable manner, for the Lord put an end to Jewish sacrifices at the destruction of the temple in AD 70 by means of the Jewish-Roman war which had begun three and a half years earlier. (See comments on Mt 24:21.) Thus, the second half of the 70th week was fulfilled.

Contrary to this view, some have asserted that the Mosaic covenant was abolished at the cross, and the New Covenant was therefore established at that time. However, Paul was clear that the Old Covenant was yet in the process of passing away at the time of his letters. He wrote that this covenant was being brought to an end (2 Cor 3:11) and that it was growing old, becoming obsolete and ready to vanish away (Heb 8:13). He recorded also that its rituals and rites would remind valid as long as the Jewish temple had a standing (Heb 9:8-10). Moreover, he wrote that the Jews remained God's chosen people after the cross, and it was the Old Covenant that
afforded them this privilege (Rom 9-11). The Old Covenant was therefore still binding during the days of the apostles and would not pass away until the destruction of the temple. It is this event that would result in the end of the Jewish age and not the cross (Mt 24:1-3). Since the New Covenant was to be established at the abolishment of the old (Heb 10:9), the Messiah would not finish His work of establishing the New Covenant until AD 70.

This means that the Messiah would establish His covenant in two visitations to Israel and there would be a forty-year interval between these visitations. This was actually foreshadowed in the Old Testament. According to Hosea, the Messiah would come to Israel like the former and latter reign (Hos 6:3; cf. Jas 5:7-8). In Judah, the former rain arrived in the fall and the latter in the spring, and the Torah required the Israelites to observe specific festivals during these two seasons (Lv 23:5-34). As Christians have long understood, the spring feasts foreshadowed the things that Christ would accomplish during His first visitation, and the fall feasts spoke of those things relating to His second. Notably, there was a four-month interval between these seasons. It may now be observed that each of these months stood for a decade and thus foreshadowed the 40-year interval between the first and second coming of the Lord.

The forty-year delay of the Messiah’s return to establish His covenant was also prefigured in the parable of the barren fig tree. In this parable, Jesus spoke of a fig tree that was given four years to produce before it would be cut down (Lk 13:6-9). Again the number four is seen to depict the four decades between the first and second appearance of the Messiah, the
latter of which would involve His cutting down of unrepentant Israel, the fruitless fig tree. (See also comments on Rv 20:4-6.)

Had there been no interval between the first and second coming of the Messiah, the timing of His return would have been easy to determine, for it would have taken place seven years after His anointing for ministry. However, Jesus told the Jews that they would not know the day nor the hour of His return (Mt 24:34-36; Mk 13:30-32). The interval between His visitations was apparently to afford the Jews time to repent for their crucifixion of the Messiah and to keep the wicked in darkness regarding the time of His coming, so it might ensure their judgment.

Though the fulfillment of the second half of the 70th week would be delayed, it could not have been postponed beyond the generation of the disciples. One of the purposes of Daniel's prophecy was to reveal how long the Jews would have the unique standing as God's chosen people. Postponing the fulfillment of the 70th week beyond the generation of the disciples would have made it impossible to determine the last generation of Jews who would enjoy this privilege and thus negate one of the major points of the prophecy (Dn 9:24). Furthermore, Daniel recorded that the 70 weeks would culminate with a war which would desolate the temple (Dn 9:26-27), and this took place in AD 70. Moreover, Christ told His disciples that they would see the abomination that would bring the desolation of the temple that had been prophesied by Daniel (Mt 24:15), and He emphatically assured them that these things would take place before the passing of their generation (Mt 24:34). The disciples were therefore not misguided to understand that a single sign could indicate the destruction of
the temple, the coming of the Messiah’s reign and the end of the age (Mt 24:3), nor were they incorrect to believe that they might live to see a sign indicating that all these things at hand.

4) And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. 5) For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. 6) And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you dare not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. 7) For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places."

Jesus told His disciples of many things that they would see but that the end would not be yet. He later informed them that after the gospel would be preached throughout the world, the end would be signaled by the abomination of desolation that Daniel had predicted (Mt 24:14-15). It will be demonstrated in this study that this abomination would take place in AD 66. (See comments on Mt 24:15.) Since Christ was speaking of things that would take place before the time of the end, He was discussing things that would take place before AD 66.

Those of us who believe that Jesus is the Son of God should need no historical confirmation that His contemporary generation witnessed the fulfillment of His predictions, for His prophetic words are history written in advance. However, this commentary will cite the works of first-century philosophers and historians who document the fulfillment of our Lord’s predictions, so the reader may be prepared to answer the skeptic who might argue otherwise. In addition to referencing the works of Josephus, the writings of the following authors will
be considered: Tacitus, a Roman senator and historian, Seneca, a Roman philosopher, and Suetonius, another historian of Rome.

Jesus began His prophecy of the things that would precede the abomination of desolation by warning His disciples not to be deceived by counterfeit messiahs. (Mt 24:4-5; see also Mk 13:5-6; Lk 21:8.) He later explained that false deliverers and prophets would arise and perform great signs and wonders to deceive even the elect if that were possible; so if they heard that He was in the wilderness or in an inner room, they were not to believe it, because His coming would not be in this manner (Mt 24:23-27; Mk 13:21-22).

In John's Gospel, Jesus rebuked the Jews for rejecting Him as the Messiah and predicted that they would instead accept men who would come in their own name (Jn 5:43). Paul later explained that God would allow false miracles to precede the Lord's return to delude and condemn those who had refused the true King of Israel (2 Thes 2:9-12).

The book of Acts informs us that false prophets and messiahs began appearing soon after the ascension of Christ. The first mentioned is Theudas who rose up and deceived about 400 men (Acts 5:36). Josephus tells us that Theudas was a magician who claimed to be a prophet, and during the procuratorship of Fadus (circa 44 to 46 AD), he gathered a multitude at the Jordan River, claiming he would part it before their eyes (Antiq. 20.5.1). However, Fadus sent troops out to meet them, and they killed Theudas along with many others (Ibid). The next false prophet who appears in Acts is Judas (Acts 5:37). This man also drew many after himself, yet he too perished and his followers were scattered (Acts 5:37). After this,
Acts records the appearance of Simon who was astounding people with his magic arts (Acts 8:9). The people called him the Great Power of God (Acts 8:10), a title which belongs to the Messiah (1 Cor 1:24). Acts informs us that while Simon initially received the gospel, his actions demonstrated that his faith was not sincere, and he remained in the bond of iniquity. (Acts 8:13, 23). According to tradition, Simon later returned to his magic arts, declared himself to be God incarnate and deceived many. Acts then tells us of a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus who opposed the disciples (Acts 13:6). This man was able to perform signs and wonders that deceived even the most intelligent men who sought to hear the word of God (Acts 13:7). Finally, Acts mentions an Egyptian who led 4,000 in a revolt against Rome (Acts 21:38). Josephus recorded that this man claimed to be a prophet and gathered a multitude on the Mount of Olives, declaring that he would command the walls of Jerusalem to fall so they could overtake the city. However, Felix sent his soldiers to put down this rebellion, and although the Egyptian escaped, about four hundred of his followers were slain (Antiq. 20.8.6; see also Wars 2.13.5).

The New Testament writers elsewhere revealed that a great number of false prophets and scoffers had arrived in their day. John recorded that many false prophets had gone out into the world, denying that the Messiah had come (1Jn 4:1-3). According to John, these men evidenced that the prophesied anti-Christian spirit had come, and thus the last hour was present (1Jn 2:18). Since the Lord spoke of these impostors preceding the end of the Jewish age, the last hour should be understood as the final period of that age, and this was the case when John wrote. Paul, Peter, and Jude also warned the Church about false prophets and scoffers who were to appear
among them in the last days and confirmed that such men had arrived (2 Pt 2:1ff.; 2 Tm 3:1-13; Jude 4, 8, 18). (See comments on 2 Pt. 3:1-4.)

Thus, in fulfillment of the Lord's prediction, the Roman world was overrun by false messiahs and prophets who claimed the power to perform signs and wonders and promised to deliver the Jews from Gentile oppression. However, as Josephus records, these pretenders gave the Jews no such relief but only served to gather them for slaughter by the Roman authorities (Antiq. 20.8.5, 6, 10; Wars 2.13.4).

Jesus also spoke of wars and rumors of wars that would precede the abomination of desolation (Mt 24:6-7; Mk 13:7-8; Lk 21:9-10). These things came to pass as well. Tacitus recorded the following conflicts which took place before AD 66: the Iberians and other nations waging war against Parthians in AD 35 (Annals 6:33-36), the Iberians battling the Parthians again in AD 42, wars among the nations in Parthia that same year (Annals 11:8-10), nations in Germany and Britain uprising against Rome in AD 47 (Annals 11:18-19; 12:31-35), battles among the kingdoms in Germany in AD 50 (Annals 12:29-30), a war between the Armenians and the Iberians the following year (Annals 12:44-50), several nations in Germany revolting against Rome from AD 54 to 58 (Annals 13:54-56), battles among the kingdoms in Germany in AD 58 (Annals 13:57), wars between the Persians and the Parthians from AD 58 to 61 (Annals 13:37; 15:1-2), nations in Britain uprising against Rome in AD 61 (Annals 14:31-39), and a great war between the Parthians and the Romans that involved several other nations from AD 58 to 63 (Annals 13:34-41; 14:23-26; 15:1-17). Josephus also documented several wars and rumors of wars which also took
place during this time: the Jews battling against the Arabians in AD 36 (Antiq. 18.5.1-2), the Romans planning a war against the Arabians the following year (Antiq. 18.5.3), the Greeks fighting against the Jews in AD 38 (Antiq. 18.8.1), rumors of a coming war between the Romans and the Jews in AD 40 (Antiq. 18.8.2-9; Wars 2.10.1-5), the Greeks and the Syrians fighting against the Jews about that same time (Antiq. 18.9.9), the Jews battling the Philadelphians circa AD 45 (Antiq. 20.1.1), the Romans marching against the Jews circa AD 50 (Antiq. 20.5.2-4; Wars 2.12.1), the Romans putting down a battle between the Jews and the Samaritans in AD 52 (Antiq. 20.6.1; Wars 2.12.3-5), and the Romans stopping a war between the Jews and the Syrians in AD 59 (Antiq. 20.8.7; Wars 2.13.7).

Jesus also prophesied that famines would precede the sign of the end (Mt 24:7; see also Mk 13:8; Lk 21:11). This too was fulfilled before the sign of the end in AD 66. Seneca wrote of a famine in Rome which occurred in AD 41 (On the Shortness of Life 18), and Luke recorded that a great famine took place during the reign of Claudius (Acts 11:28). This is likely the famine mentioned by Josephus that occurred in Judea circa AD 45 (Antiq. 20.2.5; 20.5.2). Tacitus also wrote of a severe famine in Rome that took place in AD 51 (Annals 12:43).

Christ also predicted that earthquakes would precede the abomination of desolation (Mt 24:7; see also Mk 13:8; Lk 21:11). Again, the words of Jesus came to pass. The book of Acts mentions a great earthquake in Philippi that happened circa AD 50 (Acts 16:26). Tacitus wrote of earthquakes in Rome that took place in AD 51 (Annals 12:43), a severe earthquake in Apamea that occurred in AD 53 (Annals 12:58), an earthquake that brought Laodicea to ruins in AD 60 (Annals 14:27), and an
earthquake in Campania that almost completely demolished Pompeii in AD 63 (Annals 15:22).

In Luke’s account of the Olivet Discourse, Jesus also prophesied that outbreaks of pestilence would precede the sign of the end (Lk 21:11). Josephus wrote of a severe pestilence in Babylonia that took place in AD 40 (Antiq. 18.9.8), and both Tacitus and Suetonius recorded a great pestilence in Rome that occurred in AD 65 (Annals 16:10-13). This prediction of the Lord was therefore also fulfilled.

Matthew 24
Part 2

8) "All these are but the beginning of the birth pains."

The false messiahs, false prophets, wars, famines, and pestilences were to be the beginning of birth pains. This means that even greater troubles would come upon the world after the abomination of desolation which would signal the time of the end.

This is exactly what took place. Tacitus described the period following the abomination of desolation (AD 66) as a time when the empire was rich with disasters, terrible with battles and torn by civil and foreign wars (Histories 1:2). Josephus said it was a period when Rome was in great disorder, the east was exceedingly tumultuous, and every part of the habitable earth was unsettled and tottering (Wars Preface 2; 7.4.2). These birth pains increased severely in the land of Judah and against her people. After the Jews began their war with Rome, a great many false prophets appeared in Jerusalem and brought
multitudes to ruin (Wars 6.5.2). Wars broke out against the Jews throughout the Roman Empire (Wars 2.18.1, 5); their land was troubled by great earthquakes (Wars 4.4.5), and they were struck with many severe famines and plagues (Wars 4.6.1; 5.10.2-3; 5.12.1, 3; 6.3.4; 6.9.3).

The Old Testament prophets often described God's judgment seizing nations and kings like the pains of labor (Is 13:8; 21:3; 26:16-17; Jer 4:31; 6:24; 13:21; 30:6; 49:24; 50:43; Hos 13:13; Mic 4:9-10). In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus echoed this language to describe the tribulation that would come upon Judah in the first century (Mt 24:8). These birth pains, however, would not result in judgment alone. As Jesus predicted, when these pains would seize Judah, this would indicate the nearness of the redemption of His people and the arrival of His kingdom (Lk 21:20-32). The troubles that would come upon Israel in the generation of the apostles would therefore be the Messianic birth pains which had been foretold by the prophets.

Isaiah prophesied of these pains, saying that before Zion would experience labor, she would give birth to God's kingdom (Is 66:7ff.). The fulfillment of this prophecy may be observed in the New Testament, for before the labor predicted by the Lord had fully seized Jerusalem, those who were accepting the Messiah were experiencing a spiritual birth that was causing them to become the kingdom of God (Eph 3:14-17; Phil 3:20; Col 1:13; 2 Cor 4:16, Ti 3:5-7; 1 Pt 2:9; Rv 1:5-6).

Isaiah elsewhere foretold of this, saying that Abraham's wife Sarah would give birth to a holy nation (Is 54:1ff.). Paul referred to this prophecy, revealing that Sarah symbolized the mother of the Church, because she bore a child according to God's
promise, just as believers were being born according to His
promise of eternal life (Rom 9:8-9; Gal 4:22ff.; cf. Gn 16-21; Is
51:2; 54:1). When Paul recalled Isaiah’s prophecy in Galatians,
he explained that Sarah pictured the New Covenant which
belonged to a heavenly Jerusalem and the citizens of this
capital were being born according to the Spirit (Gal 4:22ff.).
Thus, when Isaiah prophesied that Zion and Sarah would give
birth to a glorious nation (Is 54:1ff.; 66:7ff.), he was speaking of
the New Covenant giving spiritual birth to the Church (Jn
1:12-13; 3:3-7; 1 Pt 1:23).

Jeremiah prophesied of these birth pains as well (Jer 30:6ff.).
He foretold that the Jews would experience labor in the last
days (Jer 30:24), and this is when Israel would be restored
under King David (Jer 30:9). In Acts, it is recorded that the last
days had arrived (Acts 2:16ff.) and David’s kingdom was being
rebuilt as Jews and Gentiles were accepting Jesus (Acts 15:16;
cf. Amos 9:11-12). It is therefore the Church that would be the
restoration of Israel. This is the holy nation that would be
established when the birth pains of the last days would seize
first-century Judah.

Micah foretold of these things as well, saying that in the last
days, God would make a remnant into a great nation, and
when labor pains would seize Zion, God would redeem these
people from Babylon (Mi 4:1-10; 5:3). Since the last days were
present in the first century (Heb 1:2), the time for the fulfillment
of this prophecy had arrived. (See comments on 2 Pt 3:1-4.) As
noted, the great nation that was being made from the remnant
of God’s people at that time, was the Church (Eph 3:14-17; Phil
3:20; Col 1:13; 2 Cor 4:16, Ti 3:5-7; 1 Pt 2:9; Rv 1:5-6). The
Church is therefore the nation that Micah foretold would be
redeemed. In Revelation, John echoed the words of Micah, prophesying that a remnant would be delivered from Babylon (Rv 7:3f; 14:1ff.; 18:4). John emphatically declared that he was writing about things that would soon take place (Rv 1:1-3; 22:6, 10, 12, 20). This affirms that Micah’s prophecy was about to be fulfilled. John went on to predict that such deliverance would take place when the Lord would come to destroy the great city Babylon (Rv 14:8; 16:19; 18). This city is elsewhere identified in Revelation as the city where the Lord was slain (Rv 11:8) and said to be guilty of shedding all the blood of the prophets (Rv 17:5-6; 18:24; 19:2). The city where the Lord was slain was undeniably Jerusalem, and it was the leaders of this city that Jesus charged with the shedding the blood of all the prophets (Mt 21:33ff.; 23:29ff.; Lk11:50-51; 13:33-34). Babylon therefore symbolized first-century Jerusalem. The New Testament thus reveals that Micah was speaking of birth pains that would arrive in the first century and result in the redemption of the early Church from the persecution of the leaders of Jerusalem, and this would take place at the coming of the Lord to destroy their capital. These are the very things that Christ was predicting in the Olivet Discourse, for He taught that when birth pains would seize Jerusalem in His generation, this would signify the nearness of the redemption of His people and the establishment of His kingdom (Lk 21:20-31).

Jesus elsewhere prophesied that these birth pains would be experienced by the righteous first and then the wicked (Jn 16:16-22). He told His disciples that the world would rejoice when this labor would seize them but He would return in just a little while to turn their sorrow into joy (Ibid). This is when the Messianic birth pains would seize their persecutors and destroy them (1 Thes 5:1ff.). However, as a pregnancy is known to last
forty weeks, but the day and hour of the birth is unknown in advance, so the Lord’s coming would be known to take place within forty years, that is before the passing of the generation of the disciples (Mt 24:34), but the day and the hour of His arrival would be unknown in advance (Mt 24:34-36; Mk 13:30-32).

It should not be thought that the Messianic birth pains would only relieve the Church from Jewish persecution. In Romans, Paul stated that the whole creation had been groaning with the pains of childbirth until his time to be adopted by God and redeemed from sin and death (Rom 8:22-23). Since it is righteous humanity that longs for these things, the creation in this passage should be understood accordingly. Paul was teaching that all who had lived before his generation would be included in a redemption that would liberate them from sin and death. In agreement with Christ’s prediction that this would occur before the passing of those who lived in the first century (Lk 21:20-31), Paul stated that this glorious redemption was about to (Gr. mellousan) take place (Rom 8:18).

Both Isaiah and Hosea confirm that the Messianic birth pains of first-century Judah would not only redeem those who would be alive at that time but also all the righteous who had longed for deliverance in the past. Notice, Isaiah prophesied that when God would punish Judah for her iniquity all the blood shed on the earth, the labor pains of the land would give birth to the dead (Is 26:19-21). Hosea also prophesied that Israel would store up her iniquity until God would send birth pangs of judgment upon her, and ransom his people from the grave (Hos 13:12-13). According to Jesus, it was the Jews of His generation that would fill up the iniquity of their fathers, and
the blood of all the prophets would be avenged upon them at the desolation of their house of worship (Mt 23:29ff.). This clearly related to the judgment that would come upon Judah in AD 70. The labor pains that would result in the resurrection of the dead therefore must have taken place at that time. Paul confirms this in 1 Corinthians, for he cited both Hosea and Isaiah’s prophecy that God would ransom the dead when Israel would fill up the measure of her sin the birth pains of judgment would seize her, and he maintained that these prophecies would be fulfilled at the coming of the Lord to raise the dead (1 Cor 15:54-55; cf. Is 25:8; Hos 13:14). (See comments on 1 Cor 15:42-44.)

9) "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."

Both Luke and Mark’s account of the Olivet Discourse also include this warning to the disciples (Lk 21:12-17; Mk 13:11-13). In Luke’s account, Jesus states that before all these things, that is the birth pains that He had described, the disciples would be persecuted, delivered to synagogues and prisons, and brought before kings and governors for His name sake (Lk 21:12). Earlier in Matthew, Jesus had also warned His disciples that they would face these trials (Mt 10:17-18). John’s Gospel contains similar warnings as well (Jn 15;18ff.). Jesus also told Peter, James, and John specifically that they would be martyred for their faith (Mt 20:20-23; Mk 10:35-39; Jn 21:18-19).

The New Testament confirms that the disciples were persecuted as Jesus had foretold. Acts records the arrest and flogging of the disciples Peter and John by Jewish authorities (Acts 4:3-22;
5:17-42). It speaks of the martyrdom of the disciple James (John’s brother) at the hands of Herod and another imprisonment of Peter (Acts 12:1-5). Peter wrote of how he was enduring a fiery trial along with the early Church (1 Pt 4:12-17), and John called himself a partner in the tribulation of the saints (Rv 1:9).

As Christ later explains in the Olivet discourse, the tribulation of the disciples would take place before the great tribulation that would be present when the end of the age would arrive (Mt 24:21). John taught this in Revelation as well, for after stating that he was a partner with the Church in a tribulation (Rv 1:9), he spoke of a greater tribulation that was about to come upon the whole world (Rv 3:10).

10) "And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. 11) And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. 12) And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold."

(See comments on 2 Pt 3:1-4.)

13) "But the one who endures to the end will be saved."

It should not be thought that Christ was promising to save the lives of the Jews who would remain faithful to His Word by delivering them from the destruction of their capital, for such a promise would have proven false, as multitudes of Christians were martyred for their devotion to Jesus toward the end of the Jewish age. (See comments on Mt 24:21-22.) Furthermore, while the prophets assured the Jewish remnant that Christ would save them at His coming (Heb 1:14; 9:28; 1 Pt 1:3-13),
they also promised believing Gentiles who lived great distances from Jerusalem, that Christ would deliver them (Rom 13:11; 1 Thes 5:8-9; 2 Thes 1:5-8). Jesus was therefore speaking of a salvation beyond physical deliverance for both Jews and Gentiles, the salvation that brings eternal life.

Though Christ associated endurance with salvation and eternal life, this does not mean that the good works of believers would merit these things. The Bible clearly teaches that such blessings are not attained by works; rather, they are gifts from God (Eph 2:8-9; Rom 3:23-24). The fact that they are gifts means that they cannot require works, for as Paul recorded, if one must work for the justification that brings eternal life, then it would no longer be a gift, but due wages (Rom 4:4-5; cf. 3:23-24 and 11:6).

Unfortunately, many have rejected this teaching, asserting that both faith and works are necessary for salvation. In defense of their position, they often cite a declaration by James that a man is saved by works and not by faith alone (Jas 2:24). Upon first glance, this statement certainly appears to contradict Paul’s teaching that one is justified by faith apart from works (Rom 3:28). However, this controversy is easily resolved when we recognize that James was using the word "faith" to speak of an acknowledgment of facts (Jas 2:19), whereas Paul was using it to speak of a belief involving trust in Jesus (Rom 3:26). Certainly, a faith that is merely an acknowledgment of facts does not result in salvation, and, as James explained, a saving faith always produces works (Jas 2:14ff.).

There are those who have also suggested that although salvation is a gift, some who initially receive it may commit
some sin that results in them forfeiting eternal life. However, Jesus made it very clear that He would give eternal life to everyone that the Father would draw to Him (Jn 6:37-45). Those who truly feared the Father would be given to the Son, and everyone given to the Son would be resurrected on the last day (Ibid.). As Paul recorded in Philippians, the One who begins His saving work is faithful to complete it (Phil 1:6).

The Bible does not teach that people cease to belong to Christ because they depart the faith; rather, it teaches that people depart the faith because they did not belong to Christ (1 Jn 2:19). Endurance therefore evidences true faith whereas apostasy demonstrates that one does not truly possess salvation (Heb 6:4-9).

14 "And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

The end would arrive only after the gospel would be preached throughout the world. The word that Christ used for "world" in this verse is the Greek word "oikumene." The Greeks originally used this word to speak of the land that they inhabited as opposed to the lands inhabited by others, and it was later used to speak of the land governed by the Roman Empire. The New Testament contains several examples of this usage: Caesar was said to have called for a census of all the world when he did so of the citizens of his empire (Lk 2:1); a famine was said to have come upon all the world when it came upon the Roman provinces during the reign of Claudius (Acts 11:28); the apostles were said to have turned the world upside down when they did so by preaching the gospel throughout the empire (Acts 17:6);
Artemis was said to have been worshipped by the world to speak of how she had been worshipped all over Rome (Acts 19:27); and the apostles were charged with stirring up the Jews throughout the world when they had done so by aggravating the Jews who lived throughout the empire (Acts 24:5). Josephus also spoke of Jerusalem's fame and influence throughout the world when he spoke of its notoriety in the Roman provinces (Wars 6.10.1). It is therefore perfectly acceptable to understand Jesus to be prophesying that the gospel would be preached throughout the Roman world before the time of the end and not the entire planet (Mt 24:34), and His prediction that this would take place before the passing of His generation (Mt 24:34) should compel this understanding.

Jesus elsewhere charged His disciples to preach the gospel to all nations throughout the world, assuring them that He would be with them to the end of the age (Mk 16:15; Mt 28:19-21; Acts 1:8). It is clear that this commission related to the Lord's prophecy of the proclamation of the gospel to the world, for both were to be completed by the end of the age. This age, as demonstrated, referred to the end of the Jewish dispensation and not a supposed end of time. (See comments on Mt 24:3.) The Lord's commission to the disciples would therefore be fulfilled by the time of the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.

The New Testament substantiates beyond any doubt that the gospel was proclaimed to all nations throughout the world before the end of the Jewish age. In fact, the identical language used to describe this commission was later used to speak of its fulfillment. The Lord had told His disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (Gr. kitisis) (Mk 16:15) and make disciples of all nations (Gr. ethnos)
Paul later recorded that the gospel had been preached to every creature (Gr. kitisis) under heaven (Col 1:23) and had been made known to all nations (Gr. ethnos) (Rom 16:26). He wrote also that the faith of the saints was proclaimed throughout the world (Rom 1:8) and was bearing fruit in the whole world (Col 1:5-6). (See also 1 Tm 3:16; 2 Tm 4:17.)

Several notable commentators have also cited Paul's statement in Romans that the witness of God had gone out to the ends of the world (Rom 10:18) to prove the fulfillment of Christ's prediction regarding the proclamation of the gospel throughout the world (Mt 24:14). This may seem like a reasonable understanding of Paul's words; however, a closer study of his statement demonstrates that Paul's teaching was not related to the fulfillment of the Lord's prediction. It is important to note that Paul was citing an Old Testament passage when he asserted that such testimony had gone out. When an inspired apostle does this, the meaning of the cited passage should be honored. This hermeneutic is vital for understanding the New Testament writers, and it is hoped that this will be demonstrated throughout this commentary. Now, the passage cited by Paul in Romans is Psalm 19:4. This Psalm speaks of how the natural creation testifies of a Creator (Ps 19:1-6). Paul cited this passage in response to the question of how those who had not heard the gospel could be saved (Rom 10:14-15). He was teaching that Gentiles could be saved without hearing the specifics of the gospel because the testimony of the natural creation is sufficient to prompt them to call upon God for salvation, that is to sustain them beyond death (Rom 10:12-18). This understanding not only recognizes the context of the quoted Psalm but also the broader context of Romans, for Paul
taught conversely in this letter that Gentiles who had not heard the gospel were without excuse for rejecting it, because they had rejected the testimony of the natural creation that there is a Creator (Rom 1:19-20).

15) "So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),"

Luke recorded a parallel account of these words that makes it easy to determine their meaning with certainty. In Luke's account, Jesus told His disciples that when they would see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, they would know that her desolation was near (Lk 21:20). The abomination would therefore relate to the Roman armies, and the desolation would speak of the resulting abolishment of the Jewish state. It is probable that Luke described this event plainly rather than recording the Lord's reference to Daniel's prophecy because he was writing to a Gentile audience who would have been less familiar with this prophecy.

In November of AD 66, the Roman general Cestius Gallus surrounded Jerusalem with armies thus fulfilling the Lord's prediction (Wars 2.19.4). These armies carried banners with the image of an eagle which was an abomination to the Jews. As Josephus informs us, the rulers of Judah had earlier resisted the attempt of the Roman general Vitellius to march his troops through Judea because they considered the image on their banners to be a violation of the Torah (Antiq. 18.5.3). Notably, even Josephus recognized that the desolation of Jerusalem that shortly followed this event fulfilled Daniel's prophecy concerning the abomination of desolation (Antiq. 10.11.7).
16) "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 17) Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, 18) and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. 19) And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! 20) Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath."

These warnings clearly related to a first-century people and not to a far distant, future generation. The Lord's instructions were for those who dwelled on housetops which was the common practice of the Jews (Dt 22:8) but is no longer. Traveling while pregnant or with infants would have been extremely difficult for the people of that time because they traveled on horseback, but such things would pose only minor inconveniences to the modern traveler. There were strict limitations for journeying on the Sabbath in the first century, and the Jews observed them even during times of war (Antiq. 13.8.4); however, there are very few people who observe any restrictions for travel on the Sabbath today. The last impedance, winter, kept even the most formidable of armies from advancing during the generation of the disciples (Wars 1.17.6; 4.8.1; 4.10.2), but only a severe storm would disrupt a modern transportation and not the season in general to which Christ refers.

Josephus provides evidence that many Jews of who lived in the first century heeded the warnings given in these verses. He recorded that when the Jews saw the armies of Cestius Gallus surrounding the city, a great number of them fled from it as though it was to be taken immediately (Wars 2.19.6). Remarkably, however, the courage of the Roman general
suddenly failed and he ordered his armies to retreat without any reason (Wars 2:19.7). This was undoubtedly an act of Providence as the withdrawal of these armies afforded many Jews the opportunity to heed the Lord’s instruction, and they in fact fled the city like men from a sinking ship (Wars 2.20.1).

The Lord gave the command for an immediate flight from Jerusalem because He foresaw that escape would eventually be impossible. In the parable of the ten virgins, Jesus warned the Jews that if they were not prepared for His coming, an event that He related to the dismantling of their temple in the Olivet Discourse, the time would come when a door would be shut, and thus their fate would be sealed (Mt 25:1-13). In plainer language, He told the Jews on His way to the crucifixion that the days were coming when their enemies would set a barricade around their city, hemming them in on every side before tearing it down, leaving not one stone upon another (Lk 19:43-44). It was the Roman general Vespasian who fulfilled the prediction concerning this barricade, for subsequent to the retreat of Cestus Gallus, Vespasian built a fortress around Jerusalem, depriving the Jews of the liberty of going out from their city (Wars 4.9.1, 10). Thus, the fate of all those who had not fled the city would be sealed, and those remaining would mourn at the coming of the Lord against them (Mt 24:30).

Matthew 24
Part 3

21) "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. 22) 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."

Jesus prophesies that a great tribulation would be present at the time of the abomination of desolation. He later adds that immediately after the days of this tribulation, His coming would take place and cause all the tribes of the earth to mourn (Mt 24:29-30). Thus, two distinct periods of suffering would arrive at the time of the end: a great tribulation followed by a time of tribal mourning.

Both Daniel and Revelation also prophesied of two specific periods of hardship that would arrive at the time of the end: one would be against the saints, the other against the Jews, and each would last three and a half years. Regarding the period against the saints, Daniel prophesied that a king would wear out the saints for a time, times and half a time (Dn 7:24-25), and Revelation predicted that a beast would be given authority for forty-two months, during which time he would make war against the saints (Rv 13:5-8). (See Rv 12:6, 14 where a time, times and half a time is equated to 1,260 days, that is three and a half years, and should therefore be understood as one year plus two years plus a half year.) Concerning the period against the Jews, Daniel prophesied that the power of his holy people would be shattered after a time, times and half a time (Dn 12:7), and Revelation predicted that the holy city would be trampled for forty-two months (Rv 11:2). (These prophecies will be addressed in greater detail below.)

The great tribulation, that is the first time of suffering that was to arrive at the time of the end (Mt 24:21-22, 29-30), would answer to the period of persecution against the saints.
Revelation teaches this, for it predicted that an innumerable company of saints would come out of the great tribulation and stand before God's throne where there would be no more suffering, and God would wipe away every tear from their eyes (Rv 7:9-17). This undoubtedly referred to a comfort that would be afforded the elect in the afterlife, and thus Revelation was picturing the slaughter of a multitude of believers. This is confirmed by Jesus, for He prophesied that the great tribulation would be cut short for the sake of the elect so that not all flesh would perish (Mt 24:22; Mk 13:20; Lk 18:8). Since these days were to be cut short for the sake of the elect, then clearly these days would be troubling them. It cannot be supposed that the shortening of this tribulation would result in a vast number of saints escaping it to remain on earth, for this would contradict a prophecy that Jesus had made earlier in His ministry. In this prophecy, Jesus promised that God would avenge the blood of the elect quickly, yet, even so, He wondered if He would find any faith on the earth at His coming (Lk 18:8). This wondering plainly implies that there would not be an innumerable company of believers remaining on earth after the time of their slaughter before the Lord's coming. Thus the vast multitude of believers that Revelation pictured coming out of the great tribulation would be those who had died for their faith.

Daniel's prophecy of the wearing out of the saints at the time of the end soundly identifies the instigator of this persecution as emperor Nero. In this prophecy, Daniel recorded that four beasts would arise from the earth that would symbolize four successive kingdoms (Dn 7). In an earlier prophecy, Daniel identified the first of these kingdoms as Babylon (Dn 2:37-38), and history informs us that the three succeeding empires were
Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Notably, Daniel prophesied that the fourth beast would have ten horns and this would distinguish it from the other beasts (Dn 7:7). This supports the understanding that the fourth beast symbolized Rome, for this empire had ten senatorial provinces, and these distinguished Rome from the preceding empires which were strictly monarchical. (Since ten is the number of biblical completion, it is also fitting to see these horns as standing for all the Roman provinces.) Daniel went on to record that a little horn with eyes like a man would rise in the midst of the ten horns and put down three of them (Dn 7:8, 24). The description of this horn to have the eyes of a man signals that he is different than the other horns, a personal ruler, and his putting down of three horns would symbolize the putting down of three provinces. Nero, in fact, did this during his reign, putting down the provinces of Britain, Armenia, and Syria when they rebelled against him. Daniel also prophesied that the little horn would speak great things and persecute the saints for a time, times and half a time, that is three and a half years (Dn 7:24-25). Nero certainly spoke great blasphemies against God, and he began a severe persecution of the saints near the close of his reign for starting the fires of Rome (Anals 15:44). According to Tacitus, Nero did this to stop the rumor that he was responsible for these fires (Ibid). During this time, Nero dressed Christians in the skins of wild animals and had them torn apart by dogs (Ibid). He also fastened them to crosses and set them on fire to light his garden (Ibid). Tacitus went on to record that Nero persecuted them so vehemently that even though the citizens of Rome held that such a crime deserved a severe punishment, they began to pity them, because it became obvious that they were being sacrificed not for the welfare of the State but to satisfy the cruelty of a single man (Ibid). Since
Daniel tells us that it is an individual who would wage war against the saints for three and a half years; this specific persecution could not have extended past the death of that individual. Nero began persecuting the Christians shortly after the fires which took place in the summer of AD 64, and he died in June of AD 68. This means that Nero waged war less than four years against Christians, and this agrees with the prophecy that believers would be persecuted for three and a half years. Identifying Nero's persecution of the saints as the great tribulation also agrees with the Lord's prediction that it would be present when the abomination of desolation would take place, as this occurred in AD 66. (See comments on Mt 24:14.) Thus, the great tribulation would be the persecution of Christians by Nero.

Revelation's prophecy of the war against the saints at the time of the end further supports that it would be waged by Nero. In this prophecy, John saw a king who was called a beast, for he personified the fourth satanic empire (Rev 13, 17). This king, like the little horn in Daniel's prophecy, reigned alongside ten horns (Rev 13:1; 17:12-13; Dan 7:7-8), had a mouth speaking great things (Rev 13:5-6; Dan 7:8, 11, 20), and would persecute the saints for three and a half years (Rev 13:5-7; 17:14; Dan 7:21-25) yet would not overcome them (Rev 17:14; Dan 7:21-22). These correlations clearly demonstrate that both John and Daniel were prophesying of the same ruler. Now, John further described this figure as a sixth king (Rev 17:9-10) and recorded that the number of his name was six hundred and sixty-six (Rev 13:8). Nero was sixth in the line of Caesars, and by means of gematria, the Hebrew spelling of his name totals six hundred and sixty-six. This emperor was therefore undeniably the tyrant who would persecute the saints during the great tribulation.
This is the first three-and-a-half year period of suffering that would arrive at the time of the end.

Incidentally, it seems likely that Paul was also discussing Nero when he spoke of a man of sin who would be slain at the Lord’s coming (2 Thes 2:3ff.). Some have objected to this, however, for Paul stated that this man of sin would exalt himself over every so-called god and take his seat in God’s temple (2 Thes 2:3-4), yet Nero never made any such claims in the temple of the Jews. However, in speaking of this temple, Paul used a word which referred to God’s dwelling place in heaven (Gr. naos) and not the word which referred to the Herodian temple (Gr. heron). It may therefore be concluded that Paul, like the prophets before him, was using figurative language to predict how this king would exalt himself to the highest heavens, only to be brought down by the hand of God (cf. Is 14:4-21; Ez 28:2-19; Dn 11:36). Furthermore, Paul went on to state more things about this man that related appropriately to Nero. He recorded that this man was being restrained from power at the time of his letter which was AD 52 (2 Thes 2:6). This would apply to Nero, for he did not become Caesar until AD 54. The time of Nero’s death also agrees with Paul’s prediction that He would be brought nothing at the Lord’s coming (2 Thes 2:8), for Nero was driven to suicide in AD 68 during the Jewish-Roman war which was to coincide with the Messiah’s second visitation against Israel. (See comments on Mt 24:3.)

The time of the tribal mourning, that is the second period of suffering that was to arrive at the time of the end (Mt 24:21-22, 29-30), would therefore answer to the outpouring of wrath against the Jews that was predicted in Daniel and
Revelation. This undoubtedly referred to the Jewish-Roman war. A comparison of Luke's account of the Olivet Discourse with a prophecy recorded in Revelation makes this abundantly clear. In Luke's account, Jesus said that there would be a great tribulation and then added that Jerusalem would be trampled by the Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles would be fulfilled (Lk 21:21). This statement directly correlates to a prophecy in Revelation that the holy city containing the temple would be trampled by the Gentiles for forty-two months (Rv 11:2). In the spring of AD 67, Nero began directing his attention to the uprising of the Jews and commissioned Vespasian to march against their city, and Jerusalem was destroyed three and a half years later in the fall of AD 70. Thus, the power of the holy people was completely shattered after a time, times and half a time (Dn 12:7), and the second period of suffering at the time of the end was fulfilled.

Revelation contains another vision that confirms the above understanding of the sequencing and nature of the two intervals of hardship that were to take place near the time of the end. In Revelation 12, it is stated that after the persecution of a woman who had born the Messiah, she would find rest for 1,260 days, and during this time, the land would swallow a flood that Satan had spewed out against her (Rv 12:6-16). Though it was Mary who literally gave birth to the Messiah, it is clear that this woman symbolized something more, as the events described do no relate to her life. Understanding this woman as the faithful elect of Israel, a remnant that may be appropriately symbolized by Mary, shows us that after the persecution of these saints during the great tribulation, those who remained alive would find relief when the river that Satan had directed toward them would be swallowed by the land. The
land in this passage should be understood as the land of Judah, for it is this land that stands in contrast to the sea which symbolizes the Gentiles in Scripture (Is 21:1; 60:5; Rv 17:15). Applying this meaning to the imagery reveals that the flood of Gentiles that Satan had directed to persecute the saints would then be directed to trouble the land of Judah. In light of Revelation's prophecy that Jerusalem would be trampled for three and a half years (Rv 11:2), it is clear that the 1,260 days that follow the persecution of the saints and gives them rest answers to the period of the Jewish-Roman war.

Though the persecution of the saints and the outpouring of wrath against the Jews would each last three and a half years, a slight overlap of these intervals would result in the combined duration of these periods lasting just over six years (from the summer of AD 64 to the fall of AD 70). Remarkably, Daniel 8 predicted this as well. This oracle begins with the description of a little horn belonging to a fourth empire who would rise up against the Prince of Princes and make war against the saints (Dn 8:8-9, 11, 24-25). These things were all predicted in Daniel's vision of the four beasts (Dn 7:8, 21, 25) and, as demonstrated, spoke of Nero's persecution of the saints. Daniel 8 also prophesied of a trampling of the temple which would cause offerings to cease and a desolation taking place (Dn 8:11-13). These things were prophesied in Daniel's prophecy of the 70 weeks and his oracle of the shattering of the Jewish power and, as noted, related to the Jewish-Roman war (Dn 9:26-27; 12:7, 11). The suggestion that Daniel 8 does not parallel these other prophecies but only describes similar things belonging to different periods must be disregarded, for Daniel 8 and the prophecies above that related to the destruction of Jerusalem, all claimed to be prophesying of things that were to
take place at the time of the end (Dn 8:17, 19; cf. 9:26-27; 12:4, 9, 13). Now, according to Daniel 8, all these things would all take place over 2,300 evenings and mornings (Dn 8:14), that is just over six years. Thus the combined duration of the great tribulation and the Jewish-Roman war was predicted by Daniel in an extremely detailed manner and fulfilled in a truly incredible manner.

23) "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. 24) For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. 25) See, I have told you beforehand. 26) 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."

(See comments on Mt 24:4.)

27) "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."

Jesus contrasts the arrival of false messiahs in the wilderness and in inner rooms with the arrival of the true Messiah which would be like lightening in the sky. The former appearances would require travel and investigation whereas the latter appearance would not require such things for it would be obvious. His disciples would therefore not miss His coming. (See comments on 1 Cor 15:51-54.)

28) "Wherever the corpse is, there the eagles [Gr. aetoi] will be gathered together."
Jesus spoke of the above event on two occasions (Mt 24:28; Lk 17:37), and several English translations render the Greek word "aetoi" as "vultures" in these instances. However, these same translations and others render this word as "eagles" in all its other appearances in the New Testament (Rv 4:7; 8:13; 12:14). This is the primary definition of the word. The reason that several versions offer the alternate translation of "vultures" is evidently because these are typically the birds that gather around corpses. However, Jesus did not state in an active form that these birds "will gather." Rather, He stated in a passive form that they "will be gathered" (Gr. sunachthesonta). As the context of this statement demonstrates, it is the Lord who would gather these birds, for He spoke of His coming immediately before declaring that these birds would be gathered (Mt 24:27). The translation of "aetoi" according to its primary meaning reveals that Christ was associating His coming with the gathering of Roman armies to desolate the Jewish capital. According to Josephus, banners of eagles were at the head of every Roman legion, for the Romans believed that this was the king of all birds and thus represented their dominion and served as an omen that they would conquer all their enemies (Wars 3.6.2; see also 5.2.1). As noted, Christ made a reference to these banners earlier in speaking of an abomination that would desolate Jerusalem. (See comments on Mt 24:15.) During the Jewish-Roman war, the Lord would gather these forces around innumerable Jewish corpses (Wars 6.6.7), and they would bring their banners not only into the city but also into the most holy place of temple (Wars 6.7.2.)

29) "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."

It has been demonstrated that the tribulation referred to Nero’s persecution of Christians. (See comments on Mt 24:21.) Jesus was therefore predicting that the sun, moon, and stars would fail immediately after this persecution. It should be apparent that Jesus was not speaking literally but symbolically. The heavenly lights stood for the governing powers of Judah. Immediately after Nero’s persecution of the saints, the Romans would march against the Jews, and their rulers and dignitaries would be shaken and fall from their high seats of authority at the undoing of their nation. The disciples would have understood the Lord to be speaking symbolically of the destruction of their state, for their prophets often used de-creation imagery to predict the ruin of kingdoms, and Jesus was answering their question about when their capital would be destroyed. (See also comments on 2 Pt 3:10b.)

Luke’s account of the Olivet Discourse records that before the shaking of the heavenly powers, there would be signs in the heavens and on the earth that would forebode of what was to come upon the earth and cause people to faint with fear (Lk 21:25-26). Josephus recorded the fulfillment of these words, for he wrote that the Jews saw omens that foretold of their coming demise and were thus exceedingly sad and made great lamentations when they perceived that the Romans would wage war against them (Wars 2.22.1). Josephus detailed many of these signs, all of which appeared just before the outbreak of the Jewish-Roman war in AD 66: He wrote of how a star resembling a sword appeared above Jerusalem, and a comet continued for a whole year (Wars 6.5.3). He recorded that a
week before the Passover, at 3:00 am, a great light appeared around the temple for a half hour that made the night as bright as day (Wars 6.5.3). He wrote that on Passover, as a high priest was preparing to slaughter a virgin cow, it gave birth to a lamb in the midst of the temple (Wars 6.5.3). He recorded that at midnight on Passover, the eastern gate of the temple, which was vastly heavy and difficult for twenty men to shut, opened by itself (Wars 6.5.3; cf. Zec 11:1). He wrote that a few days after Passover, a vision of armies appeared in the clouds circling Jerusalem (Wars 6.5.3). He recorded that on Pentecost, as the priests were going into the temple to perform their duties, they felt the earth tremble and heard a voice of many multitudes proclaim "let us depart" (Ibid). Tacitus also wrote of these heavenly armies, the trembling of the earth and the sounding of this great voice (Histories 5.13). Thus the words of Jesus were fulfilled.

30a) "Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man,"

The literal translation of the Greek in this verse reads as follows: then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. It is not a sign that would appear in heaven; rather, a sign would appear that the Son of Man was in heaven. The sign that would take place immediately after the Neronic persecution to show that Jesus had been enthroned in heaven would be His direction of the Romans against the Jews who had instigated His crucifixion and the persecution of His Church.

30b) "and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn,"
It was earlier shown that the time of the tribal morning related to a period of three and a half years when Israel would be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles during the Jewish-Roman war. (See comments on Mt 24:21). This suggests that the tribes who would mourn at this time would be the tribes of Israel. This view is further supported in that the New Testament writers often used the word "tribes" without any qualifier to speak of the Jewish tribes (Mt 19:28; Lk 2:36; 22:30; Acts 13:21; Rom 11:1; Heb 7:13; Phi 3:5; Jas 1:1; Rev 5:5; 7:4-9; 21:12). Furthermore, the word that Christ used for "earth" in this verse is the Greek word "ge" which means "land," a word that is appropriate for a region such as Judah.

It has been argued, however, that the phrase "all the tribes of the earth" has no reference to Israel, because the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament that was prevalent in the first century) uses the phrase "all the tribes of the earth" four times to refer to the nations that were outside of Israel (Gn 12:3; 28:14; Amos 3:2; Zech 14:17). However, John, who heard Jesus use this phrase, clearly understood it to speak of the tribes of Israel. This is apparent, for in Revelation, John quoted a prophecy in Zechariah that was directed solely against Israel and repeatedly predicted that her tribes would mourn over the piercing of the Messiah; then he immediately added "all the tribes of the earth shall mourn," thus applying the identical phrase that Jesus had used to the Jewish tribes only (Rv 1:7; cf. Zech 12:10-14).

It has also been asserted that since Zechariah's prophecy concerned a mourning over the piercing of the Messiah, it spoke of grieving of repentance due to an acknowledgment of guilt rather than to a mourning of despair, such as the Jews
would experience at the desolation of their city. However, a lamentation that results from an acknowledgment of guilt by no means necessitates repentance. This is plainly demonstrated by Judas whose mourning over his betrayal of the Messiah drove him to despair and not repentance, causing him to take his own life (Mt 27:3-5; Acts 1:16-18). Undoubtedly, the destruction of the Jerusalem would cause many Jews to recognize that they had betrayed the Messiah and drive them to mourn as Judas had mourned, for this judgment would have proven beyond any doubt that Jesus was a prophet who had been sent by God. Thus, the mourning prophesied by Zechariah would relate appropriately to the desolation of Judah in the first century.

Nevertheless, even if both Jesus and John were prophesying that all nations would mourn in repentance at the coming of the Lord, this would still find fulfillment at the destruction of Jerusalem. This is taught in Revelation, for it is prophesied here that rulers and people throughout the earth would lament over the destruction of the great city Babylon (Rv 18), that is the city where the Lord was slain (Rv 11:2). Upon witnessing the fulfillment of the Lord’s prophecy regarding the destruction of that city, that is Jerusalem, a great many from all nations would recognize that their generation had crucified the Son of God and thus repent and receive His gospel. Jerusalem’s fall has, in fact, has caused many throughout the centuries to embrace the gospel, as this destruction vindicated the Lord’s prophecy of that city’s fate and thus proved Him to be the Messiah of Israel.

Matthew 24
Part 4
30c) "and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

The Bible associates the coming of the Lord with a judgment upon the Jewish state in numerous ways. This is seen in the passage before us, for Jesus spoke of His coming in response to His disciples asking about when the temple would be destroyed and the age related to it would end (Mt 24:1-30-34; Mk 13:1-4, 26-30; Lk 21:5-7, 27-32). In the parable of the ten minas, Christ also taught that at His return, He would slay the citizens of His nation who had refused His reign (Lk 19:12ff.). This is an unmistakable reference to the slaughter of the Jews who had rejected Him as their King. In the parable of the tenants, Jesus again affirmed that His coming would be against the rulers of Judah, and they understood this to be the meaning of the parable (Mt 21:40-45; Mk 12:9-12; Lk 20:9ff.; cf. Is 5:1-7). In Romans, Paul stated that the Lord’s coming would fulfill a prophecy in Isaiah concerning the judgment of Israel for shedding the blood of the righteous (Rom 11:26-27; cf. Is 59), and Jesus had promised that this blood would be avenged upon the Jewish leaders of His generation when their house would be left desolate (Mt 23:31-36; Lk 23:28-21). Paul told the Thessalonians that Christ would come against those who were persecuting them (2 Thes 1:4ff.), and Acts informs us that it was the Jews who were persecuting the Christians at Thessalonica (Acts 17:1ff.). In Hebrews, Paul warned the Jews not to be overtaken by the judgment prophesied against them in the Song of Moses (Heb 10:26ff.; Dt 32:20, 29), and then declared that Christ would return in a very little while to enact this judgment (Heb 10:37-39). Revelation, as noted, also teaches that the Lord’s coming would result in the fall of the great city
where He was slain, that is first-century Jerusalem (Rv 16:15ff.; cf. 11:8).

In harmony with the view that the Lord’s coming would take place at the overthrowing of Jerusalem at AD 70, the apostles announced throughout the New Testament that the coming of the Lord was near in their day. Their statements regarding this fact are so numerous and varied, they simply cannot be reasonably interpreted otherwise. Paul told the Philippians that the Lord was at hand (Phil 4:5), and he did so in speaking of the resurrection (Phil 3:10ff.). He assured the Thessalonians that God would relieve their present suffering by means of the second coming (2 Thes 1:5-8). He told Timothy to keep the faith until Christ’s return (1 Tm 6:13-14) and assured him that Jesus was about to (Gr. mellontos) appear (2 Tm 4:1). In Hebrews, Paul declared that Christ would come in a very little while and would not delay (Heb 10:37). James told his readers to wait for the coming of the Lord for He was at hand, even at the door (Jas 5:7-9). Peter recorded that Christ was ready to judge the living and the dead (1 Pt 4:5). The Spirit of God in fact repeatedly assured those who were eagerly awaiting the Lord’s return in the first century that He would appear to them (1 Cor 1:6-8; Col 3:4; 2 Tm 4:1; Heb 9:28).

Jesus also prophesied that His coming was near and would take place within the lifetime of some of His contemporaries. He not only told His disciples that He would come in glory before the passing of their generation (Mt 24:33-34; Mk 13:28-29; Lk 21:27, 32) but also that the Son of Man would come before they could personally witness to all the cities in Israel (Mt 10:23). On another occasion, He announced to a crowd that some of them would not taste death before He
would come in His kingdom (Mt 16:27-28; Mk 8:38-9:1; Lk 9:26-27). During His trial, Jesus told the Sanhedrin that they would not only see Him exalted but also witness His coming in glory (Mt 26:64-66; Mk 14:62-64). In Revelation, Christ told first-century churches that He would come to them for reward or punishment (Rv 2:25; 3:3-11), and at the close of this book, He affirmed the nearness of His coming no less than three times (Rv 22:7, 12, 20).

31) "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."

There are those who believe that the gathering of the elect would involve living believers escaping death and being translated directly into the kingdom of heaven in the afterlife. Adherents of this view who also believe in the past fulfillment of biblical prophecy often place this event at the beginning of the Lord’s second visitation against Israel, that is at the outbreak of the Jewish-Roman war. However, this kind of gathering could not have taken place at this time. As earlier demonstrated, the Lord’s second visitation would begin in the spring of AD 67, and Nero’s persecution of the saints would continue past this time. (See comments on Mt 24:21.)

Daniel 12 confirms that believers would be called to endure until the very end of the Jewish age. Here, Daniel prophesied that there would be 1,290 days from the time of the abomination of desolation to the time that the sacrifice would cease. This abomination, as noted, was the surrounding of Jerusalem by armies in November of AD 66. (See comments on Mt 24:14.) A period of 1,290 days would bring us to July of AD
70, just before the destruction of the temple. Remarkably, all Jewish sacrifices ceased at this time, and thus the fulfillment of the 1,290 days is observed. Now, immediately after speaking of this period, Daniel recorded that the one who would make it through the 1,335 days would be blessed. Understanding this to be a 45-day extension of the 1,290 days would bring us to the destruction of the temple in August of AD 70. Since the one who would endure through this entire period would be blessed, this means that if there was to be a translation of the saints into heaven, it would not be experienced until that time, that is at the very end of the Jewish age. (See comments on 1 Cor 15:23 and 51-54.)

32) "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. 33) So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. 34) "Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place."

In an attempt to postpone the fulfillment of the Olivet Discourse beyond the passing of the generation of the disciples, some have suggested that the fig tree in the above verse symbolizes the Jewish people, and thus when Jesus went on to state that this generation would not pass away until all His prophecies were fulfilled, He was saying that the race of the Jews would not pass away until all these things would be accomplished. Others who deny a first-century fulfillment of the Lord's prophecies have said that the fig tree answers to a generation that was not present at the time of the discourse, and thus Jesus was saying that a future generation that would witness the events of the discourse would not pass away before
everything had come to pass. However, such interpretations completely disregard the Lord's analogy of the fig tree. Jesus told His disciples that as the blossoming of the fig tree shows the nearness of summer, so all the things that He had been discussing would show the nearness of His return. The blossoming of the fig tree therefore answers to all the things that He had been discussing and not to a specific generation. Jesus was instructing His disciples that when they would see all the things that He had predicted, His coming would be near, and He went on to affirm that their generation would not pass away until all these things had been fulfilled.

The Lord's use of the near demonstrative "this" (Gr. haute) to describe the generation that would not pass away before the fulfillment of His words, along with His use of the second person plural (you) throughout His discourse to tell His disciples what some of them would see, should make it obvious that He was speaking of the generation then present. This understanding is soundly established by the Lord's repeated and consistent use of the word "generation" (Gr. genea) to refer to His contemporaries and to them alone. Earlier in Matthew, Jesus used this word to speak of unbelievers who were in His midst, and He asked them how long He would remain with them (Mt 17:17; see also Mk 9:19). This question clearly related to how long He would continue on earth with the generation that was then present. Later in Matthew, Jesus used the phrase "this generation" to speak of those who had accused Him of being a glutton and a drunkard for enjoying certain foods and drink and John the Baptist of having a demon for abstaining from them (Mt 11:16-19; Lk 7:31-35). These accusations were made by those who were living at that time, and Jesus certainly had no other generation in mind. In Luke, Jesus used
the phrase "this generation" to speak of those who would be given the sign of Jonah, a reference to His resurrection (Lk 11:29). Only those who were alive at that time would be given that sign; all other generations would rely solely on their testimony of it. Again in Luke, Jesus used the words "this generation" to speak of those who would reject Him and make Him suffer (Lk 17:25). This could only apply to the generation then present, for it was only during their lifetime that the Lord would suffer. Finally, in the chapter immediately preceding Matthew's account of the Olivet Discourse, Christ used the phrase "this generation," the identical language that He used in His Olivet Discourse (Gr. genea haute), to speak of those who would be judged for shedding the blood of the prophets, and He defined this judgment as the impending desolation of their house of worship (Mt 23:36; see also Lk 11:50-51). This was an unmistakable reference to the catastrophe of AD 70 that would come upon His contemporaries. Thus, Jesus repeatedly and without exception used the term "generation," even without the near demonstrative, to speak solely of His contemporaries. It is therefore reasonable and consistent to understand this word to mean the same in the Olivet Discourse, especially considering that it appears with the near demonstrative.

A comparison between the Olivet Discourse and an earlier prediction by Jesus in Matthew 10 demonstrates beyond any reasonable doubt that He was, in fact, declaring that the events belonging to the Olivet Discourse would take place before the passing of the generation then present. Notice the parallels between these prophecies: both were addressed to the original disciples of Jesus (Mt 10:1-5; 24:1-4); both predicted that they would be delivered to the courts and flogged in synagogues (Mt 10:17; Lk 21:12); both instructed them not to worry about what
they would say for the Holy Spirit would speak through them to the Gentile rulers (Mt 10:19-20; Lk 21:14-15); both predicted brother turning against brother, father against child, and children against parents (Mt 10:21; Lk 21:16); both foretold that the disciples would be hated by all nations and command them to endure until the end (Mt 10:22; 24:13); both warned the disciples to flee from these troublesome times (Mt 10:23; Lk 21:21); and both spoke of the Lord's return (Mt 10:23; 24:30). These numerous and direct correlations make it clear that both prophecies concerned the same coming of the Lord. Now, while Jesus concluded the Olivet Discourse by declaring that "this generation" would not pass away before all these things would take place (Mt 24:34), He closed His prophecy in Matthew 10 by telling His disciples that they would not be able to go through all the cities of Israel before the Son of Man would come (Mt 10:23). These statements together demonstrate decisively that Jesus was delimiting the fulfillment of the Olivet Discourse to the passing of the generation of His day.

It should also be noted that the Lord did not say that some of the prophecies in His Olivet Discourse would be fulfilled during the span of a generation but all of them. This means that the generation that would witness the fulfillment of one prediction would not pass away until all the rest of His prophecies would come to pass. It is undeniable that the contemporaries of Christ witnessed the fulfillment of His prophecy concerning the destruction of the temple. Consequently, all the rest of the Lord's prophecies must have taken place before that generation passed away. The fall of Jerusalem should therefore be understood to signify that everything predicted in the Olivet Discourse came to pass in the first century, including any events that might be unobservable to mortal eyes, such as the
arrival of the Messiah’s kingdom. As Luke recorded, the calamities preceding the downfall of Jerusalem would signify the nearness of this kingdom, yet the kingdom itself would not come with observation (Lk 21:31; 17:21). Christ would rule this world from the heavenly sphere, and the establishment of this reign would be signified by the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the Jewish age.

35) "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."

The passing of heaven and earth may be understood in light of the Lord’s teaching earlier in Matthew regarding this subject and the Jewish understanding of their temple. In this earlier teaching, Jesus declared that every word of the Torah would remain binding on the Jews until the passing of heaven and earth (Mt 5:17-18). The Torah is clearly no longer binding on the Jews. This means that heaven and earth must have passed away. Consequently, Jesus was not speaking of the passing of the literal heaven and earth. He was focused on the destruction of something that may have been referred to as such and was associated with the Torah, that is the temple. According to Josephus, the Jews understood that their temple was a representation of the natural heavens and earth (Antiq 3.6.4; 3.7.7). Josephus even called the most holy place "heaven" and explained that the veil before it was adorned to symbolize the earth (Antiq 3.6.4; see also 3.7.7). These things being so, it is evident that when Jesus assured His disciples near the close of His discourse that heaven and earth would pass away, He was declaring emphatically that the temple and nation governed by the Torah would be destroyed in the manner that He had predicted. (See comments on 2 Pt 3:10b.)
36) "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. 37) For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 38) 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, 39) and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 40) Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. 41) Two women will be grinding oat the mill; one will be taken and one left. 42) Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. 43) 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. 44) Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

It has been suggested that at this point in His discourse, the Lord shifts from speaking of His coming against Jerusalem to a different day and hour that would involve a distant and yet future coming of the Son of Man when the physical heavens and earth would pass away and be recreated. However, such a view is clearly influenced by tradition and not the context of this discourse. Jesus had given His disciples signs to indicate the nearness of His coming, and after assuring them that it would take place before the passing of their generation, He informs them that only the Father knew the day and hour, that is the precise time of His arrival. The arrival of the Lord would take place in the twinkling of an eye (1 Cor 15:52), but the
disciples would not be informed of this moment in advance. Thus, they were to remain awake and ready. The word that Christ used for "awake" is the Greek word "gregoreite" which means to be watchful. Notably, however, after telling His disciples to be watchful, Jesus does not mention any signs that would require watchfulness. He speaks only of things that would happen suddenly and without warning: a judgment that would be like the flood in Noah's day, something unexpected that would take one and leave another. Jesus therefore must have been admonishing His disciples to remain watchful for the signs that He had mentioned earlier in His discourse, the signs that would indicate that the destruction of Jerusalem was near. Consequently, these signs would not only indicate the nearness of the Jerusalem’s fall but also the nearness of the day and hour of which the Lord was speaking. This day and hour therefore related to the Lord’s coming against Jerusalem and not a distant and yet future coming at a supposed end of human history. (See comments 2 Pt 3:10a.)

The conclusion that the Olivet Discourse cannot be divided into an earlier section that speaks of the coming of Christ against Jerusalem and a latter section that speaks of a distant and yet future coming of the Lord is decidedly proven by a comparison between Matthew 24 and Luke 17. Notice that in the earlier section of Matthew 24, Jesus makes three statements about His coming against Jerusalem: He states that it would be like lightening (Mt 24:26-27); He tells His disciples to come down quickly from their housetops in those days (Mt 24:17-18); and He speaks of eagles gathering around a corpse (Mt 24:28). Then in the latter section, Jesus makes two statements about His coming that is supposedly distant and yet further: He compares it to the judgment of Noah’s flood (Mt 24:37-39), and
He states that one would be taken and another left (Mt 24:40-41). Those who believe that the latter section refers to a coming that has not yet occurred assert that the two statements relating to it show that it would be unexpected and unaccompanied by signs and this distinguishes it from the coming in the earlier section that would be preceded by signs. In Luke 17, however, Jesus clearly speaks of a single coming, and applies all five of the above statements to it in the following order: He states that it would be like lightning (Lk 17:23-24), compares it to the judgment of Noah’s flood (Lk 17:26-27), tells His disciples to come down quickly from their housetops in those days (Lk 17:31), states that one would be taken and another left (Lk 17:35-36) and then speaks of eagles gathering around a corpse (Lk 17:37). He thus relates things in the earlier and latter sections of Matthew 24 to a single coming, and it is widely recognized that He was speaking of a coming that would result in Jerusalem’s fall in Luke 17. The things relating to the day and hour of His return in the latter section of Matthew 24 therefore also relate to the coming described in the earlier section of this chapter, and both sections refer to the coming of the Lord against first-century Jerusalem.

There is simply no biblical support for two "second comings" of the Lord. The early Church clearly anticipated a single imminent return of Christ that would result in both the removal of the Old Covenant world and the completion of their redemption. Nowhere do the New Testament distinguish between a coming of Christ that was near and one that would be thousands of years away.
Jesus is the substance of biblical prophecy (Col 2:17). He would give prophecy its full and final meaning. The Old Covenant world was a physical type of the spiritual kingdom that Christ was to establish at His coming (Col 2:17; Heb 8-10). This spiritual kingdom would not typify a future physical kingdom because it is the physical that comes first and then the spiritual and not the reverse of this (1 Cor 15:46). The spiritual reality is the ultimate and eternal reality (2 Cor 4:18). If therefore the Lord has come and set up His kingdom in the spiritual realm, then the ultimate fulfillment of prophecy has been accomplished.

45) "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? 46) Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. 47) Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. 48) But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' 49) and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, 50) the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know 51) and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The Lord, foreseeing what would happen during the lifetime of His disciples, gives them suitable encouragement and admonition by means of a parable. They were to feed the household of God, and they did so by interpreting the prophets, revealing New Covenant doctrine and continuing to warn the Jews of the impending destruction of their nation. The reward that they and their fellow servants would receive for this service
would be not on earth but in heaven. (See comments on Rv 20:12-13.) Though decades would pass before the Messiah would come, they were not to conclude that His coming would be delayed. To conclude this would be to doubt that Christ would return to abolish Old Covenant Israel and establish His kingdom before the passing of their generation as He had promised. Such doubt would cause many to abandon the Christian faith and return to an observance of the Torah. It is apparent that this happened, for Hebrews was written in response to this very kind of apostasy. (See comments on 2 Pt 3:1-4.) Those who would forsake the gospel in this way would align themselves with the Jews who were persecuting the saints, and thus they would beat their fellow servants. Nevertheless, these unfaithful servants and rebellious Jews would be overtaken by the Lord’s return to desolate their capital where there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

1 Corinthians 15
Part 1

1) Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2) and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you -- unless you believed in vain.

Paul is preparing to address the assertion of some in Corinth that there is no resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:12). In suggesting that his readers might have believed the gospel in vain, Paul is introducing his argument that their faith would be worthless if there is no resurrection, for this would mean that Christ was not raised, and if Christ was not raised, then the gospel would be false and their faith would be of no
consequence, because it would give them no hope for the afterlife (1 Cor 15:14-19).

3) For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4) that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, It is the sacrifice of Christ's body and blood that atones for the sins of believers (Rom 3:25-26; 5:9-10; 1 Cor 11:23-25; Eph 1:7; 2:13; Col 1:20-22; Heb 9:12:ff.; 10:10ff.; 12:24; 13:12, 20). The Scriptures teach that Jesus somehow bore the sin of His people in His body, receiving the punishment for it (Is 53:4ff.; 1 Pt 2:24). He thus freed them from the curse of death that was due to them for their transgressions against God (Rom 6:23; Gal 3:13).

The resurrection of Jesus is also an essential element of the gospel. (See also Rom 10:9.) This is made clear not only in the above verses but also in those that follow. As Paul goes on to state, if Christ was not raised, then believers would still be dead in their sins (1 Cor 15:17). This harmonizes with Paul’s statement in Romans that Christ was raised for the justification of the saints (Rom 4:25). The Lord's resurrection was connected with God's declaration that He was innocent of the sin that had been imputed to Him (1 Tm 3:16; cf. 1 Pt 3:18). His resurrection therefore made it possible for those who would unite themselves to Him by faith to be declared innocent as well.

In stating that Christ's death and resurrection on the third day were according to the Scriptures, Paul refers to the writings of
Isaiah and Hosea (Is 53; Hos 6:2). Paul cites these prophets directly as he closes this chapter, showing that they also foretold the resurrection of Israel (1 Cor 15:54-55; cf. Is 25:8; Hos 13:14). Thus, Paul demonstrates that his readers were in error to affirm the resurrection of Christ but deny that His people would experience the same.

5) and that he [Jesus] appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6) Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7) Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8) Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. 9) For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10) But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. 11) Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed. 12) Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13) But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

In the above verses, Paul lays the foundation for his argument for the resurrection of the dead, that is the resurrection of Christ. Paul reminds his readers that Christ had been raised from the dead and so demonstrates that resurrection is possible. He then argues that the concept of resurrection therefore cannot be denied, for if it is denied, then it must also be denied for Christ.
14) And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. 15) We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. 16) For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. 17) And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. 18) Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

Paul lists conclusions to which the Corinthians would have objected, for he wants them to reconsider the faulty premise that would lead to such conclusions, namely that the dead are not raised. The Corinthians would have undoubtedly objected to the concept that dead Christians had perished, due to their acceptance of Greek philosophies which taught that the soul had no need for a body. Such beliefs were common near Corinth, and those who held them laughed at the notion of a resurrection, supposing that it involved the return of the soul to its former flesh (Acts 17:18, 32). The teachings of the Greeks were clearly influencing the Corinthian church because Paul interacted with these teachings as he attempted to persuade these believers of the coming resurrection (1 Cor 6:13; 15:32).

While the Bible agrees with the Greek concept that man is both body and soul (Gn 2:7; 35:18; Eccl 3:21; Is 10:18; Mt 10:28; Phil 1:23-24; 1 Cor 7:1; 2 Cor 5:8; Jas 2:26), it does not agree that the body is impertinent. Instead, it teaches that the body is essential to man and he is defined by the actions of his flesh (Gn 2:7; 1 Cor 6:13ff.; 15:35ff.; 2 Cor 5:1ff.). The departed would therefore not be fully redeemed unless each would be
restored as a duality of body and soul (1 Cor 15:35ff.; 2 Cor 5:1ff.).

While the Bible also agrees with the Greek notion that a soul remains conscious in the afterlife (1 Sm 28:3ff.; Mt 17:3; Mk 9:4; Lk 9:30-31; 16:19-30; Heb 12:23; Rv 6:9-10), it does not teach that such consciousness is eternal life. Rather, it teaches that eternal life involves fellowship with God (Jn 17:3). In the first century, departed souls had yet to be raised to heaven into God's presence (Jn 3:13). Therefore, while the departed remained conscious, they had yet to experience eternal life.

19) If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

Paul explains that if the dead are not raised, then there is no hope for those who had passed into the afterlife. If the departed would not be raised from Hades to heaven and receive a body, then they would remain in a state of destruction.

20) But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Paul has used the term "fallen asleep" twice already to refer to those who had physically died (1 Cor 15:6, 18). He is therefore teaching in this verse that Christ was the first to be raised of those who had physically died. Moreover, in calling Christ the firstfruits, Paul is asserting that the resurrection of Christ was the first of a coming harvest of souls. This means that the rest of those who had physically died would be raised as Christ had been raised.
The New Testament states in several passages that Christ was the first to be raised from the dead (Acts 26:23; Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:20, 23; Col 1:18; Rv 1:5). However, the Bible records several physical resurrections that took place before the Lord's resurrection (1 Kgs 17:22; 2 Kgs 4:32ff.; 13:20ff.; Mk 5:35ff.; Lk 7:14ff.; Jn 11:43ff.). It therefore follows that Jesus was the first to attain a different kind of resurrection. The resurrection that He was the first to attain was one from the underworld of Hades to receive a spiritual body. (See comments on 1 Cor 15:21.) As Paul recorded, though Christ was sown with a natural body, He was raised with a spiritual body (1 Cor 15:44-45). Peter taught this as well, stating that Christ was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit (1 Pt 3:18). When Christ's soul was raised out of Hades into His former body, this body was transformed into a glorious spiritual body (cf. Phil 3:21). This body possessed flesh and bone (Lk 24:39), was able to consume food (Lk 24:41-43) and apparently retained some continuity with His former flesh, for He was able to present the scars from His crucifixion (Jn 20:27; Lk 24:36-43). This demonstrates that the Lord was not raised as a disembodied spirit. Rather, He was restored to life as a duality of body and soul.

Some have suggested that since Christ's body was tangible, this means that His physical body was raised without any change. They further contend that since Paul taught that flesh and blood could not enter the kingdom of heaven (1 Cor 15:50), Christ's risen body would need to be changed to enter into heaven, and they typically place this change at His ascension or shortly thereafter (Lk 24:51-53; Acts 1:9-11). Those who hold this view contend that Christ’s body either became spiritual at
His ascension or was discarded at that time. To further support this position, some point out that after the Lord’s ascension, Paul wrote that Jesus was no longer regarded according to the flesh (2 Cor 5:16) and his teaching in Hebrews that Christ’s days in His flesh were past (Heb 5:7). They further argue that since John saw the risen Lord (Mt 28:16ff.; Mk 16:14ff.; Lk 24:33ff.; Jn 20:19ff. Acts 1:3ff.) yet later told the saints that it had not yet appeared what they would become at Christ’s return (1 Jn 3:2), Christ’s risen body had not demonstrated the kind of spiritual body that believers would possess, so it must have been changed or discarded near the time of His ascension. However, Paul taught plainly that Jesus was sown with a natural body and raised with a spiritual body (1 Cor 15:44-45). The Lord’s body was therefore changed at His resurrection. The fact that the risen Lord drank with His disciples before His ascension (Acts 10:40-41) also demonstrates that He was raised into a spiritual body, for He told His disciples that He would not drink with them again until He would drink in a new way in His Father’s kingdom (Mt 26:29). This means that Christ had entered the heavenly kingdom before eating with His disciples, and since flesh and blood cannot enter the kingdom (1 Cor 15:50), He must have been eating with them in a spiritual body. (See also Lk 24:44, where Christ considered Himself as being no longer in the physical world after His resurrection.) Paul’s statement that the saints no longer regarded Christ after the flesh (2 Cor 5:16) also cannot be used to support the view that Jesus had discarded His flesh at the ascension, for immediately before stating this, Paul said that he no longer regarded anyone after the flesh (2 Cor 5:16). Paul was clearly not implying that these people had no bodies. He was simply stating that he no longer recognized the carnal descent of any man or the privileges
they possessed in this world because of it, and it follows that he was saying the same of Jesus. Furthermore, the Bible states in several passages that after His ascension, Jesus continued to express the fullness of Deity in a bodily form (Acts 7:56; Phil 3:21; Col 1:15; 2:9; 1 Tm 2:5; Heb 1:3). When Paul therefore spoke in Hebrews of Christ’s days in the flesh as being past (Heb 5:7), he was merely referring to the Lord’s days in His natural flesh before it was changed. Moreover, John’s statement that it had not yet appeared what the saints would become at Christ’s return (1 Jn 3:2) also cannot mean that Christ had yet to demonstrate the kind of body that they would possess and implying that His body had been changed or discarded at His ascension, for Paul saw Christ after His ascension (Acts 9:4; 22:7; 26:14; 1 Cor 15:8) and claimed that this made him a witness of the resurrection for which he was contending (1 Cor 15:3ff.). John was simply stating that Christ had yet to appear a second time, contrary to what some were saying in that day (2 Tm 2:16-18; 2 Thes 2:1-2).

In 2 Corinthians, Paul taught that spiritual things belong to the unseen realm (2 Cor 4:13-18). The appearances of Christ’s spiritual body were therefore contrary to its normal state and may be understood as glimpses into the invisible world where He was truly present (cf. Lk 24:44). These appearances, as Christ stated, would be a sign (Mt 12:39-40; Lk 11:29). The risen Christ would make Himself visible to evidence His resurrection from Hades and the existence of His spiritual body (Acts 2:27, 31; cf. 10:40-42). Since Christ would be the firstfruits of the resurrection, these appearances would also signify how the rest of the dead would be raised (1 Cor 15:20).
Since the normal state of the risen Christ was invisible, and since Jesus was the firstfruits of the resurrection, the rest of the dead would receive bodies belonging to the unseen realm. However, while the firstfruits resurrection of Christ would be displayed before men as a sign of His conquering of death, the resurrection of the rest of the dead would not. Paul taught explicitly in 2 Corinthians that the resurrection of the rest of the dead would not be observed in the natural world (2 Cor 4:13-18). The Mosaic law apparently foreshadowed this, for it required the Israelites to offer God the firstfruits of their harvest by displaying them before the altar in the temple, yet the rest of the harvest was not presented in this manner (Lv 23:10-11).

21) For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.

As the first man Adam sinned and introduced the death that would come to all who would sin, so Christ remained sinless and introduced the life that would come to all who would trust in Him for salvation (Rom 5:12ff.).

Though it is not the intent of this work to exposit the biblical creation account, it seems appropriate at this point to offer a brief commentary on it, since Paul has taken us to the Garden of Eden. Genesis, like any other book, must be understood in light of its original audience and culture. It was written in Mesopotamia sometime during the 15th century BC, and creation accounts belonging to this region and period were not at all concerned with material origins. In these accounts, deities created things by assigning purposes to them. This is how the people of that time and place viewed creation. To the ancients, a thing did not exist until it was given a function. The same
understanding of creation is present in Genesis. The author, who was likely Moses, was not at all focused on the origins of the material universe. This is clear, because he stated in Exodus that the Lord created the heavens and earth in six days (Ex 20:11), yet he recorded in Genesis that the material heavens and earth were already present before the first day (Gn 1:2). The creative acts belonging to the six days therefore did not involve the material origins of the natural world. Rather, these acts involved the assignment of roles to the existing elements, and this was done to create a functioning temple wherein the God of the universe would reside.

As Isaiah informs us, the heavens and earth are the Lord's temple (Is 66:1-2). Hence, when Moses spoke of the creation of the heavens and earth in Genesis (Gn 1:1), he was speaking of the creation of the God's temple. In the Old Testament, it is recorded that the Jews created a temple for their God during a seven-day dedication ceremony (2 Chr 7:9-11). Before this ceremony, the temple did not exist, because its material had not been assigned purposes. All that existed was the structure that was to become the temple. Upon the completion of the ceremony, during which the functions of the temple were assigned, the Lord would take His rest in the holy place, and thus complete the creation of the temple. Accordingly, before the seven-day dedication ceremony of the natural world that is recorded in Genesis, the heavens and earth, that is the Lord's temple, did not exist, because their elements had not been assigned purposes. That which existed was the only the material world that was to become God's temple. Upon the completion of the dedication ceremony, during which the functions of the natural creation were assigned, the Lord would take His rest in
the heavens and earth, and thus complete the creation of His temple.

The understanding that Genesis presents a dedication ceremony of the natural world to create it as God’s temple is further supported by its poetic structure. Notice the purposeful arrangement of the work: day one tells of the creation of the heavenly realm, and day three speaks of its inhabitants; day two tells of the creation of the sea, and day five speaks of its inhabitants; day three tells of the creation of the land, and day six speaks of its inhabitants, and each day closes with the refrain "and it was evening and morning." This is a composition fitting for a dedication ritual. It is nothing like a literal, historical narrative and therefore should not be interpreted as such.

Nevertheless, it is evident that Adam was a historical person. Paul refers to both Adam and Christ as men, and since Christ was an individual, it follows that Adam was as well. The Bible, in fact, teaches that humanity descended from Adam and Eve, for it speaks of God making every nation from one man (Acts 17:26) and refers to Eve as the mother of the living (Gn 3:20). It also lists Adam in literal genealogies as the first created man (Gn 5; Lk 3:23-38). Consequently, regardless if other creatures like Adam existed when he was alive, it is Adam who received a unique breath of life from God that enabled him to bear the image of his Creator (Gn 1:26-27; 2:7), and he would be the father of all those who would possess this life and image (Acts 17:26).

To understand the death that Adam introduced to mankind it is helpful to begin with a study of the covenant that stipulated
this death. In the garden, God told Adam that he could eat of every tree but not of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for in the day that he would eat of it, he would die (Gn 2:17). The death introduced by Adam would therefore be a consequence of sin and take place on the day of his transgression.

It is evident that Adam did not die physically on the day that he broke God's commandment by eating of the forbidden tree (Gn 3:6ff.). Nevertheless, Adam experienced a kind of death that day, for the New Testament informs us that when God gives man a commandment, this makes him aware of sin, and sin kills him when he breaks the commandment by causing him to experience a moral decay (Rom 7:7ff.; Eph 2:1; Col 2:13). This is the first element of the death that Adam introduced to mankind: moral decay.

On the day that Adam broke God's, he was also expelled from God's presence (Gn 3:22-24). Thus, He lost eternal life, that is fellowship with God (Jn 17:3). Sin would continue to keep mankind in this state of exile (Is 59:1-2). Hence, the law would administer death to them (2 Cor 3:7-9). This is the second element of the death that Adam brought into the world: exile from God.

The New Testament also teaches that the ultimate consequence of sin is the complete destruction of human life, both body and soul (Mt 10:28; Rv 20:13-15). When God therefore warned Adam of death, He must have been referring to this punishment as well, for God would certainly not be so unjust as to later sentence mankind to a far greater punishment than outlined in
His covenant with their representative Adam. Hence, the third element of death that Adam introduced was destruction.

Though God did not destroy the first couple in the day that they ate of the forbidden tree, a slaughter nevertheless occurred that day, for God made skins from animals to cover their shame (Gn 3:21). This undoubtedly prefigured the substitutionary death of Christ (Is 53:4-5; Jn 1:29, 36; Acts 8:32; Rom 3:25; 4:25; 1 Cor 5:7; 15:3; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 1:4; 1 Pt 1:18-19; 2:24; 1 Jn 2:2; 4:10; Rv 5:6ff.; 7:14; 12:11; 13:8). The substitutionary slaughter of these animals confirms that the death threatened to Adam would have involved his destruction. Though the death of these animals did not atone for Adam's sin (Heb 10:14), their slaughter evidenced that God would defer Adam's punishment of complete destruction until He would provide the true substitutionary sacrifice that would satisfy His justice and allow him to escape this fate (Rom 3:25; 1 Jn 2:2; 4:10). Upon their biological death therefore the souls of Adam and Eve would be imprisoned in the underworld until the great judgment when they would realize their ultimate fate (Mt 11:20ff.; 12:41-42; Lk 10:10ff.; 11:31-32; Rv 20:13-15).

As the Old Testament informs us, those who died before the time of Christ did not ascend to heaven but descended to a realm called Sheol (Gn 37:35; Nm 16:30ff.;Dt 32:22; 1 Sm 28:11-15; Jb 11:8; 21:13; Ps 55:15; 139:8; Prv 9:18; 15:24; Is 7:11; Am 9:2). The prophets often mentioned Sheol when speaking of death, as death was the gateway to this realm (2 Sm 22:6; Ps 18:4-5; 49:14; 55:15; 89:48; 116:3; Prv 5:5; 9:18; Is 28:15ff.; 38:13; Hos 13:14; Hb 2:5). Sheol was described as a pit, a land of darkness and gloom, shadows and disorder, where the living would be consumed (Jb 10:21; 17:13-14; 33:18;
Ps 30:3; 49:14; 88:3-4; Prv 1:12; Is 14:15; 38:18; Ez 31:14-17; Jon 2:2-6). The prophets spoke of it as a prison, a place of no return that would ensnare souls upon their passing (2 Sm 22:6; Jb 7:9; 10:21; 16:22; 17:16; 24:19; Is 38:10; Ps 18:4-5; 49:14; 116:3; Is 38:10; Jon 2:2-6). It was Israel's hope to be delivered from this place of exile and restored to fellowship with God (Ps 16:10; 30:3; 49:15; 86:13; 89:48; Hos 13:14).

When the apostles quoted Old Testament passages which spoke of Sheol, they referred to it as Hades (Acts 2:27, 31; 1 Cor 15:55). The New Testament also says much concerning this realm, for it remained connected with death at that time (Rv 1:18; 6:8; 20:13-14). As Luke records, Hades had two sections: one of comfort for the righteous and one of torment for the wicked (Lk 16:19-30). Here, the souls of all men would remain imprisoned until being raised for judgment (Mt 11:20f; 12:41-42; Lk 10:10ff.; 11:31-32; Rv 20:13-15). According to Jesus, no one had escaped this place and ascended to heaven by the time of His ministry (Jn 3:13), and though He promised His Church victory over this realm (Mt 16:18), the Bible makes it clear that even the righteous dead would remain in Hades until the resurrection at the end of the age (Dn 12:2; Jn 5:28-29; 6:39-40, 54; Acts 24:15; 1 Cor 15:51-55; 1 Thes 4:13-17; Rv 20:13-14).

The death that Adam introduced was consequently threefold: moral decay, exile from God and destruction, and Hades would hold the departed in a state of exile and destruction until the day of judgment when they would realize their ultimate destiny. As Romans informs us, this death spread to all mankind, for all sinned against God as Adam had done (Rom 5:12ff; 7:7ff.).
Now, the Bible teaches in numerous passages that Christ would die in the place of His people for sin (Is 53:4-5; Rom 3:25; 4:25; 1 Cor 15:3; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 1:4; 1 Pt 2:24; 1 Jn 2:2; 4:10). It states also that His sacrifice would abolish the sentence of death against believers (2 Cor 1:9; 2 Tm 1:10), and, as a result, they would never die (Jn 8:51; 11:25-26). Biological death therefore could not have been the death promised for sin; otherwise Christians would no longer be experiencing it. Rather, the death that the believer avoids is a state of moral decay, exile from God and destruction.

Clearly, biological death did not result from Adam's sin. Adam's understanding of God's threat of death plainly demonstrates that he was familiar with it, and thus it already existed in the word (Gn 2:16-17; 3). Furthermore, the Scriptures teach that God designed plants to grow from the death of a seed (Gn 1:11-12; Jn 12:24; 1 Cor 15:36) and inform us that He created carnivores and finds glory in giving them pray (Jb 38:39-41, 39:29-30, Ps 104:20-29). It is also evident that God created mankind subject to death, for He gave Adam access to the tree of life even before he sinned, and the purpose of this tree was to sustain his physical life (Gn 2:9, 16; 3:22). Since Adam eventually died, this also demonstrates that he was not created immortal; otherwise, he would have been unable to die.

It is therefore likely that if Adam would have abstained from breaking God's commandment, he would have nevertheless eventually experienced biological death. However, since the Bible teaches that a man in not whole unless he exists as a duality of body and soul, it is certain that Adam would have continued to exist as such in the afterlife (1 Cor 15:50-55). By sinning, however, Adam cut himself off from the Author and Sustainer of
life. This meant that his biological death would produce no further life but render him as a dormant seed, a soul unable to germinate a new living form (Eccl 3:20-21; 12:7; Jas 2:26). Biological death thus became man’s enemy because of sin (Heb 2:14-15), and its sting would not be removed for believers until Christ’s return (1 Cor 15:54-55).

Since Paul teaches that Christ would defeat the death of Adam by being raised from it (Rom 4:24-25; 1 Cor 15:4-5), Christ must have experienced and overcome moral decay, exile from God and destruction, and with this, the Scriptures agree. Though the Bible informs us that Christ remained sinless (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1 Pt 2:22), it nevertheless teaches that He experienced the full burden of moral death. The Scriptures teach that Jesus took upon Himself the sins of the world (Is 53:6; 1 Pt 2:24; Rom 8:3-4) and even states that He became sin on our behalf (2 Cor 5:21). Jesus was attacked by every temptation known to man (Heb 4:15) and experienced all the associated guilt, grief and shame (Is 53:3ff.). He also experienced the exile from God, for He was forsaken by the Father when He bore our sin on the cross (Ps 22:1; Mt 27:45-46; cf. Hab 1:13), and He continued in this exile upon His death, for His soul did not ascend to the Father (Jn 20:17); rather, it descended to the Hadean realm in the heart of the earth (Mt 12:40; Eph 4:8-10; 1 Pt 3:18-19). Christ also clearly suffered the destruction promised to Adam (Is 53:4-5; Rom 3:25; 4:25; 1 Cor 15:3; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 1:4; 1 Pt 2:24; 1 Jn 2:2; 4:10). This destruction, however, was not of His entire being, for Christ possessed immortality (Jn 8:51; 10:17-18; Heb 2:9-10). Nevertheless, He must have suffered all the torment related to a complete destruction of both body and soul, for the Bible teaches that He experienced the full punishment for sin on our
of behalf (Is 53:4-5; Rom 3:25; 4:25; 1 Cor 15:3; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 1:4; 1 Pt 2:24; 1 Jn 2:2; 4:10). Since Christ declared that He finished the payment for sin on the cross (Jn 19:30), it may be concluded that He underwent the agony of this destruction during His crucifixion.

Adamic death, however, could by no means hold Christ (Jn 10:8). He overcame the moral decay that was placed on Him at the cross (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1 Pt 2:22), conquered exile from God by rising from Hades (Acts 2:27, 31-32; Rv 1:18) and reversed His destruction by regaining life as a duality of body and soul (Lk 24:37-43). Hence, he defeated the threefold death of Adam.

Since Christ was the firstfruits of the resurrection and thus demonstrated how the dead would be raised, the rest of the dead would also rise from Hades to regain life as a duality of body and soul. However, the Bible teaches that the dead would not return to their former bodies as a Christ has done but to spiritual bodies that would be waiting for them in the unseen heavenly realm. (See comments on 1 Cor 15:20 and 15:36-38.)

1 Corinthians 15
Part 2

22) For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

To be in Adam is to sin against God and so be associated with Adam's transgression which results in death (Rom 5:12). To be in Christ is to trust in Him and so be associated with His obedience which results in life (Rom 5:17). Thus all who remain
in sin are in Adam, and all these die, whereas all who turn to Christ are in Him, and all these are made alive.

Though this verse has been cited to prove that Christ would resurrect all people to eternal life, the Scriptures soundly preclude this view. While the Bible teaches that both the just and the unjust would be resurrected from Hades, it plainly states that this would only result in further condemnation for those who had refused God’s grace, as these would then be sentenced to a complete destruction (Dn 12:2; Mt 10:28; 25:41ff.; Jn 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; Rv 20:13-15).

There are those who have asserted that from the moment of conception, people are in Adamic death, that is morally corrupt, exiled from God and under a sentence of destruction, and they often cite David’s statement that he was conceived in sin as evidence for their position (Ps 51:5). However, Paul taught that he was alive before the Law made him aware of the sin that killed him (Rom 7:9). Paul also recorded that people die in Adam because they sin like Adam (Rom 5:12). The Bible is clear that children do not bear the sins of their parents (Ez 18:20) and each person is responsible for his own actions (Rom 14:12). It is therefore one’s own disobedience that brings him death and not Adam’s. According to Scripture, there is an age when a child becomes aware of sin (Is 7:15-16), and God would certainly not be so unjust as to charge a child with sin before he is aware of it. It may thus be concluded that people are innocent of evil until they knowingly embrace it, and this is when they become guilty of sin and incur the condemnation introduced by Adam (Rom 5:12ff.). Hence, David was not speaking literally when he wrote of being conceived in sin (Ps 51:5) but making a poetic admission of his utter depravity, as
he wrote it shortly after committing both murder and adultery, just as Job was obviously not speaking literally when he declared that he had cared for orphans and widows from the womb but was expressing his lifelong devotion to righteousness (Jb 31:18).

23) But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

The resurrection would take place at the coming of Christ. This coming was imminent in the first century and would take place at the destruction of Jerusalem. (See comments on Mt 24:30c.) The resurrection would therefore also take place at this time.

The Bible places the resurrection of the dead at Jerusalem's fall in numerous ways. Isaiah foretold that the new heavens and earth would arrive when God would slay the Jews who had rejected Him (Is 65:13ff.), and Revelation informs us that the resurrection would take place immediately before the arrival of this new world (Rv 21-22). Isaiah also prophesied that God would swallow up death on the day that He would crush the altar in Jerusalem (Is 25:8, 27:9ff.). Daniel prophesied that the resurrection would occur when the Jewish power would be completely shattered (Dn 12:2, 7). Daniel was undeniably speaking of the resurrection that was to take place on Judgment Day, for he recorded that this is when the righteous would be raised to everlasting life (Dn 12:3), the wicked would be raised to everlasting shame (Dn 12:3), and everyone whose name would be found written in a book would be delivered (Dn 12:1). According to Revelation, all these things would take place when the dead would be raised for judgment at the end of the millennium (Rv 20:12-13). Hosea also connected the resurrection
to an appointed harvest for Judah (Hos 6:2, 11), and this harvest referred to a time when God would judge Judah in the manner that He was about to judge Israel in Hosea's day which He did by putting an end to her kingdom with a foreign army (Hos 6:11; cf. 2:21-23).

In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus confirmed that Daniel's prophecy of the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked would be fulfilled at the destruction of Jerusalem in the first century. Notice the parallels between the Olivet Discourse and Daniel's oracle: both were speaking of the time of the end (Dn 12:4; Mt 24:3), the great tribulation (Dn 12:1; Mt 24:21), the abomination of desolation (Dn 12:1; Mt 24:15) and the gathering of the elect (Dn 12:2-3; Mt 24:31). These correlations plainly demonstrate that both Jesus and Daniel were prophesying of the same things. In fact, Jesus expressly stated that He was discussing the things that Daniel had predicted (Mt 24:15). Now, while Jesus taught that all these things would occur before the temple would be destroyed in the first century (Mt 24:1-3, 34), Daniel recorded that all these things, as well as the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked, would occur by the time of the shattering of the Jewish power (Dn 12:2, 7). Clearly, both Jesus and Daniel were delimiting their prophecies to the time of the Jerusalem's fall in AD 70. The resurrection of the righteous and the wicked therefore must have taken place by this time.

The passing of the Mosaic law at AD 70 also demonstrates that the resurrection is a past event. According to Jesus, no part of the Law would not pass away until all of it was fulfilled (Mt 5:17-18). This is notable, because the law prophesied of the first resurrection, that is the resurrection of Christ and others
who would accompany Him to heaven at that time, as well as the general resurrection that would take place at His return (Acts 24:14-15; see also Mt 11:13 where the Law is said to prophesy.). The law predicted the first resurrection by requiring Israel to celebrate the feast of firstfruits (Ex 23:19; 34:26; Lv 23:10ff.), and foretold of the resurrection of the rest of the dead by requiring Israel to celebrate the feast of ingathering (Lv 23:39-43; cf. 1 Cor 15:23). Hence, the Law could not pass away until its prophecies concerning both resurrections were fulfilled. Since the Law passed in AD 70, both resurrections must have occurred by this time.

The parable of the sower also teaches that both the firstfruits resurrection and the harvest resurrection at the Lord’s coming would take place Jerusalem’s fall. In this parable, Jesus taught that the resurrection harvest would be at the end of the age (Mt 13:37-43). The Law, as mentioned above, foreshadowed that the resurrection harvest would involve two resurrections: the firstfruits resurrection of Christ and the ingathering resurrection of the rest of the dead (Ex 23:19; 34:26; Lv 23:10ff.; cf. 1 Cor 15:23). Both resurrections would therefore take place at the end of the same age. In Hebrews, Paul affirmed that the firstfruits resurrection of Jesus took place at the end of the age (Heb 9:26), and it is clear that this occurred at the end of the Jewish age. Consequently, the resurrection of the rest of the dead would also take place at the end of that age. Jesus further attested to this in His parable, for in speaking of the harvest resurrection that would be at the end of the age (Mt 13:40), He referred to the age using the near demonstrative (Gr. toutou), meaning that He was discussing the end of the age in which He was living, that is the Jewish age. Furthermore, Jesus concluding His parable by quoting Daniel’s prophecy of the
resurrection of the righteous and the wicked, thus revealing that He was discussing its fulfillment (Mt 13:43; cf. Dn 12:3), and, as noted, Daniel delimited this prophecy to the time when the Jewish authority would be shattered, that is the end of the Jewish age (Dn 12:2-7).

The New Testament contains two other passages that associate the harvest with an impending judgment upon Jerusalem. John the Baptist declared that wrath was about to (Gr. mellouses) come upon the Jews while proclaiming the Lord’s readiness to perform the harvest (Mt 3:7, 12; Lk 3:7, 17), and in Revelation, John saw a vision of Christ performing this harvest as blood filled a land the length of ancient Israel from north to south (Rv 14:14ff.). Though these passages do not specifically mention resurrection, the parable of the sower makes it clear that they were speaking of this event.

Paul’s second letter to Timothy informs us that some in the first century not only understood that the time for the resurrection had arrived but also believed that it had already taken place. A careful study of how Paul addressed this error provides even more evidence that the resurrection would coincide with Jerusalem’s fall in AD 70. In this letter, Paul rebuked those who were contending for a past resurrection by citing a passage in Numbers, declaring that God nevertheless knew His own and they were to depart from these false teachers (2 Tm 2:19; cf. Num 16:5, 21). This is significant, because it was Paul’s conviction that Old Testament narratives often typified events that were taking place in his day (1 Cor 10:11; Gal 4:21ff.). Notice how this was the case with this passage in Numbers: Here, a leader named Korah challenged the sole authority of Moses, claiming that he and his followers
also had the right to govern Israel (Num 16:1-3). This resulted in a controversy between the followers of Korah and those of Moses as to which of them belonged to God (Num 16:5). To settle this matter, God commanded the Israelites to depart from Korah's assembly so He might destroy them to reveal His own (Num 16:5ff.). God then accomplished this by causing the earth to split open and devour Korah and his men (Num 16:31-33). Now, just as Korah's assembly had challenged the sole authority Moses, so there were apostates in the first century known as Judaizers who were challenging the sole authority of Christ by claiming that the Mosaic law should also govern the Church (Acts 15:1ff.), and just as a contention resulted in ancient Israel pertaining to the identity of God's people, so a contention resulted between the advocates of the Law and those of the gospel of grace as to which of them belonged to God (Rom 2:28-29; 9:6; Gal 4:21ff.; Phil 3:2), and just as God commanded the Israelites to depart from Korah and his followers, so He was commanding the Church to depart from those who were attempting to subjugate them to the Law (Gal 3; Col 2:16-23), for just as God destroyed Korah's assembly to reveal His own, so He was about to judge those who were clinging to the Law to reveal those who belonged to Him (Rv 2:9; 3:9). The Scriptures thus reveal that Paul was rebuking Judaizers in his letter to Timothy and instructing the Church to depart from these men, because they would soon be caught up in a destruction that would reveal the apostolic Church as the true sons of God. Since Paul was giving this instruction in response to an error regarding the timing of the resurrection, it is evident that he was associating the resurrection with this impending judgment, especially in view of Paul's teaching elsewhere that the sons of God would be revealed at the resurrection (Rom 8:11ff.). Moreover, if the apostles were
associating the demise of Jerusalem with the resurrection, this explains why the Judaizers were teaching that the resurrection was past, for if they could convince the Church of this, then they could point to the standing of the temple as evidence that the apostles were wrong to teach that the resurrection would occur at the abolishment of the Mosaic dispensation, and this would support their claim that the Law would retain its authority in the Messiah's kingdom.

Revelation also provides convincing evidence that neither the living nor the dead would enter into heaven until the end of the Jewish age. Here, John recorded that God's wrath would be completed and the most holy place opened to man at the sounding of the last trumpet to raise the dead (Rv 11:15-19; cf. 1 Cor 15:50ff.; 1 Thes 4:17-18). However, John went on to record that God's wrath would be completed and the most holy place opened to man at the pouring of the last vial of God's anger upon the great city where the Lord was slain (Rv 15:8; 16:15-19; cf. 11:8). God's wrath would therefore be completed and the most holy place opened to man when God would pour out His wrath on Jerusalem, and this is when the last trumpet would sound to raise the dead and afford them entrance into the heavenly kingdom (1 Cor 15:50ff.; 1 Thes 4:17-18).

Paul taught this in Hebrews as well, stating that the standing of the temple was a sign that the holy place was not yet opened to man (Heb 9:8-9). In other words, mankind would not be raised into heaven until the earthly temple would lose its standing. According to Paul, the temple and its rituals would remain valid until the time of reformation when Israel would reach her destiny (Heb 9:10; cf. Acts 3:21). While the rituals of the Mosaic Law remained valid when Hebrews was being written,
as the Old Covenant was yet in the process of passing away (Heb 8:13; 2 Cor 3:11), such practices would lose their standing when the Lord would return at the end of the Jewish age. Consequently, this is when the time of reformation would occur and the faithful would reach their destiny and enter the most holy place, a place Paul defined as heaven itself (Heb 9:24).

The New Testament also teaches that the resurrection was imminent in the first century. This agrees perfectly with the view that it would coincide with the destruction of first-century Jerusalem. Jesus proclaimed that the hour was coming when all who were in their graves would come out (Jn 5:28-29), and John, who recorded these very words, later wrote that the last hour had arrived (1 Jn 2:18). Twice in the New Testament, Paul declared that the resurrection was about to (Gr. mello) occur (Acts 24:15; 2 Tm 4:1). John saw several visions of the resurrection in Revelation (Rv 11:18; 14:14f; 20:12-13), and he was told repeatedly that these things would soon take place (Rv 1:1, 3; 22:6, 10). In fact, while Daniel was told to seal his vision concerning the resurrection, because it was not for his generation (Dn 12:4, 9), John was told not to seal his visions concerning it, for the time of their fulfillment was near (Rv 22:10).

Another way the Bible presents the resurrection as near in the first century is by associating it with the arrival of the kingdom. Notice first how the Scriptures connect these glorious events: Isaiah foretold that death would be swallowed up when the Lord would gather His people into the kingdom of Zion (Is 24-25). Daniel prophesied that the saints would inherit the kingdom when the heavenly court would open books for judgment (Dn 7:9-14, 26-27), and Revelation teaches that these
books would be opened at the resurrection (Rv 20:12). John the Baptist announced the impending arrival of the kingdom while declaring that Christ was ready to perform the harvest (Mt 3:2-12), an allusion to the resurrection (Mt 13:37-43). Jesus said that at the resurrection harvest, the righteous would shine in the kingdom (Mt 13:36-43). In the parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus taught that men would be raised for judgment so the righteous might enter the kingdom (Mt 25:31-46; cf. Rv 21:12ff.). Paul recorded that the dead would need to be raised into spiritual bodies before they could possess the kingdom (1 Cor 15:50). He instructed Timothy that Christ was about to raise the dead for judgment at His appearing in His kingdom (2 Tm 4:1), and John recorded that the dead would be judged when the Lord would establish His kingdom on the earth (Rv 11:15-18). These statements plainly demonstrate that the dead would be raised at the coming of the kingdom. When the New Testament writers therefore declared that the kingdom was at hand in the first century (Mt 3:1-2; 4:17; 10:7; Mk 1:14-15; Lk 10:9, 11) and some who stood beside Jesus would not die before its arrival (Mt 16:28; Mk 9:1; Lk 9:27), such statements applied to the resurrection as well. Hence, Paul expected that some of his readers would live to see the dead be raised (1 Cor 15:51; 1 Thes 4:13-18).

24) Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. 25) For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26) The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Paul could not have been referring to the end of the Christian age in these verses, for the Scriptures teach that the Messiah's
rule on this earth would ever increase and have no end (2 Sm 7:12-16; Ps 45:6-17; Is 9:6-7; Dn 2:44; 7:14, 27; Lk 1:32-33; Eph 3:21; Heb 1:8; 2 Pt 1:11; Rv 5:13; 11:15). The end that Paul has in view, as shown, is the end of the Jewish age, for this is when the resurrection would take place and remove the sting from death. (See comments on 1 Cor 15:23.)

The Lord would reign over Old Covenant Israel from heaven and then return to put the rebellious citizens of that kingdom under His feet. (See comments on Mt 24:30c.) Then His limited reign over Israel would come to an end, and He would establish His kingdom over all others. (See comments on Rv 20:4-6.) This does not mean that Christ would put down the reprobate among all nations at His return, for the Bible teaches that Christ would inherit all nations to rule them with an iron rod (Ps 2:9; Rv 2:27; 12:5; 19:15). Such imagery clearly speaks of a forcible governing which would not be necessary if His kingdom consisted solely of sanctified believers. Furthermore, the Scriptures teach that after the arrival of the kingdom, the nations of the earth would continue to stand in need of healing, and the wicked would remain outside the capital of His kingdom (Rv 21:24-26). This is because the kingdom would arrive in the midst of the natural world in the unseen realm (Lk 17:20-21), and only the righteous would perceive it and enter it for eternal life (Jn 3:3ff.).

27) For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him.
After stating that all things would be put under Christ, Paul quotes a prophecy in Psalms concerning this and speaks of it as having already been fulfilled (Ps 8:6). Several New Testament verses affirm that Christ had already been given authority over all things (Mt 28:19; Eph 1:20-23; Col 2:9-15; Heb 2:7-8). However, He would not judge and destroy His rebellious citizens and Satan’s kingdom until His return at the end of the Jewish age (1 Cor 15:24-26; Jude 6; Rv 20:10).

28) When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

When Christ would put down His enemies, He would deliver His kingdom, the faithful remnant of Israel and believing Gentiles, to His Father in heaven. (See comments on 1 Cor 15:51-54.) Then God's righteousness would not only indwell their souls but also their bodies. (See comments on 1 Cor 15:42-44.) Thus, God would fully indwell all of His people.

29) Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf? 30) Why are we in danger every hour? 31) I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day!

Immediately after Paul asks his readers why people would be baptized on behalf of the dead, he asks them why the ministers of the gospel would subject themselves to danger. The latter question is an apparent iteration of the former and thus identifies the baptisms on behalf of the dead as the sufferings
that the ministers of the gospel were enduring to fulfill the great commission so the end could arrive and bring the dead into the eternal kingdom (Mt 24:14; 1 Cor 15:24). Jesus told His disciples that they would be baptized with such trials (Mt 20:22-23; Mk 10:38-40; Lk 12:50), and the apostles accepted this calling because of the promise of the resurrection (Heb 11:35ff.).

32a) What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus?

Paul continues to discuss the baptism of sufferings that the apostles were enduring to further the gospel and bring about the end of the Jewish age so the dead might be raised. If Paul had literally fought with beasts, it seems that he would have mentioned this in 2 Corinthians where he listed the various trials that he had endured as an apostle (2 Cor 11:23ff.). It is therefore likely that Paul was speaking metaphorically of his struggles against those who had persecuted him for preaching the gospel (cf. 2 Tm 4:17).

32b) If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

This was a longstanding proverb of the wicked (Is 22:13). As evidenced in the following verses, some in Corinth were living according to this saying, indulging themselves in the flesh.

33) Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals." 34) Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.
Paul employs the wisdom of the Greek poet Meander to correct his readers regarding their view of the resurrection. The apostle used this same strategy in Athens, encouraging the Greeks to embrace the truth to which their philosophers pointed (Acts 17:22ff.). Paul’s expectation that the wisdom of this philosopher would persuade his readers demonstrates that they respected the teachings of the Greeks. This supports the view that his readers were rejecting the resurrection due to the influences of Greek philosophies.

The Greeks, as noted, laughed at the idea of a resurrection, because they believed the body was impertinent to man (Acts 17:32). Many held that matter was evil and that the soul thus needed to be liberated from its body. These ideas resulted in two major philosophies: Stoicism and Epicureanism (Acts 17:18). The Stoics taught that one should deny himself all pleasures since the body was evil, while the Epicureans asserted that one should indulge the body since it was inconsequential. Since Paul was rebuking his readers for indulging their flesh, it is evident that the Epicurean philosophy was prevailing in the church at Corinth.

Paul chided the Corinthians for embracing Epicureanism by teaching that man is a duality of body and soul and that he would be raised and judged as such (1 Cor 6:12). This is what motivated Paul to endure the baptisms of his sufferings. He knew that the body was not impertinent and he would be rewarded for the deeds that he had done in the flesh (2 Cor 5:10).

1 Corinthians 15
Part 3

35) But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?"

Paul presupposes that his readers were denying the resurrection due to their failure to conceive of the kind of body that the dead would possess (1 Cor 15:35). Undoubtedly, the Corinthians would have had difficulty imagining this due to the fact that countless corpses would have already been dissolved and transmuted throughout creation.

Nevertheless, some have argued that in objecting to the resurrection, the Corinthians were denying that Jews, who were morally dead in their sins, would be included in the collective body of Christ. However, this would mean that contrary to Paul's statement, the Corinthians were, in fact, conceiving of the kind of body that the dead would receive and the controversy concerned only who would be included in it. Paul's presupposition that the Corinthians were having trouble imagining what kind of body that the dead would receive therefore soundly precludes that he was addressing a controversy that concerned who would be included in the collective body of Christ.

Those who take the view that the body was referring to the collective body of Christ also assert that since Paul is speaking of the dead (plural) receiving a body (singular), he must have been arguing for the inclusion of dead ones coming into a collective body and not into individual bodies. However, the New Testament writers often used plural possessive pronouns with singular nouns to refer to many people possessing their
own individual form of that noun (Mt 6:25; Rom 8:16; 1 Cor 6:18-20; 2 Cor 1:12; 6:11; 1 Thes 2:17; 5:23; Jas 3:6; Rv 13:16). Hence, the language in this passage by no means demands that Paul was speaking of the dead ones sharing a collective body.

Paul also used a plural possessive pronoun with a singular noun to speak of how the living saints (plural) would receive a life that would transform their lowly body (singular) into a glorious body (singular); he did this in several passages (Rom 6:6; 8:23; 2 Cor 4:8-11; 5:1-5; Phil 3:20-21). In Romans, however, Paul made it clear that this grammatical construction does not mean that he was speaking of only the collective body of his readers. Here, Paul used the plural possessive pronoun "our" with the singular noun "body" twice to speak of the body that would be given life (Rom 6:6; 8:23). However, between these statements, Paul stated that the mortal bodies (plural) of the saints would receive this life (Rom 8:11). It would therefore be individual bodies that would receive an eternal and transforming life.

36) You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. 37) And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. 38) But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. 39) For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. 40) There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. 41) There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon,
and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

The resurrection is not unreasonable, for even nature testifies to it, as the death of a seed results in continuing life. Christ also used this analogy to speak of how the martyr's death would yield further life for him (Jn 12:24).

The teaching in this passage makes it clear that the dead would not receive their bodies as Christ had received His. If this was to be the case, surely Paul would have simply stated so instead of introducing an analogy about how the dead would be raised.

The seed should be understood to represent the whole man: the shell would answer to the body and the germ to the soul. At biological death, the natural body would decay like a shell, and at the resurrection, the soul would rise as a germ to take a new form. Thus, God would give to each of the seeds a body of their own (1 Cor 15:38).

Paul’s emphasis that there are many kinds of flesh and bodies (1 Cor 15:39-41) presupposes that the Corinthians were thinking of only one kind of flesh, that belonging to the physical body. This supports the view that the Corinthians were denying the resurrection because they could not see how the dead could return to corpses that had decayed or turned to dust. Paul corrects this misunderstanding by telling his readers that there are different kinds of flesh and explains in the following verses that the dead would not return to their former bodies but be raised from Hades into glorious bodies of another kind.
Note also that Paul was speaking of the resurrection of the dead ones and not the resurrection of corpses (Gr. anastasis nekon; 1 Cor 15:12, 13, 21, 42). The Bible nowhere speaks of the raising of dead bodies or flesh at the Lord’s coming. Clearly, the dead would not reclaim their corpses, for by the time of the resurrection, the vast majority of these bodies would have been dissolved. As the Bible records, the bodies of all people return to dust (Gn 3:19). The focus of the resurrection would be the raising of souls from Hades and not the raising of dead bodies. This is precisely how it is depicted in Revelation. When John saw a vision of the resurrection at the last day, he spoke of it as the ascension of souls to heaven for judgment and said nothing of the rising of corpses (Rv 20:13-14).

In 2 Corinthians, Paul soundly confirms this view of the resurrection. Here, Paul stated that he was groaning to put on a heavenly tent while in his earthly tent (2 Cor 5:1-4). In context, Paul was speaking of groaning with Silvanus and Timothy in their earthen vessels as they suffered for the sake of the gospel (2 Cor. 4:7ff.). These earthen vessels plainly spoke of the mortal bodies of these apostles (cf. 1 Thes 4:4; 2 Tm 2:20). It therefore follows that the earthly tent spoke of the same. (See also 2 Pt 1:13-14, where Peter speaks of his physical body as a tent.) Now, Paul stated that although he wanted to put on this heavenly tent while in his earthly tent, he knew that if his earthly tent would be destroyed, another tent would be waiting for him in heaven (2 Cor 5:1). Paul was thus expecting the heavenly tent to clothe him in the same way that his earthly tent was clothing him, that is in a personal, bodily manner. Notably, Paul did not the speak of the resurrection of the earthly tent but of its destruction and of being raised in an
unclothed state to receive another tent that had been prepared for him in the heavenly realm (2 Cor 5:1-4). Thus, the shell of the seed, that is the body, would decay, and the germ, that is the soul, would rise to heaven to receive a new and glorious form.

42) So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. 43) It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. 44) It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

What is sown is the seed, that is the whole person, both body and soul. The person is sown in a body that is perishable, dishonorable, weak and natural but raised to heaven in a body that is imperishable, glorious, powerful and spiritual.

Throughout his letters, Paul stated that the Spirit was serving as a guarantee of the complete redemption of the early Church (Rom 8:23; 2 Cor 1:21-22; 2 Cor 5:4-5; Eph 1:13-14; 4:30; Heb 6:5). In 2 Corinthians, Paul expressly stated that the Spirit was a guarantee that the saints would receive spiritual bodies (2 Cor 5:1-5). It is therefore the receiving of this body that would complete the believer's redemption and perfect him in righteousness (Rom 8:23; 1 Cor 15:50ff.; 2 Cor 5:1-5; Phil 3:8-21).

Those who believe that Paul was anticipating the resurrection of a collective body, that is the exaltation and establishment of the Church from the bondage of its Judaic roots, point out that in these verses Paul was using present, passive indicative verbs
to speak of the sowing and raising of the seed (e.g. the seed is being raised). They cite this as evidence that Paul was not discussing a future resurrection that was limited to souls in Hades, but a resurrection that was already in process as the collective body of Moses was being transformed into the collective body of Christ. However, while such verbs may convey ongoing action (e.g. the seed is being raised), they may also instead convey momentary action (e.g. the seed is raised). Hence, the translation of these verbs must be determined by their context. Since Paul is speaking of a future resurrection from Hades (1 Cor 15:22-23, 49-55), it is apparent that he was explaining how the seed "is raised" by referring to the resurrection as a momentary action that had yet to take place.

In speaking of the natural and spiritual bodies, Paul used the Greek words "psuchikos" (natural) and "pnueumatikos" (spiritual). Earlier in this letter, Paul used these words to contrast those who were behaving carnally with those who were devoted to God (1 Cor 2:14-3:3). In fact, throughout the New Testament, "psuchikos" refers to all manner of wickedness (1 Cor 2:14-3:3; Jas 3:15; Jude 19) while "pnueumatikos" describes those who were righteous (1 Cor 2:14-3:3 14:37; Gal 6:1; Col 1:9). It may therefore be concluded that while the natural body is driven by carnal passions, the spiritual body would be governed by righteousness desires.

Notice how Paul described the experience of living in a natural body in his letter to the Romans: Here, Paul stated that God's commandment against sin had made him aware of it and this resulted in sin killing his body by enslaving it to evil desires (Rom 7:7ff.). Paul then related that while his inner being wanted to serve God, his sinful flesh waged war against his mind,
causing him to do evil instead of good (Rom 7:14ff.). This conflict made Paul declare that he was a wretched man and cry out for deliverance from his body of death (Rom 7:24). Paul went on to record that although he had the firstfruits of redemption, he was yet groaning for God to liberate him from the bondage of sin by redeeming his mortal body (Rom 8:10-11, 20-23). Notably, in 2 Corinthians, when Paul spoke of groaning for a life that would complete his redemption, he was speaking of his desire to be clothed in a heavenly tent, that is a personal, spiritual body. (See comments on 1 Cor 15:36-38.) It is therefore the putting on of the heavenly tent that would relieve Paul's struggle against the sin in his flesh so that he could serve God according to the desire of his mind. This confirms that the spiritual body would act in harmony with a soul that longed to please God.

Jesus came to prepare these bodies for His people so they might live without sin in God’s presence (Jn 14:1-3; Col 1:22-23; Eph 5:25-27). He did this by putting on our flesh and making it die to every carnal desire so it might become perfect in obedience (Rom 6:10; 8:3; Phil 2:7-8; Heb 2:14; 5:8-9). God then made this body immortal at Christ’s resurrection and thus prepared the flesh that would clothe His people (Acts 13:34; Rom 6:9; Jn 11:25-26; 1 Cor 15:54-55; 2 Cor 5:1-5; Phil 3:8-11; Col 3:1-4). Accordingly, the Bible teaches that when Christ ascended into heaven, the believer’s life was hidden there as well (Rom 4:22-25; 6:1-13; 2 Cor 5:1-5; Eph 2:1-9; Col 2:11-3:4; 1 Pt 2:24). When Christ would return, He would give this flesh and bone to His Bride, the Church, even as Adam gave his flesh and bone to Eve (Gn 2:21-23). Thus, Christ would be the resurrection and the life of His people (Is 26:19; Jn 11:25-26).
A dichotomy would therefore exist between the believer’s soul and his natural body until he would receive a spiritual body that would act according to his desire to serve God (Rom 7:7ff.; cf. Mt 26:42; Mk 14:38). Though God considered the body of sin or old self of the Christian to have been crucified with Christ (Rom 6:6; Col 2:11-14), the believer would yet struggle against the sin in his flesh until his redemption would be complete (Rom 6:6-13; Rom 7:14ff). Hence, the Christian life would involve a continual denial of the old self and embracing of the new self until perfection would be attained (Eph 4:17ff.; Col 3:1ff.). Such perfection would not result from the outer self of the believer becoming like Christ, for the outer self would perish (2 Cor 4:7-5:1). Rather, it would result from the believer putting on a spiritual body that would be governed by righteousness desires (2 Cor 4:16-5:5). (See comments on 1 Cor 15:51-54.)

45) Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

As Adam gives natural life to his offspring, so Christ gives spiritual life to God’s children (cf. 2 Cor 13:4; 1 Pt 3:18). Jesus taught this also, stating that flesh gives birth to flesh and spirit gives birth to spirit (Jn 3:6). The kingdom of God would be populated by those who would be born spiritually by trusting Christ for salvation (Mt 22:24ff.; Mk 12:18ff.; Lk 20:34ff.; Jn 3:3; Ti 3:5-6; 1 Pt 1:3; 1 Jn 3:9; 5:1). Such faith would generate a life inside the Christian that would be neither male nor female (Gal 3:28), that would not marry (Mt 22:30; Mk 12:25; Lk 29:35) and would never die (Lk 20:36; Jn 8:51; 11:25-26).
46) But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual.

Man progresses from the natural to the spiritual in his existence and relationship to God (Heb 8:5f; 9:11, 24-25; 10:1-4; Col 2:14-17). The popular notion that the first and second resurrections described in Revelation (Rv 20:4-15) speak of a spiritual resurrection followed by a physical one should therefore be rejected, for this is contrary to God's redemptive work.

47) The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. 48) As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. 49) Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

Adam was created out of dust (Gn 2:7; 3:19), and the saints had born this image as each had possessed a mortal body since the time of their birth (Gn 5:3). Christ was raised into a spiritual body (1 Cor 15:44-45; 1 Pt 3:18), and believers would bear this image as each would possess an immortal body at the Lord's return (1 Cor 15:35ff.; 2 Cor 5:1-5; Phil 3:20-21; 1 Jn 3:2).

1 Corinthians 15
Part 4

50) I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51) Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not
all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52) in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. 53) For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. 54) When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

It has been shown that the death of Adam was threefold involving moral decay, exile and destruction (See comments on 1 Cor 15:21). Moral decay would be defeated by the putting on of the spiritual body. (See comments on 1 Cor 15:42-44.) Exile would be conquered as the dead would be brought out of Hades. (See comments on 1 Cor 15:36-41.) Destruction would be overcome as the departed would each be restored as a duality of body and soul. (See comments on 1 Cor 15:36-41.) Thus, the threefold death of Adam would be swallowed up in victory.

Paul explains that the living and the dead would need to become imperishable to inherit God's kingdom. He does not speak of the former bodies of the dead being changed to an imperishable state. Their souls would be raised from Hades to receive imperishable bodies that had been prepared for them. (See comments on 1 Cor 15:36-41.) Paul does, however, speak of the bodies of the living being changed. He used the near demonstrative "this" (Gr. touto) to refer to his own perishable body as the example of what would be changed by the putting on of the imperishable (1 Cor 15:53). The word that Paul used for imperishable (Gr. aphtharsian) is the same word that he
used to describe the bodies that the dead would receive (1 Cor 15:42). This means that the living would put on the same imperishable bodies as the dead.

Though Paul does not specifically state that the living would put on imperishable bodies, only that they would put on the imperishable and immortality, when the above verses are compared with a passage in his second letter to the Corinthians, it becomes clear that the living would put on imperishable and immortal bodies. Notice, in 2 Corinthians, Paul spoke of his hope to put on a heavenly tent (2 Cor 5:4). It has been shown that this tent referred to an individual, spiritual body. (See comments on 1 Cor 15:36-41.) In speaking of this hope, Paul said that he desired to remain in his earthly tent until he would put on his heavenly tent, so mortality might be swallowed up (2 Cor 5:4). Now compare this with Paul’s declaration in 1 Corinthians that those would be alive at the Lord’s return would put on the imperishable and immortality so death would be swallowed up (1 Cor 15:54-55). These are undeniably parallel statements. Remaining alive at the Lord’s coming would therefore answer to remaining in an earthly tent, and putting on the imperishable and immortality would speak of putting on a heavenly tent.

According to Paul, the putting on of these bodies would change the living in the twinkling of an eye, at the moment when the dead would be raised (1 Cor 15:51-52). Since the dead would be raised at the Lord’s coming (1 Cor 15:23), the living would be changed at the moment of His return.

It should not be supposed that the living believer would put on an intangible, invisible body while remaining in his physical
body. As Paul told the Philippians, their lowly bodies would be transformed to be like Christ’s glorious body at His coming (Phil 3:20-21). Thus, their natural bodies would be changed into spiritual bodies (1 Cor 15:54.) It has also been shown that Paul was groaning to put on a heavenly tent that would rid him of the sin that was in his flesh so he could serve God according to the desire of his mind and no longer be a wretched man who had the desire to do what was right but not the ability to carry it out (Rom 7:14ff.) (See comments on 1 Cor 15:42-44.) Hence, the changing of the natural body would perfect the believer in righteousness. Furthermore, Paul told the Corinthians that this change would keep the living from sleep (1 Cor 15:54). In the verses preceding this statement, Paul used the term "sleep" to refer to physical death (1 Cor 15:6, 18, 20). This means that those who would remain alive until the Lord’s coming would avoid physical death, much like Enoch and Elijah (Gn 5:21-24; 2 Kgs 2:3, 11; Heb 11:5). The natural bodies of the living would therefore be transformed into spiritual bodies that would glorious, free from sin and immortal. Thus, they would become like the risen Lord at His appearing (1 Jn 3:2).

Paul earnestly desired that his body and the bodies of his contemporaries would be preserved to experience this (2 Cor 5:4; 1 Thes 5:23). However, he knew that whether they would be alive or dead, they would all put on these bodies and be gathered to the Lord at His return (1 Cor 15:52-54; 2 Cor 4:13-14; 1 Thes 4:15-18; 5:9-10; Heb 11:40).

In 2 Corinthians, when Paul spoke of groaning to be clothed in his heavenly tent, he explained that he was looking for eternal things that were by nature unseen (2 Cor 4:17-18). It has been demonstrated that Christ’s risen body belonged to the invisible
realm and appeared only exceptionally in this world as a sign of His defeat of death. (See comments on 1 Cor 15:20.) It has also been shown that the resurrected dead would be clothed in bodies of this kind in the unseen realm. (See comments on 1 Cor 15:36-41.) It therefore follows that when the living would the same imperishable bodies as the dead (1 Cor 15:54) and their natural bodies would be transformed to be like Christ’s glorious body (Phil 3:20-21), they would no longer be visible in this world but be translated into God’s kingdom as it exists in the afterlife.

Jesus taught that His kingdom was not of this world (Jn 18:36). When asked by the Pharisees how this city would arrive, He stated that it would come without observation (Lk 17:20-21). Clearly, these statements mean that Christ would not return in the natural world to raise a myriad of corpses and admit them into a physical city that would descend from the sky. It is evident that the Father, His holy angels and all the righteous dead exist in a kingdom that is not of this world and cannot now be seen. This is the kingdom that the living were to enter at the Lord’s coming.

The hope of the early Church was not to enter Christ’s kingdom as it makes itself present on earth, for this honor was theirs already (Phil 3:20; Col 1:13; Rv 1:6). It was not to have God’s presence arrive within them, for they possessed this already as well (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16-17; Eph 2:18). It was not for Jesus to enter their hearts, for this blessing was also theirs already (Jn 14:18-23; Rom 8:9-11; 2 Cor 13:5; Gal 2:20; Col 1:27). The hope of the early Church was to be admitted into the kingdom of heaven at the Lord’s coming (Mt 25:31-46; Acts 14:22; 2 Tm 4:18; 2 Pt 1:10-11; Rv 22:14). It was
to enter the heavenly tabernacle that Jesus had literally entered as their forerunner (Heb 6:19-20; 8:1-2; 9:11-12, 24; cf. Lk 24:51; Acts 1:9-11, 22; 1 Tm 3:16). It was to reign with Christ in the world beyond (Mt 19:28; Lk 22:28; 1 Cor 4:8; 6:2-3; Rv 3:21). The hope of the early Church was to experience a glory that would far outweigh the terrible sufferings that they were enduring (Rom 8:18). It was to inherit a new world with no more sorrow, pain and death (2 Pt 3:13; Rv 21:1-7). This city would not be found on earth but in heaven (Heb 11:10-16; 13:13-14; 1 Pt 1:4). Accordingly, though the saints were manifesting God's kingdom on earth (Phil 3:20; Col 1:13; Rv 1:6), they earnestly prayed for it to come (Mt 6:9-13; Lk 11:1-4).

Jesus had told His disciples that He was going to His Father to prepare dwelling places for them and then receive them to Himself at His coming (Jn 14:2-3). John's Gospel repeatedly affirms that Christ was going to depart this world to be with His Father in heaven (Jn 13:1, 3; 14:2, 12, 28; 16:10, 16, 28; 17:11; 20:17). The New Testament teaches that Jesus literally ascended to His Father and entered into heaven itself (Lk 24:51; Acts 1:9-11, 22; 1 Tm 3:16; Heb 9:24). Since Christ would receive His disciples to Himself at His return (Jn 14:2-3), He would receive them into heaven itself at this time.

This understanding is further supported by the parable of the ten virgins. In this parable, the Lord compared the arrival of the kingdom to a groom (Jesus) returning to take his bride and her faithful attendants (the Church) to a wedding feast (Mt 25:1ff.). In Jewish culture, the wedding feast was held in the house of the groom's father. Hence, Christ was teaching that He would
return to take His Church to His Father's house, and this house is undeniably in the unseen, heavenly realm (Is 66:1; Acts 7:49).

In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul made it very clear that Christ would return to gather the living into His kingdom in a literal manner (1 Thes 4:13-5:10). Here, Paul encouraged his readers not to grieve without hope for those who had died but to anticipate a glorious reunion with them (1 Thes 4:13-17). As Paul recorded, when the trumpet would sound, the dead in Christ would rise first, and then those who would be alive at the Lord's coming would be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air (lbid). After stating this, Paul encouraged his readers to comfort one another with the promise of this reunion (1 Thes 4:18). It is impossible that such a promise could be satisfied by a figurative or intangible meeting. Paul was clearly assuring his readers that the dead would rise first from the heart of the earth, and then the faithful who would be alive at this time would be caught up to be rejoined with them in the air (Gr. aeros), that is the unseen realm that is in the midst of this earth (Lk 17:20-21; cf. Eph 2:2). Thus, they would always be with the Lord (1 Thes 4:18).

Despite the plain teachings in the passages above, some still contend that the living experienced no tangible change when they put on their immortal bodies and that Christ did not literally receive them to Himself at His return. In support of their position, they point out that Jesus had commanded His Jewish disciples to flee from Judea to the mountains so He might gather them into His kingdom (Mt 24:15ff.; Mk 13:14ff.; Lk 21:20ff.) and argue that such a command would have been pointless if believers were going to be taken to heaven at the Lord's return. However, God often required acts of faith and
obedience before He would perform a miracle, such as when Elijah commanded a man to wash in a pool seven times before supernaturally healing him (2 Kgs 5:10), and when Jesus told a blind man to wash in the pool of Siloam before miraculously restoring his sight (Jn 9:7). So also, Jesus was asking His Jewish disciples to demonstrate their faith in Him by abandoning their capital at the end of the Jewish age before He would take them to the heavenly kingdom (cf. Heb 13:13-14).

It is also argued by some that since there is no surviving secular record of the disappearance of the early saints, it must not have taken place. However, there is also no such account of the resurrection of Jesus and many others that were also raised at that time (Mt 27:52-53), yet Christians believe that these miraculous events occurred due to their confidence in the Scriptures. Likewise, Christians should require no testimony from the unregenerate world to believe that the saints were taken to heaven, for the Bible clearly teaches that Christ would return to gather His followers to Himself before some of them would pass away (Mt 24:30-34; Mk 13:26-30; Jn 14:2-3; 1 Thes 4:17-18).

In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus foretold that a great tribulation would precede His coming to gather the elect, stating that if God would not cut it short, all the elect would perish (Mt 24:22; Mk 13:20). Jesus also taught that even though God would avenge the blood of His saints quickly, it would be a wonder if any would be left at His return (Lk 18:8). John also prophesied of a great multitude being martyred in the great tribulation and entering into heaven (Rv 7:9ff.). (See comments on Mt 24:21-22.) This means that very few Christians would remain alive at the
Lord’s coming. It is therefore understandable that their disappearance would have gone largely unnoticed, especially if the Lord would have taken them at night or when they were assembled in the catacombs for worship, as was their custom. Moreover, the unregenerate who might have noticed their absence would have undoubtedly attributed it to a flight from persecution or to the Roman sword rather than to a miraculous gathering.

The repeated statements of the apostles that the Church would see Christ at His coming also supports the view that they would be taken to the heavenly realm. Their statements regarding this are too numerous and varied to be negated. Jesus declared that His coming would be like lightening in that it would light up the sky from one end to the other (Mt 24:27; Lk 17:24). Paul told the Corinthians that they would see things face to face and attain full knowledge at the Lord’s return (1 Cor 13:12). He also informed the saints that when they would put on their heavenly tents, they would be at home with Christ and thus no longer walk by faith but by sight (2 Cor 5:2-8). Paul repeatedly told saints throughout the Roman Empire that Jesus would appear to them (1 Cor 1:6-8; Col 3:4; 2 Thes 1:10; 2 Tm 4:1; Heb 9:28). Furthermore, Peter spoke of how the saints could not presently see Christ, which undeniably referred to their inability to literally see Him, and then contrasted this with a time when Jesus would appear and reveal Himself to them (1 Pet 1:8; 5:1, 4). John also encouraged believers to live righteously, so they would not shrink back in shame at the Lord’s coming (1 Jn 2:28). This admonishment clearly does not accord with the view that they would only see their Lord by perceiving His orchestration of the Jewish-Roman war. Moreover, John told believers that at Christ’s return, they would see Him
as He existed in heaven (1 Jn 3:2), and Christ existed in heaven in a tangible, bodily form (Acts 7:56; Phil 3:21; Col 1:15; 2:9; 1 Tm 2:5; Heb 1:3). John also recorded that every eye would see Jesus and [Gr. kai] those who pierced Him (Rv 1:7). His reference to eyes makes it very unlikely that he was speaking of mental perception.

Incidentally, though John spoke of every eye seeing Jesus, this should not be understood as every eye of every person. Notice, John recorded that every eye would see Him and (Gr. kai) those who pierced Him. John used the Greek work "kai" before speaking of those who pierced Jesus, and the primary meaning of this word is "and." Translated accordingly, John was saying that another category would see Jesus besides those belonging to the group whose every eye would see Him. In light the statements mentioned above, it is apparent that the first category related to believers. John was saying that all the saints would literally see Jesus along with those who had pierced Him. As earlier noted, this latter group literally saw heavenly armies in the clouds before the outbreak of the Jewish-Roman war, and the Lord was undoubtedly leading these armies. (See comments on Mt 24:29.)

A comparison of Paul's description of the gathering of the saints in 1 Thessalonians with Matthew's account Olivet Discourse, decisively proves that it would take place at the fall of Jerusalem in the first century. Notice the parallels between these passages: both speak of the Lord's coming (Mt 24:30; 1 Thes 4:16) from heaven (Mt 24:30; 1 Thes 4:16) at the sound of a trumpet (Mt 24:31; 1 Thes 4:16), accompanied by angels (Mt 24:31; 1 Thes 4:16) as believers are gathered (Mt 24:31; 1 Thes 4:17); both state that this would happen at an unknown
time (Mt 24:36, 44; 1 Thes 5:1-2) when Jesus would come as a thief (Mt 24:43; 1 Thes 5:2) upon the unaware (Mt 24:37-39; 1 Thes 5:3) as labor upon a pregnant woman (Mt 24:8; 1 Thes 5:3); both warn the faithful not to be deceived (Mt 24:4; 1 Thes 5:4-5), command them to be watchful (Mt 24:42; 1 Thes 5:6) and admonish them to avoid drunkenness (Mt 24:49; 1 Thes 5:7). These numerous and direct parallels demonstrate that both passages were speaking of the same coming of the Lord. Since Jesus declared in the Olivet Discourse that this coming would occur before the passing of that generation (Mt 24:34), the gathering spoken of by Paul would also take place by this time.

54) When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." 55) "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

The apostle cites two Old Testament prophecies that would be fulfilled at the resurrection (Is 25:8; Hos 13:14). These prophecies spoke of Israel’s resurrection and entrance into the heavenly kingdom. Both Ezekiel and Daniel also prophesied that Israel would be raised from the dead (Ez 37:1-14; Dn 12:2). Hence, Paul often referred to the resurrection as Israel’s hope and a promise belonging to her (Acts 23:6ff.; 24:14-15; 26:6-8, 22-23; 28:20; Rom 9:3-4; 11:15). Paul was adamant that God would fulfill His promises to this nation and such promises would not be revoked from her (Rom 9:3-4; 11:26-29). Consequently, God would not dissolve His covenant with Israel until He would raise her departed and bring her faithful remnant into the heavenly kingdom. As Jesus taught, the words
of the Law and the prophets would not be abolished or pass away until all such words would find fulfillment (Mt 5:17-18).

The first prophecy that Paul quoted and taught would be fulfilled at the resurrection is commonly referred to as Isaiah’s apocalypse. This prophecy anticipated the time when death would be swallowed up in victory (Is 24:23-25:8). Before speaking of this, Isaiah accused the Jews of violating the Law and declared that a curse would therefore devour their land and devastate their city (Is 24:5-6-10). This was prophecy was only against Israel, for she alone possessed the Law and the curses related to breaking it (Dt 28; Lv 26:14ff.). Isaiah then prophesied that on this day, death would be swallowed up in victory (Is 24:23-25:8). After this, Isaiah recorded that when the Jewish altar would be crushed, the trumpet would sound to gather the faithful into the kingdom of Zion (Is 26:18-19; 27:9-13). Since Paul was anticipating the fulfillment of this prophecy, when he spoke of a trumpet that would sound to herald the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:52), he was speaking of something that would take place when the curses of the Law would come upon the Jews and their altar would be crushed.

In Hebrews, Paul told his readers that they had come to the kingdom of Zion and were already receiving it (Heb 12:22, 28). This reveals that Isaiah’s apocalypse, which predicted their gathering into Zion, was beginning to find fulfillment at that time. Paul then recorded that God would remove the created things, so that only the heavenly kingdom would remain (Heb 12:26-27). In context, the created things referred to the physical things belonging to the world of Old Covenant Israel (Heb 12:18ff.). Hence, Paul went on to tell his readers to depart from
Jerusalem, for it would be no lasting city (Heb 13:13-14). As Isaiah predicted, when the trumpet would sound, the curses of the Law would devour the Jewish state, and this is when the faithful would enter Zion where death would be no more (Is 25:6; 27:9-13; Rv 21:2-4).

In 2 Corinthians, Paul also affirmed that Isaiah's apocalypse was being fulfilled. Notice, Isaiah recorded that death would be swallowed up when the Lord would remove the veil over His people on the day of salvation (Is 25:7-9). In 2 Corinthians, Paul called the Old Covenant a ministry of death, because it could not offer salvation from sin, and then referred to it as a veil that God was removing by offering them a New Covenant that would give them life (2 Cor 3:12-18). Paul then declared that the day of salvation had arrived (2 Cor 6:2). The parallels between these statements and Isaiah’s apocalypse are clear. The time for the swallowing of death had therefore arrived in Paul’s day.

Jesus taught that Isaiah's apocalypse would find complete fulfillment at the judgment of Jerusalem in the first century. In Isaiah’s prophecy, it is recorded that a great feast would be held on Mount Zion when death would be defeated (Is 25:7-8). The Lord told the unrepentant Jews that this feast would be held when they would be cast out and their city would be burned (Mt 8:11-12; 22:1-14; cf. Lk 14:12-24). Notice also, Isaiah’s oracle states that the dead would be raised when the Lord would come to punish Israel and the land would disclose its blood (Is 26:19-21). This imagery speaks of the vindication of the blood of the righteous against Jerusalem, and Jesus declared that the blood of all the righteous slain on the earth would be avenged upon His Jewish contemporaries (Mt
of 105

23:31-36; Lk 23:28-21). Hence, the swallowing of death must have taken place by this time.

Paul quotes from the second prophecy that would be fulfilled at the Lord’s return, stating, "O death, where is your victory? O Hades, where is your sting?" Hosea recorded this prophecy, and it spoke the defeat of Adamic death for Israel. In this oracle, Hosea declared that Israel had incurred guilt through Baal worship and died (Hos 13:1). Hosea then recorded that Israel was continuing to sin, more and more (Hos 13:2). The death in this passage therefore referred to moral decay. Now, Hosea went on to prophesy that Israel would perish for her sin and descend to Hades (Hos 13:7-14). Israel would thus experience the threefold death of Adam, moral decay, exile and destruction, because she had violated God’s law like Adam (Hos 6:7). Hosea then recorded that God would one day defeat this death for Israel (Hos 13:14). As noted, Hosea connected the resurrection to an appointed harvest for Judah (Hos 6:2, 11), and this harvest would occur when God would judge Judah what He was about to judge Israel in Hosea’s day by making an end of her kingdom with foreign armies (Hos 6:11; cf. 2:21-23). In fulfillment of this prediction, the Lord made an end of Old Covenant Judah with the Roman armies in AD 70. Consequently, this is when God defeated death for the faithful in Israel and the resurrection took place.

56) The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

God’s law awakens man to sin by forbidding it, and sin kills him by corrupting his flesh. (See comments on 1 Cor 15:21.) Though God would postpone the annihilation of the sinner until
He would provide a way for him to escape it, biological death would nevertheless cause him to forfeit his body and be confined to Hades. (See comments on 1 Cor 15:21.) This is the sting that the law had empowered sin to put into death. The Jews understood this and thus lived in fear of the grave (Heb 2:14-15). Paul expressed this fear as well, stating that he longed to remain in his earthly tent until he would put on his heavenly one so he might not become naked, that is a disembodied soul (2 Cor 5:1-5).

Though Paul was speaking as a Jew who had lived under Torah, the law that empowered sin to put a sting into death was not limited to the Mosaic law. God’s commandment to Adam was the first law that empowered sin to put a sting into death. (See comments on 1 Cor 15:21.) In Romans, Paul taught that the following generations who were not living under the Torah had also sinned and been condemned to death (Rom 2:12-14; 3:9ff.; 5:12ff.). Paul explained that those who did not have specific commandments from God had sinned by acting contrary to His unchanging attributes and glory (Rom 1:18-20; 3:23). Since the Bible defines sin as a transgression of law (1 Jn 3:14; Rom 4:15; 5:13), it follows that God’s character is itself a moral law. It is therefore ultimately the transgression of the moral law that results in sin and death. As Paul told the Romans, the Torah only exemplified the failure of all men to live according to God’s glory (Rom 3:19).

Consequently, the removal of the Torah at AD 70 would not remove the possibility of sinning and incurring a sentence of Adamic death. Paul certainly did not believe that the removal of the Torah would deliver him from sin and death, for he knew that he was not under its condemnation, even before its
passing (Rom 6:14-15; 7:4-6; 1 Cor 9:20; Gal 3:24-25; 5:18). Paul was groaning for a spiritual body that would deliver him from the sin that had killed him by corrupting his flesh, so he might be able to keep God’s moral law according to the desire of his mind (Rom 7:14ff.). (See comments on 1 Cor 15:42-44.) Hence, it is the putting on of the imperishable body and not the removal of the law that would complete the redemption of the saints.

The New Testament teaches in several passages that salvation from sin and death would not be fully realized until the Lord’s coming. Paul not only expressed his hope to be saved from sin at the Lord’s coming in Romans (Rom 7:14ff.; 13:11-12) but also in 1 Thessalonians (1 Thes 5:8-9) and Hebrews (Heb 1:14; 9:28). Peter also looked for a heavenly reward that would save him from sin on the day of the Lord (1 Pt 1:3-9).

In Hebrews, Paul taught that Christ was about to return save His people from sin. Here, he explained that just as the high priest of Israel killed the sacrifice and brought it into the most holy place, so Christ came to put away sin by sacrificing Himself and entering the temple of God in heaven (Heb 9:23-26). After this, he recorded that Christ would appear a second time to save His people, adding that the Torah had foreshadowed this but could not remove sin (Heb 9:27-10:1). The Law had therefore predicted the second coming by requiring the high priest to return from the most holy place to complete the atonement ritual (Lv 16:7). This is notable, for Jesus taught that the Law could not pass until all of it was fulfilled (Mt. 5:7-8). Hence, the second coming that would remove Israel’s sin must have taken place before the passing of the Law in AD 70. Accordingly, Paul, writing around AD 64, told
his readers that Christ would return in a very little while to bring them this salvation (Heb 9:26; 10:37).

Daniel also predicted that Christ would return to save Israel from sin at the destruction of first-century Jerusalem. In his prophecy of the 70 weeks, Daniel recorded that sin would be put away from the Jews when a period allotted for them would end with an abomination that would desolate their capital (Dn 9:24ff.). In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus told His disciples that Daniel was speaking of things that would occur before the passing of their generation (Mt 24:15, 34) and the surrounding of Jerusalem by armies would signify the nearness of their redemption (Lk 21:20-28), that is the putting away of their sin. It therefore follows that Daniel was speaking of the desolation of the Jewish capital in AD 70 and this is when the saints would put on the immortal bodies that would remove their struggle with sin.

Romans also supports this understanding. In this letter, Paul taught that three Old Testament prophecies would be fulfilled at the Lord's coming (Rom 11:26-27; cf. Is 27:9; 59:20, 21; Jer 31:33, 34): The first prophecy concerned the Lord judging Israel for her bloodguilt (Is 59); the second spoke of Israel finding atonement when her altar would be crushed (Is 27:9); and the third concerned the removal of Israel's sin in fulfillment of a new covenant that He would make with them (Jer 31:31-34). As noted, these first two prophecies were fulfilled at AD 70, for this is when Israel was judged for her bloodguilt and her altar was crushed (See Mt 23:31-36; Lk 23:28-21 and comments on 1 Cor 15:54-55). This means that the third prophecy regarding the removal of Israel's sin according to the promise of the New Covenant was also fulfilled at this time.
Though God had made the New Covenant with Israel (Jer 31:31ff.), and it was Israel after the flesh that owned the promises relating to redemption (Rom 9:3-4), this does not mean that Israel alone would receive these blessings. In Hebrews, Paul recorded that those who had trusted in God long before the establishment of Israel would receive the same inheritance that had been promised to her (Heb 11:4ff.). Paul also taught in Romans that those who were not Abraham's descendants were being grafted into Israel to receive the redemption that she had been promised (Rom 11). The New Covenant would therefore offer its blessings to all who would trust their Creator to redeem them.

Since everyone sins against God (Rom 3:23) and thus incurs a sentence of death (Rom 6:23), those who would live after the Lord's coming would also stand in need of salvation. Certainly, the believer today does not hope for this deliverance in vain. The gospel is everlasting (Rv 14:6). God's Word remains forever to regenerate the lost (1 Pt 1:23-25). The words of Jesus offer eternal life (Jn 6:63), and these words will never pass away (Mt 24:35; Mk 13:31; Lk 21:33). Accordingly, the Lord's kingdom will ever increase and remain on earth forever (2 Sm 7:12-16; Ps 45:6-17; Is 9:6-7; Dn 2:44; 7:14, 27; Lk 1:32-33; Eph 3:21; Heb 1:8; 2 Pt 1:11; Rv 5:13; 11:15).

The redemption of sinners today involves a process of sanctification, even as it did for those who lived before the coming of Christ. Those who long to serve God still contend with the sin in their flesh that opposes this desire. This is a plain indication that the believer today has yet to receive his spiritual body, because Paul taught that this body would
complete the redemption of the Christian and thus relieve this struggle (Rom. 7:7ff.; 2 Cor 5:1-5). The believer today therefore has the same hope as those living before the coming of Christ: to receive a body uncorrupted by sin and to enter the kingdom as it exists in the afterlife. Though this would take place mysteriously and exceptionally for the early Church as they would put on these bodies and enter the kingdom at the Lord’s return (1 Cor 15:50-52), the natural process for inheriting these things would involve the death of the mortal body (1 Cor 35ff.; 2 Cor 5:1-5). This is how the Christian receives his eternal inheritance today.

Though our redemption is not complete until we pass from this world, we nevertheless enjoy a covenant with God that is far greater than the covenant of Moses. Under the Old Covenant, God expressed His law by means of ordinances that no one could bear (Acts 15:10), and the sacrifices of that priesthood could never remove the sins of His people (Heb 7:11ff.; 10:1-4). As a result, the people of God remained in death and condemnation (2 Cor 3:7-10; Rom 3:20; Gal 2:16; 3:10-11; Heb 10:1-4; Jas 2:10). The New Covenant, however, expresses the essence of the moral law: to love God and love others (Mt 22:37-40), and the Lord’s sacrifice completely covers our sin thereby enabling us to remain in perfect fellowship with God (1 Jn 1). Moreover, in the New Covenant age, the believer no longer becomes a disembodied soul and descends to Hades at death but immediately receives a new body to continue in God’s presence as a whole person. Hence, it may be said that the one who believes in Christ will never die (Lk 20:36; Jn 8:51; 11:25-26; cf 2 Tm 1:10).
Consequently, we should no longer fear biological death as did the Jews during the former age (Heb 2:14-15). Physical death, as Paul recorded, has now become a doorway to something far better and to die is now gain (Phil 1:20-24). The Bible even expressly states that those who would die after the fall of Jerusalem would be blessed, for they would immediately enter God's rest (Rv 14:8, 13). Christ has removed the sting of biological death, and this death is now good, just as the death of a seed has always been a good and natural process that yields new life (Gn 1:11-12; Jn 12:24; 1 Cor 15:35ff).

57) But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58) Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

The faithful were not undergoing persecution for the sake of the gospel in vain. These hardships would usher in the heavenly kingdom, and both the living and the dead would be gathered into God's presence to be rewarded for all they had done in the flesh (2 Cor 5:1-10).

2 Peter 3
Part 1

1) This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, 2) that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles. 3) Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come
with their mocking, following after their own lusts, 4a) and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?"

Peter explains that in both of his letters to this church, he is speaking of things that the prophets foretold would take place in the last days. In his first letter, Peter twice declared that they were living in the last times (1 Pt 1:5, 20), adding that Christ was ready to judge the living and the dead (1 Pt 4:5), for the end of all things was at hand (1 Pt 4:7) and the time for the judgment had arrived (1 Pt 4:17). As Peter writes of these things in his second letter, he is therefore writing of things that would soon take place.

Throughout the Bible, the term "last days" is connected with the final days of Old Covenant Israel. Jacob prophesied that Judah would lose her authority in the last days (Gn 49:1, 10). Moses foretold that the last days would result in the end of the Hebrew nation (Dt 31:29; 32:20, 29). Isaiah declared that in the last days, a war would devastate Jerusalem (Is 2:2 3:25). Daniel prophesied that the last days would arrive during the rule of the fourth empire from Babylon, that is Rome (Dn 2:28, 44), and these days would result in the shattering of the Jewish power (Dn 10:14; 12:1, 7).

The last days and the end of the age had undeniably arrived in the first century. Peter not only affirmed this in his first letter to this church (1 Pt 1:5, 20; 4:5, 7, 17) but also during his sermon at Pentecost, telling his contemporaries that they were living in the last days and witnessing the fulfillment of what their prophets foretold (Acts 2:14ff.; cf. Jl 2:28). Both Peter and Jude spoke of scoffers who would appear in the last days, and both attested that these men had invaded their churches (2 Pt
3:3ff.; cf. Jude 4, 17-18). Jesus taught that time was fulfilled, meaning that the age had reached its end (Mk 1:15), and He associated the end of the age with the destruction of the temple that was to take place before the passing of His generation (Mt 24:1-3, 34; Mk 13:1-4, 30; Lk 21:5-7, 32). Paul declared also that the fullness of time had arrived (Gal 4:4; Eph 1:10) and the end of the age had come (1 Cor 10:11). In Hebrews, Paul recorded that Christ had appeared in the last days and was crucified at the end of the age (Heb 1:2; 9:26). Both Paul and John announced that the last hour was present (Rom 13:11-12; 1 Jn 2:17-18), and James recorded that his wealthy contemporaries had fattened themselves for slaughter by storing up riches in the last days (Jas 5:3-9). These statements agree perfectly with the view that these days referred the final days of the Jewish age, for this dispensation was about to close when the apostles wrote. The time for the fulfillment of the things that Peter was discussing in this letter had therefore arrived.

The identity and fate of the scoffers that Peter mentions may be understood in light of Isaiah's writings. Isaiah recorded an oracle that twice referred to a people as scoffers (Is 28:14, 22) and predicted that they would be destroyed by the Lord's day (Is 28:5ff.). It is clear that Peter was looking for the fulfillment of this prophecy, for he was speaking of scoffers who would be destroyed by the Lord's day and reminding his readers of what the prophets had foretold (2 Pt 3:1-3, 10). Furthermore, Peter claimed to be iterating things that he had stated in his first letter (2 Pt 3:1), and in that letter, he quoted from Isaiah's prophecy of these scoffers (1 Pt 2:6; cf. Is 28:16) and then declared that Christ was ready to enact the prophesied judgment (1 Pt 4:5). Isaiah's prophecy plainly referred to these
scoffers as rebellious Jews (Is 28:14) and foretold that the day of the Lord would kill them (Is 28:18), trodden them under foot (Is 28:3) and desolate their land (Is 28:22). This language describes a temporal destruction of the Jewish nation. Since Peter was looking for the fulfillment of this oracle, he was anticipating this event.

The apostles taught on more than one occasion that Isaiah's oracle (mentioned above) was being fulfilled in their day. Paul quoted Isaiah's prediction that God would speak to the scoffers in foreign tongues and then told the saints at Corinth that they had received the miraculous gift of tongues for this purpose (1 Cor 14:21; cf. Is 28:16). Both Peter and Paul referred to Isaiah's statement that God would set a precious cornerstone in Zion, and both taught that this had been fulfilled by the advent of Jesus (Rom 9:30-33; 1 Pt 2:4-8; cf. Is 28:16). This is significant, because Isaiah recorded that when God would set this cornerstone, He would annul the covenant that the scoffers had made with death (Is 28:18), that is the agreement that they had made with death that it would not take them (Is 28:15), and He would beat them down (Is 28:18). The day of the Lord would therefore arrive against scoffers who were present in the generation of the apostles.

Peter and Jude both inform us that the scoffers of the last days were those who had departed from the faith (2 Pt 2:1-3:3; Jude 4-19). The Jews had done this by their crucifixion of Jesus, for this was a grievous defection from the true religion of Israel. However, as both Peter and Jude recorded, the prophesied scoffers were also attending the churches of the saints (2 Pt 2:13; Jude 4, 12). Consequently, the scoffers not only included Jews who had outright rejected Jesus as the
Messiah but also those who had ostensibly accepted Him as such, as evidenced by their association with the Church, but were mocking the promise of His coming against the Jewish state. This latter category of apostates would have belonged to a religious sect known as the Judaizers.

The Judaizers believed that Jesus was the prophesied King of Israel but insisted that men be circumcised and keep the Law to enter His kingdom (Acts 15:1-5). These beliefs countered the teachings of the apostles that men would not be saved by works of the Law but by grace through faith in Christ (Acts 15:6-11; Rom 3:20, 28; 4:5; 11:6; Gal 2:16, 21; 5:6; Phil 3:9; Ti 3:5) and that the Law was passing away (2 Cor 3:11; Heb 8:13). Thus, as Paul recorded, to embrace the Judaizing heresy would be to fall away from the faith (Gal 5:4).

The Judaizing error appears in Scripture as the most prominent false teaching in the early Church. It was this heresy that prompted the first apostolic council (Acts 15). Paul’s letter to the Galatians was occasioned solely by this error, and his letter to the Colossians interacted with it as well (Col 2:8-23). It is also evident that Paul was addressing this heresy when he told the Corinthians not to heed the Jews who were preaching another Jesus and a different gospel (2 Cor 11:4ff.) and when he instructed the Philippians to beware of the Israelites who were preaching circumcision (Phil 3:2-3), for these are the same warnings that Paul gave the Galatians regarding the Judaizers (Gal 1:6-7; 6:12). Considering the prevalence of this error from the earliest days of the Church, it is no surprise that it would play a significant role in the apostasy that would later take place just before the Lord’s coming.
Though these heresies were present shortly after the time of the Lord's crucifixion, neither the first apostolic council nor Paul's letter to the Galatians should be viewed as addressing the predicted apostasy itself, for very near the time of these things (ca. AD 51), Paul told the Thessalonians that the apostasy that would precede the Lord's coming was yet future (2 Thes 2:3). It also seems that it had yet to occur when Paul wrote to the churches at Colossi, Philippi and Corinth (ca. AD 57 - 62), since these letters did not speak of the predicted scoffers as having arrived. Nevertheless, it was plainly underway when Peter and Jude wrote (ca. AD 63), for both affirmed that the last-day scoffers were among them (2 Pt 2:13; Jude 4, 12).

Near this time (ca. AD 63), Paul also documented the arrival of the last-day apostasy. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul told this pastor to rebuke those who had departed from the faith and were devoting themselves to speculations and myths (1 Tm 1:3-7). After this, Paul described the scoffers of the last days in the same terms, reminding Timothy of how the Spirit had foretold that in the last times, people would depart the faith, devoting themselves to false teachings and myths (1 Tm 4:1-7). These statements together make it clear that it was the scoffers of the last days that were causing Timothy grief. Furthermore, Paul then instructed Timothy how to respond to the apostates of the last days (1 Tm 4:4ff.). This teaching would have been irrelevant to Timothy unless these men belonged to his generation.

Paul's second letter to Timothy also informs us that the last-day apostasy had begun. In this letter, Paul lamented that all in Asia had forsaken him (2 Tm 1:15). It is difficult to imagine a more emphatic declaration that a great defection from the faith
was underway. Paul then spoke of those who had swerved from the truth and were deceiving people, causing more and more wickedness (2 Tm 2:16-18). After this, Paul described the apostates of the last days, in the same manner, reminding Timothy that in the last days, evil men would deceive others (2 Tm 3:1-5, 13), causing things to go from bad to worse (2 Tim 3:13; 4:3-4). Paul thus again recorded parallel statements that identify those who were harassing Timothy as the scoffers of the last days. Moreover, Paul again instructed Timothy how to respond to the apostates of the last days, telling him to avoid these (Gr. toutous) men (2 Tm 3:5). Clearly, since Paul told Timothy to avoid these men, they must have been among his contemporaries.

Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus, all of which were written very near the same time (ca. AD 63), when examined together, leave no doubt as to the identity of the last-day apostates who were troubling these churches. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul spoke of these heretics as those who were misapplying the Torah and teaching myths, accusing them of turning away from the faith and a clear conscience (1 Tm 1:5-7). Paul then recorded that Hymenaeus was one who had turned away from the faith and a clear conscience (1 Tm 1:19-20) thus identifying him as one who was misapplying the Torah and teaching myths. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul also spoke of Hymenaeus, charging him with swerving from the truth and overthrowing people's faith (2 Tm 2:16-18). All these statements about Hymenaeus reveal the nature of his false teaching when examined in light of Paul's letter to Titus. Here, Paul spoke of many wicked men who had crept into the Church, adding that those who belonged to the party of the circumcision were especially depraved (Ti 1:10). "The party of the circumcision"
was Paul’s term for the Judaizers as evidenced in his letter to the Galatians (Gal 2:12). Paul then told Titus to rebuke those who were teaching myths about the Torah and overthrowing people’s faith (Ti 1:14; 3:9). Thus, Paul charged the party of the circumcision with the very same charges that he had made against Hymenaeus and the wicked men who were harassing Timothy (1 Tm 1:3-20.; 2 Tm 2:16-18). Hence, it was the party of the circumcision, that is the Judaizers, who were troubling these churches in the last days. (See also comments on 1 Cor 15:23.)

The Hebrew letter, which Paul wrote very near the time that he wrote to Timothy and Titus (ca. AD 63), further supports this view of the last-day apostates and their punishment. Paul began this letter by announcing that the last days had arrived (Heb 1:2) and imploring his readers not to fall away from the faith (Heb 3:7ff.). After this, Paul warned that those who had departed from the truth would face God’s fire (Heb 6:4-8). Paul was therefore addressing a Jewish apostasy that was taking place in the last days and would lead to judgment. The apostle then explained that the purpose of his letter was to show the superiority of the New Covenant to the Mosaic law which was passing away (Heb 8). This reveals that the last-day apostasy involved a return to the outward observance of the Torah. Paul then continued to speak of the fire that would come upon those who had departed from the truth by telling his readers that they could see the Lord’s day drawing near (Heb 10:25). He then quoted from the Song of Moses, a prophecy that spoke of a fire that would fall on unfaithful Hebrews and put an end to Israel (Heb 10:30ff.; cf. Dt 32: 20-29). The Lord’s day against the apostates of the last days thus referred to a judgment that was drawing near and would utterly abolish the
Jewish state. Accordingly, Paul closed his letter to the Hebrews by admonishing them to depart the camp of Judah, for they had no lasting city in it (Heb 13:13).

A comparison between Peter's letter and the Olivet Discourse resolves any remaining doubt that Peter was speaking of apostates who would be overtaken by the Lord's coming in the first century. Notice the parallels between these passages: both were discussing a great apostasy (Mt 24:10-12; 2 Pt 2) that was to precede the Lord's return (Mt 24:30; 2 Pt 3:4, 10) to dissolve the creation (Mt 24:29, 35; 2 Pt 3:10-12) at the time of the end (Mt 24:3, 13-14; 2 Pt 3:3). These numerous correlations, along with Peter's earlier claim to be reminding his readers of what Jesus had foretold (2 Pt 3:1-2), demonstrate that both Jesus and Peter were speaking of the same events. Now, Jesus declared in no uncertain terms that all these things would take place before the passing of His generation (Mt 24:34). The day of the Lord against the scoffers that Peter was anticipating would therefore take place by this time.

4b) "For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." 5) For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, 6) through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. 7) But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

The scoffers were asserting that Christ would not return because everything had continued since the beginning of
creation. Peter begins to respond to this by recalling the creation account of Genesis (Gn 1:1-10). This account was speaking of the natural world, for Peter stated that the heavens and earth in this passage were formed out of the waters that later came upon the earth during the great flood (Gn 1:1-10). The scoffers, as Peter records, were overlooking that the world at that time was destroyed by this flood. The word Peter uses for this world is the Greek word "kosmos" which carries the meaning of a world system or civilization. In the previous chapter, Peter used this word to speak of the wicked people who perished in Noah's day (2 Pt 2:5). Thus, the scoffers were focusing on the endurance of the natural creation, and this was causing them to overlook that a world order was destroyed.

Peter then explains that as the former world was destroyed in the flood, so the present heavens and earth would be destroyed. The destruction of the former world did not involve the undoing of the natural creation but the ruin of a people. The destruction of the heavens and earth that Peter was discussing would therefore involve the same.

This is further supported by Peter's teaching in the previous chapter that the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah served as an example of what would befall the apostates at the Lord's return (2 Pt 2:6-9). The judgment of these cities was temporal and did not involve the destruction of the natural creation. Consequently, it is this kind of judgment that would come upon the scoffers at the Lord's coming. Furthermore, Peter could not have been prophesying of a catastrophe greater than the destruction of Noah's day, for the Lord had promised to never again destroy every living thing as He had done in the flood (Gn 8:21-22).
Since Peter had earlier informed his readers that the Lord’s coming would overtake the apostates among them, they would have understood him to be speaking of an event that would destroy the Jewish scoffers and Judaizers. Hence, it would not be necessary for Peter to identify the world that would be destroyed as Old Covenant Israel. To have done so would have been to prompt further violence from the Jews against the Church. Accordingly, Peter speaks of a world that was to be dissolved, thus following the example of his Lord who also prophesied of Jerusalem’s destruction without mentioning her by name so as not to incite open persecution from His countrymen (Mt 21:33ff.; 22:1ff.; Mk 12:1ff.; Lk 20:9ff.).

8) But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. 9) The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

Many scholars have recognized that Peter is referring to Psalm 90 which states that a thousand years are like yesterday in God’s sight (Ps 90:4). The Talmud informs us that the Jews had long cited this psalm to support their view that the seven days of creation would correspond to seven thousand-year periods. They referred to the seventh period as the day of the Lord and believed that it would begin with the Messiah’s initial appearance and close with His judgment of the world. This teaching was quite prevalent in Peter’s day, and his Jewish readers would have undoubtedly been influenced by it. These things being so, it is evident that Peter was refuting this
tradition by giving the true interpretation of the psalm upon which it was erroneously based. As Peter explains, Psalm 90 does not teach that God would be slow in keeping His promise to judge the world. It does not imply that there would be a literal thousand-year period between the Messiah’s initial appearance and the great judgment. Rather, it teaches that God is patient. The Lord is not anxious to destroy a wicked generation, for even a thousand years are as a day to Him (Ps 90:4). Nevertheless, He would certainly not fail to judge those who had crucified their Messiah but return against them before the passing of that generation, just as He had promised (Mt 24:30, 34; Mk 13:26, 30; Lk 21:27, 32).

10a) But the day of the Lord will come like a thief,

Throughout the Scriptures, the term "day of the Lord" describes a time when God would devastate or destroy a nation. It appears that Joel was the first prophet to employ the term in this manner, though the date of his oracle is difficult to determine. Joel spoke of a day of the Lord was near against His people (Jl 1:15; 2:1), and, as his prophecy informs us, this day concerned the devastation of Israel by means of a locust plague (Jl 1:4ff.;2:25). Amos also prophesied of a day of the Lord that would come against Israel (Am 5:18ff.). He prophesied that the Lord would bring this day upon His people by sending them into captivity beyond Damascus into the land of Assyria (Am 5:27). This day arrived in 722 BC, as the Assyrians destroyed the kingdom of Israel at this time. Isaiah prophesied of a day of the Lord that would soon come upon Babylon (Is 13:1, 6, 9), declaring that the Lord would summon mighty men of war to enact this judgment (Is 13:3-5). Shortly after these words were penned, the Assyrians overtook Babylon; then, near
the close of the sixth century BC, the Medes brought Babylon to ruin (Is 13:17). The prophets also wrote of a day of the Lord that would come soon against Egypt (Jer 46; Ez 30), Jerusalem (Ez 13; Zep 1), and Edom (Ob 15). Jeremiah and Ezekiel both declared that God would use the Babylonians to bring this day of judgment against these nations (Jer 25:8-26; 46:13ff.; Ez 30:10ff.), and these kingdoms fell to Babylon in the sixth century BC. Understanding the day of the Lord in Peter’s letter to involve the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans therefore accords perfectly with the biblical use of this idiom.

Joel not only spoke of a day of the Lord that was near when he wrote but also of one that would arrive in the last days (Joel 2:28ff.; cf. Acts 2:16ff.). Notice how this prophecy is illuminated by the New Testament writers: According to Joel, this day of the Lord would be preceded by great signs and wonders (Jl 2:28ff.). Peter tells us that Joel was speaking of the signs and wonders that began on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1ff.). Joel went on to record that in those days and at that time, the Lord would deliver a chosen remnant of Judah from a coming judgment (Jl 2:32-3:1). In His Olivet Discourse, Jesus declared that a chosen people would be delivered from judgment before the passing of His generation (Mt 24:31, 34; Mk 13:27, 30), and Paul later wrote that God had reserved an elect remnant of Jews for a salvation that would shortly come to pass (Rom 9:27-28; 11:1ff.). In Revelation, John also recorded that God would save a remnant of Israel from the Lord’s day (Rv 6:15-7:8), and he claimed to be writing of things that would soon take place (Rv 1:1-3; 22:10, 12, 20). Joel continued his oracle by stating that at this time, the Lord would judge all nations and admit the faithful remnant into His kingdom (Jl 3:2-12, 18-21). Jesus told His disciples that He would come in
glory to gather all nations and determine who would enter His kingdom before some standing beside Him would die (Mt 25:31-46; cf. 16:27-28). At the close of his oracle, Joel prophesied that in that day, God would destroy Egypt to avenge the innocent blood that He had yet to avenge (Jl 3:19-21). Correspondingly, Revelation speaks of a great city that had been spiritually called Egypt (Rv 11:8) and states that the Jewish remnant would be delivered from this city when the Lord’s day would arrive against it to avenge the blood of the martyrs (Rv 6:15-7:8; 14:1-8; 16:14-19; 18:1-10; 19:2). This is the city that was earlier identified in Revelation as the city where the Lord was slain (Rv 11:8) and charged with shedding the blood of the righteous (Rv 17:5-6; 18:24; 19:2), that is Jerusalem, and Jesus had prophesied that the avenging of the blood of all the righteous would take place at the desolation of her temple in the first century (Mt 23:31-36; Lk 23:28-21). Joel’s prophecy regarding the day of the Lord that would arrive in the last days therefore related to events that began at Pentecost and would conclude at Jerusalem’s fall in AD 70.

Isaiah also prophesied of the day of the Lord that would arrive in the last days (Is 2:2,12). In this oracle, Isaiah recorded that on this day, the Jews would hide in the rocks and the caves from the Lord’s coming (Is 2:1-21) and the bloodstains of Jerusalem would be cleansed by fire and judgment (Is 4:2-4). Jesus not only predicted that the blood-guilt of Jerusalem would be avenged upon His Jewish contemporaries at the desolation of their temple (Mt 23:31-36; Lk 11:47-51) but also directly quoted Isaiah’s prophecy of this day and declared that these things would come upon the women and children of His generation (Lk 23:28-31; cf. Is 2:19-21). John also quoted Isaiah’s prophecy of this day, affirming that it would avenge the
blood of the righteous (Rv 6:9-11; cf. Is 2:19-21) and its fulfillment was near (Rv 1:1-3; 22:10, 12, 20). Isaiah's prophecy of the day of the Lord that would arrive in the last days therefore concerned the destruction of first-century Jerusalem.

Malachi spoke of a great and terrible day of the Lord (Mal 4:5), and the New Testament references to this prophecy not only show that he was speaking of the day that would come in the last days but also that it would devastate Judah in the generation of the disciples. As Malachi informs us, the Lord was to send Elijah to precede the great and terrible day of the Lord and call the Jews to repentance (Mal 3-4). According to the Gospel writers, John the Baptist fulfilled this prophecy by coming in the spirit and power of Elijah (Mt 11:13-14; 17:10-13; Lk 1:13-17). These writers also tell us that John called the Jews to repentance by warning them of their impending ruin (Mt 3:7-12; Lk 3:7-17). John was undeniably speaking of the desolation of the temple in AD 70, an event that Jesus said was to avenge the blood of all the righteous (Mt 23:31-36; Lk 11:47-51). This means that Malachi was prophesying of a great and terrible day of the Lord that would avenge the blood of the righteous. This is notable, for in Revelation, John quoted Isaiah's prophecy concerning the day of the Lord that would arrive in the last days and referred to as the great and terrible day of the Lord that would avenge the blood of the righteous (Rv 6:9-11; cf. Is 2:19-21). Hence, Malachi was speaking of the day of the Lord that would arrive in the last days, and this day would avenge the blood of the righteous in AD 70.

Since the prophecies of Joel, Isaiah and Malachi about the day of the Lord that would come in the last days all referred to the desolation of Judah in the first century, and since Peter
was discussing the day of the Lord that would arrive in the last days (2 Pt 3:1-3, 10) and reminding his readers of what had been foretold by the prophets (2 Pt 3:1-2), it is undeniable that he was anticipating the judgment that would befall the Jews at the hands of the Romans in AD 70.

Peter further described this day as one that would come like a thief (2 Pt 3:10). This means that it would come suddenly and unexpectedly upon the scoffers. As Peter taught earlier in his letter, the Lord’s coming would overtake the wicked, just as the great flood had overtaken the depraved men of the former world (2 Pt 3:5ff.).

Jesus also compared His coming to the arrival of a thief and the great flood (Mt 24:37-44; Lk 12:39-40; 17:26-27; Rv 3:3). Accordingly, He warned His disciples to watch for signs that would precede His coming, so they might escape the judgment that would follow (Mt 24:32-44; Lk 21:31-36). Paul later repeated the warning that the Lord’s day would come as a thief, encouraging the saints to be watchful (1 Thes 5:1-9). Clearly, Jesus and the apostles would not have been commanding the early Church to watch for signs to escape an ensuing destruction if these signs were not to appear in their generation.

In Revelation, John also wrote of a day of the Lord that would come like a thief. Here, the Lord told John to warn the church in Sardis that if they refused to repent, the Lord would come against them as a thief (Rv 3:3). This warning was given to a church that existed in John’s day. If they did not repent and become watchful, they would be overtaken by a catastrophe that was to arrive in their generation. Later in Revelation, John
heard Jesus repeat the warning that He would come as a thief, and He instructed His people to remain watchful (Rv 16:15). Immediately after this admonition, John beheld the day of the Lord coming against the great city where He was slain to avenge the blood of the martyrs (Rv 16:14ff.; cf. 11:8). Revelation confirms that this foretold of the judgment that would befall Jerusalem at AD 70, for it records that the day of the Lord would come like a thief against the great city in response to the saints reciting the Song of Moses (Rv 15:3ff.). The Song of Moses spoke of a fire that would consume the world of Old Covenant Israel (Dt 32:20, 29). Notice also, John recorded that the fall of this great city would make the Bride of Christ ready for marriage (Rv 18:1-19:8). John then prophesied that the Bride of Christ would be ready for marriage at the arrival of the new creation (Rv 21:1-2). These are the very things that Peter was anticipating: the day of the Lord that would come as a thief to burn up the world and result in a new creation as foretold by the prophets and apostles (2 Pt 3:10). The burning of the world in Peter’s letter would therefore answer to the fall of the great city in Revelation, that is Jerusalem, and thus Peter was anticipating the coming of the Lord to close the Mosaic dispensation.

2 Peter 3
Part 2

10b) in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.

When the day of the Lord would arrive in the last days, the heavens and earth would be consumed by fire. Other prophets
also spoke of a cataclysm event that would take place at this
time. Joel predicted that this day would turn the sun to
darkness and the moon to blood (Jl 2:28-31). Malachi foretold
that this day would burn like an oven and consume the wicked
(Mal 4:1). John predicted that the heavenly lights would collapse
on this day and the sky would be rolled up like a scroll and
vanish (Rv 6: 12-14). However, these statements all belong to
oracles which were speaking of the day of the Lord against
first-century Jerusalem. (See comments on 2 Pt 3:10a.)
consequently, the de-creation language in these prophecies
should not be taken literally. These oracles were focused on
the desolation of Judah. The undoing of the natural creation in
these prophecies should thus be understood to symbolize the
destruction of that nation.

It was David who first employed this kind of symbolism to
depict the defeat of nations. In speaking of how God delivered
him from the armies of Saul and the various kingdoms who
opposed Israel (2 Sm 22:1), David recorded that the Lord came
down in thick, dark clouds and shook the heavens and earth (2
Sm 22:8ff.; Ps 18:7ff.). In the narratives of these battles, the
Scriptures nowhere speak of the Lord coming in the clouds
visibly and shaking the literal heavens and earth to deliver
David and his armies. David was therefore using figurative
language to speak of the coming of the Lord in the unseen,
spiritual realm to orchestrate the defeat of the nations that
opposed Israel.

Isaiah often used de-creation language in a similar way. In one
prophecy, he recorded that the sun, moon, and stars would all
become dark, and the heavens and earth would be shaken out
of their place (Is 13:10-13). According to Isaiah, this would
occur when the day of the Lord would come against Babylon at the hands of the Medes (Is 13:1, 6, 9, 17). This took place in the sixth century BC. In another prophecy, Isaiah declared that the Lord would come in the clouds against Egypt, making their idols tremble and their hearts melt within them (Is 19:1ff.). However, Isaiah informs us that God would accomplish this by means of the Assyrians (Is 20:1ff.). This nation came against Egypt in 701 BC. Isaiah also spoke of a day when the earth would mourn and break apart, the moon would be confounded and the sun ashamed (Is 24:4, 19, 23). This judgment was to arrive against a people who had violated the Torah, and it would desolate their city and leave few survivors (Is 24:5-6, 10-13). It would therefore involve a temporal judgment of Judah, one that scholars have recognized to have been accomplished by the Babylonians in the sixth century BC. In another prophecy, Isaiah declared that the Lord would come in the clouds with a great voice, with hailstones, and with fire, to rescue Jerusalem from the Assyrians (Is 30:30; 31:4-5). This was fulfilled when the angel of the Lord destroyed the Assyrian armies as they slept in their tents (Is 37:36-37), an event that occurred in 701 BC. The armies in this conflict neither heard a shout nor saw the Lord coming with hailstones and fire, for the Assyrian king did not realize the slaughter of his army until he awoke the next morning (Is 37:36-37). Isaiah also prophesied of a time when all the hosts of heaven would rot, the skies would be rolled up like a scroll, and the stars would fall like leaves from a fig tree (Is 34:1-4). However, this oracle states that such things would occur when the Lord would slaughter the Edomites, drenching the land with their blood (Is 34:5ff.). According to the scriptures, God accomplished this by means of the Babylonians in the sixth century BC (Jer 25:8-21; Mal 1:2ff.). (The falling of stars is also said to depict the ruin of a people
Thus, Isaiah repeatedly used cataclysmic language to depict the ruin of kingdoms.

Jeremiah used de-creation symbolism in this manner as well. He spoke of a time when the earth would be formless and void, the heavens would be darkened, the mountains would trample and cities would be laid waste (Jer 4:23-26). Jeremiah directed this prophecy against Judah and stated that God would accomplish this judgment by means of the Babylonians (Jer 4:5f; 5:15ff.; 20:4). In fulfillment of this oracle, the Babylonians laid waste to the cities of Judah in the sixth century BC.

Ezekiel also prophesied against a kingdom using this kind of imagery. He foretold of a day when God would darken the sun, moon, and stars, and put out all the lights of heaven (Ez 32:7-8). According to Ezekiel, this day was near and would arrive when God would bring the Babylonians against the Egyptians (Ez 30:1ff.; 32:1-2, 7, 11). This war took place in the sixth century BC.

Joel employed de-creation symbolism in this manner as well. In speaking of a day of the Lord that was near when he wrote, Joel declared that in that God would make the earth quake, the heavens tremble, and darken the sun, moon, and stars (Jl 2:10). However, Joel then revealed that this judgment was near in that it had already come upon Israel by means of a locust plague (Jl 1:15; 2:1-2, 25).

Micah used language that was very similar to Peter’s to describe the defeat of a kingdom. He recorded that the Lord would come out of heaven to melt the world with fire, because of the idolatry of Samaria and Jerusalem (Mi 1:3-5). Micah then
explained that God would punish these people for their idolatry by destroying their cities (Mi 1:6). The coming of the Lord out of heaven to melt the world thus referred to His temporal judgment of Samaria and Jerusalem, and these cities fell to the Assyrians in the eighth century BC.

Nahum also prophesied against a nation using this kind of imagery. He declared that the Lord would come with the clouds as the dust of His feet, and His appearance would dry up the rivers, make the mountains quake, melt the hills and cause the world to heave (Na 1:1-8). This omen was directed against Nineveh (Na 1:1), and this city fell to the Babylonians in the seventh century BC.

Zephaniah was another who used language that was nearly identical to Peter’s to foretell of the destruction of a nation. This prophet spoke of a time when God would destroy every living thing and consume the earth with fire (Zep 1:2-3, 18). This was undeniably hyperbolic expression, for it was penned after the Lord had promised to never again destroy every living thing as He had done in the great flood (Gn 8:21-22). As Zechariah went on to record, this oracle concerned a day of the Lord that would come upon Jerusalem for her worship of Baal (Zep 1:4-7). This judgment befell her by means of the Babylonians in the sixth century BC.

Haggai even spoke of God’s manipulation of a kingdom as a disturbance of the natural world. He recorded that in a little while, the Lord would shake the heavens and earth to fill His house with glory (Hg 2:6). The context of this prophecy tells us that this referred to God shaking the Medo-Persian empire to beautify His temple in Jerusalem (Hg 2:7-8). The king of this
empire was persuaded by the nations to halt the rebuilding of Jerusalem and its temple near 465 BC (Ezr 4:7-24), but in 457 BC, God used Ezra to persuade the king to direct his funds once again to its reconstruction (Ezr 7:11-28) thus fulfilling this oracle.

Incidentally, Paul referred to Haggai’s prophecy in Hebrews, because its fulfillment was typological of the shaking of another heavens and earth that was about to take place in the first century (Heb 12:26-28). Just as the Lord shook the world of Medo-Persia to establish and glorify His temple on earth, so He would shake the world of Old Covenant Judah to do the same for His temple in heaven. (See comments on 2 Pt 3:13a.)

The Old Testament therefore soundly establishes a precedent for understanding the de-creation language used by Peter. The prophets repeatedly spoke of the coming of the Lord against various nations and declared that the world would be disturbed, dissolved or burned up at their demise; however, it is apparent that these kingdoms were shaken or laid waste apart from the undoing of the literal creation. Consequently, it evident that in biblical prophecy, the destruction or disturbance of the natural world symbolizes the defeat or abolishment of a nation. In fact, the Bible nowhere speaks of the end of the material world. To the contrary, the Scriptures repeatedly attest to the enduring nature of the physical creation (Eccl 1:4; Ps 78:69; 89:36-37; 93:1; 96:10; 104:5; 119:90; 148:4-6; Jer 31:35-36).

It is important to remember that Peter was a Jewish prophet (Gal 2:8ff.) writing to a Jewish audience (1 Pt 1:1-2; 2 Pt 3:1) that was intimately familiar with how the prophets employed symbolic language to foretell the doom of a nation. This being
so, since Peter was using terminology very similar to the prophets before him, his audience would have understood it to carry a similar meaning. If Peter was using this language differently than the prophets before him, that is to speak of the destruction of the literal cosmos, then clearly it would have been necessary for him to explain this to avoid being misunderstood by his Jewish contemporaries. Peter not only offered no such explanation but also claimed to be reminding his readers of the very words of their prophets, some of whom had employed de-creation imagery to speak of the destruction of Jerusalem that was to take place at AD 70. (See comments on 2 Pt 3:10a.) Hence, it is reasonable to conclude that Peter was echoing the language of the prophets to remind his readers of Jerusalem's fate.

Though symbolic language was used to foretell the destruction of kingdoms, this does not mean that the Lord did not literally visit these nations to judge them. To the contrary, the Scriptures reveal that the Lord and His armies were truly present at these battles. On one occasion, the Lord enabled David to hear the angelic armies marching as they went before him in battle (1 Chr 14:15). On another, He permitted Elijah to see into the heavenly sphere and behold the divine infantries that would strike down the Syrians (2 Kgs 6:15-18). The presence of the Lord and His armies at these battles was therefore not in the physical world but in the unseen, heavenly realm. Accordingly, Christ would return personally in this realm to direct the Romans against Jerusalem in AD 70 (cf. Acts 1:9-11). As noted, the Lord enabled many people to see angelic armies preparing for battle in the clouds above Jerusalem a few days after Passover in the year before the outbreak of the Jewish-Roman war. (See comments on Mt 24:29.)
11) Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12a) looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God,

Jesus instructed His disciples concerning how to hasten His arrival. He told them that if they petitioned God for justice, He would hear their prayers, and the Son of Man would come to avenge them quickly (Lk 18:7-8). The prayers of the early Church clearly availed this day, for Christ came to avenge the blood of His servants against the house of Israel, just as He had predicted (Mt 23:31-36; Lk 11:47-51).

12b) because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!

Peter states for the second time that the elements would be dissolved at the passing of the heavens and earth. The word that he used for "elements" is the Greek word "stoicheion." This word appears five other times in the New Testament (Gal 4:3, 9; Col 2:8, 20; Heb 5:12), and in each case, it refers to the rudimentary principles of the Mosaic law.

In Galatians, Paul mentioned elements (Gr. stoicheion) twice, stating first that Jews had been under the elements of the world (Gal 4:3) and then asking his readers why they would want to return to these elements (Gal 4:9). The elements of the world in this passage referred to the rituals and feast days of the Torah (Gal 4:9, 10). Paul was trying to keep his readers from coming under the precepts of the Law (Gal 5:1ff.), for, as he went on to explain, the Jerusalem that was enslaving her
people to such observances was to be cast out (Gal 4:21-30). Thus, the elements of the world would be consumed by God’s fire.

Paul also mentioned elements (Gr. stoicheion) twice in his letter to the Colossians. Here, Paul warned his readers not to let anyone hold them captive to the elements of the world and then explained that by accepting Christ, they had died to these elements (Col 2:8, 20). Paul issued this warning while encouraging his readers not to let anyone judge them for failing to observe feast days, festivals and Sabbaths, for these things merely foreshadowed the person and work of Christ (Col 2:16). The elements of the world thus concerned the principles of Judaism that were about to pass away (2 Cor 3:11; Heb 8:13).

Paul's last mention of these elements (Gr. stoicheion) appears in Hebrews where he speaks of the elements of the oracles (Heb 5:12). The word that Paul used for oracles is the Greek word "logion." This word is used elsewhere in the New Testament to refer to the Old Covenant (Acts 7:38; Rom 3:2). Paul was thus referring to the principles of Judaism. In context, Paul was explaining how these elements foreshadowed the person and work of Jesus to implore his Jewish readers to abandon these principles for the sake of a new and better covenant (Heb 5:12-14; 6:1; 7:22; 10:1). As Paul went on to record, Christ would soon return to bring the fire of the last days upon the world associated with these elements as prophesied in the Song of Moses (Heb 10:25, 30, 37; Dt 32:20, 29). The elements that would be consumed at the day of the Lord thus spoke of the principles of the Old Covenant.
After Peter spoke of the burning of these elements in the last days at the day of the Lord (2 Pt 3:3, 10-12), he stated that Paul had also written of these things (2 Pt 3:14-16). This is notable, for Paul only used the word that Peter used for elements (Gr. stoicheion) to refer to the principles of the Mosaic law (Gal 4:3, 9; Col 2:8, 20; Heb 5:12). Furthermore, Paul only wrote of the day that would arrive in the last days and burn up the world with reference to God’s judgment upon Israel (Heb 1:2; 10:25, 30; cf. Dt 32:20, 29). It is therefore undeniable that Peter was discussing these things.

Notice also how the Lord connected the passing of the Law with the passing of the heavens and earth: Jesus said that not a single part of the Law would pass until heaven and earth would be dissolved (Mt 5:17-18). Since the Law passed at the fall of the temple, the heavens and earth must have been dissolved at this time. This further proves that the heavens and earth which Peter was expecting to pass away did not refer to the literal creation but to the world of Old Covenant Israel. Moreover, Christ declared that none of the Law would pass until it was all fulfilled (Mt 5:17-18). This is significant, because the Law included the prophecy of the Song of Moses that concerned the consumption of the earth by fire in the last days (Dt 31:29; 32:22). Consequently, these things must have been accomplished by the time of the passing of the Law in AD 70.

13a) But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth,

Peter was looking for a new world to be established at the dissolution of the old world as God had promised through his prophets (2 Pt 3:2). Isaiah foretold of the creation of the new
heavens and earth several hundred years before the time of Peter’s letter (Is 65-66). Observing how Isaiah elsewhere spoke of the heavens and earth will help us understand his prediction of the coming new world. Before prophesying of the new creation, Isaiah recorded that when God divided the sea and gave His Word to Israel, He planted the heavens, laid the foundation of the earth and called them His people (Is 51:15-16). In other words, when God parted the Red Sea to deliver the Hebrews from Egypt and gave them His Law, He established them as a nation (Ex 19-24). Isaiah was describing the founding of Israel as the creation of a heavens and earth. After stating this, Isaiah prophesied that God would slay Israel for rejecting Him and call His people by a new name, for He would create a new heavens and earth (Is 65:15-17). This means that the new heavens and earth would arrive when God would slaughter those belonging to the old heavens and earth, that is Old Covenant Israel (Is 51:15-16). Since Isaiah had spoken of the founding of Old Covenant Israel as the creation of a heavens and earth, it follows that when he prophesied of the creation of a new heavens and earth, he was speaking of the establishment of a New Covenant people. At the slaughter of Old Covenant Israel and her abolishment at the hands of the Romans in AD 70, a new creation would remain forever in her stead. From this day forward, the former world, that is the nation governed by the Torah, would no longer come to mind (Is 65:17). In its place would be a new world, that is a people belonging to a new covenant, and the name of this people would endure forever (Is 66:22; cf. Ps 102:25-28).

Notice the following parallels between the prophecies of Isaiah and Peter: both were anticipating of the coming of the Lord (Is 66:15; 2 Pt 3:4) in fire (Is 66:15-16; 2 Pt 3:10-12) to destroy a
people (Is 65:15; 2 Pt 3:7) and create a new heavens and earth (Is 66:22; 2 Pt 3:13). These correlations show us that Isaiah and Peter were discussing the same things. This is further supported by Peter’s claim to be speaking of things foretold by the prophets (2 Pt 3:2), for Isaiah was the only prophet who specifically foretold of the new heavens and earth. The new world that Peter was discussing would therefore arrive when God would slay Old Covenant Israel, just as Isaiah predicted (Is 65:15-16).

Isaiah also foretold that God would create this new heavens and earth when He would punish Israel for her sins and the sins of her fathers (Is 65:6ff.). According to Jesus, the Jews of His generation would fill up the measure of their fathers' guilt, and God's wrath would come upon them for killing the prophets, the Messiah and the apostles (Mt 23:31ff.). Paul later affirmed that the Jews were filling up their fathers' guilt, and God's wrath was about to come upon them for killing the prophets, the Messiah and the apostles (1 Thes 2:14-16). In Revelation, John saw God pouring out His wrath on the great city where the Lord was slain for filling up her cup with the of the prophets, the Messiah and the apostles (Rv 11:8; 17:4-6; 18:24; 19:2), and he was repeatedly told that these things would soon take place (Rv 1:1-3; 22:10, 12, 20). These prophecies make it clear that the Jews of the first century would fill up their fathers' guilt and be punished for it when God would pour out His wrath on their city in AD 70. Consequently, this is when the new heavens and earth would arrive as prophesied by Isaiah (Is 65:6ff.).

As the Bible informs us, the Lord waits to abolish a kingdom until it fills up the cup of its iniquity (Gn 15:16). Daniel
prophesied the same for Judah, stating that when her
transgression would be completed, her age would expire with a
war that would desolate her city (Dn 7:24ff.). Jesus taught that
the desolation prophesied by Daniel would take place before
the passing of His generation (Mt 24:15, 34). This further proves
that the Jews would be punished for their sins and for the sins
of their fathers at AD 70, and since Isaiah placed the arrival of
the new creation at this judgment (Is 65:6ff.), the new creation
must have been established at this time.

According to Scripture, the capital of this new heavens and
earth would be a new Jerusalem that would be a source of
living water (Is 65:17-19; Rv 21:1-2; 22:1-2). Zechariah also
prophesied of this city and fountain, affirming that these things
would be established at Jerusalem's fall. This prophet recorded
that a day was coming when God would gather all nations
against Jerusalem and she would be utterly destroyed (Zec
14:1-2). However, Zechariah declared that in that day, the Lord
would come with all His holy ones to deliver a remnant and
establish their kingdom above all nations (Zec 14:2ff.).
Jerusalem would then become a source of living waters, and
she would be glorified by the riches of the nations (Zec 14:8ff.).
These images were obviously not predicting the victory of the
earthly Jerusalem, for this Jerusalem would be completely
ruined in that day (Zec 14:1-2). As the New Testament teaches,
the living waters of the new Jerusalem would answer to a
spiritual life emanating from a heavenly city (Jn 7:38; Rv 22:17).
Zechariah was therefore predicting that the day of the Lord
would destroy the earthly Jerusalem and exalt a heavenly one
in her place.
Consider how Zechariah’s prophecy above agrees with Joel’s oracle concerning the day of the Lord that would arrive in the last days: both Zechariah and Joel spoke of a coming day (Zec 14:1; Jl 2:31) when God would gather all nations against His people (Zec 14:1; Jl 3:2ff.), deliver a Jewish remnant (Zec 14:2; Jl 2:32), punish Egypt (Zec 14:18-19; Jl 3:19) and cause a fountain to flow from Jerusalem (Zec 14:8; Jl 3:18). These parallels indicate that both prophecies concerned the same things. As demonstrated, Joel’s oracle spoke of things that were taking place in first-century and would conclude with the desolation of Judah at AD 70. (See comments on 2 Pt 3:10a.) Joel’s oracle thus confirms that Zechariah was prophesying of the desolation of first-century Jerusalem and that this is when the Jerusalem belonging to the new creation would be established.

In Hebrews, Paul also associated the destruction of the earthly Jerusalem with the establishment of the heavenly one. Here, Paul explained that believers in Christ had not come to a city that could be touched, for it was heavenly in nature (Heb 12:18-22). He then declared that God would shake the heavens and earth, removing the created things so that only the kingdom of God would remain (Heb 12:18ff). In context, the created things referred to the physical world of Old Covenant Israel which was typological of the world to come (Heb 12:18-21). Accordingly, Paul told his readers that Christ was about to return to burn up the world of Israel as prophesied in the Song of Moses (Heb 10:30-39; cf. Dt 32:22ff.) and implored them to depart the gates of Jerusalem as it would be no lasting city (Heb 13:13). Hence, it is the capital of Judah that would be removed to establish the heavenly kingdom (Heb 12:27).
Since the prophets taught that the new heavens and earth, the new Jerusalem and the kingdom of God would all arrive at the desolation of the earthly Jerusalem, it is evident that these depictions of the coming new world all spoke of the same thing. In the New Testament, these terms and their related concepts are shown to refer to the Church. Paul described the saints several times as a new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:10; 4:24; Col 3:10). Jesus taught that those who would believe in Him would become a fountain of living water as foretold in the Scriptures (Jn 7:38), and the prophets spoke of living waters emanating from a glorified Jerusalem (Jl 3:18; Zec 14:8). Paul recorded that just as the Old Covenant people answered to an earthly Jerusalem, so the New Covenant people answered to the heavenly one (Gal 4:22ff.). Both Paul and John spoke of believers as citizens of a heavenly kingdom (Phil 3:20; Col 1:13; Rv 1:6), and Peter referred to the saints as God's holy nation (1 Pt 2:9). Hence, it is the Church that would be set over all nations at the destruction of Israel's world in AD 70.

13b) in which righteousness dwells.

The new creation would be characterized by an indwelling of righteousness. According to Daniel, everlasting righteousness would arrive before the end of the Jewish age (Dn 9:24-27). It is difficult to believe that Daniel was anticipating a different arrival of everlasting righteousness than Peter, especially considering that Peter was reminding his readers of what the prophets had foretold (2 Pt 3:1-2). Daniel's prophecy therefore further supports the view that the new creation would arrive by the time of the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.
The understanding that Peter was contrasting the heavens and earth of his day with a coming world of righteousness agrees perfectly with the view that he was speaking of the old and new covenant kingdoms, respectively, for these worlds stood in notable contrast to one another with respect to righteousness (2 Cor 3:9). The Old Covenant world could not offer righteousness to man, for no one could attain this by observing the Torah (Rom 3:20; Gal 2:16; 3:10-12). The New Covenant world, however, would offer the righteousness of Christ to those who would believe in Him (Rom 3:21-24; 4:3-5, 22-25; 5:19-21; 10:4; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:8-9).

The saints were actually receiving the righteousness belonging to the new world even before its arrival, for God was counting them as righteous for having faith in His Son (Rom 3:21-24). Nevertheless, the early Church was eagerly awaiting the day when they would experience righteousness in its fullness (Gal 5:5; Phil 3:8-14; 2 Tm 4:7-8; 2 Pt 3:13). This consummation would arrive when the saints would put on spiritual bodies and enter the kingdom of heaven as it exists in the afterlife. (See comments on 1 Cor 15:42-44 and 51-54.)

The fact that believers would begin to live in the heavenly kingdom while yet in the natural world is also reflected in Scripture. Isaiah prophesied of people living in the new heavens and earth who would have offspring and experience biological death (Is 65:20-23). These things obviously do not speak of life in the heavenly city as it exists in the afterlife but of life in the kingdom as it manifests itself in the present world by means of the Church. Revelation also pictures the New Jerusalem presenting itself in the natural world, for it speaks of this capital descending from heaven and remaining in the midst of


the nations who would yet stand in need of healing and would enter her gates to find restoration and enteral life (Rv 21:24-26; 22:2).

14) Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, 15) and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, 16) as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. 17) You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, 18) but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Peter closes his letter by encouraging his readers not to be carried away by the heresies of the apostate Jews and Judaizers, so they might not be caught up in the destruction that was about to come upon the world of Israel. (See comments on 2 Pt 3:1-4). Instead, they were to continue in the gospel and grow in their knowledge of Jesus Christ, who was worthy of all glory then, even as He is now and will be throughout all generations (Eph 3:21).

Revelation 20
Part 1
1) Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. 2) And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, 3) and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

In the first chapter of Revelation, an angel told John that he would see visions signifying things that were past, present and about to take place (Rv 1:1-3, 19). The book of Revelation would not progress in this manner as a whole, however, for John sometimes saw a vision of the future that was followed by a vision of the past. (For example, see Rv 11:15-12:5 where John sees the arrival of the kingdom and the judgment of the dead and then witnesses the birth of the Messiah.) When John therefore speaks of seeing a vision or sign, as he does at the start of this chapter, it stands to be determined whether the vision concerns things that were past, present or future to him.

Revelation 20 evidently begins with events that were past to John. Notice the following parallels between Satan’s defeat in the opening verses of this chapter and the defeat that he suffered during Christ’s ministry: John saw the binding of Satan (Rv 20:2), and Jesus said that He was binding Satan during His ministry using the identical Greek word as John (Gr. deo) to describe this restriction (Mt 12:24-29; Mk 3:22-27; Lk 11:20-22). John saw Christ binding the devil so that He might begin His reign (Rv 20:1-6), and Jesus taught that He was binding Satan during His ministry so that He might begin His reign (Mt 12:24-29; Mk 3:22-27; Lk 11:20-22). John witnessed Satan being
cast down (Rv 20:1-3), and Jesus stated that Satan was cast down during His ministry (Lk 10:17-18). John saw Satan descending into an abyss, an image that depicts God's judgment (cf. Ps 36:6), and the New Testament tells us that God judged Satan at the cross (Jn 12:31-32; 16:8-11; cf. Col 2:14-15). These numerous and direct correlations demonstrate that John's vision was signifying the defeat of Satan that took place during Christ's first advent and culminated at the crucifixion.

Paul also spoke of Satan suffering a defeat at the cross, stating that Christ had disarmed the devil at this time (Col 2:15). However, Paul also instructed the Church to beware of Satan's flaming darts (Eph 6:16). These statements together show us that when the Bible speaks of things happening in the spiritual realm, such things should not be interpreted too literally. They also reveal that while Satan's power had been severely limited by the cross, it had not been completely removed. The binding of Satan should therefore not be pressed to mean that he could no longer engage the world. Rather, as John recorded, this binding should be understood to signify that he could no longer deceive the nations (Rv 20:3).

Christ declared that He was binding Satan to plunder his house (Mt 12:29; Mk 3:27; Lk 11:20-22). Satan's house was comprised of the nations, for he was the ruler of this world (Dn 10:12-14, 20-21; Mt 4:8-9; Lk 4:5-7; Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:2; Rv 13:2). After the crucifixion, the apostles began plundering Satan's house by preaching the gospel and thus delivering people from his power and into God's kingdom (Acts 26:18; Eph 2:1; Col 1:13; 1 Pt 2:9). This proves that Satan had
been bound by this time, for Jesus stated that his house could not be plundered otherwise (Mk 3:27).

4) Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. 5) The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. 6) Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

The first resurrection would enable the saints to reign in God's kingdom and serve as priests (Rv 20:4-6). Elsewhere in the New Testament, Paul told believers that they had been raised with Christ (Rom 6:1-13; Eph 2:5-6; Col 2:11-3:4) and translated into God's kingdom (Phil 3:20; Col 1:13), and John recorded earlier in Revelation that God had made the saints a kingdom of priests (Rv 1:5-6). Hence, by the time of John's visions, the first resurrection had taken place and the thousand-year reign was underway.

Paul confirms this understanding in his letter to the Ephesians. Notice the following parallels between John's vision of the millennium and this letter: John saw the saints being raised from the dead and seated in the heavens to rule with Christ, adding that a host of martyrs had also ascended at this time
(Rv 20:4). Paul told the Ephesians that they had been raised from the dead and were seated in the heavens to minister with Christ (Eph 2:4-10), adding that they had been empowered for this purpose when Christ had ascended to heaven with a host of captives (Eph 4:7ff.). These direct correlations make it evident that both passages were speaking of the same things. It was therefore at the Lord’s ascension that the first resurrection took place and the millennium began.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul also revealed that Christ began His millennial reign at the ascension. In this letter, Paul, like John, spoke of a first resurrection (1 Cor 15:23; Rv 20:4-5), followed by a reign of Christ (1 Cor 15:25; Rv 20:4) that would conclude with the defeat of death (1 Cor 15:26; Rv 20:5, 14). These apostles were therefore clearly speaking of the same millennial reign. Now, Paul told the Corinthians that Christ would continue this reign until His enemies would be put under His feet (1 Cor 15:25). According to the New Testament, Christ was seated to reign until His enemies would be put under His feet at His ascension into heaven (Acts 2:34-36; Heb 1:13; 10:12-13; cf. Ps 110:1-2). Hence, Christ began His millennial reign at the ascension. This is when God enthroned the Messiah in heaven, despite the Romans and Jews rejecting His kingship (Ps 2:1-6; cf. Acts 4:25-28).

The first resurrection undoubtedly involved the union of the saints in the resurrection of Christ. Jesus is called the firstfruits of the resurrection because He was the first to overcome death. (Acts 26:23; Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:20, 23; Col 1:18; Rv 1:5). The apostles also spoke of living believers as a kind of firstfruits (Rom 8:23; 11:16; 2 Thes 2:13; Jas 1:18; Rv 14:4). This is because God considers those who trust in Jesus to be
united with Him in His victory over sin and thus views them as being resurrected from the death that results from sin (Rom 6:1-13; Eph 2:1-9; Col 2:11-3:4). Those who were believing in Christ were passing from death to life (Jn 5:21-24) and were thus being raised from a state of moral decay to find inclusion in His collective spiritual body, that is the Church (Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 10:16-17; 12:12-27; Eph 1:22; 4:4-16; 5:23, 29-30; Col 1:18, 24; 2:19; 3:15).

Because the living were experiencing a firstfruits resurrection by associating themselves with Christ and thus finding inclusion in His Church, some have concluded that the final resurrection, that is the resurrection that would take place at the Lord’s coming, would speak only of the culmination of this process for first-century believers. They place this culmination at the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, for it is this event that would remove Old Covenant and establish the Church in its place as the collective body of God (Heb 10:9). This understanding of the final resurrection is based primarily on the fact that the firstfruits resurrection would speak of the nature of the coming harvest, that is the final resurrection. However, this view overlooks the biblical teaching that the firstfruits resurrection of the saints was only an association with the actual firstfruits resurrection of Christ from Hades to receive a personal, immortal body (Rom 6:1-13; Eph 2:1-9; Col 2:11-3:4). (See comments on 1 Cor 15:20.) Since the resurrection of Jesus was the actual firstfruits resurrection, it is undoubtedly this resurrection that would speak of the nature of the coming harvest, that is the resurrection that would take place at the Lord’s return. Paul, in fact, makes this very argument in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 15:12-20).
The Bible is very clear that the final resurrection would not only refer to the inclusion of living believers into the established Church but also to the raising of departed souls. Daniel was told that after he would sleep in death, he would be resurrected to receive his reward at the time of the end (Dn 12:2, 13). Jesus prophesied that many bygone nations and peoples would be raised for judgment (Mt 11:20-24; 12:41-42; Lk 10:10-14; 11:31-32; Jn 5:28-29). He also distinguished the firstfruits resurrection of the living from the harvest resurrection of the departed, for after speaking of how those who were hearing Him were passing from death to life, Jesus prophesied of a coming hour when all who were in the tombs, that is those who had physically died, would be raised to life (Jn 5:21-29). Revelation teaches this also, for it depicted the final resurrection as the raising of departed souls from Hades to heaven for judgment (Rv 20:4, 13-14).

Those who believe that the final resurrection would involve only the inclusion of believers into the established Church have suggested that this is the kind of resurrection that the departed would experience as well, for they would be raised out of Hades into the collective body of Christ, however it might exist in the afterlife. The Scriptures, however, preclude this view. Notice, Paul recorded that the resurrection would involve those who had fallen asleep in Christ (1 Cor 15:16-18; 1 Thes 4:13-17), that is departed Christians. If Paul was teaching that departed Christians would once again be included in the Church, this would mean that death had caused them to forfeit their standing in Christ’s collective body. However, this could not have been the case, for Paul elsewhere stated that nothing, not even death, could separate the faithful from Christ (Rom 8:38). Moreover, the Bible tells us that the resurrection of the
wicked departed would not result in their inclusion into the Church but would instead be a shameful event that would lead to the destruction of their souls (Dn 12:2; Mt 11:20-24; Lk 10:10-14; Jn 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; Rv 20:13-14; cf. Mt 10:23).

The first resurrection of living believers would certainly not be the fullness of the life that they would receive. Jesus made this clear when He said that those who were hearing Him were passing from death to life and yet they would also be raised to life on the last day (Jn 6:39-40; 50-58; cf. Jn 11:27-28).

According to Paul, the resurrection of the living involved the Spirit of God giving life to the inner man, that is their souls (Eph 3:14-17; 2 Cor 4:16). As noted earlier, this Spirit was serving as a guarantee of the complete redemption that would involve putting on a spiritual body. (See comments on 1 Cor 15:42-44.) This is the fullness of life that they were to receive.

The first resurrection was apparently not limited to the union of living believers in the resurrection of Jesus. Notice, John not only spoke of saints being enthroned in heaven but also of those who had been beheaded participating in the first resurrection (Rv 20:4). Paul likewise spoke not only spoke of living believers being enthroned but also a host of captives ascending to heaven (Eph 2:4-10). The latter category in these passages clearly speaks of the departed, specifically those who had been martyred. Earlier in Revelation, John saw these souls in heaven, waiting for the Lord to return to avenge their blood (Rv 6:9-11). The resurrection of these saints may be observed in Matthew’s Gospel, for he recorded that many of the righteous dead were raised and came out of their tombs when Christ was raised (Mt 27:52).
John identifies the departed who participated in the first resurrection as those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark. In an earlier vision, John also saw a beast, its image and its mark (Rv 13:1ff.). This vision contains several details that illuminate the meaning of these things.

In the earlier vision, John saw a beast rising from the sea and receiving authority from a dragon (Rv 13:1ff). This beast had the features of a lion, a bear, and a leopard, and it had ten horns (Rv 13:1-2). This is notable, for Daniel had prophesied that a lion, a bear, a leopard and a beast with ten horns would arise from the sea as four successive empires (Dn 7). These four empires were also depicted as a great statue in the book of Daniel (Dn 2:31-45). The beast in John's vision, like the statue, should therefore be understood to symbolize all four of the kingdoms foreseen by Daniel. The rise of this beast from the sea signifies that these kingdoms belonged to the Gentiles, for the sea consistently represents the Gentiles in Scripture (Is 21:1; 60:5; Rv 17:15). Its empowerment by the dragon reveals that these empires were an expression of Satan's reign (Rv 20:2). The sea beast should therefore be understood as the kingdom of Satan as it had manifested itself in the world by means of four great Gentile empires. According to Daniel, the first of these four kingdoms was Babylon (Dn 2:37-38), and history informs us that the three succeeding empires were Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Revelation confirms that the fourth expression of Satan's kingdom was Rome, for John implored his readers not to take the mark of the beast (Rv 1:3; 14:9ff.), and Rome was the Gentile empire that was reigning in John's day.
As the earlier vision continues, John sees another beast rising from the land (Rv 13:11ff.). This undoubtedly symbolized the kingdom of Judah, for it is her land that stood in contrast to the Gentile sea. John saw this land beast performing signs and wonders and causing people to make an image of the sea beast (Rv 13:13-14). This should be understood to depict the leaders of Judah causing their citizens to engage in idolatry. The Jewish religion became an image of the sea beast, that is an idolatry that would empower the Gentile kingdom, by demanding devotion to itself and to reigning empire (Rv 13:15-17). Since the land beast and the image, that is apostate Judah and Jewish idolatry, related to a sea beast that represented four successive empires, then the land beast and the image should be understood to speak of apostate Judah and Jewish idolatry that existed throughout the reign of the four empires.

At the close of the earlier vision, John saw the image of the beast, that is Jewish idolatry, commanding people to take the mark of the beast, which puts its name on their hand or forehead (Rv 13:16-17). This mark should be understood to symbolize allegiance to the reigning Gentile kingdom, for in Revelation, the mark of the beast stands in contrast to the mark of God on the foreheads of the saints which signifies their devotion to Him (Rv 7:3; 14:1; see also Ez 9:1ff.). In John’s day, this mark represented allegiance to satanic Rome (Rv 13:18). However, since this mark related to a satanic beast that had expressed itself by means of four successive Gentile empires, it should be understood to signify allegiance to any of these empires over devotion to God.
When John therefore spoke of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of the Word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark, he was referring to those who had been martyred for remaining faithful to God and had not bowed down to any of the four satanic Gentile empires or had participated in the Jewish idolatry that had furthered their reign. These were the faithful dead who had been raised with Christ and had ascended with Him to participate in His millennial reign.

To understand the millennium it is necessary to understand how this term was used in John's day. As evidenced in Talmud, the millennium spoke of a transition between two great ages: this age, which referred to the Jewish age, and the age to come, which spoke of the eternal age of the Messiah's reign over all nations. The Jews believed that the Messiah would begin reigning over Israel during the Jewish age, so He might conquer all nations and establish His universal reign in the age to come. Some Rabbis believed that it might take the Messiah as long as a thousand years before He would put down all His enemies and establish His universal reign. Consequently, they began referring to His limited reign over Israel during the Jewish age as the millennium. In light of this, and that John was speaking of a reign that had begun during the Jewish age and would yield to a universal reign (Rv 21-22), it is apparent that John was using the term "millennium" to refer to the Messiah's limited reign over Israel.

The Talmud also informs us of a competing view among the rabbis that the Messiah's reign over Israel would last only forty years before yielding to His universal reign. The rabbis believed that this was typified by David's rule and the Hebrew exodus,
both of which lasted forty years. As this study will demonstrate, the actual duration of the millennium, that is Christ’s reign over Israel, would indeed last forty years, and thus it was about to culminate quickly when John wrote, just as he recorded (Rv 1:1-3; 22:10, 12, 20).

Jesus and the apostles also spoke of this age and the age to come, thereby substantiating the rabbinical understanding of the two great ages. (Mt 12:32; Mk 10:30; Lk 18:30; 20:34-35; Eph 1:21; 1 Tm 6:17-19). However, the apostles repeatedly referred to the coming age as the age about to (Gr. mello) come, thus emphasizing its impending arrival (Mt 12:32; Eph 1:21; 1 Tm 6:17-19; Heb 2:5; 6:5). It should be noted that the apostles spoke of both ages in the same manner, even after Christ had ascended to heaven (Eph 1:21; 1 Tm 6:17-19; Heb 2:5; 6:5). Since Jesus began His millennial reign at this time, the millennium began during the final days of the Jewish age and would yield the universal reign of Christ in the age that was to come at the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

Accordingly, both John the Baptist and Jesus repeatedly announced that the kingdom of God was near in their day (Mt 3:1-2; 4:17; 10:7; 16:27-28; Mk 1:14-15; 8:38-9:1; Lk 9:26-27; 10:9, 11). This was not a reference Christ’s enthronement at the ascension, for John announced that the kingdom was at hand while in the same breath declaring that God’s wrath was about to (Gr. mellouses) come upon the Pharisees (Mt 3:2-12), and Jesus told the disciples that when they would see tribulation coming upon the Jews, His kingdom would be near (Lk 21:20-28). These statements reveal that both John and Jesus were speaking of a reign that would be established at the destruction of the Jewish state. Clearly, no such thing took
place when Christ began to reign at His ascension. Both John and Jesus therefore must have been speaking of the second reign that Christ would establish, that is His universal reign. Consequently, it would be at the fall of first-century Jerusalem that Christ would set His kingdom above all others as predicted by the prophets and apostles (Is 2:2-4; Dn 2:44; 7:14, 27; Mic 4:1-3; Rv 11:15ff.).

The Old Testament confirms this understanding, for it states repeatedly that the Messiah was to establish His kingdom above all others in the last days (Is 2:2; Dn 2:28, 44; Mic 4:1). As earlier noted, the last days referred to the final days of Old Covenant age, and these days were present in the first century. (See comments on 2 Pt 3:1-4.) Thus, the time for the Messiah to set up His kingdom above all others had arrived.

Daniel also prophesied that Christ would establish His universal reign during the rule of the Rome. In interpreting Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the great statue, Daniel prophesied that it would be in the days of the fourth empire from Babylon that God would set up an eternal kingdom that would abolish the dominion of all others (Dn 2:44). In his vision of the four beasts, Daniel also recorded that the Messiah and His saints would be given dominion over all the kingdoms under heaven when God would destroy a ruler belonging to the fourth empire (Dn 7:19-27).

Isaiah also predicted that the Messiah would establish His universal kingdom at the destruction of Jerusalem. He recorded that the Lord would gather His people into the kingdom of Zion when He would crush the altar in Jerusalem (Is 25:6ff.-27:9). He prophesied also that God would set His kingdom above all
others when those in Judah would hide in the caves from the Lord’s coming to bring a war against them and cleanse their bloodguilt with judgment and fire (Is 2:2, 10, 19-21; 3:25; 4:4). This referred to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70, for not only did Christ predict that Jerusalem would be judged for her bloodguilt when her house of worship would be made desolate in the first century (Mt 23:31-36; Lk 11:47-51), He also quoted Isaiah’s prophecy of this judgment and stated that these things would come upon the women and children of His generation (Lk 23:28-31; cf. Is 2:19-21). John quoted Isaiah’s prophecy in Revelation as well, affirming that it would avenge the blood of the righteous (Rv 6:9-11; cf. Is 2:19-21) and that its fulfillment was near (Rv 1:1-3; 22:10, 12, 20).

In the parable of the vineyard owner, Jesus also associated the arrival of the kingdom with the impending destruction of the Jewish state (Mt 21:33-46; Mk 12:1-12; Lk 20:9-19). Here, Christ spoke of the tenants of a vineyard killing the servants of the vineyard owner as well as his son (Mt 21:34-39). This referred to the Jewish people murdering the prophets and the Son of God. Jesus then asked His Jewish audience what the vineyard owner would do to those tenants at his coming, and they answered that he would put them to a miserable death (Mt 21:40-41). Jesus agreed and stated that the kingdom of God would be taken from them and given to another people (Mt 21:43-45; cf. Mt 8:11-12). Hence, the righteous would inherit the promised kingdom when the rebellious Jews of the first-century would be put to death at the Lord’s coming.

Though it may be said that Christ began His Messianic reign over Israel at the ascension, it should not be supposed that he had no kingdom before this time. The Lord has always been
the King of those who love Him (Ps 5:2; 44:4; 74:12; 145:1). He was the unique King of Israel (Is 43:15; 44:6; Mal 1:14), and the prophets spoke of Him as the King over all the earth as well (Ps 29:10; 95:3; 103:19; Jer 10:10; Dn 2:47; 4:34-35). Christ, being One with the Father (Jn 10:30) and sharing in His glory (Jn 17:5), had therefore always reigned over all creation.

However, due to the sin of mankind, God's rule was distant from this world before the appearance of His Son. God had given Satan direct authority over the nations (Mt 4:8-9; Lk 4:5-7; Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:2; Rv 13:2), and though the Lord had established His rule in Israel, this nation was unable to properly manifest His reign (Col 2:16-17; Heb 10:1). Furthermore, the heavenly kingdom was also distant from this world, for mankind was not permitted to enter it at death (Jn 3:13; Heb 11:13).

Christ came to offer the forgiveness of sins, so God's kingdom might be reunited to earth (Eph 1:7-10; Heb 12:22-23). Upon its arrival, Satan would lose his dominion over the nations, and Christ would inherit the kingdoms of the world (Rv 11:15; 20:7ff.). The earthly citizens of God's kingdom would properly manifest His reign upon the earth by practicing the New Covenant (Phil 3:20; Col 1:13; Rv 1:6), and they would be permitted to enter the heavenly kingdom immediately at death (1 Cor 15:35ff.; Rv 21-22).

As the New Testament teaches, God's kingdom manifests itself in this world as righteousness, peace and joy indwelling the heart of those who accept Jesus as King (Rm 14:17). The first-century saints were experiencing these blessings, and thus the Scriptures teach that they had attained the citizenship of the
kingdom and were receiving it (Phil 3:20; Col 1:13; Heb 12:28; Rv 1:6). They were able to perceive the spiritual nature of God's kingdom, because they had been given spiritual life (Jn 3:3), and they valued this find more than any treasure on earth (Mt 13:44-46).

It was the desire of the Jews for a physical king that kept them from recognizing the heavenly kingdom of Jesus. This longing had always been a sign of their rejection of heaven's King (1 Sm 8:10-12). The Jews were eager to embrace a Messiah who would establish an earthly kingdom (Mt 21:1f; Mk 11:1ff.; Jn 12:12ff.) and were thus seizing God's kingdom with violence (Mt 11:12-13 Lk 16:16). Jesus, however, rejected this kind of throne, refusing the attempt of the Jews to make Him their national king (Jn 6:15). Christ would restore the kingdom of Israel and set her over all nations but not as a physical kingdom. Rather, He would restore her by transforming her into a spiritual nation, and He would rule over her and all nations from a throne in the unseen, heavenly realm. Hence, the apostles declared that the kingdom of David was being rebuilt as Gentiles were accepting the Messiah who was reigning from the invisible world beyond (Acts 13:1ff.; cf. Amos 9:11-12).

The millennial reign would cause the Church to become a mature expression of God's kingdom on earth and establish it as a spiritual nation for all people. During this time, the kingdom would grow like leaven in bread (Mt 13:33); it would be a temple under construction (Acts 15:16-17; 1 Pt 2:4ff.; Eph 2:19-22); it would be a child that would reach adulthood (Eph 4:11-13); it would be a tree that would grow into a home for all nations (Mt 13:31-32; Mk 4:30-32; Lk 13:18-19). According to Paul, this maturation would coincide with the arrival of the
perfect (1 Cor 13:8-12). The Church would therefore reach maturity when the perfect heavenly city, that is the kingdom of God as it exists in the afterlife, would arrive in the midst of this world (Lk 17:20-21; Rv 2:1-22:5). (See comments on 1 Cor 15:50-54.)

Revelation 20
Part 2

7) And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison 8) 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. 9) 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,

It was Ezekiel who first predicted the battle of Gog and Magog (Ez 38-39), and he recorded that it would take place in the last days (Ez 38:8, 16). As demonstrated, the biblical term "last days" referred to the final days of the Jewish dispensation. (See comments on 2 Pt 3:1-4.) This is therefore when the battle of Gog and Magog would occur. Thus, John recorded that his visions would soon take place (Rv 1:1-3; 22:6) and that none of the words of his book should be sealed, because the time of their fulfillment was near (Rv 22:10).

According to Ezekiel, Gog and Magog would bring several nations against an Israel without walls, yet Israel would be victorious over these foes (Ez 38:5ff.). The nations that Ezekiel listed reflect the extents of the Roman Empire in the first
century. Gog and Magog, along with these nations, may therefore be understood to stand for the Roman Empire. The Israel without walls undoubtedly pictured the Church, for the New Testament affirms that she had become the Israel of God (Rom 2:28-29; 9:6; Gal 4:22ff.; 6:16; Phil 3:3; 1 Pt 2:5ff.), and she had no boundaries or fortified city. Thus, John's vision of the battle of Gog and Magog depicted the persecution of the early Church throughout the Roman Empire and their victory over this persecution by remaining faithful unto death.

Though John witnessed fire descend from heaven to consume Gog and Magog in a moment, Ezekiel recorded that Israel would defeat these enemies and then burn their weapons for seven years (Ez 39:9-10). He recorded also that the Israelites would bury the bodies of these nations for seven months (Ez 39:11-14). Clearly, this language should not be interpreted literally. The fire that descends from heaven to consume Gog and Magog should be understood to signify the wrath of God descending to destroy the satanic powers that were attacking the Church throughout Rome and abolish the Jewish state that had instigated this persecution.

The Song of Moses clearly identifies the nation that would be destroyed by God's wrath at the end of the millennium. This prophecy parallels the oracles of Ezekiel and John concerning the battle of Gog and Magog, for it spoke of a great war that would take place in the last days (Dt 31:29; 32:23-42; cf. Ez 38-39; Rv 20:7ff.) and a terrible fire that would descend from heaven to consume the earth (Dt 32:22; cf. Ez 39:6 Rv 20:9-11). According to Moses, at this time, the Lord would put an end to Old Covenant Israel and avenge the blood of His servants (Dt 32:20, 29, 43). Hence, the fire that would descend at the end
of the millennium would arrive at the end of the Jewish age when the Lord would avenge the blood of the righteous at the desolation of the temple in AD 70 (Mt 23:31-36; Lk 11:47-51).

This conclusion is further supported by Peter's interpretation of Joel's prophecy concerning the Day of the Lord. Joel prophesied that in days to come, God would pour out His Spirit; then He would darken the sun, turn the moon to blood (Jl 2:38ff) and gather the nations for a great war (Jl 3:2, 7, 9-11). On the day of Pentecost, Peter quoted this prophecy, stating that it concerned events belonging to the last days (Acts 2:17). It therefore concerned the battle of Gog and Magog, for this is the great war that would take place in the last days (Ez 38:8, 16). Peter then declared that the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost evidenced that Joel's prophecy was being fulfilled (Acts 2:16ff.; cf. Jl 3:1ff.). Consequently, the time for God to stir up the nations for the battle of Gog and Magog had arrived. Accordingly, after quoting Joel's prophecy, Peter implored the Jews to save themselves from the fate that would befall that generation (Acts 2:40). Either they would repent and be saved, or they would be destroyed by the great war that would occur in the last days of the Jewish age.

Peter's prophecy in his second letter about the Lord's coming also has several correlations to the great battle at the end of the millennium: both concerned a judgment of fire (2 Pt 3:7ff.; cf. Ez 39:6-10; Rv 20:7-9) that would arrive in the last days (2 Pt 3:3; cf. Ez 38:8, 16) to dissolve the world then present (2 Pt 3:7-12; cf. Rv 20:11), and establish a new heavens and earth (2 Pt 3:13; cf. Rv 21-22). Peter was therefore prophesying about the fire that would arrive at the end of the millennium, and, as demonstrated in this work, Peter was speaking of a judgment
that would come against apostate Jews and Judaizers and burn up the principles of the world belonging to the Mosaic law. (See comments on 2 Pt 3:1-4 and 12b.) Hence, this is the fire that would descend at the battle of Gog and Magog.

Hebrews also teaches that Israel would be destroyed by the judgment of God at the end of the millennium. Here, Paul told the saints that they were living in the last days (Heb 1:2) and a fire would soon consume the earth and their enemies as prophesied in the Song of Moses (Heb 10:25-31; cf. Dt 32:20, 29). This corresponds directly with the events at the end of the millennium, for the battle of Gog and Magog was to take place in the last days (Ez 38:8, 16) and end with a fire that would consume the earth and the enemies of the saints (Ez 39:6; Rv 20:9-10). Paul then assured his readers that Christ would return in a very little while to reward them (Heb 10:34-37) and they would receive this inheritance when the present creation would pass away (Heb 12:18-29). The coming of Christ in the last days to set fire to the earth and deliver the saints, that is His coming at the end of the millennium, was therefore imminent when Paul wrote. Moreover, Paul closed his letter by warning the Jews to depart the earthly Jerusalem because it would be no lasting city (Heb 13:14). This further demonstrates that he was anticipating Israel’s world to be consumed by this fire (Heb 10:26ff.).

Significantly, none of the New Testament writers expected a literal millennium to pass before the Lord would come in fire to dissolve the heavens and earth. To the contrary, they taught that the world was about to be destroyed in their day. In speaking of the burning up of the creation, Peter told his readers that he was reminding them of things that he had
previously stated were imminent (1 Pt 4:5, 7, 17; 2 Pt 3:1ff.). Paul told the Hebrews that they could see the day drawing near that would consume the world with fire as prophesied by Moses (Heb 10:25-31; cf. Dt 32:20, 29). He told the Corinthians that the passing of the world was so near, it would be better if they did not marry (1 Cor 7:31). John declared that the world and all its lusts were passing away (1 Jn 2:17), and while this might be said of any generation, it is apparent that John was speaking of the world that was to pass away in the last days, for he declared that it was passing away at the last hour (1 Jn 2:18). Moreover, John saw visions of the passing of the heavens and earth in Revelation (Rv 6:12-14; 16:20; 20:11; 21:1), and he repeatedly told that these things would soon take place (Rv 1:1-3; 22:6, 10, 12, 20). Hence, the heavens and earth were about be destroyed. They would be dissolved before the passing of the apostolic generation, just as Christ predicted (Mt 24:29-35; Mk 13:24-31; Lk 21:25-33).

10) 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.

At the close of Revelation 19, John saw the beast and the false prophet being thrown into the lake of fire (Rv 19:19-20). Since neither man nor demons would experience this fate until the great judgment (Mt 25:31ff.; 2 Pt 2:4ff.; Jude 6ff.; Rv 20:10ff.), this means that Revelation 19 concluded with this judgment (Rv 19:20). In Revelation 19, however, John did not see Satan being thrown into the lake of fire, only the beast and the false prophet (Rv 19:20). John now sees the devil experience this fate and adds that the beast and the false
prophet are there. This is because Satan was the power behind the beast and the false prophet (Rv 13:4, 12) and to destroy the devil would be to abolish these institutions.

The beast, as demonstrated, symbolized Satan's kingdom as it had made itself present in this world by means of four Gentile empires: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. (See comments on Rv 20:4-6.) Its cohort, the land beast, who appeared earlier in Revelation and represented apostate Judaism, is here represented as a false prophet (Rv 13:11-17; cf. 19:20). This false prophet should be understood not only to depict apostate Judaism but all religions that had been empowered by demons (Lv 17:7; Dt 32:16-18; 2 Chr 11:15; Ps 106:36-38; 1 Cor 10:19-21; 1Tm 4:1; Rv 2:9, 13; 9:20), for all these would be abolished at Satan's demise. Though the outward form of Rome and false religions would continue, they would cease to exist as satanic institutions, for the demonic kingdom that was exercising authority through them would be destroyed.

As prophesied in the Garden of Eden, a Deliverer would one day crush serpent's head (Gn 3:15). Jesus appeared to fulfill this prophecy and destroy the devil who had the power of death (Heb 2:14; 1 Jn 3:8). Satan had this power because he could accuse man of sin (Zech 3; Rv 12:10). This put a sting into death (1 Cor 15:56) and caused the Jews to fear it (Heb 2:15) because they knew that it would lead to judgment (Heb 9:27). Christ would disarm the devil of this power by His work on the cross (Col 2:15; Heb 2:14). His shed blood would offer the forgiveness of sins (Eph 1:7-14; Heb 9:22-10:18), and this would render Satan powerless to accuse the saints (Rom 8:33ff.; Heb 2:14-17). Consequently, the devil would have no further
role in God’s court (Rv 12:7ff.). Thus, he would be crushed soon after the cross (Rom 16:20). Jude in fact recorded that all demons would be destroyed at the judgment of the great day (Jude 6), and the New Testament writers repeatedly announced that this judgment was about to take place (Mt 16:27-28; Acts 17:31; 24:25; Jas 5:7-9; 1 Pt 4:5, 7, 17; 2 Tm 4:1). (See comments on Rv 20:12-13.)

Daniel also prophesied that Satan's kingdom would be destroyed during the days of the Roman Empire. In his prophecy of the four beasts, Daniel recorded that when God would take away the dominion of the first three beasts (Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece), their lives would continue (Dn 7:12). This is because Satan's kingdom would survive to empower the succeeding empire (Rv 13:1ff.). However, Daniel prophesied that when God would remove the dominion of the fourth beast, its life would perish (Dn 7:11, 26). Thus, when God would crush the satanic power behind Rome (Rv 13:2), the demonic kingdom would not live to express itself in another empire but be thrown into the lake of fire and destroyed (Rv 20:10).

The Scriptures also teach that Satan's kingdom and first-century Jerusalem would perish at the same time. Isaiah prophesied that the great dragon would be slain on the day that Judah’s altar would be crushed (Is 27:1-11). Both Peter and Jude recorded that the day of the Lord that would overtake the scoffers of the last days would also the demonic world (2 Pt 3:1ff.; Jude 4, 6, 17-19). As noted, this day would arrive against the scoffers in AD 70 (See comments on 2 Pt 3:1-4.) This is therefore when the demons would be judged. Thus, Paul recorded that Satan would soon be crushed (Rom 16:20).
11) Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. 12) And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. 13) And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done.

These verses reveal that the focus of the resurrection was to be the rising of souls from Hades. (See comments 1 Cor 15:36-38.) The rising of the dead from the sea emphasizes that it is not only the Jews would participate in the resurrection, but also those belonging to the Gentile kingdoms. (See also Mt 11:20-24; 12:41-42; Lk 10:10-14; 11:31-32; Jn 5:28-29). This resurrection was to take place at the destruction of first-century Jerusalem. (See comments on 1 Cor 15:23.) Thus, the passing of the heavens and earth symbolize the passing of that nation. (See comments on 2 Pt 3:10b-12b) The end of the millennium would therefore coincide with the end of the Jewish age.

Though John does not name the One performing the great judgment, it is undoubtedly Jesus. God gave Him the authority to judge mankind (Jn 5:22ff.; Acts 10:42), and all would stand before Him to give an account of their lives (Rom 14:10-12; 2 Cor 5:10; Heb 4:13; 1 Pt 4:5). This judgment would take place at the Lord’s second coming (Mt 16:27; 25:31ff.; 1 Cor 4:5; 2 Tm 4:1; Jas 5:7-9; Rev. 22:12), an event that was also
associated with the end of the Jewish age. (See comments on Mt 24:30c.)

The coming of the Lord against Jerusalem in AD 70 cannot be divorced from His coming to enact the judgment at the end of the millennium. In the parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus taught that He would come in glory with His angels to reward the righteous with the kingdom and punish the wicked with eternal fire (Mt 25:31ff.) This is the judgment that John saw taking place at the end of the millennium (Rv 20:12ff.) However, Jesus told His disciples that He would come in glory with His angels to reward every man according to his works before some standing beside Him would die (Mt 16:27-28). This means that the judgment at the end of the millennium would take place at the Lord's coming in the first century.

Christ's prediction to come in glory and reward everyone according to their works before some standing beside Him would die appears in three of the four Gospels (Mt 16:27-28; Mk 9:1; Lk 9:28-36), and immediately after each appearance is an account of the Lord appearing in glory on a mountain before His disciples, an event commonly referred to as the Transfiguration (Mt 17:1-13; Mk 9:2-13; Lk 9:28-36). This has caused some to assert that the Transfiguration was the fulfillment of Christ's prediction that some would see His coming in glory. However, this cannot be the case, for Jesus had prophesied that He would come to reward every man according to His works (Mt 16:27-28), and this plainly did not happen at the Transfiguration. Furthermore, Christ had declared that some standing beside Him would not die until His coming, and this would be a very inappropriate way of referring to an event that would happen just a few days later.
Nevertheless, the fact that the transfiguration immediately follows Christ’s prediction of His second coming in three of the four Gospels demonstrates a relation between these two things. This relation is explained to us in Peter’s second letter. Here, Peter recorded that the disciples were not propagating myths when they spoke of the power and coming of Christ but were eyewitnesses of His majesty on the mountain and heard the Father say that He was well pleased with His Son (2 Pt 1:16-18). This is a clear description of the Transfiguration (cf. Mt 17:1-13; Mk 9:2-13; Lk 9:28-36). After stating this, Peter explained that at the time of his letter, they had the prophetic word more fully confirmed (2 Pt 1:19). Thus, the Transfiguration was an initial confirmation that Christ would fulfill His promise to return before some would die and the Spirit was more fully confirming this word to the Church through the ministry of the apostles.

At the close of Revelation, Jesus again declared that He was coming to reward everyone according to their works (Rv 22:12). Only some of those who had stood beside Him when He made this prophecy during His ministry would have remained alive until the time that Revelation was written. Thus, to fulfill His prediction that some would not die until this event, the coming of the Lord would need to take place soon, and this is precisely what a Revelation teaches (Rv 1:1-3, 8; 22:7, 12).

The New Testament elsewhere repeatedly stressed the immanency of the great judgment. James told His readers that the Judge was at hand and standing at the door (Jas 5:7-9). Paul stated several times that the judgment was about to (Gr. mello) take place (Acts 17:31; 24:25; 2 Tm 4:1). Peter affirmed
this also, recording that Christ was ready to judge the living and the dead, for the end had come, and the appointed time for the judgment had arrived (1 Pt 4:5, 7, 17).

Another way the Bible teaches that the great judgment would take place in the first century by associating it with Jerusalem’s fall. According to Isaiah, the Lord would come with His reward when He would marry Jerusalem and call her by a new name (Is 62:2-5, 11). In Revelation, John also prophesied that the Lord would reward every man immediately before marrying a new Jerusalem (Rv 20:15-21:1-2). The time for this wedding, as John recorded, would arrive at the fall of the great city where the Lord was slain (Rv 18:1-19:9; cf. 11:8), that is Jerusalem (cf. Rv 11:8). This is therefore when the great judgment would take place.

Jesus taught that at His coming, He would gather all nations before His throne (Mt 25:31-46). Elsewhere during His ministry, the Lord identified several of these nations and explained that they would be raised out of Hades for judgment (Mt 10:15; 11:21-24; Lk 10:12ff.). In Revelation, John witnessed this judgment and mentioned only the dead standing before God’s throne (Rv 20:12-13). This is because the final judgment would take place in the afterlife (Heb 9:27). It would be held before a throne that does not belong to this world but to the unseen heavenly realm (Lk 17:20-21; Jn 18:36). Thus, only the departed nations would realize their ultimate fate on judgment day, and this event would not be observed in the natural world.

Nevertheless, the Bible also teaches that Christ would judge the living at His coming (2 Tm 4:1). As the parable of the ten virgins informs us, this judgment would involve determining who
would be taken into the heavenly kingdom and who would remain (Mt 25:1-13). Since the faithful would be taken to the afterlife at the Lord's coming, they would also stand before His heavenly throne and receive their ultimate reward at this time. (See comments on 1 Cor 15:54-55.)

Throughout the New Testament, the apostles encouraged the saints to expect a glorious reward at the Lord's return. Their hope was to receive an imperishable crown (1 Cor 9:24-25), one of righteousness (2 Tm 4:8), glory (1 Pt 5:4) and life (Jas 1:12; Rv 2:10). This incorruptible reward, according to Peter, was reserved in heaven for them (1 Pt 1:3-5), and they would receive it at Christ's appearance (1 Pt 5:4). Paul also spoke of this reward and assured his readers that they would receive it at the Lord's coming. In Romans, Paul taught that Jesus would reward the saints with immortality (Rom 2:6-8), and in 1 Corinthians, he stated that both the living and the dead would put on this immortality in an instant, at the sounding of a heavenly trumpet that would announce Christ's return (1 Cor 15:51-53). As this commentary has shown, this immortal reward would involve the receiving of a spiritual body and entrance into the heavenly kingdom in the afterlife. (See comments on 1 Cor 15:51-54.)

According to the New Testament, the Lord would judge all men would for every thought, word and deed (Mt 12:36; Rom 2:16; 1 Cor 4:5). The good works of the saints would merit them various rewards (Mt 5:12; 10:40-42; Mk 9:41; Lk 6:35), while their misuse of time and talents would cause them to suffer loss (Mt 25:4ff.; Lk 19:12ff.); however, they would still be saved if they belonged to Christ (1 Cor 3:10-15). The sinful acts of the ungodly would also determine the extent of their
punishment, for the Gospels teach that it would be more tolerable for some than for others at the great judgment (Mt 10:14-15; 11:20-24; Lk 10:10ff).

Though the departed would receive varying degrees of reward or punishment based on their works, this does not mean that they would be judged worthy of eternal life according to their behavior or efforts. It is clear from Scripture that good works do not merit eternal life (Rom 3:27-28; 4:5; 11:6; Gal 2:16, 21; 3:2-6; Eph 2:8-9; Ti 3:5). The only requirement for admittance into the eternal kingdom would be the record of one's name in the Book of Life (Rv 20:15; 21:27), and the only work necessary to be recorded in this book would be the work of belief in God's son (Mt 7:21; cf. Jn 6:40).

In Revelation, John tells us that the followers of Christ were written in the Book of Life from ages past (Rv 13:8; 17:8). Jesus encouraged His disciples to rejoice in this fact (Lk 10:10), and they remained mindful of it throughout their trials and persecutions (Phil 4:3). God would certainly save the full number of Israelites and believing Gentiles who were recorded in this book and bring them into His eternal kingdom at the end of the Jewish age (Rom 11:25-26).

Old Covenant Israel also kept a book of life: to be written in it was to be counted among the living, and to be stricken from it was to be numbered among the dead (Ex 32:32; Ps 69:28; 87:6; Ez 13:9). Though many of the saints would be blotted out of Israel's book of life in the first century, Jesus assured His followers that they would not be blotted out of His Book of Life, and this hope inspired them to be faithful to God unto death (Rv 3:5).
It should not be supposed that the dead are no longer judged simply because the great judgment event is past. Jesus would never leave His throne as Judge and King, for His reign would ever increase in this world and have no end (2 Sm 7:12-16; Ps 45:6-17; Is 9:6-7; Dn 2:44; 7:14, 27; Lk 1:32-33; Eph 3:21; Heb 1:8; 2 Pt 1:11; Rv 5:13; 11:15).

The parable of the wedding feast soundly affirms that mankind would continue to be judged after Judgment Day. In this parable, Jesus tells of a king who sends his servants to call those who were invited to his son’s wedding, but they reject this call and murder those who were sent to them (Mt 22:1-6). This speaks of the Jews murdering the prophets who were sent to them by God to call them into the heavenly kingdom. In response, the king commands his armies to destroy those murders and burn their city (Mt 22:7). This depicts the burning of Jerusalem in AD 70, and it would be at the fall of this city that Christ would marry His Bride and reward every man every man according to his works (Rv 18:21-19:9; cf. Is 62). Notably, the parable of the wedding feast tells us that after this city is burned, the king continues to invite people to his feast (Mt 22:8-10). Evangelism would therefore continue after the return of Christ. The parable then records that after the fall of the city, as people would respond to the king’s invitation, his house would become filled with guests; and yet when the king would find someone to be without the proper wedding clothes, he would cast him out of the banquet where there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Mt 22:11-14). This depicts the judgment of one who stands before God’s heavenly throne after AD 70 and is found to be without the righteousness that comes by faith in Christ.
As Paul taught in Romans, Christ would reward each according to his works by giving immortality to the faithful and executing wrath on the disobedient (Rom 2:6-8). Paul then explained that these judgments would be rendered to the Jews first and then to everyone else (Rom 2:9-11). When Christ would return, He would give immortality to all those who comprised true Israel (1 Cor 15:50-55) and execute His wrath on apostate Jews by means of the Roman armies (Lk 21:24ff.) which would bring many of them to their ultimate fate in the world beyond (Mt 10:28; Rv 20:13). Though some reprobate Jews would escape the hands of the Romans, they would certainly not escape giving an account to the Messiah whom they crucified (Is 45:23; Rom 14:10-12; Phil 2:10-11; 1 Pt 5:4). The judgment of these, as well as those of all subsequent generations, would take place immediately upon their passing from this world (Mt 22:11-14; Heb. 9:27).

Revelation 20
Part 3

14a) Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.

Once Jesus would provide salvation for His people and establish His kingdom on earth, it would no longer be necessary to postpone the sentencing of either the righteous or the wicked. Hence, God would destroy the Hadean realm that had held the departed for judgment, and man would be judged immediately upon his passing from this world.
In 1 Corinthians, Paul also spoke of the defeat of death at the Lord’s return (1 Cor 15:52-55). In context, Paul was speaking of the defeat of death for those who belonged to Christ (1 Cor 15:22-23). Consequently, John’s vision should be understood to depict the same and not the abolishment of death for all men. God’s Word teaches that victory over death would only be given to those who would receive Christ and belong to Him (Rom 5:17; 1 Cor 15:22-23).

14b) This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15) And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Christ spoke of the second death when He told the Jews not to fear those who could kill the body but not the soul but to fear God who could destroy both body and soul in hell (Mt 10:28). In Luke’s account of this statement, Jesus told the Jews to fear God who, after He has killed, has the authority to cast into hell (Lk 12:5). The first death would therefore answer to the killing of the body and the second to the killing of the soul.

In speaking of hell, Jesus used the Greek word "Gehenna" which referred to the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, a region southeast of Jerusalem (Jo 15:8; 18:16). In ancient times, heathens and apostate Jews gathered there to worship Baal by heating an image of this deity and placing their infants in its arms to burn them alive as a sacrifice (2 Chr 28:2-3; 33:6; Jer 7:30ff.; 19). The place where they did this became known as "Topheth," a derivative of the Hebrew word for drum, because drums would be sounded to obscure the cries of the infants as they suffered. Jeremiah prophesied that God would turn this valley
into a place of slaughter for His people for engaging in this wickedness (Jer 7:32-34; 19:6ff.), and this was fulfilled when the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem in the sixth century BC and buried the Jews in this valley.

The Lord repeatedly warned His Jewish contemporaries that Gehenna would be a place of judgment for them as well (Mt 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:8-9; 23:15, 33; Mk 9:43-47; Lk 12:5). In the first century, this valley had become a dump that smoldered continually, and during the Jewish-Roman war, the corpses of Jews were literally cast into this pit. Since Jesus taught that the judgment of Gehenna would destroy both body and soul (Mt 10:28), the Jews would experience the second death during their war with the Romans. Since the second death was to take place at the end of the millennium (Rv 20:14), this further proves that the end of the millennium was to coincide with the close of the Jewish age.

Jesus plainly defined the death that God would bring to the soul. He stated that while man could kill the body but not the soul, God could destroy both in Gehenna (Mt 10:28). In other words, what man could do to the body but not the soul, God could do to both. The death that man is able to bring to the body is an unconscious ruin. This is therefore the death that God would bring to the soul. (See also Acts 3:23 and Jas 5:20 which teach that the soul is able to die.) The annihilation of the body in Gehenna thus pictured the annihilation of the soul that would take place in the lake of fire in the afterlife.

It should be noted that Jesus did not present this teaching on the second death in a parable or in metaphoric terms but in a straightforward warning. Hence, this teaching should guide the
interpretation of passages that employ figurative language or symbols to speak of the final punishment, for this is a reasonable and sound principle of interpretation.

John’s vision of the second death might seem to contradict Christ’s warning about this fate (Mt 10:28), for John saw it as a lake of fire that would torment the beast, the false prophet and Satan, day and night forever and ever (Rv 20:10). He recorded also that wicked idolators would be tormented with fire and the smoke of their suffering would rise forever and ever (Rv 14:9-11). Nevertheless, when such imagery is properly understood, it actually agrees perfectly with Christ’s warning that the second death would destroy the soul like the first death would destroy the body.

Notice how Isaiah used the imagery of eternal burning in his oracle against Edom: In this prophecy, Isaiah recorded that God was going to slaughter the Edomites and their livestock, drenching the land with their blood (Is 34:5-7). He then added that Edom’s land would burn day and night and its smoke would rise forever and ever (Is 34:9-10). The slaughter of these Edomites and their livestock took place at the hands of the Babylonians in the sixth century BC (Jer 25:8-21; Mal 1:2ff.). Clearly, when Isaiah prophesied that Edom’s land would burn forever and ever, this did not mean that it would be eternally kindled but permanently destroyed. Notably, the language that Isaiah used to predict this destruction is remarkably similar to the language that John employed to describe the second death. In light of John’s intimate acquaintance with Isaiah’s writings, it is reasonable to conclude that John was using eternal-burning imagery (Rv 14:9-11; 19:1-3; 20:10) in the same way as Isaiah had used it. Thus, the souls of the wicked would not be
eternally kindled in the afterlife but would be irrevocably destroyed.

Isaiah also used this symbolism to describe the fate of the Jews in the first century. In his final prophecy, Isaiah spoke of a judgment that would come upon those who would offer sacrifices according to the Mosaic Law to express their rejection of the Messiah (Is 66:3ff.). Isaiah foretold that the Lord would come in fire to make a complete end of these idolators and succeeding generations of God’s people would look at the corpses of these men, for their worms would not die and their fire would not be quenched (Is 66:15ff.). In Mark, Jesus cited this prediction, declaring that it would be fulfilled at the impending judgment of Gehenna (Mk 9:43-48; cf Is 66:24). As noted, the corpses of the Jews were literally thrown into the smoldering dump of Gehenna during the Jewish-Roman war. If Isaiah’s prophecy of this judgment was to be fulfilled literally, then the corpses of these Jews would still be burning today. It should be apparent that the imagery of corpses burning forever to be observed by succeeding generation speaks of how the Jews would be utterly destroyed and this tragedy would be maintained in the minds of succeeding generations as they reflected upon it.

Since Jesus taught that the fate of the body and soul would be the same in Gehenna (Mt 10:28), and since Isaiah used eternal-burning language to describe the annihilation of bodies in Gehenna (Is 66:24), it may be concluded that when John used eternal-burning language to speak of the fate of souls in the afterlife (Rv 14:9-11; 20:10, 15), he was speaking of their annihilation as well. Neither soul nor body would be forever kindled; both would be utterly destroyed, and their shame
would be maintained in the thoughts of those who reflected on their ruin.

Daniel confirms this understanding of the final punishment. At the close of his visions, Daniel recorded that while the righteous would awake to everlasting life, the wicked be raised to everlasting contempt (Dn 12:2). This contempt would be experienced by those who held them in disdain. The misery of the ungodly would be preserved forever in the minds of the righteous who would recall with contempt their refusal of God's grace.

An earlier vision in Revelation also shows that the second death would take place at Jerusalem's fall and spoke of an irrevocable destruction. Upon witnessing a vision of the fall of the great city Babylon, that is the city where the Lord was slain (cf. Rv 11:8), John saw her smoke and the smoke of her people's torment rising forever and ever (Rv 14:9-11; 19:1-3). However, when an angel spoke plainly concerning the fate of this city, he told John that it would be thrown down and found no more (Rv 18:21). The same was said of ancient Tyre (Ez 26:21), and when that city was destroyed, it was never again rebuilt. Clearly, no one would expect the smoke of the city where the Lord was slain, that is first-century Jerusalem, to be yet rising today. So also, no one should expect the torment of its citizens to be yet continuing in the world beyond.

A comparison between John's vision of the torment of the beast in the lake of fire and Daniel's visions of the fate of this beast yields even more evidence that the lake of fire depicts a complete destruction. It has been demonstrated that John's vision of the torment of the beast spoke of the defeat of
Satan’s kingdom, and it is paralleled by Daniel’s vision of the great statue and his vision of the four beasts. (See comments on Rv 20:10.) Now, while John’s vision showed the beast burning day and night forever and ever (Rv 20:10), Daniel’s vision of the great statue showed it being crushed and swept away so that not a trace of it was found (Dn 2:35). His vision of the four beasts likewise showed the final beast being utterly annihilated by fire (Dn 7:11, 26). As Daniel informs us, both of his visions signified that the statue and the beasts would come to a complete end (Dn 2:44; 7:26). John’s vision of eternal torment is thus paralleled by visions of complete annihilation, and since all such imagery is said to speak of a complete end, it is evident that Daniel’s visions of annihilation are a more direct analogy of the punishment.

Notably, Jesus never used the imagery of souls burning forever and ever to speak of their fate in hell. He did, however, refer to the judgment of Gehenna as an unquenchable fire (Mt 3:12; Mk 9:43-48; Lk 3:17). However, when Jesus stated this in Mark, He was quoting from Isaiah’s prophecy regarding the destruction of Jewish corpses during their war with the Romans (Mk 9:43-48; cf. Is 66:24). Christ was therefore using the phrase "unquenchable fire" to speak of a fire that would reduce to ruin. This is consistent with the use of this term elsewhere in scripture, for the Bible often speaks of an unquenchable fire not with reference to a fire that would never be quenched but to a fire that would not be quenched until it had accomplished its destructive end (2 Kgs 22:17; Jer 7:20; 17:27; Ez 20:47-48).

Nevertheless, those who believe that a soul will be forever in hell will argue that Jesus also referred to hell as an eternal fire (Mt 18:8-9; 25:41), so it must be a fire that burns forever. This
may be true, since the judgment of Gehenna pictures a lake of fire in the afterlife that may eternally burn. However, this does not mean that souls would burn forever if cast into this lake. The New Testament usage of the idiom "eternal fire" actually validates the view that souls would be reduced to ruin when encountering this judgment. Notice, Jude stated that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah suffered the punishment of eternal fire and this served as an example of what would happen to the wicked at the Lord’s coming (Jude 7, 14-15). Notably, Jude recorded that it was the destruction of these cities that demonstrated what would happen to the ungodly and not any subsequent punishment in the afterlife. The fate of these cities obviously did not involve their eternal burning but their everlasting demise. Peter also stated that it was the reduction of Sodom and Gomorrah to ruin and extinction that demonstrated what would happen to the wicked at the day of the Lord (2 Pt 2:6; 3:10). The idiom "eternal fire" thus described a punishment that would reduce the bodies of the wicked to nothing, and since the judgment of Gehenna would bring an eternal fire on both body and soul (Mt 10:28; 18:8-9; 25:41), it follows that this punishment would reduce both body and soul to ruin and extinction.

In the parable of the sheep and the goats, Christ affirmed the eternal nature of the second death. He stated that on Judgment Day, the righteous would go to eternal life but the wicked to eternal punishment (Mt 25:46). Hence, the punishment of the wicked would be as everlasting as the life of the righteous. However, since the final punishment would involve the destruction of the soul (Mt 10:28), that is its annihilation (2 Pt 2:6), then Jesus could not have been saying that the destructive process of the soul would be eternal, otherwise the
soul would never become extinct. The eternal aspect of the punishment therefore spoke of the finality of the soul's ruin. In other words, eternal punishment would not be a punishment with an everlasting process but a punishment with an everlasting result.

The grammatical construction that Jesus used when speaking of eternal punishment (action noun with the Gr. adjective "aionion") was also used by Paul in Hebrews to speak of eternal judgment (Heb 6:2), eternal salvation (Heb 5:9) and eternal redemption (Heb 9:12). Eternal judgment plainly does not speak of a never-ending process of judgment but of a judgment with an eternal outcome. Similarly, eternal salvation and redemption do not speak of a never-ending process of salvation and redemption but of a salvation and redemption that produce an everlasting result. Accordingly, eternal punishment should not be understood to speak of a never-ending process of punishment but of a punishment that yields an everlasting outcome.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that there would be no suffering involved in the soul's destruction (Lk 4:34; cf. Mt 8:29). Jesus said that it would be more tolerable for those guilty of less evil on the day of judgment (Mt 10:14-15; 11:20-24; Lk 10:10ff.). Since the outcome for all the ungodly would be the same, that is ruin and extinction (Mt 10:28; 2 Pt 2:6), it is reasonable to conclude that Jesus was speaking of the destructive process being more tolerable for those who had committed lesser sins.

Though the Bible repeatedly describes the destructive process of the final punishment as a burning, it plainly teaches that such a process would completely devour those who had
rejected God’s grace. Both Moses and Paul stated that God would be a consuming fire to His adversaries (Dt 4:24; Heb 12:29). Malachi prophesied that the Lord would suddenly come to His temple to set the wicked ablaze, so that it would leave them neither root nor branch (Mal 4:1ff.). Jesus stated several times that the wicked would be burned up (Mt 3:12; 13:30; 13:40; Lk 3:17), and the word that He used to describe this burning (Gr. katakaio) is used throughout the Bible to speak of things being utterly devoured by fire, such as books, grass, trees and animal sacrifices (Acts 19:19; 1 Cor 3:15; Heb 13:11; Rv 8:7; 17:16; 18:18). Peter also used this word to predict the complete dissolving of the Old Covenant world (2 Pt 3:10). In the Septuagint, this word appears in the story of Moses and the burning bush, and it used to state that although the bush was burning, it was not burned up (Gr. katakaio), meaning it was not consumed (Ex 3:2). Hence, it is evident that when Jesus used this word to say that the wicked would be burned up, He meant that they would be consumed and not burn without being consumed like the bush that Moses encountered. Furthermore, Jesus taught that the metaphor of being consumed by fire was a direct analogy of how the ungodly would be destroyed at the resurrection, for He stated that just as tares are burned up (Gr. katakaio), so the wicked would perish on the day of judgment (Mt 13:24-42).

As David recorded, God’s wrath lasts for a moment, but His mercy endures forever (Ps 30:5). Insisting that the final punishment does not involve a brief period of suffering before a reduction to ruin and extinction but a torment that endures forever therefore not only contradicts the Bible’s teaching regarding the final punishment but also directly opposes its revelation of the heart of God.
Appendix

52 Preterist Quotes
By Vernon C. Klingman III

01. Thank you for liking Preterism on Facebook! I look forward to hearing from you in the future ... but not about it.

02. So, why don't we all talk about the second coming? For old times' sake.

03. I believed the gospel; I just didn’t know what to do with the rest of the story. Then I discovered preterism. And the rest is history.

04. I don’t have a lot of hobbies, but I do enjoy studying the last days as a past time.

05. When it comes to viewing eschatology, hindsight is 20/20.

06. Preterists are the reformers of “this generation.”

07. I’m taking futurists to the woodshed. And I’m bringing a timing belt.

08. I like to call them the last days of yore.

09. I’m quite comfortable keeping it at 70 in my study.
10. Join the reformation! Make preterism the eschatology of the future! Er, you know what I mean.

11. I'm tired of arguing about whether or not the second coming is past. Can't we just agree to let bygones be bygones?

12. When I said, “Time will tell which view of eschatology is correct,” I didn't mean we'd have to wait and see.

13. Some people just can't let go of the past. And they happen to make great theologians.

14. So, God told Jesus, who told an angel, who told John, who told the churches that the time was near for the fulfillment of Revelation (Rv 1:1-3). But the time really wasn't near? I guess that's what happens when you play that telephone game.

15. I went over 70 in the car with my kids last night. Of course, I go over it with them at home, too.

16. People who call themselves “orthodox preterists” can't help but admit to being partial to me.

17. If you think preterism is hard to believe, just try refuting it!

18. By the time I'm through with those futurists, their view will be history.

19. The Bible says that even the angels are into eschatology (1 Pt 1:12). I bet their discussions about it are quite a trip! (Down memory lane.)
20. I'm sorry if I've upset you by speaking about eschatology in the past. I promise not to speak of the coming of Christ in the future.

21. Whenever you get discouraged in your efforts to convert people to preterism, just remember, in less than a hundred years, everyone you know will agree with you.

22. Eschatology is old news.

23. I'm considering having a sandwich board made that says, “The end WAS near.” And signing up to be a greeter at church.

24. I'm noticing that a lot of my friends are becoming Pинтерests. Perhaps they've misheard me.

25. I stopped by an espresso stand this morning. Now, I'm a hyper preterist.

26. The Bible clearly teaches that the archangel was to sound his trumpet to herald Christ's return in the first century. So all views of eschatology must admit that he blew it.

27. I'm really not opposed to dispensationalists getting raptured.

28. Preterism will stop futurists by putting them in “time out.”

29. I may not be looking forward to getting old, but I'm convinced it's a blessing to live past 70.

30. I'm completely dedicated to preterism ... even though there's really no future in it.
31. Those who speak of the coming of Christ as having already taken place are speaking in the perfect tense.

32. I prefer to call it the yesterday of the Lord.

33. Preterism is the only view of eschatology that will stand the test of time.

34. If you're waiting for Revelation 19 to be fulfilled, I've got news for you: that horse has left the barn.

35. The fact that the water of life began to flow in the past does not mean that it's under the bridge today.

36. I truly believe that preterism will become the dominant view of eschatology, soon. And for those of you who aren't preterists, I don't mean in a couple thousand years.

37. I told my futurist pastor that his teaching on the second coming just ain't what it used to be.

38. In AD 70, Christ married His Bride. That makes me a legitimate son of the resurrection age (Lk 20:36). Despite what they call me.

39. Preterism kicked my left behind all the way to kingdom came.

40. Whenever someone asks me how much of the Olivet Discourse was fulfilled, I just say, “Olivet.”
41. It’s more like the not-so-new Jerusalem, now.

42. The Jewish rebellion against Rome may not have been the greatest uprising in history, but it did coincide with it.

43. Perhaps the Great Pumpkin never shows up because his coming took place long before Linus was born.

44. I like telling postmillennialists that the coming of Christ may be closer than they think. And getting further away every day.

45. The book of Revelation is all about Jesus ... and His glory days.

46. Sometimes, I play the devil's advocate and take the futurist position.

47. When Jesus answers prayers to understand eschatology, I bet it makes Him feel nostalgic.

48. No, I'm not going to an al-Qaeda training camp. A pre-terrorist is something completely different.

49. Still waiting for the Lamb to trample the wine press? Try checking His cellar.

50. Contrary to what you may have heard, the doctrine of a future rapture is going down.

51. Well, Christmas is almost here. And I really hope you’re not looking for anyone to come in the clouds.
52. Here’s to all of you! May you drink the finest wines, eat the choicest foods, and become full preterists!