

THIS GENERATION WILL NOT PASS AWAY UNTIL ALL THESE THINGS TAKE  
PLACE

by

Ryan Michael Cataldo

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts in  
Religious Studies

Charlotte

2021

Approved by:

---

Dr. James D. Tabor

---

Dr. John C. Reeves

---

Dr. Shimon Gibson

©2021  
Ryan Michael Cataldo  
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

## ABSTRACT

RYAN MICHAEL CATALDO. This Generation Will Not Pass Away Until All These Things  
Take Place  
(Under the direction of DR. JAMES D. TABOR)

This study examines the apocalyptic expectation of Jesus' imminent return from heaven in the early Jesus movement, and how Matthew and Mark respond to its failure by recasting it as fulfilled. Jesus' return from heaven, also known as the *Parousia*, was expected to be a literal event that would happen soon and would be directly and universally experienced (according to the descriptions in Paul's epistles). In response to the *Parousia* failing to take place, Mark and Matthew reinterpret the expectation of Jesus' return and tie it explicitly to the events surrounding the destruction of the Jewish Temple by the Romans—which turns a failure into a fulfillment.

I focus mostly on the "Synoptic Apocalypse" passage in Mark 13, its expanded version in Matthew 24, and related materials in chapters 23-25. By comparing the close thematic language parallels to earlier apocalyptic materials in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians and in the Deutero-Pauline letter of 2 Thessalonians, I argue that Mark and Matthew explicitly tie the "*Parousia* and the end of the age" to the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem. In the Synoptic Apocalypse passage, they both use the apocalyptic and heavenly language metaphorically to describe the Roman destruction of Jerusalem. In doing so, they spiritualize Jesus' return, which expected earlier by Paul to be something more literal. I also look at two of Matthew's eschatological parables and his redactions of Mark 13, which strengthen this interpretative connection between the destruction of Jerusalem and the *Parousia*.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank my director James D. Tabor who has been an incredible mentor and teacher, and whose continuous critiques and challenges helped shape the topic of this project in a way for which I am extremely grateful. His humor, sarcasm, ability to think outside the box, and grasp on both the archaeological and textual evidence of early Christianity makes him one of a kind. One of my best memories will always be traveling throughout the land of Israel with Dr. Tabor. The destruction of the Second Temple is at the heart of this study—I had the privilege of meditating upon it with Dr. Tabor while hanging out in Jerusalem and looking at its leftover stones beside the Temple Mount.

I also want to thank the other members of my committee, John C. Reeves and Shimon Gibson. A faculty member used to say that Dr. Reeves “has ten brains”—I am now convinced. I am extremely grateful for his seemingly limitless knowledge which he has shared with me over the past few years. When it comes to archaeology, Dr. Gibson’s knowledge also appears to be endless, and I am appreciative for his constructive input on this project.

I owe everything to my family who have supported and loved me unconditionally throughout my time at UNC Charlotte, and whose encouraging words kept me inspired enough to keep going without breaking stride. I also want to give a special thanks to my friend and boss Albert Hodges who has been extremely lenient and merciful by letting me skip out on work numerous times to work on my thesis.

Finally, I want to thank the love of my life, Cristina. Without her unconditional love, support, and affection, I really do not know if I would have been able to push through at times.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS AND METHODS	3
MARK 13	10
MATTHEW 23-25 AND 1 AND 2 THESSALONIANS	30
CONCLUSION	42

## This Generation Will Not Pass Away Before All These Things Take Place

### INTRODUCTION

One of the more remarkable sections of the New Testament is an extended discourse attributed to Jesus in which he predicts the utter destruction of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. This discourse, found in Mark 13, is paralleled in Matthew 24 and Luke 21—both of whom use Mark as their source.<sup>1</sup> This section of Mark is often referred to as the “Synoptic Apocalypse” in that it appears to relate events leading up to Jerusalem’s destruction and connects them with the “Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory” (Mark 13:26).<sup>2</sup> Matthew explicitly connects Mark’s focus on the utter destruction of the Temple buildings, which Jesus’ disciples were admiring in awe, with the *Parousia* and the end of the age.<sup>3</sup> There the disciples ask Jesus “Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of your *coming*, and of the *end of the age*” (Matthew 24:3).<sup>4</sup> All three accounts close with the emphatic declaration “This generation will not pass away until all these things take place” (Mark 13:30; Matthew 24:34; Luke 21:32).

Since the Romans did destroy the Temple, as well as the city of Jerusalem itself, in 70 CE as a result of the first Jewish Revolt, but Matthew’s predicted “end of the age” signaled by the “Son of Man coming on the clouds” presumably did not take place, these chapters have given

---

<sup>1</sup> For purposes of this thesis, I am assuming Markan priority.

<sup>2</sup> Benj. W. Bacon, “The Apocalyptic Chapter of the Synoptic Gospels,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 28, no. 1 (1909): 1-25, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4617101>. English translations of the Bible are from the *New American Standard Bible*, 1995, unless otherwise specified.

<sup>3</sup> The Greek word *parousia* (arrival/coming) is used four times by Matthew in this chapter (vv. 3, 27, 37, 39), and a dozen times in the letters of Paul and elsewhere in the N.T. writings as a technical term for the “arrival” of either the Day of the Lord, or of Jesus, bringing judgment and vindication. See *BDAG*, sv. Παρουσία.

<sup>4</sup> Emphases using *italics* are mine throughout unless otherwise noted.

rise to much discussion as to whether this Synoptic Apocalypse represents an example of the failed apocalyptic expectations of the Jesus movement. As a result, some have raised the issue of whether Mark 13 is one unified discourse based on v.30—namely that “this generation will not pass until all these things are fulfilled,”—or if vv. 24-27, that seem to refer explicitly to an apocalyptic “end of the age,” might be separated in time from the events of 70 CE.<sup>5</sup> Others have contended there is no indication in Mark 13 of any such division, in fact quite the opposite, by arguing for the unity of the discourse *and* its first-century fulfillment by casting doubt on the eschatological and apocalyptic nature of vv. 24-27.<sup>6</sup> There have been additional proposals to address what appears to be a failed prediction of the *Parousia*, also known as the Second Coming.<sup>7</sup> For example, some have interpreted “*genea*” in Mark 13:30 to mean “humankind” or “race” as opposed to its most common translation and interpretation—“generation,” or they have argued that it refers to the some subsequent “final” generation that would in fact witness the events of vv. 24-27.

My thesis focuses on Mark’s original discourse in chapter 13, along with Matthew’s expansion of the discourse and related themes in chapters 23-25.<sup>8</sup> By comparing the close

---

<sup>5</sup> For an extensive overview of the various theories attempting to explain Mark 13, see George R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Last days: The interpretation of the Olivet Discourse* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> For a well-argued example of this approach, see Thomas R. Hatina, “The Focus of Mark 13:24-27: The Parousia, or the Destruction of the Temple?”, *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 6 (1996): 43-66.

<sup>7</sup> I am using the term *Parousia* in reference to the widespread belief that Jesus would soon return from heaven to bring history to its eschatological climax.

<sup>8</sup> I am limiting my consideration to Mark 13 and Matthew 23-25 rather than including Luke 21, since Matthew provides an almost “*pesher*-like” interpretation of Mark, whereas Luke, including material from the Sayings source Q, and coupled with the book of Acts, has a different eschatological perspective, see Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of Saint Luke*, trans. Jeffrey Buswell (London: Faber and Faber, 1960).

thematic language parallels in earlier apocalyptic materials in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, as well as those of the Deutero-Pauline letter of 2 Thessalonians, I argue that Mark and Matthew explicitly tie the "*Parousia* and the end of the age" to the events surrounding the first Jewish revolt of 66-70 CE. In doing so they explicitly recast these earlier apocalyptic materials as in the past, not as events imminently expected in the future, looking back on them after the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple as fulfilled--thus vindicating Jesus' declarative statement, "This generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place." Accordingly, rather than the Synoptic Apocalypse of Mark and Matthew providing an example of failed apocalyptic expectations—it is precisely the opposite. Matthew's explanatory gloss is critical here—as he is writing, according to most scholars, well into the 80s CE—looking back on the events of 70. His intent is to make explicit what is already implicit in Mark—namely that we are to read these predictions as past fulfillments of Jesus' prophecy.<sup>9</sup> This is consistent with both writers' styles: Matthew regularly expands and explains passages in Mark that are more cryptic and elusive.<sup>10</sup> In addition to tracing the parallels, I will show how Matthew's eschatological parables and redactions of the Markan account strengthen this interpretative connection between the destruction of Jerusalem and the *Parousia*—as they both understood the term.

## PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS AND METHODS

---

<sup>9</sup> I.e., Matthew changing the disciples' question to Jesus in Mark 13:4 to include the "*Parousia* and the end of the age" in Matthew 24:3.

<sup>10</sup> For example, Jesus' reference to the "leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees" in Mark 8:15 is explained by Matthew as referring to their "teaching," in Matt 16:12. One finds this sort of thing throughout Matthew's use of his narrative source Mark.

*Apocalyptic and Eschatology*

I begin with some preliminary observations and analysis regarding the eschatological hopes in apocalyptic and prophetic biblical literature. D.S. Russell and others have sought to draw a distinction between the type of eschatology found in apocalyptic literature (e.g., 2 Esdras, 2 Baruch, Daniel, 1-2 Enoch) from the “Old Testament prophetic hope” captured in the Latter Prophets. In his book *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*, he refers to the latter as the “prophetic hope” and the former as “apocalyptic eschatology.”<sup>11</sup> He describes “apocalyptic eschatology” as “dualistic, cosmic, universalistic, transcendental and individualistic.” According to Russell, the age to come is brought in not through evolution, but by God breaking into human history in a universal cataclysmic transcendental fashion to establish the kingdom.<sup>12</sup> The end of the age is marked by a universal judgment that takes the form of a “cosmic drama” where both good and evil divine forces are at work.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, Russell held that the hopes of the prophets in the Hebrew Bible were “this-worldly, national and political,” and more often than not, bound up with restoration of David’s royal line, as opposed to the “other-worldly, universal and transcendent hopes of the apocalyptists.”<sup>14</sup> However, even given this distinction, Russell points out that his two types of eschatological visions cannot be so easily separated into two different well-defined categories, because both share a considerable number of overlapping themes.<sup>15</sup> I would take it a step further and suggest that not only is it difficult to dichotomize them, but they

---

<sup>11</sup> D.S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (Michigan: Westminster Press, 1964), 269-270.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 269.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 270; Although Russell acknowledges that in Deutero-Isaiah the future hope becomes “increasingly supra-terrestrial and transcendent” (265).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

should be seen together as one larger worldview.<sup>16</sup> The apocalyptic literature builds on and expands the existing hopes of the prophets and the Jewish people in unique ways. The distinction may be caused in part by presenting apocalyptic as a new and somewhat different worldview as opposed to a type of literary genre that expounds upon the existing Israelite hopes. As N.T. Wright and others argue, apocalyptic is best understood not as a new and distinct eschatological framework, but as a literary genre that employs metaphorical and cosmic language to denote this-worldly realities.<sup>17</sup> The dualistic and transcendent understanding of apocalyptic as opposed to the more “this-worldly” political hopes of the prophets appears to presuppose a split of heaven and earth, so that if God were to do something significant, he would be “intervening from the outside” to perform something miraculous and cataclysmic. But no such dichotomy is necessary here. Heaven and earth overlapped and worked together, as represented by the Temple. This Jewish cosmology is what enabled Isaiah to speak about the time when God defeated Israel’s enemies as the time when God “came down” and made the “mountains quake” before him, even though they were defeated often through military means (Isaiah 64:2). The temporal events in Israel’s history often represented the “other-worldly.” Another example is found in the Exodus narrative when Pharaoh and his people were smitten with ten plagues; it is not portrayed as merely a natural event, but as Israel’s God bringing judgment on both Egypt and her gods (Exodus 12:12). The fact that Isaiah could describe war as a time when God came down from heaven, or that Daniel could describe the Babylonian empire as a lion with the wings of an eagle (Daniel 7:4), becomes important for understanding how Mark could possibly have thought that

---

<sup>16</sup> Although these two types of eschatological visions overlap to form one greater vision of the future, there remains a lot of variety within Second Temple Judaism(s) as to how the eschaton would play out.

<sup>17</sup> N.T. Wright, *History and Eschatology: Jesus and the Promise of Natural Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 134.

heavenly signs followed by the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven was an apt way of describing the significance of the events associated with the destruction of the Temple and the city of Jerusalem in the first Jewish revolt against Rome (Mark 13:26).

During the Second Temple period one might better speak of “Judaisms” in a broad diverse cultural spectrum rather than as a monolithic “religion” per se. This was true in the area of Judea and the Galilee as much as in the Roman Diaspora. There was no such thing as one standard authoritative form of Judaism.<sup>18</sup> The same can obviously be said of the different eschatological visions of the varying Second Temple sects. Each group was motivated by their dedication to Yahweh but differed in their understanding as to how God would fulfill his promises to the people of Israel and establish his kingdom. The Qumran community was an apocalyptic messianic group who were awaiting a final holy war at the end of the age, but it is not at all clear, in texts like the War Scroll (1QM), that final war depicted in military detail was expected to play out in literal ways—especially since the events on earth were tightly aligned with angelic hosts and cosmic battles against evil forces. The Zealots, at least according to Josephus, believed the kingdom of God needed to be established through military means, namely overthrowing the Roman occupation of the Land of Israel.<sup>19</sup> Although there was no authoritative understanding as to how Israel would be restored and her promises fulfilled, the end goal was agreed upon by virtually all sects. The means of liberation and fulfillment were open to debate,

---

<sup>18</sup> See Shaye J.D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> See Josephus, description of this “fourth philosophy” in *Jewish Antiquities* 18.23-25, as well as *Jewish War* 2.1-75 where he recounts the attempts of Judas son of Ezechias, Simon of Peraea, and Athrongaeus, to overthrow the forces of Varus, the legate of Syria, who brought south three legions to suppress the revolts following the death of Herod the Great. References to Josephus given here are based on the Loeb Classical Library edition, *Josephus* edited by Thackeray, et al. vols 1-9 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927ff).

the goal was not. The eschatological hopes that were virtually ubiquitous in all the different sects are summarized nicely by E.P. Sanders:

Many Jews looked forward to a new and better age. This applies very widely. The same hopes are seen in literature from the time of the Maccabees to the destruction of Jerusalem, and in the Greek-speaking Diaspora as well as in Palestine. The hopes centered on the restoration of the people, the building or purification of the temple and Jerusalem, the defeat or conversion of the gentiles, and the establishment of purity and righteousness.<sup>20</sup>

### *Methods and Arguments*

Scholars over the last few centuries have put forth numerous compositional theories regarding the use of sources for Mark 13. Adela Yarbro Collins has put them into three main categories: “(1) Mark used a substantial, coherent written source; (2) Mark joined together a variety of materials, in oral or written form; (3) Mark took a more active role in composing the discourse, making use of scripture and other sources in written and oral form.”<sup>21</sup> Fitting under Collins’ first category is the “little apocalypse” theory, which remains, in one form or another, a widely held explanation of Mark 13. The origin of the theory is associated with Timothy Colani, who postulated that vv. 5-31 originally belonged to a Jewish-Christian apocalypse and was then interpolated into Mark 13 and put into the mouth of Jesus.<sup>22</sup> Colani believed that this apocalypse was composed by Jewish Christians because he viewed it as being wholly incompatible with the life and teachings of the historical Jesus. According to Colani, it was likely the same Jewish-Christian apocalypse mentioned by Eusebius in his *Church History* which warned the Jerusalem

---

<sup>20</sup> E.P. Sanders, *Judaism Practice & Belief 63 BCE – 66 CE* (Philadelphia, PA: Trinity Press International, 1992), 298.

<sup>21</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, ed. Harold W. Attridge (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 594.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 596.

Christians to flee to Pella during the Roman-Jewish War.<sup>23</sup> As evidence of the tractate's existence, scholars have pointed to the aside "let the reader understand" in v. 14, indicating that the passage was an already written source, thus requiring a "reader." Others have seen the aside as nothing more than a literary device used by Mark to signal the cryptic reference to Daniel (the abomination of desolation; 9:27, 11:31, 12:11). Collins speculates that "the little apocalypse" was a Jewish text written around 40 CE because of the panic over Gaius Caligula's order to install his statue in the Jewish Temple.<sup>24</sup> The debate is complex, but the broad notion of a pre-synoptic apocalyptic tradition will become important for my argument.

My thesis is not dependent on a particular source theory, in that I need only to demonstrate that Mark, and particularly, his interpreter Matthew, draw upon a pre-synoptic tradition, whether written or oral, that is reflected in 1-2 Thessalonians and deals clearly with the *Parousia*.<sup>25</sup> Obviously, parallels between various New Testament texts do not necessitate a common tradition. It is possible that what appears to be a parallel is nothing more than the authors drawing upon similar Jewish sources which reflect ideas the movement holds in common. Moreover, even if the parallels are explicit enough to posit a connection of some sort, one cannot always assume direct influence. To further complicate matters, if a common tradition underlies both texts, the authors may not have had the same version of that particular tradition. It is also possible that both texts were using different traditions with overlapping content. When positing a pre-synoptic tradition, I am using the term broadly to mean that throughout many early

---

<sup>23</sup> Eusebius, *Church History* 3.5.

<sup>24</sup> Collins, *Mark*, p. 596.

<sup>25</sup> David Wenham also hypothesized a pre-synoptic tradition behind the "coming of the son of man" (Matthew 24:29-31, Mark 13:24-27, Luke 21:25-28) by noting their numerous parallels to 1-2 Thessalonians. See David Wenham, *Gospel Perspectives: The Rediscovery of Jesus' Eschatological Discourse*, Vol. 4 (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), 304-326.

Christian communities, as witnessed in a variety of texts now contained in the New Testament, there existed a common hope and expectation for the imminent *Parousia* of Jesus—a distinguishable hope and expectation that the New Testament writers described using much of the same apocalyptic language. I argue that the general apocalyptic elements that are found in 1 and 2 Thessalonians, are reflected in Mark and Matthew in the Synoptic Apocalypse.

I will analyze the Synoptic Apocalypse passages as Mark and Matthew present them—as a self-contained discourse. Regardless of the sources compiled or utilized, both authors made the redactional, editorial, and compositional decisions that reflect their theological convictions.<sup>26</sup> This in no way implies that the work of source and form critics is irrelevant. These methods are important for understanding Mark and Matthew, but they remain secondary in my approach. The sources embedded in the Synoptic Apocalypse, whether Hebrew Bible texts or pre-synoptic apocalyptic tractates, inform our understanding of the passage, but it is the way these sources are shaped and used by the authors that ultimately takes precedence. However, I contend that the gospel writers either directly draw upon or reflect earlier apocalyptic materials within New Testament writings. For example, it might seem unlikely, that the apocalyptic language of Mark 13:24-27 is being appropriated by Mark to refer to something other than the ultimate eschatological end, when the same language is used to refer to such in earlier New Testament texts. I will argue that the notion of the *Parousia* and the “end of the age,” in the Synoptic Apocalypse passages get molded around the events of 70 CE, possibly in reaction to the passing of the generation of Jesus with no literal fulfillment as it was originally expected.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> A similar approach is taken by M. A. Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary-Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989).

<sup>27</sup> The apocalyptic expectations of some early Christians are reflected in Paul's epistles, which are our earliest sources (e.g., 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17, 1 Corinthians 15:51-54, Philippians 3:20-21, 1 Corinthians 7:29-31).

## MARK 13

Among those who have attempted to interpret Mark 13 as a self-contained discourse, two dominant views have emerged. The first view, held by N.T. Wright and others, is that the entire discourse of Mark 13 is one unified body highlighting the events leading up to and climaxing with the Temple's destruction.<sup>28</sup> Proponents of this view rightly point out how the apocalyptic language in vv. 24-27 can easily be understood to refer to contemporary temporal events, without having in view the *Parousia* and the apocalyptic end, which remain in future. The second view is that the discourse is not entirely uniform—some portions refer to first-century events while vv. 24-27 refer to the *Parousia* and the end of the world. It has been described by Johann Albrecht Bengel as a landscape "which marks distinctly the houses, paths, and bridges in the foreground, but brings together, into a narrow space, the distant valleys and mountains, though they are really far apart."<sup>29</sup> Among the proponents for the second view is R.T. France, who suggests that the entire discourse up to v. 31 deals with the fall of Jerusalem, but that vv. 32-37 refer to the *Parousia*.<sup>30</sup> According to France, the use of the second person in the discourse leading up to v. 31 indicates that Jesus is speaking to his disciples and not a future generation. However, this argument fails to apply the same logic to vv. 32-37 where the same grammatical form is found.<sup>31</sup> France also argues that the phrase "but of that day or hour" in v. 32 introduces something

---

<sup>28</sup> N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 339-343.

<sup>29</sup> Beasley-Murray, *Jesus*, 128. The quote is from Johann Albrecht Bengel to whom Beasley-Murray attributes the origin of this perspective. Beasley-Murray also holds this view as his foundation but ultimately departs from Bengel over other issues.

<sup>30</sup> R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament: His Application of Old Testament Passages to Himself and his Mission* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1971) 231-32.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

different than the events of “those days” (vv. 17,19, 24) in the previous section, which is confirmed by Jesus’ sudden lack of knowledge in v. 32.<sup>32</sup> Drawing a distinction between these two alleged sections based on “that day” versus “those days” seems rather arbitrary. The style is better explained by understanding the discourse as a progressive unfolding of events leading to a climax. A similar phenomenon can be seen in Isaiah 2, where Isaiah’s eschatological prophecy progresses from “the last days” to “that day.”<sup>33</sup> Jesus’ lack of knowledge in v. 32 is best understood as subordinate to his statement in v. 30: “this generation will not pass away until all these things take place” (Mark 13:30). The Markan Jesus appears to be teaching his disciples that their generation would surely not pass away until all the words of Jesus were fulfilled, but as to the exact day or hour, no one would know. The idea is alluded to earlier in Mark 13:8 where the “birth-pangs” of suffering are connected to the destruction of Jerusalem. A woman who gets pregnant is sure to give birth within nine months, although the exact day and hour is unknown. Reading the text this way makes sense of Jesus’ advice to his disciples. After all, if the day or hour were known, staying on guard would be unnecessary. Furthermore, the parabolic material in vv. 33-36, which France believes refers to the *Parousia*, echoes the instruction to the disciples to be on guard and be ready to flee from Judea (vv. 14-18). The second view has weight insofar that the language of vv. 24-27 is referring to the *Parousia*. The first view has the advantage of understanding the entire discourse as one unified body and its fulfillment limited to a single generation.<sup>34</sup> My position is that the apocalyptic discourse is unified and at the same time it views the *Parousia* and the end of the age as connected to the subject at hand—the destruction of Herod’s Temple and the city of Jerusalem itself in the first century.

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Isaiah 2:2; 2:11.

<sup>34</sup> In keeping with Jesus’ definitive summary statement in Mark 13:30.

If Mark 13 is indeed one unified discourse, then Mark presents Jesus' eschatological discourse as something that was to be fulfilled in the lifetime of the disciples, specifically in the events leading up to and climaxing in 70 CE.<sup>35</sup> I contend that Mark and Matthew believe that the prophetic words attributed to Jesus, including the language of Daniel and other prophetic texts from the Hebrew Bible to have been fulfilled. Simply put, the writers are in fact looking back on events that have taken place. The Olivet Discourse is one of the clearest examples of *vaticinium ex eventu*.<sup>36</sup> Among the events that would be fulfilled in the first century are the controversial apocalyptic vv. 24-27, which so many understand as referring to the Second Coming which will happen at the end of the age, but, in fact, Mark connects it to events surrounding the subject of the discourse, i.e. the destruction of Jerusalem. Putting the debate concerning the meaning of vv. 24-27 aside, in the literary context of Mark's gospel, vv. 24-27 are found among the events that marked the nearness of the destruction of the Temple, assuming the entire discourse to be in response to the disciples' question in v. 4. If vv. 24-27 were understood to be failed apocalyptic expectations that were still awaiting fulfillment, it is difficult to make sense of Mark's delimiting time statement in v. 30 which caps the discourse and declares emphatically that Jesus' contemporary generation would witness the prophesied events. Apocalyptic groups have coped with failed expectations throughout history by any number of strategies—whether recasting their prophetic timetable, claiming fulfillment in some non-literal way, or abandoning the predictive enterprise. One response is for the group to postpone the time of fulfillment by recalculating and pushing the time of fulfillment into the future. One possible example from the Second Temple period of the postponement strategy is found in the medieval Cairo Damascus Document,

---

<sup>35</sup> Again, per Mark 13:30.

<sup>36</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 100.

portions of which were later discovered among the Second Temple era writings at Qumran. We have two recensions, usually referred to as CD-A and CD-B. In CD-B there is an intriguing passage:

And from the day of the gathering in of the unique teacher, until the end of all the men of war who turned back with the man of lies, there shall be about forty years (CD-B XX, 13b-15).<sup>37</sup>

So far as we can tell, the end of the “men of war” correlates with the expectation of the end of the age as the Qumran community viewed things. This seems clear in 4Q171, a fragmented text that offers an interpretation or “Peshar” on Psalm 37:10 which says “I will stare at his place and he will no longer be there.” This is then interpreted to be a forty-year period leading to the destruction of all wickedness:

Its interpretation concerns all the wickedness at the end of forty years, for they will be complete and upon the earth no [wic]ked person will be found (4Q171, 7-8).

In the Habakkuk Peshar found in Cave 1 at Qumran, which was very possibly written after the forty-year period had expired without judgment taking place, the author attempts to reconcile the prophecy with the sect’s failed expectations. This is accomplished by the author reinterpreting a critical prophecy from the book of Habakkuk, which directly references the idea of delayed fulfillment of a prophetic vision— “Though it might tarry, wait for it; it definitely has to come and will not delay” (1QpHab VII, 9). The idea here seems to be that to perceive “delay” is simply a misconception in God’s wisdom “For the vision has an appointed time, it will have an

---

<sup>37</sup> English translations from the Dead Sea Scrolls are from Florentino García Martínez, trans., *The Dead Sea scrolls: Study Edition*. Vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2005). Most scholars working on the Dead Sea Scrolls have become convinced that the totality of manuscripts found in the 11 caves around Qumran represent a diversity of authors and perspectives over a 300-year period rather than being a monolithic single sectarian library. See Joan E. Taylor, *The Essenes, the Scrolls, and the Dead Sea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

end and not fail.” Its interpretation: “the final age will be extended and go beyond all that the prophets say, because the mysteries of God are wonderful” (1QpHab VII, 6-7). Later the Romans swept through the land of Palestine, eventually attacking and overcoming the Dead Sea Scroll group.<sup>38</sup> Judging from what we know of their expectations, especially as they are laid out in the War Scroll, any hopes that they had were probably crushed, causing the sect to apparently disappear—at least from our historical records. Their deeply held expectations died with them at the hands of the Roman soldiers.

Mark 13 adopts none of these approaches. He does not understand Jesus’ discourse to be a case of “when prophecy fails.” The events of the Roman-Jewish war were interpreted by Mark and Matthew as the vindication of the early Christian movement and the man they believed to be the Messiah, events that Mark presents as prophecies accurately proclaimed by Jesus the last week of his life as he and his disciples overlooked the Herodian Temple complex. Not only do the events of the war represent God’s vindicating judgment, but Mark uses much of the same language, scriptures, and themes that are used in earlier New Testament texts which describe the imminent *Parousia* of Jesus. Mark may be responding to the fact that the hope of the imminent *Parousia* had not happened as it was described in earlier New Testament texts, so he shapes the hope of the *Parousia* around the events of 70 CE, which turns a failure into a fulfillment.<sup>39</sup> The contrast between the postponement strategy and the time statement in v. 30 makes good sense if Mark is indeed presenting the discourse as fulfilled.

However, the central question remains: If Jesus’ eschatological discourse is presented by Mark as fulfilled prophecies, does Mark intend for vv. 24-27 to refer to the widely held belief

---

<sup>38</sup> For a general discussion on the archaeological evidence, see Jodi Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

<sup>39</sup> See note 27 above.

and expectation of the *Parousia* of the early Jesus followers, as described in earlier texts such as 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17? Or are they simply an appropriation of Jewish scriptures to draw out the theological significance of Jerusalem's destruction? I propose to argue the former, although the latter is also partly true. I will argue that Mark 13:24-27 should be understood in light of two points: 1) The entire context of the Gospel of Mark, especially Mark 13, is eschatological;<sup>40</sup> and 2) the quotations and allusions to the Hebrew Bible in Mark 13 are meant to import the larger contexts of the passages where the quoted texts originate from, thus connecting significant eschatological passages to the events surrounding 70 CE.<sup>41</sup>

### *Mark's Broader Eschatological Contexts*

Mark opens his gospel with a composite citation from Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. His reference to Isaiah signals the conceptual framework of his Gospel—the time of Yahweh's return to Zion and the restoration of his covenant with his people. At the same time, Mark joins his citation of Isaiah with a passage from Malachi where God predicts the coming of his messenger Elijah before his purifying judgment upon Israel (Malachi 3:1, 4:5). Mark's description of John's attire—clothing made of camel's hair and a leather belt, links John the Baptist with Elijah, although it is already clear from the first four verses that he is the anticipated Messenger (Mark 1:6). The coupling of judgment and salvation, and welcome and warning, is a theme that permeates the Synoptic Gospels and summarizes the ministry of Jesus and John. Both Jesus and John announce the newly inaugurated kingdom while warning of imminent destruction upon the

---

<sup>40</sup> Mark opens his gospel with a composite citation from Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1, both which speak of Yahweh's return to Israel. Jesus then proceeds to teach and announce the long-awaited kingdom (e.g., Mark 1:15, 4:11) throughout the rest of the gospel narrative.

<sup>41</sup> C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures* (London: Nisbet, 1952), 110, 126-127; Richard B. Hayes, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016) 11.

nation in general and on Jerusalem in particular. The same theme is found in the eschatological hopes of the prophets—the time of God’s judgment is also the time of vindication for God’s people. However, a new twist on Israel’s story begins to develop in the early Christian texts: Israel is now cast into the role of the pagan nations who oppress God’s people (Revelation 11:8). Jerusalem and her present corruption had become like Babylon while Jesus and his followers constitute the true Israel (Revelation 17:6, 3:9). The plot is the same, but the characters have changed. Those who acknowledged Jesus would be vindicated and those who did not would be cast out. Thus, we find Jesus announcing the kingdom (Mark 1:14) while predicting the destruction of Jerusalem and her Temple (Mark 13:3).

In the chapters leading up to the Synoptic Apocalypse, Mark purposefully places the stories of Jesus cursing the fig tree and chastising the corrupt temple cult for turning the sanctuary into a “den of robbers” (Mark 11:12-17). Mark gives an intertextual link to Jeremiah 7:11, where Jeremiah also rebukes the corrupt priesthood in Jerusalem before pronouncing God’s wrath on them, which consumes the First Temple (destroyed in 586 BCE). The link to Jeremiah is intended to capture the larger context of the passage—just as judgment hovered over Israel in Jeremiah’s time, just prior to the Babylonian destruction, so it does again in Jesus’ day, prior to the Roman destruction. It might also be noted that Jeremiah delivered his prophecy in the generation that witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem and the First Temple—paralleling Mark’s emphasis on a final “generation” that would live through the Roman destruction. Mark frames the Temple cleansing scene with Jesus’ curse on the fig tree, evoking the imagery from Jeremiah 8:13 where Israel, and her near destruction, is depicted as a fig tree about to lose its ability to produce fruit. Furthermore, the agricultural imagery parallels the parable of the tenants told shortly after the cleansing of the Temple scene, which portrays Israel as a vineyard with wicked

tenants who refuse to render a proper harvest to the owner. The tenants' punishment is death, and their vineyard is given to others (Mark 12:1-9). The symbolic actions of Jesus cursing the fig tree and cleansing the temple along with his parable of the tenants, all function as a pronouncement of Israel's near destruction. A reader in tune with the scriptural imagery packed into Jesus' symbolic actions and teachings is not surprised to find Jesus forthrightly declaring in Mark 13 that "not one stone will be left upon another" of the Temple complex.

### *The Specific Context of Mark 13*

The context of the discourse in Mark 13 is quite explicit. The disciples ask Jesus two questions: when will the Temple be destroyed and what will be the signs that it is going to happen? (Mark 13:2-4). After giving a series of events which address their second question (Mark 13:5-27), he responds to their first question by assuring them that their generation would not pass away until it all took place (Mark 13:30). It seems improbable that Mark would attach such a time-delimiting statement to prophecies that were understood to be failed predictions. The focus of the discourse was the Temple's destruction and Jesus was emphatic that it would happen in their generation, which was fulfilled when Titus burned the Temple in 70 CE. It is difficult to imagine that the signs leading up to the Temple's destruction were perceived as failures while the event they were supposed to lead to was not. I agree with George Caird that the "coming of the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven really was an answer to the disciples' questions about the date of the fall of Jerusalem."<sup>42</sup> Discerning how to 'decode' apocalyptic language while keeping in mind the reshaping of Israel's story are two important factors to understanding the eschatological significance of the Synoptic Apocalypse and Jerusalem's destruction. What

---

<sup>42</sup> George Caird, *Jesus and the Jewish Nation* (London: Athlone Press, 1965), 21.

follows is not intended to be an exhaustive study of every aspect of the Synoptic Apocalypse, but a highlighting of those elements that best illustrate the eschatological nature of the discourse.

### *The Beginning of the Birth Pangs*

In later Jewish writings, the phrase “birth pangs of the Messiah” is used to describe the period of distress preceding God’s final triumph, which can be found in Rabbinic literature, the Hebrew Bible, and in the New Testament.<sup>43</sup> This idea, which can be traced back to Hosea 13:13, finds its way through such passages as Isaiah 66:7-9 and Daniel 12:1, eventually becoming commonplace in apocalyptic thought.<sup>44</sup> The Hebrew Bible also uses the imagery and illustration of a woman in travail to foretell impending national disaster and judgment.<sup>45</sup> More specifically, the national disaster foretold was always God’s divine judgment. The imagery of a woman in travail carried the concept of death and destruction because giving labor was painful and dangerous in the ancient world, and the infant mortality rate was high. Yet, with the pain and danger came the opportunity for a new life, which lends over to the theme of the messianic birth pangs preceding God’s final victory. In Isaiah 66:7-9, God uses the birth pain imagery to describe the time prior to his new creation. God assures his people that the birth pangs will not be for no reason as they appeared to be in Isaiah 26:18, this time it will surely bring new life. This idea is virtually ubiquitous in the apocalyptic literature of the Second Temple era. The apocalyptic writers speak of the great wickedness and disaster that would precede the end of the age. And in some cases, they speak of a final generation exceptional in their wickedness

---

<sup>43</sup> See for example Sanhedrin 97a, 98b; Revelation 12:1-6, 1 Thessalonians 5:3, and Mark 13:8 (cf. Matthew 24:8).

<sup>44</sup> Cf. also Micah 4:9-10, Haggai 2:6, Zechariah 14:13.

<sup>45</sup> For more on the birth pangs imagery see Brant Pitre, *Jesus, the Tribulation, and the End of the Exile* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 2006), 251ff.

(Jubilees 23:14), perhaps paralleling Jesus' indictment of his contemporaries as a "adulterous and sinful generation" (Mark 8:38; cf. Mark 13:12-13). Daniel 12:1 envisions a time of distress, "such as never has been since there was a nation till that time," prior to the resurrection itself. In Mark 13:19, Jesus references Daniel 12:1 to describe the events of 66-70 CE as a time of "tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created until now" (Mark 13:19). Josephus coincidentally bears the same testimony, concerning the tribulations resulting from the Roman siege of Jerusalem, he writes: "To narrate their enormities in detail is impossible; but, to put it briefly, no other city ever endured such miseries, nor since the world began has there been a generation more prolific in crime."<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, Jesus explicitly designates the signs leading up to Jerusalem's demise as the "birth pangs"—the time of distress before the end of the age (Mark 13:8). The signs he gives are packed with eschatological meaning and contain echoes and allusions to the signs and times of distress that some apocalyptic writings of the Second Temple period describe—family betrayal, famines, and portents in the heavens.<sup>47</sup> The significance is that Jesus tells his disciples that the signs they would see and experience in the times leading up to 70 CE, were none other than the birth pangs that would lead directly to God's climactic victory. It is interesting to note, that in Isaiah 65-66, the creation of the new Jerusalem occurs alongside the destruction of Jerusalem. It is quite possible that texts like Isaiah 65-66, which posit the judgment of Jerusalem at the same time of

---

<sup>46</sup> Josephus, *Jewish War* 5.442. Although Josephus' well-known tendency to exaggerate the scope of events as well as the guilt of those Jews who opposed Rome, his descriptions of the horrors of the siege of Jerusalem are nonetheless in keeping with Mark's language, based on Daniel 12:1.

<sup>47</sup> 1 Enoch 100:1-2 speaks of family members betraying and killing each other (cf. Mark 13:12). 1 Enoch 80:2-3 and Jubilees 23:18 both imply that there will be famines (cf. Mark 13:8). Although written shortly after the Second Temple era, 2 Baruch and 2 Esdras both speak of earthquakes (2 Baruch 27:7; 70:8; 2 Esdras 9:3; cf. Mark 13:8) and famines (2 Baruch 27:6; 70:8; 2 Esdras 6:22; cf. Mark 13:8).

Jerusalem's salvation, inspired the early Christian language about two Jerusalems (Galatians 4:25-26; Hebrews 12:22). This would help explain how Mark could have an understanding so counterintuitive to prominent Jewish thought—that the destruction of Jerusalem was the eschatological climax of Israel. It becomes plausible, however, when we consider that Mark and his early readers believed that a new Jerusalem and a new temple had been established, which were opposed by the literal Jerusalem and its temple cult.

*Daniel and the Abomination of Desolation Fulfilled*

The sign that was an indicator for the disciples to flee from Judea into the mountains was the “abomination of desolation” spoken of by the prophet Daniel (Mark 13:14).<sup>48</sup> In their original historical contexts, these passages in Daniel were fulfilled during the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, and their fulfillment is recorded in the apocryphal books of 1 and 2 Maccabees. 1 Maccabees records how Antiochus Epiphanes came against Jerusalem and erected a desolating sacrilege upon the altar, which the Jews called the “abomination of desolation” (1 Maccabees 1:54). Antiochus set out to destroy Judaism along with anyone who rebelled against his effort to Hellenize and rule over Jerusalem. He gave orders prohibiting Sabbath observance, the feasts, and circumcision (2 Maccabees 6:6). His most abominable act was the erection of an altar to Olympian Zeus upon the altar of burnt offering, where he demanded sacrifices of swine be made (2 Maccabees 6:2-5).<sup>49</sup> It was Antiochus's abominations that left Jerusalem “desolate” (1 Maccabees 1:39). That is, all the loyal Israelites had fled to the mountains and hills, only the gentiles and the compromised Jews remained, making Jerusalem a “dwelling of strangers” (1

---

<sup>48</sup> Daniel 9:26-27; 11:31; 12:11.

<sup>49</sup> Josephus, *Jewish War* 1.34-35.

Maccabees 1:38). Among various groups of Jews in the late Second-Temple era, there was a wide-spread belief that Daniel's prophecy of 490 years (Daniel 9:24-27) reached into the early Roman period.<sup>50</sup> Desmond Ford writes: "Furthermore, there were many in Israel who believed that Antiochus Epiphanes had not completely fulfilled the visions of Daniel, 8, 9, 11 and 12. That book had promised the advent of the kingdom of God after the profanation of the sanctuary by the willful king. But certainly, the kingdom had not come with the rededicated sanctuary of 165 B.C. Therefore, they reasoned, the woes under Antiochus must have been pre-figurative of worse woes to come."<sup>51</sup> Thus, Jesus applying the "abomination of desolation" to the events of the Roman-Jewish war also meant the time when God's kingdom, as predicted by Daniel, would truly be established. Josephus ironically saw the fulfillment of an "ambiguous oracle" found in the Jewish scriptures, possibly Daniel 9:26, in Vespasian becoming the new world leader circa 70 CE.<sup>52</sup> Mark also perceived 70 CE to be the time when Daniel would be fulfilled, although in a remarkably different way.

### *The Sun Moon and Stars*

In Mark 13:24 Jesus predicts to his disciples "in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken." Those who think this language is best interpreted as a literal description of the apocalyptic end of the world, as commonly understood, inevitably conclude that this passage represents the failed expectation of the early Jesus

---

<sup>50</sup> Cana Werman, "Epochs and End-time: The 490-Year Scheme in Second Temple Literature," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 13, 2 (2006): 229-255.

<sup>51</sup> Desmond Ford, *The Abomination of Desolation in Biblical Eschatology* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1979), 157.

<sup>52</sup> Josephus, *Jewish War* 6.311-313.

movement or that vv. 24-27 are somehow disconnected to the “generation” of which Jesus clearly speaks in Mark 13:30. Interpreting Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet who expected some kind of cosmic cataclysmic “end of the world” with such accompanying heavenly signs is a common view among current scholars of Christian Origins who see Jesus as a failed prophet.<sup>53</sup> Consequently, for such, the early Jesus movement clearly represents a group whose apocalyptic predictions and expectations failed.<sup>54</sup> But we must examine whether there is any evidence that Mark and his interpreters shared that view. The pertinent question remains: how would Mark’s readers have understood such language? We have reason to believe that the early Jesus followers understood the kind of language in the Synoptic Apocalypse in the same way Isaiah or other prophets of the First Temple period used it. This is made explicit in the mouth of Peter in Acts 2:19-20, quoting Joel 2:28-30 and applying the “wonders in heaven and signs on the earth beneath,” including the sun and moon, to events on the day of Pentecost around 30 CE. A first century reader familiar with Jewish prophetic literature would recognize the references to Isaiah 13:10 and Isaiah 34:4. In Isaiah 13:10 the prophet used almost identical language about the sun and the moon being darkened to describe Yahweh bringing judgment upon Babylon. Isaiah 34 speaks of the ‘stars dissolving’ and the ‘heavens rolling up like a scroll’ when announcing judgment on the nations. N.T. Wright puts things well, writing that “...there is virtually no evidence that Jews were expecting the end of the space-time universe. There is abundant

---

<sup>53</sup> For example, see Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Dale C. Allison, *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998); James D. Tabor, *The Jesus Dynasty: The Hidden History of Jesus, His Royal Family, and the Birth of Christianity* (New York: Simon & Shuster Paperbacks, 2007); and Paula Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews: A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000).

<sup>54</sup> See James D. Tabor, “Standing in the Shadow of Schweitzer: What Can We Say About an Apocalyptic Jesus?” CSER Review (2009): 8-10, for a succinct summary of this Schweitzerian approach.

evidence that they, like Jeremiah and others before them, knew a good metaphor when they saw one, and used cosmic imagery to bring out the full theological significance of cataclysmic socio-political events.”<sup>55</sup> The same cosmic language is found in Ezekiel 32:7-8, Joel 2:10, Amos 8:9 and other prophetic texts. In the various passages where this language is used, the context is always judgment, where a prophet predicts God’s imminent wrath upon a people, destroying their political, economic, and religious structures. The key point is this, the cosmic portents have a temporal significance, the metaphor describes the demise of a political entity within history and not the end of the world. The means through which God executes these judgments, usually referred to as “the day of the Lord,” is military warfare, where one nation is utilized by God to destroy another. The prediction in Mark 13:24 is best understood in the context of the Roman siege and destruction of Jerusalem, events Mark most likely lived through.

### *The Son of Man on the Clouds*

Richard Hays rightly points out that “The distinctive expression ‘abomination of desolation’ unmistakably links Jesus’ discourse to Daniel’s apocalyptic picture of history and prepares the way for Mark’s introduction of the triumphant Danielic Son of Man in Mark 13:24-27.”<sup>56</sup> I would take it a step further by pointing out that the other Danielic themes such as the birth pangs and the unparalleled time of tribulation also link Jesus’s discourse to Daniel’s apocalyptic picture of history as whole. Mark 13:26 alludes strongly to Daniel 7:13, a passage following verses where Daniel has a vision of four beasts, each representing a pagan empire, all of which eventually lose power and dominion. At the time of their losing power comes “One like

---

<sup>55</sup> N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 333.

<sup>56</sup> Hayes, *Echoes*, 58.

a Son of Man” who approaches the “Ancient of Days” and receives an everlasting kingdom. The Son of Man has often been interpreted as Israel receiving her vindication over the cruel and oppressive empires. Israel’s representative Son of Man denotes the true humanity of God’s people in comparison to the pagans who were likened to wild beasts. In other apocalyptic writings the Son of Man can refer to either God’s son (4 Ezra 13) or the anointed one (1 Enoch 48:10, 52:4). I do not think that Mark alludes to the Son of Man figure in Daniel 7:13 to speak of Jesus ascending to heaven to acquire power or authority, since in the narrative, he already possesses both from the time of his baptism. Instead, I am convinced that Mark’s post 70 CE audience would have understood the coming of the Son of Man on clouds as the divine judgment upon Jerusalem and the Temple system—a judgment that vindicates Jesus against those who rejected him. To understand the language of the Son of Man coming on the clouds it is imperative that we once again look back to the prophets for guidance. In several places in Hebrew Bible, “the day of the Lord” is described as “a day of clouds” (Ezekiel 30:3; Joel 2:1-2). In Isaiah 19:1, the prophet predicts Yahweh’s impending judgment on Egypt by declaring: “Behold, the Lord rides upon a swift cloud, and comes unto Egypt...” In Joel 2, the imagery of clouds is used alongside the cosmic portents discussed above. Similarly, by combining the cosmic judgment language in vv. 24-25 with v. 26, Mark seems to fuse the motif of God using a nation to judge and destroy another with the apocalyptic Son of Man from the book of Daniel. In Mark 13:26 it is not the Lord, who is usually the rider of the clouds, but the Son of Man who will come on the clouds to judge, indicating his newly received authority. This interpretation is consistent with other early Christian texts in which the return of Jesus is associated with judgment, vindication, and coming with clouds (1 Thessalonians 4:15, Revelation 1:7). During his trial, the Markan Jesus responds to the High Priest’s question by conflating Psalm 110:1 and

Daniel 7:13, which clearly illuminates the idea of Jesus being vindicated through judgment (Mark 14:62).

### *Gathering of the Elect*

One key component to eschatological redemption in the biblical prophetic literature is the regathering of scattered Israelites in the Diaspora back to the promised land.<sup>57</sup> From the ancient Israelite perspective, the land of Israel, as defined in the Torah, belonged to the Jewish people throughout all generations as promised to their forefather Abraham.<sup>58</sup> The land of Israel was called the “land of the living” by the prophet Isaiah (53:8), and was the place where God chose to build his Temple and put his name forever (1 Kings 9:3).<sup>59</sup> Ezekiel had a vision depicting the exiles in Babylonian captivity as a valley of dry bones, whose hope was crushed because they were cut off from the promised land (37:1-11). Since the exiles are depicted as a valley of skeletons, their return into the promised land is described using resurrection language—flesh being put back onto bones and corpses coming out of graves (37:5-6, 12). The idea is that to be cut off from the Promised Land was to be dead. From this developed the idea that when God restores Israel and establishes the kingdom all the Jews scattered among the nations would be brought back into the land. Deuteronomy 30:2-4, which appears to be the main text alluded to in Mark 13:27, reads:

...and you return to the Lord your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul in accordance with everything that I am commanding you today, you and your sons, then the Lord your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you. If any of your scattered countrymen are at the ends of the earth, from there the Lord your God will

---

<sup>57</sup> See Isaiah 11:11, Jeremiah 16:14-15, 31:7-8.

<sup>58</sup> Genesis 17:8.

<sup>59</sup> According to the Deuteronomist view of history.

gather you, and from there He will bring you back...

Thomas Hatina has suggested that Mark 13:27 echoes Zechariah 2:6-7 which instructs those in Babylon, whom the Lord had dispersed as “the four winds of the heavens.” to return to the land of Judah.<sup>60</sup> Hatina points out that both verses are not eschatological in nature and simply speak of historic regatherings from exile. Therefore, he argues, we should not read any eschatological meaning into Mark 13:27.<sup>61</sup> This is problematic for several reasons. The first, as noted above, is that the entire context of Mark’s Gospel, especially chapter 13, is eschatological in nature. The second is that Mark 13:27 can also be echoing passages from the Hebrew Bible that speak of the scattered being regathered in the context of the Davidic messiah and eschatological restoration (Isaiah 11:10-12).<sup>62</sup>

Although it is true that Deuteronomy 30:2-4 and Zechariah 2:6-7 are not explicitly eschatological in their respective contexts, it is important to understand how some Jews during the Second Temple Era, particularly those of the apocalyptic persuasion, would have read and understood such texts. For example, Jeremiah predicts that the Babylonian exile would only last seventy years (29:10). To get exactly seventy years, some start the count at 586 BCE when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and end the count at 516 BCE when the Temple was rebuilt. But how does the author of Daniel, writing centuries later, interpret Jeremiah’s seventy-year prediction? He says that the seventy years is actually seventy times seven (9:24). Put

---

<sup>60</sup> Hatina, “The Focus of Mark,” 64-65.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>62</sup> Jason Staples has recently proposed a new paradigm for how the biblical concept of Israel both shaped and was shaped by early Jewish apocalyptic hopes for restoration after the Babylonian Exile. His book lays the groundwork for a better understanding of the so-called “parting of the ways” between Judaism and Christianity and how earliest Christianity itself grew out of hopes for Israel’s restoration. See Jason Staples, *The Idea of Israel in Second Temple Judaism: A New Theory of People, Exile, and Israelite Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

simply, the exile is to last 490 years according to Daniel. But how could the author of Daniel claim such a thing considering the Babylonian exile was well over at the time of his writing? The Jews did return to the land in 536 CE and rebuilt the Temple in 516 CE, but they still had no king, were in continued subjection to pagan rulers, and the glorious restoration upon returning as envisioned by the prophets never fully happened. Presumably then, it is reasoned by the author of Daniel that Israel was still in a state of exile—i.e., being ruled over by gentiles because of sins. The book of Enoch also appears to think of Israel as still being in a state of exile.<sup>63</sup> A similar understanding can also be found in non-apocalyptic writings, consider Nehemiah 9:36-37:

Behold, we are slaves today, and as to the land which You gave to our fathers to eat of its fruit and its bounty, behold, we are slaves in it. Its abundant produce is for the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins; they also rule over our bodies and over our cattle as they please, so we are in great distress.

In continuance with the “long exile” motif, Mark opens his gospel quoting Isaiah’s pivotal declaration of hope that the exile would end (40:3). In the narrative world of Mark’s gospel, the Jews are already in the promised land, yet somehow the real end of exile is happening with the person and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.

It is slightly more difficult to figure out how Mark or his first-century audience would have understood v. 27 as a fulfilled prophecy. Some have postulated that angels in v. 27 is better translated as “messengers,” referring to those who travelled throughout the Greco-Roman world preaching the gospel message and thus “gathering the elect.” Jason Staples has argued that Paul saw his work of preaching the gospel to “Gentiles,” as in fact drawing in those of the “lost

---

<sup>63</sup> I.e., the Vision of the Animals (1 Enoch 85-90). For an exposition on 1 Enoch 85-90 and the “long exile” motif, see Michael A. Knibb, “The Exile in the Literature of the Intertestamental Period,” *The Heythrop Journal*, 17 (1976): 253-272.

tribes” of Israel who had become “not my people” to use the language of Hosea—thus fulfilling a prime Messianic mandate of Isaiah 11:10-12.<sup>64</sup> Both Mark and Matthew emphasize that the gospel must first be preached to “all the nations,” before the end comes. Others have understood the gathering of the elect as the flight of the disciples to safety in Pella (circa 66-70 CE), although this tradition shows up later in the writings of Eusebius and may have been unknown to Mark. Another possible interpretation of the “gathering” is that of a covenantal gathering of believers unto God. Although written later, a similar interpretation of “gathering” may lay underneath Jesus’ lament in Matthew 23:37: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who have been sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.” In our earliest Christian sources, there is a lack of focus on any type of physical gathering of believers into the land of Israel or elsewhere.<sup>65</sup> One consistent theme that runs throughout the Pauline epistles is the importance of the Christian believer being “in Christ.” Udo Schnelle describes this phrase as the “sphere within which the new life is lived, between the beginnings of salvation and its consummation...”<sup>66</sup> Both in Hebrews and Galatians, those participating in the new covenant are said to be in the “heavenly Jerusalem.” The dominant focus in the New Testament writings is the position of the believer in their relationship to God, not their geographical location. Considering the non-literal fulfillments of the metaphorical language in Mark 13:24-26, I would venture to say that v. 27 is best understood in the same non-literal way.

---

<sup>64</sup> Jason Staples, *Reconstructing Israel: Restoration Eschatology in Early Judaism and Paul’s Gentile Mission* 2016, unpublished dissertation directed by Bart Ehrman, forthcoming with Cambridge University Press.

<sup>65</sup> A possible exception is 1 Thessalonians 4:17, where it seems that Paul expected believers to experience some sort of literal gathering to the Lord.

<sup>66</sup> Udo Schnelle, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2009), 277.

*Intertextuality in Mark*

The constant allusions, echoes, and sometimes explicit quotations from the Hebrew Bible in the gospels are obvious to any reader familiar with Israel's sacred scriptures, but the nature of these references is debated. Do the New Testament writers reference such texts by ignoring their original meaning and context? Do they rip texts out of context and misapply them to something totally different? One critical component to my argument has to do with the nature of the intertextual references in Mark. C.H. Dodd in his book *According to the Scriptures* observes that in the New Testament there are many scattered quotations of the Jewish scriptures that derive from the same few contexts.<sup>67</sup> He concludes that the New Testament authors were aware of the broader contexts of the passages from which the quoted scripture originates. Thus, Dodd argues that intertextual references are meant to serve as signposts, signaling to the reader the broader context of the referenced text.<sup>68</sup> Because this phenomenon is found in the earliest strata of Christian texts, Dodd argued that the hermeneutical method was an invention by Jesus himself, and passed on to his followers.<sup>69</sup> This claim is highly speculative, however. Apart from making any bold claims about the historical Jesus, Richard Hays has expounded upon Dodd's theory of intertextual exegesis. Hays uses the word "metalepsis" to describe the way in which a New Testament author references a text from the Hebrew Bible. He defines metalepsis as "a literary technique of citing or echoing a small bit of a precursor text in such a way that the reader can

---

<sup>67</sup> C. H. Dodd, *According*, 126-127.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 110.

grasp the significance of the echo only by recalling or recovering the original context from which the fragmentary echo came and then reading the two texts in dialogical juxtaposition.”<sup>70</sup>

An example of this can be seen in the references to Jeremiah in Mark 11 leading up to the Olivet Discourse. Jesus’ cursing of the fig tree and rendering it unfruitful hearkens back to Jeremiah 8:13, and his accusation of the money changers turning the Temple into a “robbers’ den” is an allusion to Jeremiah 7:11. The broad context in which both passages are found is Jeremiah the prophet denouncing and pronouncing judgment upon an unfaithful Jerusalem and a corrupt priesthood. Once the reader imports the broader context of these scriptural references, he or she becomes prepared for the emphatic prediction by Jesus that the Temple will be destroyed, just as it was in Jeremiah’s day. In light of this hermeneutical principle, consider then the multiple allusions to the Book of Daniel in Mark 13. If the references to Daniel 12:1 and Daniel 7:13 are meant to import their larger contexts, and if they are being presented as fulfilled prophecies, then Mark is placing the “end time” (Daniel 12:9) at the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. And so, I think it is best to understand vv. 24-27 as referring to the apocalyptic end and the *Parousia*.

#### MATTHEW 23-25 AND 1 AND 2 THESSALONIANS

Much of the language, images, and even phrasing in Mark 13 and Matthew 23-25 can be found in other earlier New Testament texts that focus on the *Parousia* of Jesus and the eschatological end of the age. This expectation of Jesus’ imminent return is found throughout

---

<sup>70</sup> Hayes, *Echoes*, 11.

most of the New Testament writings.<sup>71</sup> This widespread hope is what I label as the “pre-synoptic tradition” underlying the eschatological discourse in the Synoptic Apocalypse passages. This broad definition of tradition avoids all the problems that come along with trying to identify a specific common source underlying two texts, or a direct connection from one text to another. The fact remains however, that the hope of the *Parousia* is virtually ubiquitous in the New Testament corpus, and it remains an identifiable belief that permeated the minds of many early Christians.<sup>72</sup> The *Parousia* is always spoken about as a one-time event that is both imminent and climactic. There is no evidence in a belief of multiple “comings” of Jesus as some suggest, who argue that the early Christians interpreted the fall of Jerusalem as “a coming” but not “the coming.” If enough commonalities and parallels exist between Matthew 23-25 and earlier New Testament documents regarding the *Parousia*, then we are on good ground for thinking Matthew has the *Parousia* in mind, which he seemingly molds to the events of the Roman-Jewish war, making it *vaticinium ex eventu*.<sup>73</sup> Because of the limited scope of this paper, only the parallels between Matthew and 1-2 Thessalonians will be laid out and a select few expounded upon in their respective contexts. Also, the same verse may be listed and explicated more than once

---

<sup>71</sup> For a list of some of the main texts see James D. Tabor, “New Testament Texts on the Imminence of the End,” *The Jewish Roman World of Jesus*, <https://pages.uncc.edu/james-tabor/christian-origins-and-the-new-testament/imminence-of-the-end/>.

<sup>72</sup> E.g., Hebrews 9:28, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, Revelation 1:7, 2 Peter 3:10, Acts 1:10-11, Titus 2:13, Colossians 3:4, 1 John 2:28, etc.

<sup>73</sup> Matthew, by repeating the Markan material, certainly associated the Son of Man coming with angels with the *Parousia* elsewhere in his gospel, i.e., Matthew 16:27-28. Some believe Matthew 16:27-28 refers to the transfiguration scene, but the Matthean Jesus tells his disciples that each person would receive rewards for everything they have done at his coming, which certainly does not happen at the transfiguration. He also says that some of the disciples would not taste death until they saw “the Son of Man coming in his kingdom,” which would be a strange thing to say if the anticipated event was only six days later with no disciples dying before then.

because often one verse will contain several parallels to the corresponding text. Consider the following parallels:

- 1) Matthew 23:29-31 Jews had slain the prophets; 1 Thessalonians 2:15 Jews had slain the prophets.
- 2) Matthew 23:32 would fill up the measure of their sin by persecuting; 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16 were filling up the measure of their sin by persecuting.
- 3) Matthew 23:36 judgment would come in that generation; 1 Thessalonians 2:16 wrath has come upon them to the utmost.
- 4) Matthew 24:10-12 many will fall away, love of most will grow cold (apostasy); 2 Thessalonians 2:3 the apostasy.
- 5) Matthew 24:12 lawlessness will abound (*anomia*); 2 Thessalonians 2:7 spirit of lawlessness (*anomia*) is already at work.
- 6) Matthew 24:15 abomination of desolation; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 man of sin in the temple (which was a sign of the end).
- 7) Matthew 25:5 coming with a shout; 1 Thessalonians 4:16 coming with a shout.
- 8) Matthew 24:30 coming with clouds; 1 Thessalonians 4:17 coming with clouds.
- 9) Matthew 24:31, 25:31 coming with angels; 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8 coming with angels.
- 10) Matthew 24:31 trumpet; 1 Thessalonians 4:16 trumpet.
- 11) Matthew 24:42 call to watch; 1 Thessalonians 5:6 call to watch.
- 12) Matthew 24:16-18 believers escape; 1 Thessalonians 5:3 believers escape.
- 13) Matthew 24:49 warning against drunkenness; 1 Thessalonians 5:7 warning against

drunkenness.

14) Matthew 24—coming of Jesus v. 3 *parousia*, v. 27 *parousia*, v. 30 *erchomai*, v. 39 *parousia*, v. 42 *erchomai*, v. 44 *erchomai*; Thessalonians—coming of Christ 1 Thess. 3:13 *parousia*, 4:15 *parousia*, 5:2 *erchomai*, 5:23 *parousia*, 2 Thess. 1:10 *erchomai*, 2:1, 8 *parousia*. Jesus' two most frequent words in the Olivet Discourse are the words used frequently in Thessalonians.

15) Matthew 23:34 would kill Jesus' prophets; 1 Thessalonians 2:14-15 had killed Jesus' prophets.

16) Matthew 24:9 shall deliver you to be afflicted (*thlipsis*); 1 Thessalonians 1:6 received the word with much affliction (*thlipsis*, cf. 2 Thess 1:5-7).

17) Matthew 24:14 gospel mission; 1 Thessalonians 1:8 gospel mission being fulfilled.

18) Matthew 24:24-27 false prophets saying Christ had come; 2 Thessalonians 2:2 some saying the day of the Lord had come.

19) Matthew 24:32-33 when you see these things come to pass know it is near, at the door; 2 Thessalonians 2:2f. that day will not come except there come first the apostasy, and the man of sin.

20) Matthew 24:24 working of false miracles; 2 Thessalonians 2:9 working of false miracles.

21) Matthew 24:30 with power and great glory; 2 Thessalonians 1:9-10 coming to be glorified (v. 9 power and glory).

22) Matthew 24:30, 37-41; 25:31f. judgment of the wicked; 2 Thessalonians 1:7f. judgment of the wicked.

- 23) Matthew 24:31 Believers gathered (*episunagogee*); 1 Thessalonians 4:17 believers gathered, 2 Thessalonians 2:1 concerning the gathering (*episunagogee*).
- 24) Matthew 24:34 this generation will not pass away until all is fulfilled; 1 Thessalonians 4:15, 17 we who are alive and remain until his coming (cf. 5:23).
- 25) Matthew 24:32-33 Believers can know when it is near; 1 Thessalonians 5:4 “But you, brethren, are not in darkness”.
- 26) Matthew 24:36 day and hour unknown; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2 times and seasons unknown.
- 27) Matthew 24:36 “that day” (cf. Luke 21:34); 1 Thessalonians 5:4 “that day”, 2 Thessalonians 1:10, 2:2-3 “that day”.
- 28) Matthew 24:38 “they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage”; 1 Thessalonians 5:3 “Peace and Safety!”
- 29) Matthew 24:37-39 unbelievers unaware; 1 Thessalonians 5:3 unbelievers unaware.
- 30) Matthew 24:43 coming as a thief; 1 Thessalonians 5:3 coming as a thief.
- 31) Matthew 25:31-32 time of separation; (24:31 gathering of elect implies separation); 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 time of separation (also see, 1 Thess. 4:14f., 2 Thess. 2:1 - the gathering).
- 32) Matthew 25:41, 46 depart from me, everlasting punishment; 2 Thessalonians 1:9 everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord.

*Day of the Lord—Clouds, Trumpets, Angels, and Gathering*

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

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the

*archangel* and with the *trumpet* of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the *clouds* to meet the Lord in the air... (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

For after all, it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty *angels* in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power... (2 Thessalonians 1:6-9)

The Christians in Thessalonica were grieving over those who had “fallen asleep in Jesus,” i.e., believers who had died (1 Thess. 4:13-4). Paul reassures them with a simple line of reasoning: since Jesus was raised from the dead, God would also raise up those who had died “in Jesus” when the Lord descends from heaven at his *Parousia*. The *Parousia* and resurrection event was something that Paul expected to happen during the lifetime of his contemporaries—“we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them...” One may interpret the “we” in v. 15 as referring to Christians generally, whether in the present or future. But the imminence of Paul’s hope can be gleaned from his other writings, which prove the former interpretation to be more probable. For example, Paul advises the Corinthians to remain unmarried if capable because “the time has been shortened” and because “the form of this world is passing away.” The time of the *parousia* and the resurrection of 1 Thess. 4:14-17 is also described as the “day of the Lord” by Paul in the following chapter.<sup>74</sup> According to Paul, the day of the Lord is when believers receive their salvation while the wicked suffer God’s wrath. Likewise, in 2 Thessalonians, the author comforts the church suffering from persecution with the

---

<sup>74</sup> 1 Thess. 4:17 cf. 1 Thess. 5:10. Both texts state that believers, whether alive or dead, would be with the Lord as a result of the “day of the Lord” and the “coming of the Lord.” Both passages end with Paul instructing the church to comfort and encourage one another with such words.

assurance of Jesus' imminent wrath upon the persecutors. Like Paul, the author of 2 Thessalonians describes this apocalyptic end as something that comes from heaven with angels and brings both salvation and judgment.

If Matthew is following in the footsteps of Mark by looking back on Jerusalem's destruction and ascribing to it the Son of Man coming on the clouds and a gathering (cf. 1 Thess. 4:17, 2 Thess. 2:1), then I think we are on strong ground for positing an association between the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE and the *Parousia*. Paul uses much of the same language to describe the coming of the Lord in 1-2 Thessalonians, namely Jesus coming from heaven with clouds, angels, and trumpets to gather the people of God. How would a Christian reader in the first century, well acquainted with the widespread hope of Jesus' return and the language associated with it, have read Matthew 24:30-31? I am convinced they would have likely read it as referring to the highly anticipated return of Jesus, after all, we do not find multiple "comings" of Jesus in our early Christian texts that use the same language to describe the time of the end when Jesus would return. In 1 Thessalonians, the *Parousia* seems to be described as an event that would be directly experienced ("we who remain alive will be caught up together with them in the clouds...") for believers than witnessing the Roman-Jewish war. And to reiterate, Paul, writing the epistle circa 50 CE, expected this *Parousia* to happen in the lifetime of his contemporaries. It is fair to assume that the mounting pressure of passing time with no such event taking place would have compelled the gospel writers to reinterpret this widespread hope, convinced that the imminent hope for the *Parousia* has not proven false. Matthew, writing in the 80s after arguably the most devastating time in Israel's history and with no such *Parousia* yet taking place, found a way to understand the perceived failure as a fulfillment—especially of Daniel 8, 9, and 11-12, whose language both he and Mark rely on so heavily.

*Jewish Persecution, Judgment, and the Abomination of Desolation*

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs for the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, ‘If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell? “Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on, you will not see Me until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’” (Matthew 23:29-39).

For you brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the results that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost (1 Thessalonians 2:14-16).

...we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. This is a plan indications of God’s righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power... (2 Thessalonians: 4-9).

In 1-2 Thessalonians, the issue of persecution is addressed. The solution in both instances is the imminent day of the Lord which will vindicate the righteous and destroy the persecutors.

Paul calls the church at Thessalonica “imitators” of the churches in Judea because they are suffering persecution from their compatriots just as the Christians in Judea suffered from the Jews. Many assume the “countrymen” of v. 14 to be Gentiles who are persecuting a church comprised mostly or exclusively of Gentiles.<sup>75</sup> If the account in Acts 17:1-13 is to be given historical value, then the picture of the Thessalonian church changes from a Gentile church to a church associated with a synagogue-based community. It is interesting that in Acts 17 it was the Jews in Thessalonica who were preventing Paul and Silas from preaching the gospel message (not only in Thessalonica but also in Berea), which is what Paul himself alleges in 1 Thess. 2:15-16— “hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles.” It is reasonable to suggest that the “countrymen” of v. 14 is comprised not only of Greeks but also of the Jews living in Thessalonica. But in any case, Paul is adamant that the day of the Lord was about to overcome the Jews who had filled up the measure of their sins.

The same sense of immediacy is found in 2 Thessalonians. The author comforts the church not with a promise of vindication some time far off in the future, but by telling them that their afflictors would soon suffer affliction themselves at the day of the Lord. However, some in the church were troubled by a message that the day of the Lord had already happened, extinguishing their hope for relief and vindication. The false message is dispelled by the author who informs the church that first the “man of lawlessness” must be revealed, “who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the Temple of God, displaying himself as being God.” Laying underneath the idea of a sinful figure desecrating the Temple in the last days is from Daniel and his description of Antiochus

---

<sup>75</sup> 1 Thessalonians 1:9 is one of the main pieces of evidence in support of this claim. It is not unlikely however, that Paul would have made general statements that pertain only to Jews or gentiles in a mixed church comprised of both. For example, see 1 Cor. 1:22-24, 7:17-18 cf. 12:2.

Epiphanes and his desecrating acts discussed above, i.e., the abomination of desolation. Not long before the composition of 2 Thessalonians, Gaius Caligula, who saw himself as a God, attempted to have his statue erected in the Jerusalem Temple. Although unsuccessful, Caligula was probably seen as an Antiochus Epiphanes type figure, revving up the Jewish and Christian expectations that the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecies was at hand.

Daniel's prophecies are also significant to Matthew's eschatological vision. Matthew redacts Mark 13:14 to identify the abomination of desolation with the prophet Daniel and to locate the abomination inside the Temple. Considering Matthew is writing a decade or more after the Temple's destruction, it is clear he is looking back on the abomination of desolation as something that had already happened, presumably during the first Jewish Revolt. If Matthew shares the same conviction reflected in 2 Thessalonians that the abomination of desolation was a sign that marked the eschatological end and the day of the Lord, then it makes sense why he associates 70 CE with the "end of the age." In correlation to 1 Thessalonians 2:16, the Matthean Jesus tells his Jewish contemporaries that they will fill up the measure of their fathers' guilt for persecuting the people of God. He also declares that his contemporary generation will have to pay for all the bloodguilt shed on earth, from Abel all the way to Zechariah. The strong rebuke of condemnation of Jesus' Jewish contemporaries leads into his lament over Jerusalem which is going to be left "desolate."

### *End of the Age*

The most significant redaction by Matthew is found just a few verses into chapter 24, where he puts into the mouth of the disciples' questions to Jesus. In Mark 13, they only ask: "tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be

fulfilled?” Matthew changes the disciples’ questions to include the end of the age and the coming of Christ in order to connect the highly anticipated *Parousia* and the end of the eschaton with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE: “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?” (Matthew 24:3). For Matthew, the utter destruction of Jerusalem meant the apocalyptic end of the age. Judgment against the wicked was rendered and the righteous were vindicated. The end of the age also meant the ushering in of a new age when a messiah reigns and all nations come to worship the God of Israel, something Matthew could have perceived as taking place with the influx of Gentile believers.

### *Wicked Tenants*

To shed some more light on the eschatological significance of 70 CE, we must look at the parables to see how Matthew incorporates and connects eschatological and apocalyptic themes to God’s judgment on Israel executed by the Romans. In the parable of the wicked tenants, the tenants kill the landowner’s (God) servants and eventually his own son (Jesus). The result is the owner coming back to kill them and to give the vineyard, which Jesus identifies as the kingdom, to another people (Matthew 21:33-43). Matthew 21:45 clearly identifies the chief priests and Pharisees as the wicked tenants by noting that they knew the parable was about them. Thus, Jerusalem’s demise was the time when God killed the wicked tenants and handed the newly inaugurated kingdom over to another people. In the following parables, Jesus is much more explicit about the judgment he pronounces upon his Jewish contemporaries.

### *The Messianic Banquet*

Another theme found in both the prophetic and apocalyptic literature is what has come to be known as the “Messianic Banquet.” As described in Isaiah 25:6ff., at the time of Israel’s salvation, God would throw a great feast on Zion, and people of all nations would come to participate. There can be no doubt that this is a vision of the messianic kingdom, where peace reigns and all the nations flow to the Temple to worship the God of Israel (Isaiah 2:1-4). The text also implicates the feast as the time when God would “swallow up death forever,” and would “wipe away tears from all faces”—certainly a vision of new creation and the messianic kingdom. In a reference to the messianic banquet, Jesus said that many from the east and west (the “all nations” of Isaiah 25:6) would come and sit at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But when would this take place? It would occur when the sons of the kingdom are thrown into the outer darkness (Matthew 8:12).

In Matthew 23, directly before he covers the materials of Mark 13, Jesus tells a parable of a king (God) who threw a wedding feast for his son (Jesus). Those who were invited (the Jewish people) rejected the invitation and killed the servants. The angry king sent his troops to kill the murdering men and to burn their city. In the meantime, more servants are sent out to find anyone (Gentiles?) who would participate in the wedding feast. Matthew strategically places this story right before chapter 23, which functions as an interpretation of the parable. Jesus viciously attacks and indicts the scribes and Pharisees as those who kill the prophets sent to them (Matthew 23:29-34). To put it another way, they kill the servants who have invited them to the messianic banquet. Just as the men from the parable are killed and their city burnt, so the scribes and Pharisees will have to endure punishment for killing those sent to them. The Matthean Jesus assures them that all the righteous bloodguilt on earth would be required of their generation, and that their house (presumably the Temple) would be left desolate (Matthew 23:35-39). For a post

70 CE reader, the Temple's destruction and the burning of Jerusalem by the Romans serves as the interpretation of the king burning the city of those who refused his invitation and killed his servants. This was the fulfillment of Jesus' declaration that all the bloodguilt shed on earth would fall upon his contemporary generation and that their house would be left desolate. Therefore, the messianic banquet was perceived to be an event fulfilled in the past. Notice the language of the king sending "his troops." In the past, Assyria and Babylon were the instruments for God's wrath upon Israel, now it was Rome's turn.

## CONCLUSION

As already noted above, the hope for Jesus' return permeates most of the early Christian texts, indicating how central it was in the expectations of Jesus' first followers. Paul thought it was so near that he advised those in the Corinthian church not to get married (1 Corinthians 7:25-31). He also expected the *Parousia* to be an event that would be directly experienced by all believers. For example, he taught that those who remained alive until Jesus' return would receive an immortal spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:51-54). But the *Parousia*, as it was expected by Paul, never happened. This led Mark and Matthew to reinterpret the *Parousia* and the end of the age and present them as having been fulfilled in the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem. The controversies and hardships that were weighing on the minds of many Christians can illuminate why Jesus' return was so important a hope to cling to, and why it would have been paramount to understand and interpret that hope in a way preserved the integrity of the new faith—and particularly the fulfillment of Daniel's visions about the "appointed time of the end."

Even if the accounts in Acts are largely unhistorical, it can be assumed that there was at least some friction between unbelieving and believing Jews. This friction shows up in Paul's

epistles to the Romans where Paul argues that a true Jew is one who is a Jew “inwardly” and has received the “circumcision of the heart” (Romans 2:28-29). Similarly, Revelation 3:9 states that those who are of “the synagogue of Satan” and claim to be Jews “but are liars,” will be forced to fall down at the feet of the church in Philadelphia. According to Paul, the entire creation was awaiting the revelation of the glorified “sons of God,” who made up a new commonwealth of spiritual Israel, that would look to Jerusalem “above” rather than below, as the spiritual seed of Abraham by faith in Christ.<sup>76</sup> In contrast, the Jewish people, who had largely rejected the idea that Jesus was the Messiah, would suffer chastising punishment as a result (Matthew 21:43).

The vindication of the Christian believers from all the controversy and persecution was reliant upon Jesus’ return from heaven. Not only would it bring vindication and alleviation, but it would confirm the religious and theological convictions that Christians held to firmly, i.e., that they were the true children of God. At the time of the writing of 2 Peter, scoffers were taunting Christians about the failure of the *Parousia*: “Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue just as they were from the beginning of creation” (2 Peter 3:4). The very identity of these Christians was at stake. At the time of Mark and Matthew writing their gospels, over forty years had passed from the time of Jesus’ alleged resurrection, and the *Parousia* as a literal and universally experienced event never happened.<sup>77</sup>

This thesis focused mostly on the Synoptic Apocalypse passage in Mark 13, its expanded version in Matthew 24, and related materials in chapters 23-25. By comparing the close thematic language parallels to earlier apocalyptic materials in Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians and in the Deutero-Pauline letter of 2 Thessalonians, I argued that Mark and Matthew explicitly tie the

---

<sup>76</sup> Romans 8:19; Philippians 3:20-21; Galatians 3:29; 4:26.

<sup>77</sup> See note 27 above.

“*Parousia* and the end of the age” to the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem. In doing so they recast these earlier apocalyptic materials as events in the past, looking back on them after the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple as fulfilled—thus vindicating Jesus’ declarative statement, “This generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.” To reiterate, my position is that the apocalyptic discourse in Mark 13 and Matthew 24 is unified and at the same time it views the *Parousia* and the end of the age as connected to the subject at hand—the destruction of Herod’s Temple and the city of Jerusalem itself in the first century. I also looked at the way in which Matthew edits the disciples’ questions in Mark 13:4 so that they are also asking about the “*Parousia* and the end of the age,” and two eschatological parables in Matthew, which strengthen this interpretative connection between the destruction of Jerusalem and the *Parousia*.

Mark and Matthew both present an interpretation of the images and language used to describe the *Parousia* that allowed them to apply Jesus’ *Parousia* to the events surrounding Jerusalem’s destruction. They both use the cosmic and heavenly language in the Synoptic Apocalypse metaphorically to describe the Roman destruction of Jerusalem. In doing so, they spiritualize Jesus’ return, which expected earlier by Paul to be something more literal. With the growing pressure upon the Christian community to deal with dilemma of the failed *Parousia*, Mark and Matthew effectively turned what could have been viewed as a failure into a fulfillment—largely fueled by their understanding that the prophecies of Daniel could not be delayed any further—allowing the movement to survive by looking back on a destroyed Jerusalem as ample evidence of God’s vindication of a reconstituted Israel with Jesus as Messiah, ruling at the right hand of God in his heavenly kingdom.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Quotations from the Bible are taken from *Holy Bible: New American Standard Bible*. LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995.
- Quotations from Josephus are from *Josephus*. The Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927-1965.
- Allison, Dale C. *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998.
- Bacon, Benj. W. "The Apocalyptic Chapter of the Synoptic Gospels," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 28, no. 1 (1909): 1-25, [https://www.jstor.org/stable/4617101?seq=2#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/4617101?seq=2#metadata_info_tab_contents) (accessed February 10, 2021).
- Beasley-Murray, George R. *Jesus and the Last Days: The Interpretation of the Olivet Discourse*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993.
- Bellinzoni, Arthur J. Jr., ed., *The Two-Source Hypothesis: A Critical Appraisal*. Macon, GA.: Mercer University Press, 1985.
- Brandon, S. G. F. *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church*. Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010.
- Caird, George. *Jesus and the Jewish Nation*. London: Athlone Press, 1965.
- Cohen, Shaye J.D. *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014.
- Collins, Adela Y. *Mark: A Commentary*. Edited by Harold W. Attridge. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007.
- Collins, John. *The Apocalyptic Imagination*. Michigan: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998.
- Conzelmann, Hans. *The Theology of Saint Luke*. Translated by Jeffrey Buswell. London: Faber and Faber, 1960.
- Dodd, C. H. *According to the Scriptures*. London: Nisbet, 1952.
- Ehrman, Bart D. *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Finegan, Jack. *The Archaeology of the New Testament: The Life of Jesus and the Beginning of*

- the Early Church Revised Edition*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992.
- Ford, Desmond. *The Abomination of Desolation in Biblical Eschatology*. Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1979.
- France, R.T. *Jesus and the Old Testament: His Application of Old Testament Passages to Himself and his Mission*. Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1971.
- Fredriksen, Paula. *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews: A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity*. New York: Vintage Books, 2000.
- García Martínez, Florentino, trans. *The Dead Sea scrolls: study edition. Vol. 1* Leiden: Brill, 2005.
- Gaston, Lloyd. *No Stone on Another*. Netherlands: E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1970.
- Hatina, Thomas R. "The Focus of Mark 13:24-27: The Parousia, or the Destruction of the Temple?" *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 6 (1996): 43-66.
- Hayes, Richard B. *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016.
- Knibb, Michael A. "The Exile in the Literature of the Intertestamental Period." *The Heythrop Journal*, 17, (April 2007): 253-272, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2265.1976.tb00590.x>.
- Magness, Jodi. *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002.
- Pitre, Brant. *Jesus, the Tribulation, and the End of the Exile*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 2006.
- Russell, D.S. *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*. Michigan: Westminster Press, 1964.
- Sanders, E.P. *Judaism Practice and Belief 63 BCE – 66 CE*. Philadelphia, PA: Trinity Press International, 1992.
- Schnelle, Udo. *Theology of the New Testament*. Translated by M. Eugene Boring. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2009.
- Schweitzer, Albert. *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. London: A. and C. Black, 1911.
- Staples, Jason *Reconstructing Israel: Restoration Eschatology in Early Judaism and Paul's Gentile Mission* 2016, unpublished dissertation directed by Bart Ehrman, forthcoming with Cambridge University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Idea of Israel in Second Temple Judaism: A New Theory of People, Exile, and Israelite Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

Tabor, James D. "New Testament Texts on the Imminence of the End," *The Jewish Roman World of Jesus*, <https://pages.uncc.edu/james-tabor/christian-origins-and-the-new-testament/imminence-of-the-end/>

\_\_\_\_\_. "Standing in the Shadow of Schweitzer: What Can We Say About an Apocalyptic Jesus?" *CSER Review* (2009): 8-10

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Jesus Dynasty: The Hidden History of Jesus, His Royal Family, and the Birth of Christianity*. New York: Simon & Shuster Paperbacks, 2007.

Tacitus, Cornelius. *Annals of Imperial Rome*. Translated by Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodbibb. Colombia, SC: Pantianos Classics, 2017.

Taylor, Joan E. *The Essenes, the Scrolls, and the Dead Sea*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Tolbert, Mary A. *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary-Historical Perspective*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989.

Wenham, David. *Gospel Perspectives: The Rediscovery of Jesus' Eschatological Discourse*. Vol. 4. Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003.

Werman, Cana. "Epochs and End-time: The 490-Year Scheme in Second Temple Literature," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 13, 2 (2006): 229-255.

Wright, N.T. *History and Eschatology*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Jesus and the Victory of God*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The New Testament and the People of God*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.