

Holy Monday Bridegroom Matins

Parables about the Rejection of the Son of God

March 29, 2010
Revision A

Gospel: Matthew 21:18-43

The Study for Holy Week picks up right after the Lord's entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. At this point, the Jewish leaders had rejected Jesus, and they were plotting His death. During Holy Week, the Lord puts the Jewish leaders on notice that He is going to reject them in a most dramatic way. Their attitude is one of indifference; what can this one man do to them? They just have no clue regarding Who it is that they're dealing with.

Most of the Twelve aren't all that much better off. They understood Jesus as the Messiah and as a prophet. Even after the Resurrection, they asked Him if He would restore the Kingdom to Israel at this time (Acts 1:6). In fact, He was about to do the opposite; take the Kingdom away from Israel and give it to the Gentiles, where the Twelve would be the new government of this Kingdom.

The Readings for Holy Week switch back and forth between glimpses of Jesus' humility in His humanity, and His exalted Majesty in His Deity. This is intentional in that it is the same person of the Son of God that is the focus of the Readings. As we work our way through these Readings, we come away with a much deeper appreciation of what the Lord did at His passion.

The Cleansing of the Temple

As Jesus drew near to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, He began to weep over the city, saying, "If only you had known the things that make for your peace!" He continued to say that, "because you did not know the time of your visitation", that the days will come when your enemies will level you to the ground (Luke 19:41-44).

Arriving in Jerusalem, Jesus went straight to the Temple and drove out the moneychangers and those who sold doves saying, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations! But you have made it a den of thieves" (Mark 11:15-17). These people were there at the Temple because of the Lord's command for all Jewish men to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times a year at the Feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles (Deuteronomy 16:16-17). The pilgrims were to bring their tithes with them and rejoice before the Lord with their household. If they came from a great distance and couldn't bring the tithe of their livestock, they were to convert it to money before they came and spend the money in Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 14:22-27). The moneychangers served as the foreign currency exchange for all the people from distant countries. But it was more than just that. Foreign money could not be used to buy any animal sacrifices; one had to use the shekel of the sanctuary (Leviticus 5:15). In addition, there was the "temple tax" (Exodus 30:11-16) that Jesus paid even though He didn't have to (Matthew 17:24-27). This "temple tax" was required from foreigners - payable in shekels of the sanctuary - before they could bring any offering forward. And the moneychangers could charge anything they saw proper to perform this "service".

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The Mosaic Law, however, strictly forbade making profits off people trying to be godly. For example, the Mosaic Law specified that if a citizen of Israel or a foreign visitor were to become poor, he was to be supported and no interest charged (Leviticus 25:35-37). This became a big issue during Nehemiah's time and Nehemiah extracted an oath from the priests that they would refrain from any interest or markup charged against their brothers during a famine (Nehemiah 5:1-13). Following the cleansing of the temple (where Jesus would not allow any vendors to hawk their wares in the temple, Mark 11:16), Jesus left the city for the night to frustrate nighttime assassination attempts by the scribes and chief priests (Mark 11:18-19).

This was actually the second time that Jesus drove the moneychangers out of the Temple. He had done it once before at the beginning of His public ministry (John 2:13-17).

Jesus Curses the Barren Fig Tree

Following the driving out of the moneychangers, Jesus returned to Jerusalem from Bethany the next morning. He was hungry and looked for some figs on a fig tree. Many fig trees have two crops, one in the spring and another in the fall. This occurred in the early spring when it was likely that there might be some unripe figs present, but "it was not yet the season for figs" (Mark 11:13). Finding nothing but leaves, the Lord said, "Let no one eat fruit from you ever again" (Mark 11:12-14). The next day as they passed the same fig tree, they saw it withered up from the roots. Peter was stunned, and remarked, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that You cursed has withered away!" (Mark 11:20-22).

John Chrysostom addressed¹ why Jesus cursed the fig tree for being fruitless when figs were not yet in season. At this point, Jesus had healed multitudes, but He had punished no one. And now He was going to be crucified in a few days. Chrysostom stated:

"He needed to show His disciples demonstrative proof of His power to take vengeance also, that both the disciples might learn that, although He was able to blast them that crucified Him, of His own will He submitted, and did not".

"He went to the fig tree, not so much for hunger, but for His disciples' sake, who indeed marveled exceedingly, although many greater miracles had been done. But this was strange, now for the first time He showed forth His power to take vengeance. Wherefore not in any other plant, but in the moistest of all planted things² did He work the miracle, so that hence also the miracle appeared greater".

"And that you might learn, that for their sakes this was done, that He might train them to feel confidence, hear what He said afterwards. 'Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done. And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive'" (Matthew 21:21-22).

"Do you see that all is done for their sake, so that they might not be afraid and tremble at plots against them? Wherefore He repeated this a second time also (Mark 11:23-24), to make them cleave to prayer and faith".

¹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, LXVII, 1-2.

² See also Theophylact, "The Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to St. Mark", Chapter 11.

Theophylact, writing in the 11th Century, interpreted³ the lesson of the fig tree as follows: “This fig tree is a symbol of that assembly of the Jews which had only leaves; that is, which had the Law which gave only shade to them, but which bore no fruit. Jesus hungered for their salvation, for He said, ‘My food is to do the Will of My Father’ (John 4:34). It is the Will of God that sinners turn back and repent. Therefore since this assembly did not bear the fruit of repentance, God’s blessing was withheld and it withered, for thereafter the unrepentant Jews had neither prophet nor teacher”.

Jesus Confronted: The Baptism of John

After cursing the fig tree, Jesus entered the Temple and was confronted by the chief priests and the elders. They demanded to know by what authority He did what He did, such as the cleansing of the Temple yesterday, but also regarding all His teaching. Jesus had already told them the answer to that question, and they wouldn’t receive it, nor would they receive it now.

“So Jesus answered and said to them, ‘I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John -- where was it from? From heaven or from men?’ And they reasoned among themselves, saying, ‘If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ But if we say, ‘From men,’ we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet’. So they answered Jesus and said, ‘We do not know’. And He said to them, ‘Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things’” (Matthew 21:24-27).

It is important to understand what the perception of John was at this time. John the Baptist and his cousin, Jesus, most likely had loud voices that carried well outdoors. Not everyone can speak to 5,000 men plus women and children outdoors and still be heard over the disruptive noise of squirming children as Jesus did (Matthew 14:13-21). John had probably a similar kind of “presence” when he spoke. John was so influential that everyone from Judea went out to be baptized by him (Matthew 3:5).

John was also very outspoken. To call the religious leaders of his day a bunch of snakes and tell them they were going to hell took courage (Matthew 3:7-12, Luke 3:7-9). John did not confine his outspokenness to religious leaders. He also publicly criticized Herod the Tetrarch (the son of his father’s murderer) for the incest of marrying his brother Philip’s wife Herodias (Matthew 14:3-4). According to tradition, after he was beheaded, John then continued his announcement of the coming of Messiah to souls in Hades, and John is considered a forerunner there as well as on earth. This is important to Holy Week, since Christ will be coming to Hades following the Crucifixion, where He will lead captivity captive (Ephesians 4:8-10, 1 Peter 3:18-20).

To the people of his day, John was considered to be a prophet, and one of the greatest of the prophets. Not only did the people consider John to be a prophet, but also this belief was so strongly held that they would have stoned their religious leaders for blasphemy if they denied it. After all, these people were the same ones that had come out to be baptized by John.

³ Theophylact, “The Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to St. Mark”, Chapter 11, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 63051, 1997, p. 97.

Jesus confirmed what the people felt. He stated flatly that John the Baptist was the greatest of the prophets (Luke 7:24-28, Matthew 11:8-14). Yet Jesus went on to say that the least in the kingdom of God is greater than John (Luke 7:28). John was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb (Luke 1:15). But the least in the kingdom of God has a body that is the Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) and united in one new man with the risen Christ (Ephesians 2:15-21). This was not possible under the Old Covenant; God provided something better for us that they should not be made perfect apart from us (Hebrews 11:40).

This entire exchange indicates the hardness of heart among the Jewish leaders. They knew that John was a prophet and his baptism was from heaven. They even sought to be baptized by John (Matthew 3:7-12) but John refused to baptize them because they rejected the will of God for themselves (Luke 7:30).

The Parable of the Two Sons in the Vineyard

After the confrontation in the Temple, Jesus directed two parables at the Jewish leaders, the parable of the two sons in the vineyard, and the parable of the wicked vineyard tenants. Both were directed at them, where Jesus gave the Jewish leaders the opportunity to pronounce their own judgment. This was similar to what happened to King David after his murder of Uriah and subsequent marriage to Bathsheba, Uriah's wife. The Lord sent the Prophet Nathan to David with an opportunity to pronounce his own judgment (2 Samuel 11:14-12:10). For David, this ushered in a time of profound repentance, which we commemorate in Psalm 51 during Matins; for the Jewish leaders, it was a time of further blindness and hardening of heart.

The Lord phrased it like this: "But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go, work today in my vineyard'. He answered and said, 'I will not', but afterward he regretted it and went. Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I go, sir', but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of *his* father?" They said to Him, 'The first'. Jesus said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you". For John (the Baptist) came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw *it*, you did not afterward relent and believe him" (Matthew 21:28-32).

This incident was rather personal to the author, Matthew, since he was one of the tax collectors that had entered the kingdom of God.

John Chrysostom explains⁴ it thus: John the Baptist came to them and they did not accept him. He did not come to the tax collectors and harlots, but they received him. Even after this, the Jewish leaders did not become jealous and enter in. Thus the Lord said, "The first shall be last and the last first" (Matthew 19:30). Chrysostom's words are:

"Again He convicts them by a parable, intimating both their unreasonable obstinacy, and the submissiveness of those who were utterly condemned by them. For these two children in the parable declare what came to pass with respect to both the Gentiles and the Jews. For the former, neither undertaking to obey, or becoming hearers of the law, showed forth their obedience in their works. And the latter having said, 'All that the Lord shall speak, we will do, and will hearken'

⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXVII, 2.

(Exodus 19:8), in their works were disobedient. And for this reason, let me add, that they might not think the law would benefit them, He shows that this self-same thing condemns them, as Paul also said, 'Not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified' (Romans 2:13). For this intent, that He might make them self-condemned, He causes the judgment to be delivered by themselves”.

In the parable of the two sons in the vineyard, the issue is what do we do about our human will. Do we conform our human will to the Will of God as Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39-42; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42)? He did not seek His own (human) will, but the Will of the Father Who sent Him (John 5:30, 6:38, 4:34; Hebrews 10:7-9). By conforming our will to the Will of God, we will be illumined about the things of God (John 7:17). Thus it matters what we will to do regarding the Will of God.

The Parable of the Vineyard Tenants

The imagery of the vineyard was carried over into the second parable also; where the vineyard represents the entire Old Covenant relationship of Israel to the Lord. Isaiah used a very similar parable (Isaiah 5:1-7) where “the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel” (Isaiah 5:7). John the Baptist was one of the messengers the Lord sent to His vineyard. In iconography, John is depicted having wings like an angel since the word “angel” means messenger (Malachi 3:1).

In the second parable Jesus told about a certain landowner, who planted a vineyard, set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. Recent excavations⁵ have shown that the purpose of the tower was similar to that of a wine cellar today for aging wine. The expectation, then, was quality wine! He then leased it to vinedressers and went to a far country. At various times He sent His servants to receive fruit from it but the vinedressers beat, killed and stoned them. Finally, He sent His Son saying, “They will respect My Son.” But the vine dressers said, “This is the Heir, let us kill Him and seize His inheritance”; and they did so (Matthew 21:33-39).

Jesus then asked them what the owner of the vineyard will do to the vinedressers when He comes. They replied, “He will destroy those wicked men miserably and lease His vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to Him the fruits in their seasons” (Matthew 21:40-41).

Taking them at their own words, just as the Prophet Nathan had done with King David (2 Samuel 12:1-10; compare Luke 19:22), the Lord said, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: “The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord’s doing and it is marvelous in our eyes” (Psalm 118:22, 23; compare Isaiah 28:16). He continued, “The Kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.” “And whoever falls on this (corner) stone will be broken, but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder” (vv.42-44).

⁵ Walsh, Carey, “God’s Vineyard” Bible Review, Aug. 1998, pg. 43-49.

At this, they tried to lay hands on Jesus, but couldn't do it publicly because the crowds regarded Jesus as a Prophet (Matthew 21:46). Two days later on Holy Thursday, they were able to lay hands on Him at night, thanks to Judas' betrayal (Matthew 26:47ff).

In this parable there is some important imagery that applies to us today. The vineyard is the Kingdom of God on earth, and the vinedressers then were the chief priests and the elders. Jesus said, "The Kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it" (Matthew 21:43). The Church is now that nation as the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16) and has been given the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 16:19, 18:18).

The hedge around the vineyard was the Mosaic Law, which tended to keep outsiders out and the faithful in. The fruit produced by the vineyard, in the words of John Chrysostom⁶ was "their obedience, the proof of it by their works". To this end the vineyard had a winepress (Matthew 21:33) to help extract the maximum from the fruit and a tower as a beacon to the world (Exodus 19:5-6; Deuteronomy 28:1, 28:12; Isaiah 42:6).

John Chrysostom comments⁷ on this parable as follows:

"He left little for them to do but to take care of what was there and to preserve what was given to them. For when they came forth out of Egypt, He gave a Law, and set up a city, and built a Temple and prepared an altar. By His going into a far country, He means His great long-suffering and not always bringing the punishments close upon their sins".

The servants He sent to receive the fruits were the prophets. "But they even here showed their wickedness, not only failing to give the fruit, after having enjoyed so much care, but also by showing anger towards them that came. They not only were angry for no reason, but even filled their hands with blood; and while deserving punishment, themselves inflicted punishment (compare Matthew 23:37). Therefore He sent both a second and a third company both that the wickedness of these might be shown, and the love towards man of Him who sent them".

Today we have a similar situation, where the priests and bishops have taken the place of the prophets as the Lord's servants sent to receive the fruit of the vineyard. How many times do they urge us to forgive one another, to embrace and to be reconciled within the Body of Christ (the vineyard), but we refuse. In the Lord's eyes, refusal to reconcile and forgive is as bad as murder (Matthew 5:21-26).

Finally, the landowner sent His son, saying, "They will respect My Son" (v.37). Why should He say this after such a long history of abusing the prophets? Chrysostom's comments⁸ are (1) that this is what they ought to have done, (2) that this is another extension of the Lord's long-suffering, and (3) that they might fill up the measure of their fathers' guilt (Matthew 23:29-32) and be without excuse (compare Isaiah 1:15, Hosea 4:2, Micah 3:10). To this one might add in all the incredible miracles Jesus performed. Certainly this should have generated considerable respect.

⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXVII, 2.

⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXVIII, 1.

⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXVIII, 1.

The inheritance that the vinedressers – and the chief priests – wanted to seize was control of the Kingdom of God on earth. This was why Satan was so eager to crucify the Son of God (1 Corinthians 2:7-8) and why he was willing to trade all the kingdoms of the world for it (Matthew 4:8-10).

As to what the landowner will do to the wicked vinedressers, the chief priests' reply was prophetic. They themselves are now in hell (Matthew 23:34-36) and the vineyard has been leased to other vinedressers who are expected to render to Him the fruits in their seasons (Matthew 21:41-43). The fruits vary from season to season: sometimes fasting and repentance, other times feasting and thanksgiving. If we, like them, refuse to render to Him the fruit He expects, He may lease the vineyard to others also. Paul uses a similar analogy: the grafting of the Gentiles as branches into a cultivated olive tree and cutting off the natural branches. "Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either" (Romans 11:16-26).

The chief priests realized the impact of what Jesus was saying; that is, the Kingdom of God will be given to others. Luke records their reaction as "May it never be!" (Luke 20:16). But the Lord spoke about the Stone which the builders (the chief priests) rejected becoming the chief cornerstone and how "this was the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes" (Psalm 118:23, Matthew 21:42). This Psalm was also quoted by the Apostle Peter in testifying before the Sanhedrin a few months later (Acts 4:8-12) and by Peter in his first Epistle (1 Peter 2:6-8; see also Ephesians 2:20).

Jesus concluded the parable by combining some prophecies about Himself. He said, "Whoever falls on this stone will be broken, but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder" (Matthew 21:44). The falling and being broken is explained by Isaiah as Israel stumbling over the stone (Isaiah 8:14-15; quoted in 1 Peter 2:8). Chrysostom says⁹ this stumbling includes being offended by the stone. If, due to the hardness of our heart, we stumble over what Christ says, we will be broken, not Him. Christ will prevail!

The grinding to powder is a reference to Daniel's prophecy about the stone that was cut out of the mountain without hands (Daniel 2:31-45). This stone promptly crushed all the great kingdoms of the world until no trace was found of them and the wind carried them away (like dust blows away). Daniel's prophecy refers especially to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, and is also applicable to the end of the age.

Impact on the Destruction of Israel

The disciples had watched and heard the Lord but yet they had not understood fully the rejection of Israel. The Jews, who had rejected their Messiah, now were being rejected by Christ. Jesus had made his triumphal entry into the city, cleansed the Temple and left. He returned the next morning, cursed the barren fig tree, was confronted by the Jewish leaders who challenged his authority, and responded with some of his most pointed parables and declarations (cf. Matthew 21-23); culminating in the awful pronouncement:

⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXVIII, 2.

“And so, on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation” (Matthew 23:35-36).

To understand the thrust of Jesus' action recorded in Matthew we need to remember His previous parable in Luke and the preaching of John the Baptist (Matthew 3:8-10).

“A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it, and he found none. Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, ‘Look for three years I have come looking for fruit on this tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?’ But he answered and said to him, ‘Lord, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it; and if it bears fruit, fine. But if not, after that you can cut it down’” (Luke 13:6-9).

Jesus, the Lord of the Vineyard, spent three years of His ministry traveling through Israel seeking fruit. Now it was time to cut it down. John the Baptist had warned the Jews that the vineyard of Israel was running out of time:

“Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance. And do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matthew 3:8-10).

In this context Jesus makes His declaration of judgment, excommunication and destruction. The generation that crucified the Lord and persecuted His apostles was truly the “terminal generation”. This was a final warning. Israel, as the Covenant People, was to be destroyed, finally and irrevocably. Years later, shortly before the holocaust of AD 70 descended on Israel, the Apostle Paul wrote:

“The Jews killed both the Lord and their own prophets, and have persecuted us. They do not please God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the¹⁰ uttermost” (1 Thessalonians 2:14-16).

The multitudes that welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem with hosannas were screaming for His blood in less than a week. Jesus portrayed their attitude in one of His parables: “We will not have this man to reign over us!” (Luke 19:14). The chief priests revealed the faith of the nation when they vehemently denied the Lordship of Christ and affirmed, “We have no king but Caesar!” (John 19:15). And finally the chilling cry of a sin-blinded people: “His blood be on us and our children!” (Matthew 27:25).

Because Israel had committed the supreme act of covenant-breaking when she rejected Christ, God rejected Israel herself. The covenant people inherited the covenant curse.

“And it shall come about that as the Lord delighted over you to prosper you, and to multiply you, so the Lord will delight over you to make you perish and to destroy you” (Deuteronomy 28:63-67).

¹⁰ *eis telos*, to the end, forever

The awful curses pronounced by Moses, the prophets, and Jesus were fulfilled in the terrible destruction of Jerusalem, with the desolation of the Temple and the obliteration of the covenant nation in AD 70. Athanasius observed¹¹ concerning Israel's response to Christ's coming:

“He was like those sent by the householder to receive the fruits of the vineyard from the husbandmen; for he exhorted all men to render a return. But Israel despised Him and would not give, for their will was not right; moreover they killed those that were sent; not even before the Lord of the vineyard were they ashamed, but even He was slain by them. Therefore when He came and found no fruit in them, He cursed them through the fig tree, saying, ‘Let there henceforth be no fruit from you’ (Matthew 21:19); and the fig-tree was dead and fruitless, so that even the disciples wondered when it withered away”.

“Then that which was spoken by the prophet was fulfilled. ‘I will take away from them the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the scent of myrrh, and the light of a lamp, and the whole land shall be destroyed’ (Jeremiah 25:10). For the whole service of the Law has been abolished from them, and henceforth and forever they remain without a feast”.

Parables From the Old Testament: Ezekiel 1:1-20 “The Four Living Creatures”

This Reading is used for Sixth Hour Prayers for Holy Monday, and it describes the Four Living Creatures who surround the Throne of God. While the heavenly creatures may be very impressive in all their activity as they serve the Lord, they are not God. They surround the Throne of God, but it is the Son of God Who is seated on the Throne. This is relevant to Holy Week because it is this same Son of God who is being rejected by His chosen people. His chosen people just have no clue Who it is that they’re dealing with. In Ezekiel’s vision of the Throne of God, he was not seeing the true essence of God, but something tailored to the weakness of his human body. The Son of God, however, is the true essence of God with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and in His humanity, He is being rejected and crucified by His people.

These Four Living Creatures who surround the Throne of God are called the Cherubim (Ezekiel 10:1-3). Some of their characteristics from Ezekiel 1 are:

- They have human form, including legs and hands.
- Each had four faces and four wings.
- The four faces resemble a man, a lion, a bull and an eagle.
- Their feet were like a calf’s hoofs.
- As they moved, two wings touched another’s wings and two covered their bodies.
- They never turned their faces as they moved.
- Beside them were wheels within wheels, full of eyes.
- Within the wheels were fire and lightning flashes.
- The spirit of the four living creatures was in the wheels.

¹¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letters, VI, 5-6.

The Apostle John also had a vision of the Cherubim that surround the Throne of God. He described them as having an appearance very similar to what Ezekiel described, and he also mentioned that they do not rest day or night (Revelation 4:6-9), continually addressing the Son of God and saying:

Holy, Holy, Holy
Lord God Almighty
Who was and is and is to come.

Daniel the Prophet had a vision of the Throne of God in the last days when judgment is to occur:

“I beheld until the thrones were set, and the Ancient of days sat; and his raiment was white as snow, and the hair of his head, as pure wool: his throne was a flame of fire, *and* his wheels burning fire. A river of fire rushed forth before him: thousand thousands ministered to him, and ten thousands of myriads, attended upon him: the judgment sat, and the books were opened” (Daniel 7:9-10 LXX).

Gregory of Nazianzen stated¹² that when Isaiah and Ezekiel “saw God”, it was not the essence of God that they saw. It was some other form, because “no man can see God and live” (Exodus 33:20).

“Isaiah was an eyewitness of very great mysteries; for he saw the Lord of Sabaoth sitting on the Throne of glory, and encircled and praised and hidden by the six winged Seraphim, and was himself purged by the live coal, and equipped for his prophetic office (Isaiah 6:1-10). Ezekiel described the Cherubic Chariot of God, and the Throne upon them, and the Firmament over it, and Him that showed Himself in the Firmament, and Voices, and Forces, and Deeds (Ezekiel 1:4-28). Perhaps this was an appearance by day, only visible to Saints, or an unerring vision of the night, or an impression on the mind, holding converse with the future as if it were the present. Perhaps it was some other ineffable form of prophecy, I cannot say; the God of the Prophets knows, and they know who are thus inspired. But neither these of whom I am speaking, nor any of their fellows ever stood before the Essence of God or saw the Nature of God”.

Irenaeus stated¹³ that when the prophets saw their various visions of God and the Throne of God, they did not actually see God Himself, but the likeness of God. On the other hand, Christ came to declare the Father (John 1:18), and he who has seen Christ has seen the Father (John 14:9).

“The prophets saw the dispensations of God in part, but not actually God Himself. For Ezekiel saw the vision of God, and the cherubim, and their wheels, and he recounted the mystery of the whole of that progression. He beheld the likeness of a throne above them, and upon the throne a likeness as of the figure of a man, and the things which were upon his loins as the figure of amber, and what was below like the sight of fire. He set forth all the rest of the vision of the thrones, but lest any one might happen to think that in those visions he had

¹² Gregory Nazianzen, Oration 28, The Second Theological Oration, XIX.

¹³ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, IV, xx, 10-11.

actually seen God, he added, ‘This was *the appearance of the likeness* of the glory of God’” (*italics mine*).

“Then neither Moses, nor Elijah, nor Ezekiel, who all had many celestial visions, saw God; but what they saw were similitudes of the splendor of the Lord, and prophecies of things to come. It is manifest that the Father is indeed invisible, of whom also the Lord said, ‘No man hath seen God at any time’ (John 1:18, 14:9, 1 Timothy 6:16). But His Word, as He Himself willed it, and for the benefit of those who beheld, did show the Father’s brightness, and explained His purposes. The Lord said, ‘The only-begotten God, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him’ (John 1:18)”.

Ambrose of Milan, commenting¹⁴ on Isaiah and Ezekiel’s visions of the Lord (Isaiah 6:1-10, Ezekiel 1, 10), stated that the wheel within a wheel represents life under the Law, which is included in grace, since the Old Testament saints are included in the Church. It is a mystery of spiritual wisdom how God can be eternally at rest, even though times and seasons fly past.

“But as the prophet saw a wheel running within a wheel, which certainly does not refer to any appearance to the bodily sight, but to the grace of each Testament. For the life of the saints is polished, and so is consistent with itself such that later portions agree with the former. The wheel, then, within a wheel is life under the Law, life under grace; inasmuch as Jews are within the Church, the Law is included in grace. For he is within the Church who is a Jew secretly; and circumcision of the heart (Deuteronomy 10:16) is a sacrament within the Church. But that Jewry is within the Church of which it is written, ‘In Jewry is God known’ (Psalm 76:1); therefore as wheel runs within wheel, so in like manner the wings were still, and the wings were flying”.

“In like manner, too, the Seraphim were veiling their faces with two wings, and with two were veiling their feet, and with two were flying. For here also is a mystery of spiritual wisdom. Seasons stand, seasons fly; the past stands, the future is flying, and like the wings of the Seraphim, so they veil the face or the feet of God. In God, Who has neither beginning nor end, the whole course of times and seasons are at rest, from this knowledge of its beginning and its end. So, then, times past and future stand, the present flies. Ask not after the secrets of His beginning or His end, for there is neither. You have the present, but you must praise Him, not question Him”.

“The Seraphim with unwearied voices praise God, and do men question Him? And certainly when they do this they show us that we must not sometimes question God, but always praise Him”.

John Chrysostom stated¹⁵ that we must listen carefully and attentively to statements in the Scriptures describing God, to avoid misinterpreting references to His humanity as references to His Deity. David and the sons of Korah titled some of their Psalms “For Contemplation” (Psalm 32, 42) and Solomon urges “seeking out Wisdom as silver and as hidden treasure” (Proverbs 2:2-4, 3:13-15). As we contemplate Him, we will come to understand that only the Son beholds the Essence of God, and it is the Son who reveals God to mankind.

¹⁴ Ambrose, On the Holy Spirit, III, xxi, 161-164.

¹⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XV, 1.

“For if anyone listens to what is said in the Scriptures without inquiring into the meaning, he will suppose many unseemly things of God. He may think that He is a man, that He is made of brass, is wrathful, is furious, and many opinions yet worse than these (Revelation 1:15). He may think that God has a bosom (John 1:18), a thing proper to bodily substances, yet no one is so insane as to imagine, that He who is without body is a body. In order then that we may properly interpret these passages according to its spiritual meaning, let us search it through from its beginning”.

“Christ said, ‘No man hath seen God at any time’. What then shall we answer to Isaiah, when he says, ‘I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up’ (Isaiah 6:1); and to John testifying of Isaiah, that ‘he said these things when he had seen His glory?’ (John 12:41)

Ezekiel too beheld Him sitting above the Cherubim (Ezekiel 1 and 10). Daniel said, ‘The Ancient of days did sit’ (Daniel 7:9). Moses himself said, ‘Show me Your Glory, that I may see You so as to know You’ (Exodus 33:18, 13). Jacob took his name from this very thing, being called “Israel”; for Israel is ‘one that sees God’ (Genesis 32:26-30). How then does John say, ‘No man hath seen God at any time?’ (John 1:18) It is to declare that all these were instances of His condescension, not the vision of the Essence itself unveiled. For had they seen the very Nature, they would not have beheld It under different forms. It does not sit, or stand, or walk; these things all belong to bodies. How He is, only He knows. And this He declared, saying, ‘I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes by the hands of the prophets’ (Hosea 12:10); that is, ‘I have condescended, I have not appeared as I really was”.

“For since His Son was about to appear in the flesh, He prepared them from old time to behold the substance of God, as far as it was possible for them to see It. But what God really is, not only haven’t the prophets seen, but not even angels or archangels. If you ask them, you shall not hear them answering anything concerning His Essence, but sending up, ‘Glory to God in the Highest, on earth peace, good will towards men’ (Luke 2:14). If you desire to learn something from the Cherubim or Seraphim, you shall hear the mystic song of His Holiness, and that ‘heaven and earth are full of His glory’ (Isaiah 6:3). If you inquire of the higher powers, you shall but find that their one work is the praise of God. ‘Praise Him’, said David, ‘all His hosts’ (Psalm 148:2). But only the Son beholds Him, and the Holy Spirit. The attribute of being incorporeal and uncreated belongs not to the Father only, but also to the Son. Paul declares this point, that He ‘is the Image of the invisible God’ (Colossians 1:15). When Paul said, ‘God was manifested in the Flesh’ (1 Timothy 3:16); this means that the manifestation took place by means of the flesh, not according to His Essence”.

Jerome made an analogy, where he compared¹⁶ the four Gospels to the four Cherubim saying, “Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are the Lord’s team of four, the true cherubim or store of knowledge. With them the whole body is full of eyes, they glitter as sparks, they run and return like lightning, their feet are straight feet and lifted up, their backs also are winged, ready to fly in all directions. They hold together each by each and are interwoven one with another: like

¹⁶ Jerome, Letters, LIII, 9.

wheels within wheels they roll along and go wherever the breath of the Holy Spirit conveys them”.

God as Fire and Light

God Himself is sometimes described as a consuming fire, and it was this aspect of the Son of God that Israel saw when He gave them the Law on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 24:17). As He spoke the words of the Law, He spoke from the midst of a huge fire on the top of the mountain (Deuteronomy 4:12-13). Israel knew God in the Pillar of Fire by night and the Pillar of Cloud by day (Exodus 13:21-22). These two pillars are both the same things. By night the fire was clearly visible; by day the fire was not seen as easily due to the bright sunlight, and the appearance of the Pillar looked like a cloud of smoke. On the top of Mt. Sinai, the appearance of the Pillar made the mountain top look like it “burned with fire to the very heart of the heavens” (Deuteronomy 4:11). This made a very awesome spectacle, accompanied by the thunder, the lightning and the very loud trumpet sound (Exodus 19:16), in addition to the earthquake (Psalm 114:4), all of which Basil attributed¹⁷ to the angels around the Throne of God.

God revealed Himself as fire on many occasions throughout the Scriptures. This fire is not necessarily physical fire, which requires a continuous supply of fuel to sustain itself. The uncreated fire of God at the burning bush was a marvel to Moses in that the bush was burning with what looked like physical fire, yet it was not consumed (Exodus 3:2-3). A similar case was the tongues of fire on each of the 120 disciples at Pentecost, 30 AD (Acts 2:3).

The Lord is also described as a refiner’s fire (Malachi 3:2). Fire has a cleansing effect on things, like the spoils of war that had been polluted by association with idols and demons (Numbers 31:23). Idols captured in war were required to be destroyed by fire (Deuteronomy 7:5, 25, 12:3). If anything could not stand the fire, it was purified with water (Numbers 31:23). In like manner, Ambrose linked¹⁸ the fire and the water, where the fire is the spiritual grace of the Holy Spirit and the water is baptism. Athanasius of Alexandria wrote¹⁹ that the servant of God should burn like a flame with an ardent spirit so as to destroy all carnal sin in drawing near to God. For this reason angels are called “a flame of fire” (Psalm 104:4), and Paul (1 Thessalonians 5:19) advises us not to “quench the Spirit”.

Ambrose of Milan linked²⁰ the Consuming Fire with the Light of God, where the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all Light. He is also the true Light that enlightens every man (John 1:5-9, Psalm 36:9, Hebrews 1:3). When Jesus began His public ministry, the Scriptures describe it as a Great Light dawning on Zebulun and Naphtali (Matthew 4:15-16, Isaiah 42:6-7). The Uncreated Light at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-5) is a manifestation of this Light.

Fire is also associated with the Lord’s judgment at the close of this age. All men’s works are to be judged by this fire (1 Corinthians 3:12-15), where the fire is an uncreated fire. The uncreated fire of God has already judged some people. Examples of this are the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24), 250 men in Korah’s rebellion (Numbers 16:35, 26:10), and the

¹⁷ Basil, On the Spirit, 14.

¹⁸ Ambrose, Duties of the Clergy, III, xviii, 103

¹⁹ Athanasius of Alexandria, Festal Letter III, 3.

²⁰ Ambrose, On the Holy Spirit, I, xiv, 160-164.

sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:2). Others will be judged in the Lake of Fire at the close of this age (Revelation 20:13-15, 21:8).

When the New Jerusalem comes, there will be no night; nor will there be any sun or moon to give light (Revelation 21:22-25). The Glory of God illumines everything. This obviously refers to the uncreated light of God.

In iconography, the Archangel Michael is “written” (Icons are written, not painted!) with a sword at his side, where the archangels are another of the beings that surround the Throne of God. Yet angels are non-physical beings. The sword, then, is not representative of a piece of steel that he carries, but of his execution of the Power of God. From this point of view, Michael’s “sword” makes star wars weapons look like Tinker Toys!!

Holy Monday Presanctified Liturgy

Prophecy of Judgment on Jerusalem

March 29, 2010

Revision A

Gospel: Matthew 24:3-35

The Gospel lesson from Matthew, along with the parallel accounts in Mark 13 and Luke 21, foretells primarily the Destruction of Jerusalem in c. 70 AD. There are many different aspects of this, which are sometimes difficult to discern. One overriding aspect of the destruction of Jerusalem is the importance of the Church following 70 AD as the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). The Church had been so before that, but the emphatic judgment of God on Jerusalem in 70 AD lent great emphasis to its importance.

Preliminary Events: Matthew 24:3-8

On Tuesday of Holy Week, Jesus departed from the Temple and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the Temple. Jesus said to them,

“Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not *one* stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down”. Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when these things will be! And what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:2-3)

For Jesus to say that the Temple would be utterly destroyed came as a shock to the disciples. From Jesus’ own words, they saw the Temple as “a house of prayer for all nations” (Mark 11:17). From the list of nations present during Peter’s sermon on Pentecost (Acts 2:9), some had come to Jerusalem from 1000 miles away. It was customary at the Temple even to offer up prayer for the Emperor in Rome.

The Twelve were looking for Jesus to bring in the Kingdom of God in glory, and they still asked Him about this just prior to the Ascension (Acts 1:6). Their question about the sign of His Coming indicates confusion on their part between the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Coming of Christ. When Jesus referred to the destruction of Jerusalem (in 70 AD and again in 135 AD), where one stone was not left upon another, His disciples thought He was referring to establishing the Kingdom of God in glory. They had no concept that the end of the age would come in a few years with the destruction of Jerusalem or that His Second Coming to bring in the Kingdom of God in glory wouldn’t occur for thousands of years. Thus there was a major gap in understanding here that needed to be overcome.

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Cyril of Alexandria stated²¹ that when His disciples asked, “When will these things be?” (Luke 21:7, Matthew 24:3, Mark 13:4), Jesus answered their immediate questions first (Luke 21:8-11, Matthew 24:4-8, Mark 13:4-8), and then went back to speak of the destruction of Jerusalem (Luke 21:12-33, Matthew 24:9-35, Mark 13:9-23). As He spoke, He compared and contrasted the immediate events with the more distant events of the Second Advent (Luke 21:25-28, Matthew 24:27-31, Mark 13:24-27). In answering their immediate questions, Jesus stated some general warnings that may apply both to the destruction of Jerusalem and to His Second Advent.

John Chrysostom stated²² that Jesus first directed His disciples’ attention to some things that they needed to understand before they would be ready to understand either the destruction of Jerusalem or the Second Advent. In doing so, He spoke of things that they would need to be mindful of prior to the destruction of Jerusalem.

“Jesus answered nothing directly to their question, but first spoke of those other things that are urgent, and which it was needful for them to learn first. For neither concerning Jerusalem straightway, nor of His own Second Advent, did He speak, but touching the ills that were to meet them at the doors. Wherefore also He makes them earnest in their exertions, by saying, ‘Take heed that no man deceive you; for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ’”.

“Afterwards, He roused them to listen about these things; and made them energetic, and prepared them to be watchful. Having spoken first of the false Christs, then He spoke of the ills of Jerusalem, assuring them ever by the things already past, foolish and contentious though they were, of those which were yet to come”.

Jesus responded to his disciples' request by giving them a number of signs of the end, where “the end” refers to *the end of the age*, the end of the Temple, the sacrificial system, the covenant nation of Israel, and the last remnants of the pre-Christian age. There is a progression in the signs in that they seem to become more specific and pronounced until we reach the final, immediate precursor of the end the age.

The first three signs are described as "the beginning of birth pangs" (Matthew 23:8). These should not be taken as signals of an imminent end; the disciples should guard against being misled at this point (Matthew 23:4). The end is not yet (Matthew 23:6). However, these are the beginnings of the great NEW THING, which God will bring forth.

False Prophets and False Messiahs: Matthew 23:5

The Jews having rejected Christ were particularly prone to look for false deliverers. This became especially intense as problems with Rome increased. Christians should avoid their folly. Eusebius, Justin, Origen, Josephus, and others, tell of the deception and delusion among the Jews. Josephus stated, “Now as for the affairs²³ of the Jews, they grew worse and worse continually, for the country was filled with robbers and *impostors*, who deluded the multitude.

²¹ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke, Homily 139.

²² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXV, 1.

²³ Josephus, Wars of the Jews, II, iv, 1-3, II, xii, 1-6, II, xiii, 1-7.

Yet Felix did catch and put to death many of those impostors every day, together with the robbers”.

Some of these signs may be duplicated prior to the Second Advent, such as false prophets and false Christs. This will be covered in more detail later. But the primary reference here is to the events that were precursors to the destruction of Jerusalem.

Wars and Rumors of Wars: Matthew 23:6-7

Jesus spoke at a time of relative peace in the Roman Empire; the next few decades were to bring trouble with several Roman emperors toppling from the throne and special trouble for the Jews. When Jesus said this, He and the disciples were sitting on the Mount of Olives looking over Jerusalem (Matthew 23:3). John Chrysostom stated²⁴ that the immediate reference here is not to the wars of the world over the centuries, but to wars in Jerusalem. Even the more distant skirmishes against the Jews tended to come home to Judea and Jerusalem.

Josephus stated²⁵ that there were uprisings against them in Alexandria, where 50,000 were slain. In Caesarea²⁶ a battle between Syrians and Jews brought death to about 20,000 Jews. The fight between Jews and Syrians divided many villages and towns into armed camps. Constant rumors of wars kept the Jewish people in an unsettled state. Josephus mentions²⁷ how Caligula, the Roman Emperor, made orders that his statue be placed in the Temple of Jerusalem. Because the Jews refused to allow this, they lived in constant fear that the Emperor might send an army into Palestine. Some Jews lived in such fear that they dared not even plow and seed the ground.

Famines, Pestilence and Earthquakes: Matthew 23:7-8

Some of these predicted elements can be found in the documents of the New Testament; there are more detailed accounts in outside sources. There are the references in the epistles and *Acts* of churches sending aid to those suffering famine in Judea. Agabus prophesied of a great famine that took a heavy toll in Judea.

“Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them, named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (*oikoumenen*); and this took place in the days of Claudius. And the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brethren who lived in Judea; and they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul” (Acts 11:27-30).

On February 5, 63 AD, the famous earthquake that damaged the city of Pompeii took place. At this same time other quakes were recorded in Samos, Chios, Miletus, Laodicea, Hierapolis, Campania, Colossae, Rome and Judea. Speaking of all these preliminary events

²⁴ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, LXXV, 1.

²⁵ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, II, xviii, 7-8.

²⁶ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, III, ii, 1-3.

²⁷ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, II, x, 1.

might disturb the disciples; Chrysostom points out²⁸ that these so called "natural" disasters are to be understood quite differently.

“Henceforth the Roman armies were a matter of anxiety. Since then these things also were sufficient to confound them [the disciples], He foretells them all. Then to show that He Himself will assail the Jews with them, and war on them, He speaks not of battles only, but also of plagues sent from God, famines, and pestilence, and earthquakes. He showed that the wars also He Himself permitted to come upon them, and that these things do not happen for no purpose according to what before has been the accustomed course of things among men, but *proceed from the wrath on high*. Therefore they shall not come by themselves or at once, but with signs. For that the Jews may not say, that they who then believed [Christian Jews] were authors of these evils, therefore He has told them also of the cause of their coming upon them. 'For verily I say unto you,' He said before, 'all these things shall come upon this generation,' (Matthew 23:36) having made mention of the stain of blood on them”

Jesus warned His disciples that these events were merely general tendencies characterizing the final generation, and not signs of the destruction. Without the warning they might have been confused.

Events Leading to the Destruction of Jerusalem: Matthew 24:9-14

Other signs, while they still characterize the period from the Ascension of Christ to the Destruction of Jerusalem - AD 30-70 - as a whole, bring us to a point nearer to the end of the age. These are circumstances that threaten the Church from without and within: *persecution and apostasy*.

Persecution of Christians for Christ's Name's Sake: Matthew 24:9

Jesus had said, “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it hated* you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master’. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also” (John 15:18, 20). Therefore, the Christians will undergo persecution because they are united to Christ and faithful to Him. It is persecution for the sake of the Name of Christ.

The story²⁹ of the Acts of the Apostles traces the progress of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome (cf. Acts 19:21; 28:14). Jewish opposition to the Gospel is repeatedly set forth as one of Jewish persecution, murder and repudiation of those of their number who became believers³⁰. The persecution increases as time passes and extends itself to the Jewish communities throughout the empire. At the same time Luke seeks to show that the Roman government refused to be stampeded - by the Jews - into repressive measures against the Christians. The Jews enjoyed the right of religious propaganda under Roman protection and were quite irked to see the Christians, who at the first were all Jews, take advantage of the situation and presume on

²⁸ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, LXXV, 1.

²⁹ From Robert Newsom, *The King Judges His People: Jesus, Jerusalem and Judgment*, Unpublished Work, Copyright 2002.

³⁰ This can be seen if one takes a concordance and reads the references to "Jews" in the Book of Acts.

the same privilege themselves. At Rome itself Paul had liberty to evangelize (Acts 28:30-31). Acts reveals that the great enemies of the Church in the period from AD 30-63 were the Jews who, having killed Christ, sought to destroy His follows. But the persecutions from without would not destroy the Church nor derail her from her commission.

First Parable from the Old Testament: Exodus 1:1-20 “Persecution of the Saints”

The First Reading illustrates the groaning of Israel in Egypt under the oppression of Pharaoh. During this time, “The children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them” (Exodus 1:7). Similarly this was a time when the Church multiplied greatly also (Acts 9:31). The text from Exodus reads:

“These are the names of the sons of Israel that came into Egypt together with Jacob their father; they came in each with their whole family. Ruben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Benjamin, Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher! But Joseph was in Egypt. And all the souls *born* of Jacob were seventy-five. And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation. And the children of Israel increased and multiplied, and became numerous and grew exceedingly strong, and the land multiplied them”.

“And there arose up another king over Egypt, who knew not Joseph. And he said to his nation, Behold, the race of the children of Israel is a great multitude, and is stronger than we. Come then, let us deal craftily with them, lest at any time they be increased, and whenever war shall happen to us, these also shall be added to our enemies, and having prevailed against us in war, they will depart out of the land. And he set over them task-masters, who should afflict them in their works; and they built strong cities for Pharaoh, both Pithom, and Raamses, and On, which is Heliopolis. But as they humbled them, by so much they multiplied, and grew exceedingly strong; and the Egyptians greatly abhorred the children of Israel. And the Egyptians tyrannized the children of Israel by force. And they embittered their life by hard labors, in the clay and in brick-making, and all the works in the plains, according to all the works, wherein they caused them to serve with violence”.

“And the king of the Egyptians spoke to the midwives of the Hebrews; the name of the one was Shiphrah; and the name of the second, Puah. And he said, ‘When you do the office of midwife to the Hebrew women, and they are about to be delivered, if it be a male, kill it; but if a female, save it’. But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt appointed them; and they saved the male children alive. And the king of Egypt called the midwives, and said to them, ‘Why is it that you have done this thing, and saved the male children alive?’ And the midwives said to Pharaoh, ‘The Hebrew women are not as the women of Egypt, for they are delivered before the midwives go in to them’. So they bore children. God did well to the midwives; and the people multiplied, and grew very strong” (Exodus 1:1-20 LXX).

Just as Israel was persecuted by the Egyptians, so the Church was persecuted by the Jewish leaders throughout the world. Part of this persecution over the first three years came from Saul (later the Apostle Paul) as he “persecuted the Way to the death, binding and delivering

into prisons both men and women” (Acts 22:4). He “punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, he persecuted them even to foreign cities” (Acts 26:11). The Church had peace for a time after Paul’s conversion in c. 34 AD (Acts 9:31), but the persecution came back strongly a few years later (Acts 12:1-3).

Paul wrote to Timothy about a partially hidden agenda in our dealing with the world, “All who desire to live piously in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12) i.e. like Moses and like Paul himself. The Lord spelled out the reasons for this in John 15:18-16:4: some people simply hate God! And this is the partially hidden agenda that we face. Jesus said, “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you”, and “If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also” (John 15:18, 20). And why does the world hate God? Because He exposes its inadequacy just as Moses and Aaron exposed the inadequacy and impotence of the secret arts of Jannes and Jambres³¹!

This happens to us also, without our even trying. Jesus said, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My Word; and My Father will love him and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words” (John 14:23-24). The world, on the other hand, loves the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (John 2:5-17). By loving God, we testify that all this is passing away and is inadequate and impotent - whether we say anything or not!

This was true in Paul’s experience also and he reminded Timothy of this (2 Timothy 3:10-11). Timothy was evidently familiar with what happened to Paul on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:44-14:20) in Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium and Lystra. The persecution by the unbelieving Jews grew worse as Paul and Barnabas went along. The more miracles Paul performed, the greater the persecution. In Lystra, Paul was stoned by the Jews and left for dead (Acts 14:19).

So what did Paul say Timothy should do, knowing that persecutions will come? “But you must continue in the things which you have learned: the Holy Scriptures which make you wise to salvation” Paul continues, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness that the man of God may be equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:14-17). The Scriptures are also encouraging in that we see that we have a lot of company: “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely (i.e. lying) for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:11-12).

Apollinarius of Hierapolis, writing against the Montanist heretics, asserted³²: “Let them tell us, before God, who of all their prophets, beginning with Montanus and his wives, has been persecuted by the Jews and killed by the ungodly. No one! Who among them has been arrested for the Name of Christ, and crucified? Again no one!” Bishop Nicholai Velimirovic adds³³ to

³¹ Jannes and Jambres were the magicians that opposed Moses in Egypt. They were able to duplicate Moses’ sign where he turned Aaron’s staff into a snake (Exodus 7:8-13), and also the first two plagues (Exodus 7:14-8:7). But the third and following plagues they recognized as the “finger of God” (Exodus 8:19). But still they didn’t repent.

³² Quoted by Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, April 27..

³³ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, April 27.

this: “Heresies are usually closer to the worldly and demonic spirit, and therefore the world and the demons do not persecute their own. To be constantly under persecution - with short breathing spaces - is a distinguishing mark of the Faith and of the Orthodox Church. This persecution has existed throughout the whole of history, whether externally or internally; externally from unbelievers and internally from heretics”.

Paul warned Timothy of trouble ahead in Ephesus, “But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Timothy 3:13). The Apostle John had to deal with one of these men over 20 years later in ex-deacon Nicolas (Acts 6:5) who tolerated idolatry and encouraged fornication (Revelation 2:6, 15) as did other heretics.

Addressing times when the evil men seem to prevail, Chrysostom added³⁴, “Let none of these things, he says, disturb you, if they are in prosperity and you in trials. Such is the nature of the case. From my own instance you may learn that is impossible for man, in his warfare with the wicked, not to be exposed to tribulation. One cannot be in combat and live luxuriously; one cannot be wrestling and feasting. Let none therefore of those who are contending seek for ease or joyous living. Again, the present state is contest, warfare, tribulation, straits and trials, and the very scene of conflicts. The season of rest is not now; this is the time for work and labor”.

Velimirovic continued³⁵, “The Lord Jesus both foretold this and showed it by His own example. And the Apostles said it, and showed it by their own example. And all the God-bearing Fathers of the Church, and confessors and martyrs, said this, and showed it by their own example. Can we have any further doubt that it is by the narrow gate that one enters into the Kingdom of God?” For more discussion on the subject of persecution by men who hate God, see the Feast Days of Demetrius and George and the Feast Day of the Exaltation of the Cross with the Sundays Before and After.

Second Parable From the Old Testament: Job 1:1-12 “Satan Asks to Sift Job”

The second Old Testament Reading, Job 1:1-12, illustrates the request by Satan to sift the Patriarch Job, just as he sifted Peter just prior to the Crucifixion (Luke 22:31-32) and the Twelve Apostles later on. Satan had tried to do the same to Christ for three years and had failed. He recognized that Job was “a man blameless, true, godly, abstaining from everything evil” (Job 1:8 LXX). Yet Satan felt that all Job’s righteousness could be attributed to the Lord’s physical blessings in his life. So the Lord allowed Satan to take away all Job’s possessions in sifting him. Similarly in the 1st Century, the Jewish leaders, who were acting on behalf of their master, Satan, sought to sift the Church. The text of the reading from Job is:

“There was a certain man in the land of Uz³⁶, whose name *was* Job; and this man was true, blameless, righteous, *and* godly, abstaining from everything evil. And he had seven sons and three daughters. And his cattle consisted of seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred she-asses in the pastures, and a very great household, and he had a great husbandry on the earth; and that man was *most* noble of the *men* of the east. And

³⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Timothy, VIII, verse 13.

³⁵ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, April 27.

³⁶ Uz was adjacent to Mt. Seir, the later home of the descendants of Esau. At one time, the people of Mt. Seir also occupied Uz.

his sons visiting one another prepared a banquet every day, taking with them also their three sisters to eat and drink with them. And when the days of the banquet were completed, Job sent and purified them, having risen up in the morning, and offered sacrifices for them, according to their number, and one calf for a sin-offering³⁷ for their souls: for Job said, ‘Lest my sons have thought evil in their minds against God’. Thus, then Job did continually. And it came to pass on a day, that behold, the angels of God came to stand before the Lord, and the devil came with them. And the Lord said to the devil, ‘Where have you come from?’ And the devil answered the Lord, and said, ‘I am come from compassing the earth, and walking up and down in the world’. And the Lord said to him, ‘Have you diligently considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a man blameless, true, godly, and abstaining from everything evil?’ Then the devil answered, and said before the Lord, ‘Does Job worship the Lord for nothing? ‘Have you not made a hedge about him, and about his household, and all his possessions round about? And have you not blessed the works of his hands, and multiplied his cattle upon the land? But put forth your hand, and touch all that he has: verily he will bless³⁸ you to *your* face’. Then the Lord said to the devil, ‘Behold, I give into your hand all that he has, but touch not himself’. So the devil went out from the presence of the Lord” (Job 1:1-12 LXX).

Job was a descendant of Esau who lived during the years that Israel was in Egypt. His ordeals began with the Lord pointing out to Satan that Job was unique on the earth, “a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil” (Job 1:8). In his day, Job was unsurpassed in righteousness. Job even offered prayers and offerings for his ten children, consecrating them just in case they had sinned in their heart (Job 1:6). Satan felt that if Job were poor and destitute, he would curse God to His face (Job 1:11).

Satan recognized Job’s godliness, just as he recognized Christ (Matthew 4:1-10). Yet Satan felt that all Job’s righteousness could be attributed to the Lord’s physical blessings in Job’s life. So the Lord allowed Satan to take away all Job’s possessions in sifting him.

Similarly, Satan asked to sift Peter just prior to the Crucifixion. Peter offered to fight, and didn’t realize that he was no match for Satan without the Holy Spirit.

“And the Lord said, ‘Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift *you* as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to *Me*, strengthen your brethren’. But he said to Him, ‘Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death’. Then He said, ‘I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me’” (Luke 22:31-34).

³⁷ The sin-offering had not yet been defined by Moses, since Israel was still in Egypt during Job’s lifetime. How did Job know the Law? He knew it the same way Abraham knew it; he lived according to the Law that had been handed down from Adam. Tertullian said, “For in this law given to Adam, we recognize in embryo all the precepts which afterward sprouted forth when given through Moses. That is, You shall love the Lord your God from your whole heart and out of your whole soul; you shall love your neighbor as yourself; you shall not kill, etc.” (Answer to Jews, I, iii, 2). John Cassian added that the saints prior to Abraham observed the commands not only of the Law but even anticipated those of the Gospel (Conferences I, viii, 23).

³⁸ The Hebrew text says “curse” instead of “bless”. In the LXX text, Satan is being sarcastic to God.

The Falling Away from the Church: the Great Apostasy: Matthew 24:10-13

Jesus declares that one of the increasing characteristics of the age preceding the destruction of Jerusalem and the overthrow of Israel was to be apostasy within the Christian Church.

We generally think of the apostolic period as a time of tremendously explosive evangelism and church growth, a "golden age" when astonishing miracles took place every day. This common image is substantially correct, but it is flawed by one glaring omission. We tend to ignore one aspect of the New Testament evidence. The early Church was the scene of the most dramatic outbreak of heresy in world history.

The infiltration by heresy began early. Acts 15:1 refers to those who were teaching that one could not be saved who did not observe the circumcision of the flesh according to the Law of Moses. This was no minor matter as Paul called it "another Gospel" and pronounced damnation upon the false brethren who taught the heresy (Galatians 1:6-9; 2:5, 11-21; 3:1-3; 5:1-12). Later Paul warned the elders from Ephesus that heresy would invade and affect the churches of Asia Minor. They should "be on guard for yourselves and for all your flock" because "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them " (Acts 20:28-30). While Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth, "The churches of Asia greet you" (1 Corinthians 16:19), he later mourns, "This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me" (2 Timothy 1:15). By the time of the writing of the Revelation some churches had become almost completely ruined through the progress of heretical teaching and resulting apostasy (cf. Revelation 2:2, 6, 14-16, 20-24; 3:1-4, 15-18).

The problem was not limited geographically or culturally, but was widespread. Some heretics taught the Resurrection had already taken place (2 Timothy 2:18), while others claimed that resurrection was impossible (1 Corinthians 15:12). Some taught strange doctrines of extreme asceticism and angel worship (Colossians 2:8, 18-23; 1 Timothy 4:1-3), while others advocated all kinds of immorality and rebellion in the name of "liberty" (2 Peter 2:1-3, 10-22; Jude 4, 8, 10-13, 16). Repeatedly the Apostles found themselves issuing stern warnings against tolerating false teachers and "false apostles" (Romans 16:17-18; 2 Corinthians 11:3-4, 12-15; Philippians 3:18-19; 1 Timothy 1:3-7; 2 Timothy 4:2-5). These had been the cause of massive departures from the faith, and the extent of apostasy was increasing as the era progressed (1 Timothy 1:19-20; 6:20-21; 2 Timothy 2:16-18; 3:1-9, 13; 4:10, 14-16). One of the last New Testament books to be written, Hebrews, was written to an entire Christian community on the brink of wholesale abandonment of Christianity. Faith and miracles did not only characterize the Church of the first generation; it was also characterized by increasing lawlessness, rebellion, and heresy from within the Christian community itself. Jesus not only had warned His disciples but had also given them great assurance: "And at that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise to mislead many. And because lawlessness is increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved" (Matthew 24:10-13).

Later Church Fathers laid the source of most of these heresies at the feet of the Heresiarch Simon Magus³⁹. Simon Magus was originally a follower of John the Baptist, but he learned his black arts in Egypt. Luke introduces us to him when he tried to purchase the Holy Spirit to supplement his magic (Acts 8:9-23). A number of Church Fathers tell⁴⁰ of some of his claims: that he was the Father, or the Son, or the Comforter, or the God over all, and that the world was formed by his angels. Simon's heretical onslaught became so intense that Emperor Claudius (reigned 41-54 AD) erected a statue of Simon⁴¹ in Rome with the title "To Simon, the Holy God".

The Rise of Antichrist.

The Christians had a name for this apostasy; they called it antichrist. The term "antichrist" is defined quite well in the Epistles of the Apostle John, and are listed below. See Appendix A for a concise definition of "Antichrist" from the Epistles of John.

From the Apostle John's definition, we can draw some important conclusions that may help understand what the Church understood regarding the term "antichrist".

- a) Christians had already been warned about the coming of antichrist before John wrote (1 John 2:18; 4:3).
- b) There was not just one, but "many antichrists" (1 John 2:18)
- c) Antichrist was already working, as John wrote, "Even now many antichrists have arisen" (1 John 2:18). "I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you" (1 John 2:26). "You have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world" (1 John 4:3). "Many deceivers have gone out into the world. This is the deceiver and the antichrist" (2 John 7). The "antichrist" was already present in the 1st Century; whether he was some individual personal figure who would arise at the end of the world is not addressed.
- d) Antichrist was a system of unbelief, particularly the heresy of denying the person and work of Jesus Christ. Although the antichrists apparently claimed to belong to the Father, they taught that Jesus was not the Christ (1 John 2:22). In union with the false prophets (1 John 4:1), they denied the Incarnation (1 John 4:3; 2 John 7, 9); and they rejected Apostolic doctrine (1 John 4:6).
- e) The antichrists had been members of the Christian Church, but had apostatized (1 John 2:19). Now these apostates were attempting to deceive other Christians, in order to sway the Church as a whole away from the Lord Jesus Christ (1 John 2:26; 4:1; 2 John 7, 10).

In summary, we can see that antichrist is a description of both the system of apostasy and individual apostates. "Antichrist" was a fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy that a time of great apostasy would come (Matthew 24:10-11). John said that Christians had been warned of coming antichrists; and, sure enough, "many antichrists" had arisen. For a time they had believed the

³⁹ For more information on the influence of Simon Magus, see Mark Kern, Simon Magus the Heresiarch, St.Athanasius Press, 2002.

⁴⁰ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, II, Preface, 1, II, ix, 1, III, Preface.
Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, VI, 14.
Ignatius, "To the Trallians", 10-11, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 1.
Vincent of Lerins, The Commonitory, XXIV, 62-63.

These references are summed up in Mark Kern, Simon Magus the Heresiarch, St.Athanasius Press, 2002, p. 40.

⁴¹ Justin Martyr, First Apology, XXVI, LVI.
Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, VI, 14.

Gospel; later they had forsaken the faith, and then went about trying to deceive others⁴², either by starting new cults or, more likely, seeking to draw Christians back into Judaism - the false religion which claimed to worship the Father while denying the Son. When the doctrine of antichrist is understood, it fits in perfectly with what the rest of the New Testament tells us about the “terminal generation”.

When the Lord later refers to His Second Advent, He speaks of a similar apostasy accompanied by great signs and wonders designed to deceive, if possible, even the elect (Matthew 24:24). Paul refers to “The man of sin” and the “lawless one” (2 Thessalonians 2:3, 8), and the Church Fathers often refer to this individual as “The Antichrist” who will come just prior to the Second Advent. See Appendix B for commentary on “The Antichrist” by the Church Fathers.

Antichrist Will Deceive Many.

As one of the most prominent sources of heresy in the 1st Century, Simon Magus was responsible for the falling away of four of the Original Seventy Apostles (Luke 10:1-20). As a master magician, Simon used his illusions to give himself the appearance of being able to perform great miracles – and thus he appeared to have Apostolic authority. Those in the Early Church that became his disciples⁴³ are as follows:

- **Nicolas** of Antioch was one of the first seven deacons (Acts 6:5) and one of the original Seventy (Luke 10:1-20). When Simon came to Antioch, Nicolas began to follow his teachings, and Nicolas was later rebuked very strongly by the Apostle John (Revelation 2:14-15).
- **Demas** was a companion of Paul and Luke at the time that Paul was under house arrest in Rome (c. 62 AD), and was mentioned by Paul as he drafted his Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon (Colossians 4:14, Philemon 1:24). However, Demas began following the teachings of Simon shortly afterward, and within 5 years, Paul stated that Demas “had forsaken me, having loved this present world” (2 Timothy 4:10). Hippolytus stated that Demas became “a priest of idols”⁴⁴
- **Phygellus and Hermogenes**: Just before his death in c. 67 AD, Paul wrote that Phygellus and Hermogenes had turned away from him (2 Timothy 1:15). Hippolytus stated that these two of the Seventy began to follow Simon’s teachings, and were therefore deleted from the ranks of the Seventy⁴⁵
- **Alexander** was the son of Simon of Cyrene, who helped to carry Jesus’ Cross (Mark 15:21). Together with his father and brother Rufus, who was one of the Seventy, Alexander helped to found the Church in Antioch (Acts 11:20). By the mid 60’s AD, Alexander had become a follower of Simon, and Paul delivered him over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh⁴⁶ on account of his

⁴² For more information on the spread of heresy in the 1st Century, see Mark Kern, Simon Magus the Heresiarch, St.Athanasius Press, 2002.

⁴³ Mark Kern, Simon Magus the Heresiarch, St.Athanasius Press, 2002, p. 56.

⁴⁴ Hippolytus, “On the Seventy Apostles”, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 5.

⁴⁵ Hippolytus, “On the Seventy Apostles”, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 5.

⁴⁶ Compare 1 Corinthians 5:4-5. The intent was the eventual salvation of the individual through a greater recognition of who it is that he’s in league with.

- blasphemy (1 Timothy 1:20). A year or two later, Alexander was instrumental in affecting Paul's martyrdom (2 Timothy 4:14-15).
- **Hymenaeus** was associated with Alexander and was also delivered over to Satan by Paul (1 Timothy 1:20). A year or two later, Hymenaeus was still busy teaching Simon's doctrine of the resurrection (2 Timothy 2:17-18).
 - **Philetas** was an associate of Hymenaeus who also taught Simon's doctrine (2 Timothy 2:17-18).

Christ's Advent and "Antichrist", "the Last Days", and "the Last Hour".

John stresses one further significant point when referring to the "spirit of antichrist". As Jesus foretold, the coming of the great apostasy, antichrist, is a sign of "the end" (Matthew 24:10-13). "Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour" (1 John 2:18). The connection people often make between the antichrist and "the last days" is correct enough. But what is often missed is the fact that the expression the last days, and similar terms, are used in the Bible to refer, not only to the end of the physical world, but to the last days of the Old Covenant, the last days of the nation of Israel, the "last days" which ended with the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. The New Testament authors unquestionably used end times language when speaking of the period in which they were living before the fall of Jerusalem. The period spoken of in the Bible as "the last days" (or "last times", or "last hour") is often the period between Christ's birth and the destruction of Jerusalem. The early Church was living at the end of the old age and the beginning of the new. The Fathers, for the most part, clearly understood this. Athanasius, for example, said⁴⁷:

“And when He Who spoke to Moses, the Word of the Father, appeared *in the end of the world*, He also gave this commandment, saying, ‘But when they persecute in this city, flee into another (Matthew 10:23). And shortly after He says, ‘When you therefore shall see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand); then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains’ (Matthew 24:15). Knowing these things, the saints regulated their conduct accordingly”.

This whole period is to be considered as the time of Christ's "First" Advent. In both the Old and New Testament, the promised destruction of Jerusalem is considered to be an aspect of the work of Christ, intimately connected with His work of redemption. Moreover, Christ's birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, outpouring of the Holy Spirit, present session in Heaven, gathering of His people from the ends of the earth, building His new Temple the Church, coming to raise the dead and judge the world, are all parts of His one work of bringing in His Kingdom.

The radical separation of Christ's "first" and "second" comings tends to give support to the idea that nothing is going on during the time in between - the present age. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The Lord will accomplish His purpose throughout the age; and His Church will accomplish Her initial task of preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom even in the face of *persecution from without and apostasy from within*.

⁴⁷ Athanasius of Alexandria, Defense of His Flight, 11.

The Gospel Shall Be Preached as a Witness to All Nations: Matthew 24:14

Jesus stated, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the entire world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). The “end” referred to here is the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

Some may say that this preaching in the entire world certainly did not take place before AD 70. The Fathers, following the Scriptures, have quite a different understanding. For example, John Chrysostom comments⁴⁸:

“Then indicating that these things will in no degree harm the noble and the firm, He said, ‘Fear not, neither be troubled. For if you show forth the patience that becomes you, the dangers will not prevail over you. You shall both live and preach everywhere’. Therefore He added moreover, ‘And this gospel shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all nations, and then shall the end come’, of the downfall of Jerusalem”.

“For in proof that He meant this, and that before the taking of Jerusalem the gospel was preached, hear what Paul said, ‘Their sound went into all the earth’ (Romans 10:18); and again, ‘The gospel which was preached to every creature which is under Heaven’ (Colossians 1:23). And do you see him running from Jerusalem to Spain? (Romans 15:24, 28) And if one took so large a portion, consider what the rest also wrought. For writing to others also, Paul again said concerning the gospel, that ‘it is bringing forth fruit, and growing up in every creature which is under heaven’” (Colossians 1:6).

“But what does it mean, ‘For a witness to all nations?’ Although it was everywhere preached, yet it was not everywhere believed. It was for a witness, He said, to them that were disbelieving, that is, for conviction, for accusation, for a testimony. And for this cause, after the gospel was preached in every part of the world, Jerusalem was destroyed, that they may not have so much as a shadow of an excuse for their perverseness”.

“This is also a very great sign of Christ's power, that in twenty or at the most thirty years the word had reached the ends of the world. ‘After this therefore’, said He, ‘shall come the end of Jerusalem’”.

The Fathers listened⁴⁹ to the words of Christ and saw it fulfilled in the works of Christ. The Scriptures proclaim, the Fathers confirm, and the Church commemorates that the Gospel indeed was preached to the whole world before Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70. This is the message contained in the Prokiemenon which is sung in commemoration of Apostles everywhere: "Their voice has gone out into all the earth and their words to the ends of the world!"

The continuation of the Jerusalem Temple and the presence of Jewish synagogues and religious life throughout the Roman Empire provided a highway for the preaching of the Apostles. The message was to the Jew first and also the Gentiles. When the initial work of preaching had been accomplished and Churches were established distinct from the Jewish

⁴⁸ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, LXXV, 2.

⁴⁹ From Robert Newsom, *The King Judges His People: Jesus, Jerusalem and Judgment*, Unpublished Work, Copyright 2002.

synagogues there would longer be a need for the husk of Judaism to remain. Then would come to pass “the days of vengeance to fulfill all that was written” (Luke 21:22); and the wrath of the Lamb would reveal that the earthly Jerusalem was no longer the city of God.

The Abomination of Desolation: Matthew 24:15

Daniel the Prophet, writing during the Babylonian Captivity, had predicted the destruction of Jerusalem and the desecration of the Temple. Daniel wrote:

“Seventy weeks have been determined upon your people, and upon the holy city, for sin to be ended, to seal up transgressions, to blot out the iniquities, to make atonement for iniquities, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal the vision and the prophet, and to anoint the Most Holy. And you shall know and understand, from the going forth of the command for the answer and for the building⁵⁰ of Jerusalem until Christ the prince, *there shall be* seven weeks, and sixty-two weeks. And then *the time* shall return, and the street shall be built, and the wall and the times shall be exhausted. And after the sixty-two weeks, the anointed one shall be destroyed, and there is no judgment in him. And he shall destroy the city and the sanctuary with the prince that is coming: they shall be cut off with a flood, and to the end of the war which is rapidly completed he shall appoint *the city* to desolation. And one week shall establish the covenant with many: and in the midst of the week my sacrifice and drink offering shall be taken away. And on the temple *shall be* the abomination of desolation; and at the end of time an end shall be put to the desolation” (Daniel 9:24-27 LXX).

Athanasius of Alexandria appealed to Daniel's prophecy, and its fulfillment in AD 70, to refute the Jews, who were saying that they were still waiting for the Messiah.

“But they [the Jews] shall be refuted⁵¹ on this supreme point more clearly than on any, and that not by ourselves but by the most wise Daniel, for he signifies the actual date of the Savior's coming as well as His Divine Advent in our midst. ‘Seventy weeks are cut short upon your people and upon the holy city, to make a complete end of sin and for sins to be sealed up and iniquities blotted out, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to seal vision and prophet, and to anoint a Holy One of holies. You shall know and understand from the going forth of the Word to restore, and to build Jerusalem, until Christ the Prince’ (Daniel 9:24, 25). In regard to other prophecies, they may possibly be able to find excuses for deferring their reference to a future time, but what can they say to this one? Not only does it expressly mention the Anointed One that is the Christ, it even declares that He Who is to be anointed is not man only, but the Holy One of holies! And it says that Jerusalem is to stand until His coming, and that after it prophet and vision shall cease in Israel. Nor is it any use for the Jews to take refuge in the Captivity, and say that Jerusalem did not exist then, for what about the Prophets? It is a fact that at the outset of the Exile Daniel and Jeremiah were there, and Ezekiel and Haggai and Zechariah also prophesied.

⁵⁰ The Hebrew reads “To restore and build”

⁵¹ Athanasius, On the Incarnation, XXXIX, 2-5.

"So the Jews are indulging in fiction⁵², and transferring present time to the future⁵³. It is, in fact, a sign and notable proof of the coming of the Word that Jerusalem no longer stands. The plain fact is, as I say, that there is no longer any king or prophet nor Jerusalem nor sacrifice nor vision among them. Yet the whole earth is filled with the knowledge of God, and the Gentiles, forsaking atheism, are now taking refuge with the God of Abraham through the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ".

"This will give you a beginning⁵⁴, and you must go on to prove its truth by the study of the Scriptures. They were written and inspired by God; and we, who have learned from inspired teachers who read the Scriptures and became martyrs for the Godhead of Christ, make further contribution to your eagerness to learn. From the Scriptures you will learn also of His second manifestation to us, glorious and divine indeed, when He shall come not in lowliness but in proper glory".

To this one might add that Matthew wrote his Gospel long before 70 AD when the events took place⁵⁵. Therefore Matthew includes the code words "Whoever reads, let him understand" so that future readers of his Gospel account might understand what it means. The "abomination of desolation" occurred when the Roman general Titus entered Jerusalem after the Temple had been burned. Before burning Jerusalem to the ground, his soldiers set up the Roman "gods" by the Eastern Gate of the Temple and offered sacrifices to them⁵⁶. As conqueror, Titus offered to spare the lives of the remaining Jews if they would throw down their arms. They refused; so Titus said that would therefore spare no one, and proceeded to burn down the city⁵⁷.

The Parallel Account in Luke

In Luke's account, the abomination of desolation⁵⁸ may be translated as the abomination, which desolates. Two elements are involved: first, it will be repulsive to the religious sense of the people (cf. reference to the holy place); second, it will bring a horrible destruction. Mark and Matthew use the expression abomination of desolation, but Luke explains this by interpreting Daniel for his largely gentile audience, which might not be familiar with the Old Testament. He identifies it as the pagan army of Rome:

"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies⁵⁹, then you know that its desolation is near". "Then He said to flee!" (Luke 21:20, 21).

Armies before had surrounded the city; sometimes they were conquered, sometimes they were delivered. But when the idolatrous standards of the Roman army are seen, it means the final day for Jerusalem. There will be no deliverance; they have rejected their Messiah and the Christ of the Living God has rejected them. It is important for Jesus' disciples to understand then

⁵² Athanasius, On the Incarnation, XL, 1-5.

⁵³ This is still happening today!

⁵⁴ Athanasius, On the Incarnation, LVI, 1-3.

⁵⁵ For a study on the life of the Apostle Matthew, including his drafting his Gospel in the Hebrew language in the early 30's AD prior to leaving for his missionary journeys, see Mark Kern, The Apostle Matthew, Unpublished Work, 2002.

⁵⁶ Josephus, Wars of the Jews, VI, vi, 1.

⁵⁷ Josephus, Wars of the Jews, VI, vi, 2-3.

⁵⁸ G. R. Beasley-Murray, "Abomination of Desolation", Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House 1988, Vol. 1, p.74-75.

⁵⁹ The Greek reads: When you see Jerusalem *being surrounded* by armies then know that its desolation *has drawn* near.

will be the last opportunity to flee the city. Athanasius reminds⁶⁰ us that they did remember and they did flee; a very practical benefit gained by understanding this passage!

Cyril of Alexandria commented⁶¹ on the events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem.

“But in the middle of His account, the Savior places what refers to the capture of Jerusalem (Luke 21:12-24); for He mixes the accounts together in both parts of the narrative. For before all these things, He says, they shall lay their hands upon you, and persecute you, delivering you up to synagogues and to prisons, and bringing you before kings and rulers for My Name's sake. But this shall prove unto you a witnessing”.

“Before Jerusalem was laid waste, the blessed disciples were persecuted by them. They were imprisoned and had part in unendurable trials; they were brought before judges and were sent unto kings; for Paul was sent unto Rome to Caesar. But these things that were brought upon them were to them a witness to win for them the glory of martyrdom”⁶².

Captivity for Seventy Years

Before going into the Destruction of Jerusalem in c. 70 AD, it is important to understand the Destruction of Jerusalem in the 6th century BC. Daniel was one of the captives who were carried away to Babylon in the 6th century BC; but he understood that the Time of the Judgment of Jerusalem under the Babylonians would be Seventy Years (Daniel 9:1-2; Jeremiah 25:11-12).

“And this whole land shall be desolation and astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Then it will come to pass, when seventy years are completed, that I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, says the Lord” (Jeremiah 25:11-12). The period probably is to be counted from the second and final deportation of the Jews, 586 BC, until about 516 BC with the rebuilding of the Temple.

Forgiveness for Israel

Daniel first confessed the Sin of the People and of the City; then he prayed for Forgiveness and Blessing. This prayer is a calling upon the mercy of the Lord God of the Covenant to remember His people, His city and His promised redemption (Daniel 9: 4, 9, 17-19, esp. 19). As Daniel had begun to pray, the Lord sent His angel Gabriel with a message of hope and encouragement. God would deliver His people by bringing to pass the coming of the Messiah. This would differ from much of the popular understanding. Messiah would come after a long and turbulent period, but He would come. The exact time of the coming of Messiah is revealed here to Daniel

⁶⁰ Athanasius, *Defense of His Flight*, 11.

⁶¹ Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke*, Homily 139.

⁶² In the Greek the word for witness is martyr, and Cyril interprets our Lord's declaration in the sense to which the word had been limited in the fourth century "of bearing witness with one's life." The original passage rather means, "This shall give you an opportunity of bearing testimony of Me in a more public manner, and in places not otherwise accessible to you."

Gabriel Brings an Answer

Daniel Received the Lord's Answer through the Archangel Gabriel (Daniel 9:20-27), and the revelation is the direct response to Daniel's prayer. It was sent that Daniel, who is greatly beloved of God, might have insight and understanding; a message of great prophetic import (Daniel 9:20-23).

The Message of the Seventy-sevens or Seventy weeks (Daniel 9:24-27) are understood as weeks of years in keeping with the use of years in Daniel 9:1-2 and the actual arrival of the Lord's Messiah. "A period of seventy weeks is determined for your people and for your holy city" (Daniel 9:24). The verb is singular and the period is treated as a unit. The message: Within a period of 490 years the Messiah will come and accomplish certain things with reference to redemption. The prophecy and the fulfillment, Daniel and the New Testament, are compared in Table 1.

Daniel had cried: "O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your Name" (Daniel 9:19). The Messiah will come and redeem His people; it will happen near the end of a 490-year period. 70 x 7 is a symbol of "full" fullness; the fulfillment was always the Messiah and the salvation which He would bring (Matt 18:22).

Table 1
Daniel 9 Versus the New Testament

| DANIEL 9 PROPHECY | FULFILLMENT |
|---|--|
| To finish the transgression | Refers to Christ's work of atonement |
| To make an end of sins, make reconciliation for iniquity, or to make atonement for iniquity | At the Cross (cf. Hebrews 9:24-28; <i>et al.</i>) |
| To bring in everlasting righteousness | Righteousness is the result of Christ's work, (cf. Romans 1:17; 3:21; 8:4; 10:14; Philippians 3:9; <i>et al.</i>). |
| To seal up vision and prophecy | Fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies and the Cessation of Prophecy and Revelation as <i>Scripture</i> |
| To anoint the Most Holy | Messiah is "Anointed one": Baptism to Ascension; anointed with the Holy Spirit as prophet (Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18); priest (Hebrews 7:23- 24) and king (Hebrews 1:9); but especially at the descent of the Spirit at Jesus' Baptism. |

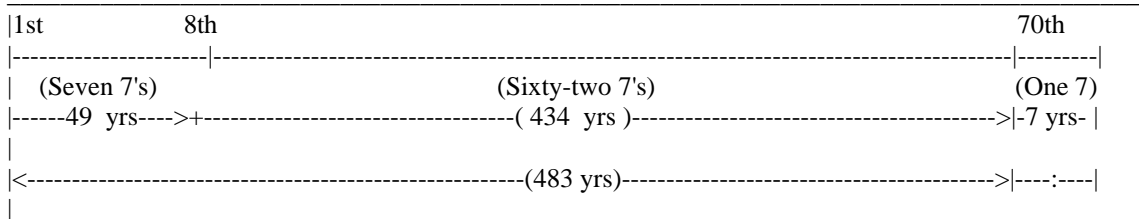
Messiah-City Parallelism in Daniel's Prophecy⁶³

The prophecy is then expanded giving details in connection with Messiah the Prince (Daniel 9:25-26). There is a parallelism in each verse: *first*, a word about the Messiah, Jesus; *second*, a word about the city, Jerusalem and judgment. It is important to follow the Messiah - City parallelism to aid in understanding what is being said.

⁶³ This section follows Robert Newsom, The King Judges His People: Jesus, Jerusalem and Judgment, Unpublished Work, Copyright 2002.

A structure is revealed about the weeks; they are identified as *7 weeks, 62 weeks, and one week*. The prophetic focus is on events taking place in the first and last periods, the first seven weeks and the last, the seventieth week.

The Seventy Weeks of Years



The Messiah

Messiah shall begin His ministry 483 years (69 weeks) after the order to rebuild Jerusalem; He will inaugurate His ministry at the beginning of the 70th week (Daniel 9:25). Jesus came to be baptized by John and anointed with the Holy Spirit in the fullness of time (Matthew 3:13-17). Jesus began His ministry in 27 AD; 483 years earlier is 456 BC.

In Ezra 1:1-4 we find that the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, King of Persia, to rebuild His Temple in the king's first year (538 BC) when he conquered Babylon. But the decree to rebuild that is spoken of here is that of the 7th year (457-56) of Artaxerxes and involves the mission of Ezra (Ezra 7:8 ff). Ezra's mission was confirmed and extended in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes (446-45 BC), when Nehemiah was commissioned to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the city walls (Nehemiah 1-2).

"On the traditional view⁶⁴, the 69 weeks (483 years) mark the interval from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem till the appearance of Christ. And if the decree in question is taken to be that of the 7th year of Artaxerxes (457-56 BC, the 483 years run out about 27-28 AD, when our Lord's public ministry began.

On the other hand, the view which supposes that the Book of Daniel belongs wholly to the Maccabean age, and does not here contain genuine prediction, is under the necessity of making the 490 years terminate with the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes (171-164 BC). And this, it is admitted, cannot be done⁶⁵.

Therefore Jesus came to be baptized by John and anointed with the Holy Spirit at the exact time prophesied by the prophet Daniel (Matthew 3:13-17).

The City

The city shall be rebuilt in troublesome times. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah describe these troublesome times connected with the rebuilding of the City and its wall.

⁶⁴ Pusey, Daniel the Prophet, Lectures II, III, IV

⁶⁵ James Orr, "Seventy Weeks" , The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1952, Vol. IV, p. 2744.

The Messiah

After the 69th week of years (i.e. sometime in the 70th week) he will be put to death - "cut off" (Daniel 9:26). The phrase "cut off" is that of Isaiah 53:8, "For he was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of my people was he stricken". He was utterly rejected by God and man. "Shall have nothing" may refer to the city and Temple in the light of the following context (cf. Matthew 23:37).

The City

As a consequence of the Messiah's death the city shall be destroyed by the people of another ruler; terrible devastation after a siege. No deliverance for it has been determined. This destruction was done against the orders of the Roman General Titus who had wanted to spare the Temple from destruction⁶⁶. The means are the people, not the prince. The cause is the rejection of the Messiah. (cf. Parable of the Wicked Wine-growers in Matthew 21:33-46).

The thought of the Messiah's death could only bring alarm (Daniel 9:27). What about His work spoken of (Daniel 9:24) and summarized in Table 1? The parallel is still Messiah, City. The "he" referred to (Daniel 9:27) is Messiah. Some try to make the pronoun refer to "the prince" in the phrase "the people of the prince who is to come" (Daniel 9:26); it is not the grammatical precedent and would destroy the pattern of the message. The point⁶⁷ of the passage is this: The fulfillment of the coming of the Messiah and His acts; and then, consequently, what befalls the City.

The Messiah

His work will be successful; He will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, i.e., the remainder of the indicated time. "The many" is covenantal language describing Christ and His people (cf. Romans 5:12-20). Our Lord spoke of this saying: "Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins'" (Matthew 26:27-28; cf. Luke 22:20).

The result and the time of Messiah's death are revealed: in the middle of the 70th week, i.e., three and one-half years after His anointing. This is the period recorded in the Gospels of our Lord's earthly ministry - from His Baptism to His Crucifixion. After His death no other sacrifice was acceptable to God; the rent temple veil spoke eloquently and clearly (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). Soon, there would be no temple for false sacrifices.

The City

Its temple would be destroyed and the worship that was unacceptable would no longer be possible. The City was leveled; the Temple destroyed; the Jews scattered. The "wing of abominations" may be a reference to the Roman Army ensign, which was considered idolatrous. The destruction was to be utter desolation; a full and complete end will be poured out on the devastated city⁶⁸.

⁶⁶ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, VI, iv, 6-7.

⁶⁷ A very helpful article, "Seventy Weeks", A. A. Hoekema, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (Revised)*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company). 1988, pp. 427-428

⁶⁸ The exact time of the desolation of the City is NOT stated; only, that it will follow the death of the Messiah. The death of the Messiah is the last DATED time point in the prophecy. Remember "70x7" is an expression of the ultimate "fullness" which is applied to the coming of the Messiah. The Fathers saw a chronological as

Our Lord not only adds the definitive element of when (Matthew 24:34), but also what! It is characteristic of Biblical prophecy that everything is not revealed all at once. Daniel heard some things he did not understand and when asked about them he was told, "Go, Daniel! For the words are sealed up and closed until the end time" because their fulfillment is distant (cf. Daniel 12:8-9; Revelation 10:5-7). In the New Testament, especially the Book of Revelation, these things are "open" and "unsealed" because the fulfillment is near (cf. Revelation 22:10); there are also some things in it which are "sealed" from our knowledge because their fulfillment is distant (Revelation 10:3-4). So the elements of this part of Daniel are completely in keeping with the rest of the biblical usage. See Appendix C, Secret Things and Revealed Things.

Daniel is to rejoice and have hope; the Messiah is coming to bring about full redemption. However, Jerusalem will reject the Messiah and that act will be fatal. It is clear that there will be no hope in the City or the Temple of Jerusalem. The only hope is in the Lord of the New Jerusalem; not in the blood of bulls and goats, but in the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ shed for His people. It is foolish and sinful to point men to hope in a restored temple and its sacrifices; to turn from Christ to the city.

"For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified". "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem; to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in Heaven, to God the Judge of all. To the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel" (Hebrews 10:14; 12:22-24).

The Great Tribulation: Matthew 24:15-28

Jesus' instruction regarding what will occur in Jerusalem is not simply to satisfy prophetic curiosity; it is very practical and extremely critical regarding the lives of Christians. It has to do with the provision for the protection of the Church and the continuation of her ministry in the world.

Christ commands Christians to flee Jerusalem: Matthew 24:15-20

Christ's words are to flee, and to flee at once; nothing is to stand in the way of an immediate escape once the city has become the object of an armed invasion. During the Jewish Wars, 66-70 AD, Jerusalem had been approached by heathen armies on several occasions. The specific event referred to as THE SIGN TO FLEE is, probably, the attack by the Edomites (Idumeans) upon Jerusalem in 68 AD.

Several times in Israel's history, as she was being attacked by heathen enemies, the Edomites had broken in to ravage and desolate the city, thus adding greatly to Israel's misery (2 Chronicles 20:2; 28:17; Psalm 137:7; Ezekiel 35:5-15; Amos 1:9, 11; Obadiah 10-16). Remaining true to form, their characteristic behavior was repeated during the Great Tribulation

well as symbolic element in passage (cf. Athanasius the Great, above). In the Scriptures, the fulfillment always sheds light on the prophecy; the Lord's Christ had come. The Lord's death in the middle of the 70th Week - after 3 1/2 years of ministry speaks of "incompleteness".

of Jerusalem. One evening in 68 AD they surrounded the city with 20,000 soldiers. As they lay outside the city wall, Josephus wrote⁶⁹: “There broke out a storm in the night, with the utmost violence, and very strong winds, with the largest showers of rain, with continual lightning, terrible thundering, and amazing concussions and bellowing of the earth, that was an earthquake. These things were a clear indication that some destruction was coming upon men, when the system of the world was put in this disorder; and anyone would guess that these wonders foreshadowed some grand calamities that were coming”.

Many of the Church Fathers⁷⁰ refer their readers to the account of Josephus for the vast, astonishing, and horrific descriptions of the fulfillment of our Lord's prophecy of the Great Tribulation, the destruction of Jerusalem, 70 AD, and the events leading up to and following it. In his Preface, Flavius Josephus wrote⁷¹: “Accordingly it appears to me, that the misfortunes of all men, from the beginning of the world, if they were compared to these of the Jews, are not as bad as they were. See Appendix D, “Josephus and the Destruction of Jerusalem”, for a suggested list of relevant sections for reading. The early Church Fathers held the reports of Josephus in very high regard and directed the attention of their hearers to them on many occasions. It would be very worthwhile for modern Christians to read these accounts.

This was the last opportunity to escape from the doomed city of Jerusalem. Anyone who wished to flee had to do so immediately, without delay. The Edomites burst into the city and went directly to the Temple, where they slaughtered 8,500 people by slitting their throats. As the Temple overflowed with blood, the Edomites rushed through the city streets, plundering houses and murdering everyone they met, including the high priest. Josephus said⁷² that this event marked “the beginning of the destruction of the city. From this date may be dated the overthrow of her wall, and the ruin of her affairs”. Jesus said, “This is the sign! Don't be misled by anything else! Know what it means! Run for your life!”

Without any delay those in Jerusalem are to flee to the hill country, where the caves that concealed the people in 173 BC from Antiochus Epiphanes would shield them again. If you are on a rooftop, go on across the roofs and out of the city. Take nothing for nothing is worth your life. Pray that you may be without hardship, handicap or hindrance. Pregnant women and suckling babes will have difficulty in travel; there will be no help from their countrymen.

Christ Reveals This as the Great Tribulation of Jerusalem: Matthew 24:21-22

Understand, there never has been, nor will there be, anything like this! The Great Tribulation was to take place, not at the end of history, but in the middle, for nothing similar had occurred “from the beginning of the world until now, or ever shall”. Luke adds something, but sees it as a middle-of-history event.

“For these are days of vengeance, that all things that are written may be fulfilled. Woe unto to them that are with child and give suck in those days! There shall be great distress upon the land and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led captive into all nations: and

⁶⁹ Josephus, Wars of the Jews, IV, iv, 5.

⁷⁰ For example, Eusebius, Athanasius and John Chrysostom

⁷¹ Josephus, Wars of the Jews, Preface, 4.

⁷² Josephus, Wars of the Jews, IV, v, 1-2.

Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:22-24, RV).

The prophecy of the Great Tribulation refers to the destruction of the Temple in that generation alone. It cannot be made to fit some "double-fulfillment", "parenthesis" or "postponement" scheme of interpretation: the Great Tribulation of 70 AD was an absolutely unique event, never to be repeated. John Chrysostom says⁷³:

“Jesus is speaking of the ills that should overtake them. The Apostles were not to keep the Sabbath day, neither to be there when Vespasian did those things. Some of the Apostles had already departed this life. Those that were left were dwelling in other parts of the world. And let not any men suppose this to have been spoken hyperbolically; but let him study the writings of Josephus, and learn the truth of the sayings. Note how bad things got; when compared with the time before, they appear more gruesome, but also with all the time to come. Therefore He said, ‘There shall be tribulation such as never was, nor shall be’”.

In a modern commentary⁷⁴ on the Great Tribulation of 70 AD, the horror of the event exceeds even the Holocaust of World War II.

“Considering the physical, moral and religious aspects of this horrible happening in history, one may safely say that the Jews have never experienced such a tribulation even up to this day. We must remember that Jesus is speaking about a tribulation to be experienced only by the Jewish nation. The Jews have suffered a great many tribulations since the destruction of Jerusalem, and particularly do we remember their sufferings during the Second World War; yet these times cannot compare with that which Jesus described in his Olivet Discourse”.

The loss of life was enormous, although the siege lasted only four or five months, from April or May until September, 70 AD. Titus, the Roman general, an experienced military commander, made the following comment⁷⁵ after the destruction.

“We have certainly had God for our assistant in this war, and it was no other than God who ejected the Jews out of these fortifications, for what could the hands of men, or any machines, do toward overthrowing these towers”.

The atrocities which the Jews within the city committed on each other⁷⁶, plus the crimes against them by their neighbors only add a nearly unbelievable element to this time of trial, were it not for our Lord's own words as to its intensity.

“But the famine was too hard for all other passions, and it is destructive to nothing so much as modesty. For what was otherwise worthy of reverence was in this case despised. Children pulled the very morsels that their fathers were eating out of their mouths, and what still more to be pitied, so did the mothers do as to their infants. When those that were most dear were perishing under their hands,

⁷³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXVI, 1.

⁷⁴ J. Marcellus Kik, Matthew Twenty Four, The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, p.59.

⁷⁵ Josephus, Wars of the Jews, VI, ix, 1.

⁷⁶ Josephus, Wars of the Jews, V, x, 3.

they were not ashamed to take from them the very last drops that might preserve their lives”.

Josephus gives⁷⁷ a horrible example of cannibalism, which could be multiplied with others even more unfit to hear. Here is an example of the wrath that the people had called down on themselves (cf. Matthew 27:25).

"A wealthy and cultured woman had stored up a great deal of food, but during the siege, she was robbed, as was very common. Cursing the villains in her despair, she then attempted a most unnatural thing. Snatching up her son, who was a child suckling at her breast she said, 'O miserable infant: for whom shall I preserve you in this war, in this famine, in this sedition? Come on: you be my food, and you be a fury to these seditious varlets, and a by-word to the world, which is all that is now lacking to complete the calamities of the Jews'. As soon as she said this, she slew her son, and then roasted him, and ate one-half of him, and kept the other half concealed. After this the seditious came in, and smelling the scent of this horrid food, they threatened her that they would cut her throat immediately if she did not show them what food she had gotten ready. She replied that she had saved a very fine portion of it for them, and then uncovered what was left of her son. Seeing this they were seized with a horror and amazement of mind, and stood astonished at the sight; when she said to them, 'This is my own son, and what has been done was my own doing! Come, eat of this food; for I have eaten of it myself. Do not pretend to be either more tender than a woman, or more compassionate than a mother; but if you be so scrupulous, and do not abominate this my sacrifice, as I have eaten the one-half, let the rest be reserved for me also'. After this those men went out trembling, never having been so alarmed at anything as they were this, and with some difficulty they left the rest of that meat to the mother”.

The fury of the Roman soldiers was kindled against the Jews; and their greedy neighbors also showed them no mercy. Josephus also tells of warring parties in the city. Not even the Temple was spared but was used as a battleground by these warring parties. Worshippers were killed before the altar and hundreds of dead were strewn within the Temple. Josephus laments the horrible situation:

“O most wretched city⁷⁸, what misery so great as this did you ever suffer from the Romans, when they came to purify you from your intestine hatred! For you could be no longer a place fit for God, nor could you continue to exist very long, after you had been a sepulcher for the bodies of your own people, and had made the holy house a burying-place in this civil war of yours”.

“It is therefore impossible⁷⁹ to go distinctly over every instance of these men's iniquity. I shall therefore speak my mind at once here briefly -- no other city ever suffered such miseries, nor did any age ever breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness than this was, from the beginning of the world” (cf. Acts 2:40).

⁷⁷ Josephus, Wars of the Jews, VI, iii, 4.

⁷⁸ Josephus, Wars of the Jews, V, i, 3.

⁷⁹ Josephus, Wars of the Jews, V, x, 5.

Some of the Jews sought to escape to the Romans, hoping to find some safety from the horrors of the city by way of their surrender; but they experienced something quite different⁸⁰ when they were crucified in jest.

“They were first whipped and then tortured with all sorts of tortures before they died, and were then crucified before the walls of the city. So the soldiers, out of wrath and hatred they bore the Jews, nailed those they caught, one after one way, and another after another, to the crosses, by way of jest, when their multitude was so great, that room was lacking for crosses, and crosses lacking for bodies”.

Some of those who deserted the city had swallowed gold; seeking to preserve some things⁸¹ they lost everything. Many thousands were dissected as they left the city.

“But when this contrivance was discovered in one instance and the fame of it filled several camps; people thought that the deserters who came to them were filled with gold. So then the multitude of the Arabians and Syrians cut up those that came as supplicants and searched their bellies. Nor does it seem to me that any misery befell the Jews that was more terrible than this, since in one night's time about two thousand deserters were thus dissected”.

The final days of Jerusalem were a time when “the day-time was spent in the shedding of blood, and the night in fear”. It was “common to see the city filled with dead bodies”. Jews panicked and began indiscriminately killing each other; fathers tearfully slaughtered their entire families, in order to prevent them from receiving worse treatment from the Romans. In the midst of terrible famine, mothers killed, roasted, and ate their own children (cf. Deuteronomy 28:53). The whole land “was all over filled with fire and blood”. The lakes and seas turned red, dead bodies floating everywhere, littering the shores, bloating in the sun, rotting and splitting apart. Roman soldiers captured people attempting to escape and then crucified them at the rate of 500 per day. See Appendix D for an outline of a number of chapters in Josephus’ Wars of the Jews that describe these events in detail.

“Let Him be crucified! Let Him be crucified! His blood be on us and our children!” the apostates had cried forty year earlier (Matthew 27:22-25). And when it was all over, more than a million Jews had been killed in the siege of Jerusalem. Close to a million more were sold into slavery throughout the empire, and the whole land of Judea lay smoldering in ruins, virtually depopulated. The days of vengeance had come with horrifying, unpitying intensity. In breaking her covenant, the holy city had become the whore of Babylon; and now she was a desert. She had become⁸² “the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird” (Revelation 18:2). Jesus, on the way to His Cross, had warned the women of Jerusalem to mourn for themselves.

“Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in which they shall say,

⁸⁰ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, V, xi, 1.

⁸¹ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, V, xiii, 5.

⁸² David Chilton, *Paradise Restored*, Fort Worth, Texas, Dominion Press, 1985, pp. 93-94. This book contains 24 chapters, where each is introduced by a lengthy quotation from St. Athanasius: 23 from *On the Incarnation* and one from *Defense of His Flight*.

blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts which never gave suck” (Luke 22:28-29).

The Warfare Will Be Cut Short: Matthew 24:22

If the war had continued, it would have spread to the caves of the hill country and beyond. "For the elect's sake" -- for Christians, those who believed, the days were cut short. There is no record of any Christian dying in the destruction of Jerusalem. The Lord was faithful in forewarning His own and kept His promise to grant security to those in the designated place of refuge. Spiritually, that place of refuge is Jesus Christ; in Him, no one shall perish; outside of Him, there is only death and destruction. And God's vengeance was tempered with mercy even to the Jews who had refused the Father's invitation to the marriage feast and rejecting His Son (cf. Matthew 22:1-14). Chrysostom comments⁸³ on the parable as a picture of the vengeance of God in 70 AD.

“What then did He do after these things? Since they were not willing to come, and also slew those who came to them, He burned up their cities, and sent His armies and slew them. These things He said, declaring beforehand the things that took place under Vespasian and Titus, and that they provoked the Father also, by not believing in Him; it is the Father at any rate who is avenging. For this reason let me add, it was not immediately after Christ was slain that the capture take place, but after forty years, that He might show His long suffering; when they had slain Stephen, when they had put James to death, when they had spitefully treated the Apostles”.

False Prophets and Unheeded Warnings Make the Slaughter Worse

Josephus also records⁸⁴ proclamations of false prophets within the city during the siege. There were a great number of them and their only purpose was to keep the people from deserting.

“A false prophet was the occasion of these people's destruction; he had made a public proclamation in the city that very day, that God commanded them to get up upon the Temple⁸⁵, and that there they should receive miraculous signs of their deliverance. Now there were then a great number of false prophets suborned by the tyrants to impose upon the people that they should wait for deliverance from God. This was in order to keep them from deserting, and that they might be buoyed up above fear and care by such hopes. Now a man that is in adversity easily complies with such promises. For when such a seducer makes him believe that he shall be delivered from those miseries which oppress him, then the patient is full of hope of such deliverance. Thus were the miserable people persuaded by these deceivers and such as belied God Himself”.

⁸³ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, LXIX, 1.

⁸⁴ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, VI, v, 2-3.

⁸⁵ The top of the Temple, called the pinnacle of the Temple (Luke 4:9), had a flat roof, and was about 6 stories high.

Josephus also adds⁸⁶ that there were signs in the skies and on the ground that destruction was imminent, and there was one courageous man that warned the city for seven years about pending doom. But all this was to no avail.

“They did not listen, nor give credit, to the signs that were so evident, and which so plainly foretold their future desolation. Like men infatuated, without either eyes to see or minds to consider, they did not regard the denunciations that God made to them. There was a star resembling a sword, which stood over the city and a comet that continued for a whole year. The year before the Jews’ rebellion, when the people came in great crowds to the Feast of Unleavened Bread, on the 8th Day of the month Nisan and at the 9th hour of the night, a great light shone around the altar and the Holy House that it appeared to be daytime for half an hour. This light seemed to be a good sign to the unskillful, but was so interpreted by the sacred scribes as to portend those events that that followed immediately upon it”.

“At the same festival, a heifer that was being led to slaughter by the high priest gave birth to a lamb in the midst of the Temple. Moreover, the Eastern Gate of the Inner Court, which was of brass and vastly heavy, and which was with difficulty shut by 20 men, was seen to be opened of its own accord about the 6th hour of the night. This also appeared to the vulgar to be a very happy prodigy, as if God opened to them the gate of happiness. But the men of learning understood the warning: the security of their Holy House was dissolved of its own accord, and the gate was opened for the advantage of their enemies. So these publicly declared that desolation was coming on them”.

“Besides these, a few days after that Feast, on the 21st of Ayar, a certain prodigious and incredible phenomenon appeared. I suppose that the account of it would seem to be a fable, were it not related by those that saw it, and were not the events that followed it of so considerable a nature as to deserve such signals. Before sunset, chariots and troops in their armor were seen running about among the clouds, and surrounding the cities. Moreover, at Pentecost that followed shortly, as the priests were going by night into the Court of the Priests, as their custom was to perform their sacred ministrations, they said that they felt a quaking and heard a great noise. After this they heard a sound as of a great multitude saying, ‘Let us get out of here!’”

“But what is still more terrible, there was a man, Jesus, the son of Ananus, a plebian and a vine grower, who came to the Feast of Tabernacles four years before the war began when the city was in great peace and prosperity. He began to cry aloud, ‘A voice from the East, a voice from the West, a voice from the four winds, a voice against Jerusalem and the Holy House, a voice against the bridegrooms and the brides, and a voice against this whole people!’ With this cry, he went about by day and by night in all the lanes of the city. Certain of the most eminent among the populace had great indignation at this dire cry of his and gave him a great number of severe stripes. Yet he didn’t say anything for himself in defense, or anything to those who chastised him. They brought him to the Roman procurator, Albinus, where he was whipped until his bones were laid bare. Yet he did not make any supplication for himself, nor shed any tears, but turning his voice to the most lamentable tone possible, at every stroke of the whip, his answer

⁸⁶ Josephus, Wars of the Jews, VI, v, 2-3.

was, ‘Woe, woe to Jerusalem!’ His cry was the loudest at the festivals and he continued for seven years and five months without growing hoarse. During the siege, he was going around on the walls, saying with utmost force, ‘Woe to the city again, and to the people and to the Holy House, and woe to myself also!’ Just then, a large stone came from one of the siege engines and struck him, killing him instantly”.

Christ Warns About Reports of Messianic Deliverance: Matthew 24:23-28

Jesus had warned about reports of a local and personal coming of Messiah; He said, “Do not believe it!” (Matthew 24:23). And He contrasted His Second Advent with false reports that would be given out saying that He had come. Many Jews expected messianic deliverance and were enthusiastic. The city was jammed with religious pilgrims; and there were many false reports that created all sorts of negative and positive excitement. Most were sure that the Lord would not let them be attacked during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The translator of Josephus, William Whiston comments⁸⁷ on this as follows:

“What is here chiefly remarkable is this, that no foreign nation ever came to destroy the Jews at any of their solemn festivals, from the days of Moses until this time [70 AD]. But now we have their apostasy from God, and from disobedience to him. God had promised protection during the festivals (Exodus 34:23-24). The fact that God did not observe this promise any longer is another indication that Israel had been excommunicated from the covenant”.

When Jesus said, “Do not believe it!” (Matthew 24:26-27), He contrasted the local character of the siege of Jerusalem with the universal nature of His appearance at His Second Advent -- His Parousia⁸⁸. When the Lord comes in His glory at the Second Advent, He will appear such that everyone can see, and it will be like lightning flashing. “For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matthew 24:27).

John Chrysostom commented⁸⁹ on the dramatic effect of Christ’s Second Advent as follows: (Matthew 24:31).

“How then does the lightning shine? It does not need one to talk of it, it does not need a herald, but even to those that sit in houses, and to those in chambers it shows itself in an instant of time throughout the whole world. So shall that coming be, showing itself at once everywhere by reason of the shining forth of His glory”.

The Gathering of the Eagles

The Lord gave a concluding proverb: “Wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together” (Matthew 24:28). There are two aspects of this gathering: one for the unrighteous and another for the righteous. For the unrighteous, birds of prey, not deliverers

⁸⁷ David Chilton, *Paradise Restored*, Fort Worth, Texas, Dominion Press, 1985, p 290.

⁸⁸ This expression (*he parousia tou huiou tou anthropou*) is used here, v. 27 and in v. 37, and v. 39 in reference to the Second Advent.

⁸⁹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, LXXVI, 3.

come to spiritually dead Jerusalem. Vultures and eagles are Old Testament symbols of foreign nations coming to attack and destroy, not to deliver⁹⁰. “The lifeless corpse⁹¹ of Judaism will naturally attract to itself the carrion eagles of Rome -- attract them to a definite spot”. These signs will enable the Church to see this approaching day of vengeance (Hebrews 10:23-27; esp. v.25).

But there is another meaning for the righteous, since they will not be attracted to Jerusalem. John Chrysostom noted⁹² that the gathering of eagles is the gathering of the saints by the angels (Matthew 24:31).

“But He mentions also another sign, ‘where the carcass is, there also shall the eagles be’; meaning the multitude of the angels, of the martyrs, of all the saints”.

Irenaeus connected this gathering⁹³ to the Lord’s plans throughout the ages regarding fellowship with God and the Salvation of men.

“For this reason God demands service from men, in order that, since He is good and merciful, He may benefit those who continue in His service. Wherefore also did the Lord say to His disciples, ‘You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you’ (John 15:16); indicating that they were glorified by Him. Of this, Isaiah says, ‘I will bring your seed from the East, and will gather you from the West. And I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back; bring My sons from afar, and My daughters from the ends of the earth; all, as many as have been called in My name. In My glory I have prepared, and formed, and made him’ (Isaiah 43:5-6). Inasmuch as then, ‘wherever the carcass is, there shall also the eagles be gathered together’ (Matthew 24:28), we do participate in the glory of the Lord, who has both formed us, and prepared us for this, that when we are with Him, we may partake of His glory”.

Ambrose linked⁹⁴ the gathering of “eagles” to the gathering of the saints at the Second Advent.

“Let us, then, seek the body of Christ which the voice of the Father from heaven has shown to you at the time when the Jews said that it thundered (John 12:29); the body of Christ, which again the last trumpet shall reveal. For ‘the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven at the voice of the Archangel, and at the trumpet of God, and they that are dead in Christ shall rise again’ (1 Thessalonians 4:16). For ‘where the body is, there too are the eagles’, where the body of Christ is, there is the truth”.

One can conclude from this that to refuse God is a horrible thing; it is also dangerous. It places a person, or city or nation in the focal point of divine judgment. These are weighty but true words; history is an eloquent witness of what Paul declared:

⁹⁰ See for example Jeremiah 15:3-4, Ezekiel 31:6, 13, 32:4.

⁹¹ Knox, R. A. *The Epistles and Gospels*, 1946. p.278.

⁹² John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, LXXVI, 3.

⁹³ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, IV, xiv, 2.

⁹⁴ Ambrose, *Two Books on the Decease of His Brother, Saytrus*, II, 108.

“Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God under foot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of Grace? For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, says the Lord’. And again, ‘The Lord will judge His people’. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”. (Hebrews 10:29-31):

One might note that none of the above involves Anti-Semitism. Not a continuing race of persons but a single generation was punished by God for its sin. The Gospel was preached to Jews and Gentiles; and the first Christians all were Jews. The Scriptures forbid personal hatred and bigotry in the name of Christ. But also, in being honest with God's Word, the testimony of Christ's Church, and the reports of eye witnesses, we may say that this generation of the nation of Israel was accountable for rejecting Christ, and that it was an object of God's wrath.

Christ Comes on the Clouds of Heaven: Matthew 24:29-31

Signs in the Heavens

As a contrast to the destruction of Jerusalem and all the announcements by the false prophets, Jesus stated that His Second Advent will be entirely different. At this time, Jesus spoke of His Second Advent from the viewpoint of what to expect in the heavens. There will be tremendous signs in the heavens, where these signs will be much greater than what was reported by Josephus at the destruction of Jerusalem.

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign⁹⁵ of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matthew 24:29-31).

In this account from Matthew, he uses the phrase “immediately after the tribulation of those days”. This can be interpreted several ways. Luke, however, adds more detail and clarifies the time frame regarding when the signs in the sky will appear. A time will intervene between the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Advent that is called “the times of the Gentiles” during which Jerusalem will be trampled. We are in that period right now.

“And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken” (Luke 21:24-26).

⁹⁵ This sign in the heavens has been interpreted to mean the sign of the Cross. See for example: John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, LXXVII, 3. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, XV, 22.

During His “trial” before the Sanhedrin, Jesus also spoke of coming on the clouds of heaven. As many false witnesses came forward to testify against Him, Jesus said nothing as the witnesses all contradicted each other (Matthew 26:59-60). The chief priests, the elders and all the council were searching for two or three witnesses whose testimony agreed so that they could convict Him of some charge punishable by death (Deuteronomy 19:15-21). Finally, the high priest placed Jesus under oath so that He had to answer, and He spoke to them of “coming on the clouds of heaven”.

“I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!’ Jesus said to him, ‘It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven’. Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, ‘He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy! What do you think?’ They answered and said, ‘He is deserving of death’” (Matthew 26:63-66; cf. Mark 14:62-64; Luke 22:69-71).

The Coming of Christ on the clouds of heaven has been universally interpreted⁹⁶ as His Second Advent, His *Parousia*. John Chrysostom stated⁹⁷ that there is an implication for the end of time that one can infer from the events of the “Great Tribulation” of 70 AD. Jesus stated that this “Great Tribulation” will be unique in world history, and no future event will be as horrible (Matthew 24:21). But at the Second Advent, there will be a lesser tribulation led by Antichrist and the coming false prophets. The false prophets and false christs shall cause confusion, and no small turmoil in the world. At this time, ‘the powers of Heaven shall be shaken’ (Matthew 24:29), and ‘the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven shall appear’ (Matthew 24:30); that is, the Cross shall appear in heaven being brighter than the sun, since the sun will be darkened, and hide itself. And the Cross will appear when it would not appear, unless it was far brighter than the beams of the sun. Then ‘they shall see the Son of Man coming’; no longer is He on the cross, but ‘in the clouds of Heaven, with power and great glory’. He comes in a cloud as He was taken up (Acts 1:9), and the tribes seeing these things mourn. By saying all this He roused His disciples, and indicated from how many evils they should be delivered, and how many good things they shall enjoy. This was important to them since they were despondent at the thought of Jesus going to the Cross.

Cyril of Jerusalem stated⁹⁸ that “the sign of the Son of Man” is the Cross and this will be a terror to His enemies:

“What is the sign of His coming, lest a hostile power dare to counterfeit it. ‘And then shall appear’, He says, ‘the sign of the Son of Man in heaven’. Now Christ’s own true sign is the Cross; a sign of a luminous Cross shall go before the King, plainly declaring Him who was formerly crucified. The Jews who before pierced Him and plotted against Him, when they see it, may mourn tribe by tribe, saying, ‘This is He who was beat up, this is He whose face they spat on, this is He whom they bound with chains, this is He whom of old they crucified. ‘Where’,

⁹⁶ For example:

Athanasius of Alexandria, On the Incarnation of the Word, 56.

Justin Martyr, First Apology, LI; Dialog with Trypho, XIV, XXXI.

Irenaeus, Against Heresies, III, xix, 2; V, xxx, 3-4.

⁹⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXVII, 3.

⁹⁸ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XV, 22.

they will say, ‘shall we flee from the face of Your wrath?’ The sign of the Cross shall be a terror to His foes; but joy to His friends who have believed in Him, or preached Him, or suffered for His sake”.

Cyril of Alexandria contrasted⁹⁹ Jesus’ first coming with His Second Advent. While He was largely unnoticed to most of the world in the 1st Century, His Second Advent will be quite different.

“Prior to the Second Advent, various false christs and false prophets will appear preceding Him, falsely assuming to themselves His person, and coming into the world like eddies of smoke springing up from a fire about to break forth”.

“It was necessary that He should remain unknown during the time that preceded His passion; but His Second Advent from heaven will not happen secretly as did His coming at first, but will be illustrious and awesome. He shall descend with the holy angels guarding Him, and in the glory of God the Father, to judge the world in righteousness. He gives us clear and evident signs of the time when the consummation of the world is near. There shall be wars and tumults and famines and pestilence everywhere; and terrors from heaven, and great signs. All the stars shall fall; and the heaven shall be rolled up like a scroll, and its powers shall be shaken” (Matthew 24:29). This is a quote from Isaiah, “And all the powers of the heavens shall melt, and the sky shall be rolled up like a scroll: and all the stars shall fall like leaves from a vine, and as leaves fall from a fig-tree” (Isaiah 34:4 LXX).

“After His discussion of the destruction of Jerusalem, He transfers His words from this subject to the time of the consummation, and says, ‘And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity; from the sound of the sea, and its surging, as the souls of men depart from fear and expectation of the things which are coming upon the world. The hosts of heaven shall be shaken’ (Luke 21:25-26). Inasmuch as creation begins to be changed, and brings unendurable terrors upon the inhabitants of earth, there will be a certain fearful tribulation, and a departing of souls to death. The unendurable fear of those things that are coming will suffice for the destruction of many. Then, He says, they shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory”.

The Rise of “The Antichrist”

Cyril of Jerusalem commented on these things at length. Regarding false prophets¹⁰⁰ and false christs (Matthew 24:24), “This has happened in part: for already Simon Magus has said this, and Menander, and some others of the godless leaders of heresy; and others will say it in our days, or after us”. Yet something similar will occur¹⁰¹ prior to the Second Advent:

“Since the true Christ is to come a second time, the adversary, taking occasion by the expectation of the simple, and especially of them of the circumcision, brings in a certain man who is a magician and expert in sorcery and enchantments of beguiling craftiness. He shall seize for himself the power of the Roman Empire, and shall falsely style himself Christ; by this name of Christ

⁹⁹ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke, Homily 139.

¹⁰⁰ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XV, 5.

¹⁰¹ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XV, 11-12.

deceiving the Jews, who are looking for the Anointed, and seducing those of the Gentiles by his magical illusions. But this Antichrist is to come when the times of the Roman Empire shall have been fulfilled (Luke 21:24), and the end of the world is now drawing near”.

Simon Magus was well on his way toward accomplishing what Cyril mentioned, until he was stopped in his tracks by the Apostles Peter and Paul. Simon was about to demonstrate to Emperor Nero that he would ascend back to his father in heaven and return to bring good things. Peter and Paul realized that stopping him would result in their martyrdom, but they proceeded anyway. As a result of their prayers, Simon fell from a great height as he ascended, and died of his injuries. Nero then imprisoned the Apostles; Peter was crucified and Paul was beheaded¹⁰².

The Apostle John defined the term “antichrist” as those who deny the Incarnation along with denying the Father and the Son. See Appendix A for more details. While John said that many “antichrists” have arisen (1 John 2:18), Cyril quoted¹⁰³ Paul to say that there will be one major antichrist who gains prominence just prior to the Second Advent, and that this will occur in a new way that did not occur in the 1st Century. Paul had said:

“Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4).

Cyril identified this “man of sin” as “*The Antichrist*” who comes just before the Second Advent of Christ; and there are similarities between “Antichrist” and Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-24), who was also a master of sorcery. Cyril wrote during the Arian controversy, where Arius (in the 4th Century) taught some of the same heresies that Simon Magus had taught in the 1st Century. There were many Arian Bishops in Cyril’s day, and Cyril described his times as a time of falling away from the Faith. To Cyril, it looked so bad that he thought the time must be just preceding the Second Advent. However, righteous men persevered in identifying the error of the followers of Arius, and the situation in the Church was reversed. Cyril wrote:

“Thus wrote Paul, and now is the falling away. For men have fallen away from the right faith; and some preach the identity of the Son with the Father, and others dare to say that Christ was brought into being out of nothing. Formerly the heretics were clear; but now the Church is filled with heretics in disguise. For men have fallen away from the truth, and have itching ears (2 Timothy 4:3). Most have departed from right words, and rather choose the evil, than desire the good”.

Irenaeus also referred¹⁰⁴ to the person he called “Antichrist” and some of the evil that he will bring upon the earth. Irenaeus implies that there is a severe demonic influence working in this “Antichrist” as if he were not even human, which is not the case, but may seem so.

“We will not incur the risk of pronouncing the name of Antichrist; for if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been announced by him (i.e. the Apostle John) who beheld the

¹⁰² For more details, see Mark Kern, *Simon Magus the Heresiarch*, St. Athanasius Press, 2002.

¹⁰³ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, XV, 11-12.

¹⁰⁴ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, V, xxx, 3-4.

apocalyptic vision. For that was seen not very long ago, but almost in our day, towards the end¹⁰⁵ of Domitian's reign”.

“But he indicates the number of the name now, that when this man comes we may avoid him, being aware who he is: the name, however, is suppressed, because it is not worthy of being proclaimed by the Holy Spirit. But now as ‘he was, and is not, and shall ascend out of the abyss, and goes into perdition’ (Revelation 17:8), as one who has no existence; so neither has his name been declared, for the name of that which does not exist is not proclaimed. But when this Antichrist shall have devastated all things in this world, he will reign for three years and six months, and sit in the temple at Jerusalem. And then the Lord will come from heaven in the clouds, in the glory of the Father, sending this man and those who follow him into the lake of fire. But He will bring in for the righteous the times of the kingdom, that is, the rest, the hallowed seventh day. And He will restore to Abraham the promised inheritance, in which kingdom the Lord declared, that ‘many coming from the East and from the West should sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob’ (Matthew 8:11).

Cyril continued to describe¹⁰⁶ the difficulties of the times preceding the Second Advent for those who remain faithful to the Lord. There will be a great many martyrs and they will face a time of great deception, greater than during the days preceding the destruction of Jerusalem.

“Who then is the blessed man, that shall at that time devoutly witness for Christ? For I say that the Martyrs of that time excel all martyrs. For the previous Martyrs have wrestled with men only; but in the time of Antichrist they shall do battle with Satan in his own person. Former kings that persecuted the saints only put to death; they did not pretend to raise the dead, nor did they make false shows of signs and wonders. In his time there shall be the evil inducement both of fear and of deceit, so that if it be possible, the very elect shall be deceived (Matthew 24:24). Let it never enter into the heart of any then alive to ask, ‘What did Christ do more than him?’ For by what power does this man work these things? Were it not God's will, He would not have allowed them. The Apostle warns beforehand, ‘For this cause God shall send¹⁰⁷ them a working of error; not that they might make excuse, but that they might be condemned. They, he says, who believed not the truth, that is, the true Christ, but had pleasure in unrighteousness’ (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12), that is, in Antichrist.”

Matthew stated that the Great Tribulation of 70 AD would be unmatched in world history (Matthew 24:21). The tribulation prior to the Lord's Second Advent does not match the horrors of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, but exceeds all previous generations in the fear of the expectation of what is about to happen.

“And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken” (Luke 21:25-26).

¹⁰⁵ Irenaeus is referring to the time that the Apostle John received the revelation that we call the Book of Revelation. Domitian reigned from c. 81 to 96 AD, and Irenaeus wrote in about 180 AD.

¹⁰⁶ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, XV, 17.

¹⁰⁷ Send, that is, shall allow to happen

The Apostle John gives us some more details of these signs that are to take place, where the earthquake will be more severe than anything in the past. Since history records earthquakes from impacts of large meteors that created craters miles in diameter, this is quite a statement to say that nothing in human history matches it.

“And there were noises, thunder and lightning; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent¹⁰⁸. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great” (Revelation 16:18-21).

John Chrysostom also stated¹⁰⁹ that the deception will be exceptionally intense just prior to the Second Advent of Christ.

“Notice here He said nothing of war, but only of those that attempt to deceive. For some in the days of the Apostles deceived the multitude, ‘for they shall come, and shall deceive many’ (Matthew 24:5, 11); and others shall do so before His Second Advent, and these shall be more grievous than the former (Matthew 24:24-26). ‘For they shall show’, He said, ‘signs and wonders, so as to deceive if possible the very elect’ (Matthew 24:24-26). Here He is speaking of Antichrist, and indicates that some also shall minister to him. Of him Paul too speaks. Having called him ‘man of sin’, and ‘son of perdition’, he added, ‘Whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, signs and lying wonders; and with all deceitfulness of unrighteousness in them that perish’ (2 Thessalonians 2:3, 9-10). Notice how He secures them; ‘Do not go forth into the deserts, enter not into the secret chambers’ (Matthew 24:26). He did not say, ‘Go, and do not believe’; but, ‘Do not go forth, neither depart from there’. For great then will be the deceiving, because even deceiving miracles are done”.

Chrysostom continued¹¹⁰ to say that even Creation will be in the process of being transfigured in anticipation of the Second Advent. And if the days were shortened due to the Jewish war, much more so now!

“Then He tells of fearful prodigies. For there shall be great tribulation, there being so many deceivers. But it is not protracted to a length of time. For if the Jewish war was shortened for the elect’s sake, much more shall this temptation be limited for these elect’s sake. Therefore, He didn’t say, ‘after the tribulation’, but IMMEDIATELY ‘after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened’, for almost at the same time all things come to pass. The false prophets and false christs shall come and cause confusion, and immediately He Himself will be here. No small turmoil is then to prevail over the world”.

¹⁰⁸ A talent was the maximum weight that a grown man could carry, or about 75 pounds.

¹⁰⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXVI, 2.

¹¹⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXVI, 3.

“Even Creation will then be transfigured, for ‘the sun shall be darkened’, not destroyed, but overcome by the light of His presence; and the stars shall fall, for what shall be the need of them if there being no night? (Revelation 21:25, 22:5). ‘The powers of Heaven shall be shaken’, in all likelihood, from seeing so great a change come to pass. For, ‘When the stars were made, all my angels praised me with a loud voice’ (Job 38:7 LXX) and the angels marveled at His work. Much more seeing all things in course of change, and their fellow servants giving account, and the whole world standing by that awesome judgment-seat, and those who have lived from Adam to His coming, having an account demanded of them for all that they did, how shall they but tremble, and be shaken?”

See Appendix B for an extended quote from John of Damascus, who summarized the mind of the Fathers, who preceded him, on “The Antichrist”. Also in Appendix B is an extended quote from John Chrysostom on Paul’s references to “The Antichrist” in his letters to the Thessalonians.

The Lesson of the Fig Tree: Matthew 24:32-35

From the Old Testament

The illustration of the fig tree has been used in the Old Testament to picture the nation of Israel in peace and prosperity, and Jesus used the same illustration several times. Israel was pictured as dwelling underneath her vine and fig tree for both shade and nourishment (1 Kings 4:25, 2 Kings 18:31). In times of apostasy, the vine and fig tree were described as withered (Joel 1:12, Habakkuk 3:17), and the vine and the fig tree no longer yielded their strength (Joel 2:22).

Fruit was expected from the nation of Israel. Jesus illustrated this by the Parable of the Vineyard Tenants, where He expected fruit in its season (Matthew 21:34, Mark 12:2, Luke 20:10). This fruit is not expected of the heathen, since one doesn’t expect to find grapes and figs on thorn bushes and thistles (Matthew 7:16, Luke 6:44). Jesus used a parable of a man who sent his two sons out to work in his vineyard. The son that actually went to work was acknowledged by the chief priests and elders as doing the Will of his Father. Jesus connected the son that actually went to work to the tax collectors and harlots who believed, and the son that didn’t go to work to the Scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 21:28-32).

The Fig Tree That Didn’t Produce

To illustrate Jesus’ care and concern for His people, He gave a parable of a fig tree that didn’t produce fruit. He requested from the Father more time to fertilize it that it might come to produce fruit. He spoke this parable:

“A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, ‘Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?’ But he answered and said to him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. And if it bears fruit, fine! But if not, after that you can cut it down’” (Luke 13:6-9).

Irenaeus said that this¹¹¹ parable points out our heavenly Father as seeking fruit from His people, both under the Old and the New Covenant:

This truth was clearly shown forth by the parable of the fig-tree, of which the Lord says, ‘Behold, now these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, but I find none’ (Luke 13:7). He was pointing onwards, by the prophets, to His Advent, where He came seeking the fruit of righteousness from them. Since he did not find it, the fig-tree should be cut down. And, without using a parable, the Lord said to Jerusalem, ‘O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kill the prophets, and stone those that are sent to you; how often would I have gathered your children together, as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house shall be left to you desolate’ (Matthew 23:37). For that which had been said in the parable, ‘Behold, for three years I come seeking fruit’, and, ‘How often would I have gathered your children together’, is false, if we do not understand that He came to them but once, and then for the first time. But He who chose the patriarchs and those who lived under the first covenant, is the same Word of God who both visited them through the prophetic Spirit, and us also who have been called together from all quarters by His Advent. In addition, He truly declared, ‘Many shall come from the East and from the West, and shall recline with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. However, the children of the kingdom shall go into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth’ (Matthew 8:11-12). If, then, those who do believe in Him through the preaching of His Apostles throughout the East and West shall recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven, partaking with them of the heavenly banquet, one and the same God is set forth as He who did indeed choose the patriarchs, visit the people, and call the Gentiles.

The Cursed Fig Tree

To make this illustration of fruit even more dramatic, Jesus came to a fig tree on Monday of Holy Week looking for figs, even though they weren’t in season. Seeing none, He cursed the fig tree, “Let no fruit grow on you ever again” (Matthew 21:18-22). This cursing of the fig tree spoke of the coming judgment on the nation of Israel in 70 AD. For a detailed study of the Cursed Fig Tree, see the Study for Holy Monday Bridegroom Matins.

The Fig Tree Illustrates Spiritual Development

To illustrate this even further, Jesus gave a parable using the growth cycle of a fig tree to illustrate how one knows what spiritual developments are coming. In the growth cycle of fig trees, they lose their leaves in the winter, and leave only buds on the branches. In the Spring, the buds start to swell and leaves begin to appear. He used this imagery to speak about both the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Advent.

“Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer *is* near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near — at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take

¹¹¹ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, IV, xxxvi, 8.

place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away” (Matthew 24:32-35).

John Chrysostom stated¹¹² that by considering the growth of the fig tree, it will be plain to those of God what is about to happen. His disciples do not need to know exactly when things will occur as they had asked to know (Matthew 24:3).

“Christ had said, ‘immediately after the tribulation of those days’ (Matthew 24:29). But they sought of this, after how long a time it should be, and desired to know in particular the exact day. Therefore He gives them the example of the fig tree, indicating that the interval was not great, but that in quick succession would occur His Advent also. And this He declared not by the parable alone, but by the words that follow, saying, ‘know that it is near, even at the doors’” (Matthew 24:33).

“Whereby He foretells another thing also, a spiritual summer, and a calm that should be on that day (after the present tempest) for the righteous; but to the sinners the contrary, winter after summer, which He declares in what follows, saying, that the day shall come upon them, when they are living in luxury”.

Daniel’s Prophecies and the Church Age

The prophecies of Daniel were used by the Fathers of the Church¹¹³ to refute the Jews who rejected Jesus as the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. Interestingly, it was Jesus' reference to coming on the clouds of heaven that brought down upon Him the wrath and judgment of Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin; for with it our Lord clearly set forth who and what He is (Cf. Matthew 26:64-66; Mark 14:62-64; Luke 22:67-71). Jesus said to Caiaphas:

“It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:64, Daniel 7:13-14).

To Daniel were given many answers to questions concerning the time and circumstances of Messiah's “first” coming. Daniel sets the stage, presents the figures, and interprets the language which our Lord applies to Himself in the Gospels.

The Consideration of the Kingdom of God in the Book of Daniel

Daniel's message is that the kingdoms of this world are not beyond God's control; one day they will be replaced by God's own kingdom. “In the days of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, and this kingdom shall not be left to another people. It shall crush these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever” (Daniel 2:44).

The book of Daniel is made up of two sections, chapters 1-6, and 7-12. Chapters 1-6 have to do with the history of Daniel and his friends. It is a very selective history that was designed to point the readers -- the Jews, the covenant people -- toward the God of the kingdom.

¹¹² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXVII, 1.

¹¹³ See for example Athanasius of Alexandria, On the Incarnation of the Word, 39-40.

A clear pattern is evident in these chapters. An event takes place -- a dream, a fiery furnace, the handwriting on the wall -- and an interpretation is given. The results:

- The king expresses faith in Daniel's God as "God of gods" (Daniel 2:47), "Most High" (Daniel 4:34), "the living God enduring forever" (Daniel 6:26);
- He issues a decree that no one speak against this God (Daniel 3:29);
- He orders everyone to tremble and fear "before the God of Daniel" (Daniel 6:26). The pattern serves to point readers to God¹¹⁴.

Chapters 7-12 have to do with visions that speak of the future and the coming of the kingdom of God. Two messages are set forth. The Kingdom of God will be established after a long period of the rise and fall of several world empires; and, the people of God are to be encouraged in a coming great time of trouble which awaits them before the coming of Messiah, the Prince. This persecution took place under Antiochus Epiphanes c. 173 BC, and is the subject of a very detailed prophecy which makes up the greater portion of chapters 10-11.

The Establishment of the Kingdom of God after Four World Empires

Daniel speaks of the four empires that are to rise before the Kingdom of God is established (Daniel 2:44). They are pictured under the figure of different metals (Daniel 2), and they are portrayed as various beasts (Daniel 7). There is an elaboration of the second and third of these empires represented as a ram and he-goat (Daniel 8). Finally he speaks of the time that is to elapse before Messiah comes and tells what Messiah will accomplish under the figure of 70 sevens (Daniel 9).

Table 1
The Kingdoms of Daniel

| Kingdom | NEO-BABYLON | MEDO-PERSIA | GREECE | ROME |
|------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| Time | 606-538 B.C., 68yrs | 538-333 B.C., 205yrs | 333-63 B.C., 270yrs | 63 B.C. - ? |
| Chapter 2 | Gold (head) | Silver (trunk) | Brass (thighs) | Iron/clay (leg) |
| Chapter 7 | Lion | Bear | Leopard | "Dreadful" |
| Chapter 8 | | Ram | He-goat | |
| Chapter 9 | 70 SEVENS AND MESSIAH THE PRINCE | | | |

The first three empires are named in Daniel 2:38; 8:20, 21. "Rome" is not named in Daniel but there is little doubt that it is the fourth empire, the Dreadful beast, under which Christ came.

Daniel's message is like that of Habakkuk: "If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay" (Habakkuk 3:2). The Kingdom of God will begin as a smiting-stone cut without human hand¹¹⁵ which will destroy the kingdoms of the world and will itself become a

¹¹⁴ LaSor, William Sanford, David Allan Hubbard, and Frederic William Bush, Old Testament Survey, Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1982, p.572.

¹¹⁵ The stone cut out without human hand is Christ according to the flesh, since He had no human father. See Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XV, 28.

great mountain -- biblical symbol for a kingdom -- that will fill the whole earth (Daniel 2:34-35, 44; cf. Matthew 13; Isaiah 2:2; 25:6-8; 65:25; *et. al.*).

Coming on the Clouds

Christ's sitting at the Right-Hand of the Father (that is, in His human flesh) began with the Ascension. In His Deity, He has always been sitting on the Throne with the Father. In His humanity, He had a point in time when He began to sit on the Throne with the Father.

John of Damascus, reflecting the understanding of the Church, stated¹¹⁶ that the Throne of God is not an actual place, but the glory and honor of the Godhead. See Appendix E for more details of this.

We hold, moreover, that Christ sits in the body at the right hand of God the Father, but we do not hold that the right hand of the Father is actual place. For how could He that is uncircumscribed have a right hand limited by place? Right hands and left hands belong to what is circumscribed. But we understand the right hand of the Father to be the glory and honor of the Godhead in which the Son of God, who existed as God before the ages, and is of like essence to the Father, and in the end became flesh, has a seat in the body, His flesh sharing in the glory. For He along with His flesh is adored by all creation¹¹⁷.

Jesus came to the Father's presence with the clouds of heaven. This was the appearance that the disciples saw when He ascended. "He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9).

"Coming on the Clouds" is a powerful and well-known biblical figure. Throughout the Old Testament God was "coming on the clouds" in the salvation of His people and the destruction of His enemies: "He makes the clouds His chariot; He walks upon the wings of the wind" (Psalm 104:3). Isaiah speaks of the judgment of Egypt along with other nations, saying: "Behold, the Lord is riding on a swift cloud, and is about to come to Egypt; the idols of Egypt will tremble¹¹⁸ at His presence" (Isaiah 19:1). The prophet Nahum spoke similarly of God's destruction of Nineveh: "In whirlwind and storm is His way, and clouds are the dust beneath His feet" (Nahum 1:3). God's "coming on the clouds of heaven" is an almost commonplace Scriptural symbol for His presence, judgment, and salvation, and it is not limited to Christ's Second Advent. John Chrysostom remarks¹¹⁹ on the Transfiguration: "The Father utters a voice out of the cloud. Why out of the cloud? Thus does God ever appear".

Now we can see why the Out-pouring of the Holy Spirit in 30 AD and the Destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD are so very prominent in the Scriptures. Each is an evidence of the exalted position of our Lord Jesus Christ as the One who accomplishes the salvation of His People and the judgment of His enemies: Pentecost and Holocaust! All this comes from the throne of the Highest One who holds the scepter of the Kingdom in a nail-pierced hand for the ultimate benefit

¹¹⁶ John of Damascus, Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, IV, 2.

¹¹⁷ Athan. Jun., p. 45, ad Ant. (Incrn of Word 17); Basil, De Spiritu Sancto, ch 6

¹¹⁸ This happened exactly as the prophet said during the Lord's flight into Egypt with His parents, following the visit of the Magi (Matthew 2:13-15). For details, see Mark Kern, The Life of the Virgin Mary, Unpublished Work, 2000.

¹¹⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LVI, 5.

of His People. “The saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom forever, for all ages to come” (Daniel 7:18).

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God *is* a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:28-29).

Appendix A: New Testament Texts Defining the Term “Antichrist”

“Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that **antichrist** is coming, even now many **antichrists** have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it may be shown that they all are not of us.”

“Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the **antichrist**, the one who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.”

“These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you” (1 John 2:18-19, 22-23, 26).

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. And every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not from God; and this is the spirit of the **antichrist**, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. They are of the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error” (1 John 4:1-6).

“For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the **antichrist**. Watch yourselves that we may not lose what we have accomplished, but that we may receive a full reward. Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds” (2 John 7-11).

Appendix B: Comments on “The Antichrist” by the Church Fathers

John of Damascus wrote a summary work on what the Church believed in his day. In this work, he referred to many of the writings of the Church Fathers that preceded him. Following¹²⁰ is what he wrote regarding “The Antichrist”.

It should be known that the Antichrist is bound to come. Every one, therefore, who confesses not that the Son of God came in the flesh and is perfect God and became perfect man, after being God, is Antichrist. But in a peculiar and special sense he who comes at the consummation of the age is called Antichrist¹²¹. First, then, it is requisite that the Gospel should be preached among all nations, as the Lord said (Matthew 24:14), and then he will come to refute the impious Jews. For the Lord said to them, ‘I am come in My Father’s Name and you receive Me not. If another shall come in his own name, him you will receive’

¹²⁰ John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, IV, 26.

¹²¹ See also Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, V, 25; Gregory Nazianzen, *Orations*, 47.

(John 5:43). And the Apostle says, 'Because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved, for this cause God shall send them a strong delusion that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness' (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12). The Jews accordingly did not receive the Lord Jesus Christ who was the Son of God and God, but receive the impostor who calls himself God¹²². For that he will assume the name of God, the angel teaches Daniel, saying these words, 'Neither shall he regard the God of his fathers' (Daniel 11:37). And the Apostle says, 'Let no man deceive you by any means. For that day shall not come except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped. So that he sits in the temple of God (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4), showing himself that he is God. In the temple of God he said; not our temple, but the old Jewish temple¹²³. He will come not to us but to the Jews; not for Christ or the things of Christ, wherefore he is called Antichrist¹²⁴.

First, therefore, it is necessary that the Gospel should be preached among all nations (Matthew 24:14). And then shall that wicked one be revealed, even him whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, with all deceit of unrighteousness in them that perish, whom the Lord shall consume with the word of His mouth and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming (2 Thessalonians 2:8-10). The devil himself¹²⁵, therefore does not become man in the way that the Lord was made man. God forbid! But he becomes man as the offspring of fornication and receives all the energy of Satan. For God, foreknowing the strangeness of the choice that he would make, allows the devil to take up his abode in him¹²⁶. He is, therefore, as we said, the offspring of fornication and is nurtured in secret, and on a sudden he rises up and rebels and assumes rule. And in the beginning of his rule, or rather tyranny, he assumes the role of sanctity. But when he becomes master he persecutes the Church of God and displays all his wickedness. But he will come with signs and lying wonders (2 Thessalonians 2:9), fictitious and not real, and he will deceive and lead away from the living God those whose mind rests on an unsound and unstable foundation, so that even the elect shall, if it be possible, be made to stumble (Matthew 24:24). But Enoch and Elijah the Tishbite shall be sent and shall turn the hearts of the fathers to the children (Malachi 4:6, Revelation 11:3), that is, the synagogue to our Lord Jesus Christ and the preaching of the Apostles. And the Lord shall come out of heaven, just as the holy Apostles beheld Him going into heaven, perfect God and perfect man, with glory and power, and will destroy the man of lawlessness, the son of destruction, with the breath of His mouth (2 Thessalonians 2:8). Let no one, therefore, look for the Lord to come from earth, but out of Heaven, as He himself has made sure (Acts 1:11).

¹²² See also John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Thessalonians, IV.

¹²³ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, 15

¹²⁴ Irenaeus, Cyril Hieros., Catechetical Lectures 15; Gregory Nazianzen, Loc. Cit.

¹²⁵ Jerome on *Daniel*, ch vii

¹²⁶ See also John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Thessalonians, III.

John Chrysostom also had a great deal to say about “The Antichrist” that he linked to what Jesus said about His Second Advent prior to His Crucifixion. These are great mysteries, and the Thessalonians were perplexed over what they meant. Some of the “Antichrist” imagery Chrysostom directs at Nero in the 1st Century and some he directs to the Second Advent.

“Christ, being seated¹²⁷ on the Mount, with great particularity discoursed to His disciples upon the Consummation. Why? He said this in order that there might be no room for those who introduce Antichrists and false Christs. And He Himself also gives many signs; one indeed, and that the most important, saying, when ‘the Gospel shall be preached to all nations’ (Matthew 24:14), and another also, that they should not be deceived with respect to His coming. ‘As the lightning’ (Matthew 24:27), He says, shall He come; not concealed in any corner, but shining everywhere. It requires no one to point it out, so splendid will it be, even as the lightning needs no one to point it out. And He has spoken in a certain place also concerning Antichrist, when He said, ‘I am come in My Father’s name, and you receive Me not; if another shall come in His own name, Him you will receive’ (John 5:43). And He said that those unspeakable calamities one after another were a sign of it, and that Elijah must come”.

“The Thessalonians indeed were then perplexed, but their perplexity has been profitable to us. For not to them only, but to us also are these things useful, that we may be delivered from childish fables and from old women’s fooleries. And have you not often heard persons talking much even about the name of Antichrist, and about his bending the knee? For the devil scatters these things in our minds that the doctrine may grow up with us, and that he may be able to deceive us. For he will not come so bending his knees, but ‘exalting himself against all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he sits in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God’ (2 Thessalonians 2:4). As the devil fell by pride, so he who is wrought upon by him is anointed unto pride”.

“Paul discourses¹²⁸ concerning the Antichrist, and reveals great mysteries. What is ‘the falling away’? He calls him Apostasy, as being about to destroy many, and make them fall away. He warns that, if it were possible, the Elect should be offended (Matthew 24:24). And he calls him ‘the man of sin’. He shall do numberless mischief, and shall cause others to do them. But he calls him ‘the son of perdition’, because he is also to be destroyed. But who is he? Is it then Satan? It is not Satan, but some man that admits his fully working in him. For he is a man! ‘And exalts himself against all that is called God or is worshipped’ (2 Thessalonians 2:4). For he will not introduce idolatry, but will be a kind of opponent to God. He will abolish all the gods, and will order men to worship him instead of God, and he will be seated in the temple of God, not in Jerusalem only, but also in every Church. ‘Setting himself forth’ (2 Thessalonians 2:4), he says; he does not just speak these things, but endeavors to show it. For he will perform great works, and will show wonderful signs”.

¹²⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Thessalonians, I.

¹²⁸ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Thessalonians, III.

One may naturally¹²⁹ inquire, what is that which restrains (2 Thessalonians 2:6), and after that would know, why Paul expresses it so obscurely. What then is it that restrains, that is, hinders him from being revealed? Some say, the grace of the Spirit, but others the Roman empire, to whom I most of all agree. Why? Because if he meant to say the Spirit, he would not have spoken obscurely, but plainly, that even now the grace of the Spirit, that is the gifts, restrain him. And otherwise he ought now to have come, if he was about to come when the gifts ceased; for they have long since ceased. But because he said this of the Roman Empire, he naturally glanced at it, and speaks covertly and darkly. He did not wish to bring upon himself superfluous enmities, and useless dangers. For if he had said that after a little while the Roman empire would be dissolved, they would be warring to this end. And he did not say that it will be quickly, but 'that he may be revealed in his own season' (2 Thessalonians 2:6). 'For the mystery of lawlessness does already work' (2 Thessalonians 2:7). He speaks here of Nero, as if he were the type of Antichrist. He too wished to be thought a God. And he has well said, 'the mystery'; that is, it works not openly, as the other, or without shame. For if there was found a man before that time, who was not much behind Antichrist in wickedness, what wonder if there shall be one now? But he did not also wish to point him out plainly, and this not from cowardice, but instructing us not to bring upon ourselves unnecessary enmities, when there is nothing to call for it. So indeed he also says here, 'Only there is one that restrains now, until he be taken out of the way' (2 Thessalonians 2:7), that is, when the Roman empire is taken out of the way, then he shall come. For as long as the fear of this empire lasts, no one will willingly exalt himself; but when that is dissolved, he will attack the anarchy, and endeavor to seize upon the government both of man and of God. For as the kingdoms before this were destroyed, for example, that of the Medes by the Babylonians, that of the Babylonians by the Persians, that of the Persians by the Macedonians, that of the Macedonians by the Romans, so will this also be by the Antichrist, and he by Christ, and it will no longer restrain. And these things Daniel delivered to us with great clearness. 'And then shall be revealed the lawless one' (2 Thessalonians 2:8). What after this? The consolation is at hand. 'Whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of His mouth, and bring to nothing by the manifestation of His coming, even he whose coming is according to the working of Satan' (2 Thessalonians 2:8-10). For as fire coming on even before its arrival consumes the little animals that are afar off, so also Christ, by His commandment only, and Coming. It is enough for Him to be present, and all these things are destroyed. He will put a stop to the deceit, by only appearing.

Appendix C: Secret Things and Revealed Things: Daniel and Revelation¹³⁰

¹²⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Thessalonians, IV.

¹³⁰ From Robert Newsom, The King Judges His People: Jesus, Jerusalem and Judgment, Unpublished Work, Copyright 2002.

"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29). Perhaps the most profound and basic principle we can grasp when it comes to understanding the nature and purpose of God's scriptural revelation. Revelation bestows knowledge, and knowledge obligates to obedience. Our Lord said, "If you know these things, happy are you if you do them" (John 13:17). Unfortunately, men more often are prompted by curiosity rather than by obedience.

There are secret things as well as revealed things. Some things God does not reveal because it is not His purpose that we should know them, ever. Some things God keeps from His people at one point in time, but reveals them at a later point. This is true especially in the unfolding of prophetic revelation; we have a good example in the books of Daniel and Revelation.

Daniel received a great deal of detailed prophecy, which was painstakingly explained to him so he might communicate it to the people of God because the time of its fulfillment was near. One of the biblical tests for a prophet was that he prophesy truthfully about something that would shortly come to pass (cf. Deuteronomy 18:22). But, on one occasion, when Daniel heard some things he did not understand and asked about them, he was told, "Go, Daniel! The words are "sealed up" and "closed" until the end time because their fulfillment was distant (cf. Daniel 12:4, 8-9; Revelation 10:5-7). In the New Testament, especially the Book of Revelation, these very things are "open" and "unsealed" because the fulfillment is near. A comparison of Revelation 10:5-7 with Daniel 12 indicates that what was sealed in Daniel is opened in Revelation. The reference is the accomplishing of the mystery of God (Revelation 10:7).

The angel witness (Revelation 10:5-7) swears that there shall be delay¹³¹ no longer, but in the days of the seventh trumpet-bearing angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is accomplished. Mystery does not mean something "mysterious" in our modern sense, but rather something formerly concealed and now unveiled. It is revelation: knowledge that God formerly withheld, but has now "revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit" (Ephesians 3:5), a mystery "that has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints" (Colossians 1:26). This "Mystery" is a major aspect of the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians: the union of believing Jews and Gentiles in the Church, without distinction. "That the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body and fellow partakers of the promise in Jesus Christ through the Gospel" (Ephesians 3:6). Gentiles, who had been strangers and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and from the covenantal promises, are now, through the work of Christ, full sons of Abraham, heirs of the Covenant, on an indistinguishable standing with believing Jews (Ephesians 2:11-22; Galatians 3). They form one "new man", one Church, one Body of Christ, in the New Covenant. And this one covenantal Kingdom, the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises, will have universal dominion: All nations will now flow to the Mountain of the Lord, as the kingdoms of the world become the one Kingdom of Christ (Revelation 11:15). The Mystery of God, the universality of the Kingdom of God, to be accomplished -- as He preached the Gospel¹³² to His servants the prophets

¹³¹ "The sense here is not an abolition of time and its replacement by timelessness, 'no more time' from the words of the angel until the completion of the divine purpose". James Barr, *Biblical Words for Time* (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, Inc., revised edition 1969), p. 80.

¹³² Greek, **eueggelisen**, preach the Gospel, is the literal translation of the Greek rather than "declare", or "proclaim".

(Revelation 10:7). The Mystery is simply the revelation of the message of the Gospel. In the Book of Revelation, just like Matthew 24, the context is the end of the age and the Old Jerusalem, and the coming of the new age and the New Jerusalem. These are not sealed-up because they are not in the far distant future. The angel told John, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy, for the time is near" (Revelation 22:10). The message of the "Little Apocalypse" (Matthew 24) and the "Big Apocalypse" (Revelation) is the same.

But there are also some things in Revelation which are SEALED from our knowledge because their fulfillment is distant: for example, the Message of The Seven Thunders (Revelation 10:3-4). What did they say? We can never know the answer in this life. Saint John was about to write down what the thunders had spoken when he heard a voice from heaven which said, "Seal up the things that the seven thunders have spoken and do not write them" (cf. Revelation 10:1-4). The message was intended for John's ears only; it was not intended for the Church at large. What is important here is that Lord wanted John to record the fact that he was not supposed to reveal whatever the Seven Thunders said! God wanted the Church to know that there are some things (actually many things!) that God has no intention of telling us beforehand. This is a warning against a curious searching into things that God has not revealed. Remember that the secret things belong to God; and try as we may, we do not have any way of forcing God to talk! We, rather, should give careful attention to the things He has revealed: to accepting His testimonies, believing His promises, heeding His warnings, and obeying His commands.

We can learn something about the purpose of the Book of Revelation from that instruction given to John in the final chapter. "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near" (Revelation 22:10). The message of the book as a whole is contemporary in nature, referring to events about to take place. In contrast, however, the message of the Seven Thunders points us to the far distant future. Recall that Daniel was told to "conceal these words and seal up the book until the time of the end" (Daniel 12:4), for the reason that the time of its fulfillment was not at hand. Similarly, when John is instructed to seal up the words spoken by the Thunders, it is an indication (among many others) that the purpose of the Book Revelation is not "futuristic". The prophecy refers to the time of the establishment of the New Covenant, and points beyond itself to a "time of the end" that was still very distant from John and his readers.

We are taught two things: First, the Book of Revelation is a contemporary prophecy, concerned almost entirely with the redemptive-eschatological events of the 1st century; second, the events of the 1st century were not exhaustive of eschatology.

Contrary to the theories of some interpreters, the Fall of Jerusalem did not constitute the Second Advent of Christ, the end of the world, and the final¹³³ resurrection. There is more to come.

This should whet our appetite for a study setting forth a chapter-by-chapter summary statement of the Revelation!

¹³³ The Orthodox Church and historic orthodox Christianity everywhere, with one voice, has always taught that "Christ shall come again, with glory, to judge both the living and the dead" (*Nicene Creed*). This is a non-negotiable article of the Christian faith.

Appendix D: Josephus' History of the Destruction of Jerusalem

The following references to excerpts from Flavius Josephus, The Wars of the Jews, and his astonishing record of the Great Tribulation of the Jews, are given here to guide the reader into his own research. The references are to any standard edition of Josephus' works. The excerpts begin by describing some of the background to the Jewish Revolt, and end with the suicide at Masada on the 15th of Nisan, AD 74 - Passover.

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Appendix E: The Understanding of the Church Fathers on the Ascension

Cyril of Jerusalem stated¹³⁴ that we must be careful not to forget that the Son has always been seated¹³⁵ at the Right Hand of the Father in His Deity. In His humanity, He had a beginning in time, and therefore a beginning seated at the Right Hand of the Father following the Ascension.

“Let us not curiously pry into what is properly meant by the throne; for it is incomprehensible. But neither let us endure those who falsely say, that it was after His Cross and Resurrection and Ascension into heaven, that the Son began to sit on the right hand of the Father. For the Son gained not His throne by advancement. But throughout His being, and His being is by eternal generation, He also sits together with the Father. And this throne the Prophet Isaiah, having beheld before the incarnate coming of the Savior, says, ‘I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up’, and the rest (Isaiah 6:1-6). For no man has seen the Father at any time, and He who then appeared to the Prophet was the Son. The Psalmist also says, ‘Your throne is prepared of old; You are from everlasting’” (Psalm 93:2).

John of Damascus, reflecting the understanding of the Church, stated¹³⁶ that the Throne of God is not an actual place, but the glory and honor of the Godhead.

We hold, moreover, that Christ sits in the body at the right hand of God the Father, but we do not hold that the right hand of the Father is actual place. For how could He that is uncircumscribed have a right hand limited by place? Right hands and left hands belong to what is circumscribed. But we understand the right hand of the Father to be the glory and honor of the Godhead in which the Son of God, who existed as God before the ages, and is of like essence to the Father, and in the end became flesh, has a seat in the body, His flesh sharing in the glory. For He along with His flesh is adored with one adoration by all creation¹³⁷.

Basil the Great¹³⁸ stated that we need to understand that when Christ sat down with the Father on His throne, that this was not a physical place. When the Scripture refers to the Throne of God, it speaks of incorporeal things.

“God fills all things (Ephesians 4:10); but they who divide their up and down between the Father and the Son do not remember even the word of the Prophet, ‘If I climb up into heaven You are there; if I go down to hell You are there also’ (Psalm 139:8 PB). There are some who, out of ignorance, predicate a place for incorporeal things. What excuse can be found for their attack upon Scripture in the passages, ‘Sit on my right hand’ (Psalm 110:1) and “Sat down on the right hand of the majesty of God?” (Hebrews 1:3) The expression ‘Right

¹³⁴ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, XIV, 27.

¹³⁵ See also John Cassian, *Seven Books on the Incarnation*, VII, 22.

¹³⁶ John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, IV, 2.

¹³⁷ Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation of the Word*, 17:1-5.

Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*, VI, 13-15.

¹³⁸ Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*, VI, 15.

Hand' does not indicate the lower place, but equality of relation. It is not understood physically, in which case there might be something sinister about God, but Scripture puts before us the magnificence of the dignity of the Son by the use of dignified language indicating the seat of honor. 'Christ is the power of God and wisdom of God', (1 Corinthians 1:24) and 'He is the image of the invisible God' (Colossians 1:15) and 'brightness of his glory', (Hebrews 1:3) and 'Him has God the Father sealed', (John 6:27) by engraving Himself on Him"¹³⁹.

"Now are we to call these passages, and others like them, throughout the whole of Holy Scripture, proofs of humiliation, or public proclamations of the majesty of the Only Begotten, and of the equality of His glory with the Father? We ask them to listen to the Lord Himself, distinctly setting forth the equal dignity of His glory with the Father, 'He that has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14:9) and again, 'When the Son comes in the glory of his Father' (Mark 8:38) that they 'should honor the Son even as they honor the Father' (John 5:23). 'We beheld his glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father' (John 1:14); and 'the only begotten God which is in the bosom of the Father' (John 1:18). Of all these passages they take no account, and then they assign to the Son the place set apart for His foes. A father's bosom is a fit and becoming seat for a son, but the place of the footstool is for them that have to be forced to fall" (Psalm 110:1).

Irenaeus of Lyons stated that one of the main purposes of Christ's First Advent was to gather into the Father's fold the children scattered abroad. He did this that they might share in His glory.

"The Jews do not recognize¹⁴⁰ the Advent of Christ, which He accomplished for the salvation of men, nor are they willing to understand that all the prophets announced His two Advents. At the one, He became a man subject to stripes, knew what it is to bear infirmity, sat upon the foal of an ass, was a stone rejected by the builders, was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and by the stretching forth of His hands destroyed Amalek. He gathered from the ends of the earth into His Father's fold the children who were scattered abroad, remembered His own dead ones who had formerly fallen asleep, and came down to them that He might deliver them. But at the Second Advent, He will come on the clouds, bring on the day which burns as a furnace, smite the earth with the word of His mouth, slay the impious with the breath of His lips, have a fan in His hands for cleansing His floor, and gather the wheat into His barn, but burning the chaff with unquenchable fire".

When Jesus¹⁴¹ said, 'I will, that where I am, there they also may be, that they may behold My glory' (John 17:24), He was not vainly boasting because of this, but desiring that His disciples should share in His glory. Isaiah also says, 'I will bring your seed from the East, and will gather you from the West; and I will

¹³⁹ Philip Schaff note: The more obvious interpretation in John 6:27 would be sealed with a mark of approval, as in the miracle just performed. Basil explains "sealed" by "stamped with the image of His person". Basil, at the end of chapter 26 of this work, calls our Lord the "express image and seal graven to the like" of the Father. Athanasius (Ep. I. Ad Serap. Xxiii.) writes, "The seal has the form of Christ the sealer, and in this the sealed participate, being formed according to it." Cf. Galatians 4:19, 2 Peter 1:4.

¹⁴⁰ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, IV, xxxi, 1.

¹⁴¹ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, IV, xvi, 1.

say to the North, Give up; and to the South, Keep not back. Bring My sons from far, and My daughters from the ends of the earth; all, as many as have been called in My name. For in My glory I have prepared, and formed, and made him' (Isaiah 43:5-7). Inasmuch as then, 'wherever the carcass is, there shall also the eagles be gathered together' (Matthew 24:28), we do participate in the glory of the Lord, who has both formed us, and prepared us for this, that, when we are with Him, we may partake of His glory.

Leo the Great stated that not only were the disciples strengthened with joy at the Ascension, but they understood that Christ had placed them at the Right Hand of the Father along with Himself.

"The disciples¹⁴² were so strengthened by the clearness of the truth that when the Lord entered the heights of heaven, not only were they affected with no sadness, but were even filled with great joy. The Nature of mankind went up, to pass above the archangels' heights, and to have Its uplifting limited by no elevation until, received to sit with the Eternal Father, It should be associated on the throne with His glory, to Whose Nature It was united in the Son".

"Since we had been driven out from the bliss of our first abode, the Son of God has made us members of Himself and placed us at the right hand of the Father, with Whom He lives and reigns in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen".

"Our humility¹⁴³ was in Christ raised to a place above all heavens at the Father's right hand. But Christ, Who with the Father is that which the Father is, abides undivided with His Father, and in coming from Him to you He did not leave Him, even as in returning to Him from us He did not forsake us. Rejoice, therefore, 'because I go to the Father, because the Father is greater than I' (John 14:28). For I have united you with Myself, and became Son of Man that you might have power to be sons of God".

John of Damascus emphasized¹⁴⁴ that it was the two Natures of Christ that made this possible.

"But if our interrogators should hint that He Who is begotten of the holy Mother of God is two natures, we reply, 'Yes! He is two natures; for He is in His own person God and man. And the same is to be said concerning the Crucifixion and Resurrection and Ascension. For these refer not to nature but to subsistence".

John Chrysostom stated¹⁴⁵ that the fact that Christ sits together with the Father on the Throne implies equality with the Father.

"When it says, 'He sat on the right hand of the Majesty on high' (Hebrews 1:3), what is this 'on high' and does he enclose God in a place? No! When he said, 'on the right hand', he did not describe Him as having figure, but showed His equal dignity with the Father. So, in saying 'on high', he did not enclose Him there, but expressed the being higher than all things, and having ascended up

¹⁴² Leo the Great, Sermons on the Lord's Ascension, LXXIII, 4.

¹⁴³ Leo the Great, Sermons on Whitsuntide, LXXVII, 5.

¹⁴⁴ John of Damascus, Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, IV, 7.

¹⁴⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, II, 2.

above all things. That is, He attained even unto the very throne of the Father; as therefore the Father is on high, so also is He. For the 'sitting together' implies nothing else than equal dignity. But if they say that He said, 'Sit' (Psalm 110:1), we may ask, did He speak¹⁴⁶ to Him standing? For had he intended to signify inferiority, he would not have said, 'on the right hand', but on the left hand".

Leo added¹⁴⁷ that Christ's Resurrection meant that His disciples needed to treat their Lord a little differently, and with spiritual understanding.

"While the Nature of the glorified Body still remained, the faith of believers was called upon to touch not with the hand of flesh, but with the spiritual understanding the Only-begotten, Who was equal with the Father. Hence comes that which the Lord said after His Resurrection, when Mary Magdalene, representing the Church, hastened to approach and touch Him. 'Touch Me not, for I have not yet ascended to My Father' (John 20:17). That is, I would not have you come to Me as to a human body, nor yet recognize Me by fleshly perceptions. I put you off for higher things; I prepare greater things for you. When I have ascended to My Father, then you shall handle Me more perfectly and truly, for you shall grasp what you can not touch and believe what you can not see".

John Chrysostom noted¹⁴⁸ that this was why a cloud received Him out of their sight. The cloud is associated with God. In His divinity, He was seen "going up into heaven". In His flesh, He was "taken up into heaven".

"But why did 'a cloud receive Him?' This too was a sure sign that He went up to Heaven. Not fire, as in the case of Elijah, nor fiery chariot (2 Kings 2:11) but 'a cloud received Him' (Acts 1:9). This was a symbol of Heaven, as the Prophet says; 'Who makes the clouds His chariot' (Psalm 104:3); it is of the Father Himself that this is said. Therefore he says, 'on a cloud'. In the symbol, he would say, of the Divine Power, for no other Power is seen to appear on a cloud. For hear again what another Prophet says, 'The Lord sits upon a light cloud' (Isaiah 19:1).

At the Ascension, there were Angels in the form of men. But why does not Christ Himself tell them these things, instead of the Angels? He had beforehand told them all things, 'What if you shall see the Son of Man going up where He was before?' (John 6:62) Moreover the Angels did not say, 'whom you have seen taken up,' but, 'going into heaven' (Acts 1:11). Ascension is the word, not assumption; the expression 'taken up', belongs to the flesh. For the same reason they say, 'He which is taken up from you shall thus come', not 'shall be sent'. 'He that ascended, the same is he also that descended' (Ephesians 4:10). So again the expression, 'a cloud received Him' (Acts 1:9), for He Himself mounted upon the cloud. Of the expressions, some are adapted to the conceptions of the disciples, some agreeable with the Divine Majesty. Now, as they behold, their conceptions are elevated; He has given them no slight hint of the nature of His Second Advent".

¹⁴⁶ It was customary for the king, dignitary or the person in charge to sit while everyone else stood by him.

¹⁴⁷ Leo the Great, *Sermons on the Lord's Ascension*, LXXIV, 2.

¹⁴⁸ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Acts*, II.

Irenaeus recounted¹⁴⁹ how the prophets had spoken not just of Christ's Resurrection, but also of His reception into heaven in His humanity. And it is in His humanity that He comes in righteous judgment.

“The prophets spoke of His having slumbered and taken sleep, and of His having risen again because the Lord sustained Him (Psalm 3:5), and who enjoined the principalities of heaven to set open the everlasting doors, that the King of glory might go in (Psalm 24:7). These proclaimed beforehand His resurrection from the dead through the Father's power, and His reception into heaven. They expressed themselves thus, ‘His going forth is from the height of heaven, and His returning even to the highest heaven; and there is no one who can hide himself from His heat’ (Psalm 19:6 LXX). They announced that very truth of His being taken up again to the place from which He came down, and that there is no one who can escape His righteous judgment. And those who said, ‘The Lord hath reigned; let the people be enraged: even He who sits upon the cherubim; let the earth be moved’ (Psalm 99:1 LXX), were thus predicting partly that wrath from all nations which after His ascension came upon those who believed in Him, with the movement of the whole earth against the Church. They were also predicting partly the fact that, when He comes from heaven with His mighty angels, the whole earth shall be shaken, as He Himself declares, ‘There shall be a great earthquake, such as has not been from the beginning’ (Matthew 24:21). And again, when one says, ‘Whosoever is judged, let him stand opposite; and whosoever is justified, let him draw near to the servant of God’, and ‘Woe unto you, for you shall wax old as does a garment, and the moth shall eat you up’ (Isaiah 50:8-9 LXX loosely quoted), and ‘All flesh shall be humbled, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in the highest’ (Isaiah 2:17 LXX). It is thus indicated that, after His passion and ascension, God shall cast down under His feet all who were opposed to Him, and He shall be exalted above all, and there shall be no one who can be justified or compared to Him”.

¹⁴⁹ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, IV, xxxiii, 13.