

Catching the Wave, or Facing the Tsunami?

by Dr. Scot McKnight, Feb 15, 2002

Because my life's story finds itself wrapped around the various poles of Christian thinking about eschatology, I have in the following allowed my own story to govern the shape of my thinking about eschatology. In short, along with many other theologians, my thinking has moved through several "either/ors": either pre-tribulation or post-tribulation rapture and either literal or metaphorical interpretation of eschatological language. By a strange twist of fate, my own thinking moved to the metaphorical hermeneutic while many popular evangelical preachers were packaging once again the older notion of the pre-tribulation rapture. To adjudicate between the literal and the metaphorical, one needs to examine prophetic language honestly and fairly; furthermore, as will be shown below, one needs a firm grasp of what Jesus was speaking of when he gave the address now recorded in Mark 13 (and Matthew 24 and Luke 21). I have not footnoted the paper but have left it in its original public lecture format.

Kris, my wife, is a psychologist and her research for her dissertation was on the process of individuation, or growing into adulthood, for kids who were raised in Fundamentalism. It gave her a solid foundation for understanding, among many other things, me – for I was reared among the Fundamentalists. But I was raised at a time that had lots in its favor, like the Beatles and the Beach Boys, and Grease – when it wasn't Olivia Newton-John and John Travolta but real kids with tattoos and cigarettes rolled up in their T-shirt sleeve and sporting a pompadour. That environment also gave me a vision of the world to understand disasters like rock music with a theory that the world was going to pot – in two ways, one not metaphorical. I was a bit of a Tom Sawyer so school was a bore; the only that interested me was competition and that occurred at recess. Teachers made us memorize, they weren't interested in self-esteem, and the politically correct group was still in kindergarten – whining already. My teachers thought I was a rough without the diamond.

But the best thing we Fundamentalists had going for us was the Rapture, and it was coming before the Great Tribulation and it might occur at any minute, and I was ready but most other people weren't, especially those who attended rock music dances on Friday nights and learned to dance without moving their feet. They were going to Hell, we were taught, and a Fundamentalist's Hell is all-bad; Heaven is all happiness without fun or pleasure and with lots of prayer meetings and rules that were obeyed without questions being asked. To be ready you had to be one of us, a Fundamentalist, and not one of them, Liberals and Modernists. Back then, the world was a very simple place, filled with people like Donna Reed and Beaver Cleaver and Andy of Mayberry. We had the Bible and we had, right next to it on our bedstands Salem Kirban's *Guide to Survival* and Hal Lindsay's *The Late Great Planet Earth*. A veritable literary holy trinity. These people taught us a belief that all things prophetic were literal and they did so, to use John Updike's language, with 'a spinsterish consistency.' And they knew the future with rococo detail.

Then I went off to college and read George Ladd's *The Blessed Hope* and Bob Gundry's *The Church and the Tribulation*, and my heart leapt the gap and landed in their pockets. This meant my teachers were wrong, and that meant also my pastor and my parents. The world was not quite as simple anymore: boys were lengthening their hair and girls were wearing slacks to church and young kids wanted to bring their guitars to church and pastors weren't sure how to deal with these changes. But, things in the world were still getting worse and it wouldn't be too long before the Anti-Christ, someone like Gorbachev or Kissinger or the Pope (we were very anti-Catholic), would take over and we'd be raptured – but it would be more challenging this time, because the rapture wouldn't be until the end of the tribulation. The tribulation didn't come and neither did the rapture – the verdict on who was right still wasn't in – so I went to Seminary just

in case more history would occur.

When I was in Seminary I saw a trend that only now is bringing forth what I never suspected then: nearly all my Seminary teachers were post-tribbers and most of my student peers were as well, but people in the churches were not catching our wave. I knew that my peers would soon populate pulpits and over the next twenty years the whole situation would change. Seminary is, to paraphrase C.S. Lewis, “a lot of young men shut up together, all thinking about their souls [and eschatology].” He then asks, “Isn’t it awful?” (*Letters*, 132). We shut-up eschatology-thinking seminarians thought pre-tribbers would disappear like the American Condor – but alas they (both the pre-tribbers and the birds) are making a comeback. I should say something about Michael Jordan or George Foreman but won’t.

Let me explain what I am saying: at the fundamental level, the entire world of academic Evangelicalism shifted in the late ‘60s and ‘70s from pre-tribbing to post-tribbing. Some, like the Amillennialists weren’t tribbing much at all, but most of us were post-tribbing. But this change was in the Academy, not in the scores who attended evangelical and Fundamentalist churches. Seminaries and those educated there are called to lead the Church and so I knew that time would eventually calm down the fears of the churches and lead them to see the light on this issue. What happened, however, continues to boggle: when my peers got into pulpits, they lacked nerve and courage, and fell prey to preaching and teaching what the parishioner wanted rather than what they knew to be the truth. Instead of sticking up for their beliefs, they decided to teach general things (Jesus is coming again, the resurrection, the millennium) and avoid controversy (and the rapture was for many of them controversial), or they simply switched their minds to appease their congregations or keep their jobs. I know peers who have told me these very things; I shall not give you their names, though I’d like to.

It is this failure of nerve, I am suggesting, that leads to the modern-day craze of reading and believing the pre-trib views and fictional scenarios of Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. Some 40 million copies of these books have sold, showing us that America is a hot-house for eschatological speculations. These two authors must soon receive the Nobel Prize for Winning Literature. Each of the 40 million copies, descending like locusts on our airports (that’s an apocalyptic metaphor!), has the same theology and it is a theology rendered impotent, so I thought, by George Ladd and Bob Gundry. Alas, this is not the case. Their books didn’t brush a molecule off Hal Lindsay’s sleeve and they are riding the wave to popular beaches. Our moment of glory was as ephemeral as our suntans gained on their beaches. They put us (post-tribbers) to bed just when the party was about to begin.

George Bernard Shaw once sent Churchill two tickets for the opening night of his new play, noting in the invitation: “Bring a friend – if you have one”; to which Churchill wrote back to say he was busy but would appreciate tickets for the second performance – “if there is one.” Well, I must confess we thought there would be no second performance for the pre-tribbers. Alas, guess who plays the part of the fool? This play has more performances than *Blue Man Group*. Now to quote Samuel Johnson: “I wish there were some cure, like the lover’s leap, for all heads of which some single idea has obtained an unreasonable and irregular possession” (*Life*, 328).

What was the case, however, was that the academics of Evangelicalism became increasingly distanced from the lay people of that movement, and this in part because of several factors: first, the “hush-hush” attitude academics had to utilize when in churches because the churches had not changed on eschatology; second, the growing awareness not only of the reasonability of the post-trib viewpoint, but the increasing awareness of Jewish apocalyptic literature which supported new approaches to the eschatological material in the entire Bible as well as the post-trib viewpoint; and third, the development of a flood of literature and scholarship on the historical Jesus that has led to a growing consensus (a slippery and advantageous term if ever there was one!) that the language of Jesus about the future, most especially that found in Mark 13/Matt 24/Luke 21, was to be understood in its Jewish context and not in light of how church people had been interpreting it for nearly a century. (a footnote: the dispensational mode of reading the Bible, its hermeneutic, is a trend that began at the end of the previous century and which took hold through Moody Bible Institute, the Scofield Bible, Dallas Theological Seminary, and famous evangelists and preachers, like Harry Ironside and Billy Graham. End of footnote.)



A word about this so-called “third” quest for the historical Jesus. In the wake of WWII Christian scholars awoke to the view that their understandings of Judaism were skewed and those understandings distorted our understandings of ancient Judaism and both Jesus and Paul. So, scholars began to quarry the mines of ancient Jewish evidence – apocrypha, pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, targums (Aramaic paraphrases of the Old Testament), and the rabbinic documents – and in so doing the minds of ancient Jews suddenly were once again alive and well. Into this newly-found knowledge about Judaism, scholars had to fit both Jesus and Paul. The fitting of Jesus into Judaism is called the “third” quest – the first two quests were dominated by European Protestant Liberalism and Ernst Kasemann. This third quest has three major scholars: Marcus Borg, whose Jesus is a religious genius and a channel of the divine; Dominic Crossan, whose Jesus is a Jewish peasant Cynic, with very little emphasis on the “Jewish” part; and N.T. Wright, whose Jesus is a prophet who calls the nation to repentance before the destruction of Jerusalem and who also fulfills massive roles of redemption from the Old Testament. My own study of Jesus, called *A New Vision for Israel*, builds on this scholarship and I hope you buy it whether you read it or not!

There are two major camps of scholars in the ‘third quest’: those who see Jesus in eschatological/apocalyptic terms and those who see Jesus in religious, non-apocalyptic terms. Borg and Crossan fit into this latter camp; Wright and McKnight fit into the former. The Jesus Seminar, directed as it is by Robert W. Funk, fits into the non-apocalyptic set of categories for understanding Jesus and is quite well-known for its skeptical conclusions regarding the reliability of the (especially) canonical Gospels. Funk himself has many good things to say, but frankly, his book has too much anger in it and I think it shapes his methods and conclusions too much.

I should like to talk about him but I’ll ... continue with my biography: if I began my life catching the dispensational wave and riding it in with my peers, I soon found myself treading water with the post-tribbers. We were a confident bunch, but we were muted. Then I received a post at Trinity and began to teach seminary students post-trib views (when the subject arose – we post tribbers have learned to guard ourselves and not talk about it much!), until I encountered two pieces of literature that shook my beliefs to the core and, once I had sorted out the biblical evidence for a third time, I knew I was no longer treading water but was in fact swimming into a Tsunami! Those two pieces of literature are G.B. Caird’s *Jesus and the Jewish Age* and R.T. France’s *Matthew* commentary (on Matt. 24:29-31). I had read Caird’s little book, a published lecture in fact, while a doctoral student but had mentally shelved it until a later date. That date arrived when I had to get my lectures on Matthew 24 up to snuff, gathered up all my *sang froid* for class where my conclusions gave my students something to think about – McKnight, they said, teaches us that A.D. 70 was the focal point of Jesus’ predictions. The question they wanted me to answer, which I could not at that time answer, was did Jesus think his predictions *also* applied to the Great Tribulation? I thought “no,” but it took me awhile to work through this to come to what I thought were reasonable and compelling conclusions. It is this that I want to share with you now. How I came to a position of facing the Tsunami – and by “Tsunami” I mean the bulk of Christians, including Evangelical academics. I know my view is not typical; I also know it is a view that has been held in the Church (J.S. Russell in some ways); and I also know that it is consistent with the central tenets of Evangelicalism, and that matters to me (but even more to some of my critics, who think my view doesn’t fit). If it is nice to be known, it is even nicer to be talked about – especially if you have a little vanity as I do. To quote G.K. Chesterton, “the object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid” (*Autobiography*, 212). Here, at last, I thought I had clamped down on something solid enough to satisfy the Gospel evidence. I wish now to speak to this.

What I offer to you for consideration is a *way of entering the Jesus puzzle discussion* and the way we shall walk tonight is by examining what Jesus thought of the future. In this way we can get at several destinies: what Jesus thought of the future and who Jesus was.

The Basic View

Let me summarize my view briefly, a view that has recently been called by R.C. Sproul “partial preterism,” but which we will see is closely allied with Transmillennialism™. Sometimes scholars call this view “realized eschatology,” because the view articulates Jesus’ view of the Kingdom as totally wrapped up in his life and in the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem, in 67-73 CE (=A.D. 70). Others, however, might see my view as “consistent eschatology” because it sees Jesus’ teachings about the Kingdom as driven by his eschatology.

[a footnote: Consistent eschatology is actually best used for that view that sees Jesus’ entire mission and message driven by eschatology and not that view that focuses on imminency. Realized eschatology, however, focuses its energy on the time part: that it has all been fulfilled in Jesus. End of note.]

Where I part from many Evangelicals is in my view that Jesus’ language is prophetic and apocalyptic, and therefore *ambiguous*, and his knowledge is also prophetic, and therefore *limited*. When I say “ambiguous” it is in the sense of “the philosophically indeterminate”, rather than determinate and his knowledge of the future is not a “snapshot of God’s future”. Instead, Jesus’ vision of the future is impressionistic and metaphorical, conveyed as it is in the language of apocalyptic. Further, I think Jesus’ vision of the future did not extend beyond A.D. 70 and that, in predicting the “end” of the Jewish nation’s privileges in its destruction, Jesus attached teachings about the general resurrection, the final banquet, and the great judgment. In other words, he saw everything taking place, in an indeterminate sense, at A.D. 70. I said that my world is not simple any more: let me add a permutation – when Jesus talks about his “coming” in Mark 13:24-27, he is not talking about skiing down the celestial slopes on clouds from heaven to earth, riding them down – to change metaphors – like a supernatural parachutist, but he is speaking *figuratively* about his vindication before God *through the destruction of Jerusalem*. Let me proceed now to back up these conclusions, and others if I need to, by examining the so-called Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24/Mark 13. One more conclusion before I go on: I think some of the writers of the NT, like Paul and the Seer of Revelation, knew what Jesus had said and *used and reworked* the language of Jesus to refer to still distant events – and this, too, is quite like OT prophets and their successors.

The Eschatological Discourse on Mt. Olivet (Mark 13; Matt 24; Luke 21)

In general, Jesus’ last discourse is concerned with the questions the disciples ask about what Jesus means by saying “this here Temple will be destroyed” and they ask two pointed questions: *when* will this occur and what will be the *sign*? Scholars have argued over whether this is one question in two forms, or two different questions. Furthermore, the language of the Gospels on these questions differs: Mark, the earliest account, says: “When will these things be? and, what will be the sign when all these things are about to be fulfilled?” (Mark 13:4). Matthew clarifies Mark’s second question with: “What will be the sign of *your coming and the consummation of the age*?” (Matt. 24:3) Luke, like an English teacher correcting language to its simplest form, says, “What will be the sign when these things happen?” (Luke 21:7) E.B. White would be proud of Luke. We can’t sort through all this but two conclusions, so important for understanding this last discourse, need to be stated: first, *the subject matter of this discourse is about the destruction of Jerusalem* – not the end of the world some 2000+ years down the road; and second, *the disciples, at least, think the destruction will lead somehow into the consummation*.

Let me criticize the conservative Evangelical view that sees in this discourse, not a prediction of A.D. 70 but of the end of the Great Tribulation, and what needs to be criticized is that, *if* this is what Jesus proceeds to discuss, then he has done a number on his disciples. They wanted information about the destruction of Jerusalem and he tells them in language that sounds like an imminent event but he is actually using language about the year 2004, just to take a date from the air to give it reality. This is not how prophetic language works. It works only if the prophet is speaking to contemporaries about things they will experience. It does no good to talk to Jesus’ disciples about the United Nations or Russia or the Palestinian-Israeli conflict or even Usama bin Laden. Now back to the text.

The first thing we need to do now is find where Jesus talks about the destruction of Jerusalem. I shall follow the Markan text, observing here that the differences with the other Evangelists are minimal and unimportant for what I am arguing. (If there were a difference that ran contrary to my theory, I’d ignore it

anyway! That's supposed to be funny because it is not true.) We run our fingers along the text and we find the following: false claims of messianic status, wars, earthquakes, and famines – things called “the birth pains” (Mk 13:8), a term used in apocalyptic and prophetic literature for sufferings that give new birth to the nation. As Casey Stengel used to say, “you can look it up.” Then Jesus predicts persecution for his followers, a persecution that leads fortuitously to evangelistic opportunities (13:9-11) – which sounds a little like parental advice to children when going through something bad – “you'll grow from this.” “Yah, right!” they add. Then Jesus speaks of betrayals and the need to persevere (13:12-13). Next, Jesus speaks of the abomination of desolation, another apocalyptic and prophetic expression, deriving from Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11, for an end-time sacrilegious act in the Temple's most holy place. Again, you can look it up. When this occurs, so predicts Jesus, the tide will turn and really bad things will occur: “unequaled distress” (Mk 13:14-23). His disciples need again to be alert because deception will be the rule.

Now if we are looking for a statement of destruction, we have not yet seen it – unless it is symbolically expressed in the abomination of desolation. So, we go on in the text. Jesus next speaks the words that have so dazzled those who are taken by apocalyptic imagery as literal and physical descriptions. Let me translate, but here from Matthew 24:29-31 because it is more complete: “*Immediately after the tribulation of those days* – notice here the word “immediately”, Jesus mixes Isa. 13:10 and 34:4, “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the skies will be shaken. And *then* the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky/heaven, and *then* (now quoting Dan. 7:13f) the tribes of the land (not ‘earth’) will beat their breasts in mourning, and they will see the Son of Man ‘coming’ on the clouds of the sky with much power and glory. And the Son of Man will send his angels/messengers with a great trumpet blast, and the Son of Man will gather his elect ones from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other” (Matt. 24:29-31). The End. At this point Jesus gives a concluding illustration, from the fig tree – about reading signs, and tells them that this description is about the end. More importantly, Jesus says words that most have ignored: (I return to Mark 13:30) “Amen, I say to you that this generation will not pass away until/before *all these things come to pass.*”

We set out to find where Jesus spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem and *it may appear he doesn't*. We must assume he did and we missed it. But before I discuss where that might have been described, let me speak to the implications of this last sentence of Jesus: “*all these things will occur before this generation dies away.*” First, *generation* means just that – contemporaries of Jesus who are standing there and who are not standing there, those who were alive as he was speaking. This term does not and cannot mean “race”, as if Jesus meant “this Jewish nation” will not pass away before the “coming” of the Son of Man. Instead, Jesus evidently thinks *everything* he has described must occur before the present generation dies away. The plain meaning of this statement by Jesus is stubborn. To quote C.S. Lewis, “That's the worst [part about] facts – they do cramp a fellow's style” (*Letters*, 256).

Now let us say that most lived to 65 and let us also say that Jesus said this in either 30 or 33 AD. This would mean Jesus is setting a terminal limit to about 30-40 years (assuming he is speaking to adults and is speaking roughly of one generation). That would mean Jesus is saying that all these things will take place before or about 30-40 years, which is about A.D. 70. (If you are still awake, you know where I'm headed.) These facts cramp many styles, especially those who think these words support either the pre-trib or post-trib viewpoint. Such a temporal limit was expressed two other times by Jesus: in Matt. 10:23 Jesus told his disciples they would not finish fleeing from or evangelizing the cities of Israel before the Son of Man came, and in Mark 9:1 Jesus said that some of those who were standing with Jesus would not die before they saw the Son of Man coming with power. So, we can conclude that at least three times Jesus had a temporal limit to the plan of God that can be reasonably established to be something like A.D. 70.

Second, Jesus said that *all these things* would occur before that time. Let me set this comment in context. In Matt 23:36 Jesus said to his followers this: “Amen, I say to you, *all these things will come about upon this generation*” – and he is speaking of the avenging of righteous blood. Then in 24:2 Jesus asks if his disciples see “these things” – and he is speaking of the Temple and its stones that are about to crumble into a heap. And then the disciples ask him when will *these things* come about (24:3). We have here the evidence: “these things” must refer in these texts to the *destruction of Jerusalem*.

Third, we can put this together as this: *Jesus predicts that all these things will occur within a generation.* Not “some,” but “all.” This ties in very well with the term “immediately” in Matt 24:29 – immediately after those things (the birth pangs, etc.) then the Son of Man will “come” – whatever that means. This means that Jesus thinks the destruction of Jerusalem will occur before or around A.D. 70.

Fourth, this leads to what was for me the most startling revelation of honest reading of Matthew 24. *When Jesus says “all these things” he includes the astral, heavenly wonders and the Son of Man’s so-called coming in Matthew 24:29-31.* We could stop right here and the case would be made, but we need to go back now to the original quest we had – where does Jesus speak of the destruction of Jerusalem?

The answer to that question, simply put, is this: Matt 24:29-31/Mark 13:24-27/Luke 21:25-28 describe *in apocalyptic and prophetic* imagery the destruction of Jerusalem as the vindication of the Son of Man, that is, *the vindication of Jesus as Israel’s Messiah who has been rejected.* In this language, then, we see that *the nation has been judged as was Israel at the hand of Assyria and Babylon and now Rome.*

Let me begin with the obvious: the word “coming” in Matt. 24:30 translates the Greek word *erchomai*, a term that means “coming” but not specific with respect to “descending” or “ascending.” To answer the *direction* of that “coming,” we need to look at the source for Jesus’ comments, and that source is Daniel 7:13 and there was described *the ascent of the Son of Man before the Ancient of Days* to receive political dominion. I can’t tell you how significant this conclusion is for understanding the prediction of Jesus. The plain sense of these words, because Jesus is so clearly appealing to the Daniel text as somehow fulfilled in the future, is that Jesus sees the words of Matt 24:29-31 as *his victorious reception of power as King and ruler over a body of people.* Jesus is announcing the fulfillment of Daniel 7, that is his *exaltation and authorization with power before God*, and not his ‘return’ to earth. That event is in some sense his ‘appearing’ (*parousia*; 24:3, 27, 37, 39).

With the term *coming* settled, we can ask about the *astral phenomena, the mourning, and the gathering of the elect.* Our time is running down and so I must be brief. Very briefly, they are also about the same destruction of Jerusalem and the vindication of the Son of Man. When we read of the sun being blotted out, and the moon’s light being quenched, and stars falling out of the heavens those who read their Old Testaments will immediately think of passages such as the following: Isa. 13:9-10; 34:4; Ezek. 32:7; Amos 8:9; Joel 2:10 and 3:15. Perhaps one example will suffice: Ezek. 32:7 reads, of Pharaoh: “When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens, and make their stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give its light.” That happened already. In other words, *astral disasters are celestial metaphors for earthly political disasters* – when Israel, when Judah, or when Egypt falls, when a political kingdom collapses, the ancients resort to heavenly phenomena falling, to the sun and moon failing to give their light, that is to *cosmic sympathy and correlation.* Incidentally, when Pentecost occurred Peter saw what happened as a fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32, and there is absolutely no idea that the sons and daughters speaking was the fulfillment but the astral phenomena yet to come – in fact, the speaking in tongues was simultaneously *political disaster for Israel.* It began the ending of her national privilege.

As for the *mourning* ... this much can be said. What Jesus predicts here about mourning sounds very much like Zech. 12:9-10 wherein we read that Israel will wail tribe by tribe over the political disasters occurring around her. But, in fact, that wailing is one of *sympathy for the nations being vanquished by God in his battle against those who oppress his people.* As the stars, sun and moon correlate with God’s acts, so also will Israel wail over punishment – but this time, so suggests Jesus, the wailing will be by those Israelites who follow Jesus and they shall bemoan those Israelites who experience God’s just judgment on Jerusalem. That Israel is in view here, and not the world, is virtually proven by the fact that the term “tribe” refers to Israel.

The *gathering of the elect* has drawn the most fire for this interpretation but I would preface my interpretation with this observation: whatever we make of the gathering of the elect, it occurs *within one generation of Jesus* and in conjunction with the astral phenomena, the mourning, and the vindication of the Son of Man. I think it most likely that the regathering is a metaphorical description of the re-constitution of Israel as twelve-tribe people – a significant theme among the prophets of Israel and Judah, but now in terms

of followers of Jesus and the Twelve apostles he appointed. That is, the destruction of Jerusalem will result in the reconstitution of Israel under the Twelve apostles. A variant interpretation, under the influence of Matt. 13:41, is that this refers to an angelic gathering of non-believing Israelites to Jerusalem for judgment. And yet another view would see this as a metaphor for evangelism of the Roman empire.

Conclusions

Let me now try to draw together some threads. The temporal indicators of Mark 13 and parallels suggest that Jesus envisioned everything therein described as occurring within one generation. Roughly speaking, he sees things occurring in about 40 years. History shows that the Romans sacked Jerusalem brutally and banished them from the City, and this event *largely confirms what Jesus predicted*. Josephus tells the story in his *Jewish War*, and Christians read Josephus until this century, when dispensationalism took over and discouraged the use of Josephus. You can look this up, too. Furthermore, we have seen plausible reasons, some more compelling than others, for seeing the language of Mark 13:24-27/Matt 24:29-31 as metaphorical descriptions of Jesus' vindication and reception of power *in the event of Jerusalem's destruction*. When Jerusalem went down, Jesus went up – down in ignominy and up in vindication.

Jerusalem's destruction was proof that Jesus was right. In addition, this event marks and shapes the focus of Jesus' ministry and message: his mission was to call Israel to repentance (and that meant to live a life of love and justice and peace) before the final bell rang. If Israel responds, the destruction can be averted; if it does not, the destruction will establish him as Messiah. What Jesus saw beyond this is, in my mind, a mystery. I think he saw connected to this event the resurrection, the final judgment, and the establishment of the Age to Come. He tied them together, the destruction and these "eternal things" because, as a prophet who relied upon God's revelation for knowledge of the future, this is how prophets worked all along. The next event on God's calendar was the End Event – and when it did not occur literally on earth, no one was bothered because prophetic knowledge about the future is like that. It trades in metaphor and metaphor is capable of various interpretations. What Jesus was referring to was Israel's destruction; it had ultimate significance to him. And he got it right.

Some scholars, most notably R.C. Sproul, think that we must make a distinction between Jesus' prediction of Jerusalem's destruction and the "eternal things", such as the resurrection, the rapture, and the final judgment. Thus, what happened for Jesus was that we see "a" coming, a day of the Lord, a judgment, and an end of the Jewish age. Sproul, however, cannot anchor such distinctions – between Jesus' predictions of A.D. 70 and his prediction of "end-time" events – in the texts of Jesus. He posits such a distinction. I am less convinced that this distinction can be drawn in Jesus' words, though I would be happy to be proven wrong. An examination of the lines that follow the texts we examined tonight in Matthew 24-25 will show that there are no temporal disconnections between Jerusalem's disaster and the so-called "eternal things." If we distinguish them, we do so with good warrant: ancient Jews did the same thing with their prophets. But they did not do so because they thought in terms of "partial" fulfillment. They did so because the images used by the prophets were alive and could evoke the hope that God had given to Israel. The same applies, I think, to the early Christian use of Jesus' language.

I can no longer embrace the dispensational program for I think that train hopped its rails and I think even the post-tribulation theory needs to use the skin of the fox. What I am convinced of is this: Jesus sees a future during which time God will be exalted, he will be enthroned as Son of Man, and justice will be established according to God's will. Frankly, I am not sure Jesus will return to earth; I'd like him to, and I'd stand in line for hours to meet him and see it all take place. I don't want to sound either irreverent or even disrespectful here, but I think a 'physical return' to earth would create chaos – every Christian alive would want meet Jesus and, if the millennium is to last 1000 years, then Jesus would be little more than a hand-shaker for the entire time. I don't want to say much more of a cynical nature, not because it scares me, but because it behooves us to think more realistically about God's future. *I believe in his 'return'* but I think it will be much better than we can imagine. In other words, I believe in the "Second Coming" but I think it is a metaphor for the establishment of Christ's reign (whether on earth or not is not that important). And now I feel like a lion in a den of Daniels.



The implication of what I have said tonight about Jesus' eschatology is this: before Jesus' message is brought into our world, and he needs to be, Jesus has to be understood in his world. And that means *as a Jew*, as a Jewish *prophet*, a prophet *who spoke to his people, Israel*, who spoke to his people about Israel *about the need to repent and live in light of the Kingdom before it is too late*, and that 'too late' is to be understood temporally for Jesus as *before A.D. 70* when God would wreak vengeance on the nation for its waywardness. This Jewish prophet Jesus, however, is also *the Messiah of the Endtime* who was destined to come to lead Israel into the 'fortunes of Israel'. And Messiah is but one term used to sum up Jesus; other ones include Son of Man, Son of God, and Lord.

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