

## DID JESUS RETURN IN 70 A. D.?

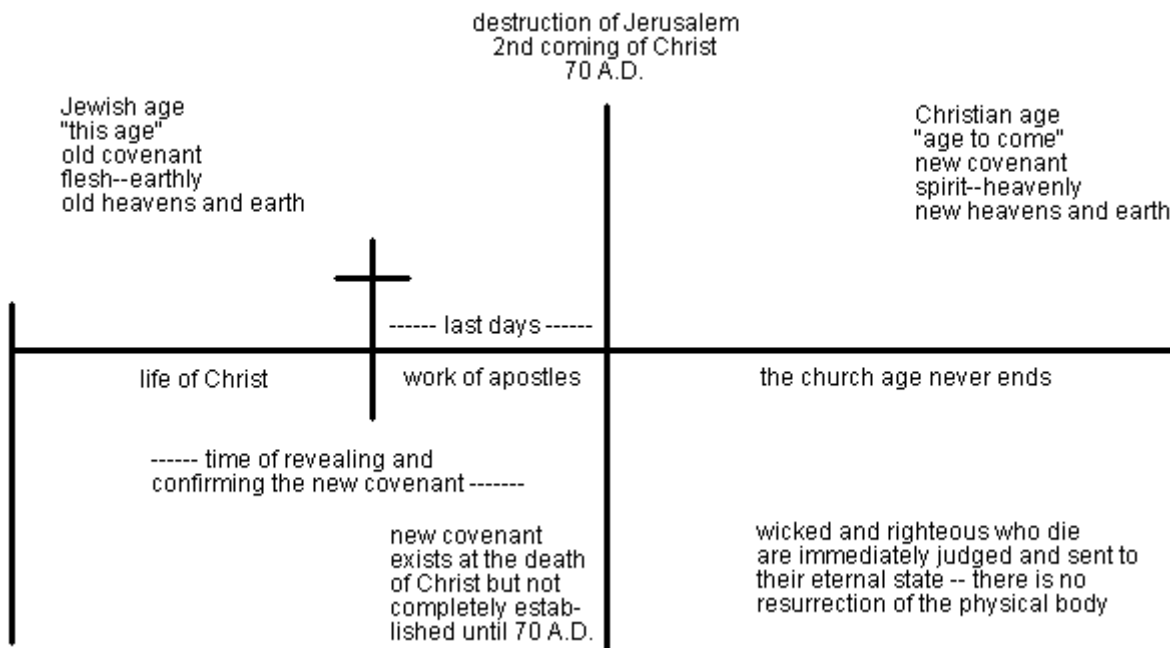
by Stafford North, Oklahoma Christian University of Science & Arts

Recently there has been a resurgence in the doctrine that Jesus' second and final return was in 70 A.D., at the same time as the destruction of Jerusalem. This view holds that when Titus, the Roman general, brought his army to destroy Jerusalem, Jesus returned at that same time, ended the Jewish age, and established in a complete sense, the Christian covenant. Those with this view also believe that the promised resurrection came at that same time, but not as a bodily resurrection.

If the Bible teaches this view, even though it is contrary in so many ways to what most have believed over the years, it should be fully accepted. If, on the other hand, it is not in harmony with plain and clear passages, it should be firmly and completely rejected, no matter how sincere its advocates.

This study will first give a brief statement of this belief so the reader will know the basic elements of the view being studied. Then, we shall present six reasons why we reject this belief as out of harmony with the scriptures.

Since I have found no statement in the books I have read by the adherents of this view which clearly summarizes it, I have, from their writings, developed a chart to aid in understanding the view. Note that 70 A.D. is the date for the second coming which, they teach, is the time when the Law was finally removed and the new covenant fully established.



At the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., the following are said to happen simultaneously: the end of the age (Matt. 28:20), the perfect has come (I Cor. 13:10), the end of all things (Matt. 5:16-17), the restoration of all things (Acts. 3:19-21), all things are made new (Rev. 21:5), the end of the miraculous age, the consummation of the age (Matt. 28:20), all things are fulfilled (Luke 21:20-22), Israel is regathered (Isa. 11:10-12), Israel is planted in their own land (Ezek. 36:24), the old heavens and earth burn up (the ending of the Jewish system not the end of our world), the new heavens and new earth come (the new kingdom is fully established) (II Peter 3), the death of Judaism and the resurrection (new covenant is fully established).

I believe this view is not a correct understanding of the scriptures and wish to present six reasons why I consider it to be false.

1. The 70 A.D. view is wrong because it makes figurative events the Bible intends literally. Thus, the corruptible body of I Cor. 15 is said to be the fleshly or carnal system of Judaism and the resurrection of I Cor. 15 is the rise of Christianity. The "world" or "fleshly" is redefined to mean the "Jewish age," while the "spiritual" refers to the Christian age. The old heaven and earth is Judaism and the new heaven and earth are Christ's kingdom. Such meanings are not the interpretation which the passages where these terms are found would suggest. In fact, it does an injustice to the Christian system to suggest that it is the resurrection of dead Judaism. While the Law of Moses was the "tutor" to bring us to Christ and while it had to die when the new system came, Christ's plan for redemption is not a resurrection of the Law and does not spring forth out of its death. The Law was a preliminary measure to prepare the way for the plan God set in motion before the foundation of the world.

We shall look in detail at two passages frequently cited by those holding the 70 A.D. view to see the error of this figurative or "spiritualizing" approach.

I Corinthians 15. Here Paul refers to the burial and resurrection of a physical body, not to burying the Jewish system and the rise of Christianity. To show this is true, let us step through various portions of this chapter. Paul begins by referring to the resurrection of Christ's body and tells of those who personally saw the resurrected body. Surely Paul speaks here of a literal body and with this the parties on both side of this issue agree. Then he moves to discuss some in Corinth who were denying the bodily resurrection of others. We know their denial was of a "bodily resurrection" because Paul begins by saying, "Now if Christ is preached that he hath been raised from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?" Christ's bodily resurrection is a case of the type of resurrection they were denying. Paul's whole argument here is that because all agreed that Christ had a bodily resurrection, it is wrong to say that Christians are not raised in the same manner. To deny one is to deny the other.

Notice further that Paul says, "If the dead [plural] are not raised, neither has Christ been raised" (verse 16). Thus, if other dead ones are not raised bodily, neither can Christ have been raised bodily. It would be beside Paul's point here to say, "If the dead [the Jewish system] has not been raised [the Christian system], neither has Christ been raised." What would be the connection with what precedes and why would he use the plural "dead ones" instead of the singular? But it certainly does make his point to say that if you do not believe dead bodies come out of graves, then you will have to deny that Christ's dead body came out of the grave.

As corroboration of this view, consider I Corinthians 6:13-14. Here Paul makes much the same point. He warns against the immoral use of our bodies for fornication and urges that we use our bodies, rather, for the Lord. What body does he mean? A body that can engage in a sexual act. He adds that not only is this body "for the Lord," but "the Lord is for the body and God both raised the Lord and will raise up us through his power." So the same body which has sexual capability is the body which we give to God and which then God raises up, even as He did the body of Christ. So in both I Corinthians 6 and 15, Paul speaks of not only the resurrection of Christ's physical body but of the like resurrection of other physical bodies as well.

Then, Paul writes in 15:22 that Christ is the "firstfruits" of them that are asleep. In other words, the same thing that happened to Him, a bodily resurrection, will later happen to us, a bodily resurrection. Paul then comments (vss. 30-34) that to put your life in jeopardy or to deny yourself the pleasures of life would make no sense unless there is a resurrection of the dead when even greater joys will be known. Still, in this section of I Corinthians 15, then, the message is about a bodily resurrection.

Next, in verses 35 through 49, Paul addresses the question that would naturally arise, "If there is a resurrection of a dead body, what will the new body be like?" Just as a seed is planted and produces something based on itself but not identical to itself, he says, even so will our bodies be planted in the grave and from them will come forth something from them but not like them. The new body, for both the righteous and the wicked, will be a body that does not die again--an eternal body, a body fit for the spirit realm not the earthly. That Paul still has in mind here a physical body here is clear from his reference to different types of flesh and then to different types of bodies--both terrestrial and celestial. Then he says "it is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body." "It," here, refers to the same entity in each of its uses: the physical body--"it" is planted and "it" is raised. The nature of that body will be different when it is raised, but Paul still refers to what was planted as that which is raised, even though it will be in a transformed state. Would any in Corinth, upon reading this epistle, have thought he meant that Judaism was buried and Christianity sprang forth? Beyond question, this passage speaks of the burial of our dead bodies and their ultimate resurrection.

To conclude his discussion, verses 50 to 58) Paul says that "as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." Notice "we." Human beings not covenants. Then he continues, "we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." Note several points from these verses in opposition to the "spiritualized" approach.

(1) Paul speaks of "we," living human beings in the plural, and he contrasts those alive at any point in time ("we") with those who have already died at any point in time ("they"). He speaks pointedly to real people and real circumstances. This is no figurative reference to a theological question.

(2) Some die and are raised, others do not die and are changed. If the resurrection of the dead is the coming of Christianity out of the grave of Judaism, what, in such a figure, are those who do not die? What do they represent? To restate, in Paul's description are three conditions: (a) those who are dead, (b) those who have been dead and are then raised anew, and (c) those who do not die and are transformed. If "death" refers to the end of Judaism and the "resurrection" refers to the coming of Christianity, what is represented by those who do not die at all? It is evident that it is a mistake to make this passage represent any thing other than physical death, a literal resurrection of the bodies of those who have died, and the transformation of those who are alive at Christ's coming.

(3) And when is all of this done? At the last trumpet sound. Could 70 A.D. be the time of the last trumpet sound? Surely "last trump," while figurative, must be intended to bring to our minds the last moment of recorded time, not an event which happened thousands of years before the time is over.

(4) And as a final piece of evidence that Paul here speaks of the resurrection of a physical body and not the end of one covenant and the start of another, notice what comes to a final end and total defeat when these events take place--death. When the bodies spoken of are raised, "death is swallowed up in victory." Victory over death is achieved only when all who have died are raised, not when the covenant with Israel ends and a new kingdom begins. After the resurrection spoken of here, death will be destroyed. So, it says, when all are raised and there will be no more dying, death has been destroyed. Since death is still with us today, the events spoken of in this passage have not yet taken place. "Death," in verse 55, then refers not to the death of something [Judaism], but to the end of dying. Death itself dies. With the resurrection of all of those who have died, then, physical death itself will have come to an end in that it never claims another victim. But such did not happen at 70 A.D.

Our point in this study of I Corinthians 15 is two-fold: (1) the subject under consideration here is that of a bodily resurrection just as Christ experienced rather than a reference to the death of the covenant through Moses and the beginning of the

covenant through Christ and (2) the figurative or allegorical interpretation of the 70 A.D. advocates gives passages a meaning that was not intended by the writer.

II Peter 3:3-12. This second passage we will examine to consider the figurative approach of the 70 A.D. advocates, speaks of the following events which shall happen at His coming: (1) the heavens shall pass away with a great noise; (2) the elements shall melt with fervent heat; (3) the earth and all the works in it shall be burned up. The 70 A.D. advocates say that this statement applies to the destruction of the Jewish system and not to the actual earth and heaven. Such, however, is not in harmony with the passage. What are the scoffers mentioned deriding? That the physical universe, that which has existed since creation, is still here even though God has said it would be destroyed. They were not scoffing because they had not seen the end of Judaism. According to the 70 A.D. advocates, Peter should have said to tell them they were looking for the wrong kind of fulfillment of the promise of the end of the world. Peter does not, however, take such an approach. Rather, he says those who scoff because His coming has not happened yet, should be reminded that God did once destroy the physical earth--by water. Thus Peter confirms that they were wondering about the right type of destruction--a physical one. With the physical destruction of Noah's day offered as a similar event, it is clear that the heaven and earth mentioned in the same context are also the physical heaven and earth.

Peter's point, then, is that those who scoff should be reminded that God does keep His promises to destroy. He once promised that He would destroy the earth by water and while it was over a hundred years before He did it. He kept His word. In a similar way, He has said He would bring the world to an end and, while some may scoff because God chooses to wait, He will keep this promise too. Only the next time it will not be just starting over with a new family on the same earth, this time all physical things will be destroyed to be replaced with a "heaven and earth" of a different type.

One writer favoring the 70 A.D. coming says that since, after the flood God promised not again to "smite any more every thing living, as I have done," (Genesis 8:21), then Peter could not be referring to a final end when God will destroy all physical things. But in the very next verse of Genesis 8, verse 22, the writer continues the quotation from God saying, "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." This promise is "while the earth remaineth." II Peter 3 speaks of the time when the entire physical universe shall cease. God does not tell Noah that he will never bring the earth to an end but that he will not again wipe out virtually all human beings as long as He is going to let life continue on the earth.

These efforts to make the death of I Corinthians 15 and the destruction of the world of II Peter 3 to be the end of Judaism are not within the range of acceptable interpretations of these passages. To view the resurrection of I Corinthians 15 to be the full establishment

of a Christianity which had been begun earlier but was not complete, is also do violence to this passage. Treating what the scriptures teach as literal to be figurative is not an acceptable view.

## 2. The 70 A.D. view is wrong because it is out of harmony with Bible teaching on Christ's second coming.

a. Events said to occur with the second coming did not happen in 70 A.D. If they did not, then whatever happened in 70 A.D. it was not the second coming of the Lord. Below are listed passages all would agree speak of Christ's second coming. Those events said to accompany His return are underlined. As you read this list, ask yourself if you can believe that all of these, or any of these, happened in 70 A.D.

Matthew 16:27--The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Is there any record of Jesus' return with angels in 70 A.D.? At that time, He could not have rewarded "every man according to his works" because every man had not yet lived to perform works by which to be judged.

Matthew 25:31-32--Jesus says, "But when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all the nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separates the sheep for the goats." In 70 A.D. Jesus did not come with all His angels nor did He gather all people of all nations before Him and judge them. That this was a judgment on Jews only does not fulfill "all the nations" being gathered before Him. Moreover, this judgment ends in a final separation into heaven and hell (Matthew 25:41, 46). Max King, on the other hand, says it occurred when Jerusalem was destroyed and was to separate those who "received the kingdom" and those "who were removed from the kingdom" (Spirit of Prophecy, p. 170).

Acts 1:11--Jesus is observed with human eyes ascending into heaven and those who watched are told, "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." There is no record of a visible coming of the Lord in 70 A.D. Surely if an event such as this had taken place it would have been noted.

I Corinthians 15:22-26--This passage is a most important one for telling us what will happen when the Christ returns: (1) those who are Christ's will be raised; (2) then comes the end when Christ will deliver the kingdom back to God; (3) all rule and authority shall be abolished; and (4) death, the last enemy, shall be abolished. If Christ came in 70 A.D., then all the righteous (as well as all others)

had to be raised like Christ was since he is the "firstfruits," thus indicating that his resurrection is the first of a kind with others like it to follow. But there is no record of any bodily resurrections taking place in 70 A.D. John 5:28-29 teaches that "all [plural] that are in the tombs shall come forth." Those people who are in the tombs shall come out of them. Although earlier in John 5 Christ uses "dead" in a spiritual sense, in these verses He clearly means the literal dead for He speaks of tombs and says this resurrection is followed by our going to our eternal destinies.

I Corinthians 15 also teaches that at Christ's return, He will complete His reign as king not start a new reign. According to the 70 A.D. view, Jesus' coming in 70 A.D. is the time when His kingdom, although begun on Pentecost, is fully established. I Corinthians 15:22-26, however, says His return is the time when He concludes His reign. His reign is over then because with the resurrection of dead bodies, He conquers His last enemy, death, and so death is abolished. But how many have continued to die after 70 A.D.? Surely death was not abolished then. With death overcome with the resurrection which accompanies His return, Jesus can return the kingdom to God because He has finished His work as king: all His enemies have been conquered.

Philippians 3:20--Paul writes that we look for the Christ to come from heaven to change our vile bodies into a body like His glorious body. The 70 A.D. advocates not only do not produce any evidence of such as transformation in 70 A.D., they deny that any such transformation of vile bodies into glorious bodies takes place. They believe, rather, that the resurrection of which the Bible speaks is the transformation of the "dead law" of Judaism into the "living body" of Christianity. So, when people die, they go directly to their eternal abode in the state of souls, but not in resurrected bodies. Philippians 3:20 says, however, that our "vile bodies" shall be "fashioned anew" into bodies like Christ's glorified body. I John 3:2 says that when Christ is "manifested" [comes again] we shall be like Him. So as Christ's dead body was buried but came forth as a new body, so we shall all die and be buried, but then these bodies shall be resurrected as new bodies.

I Thessalonians 3:13--When Christ returns, He shall come "with all his saints." Thus, those who have died already are seen as accompanying Jesus in His victory because they have returned with Him. There is no indication that in 70 A.D. there was any such return of saints with Christ.

I Thessalonians 4:15-17--When Christ returns, dead Christians will be raised from the dead in new bodies and living Christians shall be changed into the same kind of bodies. Again it is stated that our resurrection will be like Jesus' resurrection "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen

asleep in Jesus will God bring with him" (verse 14). As Jesus rose again--"even so" shall God bring Christians to be with Jesus. After this change of living and dead bodies, both groups shall go up into the air and be with Him forever. This word of comfort was given about "them that fall asleep," again a plural number, not about a dead Judaism. These deaths were occurring then and Paul deals with how to comfort those who are separated from Christians they love through death. Paul answers that those who are alive when the Lord returns will not have any advantage over those who have died because both will be transformed into new bodies and then will go together to meet Jesus. To make this passage, which is so specific about Christians who die, to be a theological discussion about the end of the law of Moses and the "full establishment" of Christ's covenant is to read into the passage what the author never intended. No person in Thessalonica reading the message as received from Paul would ever have dreamed that this passage was not given to comfort those whose loved ones had died in the faith.

II Thessalonians 1:7-10--"when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." Certainly no such spiritual judgment took place in 70 A.D. and to push this passage into being a figurative reference to the end of the Jewish nation is to go beyond the limits of acceptable exegesis.

II Thessalonians 2:3-8--Before the Lord comes must be a falling away led by "a man of perdition." At His coming, the Lord will reveal this wicked person (or entity) and shall destroy him. The church had not experienced a major departure by 70 A.D. The Jewish leaders, destroyed in the fall of Jerusalem could, in no way, be considered leaders of a digression in the church, so the promise to reveal and punish this one (whoever he is) did not happen in 70 A.D.

II Timothy 4:1--Paul writes that at His coming, Jesus shall judge the living and the dead. In 70 A.D. there was not a general judgment of all who have lived, whether they were still living or, by that time, dead. While the destruction of the Jewish system in 70 A.D. was certainly a judgment of the Lord on those who had rejected prophets and finally the Son of God, such a judgment does not qualify as the general judgment on all the living and dead.

II Peter 3:4-13--Considered in detail earlier, this passage is added to this list to remind that at the coming of the Lord or the day of the Lord "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat." As shown earlier, this does, indeed, refer to the physical earth and heaven and, therefore, when this event happens, the earth as we know it will be burned up.



I John 3:2-3--In this passage, John says that "when He shall be manifested, we shall be like him." So when Jesus returns we shall be transformed into the same type of body He has--and this did not happen in 70 A.D.

We have studied passages that speak clearly of the second coming and of events which shall accompany that coming. We have one of three choices in interpreting these passages: (1) that the events which are said to accompany the second coming literally took place in 70 A.D. but we have no record of it; (2) that since these events did not take place in 70 A.D. (or since) that we are to continue to look for Jesus' coming when they will take place, or (3) that there is a figurative meaning hidden in these passages about the end of the Jewish law and the beginning of the Christian system. We clearly reject option one because had such spectacular events have taken place, we certainly would have some record of it. Option three is the view of those believing Jesus returned in 70 A.D., but to hold this view they must allegorize these passages when there is no justification for doing so. The context and language describes real events which are to be expected to occur. Moreover, John, writing after 70 A.D., still speaks of the coming as future.

b. The New Testament gives clear indications that the return of Christ would not be as early as 70 A.D.

When some in the first century began to be too specific about the time of Christ's return, they were rebuked by apostolic authority. Paul wrote in II Thessalonians 2:2 that the Thessalonians should not think that this event is just at hand. They should not expect the second coming to be immediate. II Thessalonians was written in 51-52 A.D. and the Thessalonians are told that a major departure from the faith would have to occur before the second coming--something that would likely take more than twenty years. And Peter, in II Peter 3, also warns that those who scoff because the Lord has not come yet should not deter Christian from believing He will come because with the Lord "a thousand years is as a day." They should not, then, be surprised if He does not come as soon as some might think. II Peter was probably written about 66 or 67 A.D., only a short time before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Peter, moreover, was told by Jesus the manner of death he would die, so Peter knew the Lord's coming would not be before his own death (John 21:19).

Paul, writing at the end of his life and but a very few years before 70 A.D., warned Timothy that "the time will come when men will not endure the sound doctrine" (II Timothy 4:3). Thus Paul again predicts a falling away is coming but that could hardly have been fulfilled before the fall of Jerusalem. Paul speaks in a similar vein in II Thessalonians 2:3 saying, "that day will not come, until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed."

And in I John 3:2-3, we have this statement from John: "when he shall be manifested, we shall be like him." John, then, is still looking forward to the coming of Christ. But virtually all scholars date the epistles of John after the destruction of Jerusalem--usually from 85 to 90 A.D. From what we know about the life of John, from the "old age" suggested for the author, and from the types of problems dealt with, these epistles were clearly written after 70 A.D. Yet, in this passage, John still speaks of the coming of Christ as future. "When he shall be manifested," or as other versions put it, "if he shall be manifested." So for John, the coming of Christ was still future and when it happened Christians would be like Jesus. This is strong evidence that the second coming was not in 70 A.D.

The teaching of the New Testament about the second coming of Christ, then, relates to it many events which did not happen in 70 A.D. Those writing just before 70 A.D., moreover, suggest that things will happen before the second coming that did not have time to happen by 70 A.D. and John, writing after 70 A.D. still looks to the coming of Christ as still to happen.

3. The 70 A.D. view is wrong because there is a better explanation of the passages they say require a first century second coming.

This is a very key point. The beginning point of this theory seems to be that some New Testament passages seem to teach that Christ would return in the first century and, if so, then a 70 A.D. coming is the best explanation of them. The adherents of this view believe that we either must accept a 70 A.D. coming or must admit that inspired writers were wrong when they wrote verses they say teach a first century second coming. If a meaning other than a first century return of Christ is a legitimate possibility for these passages, however, then we have another alternative. We shall look at the most often used passages of this type and shall ask if a meaning other than a first century return is possible and even likely. If other meanings are found, then we do not have to choose between the inspired writers being wrong and a 70 A.D. coming of Christ.

Philippians 4:5. In this passage, Paul says to rejoice and let your forbearance be known unto all men because "the Lord is at hand." Note first that Paul does not say that the Lord's coming is at hand, only that He is near. The word used for "at hand" is a word that means "near" either in time or in space. Certainly the meaning here can easily be that the Philippians are to be patient with others because the Lord is close by them. Nothing in this passage requires the second coming to be in the first century.

Matthew 26:64. Jesus is being tried before the Jewish High Priest who asks Jesus if he is the Christ, the son of God. Jesus answers in the affirmative and then adds, "Henceforth ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." Here Jesus tells the High Priest that he will see Him both "sitting at the right hand of Power" and "coming on the clouds of heaven." The most obvious question is

how the High Priest could see Jesus sitting at the right hand of power--obviously a reference to His being seated at the right hand of God? Jesus would not have been visible to the human eye while sitting in heaven except by a miracle such as occurred when Stephen saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. We have, then, two possibilities for this part of Jesus' statement: (1) the High Priest (and others present who heard) would be given a similar miracle to the one given Stephen, or (2) the High Priest (and others present) would see some event which would demonstrate that Jesus was seated at the right hand of power.

Since we have no record of the first, we ask whether some event could have demonstrated that Jesus was seated at God's right hand. The answer would seem to be that His prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem could well have been the demonstration Jesus had in mind. After all, it was but two or three days earlier that Jesus had given his prediction that Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed and had given his lament over the city (Matt. 23:29-24:35). So the destruction of Jerusalem, in exact fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy, showed He was sitting at the right hand of God.

But what of the second part of the statement: "coming on the clouds of heaven?" Is this a statement from Jesus to the High Priest that the High Priest (and other within hearing) would see Jesus coming on the clouds for His second advent?

The phrase "coming on the clouds" is an interesting one. Isaiah 19:1 uses this expression in speaking of Jehovah coming on the clouds to destroy Egypt. In that passage it does not refer to the physical presence of God but to His coming (figuratively) to do what He had promised He would do. Again the expression is used in Daniel 7:13 where one like a son of man (Christ) comes with the clouds of heaven to approach God's throne and receive from God the eternal kingdom. In this passage, again, "coming on the clouds" does not refer to a coming of Christ to earth but to His approaching the throne of God in heaven to receive the kingdom. This passage, by the way, makes it clear that Christ received His kingdom when he went to heaven not when he returned to earth. This teaching is the same as in I Corinthians 15:22-26 that when Christ returns He ends His reign rather than starts it.

Three times in the New Testament does the expression "coming on the clouds" appear: (1) in Matthew 24:30 (and the parallel passages in Mark and Luke) which will be studied later in this paper, (2) in the passage we are considering about the High Priest, and (3) in Revelation 1:7. Many passages in the New Testament speak of Jesus' coming, but only these speak of His "coming on the clouds." Is there some special significance to this? Why this wording? From the two Old Testament uses it is clear that "coming on the clouds" was an expression that referred to the movement of deities within the heavenly realm to carry out some action. It does not mean, in either of its Old Testament uses, the actual coming of deity to earth.

Would we not, then, look first to that possibility for the New Testament uses? When this possibility is applied in Matthew 26:64, it certainly offers a good meaning. Jesus, thus, says to the High Priest and those standing by: you will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power when you recognize that the destruction of Jerusalem comes as I have predicted publicly and, at the same time, you will see the Son of man coming on the clouds because you will know that He is the one who, although still in heaven, is carrying out His promise of the destruction. The passage says, "Ye shall see me sitting . . . and coming," and speaks of these as happening at the same time. He could sit and come simultaneously because he was "sitting" on the right hand of God while "coming" in a figurative sense to carry out what He had said He would do.

As we will show later, the other two New Testament uses of "coming on the clouds" also speak of "coming" in a special sense--to carry out a predicted destruction and not to come in a physical presence.

I John 2:18. In this passage John is warning about the anti-christ, that is "he that denieth the Father and the Son" ( I John 2:22-23) and who "confesses not that Jesus Christ cometh in the flesh" (II John 7). John says that "it is the last hour" because there the anti-christs are already at work. What, then, does the expression "last hour" mean?

J.W. Roberts, in his commentary on the letters of John, explains the Greek construction: "In Greek neither occurrence of the term **last hour** in this verse has the definite article 'the.' By this use of the noun and modifier without the article, John emphasizes that he is speaking in a qualitative or categorical way and not of a definite last hour, as one might suppose from the English translation. He means that this is a 'last-hour' kind of situation or time. In line with John's use of 'hour' in the Gospel, where the word means a decisive time in the history of the world, a time of importance created by the appearance of Christ into the world (John 4:21, 23; 5:25, 28; 16:2, 4, 25, 32), the writer in this present passage refers to a time of stress or danger related to the history of salvation. . . . Thus the term 'last hour' in John does not refer to a segment of time as the culmination of a series in which time approaches an end."

From this statement by Roberts, an outstanding Greek scholar, we understand that John was not saying, "This is the last hour of time" but rather this is a "critical time." If he meant that "the last hour of recorded time is soon upon us because the anti-christs are here," then he was wrong because that point in time was not even close to the last hour of recorded time. Over 17 million hours have passed since then so, if he literally meant the last hour of time is soon to come, he was wrong.

We must, then, look to some meaning other than a strictly literal one and the Greek makes clear that John referred to a critical hour because of the false prophets who were there. Those believing that John is referring to the destruction of Jerusalem with his comment about a critical hour are mistaken because (1) John was living in Ephesus by

this time and had little contact with Jerusalem and (2) the on-set of this critical hour is brought about by the Gnostics who taught that Jesus had not come in the flesh and not by a Roman attack on Jerusalem. And as mentioned earlier, I John was written years after the destruction of Jerusalem.

The passage in I John 2:18, then, cannot be used as evidence requiring a first century coming of Christ. It is not a reference to a second coming at all and its use of "last hour" is best explained in other ways than a reference to a first century return of Jesus.

I Peter 4:7. Peter declares in this passage that the Christians to whom he is writing ought to live good lives because "the end of all things is at hand." Notice that Peter does not specifically mention the coming of Christ. The "end of all things" has several possible meanings.

(1) Those holding the 70 A.D. return believe that Peter was warning that the second coming would be soon and it was because it came in 70 A.D., not long after Peter wrote these words. This view cannot be the correct one, however, because the end of Jerusalem does not qualify as being broad-scaled enough to be called "the end of all things." Surely some event of wider significance must be in Peter's mind. While the fall of Jerusalem was an important event, particularly to Jews, it would not be the end of everything.

(2) Another option is that Peter is saying that Christians should live good lives because the "end of all things" (end of time) is imminent. "At hand" could be taken in the sense that it might happen at any moment. Jesus and many other New Testament writers have spoken of how Jesus' return will be like a "thief in the night," that is, it will come unexpectedly. In this view of the passage, the end of the world is always "at hand" because it could happen at any time. This is certainly a possible meaning because Peter is urging the "end" of which he speaks as motivation for faithful living. The coming end of the world, at any time, is surely such motivation.

(3) A third possibility is that Peter could be speaking of the "end" for each one individually. For every person, the end of things (for him) could be at any moment. It may be that we die or it may be that Christ will return. In either case, we are to live each moment as if it might be our last--for indeed it might. We are not required by this passage, then, either to place the second coming in the first century or declare Peter mistaken because there are other views which can fit the passage. Besides, Jesus told Peter the manner of death he would die, as noted earlier, so Peter knew the Lord would not come during his lifetime.

Hebrews 10:37. The writer of Hebrews here quotes a passage from Habakkuk 2:3. He uses it as a means of encouraging the Hebrews just as Habakkuk had encouraged the

people of his day. First, what did Habakkuk mean when he wrote: "For yet a very little while, He that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry. But my righteous one shall live by faith: And if he shrink back, my soul hath no pleasure in him." Habakkuk had previously said that God would use the Babylonians as his agent to punish Judah, but then promised that God would eventually destroy Babylon. Since some might think God was delaying, Habakkuk here states that God's promise about the Babylonians is sure even though it might take longer to be fulfilled than some might wish. Habakkuk was not dealing at all with the second coming of Christ but with the approaching destruction of a nation. If Habakkuk had been speaking of the second coming, then he was mistaken for it certainly did not happen soon.

The writer of Hebrews appropriates the language of Habakkuk to make a similar use. He, also, is seeking to encourage a discouraged people; he also is seeking to get those who are growing weak to hold on until some event which is soon to come and which would strengthen them. For the people of Habakkuk's day, the event soon to come was the fall of Babylon which had destroyed Jerusalem and carried away many into captivity. To take Habakkuk's statement to the people of his day about the coming fall of Babylon and apply it here to Christ's second coming would not at all fit the purpose of the writer of Hebrews. Rather, he is describing an event parallel in nature to what Habakkuk was presenting--the coming fall of a nation.

The passage in Hebrews 10:37-38, then, is a first century re-application of Habakkuk's message to the people of his day. To the discouraged Hebrews among God's new people, Christians, the writer says, just as the prophet of old encouraged God's people to hang on because God would one day bring down their persecutor so the writer here says to God's new "nation" that they should hang on because God will soon bring down their persecutor. Who was the persecutor of the Hebrew Christians in the time of this writing, the 60's A.D.? It was, of course, the Jews and the reference is to the coming destruction of Jerusalem and to Judaism as it was then practiced. While not all Jewish persecution of Christians ended in 70 A.D., it certainly was reduced. This message fits the meaning of the passage in Habakkuk and the use of it by the Hebrew writer.

James 5:8. This passage says, "You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand." The whole thrust of this passage is for Christians to be patient--to endure --because Christ's coming is near. This passage could mean: (1) don't give up now because Christ will return in a short time; or (2) be patient because Christ's return is always "at hand" and could happen at any moment, or (3) be faithful because the destruction of Jerusalem [but not the second coming] will soon happen and that will give you relief from some of the trials you are under. Since either the second or third options are possibilities, we are not forced to accept, on the basis of this passage, a first century coming.

Revelation 1:7. John writes: Behold, he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they that pierce him; and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn over him." And in Revelation 22:7, "Behold, I come quickly." Now the question here is whether the coming mentioned in these passages is Christ's second coming. If so, then Christ told first century Christians he would come soon.

To get the full context of these verses, one would have to study the entire Book of Revelation because these passages are related to the basic meaning of the book. Such is, of course, beyond the scope of this paper. A brief resume of the book will, however, be helpful. John wrote Revelation while on the island of Patmos, off the coast of Asia Minor and Christ instructed him to send it to congregations in seven cities of Asia Minor, that is, to Ephesus and nearby cities. Satan is pictured in the symbolic book as a dragon (Rev. 12:9) who is plotting to overthrow the church by persecution (Rev. 12:17). Satan's primary helper in this attempt to persecute the early church out of existence is a seven-headed beast described primarily in chapters 13 and 17. Imagine that you live in Ephesus in the first century and receive a book which describes some entity by the following terms: (1) a beast like the fourth beast of Daniel 7--that is with ten horns; (2) a beast with seven heads each of which represents a king--five are already gone, one is in power at the moment, and another is yet to come; (3) the seven heads also represent seven hills; (4) this beast has authority over "every tribe and people and tongue and nation and all that dwell on the earth, except Christians, worship him"; (5) this beast shall persecute Christians.

You, as a Christian in Ephesus in the first century, ask yourself then, what political power now reigns over all the earth, was represented as Daniel's fourth beast, has kings who are worshipped, persecutes Christians because they will not worship him, and has a connection with seven hills. The answer would not be hard to find. Daniel's fourth beast was the Roman Empire. The emperors of Rome were worshipped and Christians were persecuted because they refused to worship him. The city of Rome was famous for being built on seven hills and, of course, Asia Minor was a Roman province in which all of the seven cities addressed in Revelation were located and where Emperor worship was particularly strong.

The Book of Revelation, then, is written to Christians in a Roman province where persecution from Rome had already occurred and was soon to get worse. The book is an encouragement to these Christians to persevere under the worst persecution Christians have ever faced and a promise that God will eventually balance the scales by bringing the Roman Empire to defeat.

The harlot of Revelation is another symbol of interest in this connection. In Revelation 17, she is introduced as riding on the back of the seven-headed beast (the Roman Empire) and is described as the great, luxurious city, drunk on the blood of the saints and who reigns over tribes and tongues and peoples. Since this city rides on [controls]

the Roman Empire, is rich, and persecutes Christians, the reference clearly is to the city of Rome. Jerusalem was not a luxurious city in that time nor was it, in any sense, ruling over great numbers of people. It was, rather, a city controlled by an outside empire. Certainly Jerusalem did not ride on the back of the Roman Empire to direct its affairs.

Two more comments about Jerusalem being the focus of the book of Revelation. The book is addressed to the seven churches in the Roman province of Asia and is particularly about their circumstances and their needs. They were under far more jeopardy from the Romans for refusing to worship the Emperor than they were from the Jews. Why direct to the seven churches of Asia, then, a book which is primarily about events which were of secondary concern to them. If the book is about the fall of Jerusalem, why not direct it to those most concerned with that topic?

A second added comment is about Revelation 11:8, a passage often cited by those who believe the book of Revelation is about the fall of Jerusalem. But look at this passage carefully. "And their dead bodies lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified." Here a great city is identified by three terms: Sodom, Egypt, and where their Lord was crucified. Obviously the same city cannot literally be all three of these and so the verse is introduced by saying--this description is spiritual or figurative. The city was called Sodom because it was immoral; it is called Egypt because it persecuted God's people; it is called where the Lord was crucified because it led in the effort to reject Jesus and "crucify him afresh." None of these terms describes the city literally--but all describe it figuratively. What great city would fit? Rome, of course. It was immoral, it led in the persecution of God's people, and it rejected Christ and His people even as Jerusalem had. It is certainly incorrect to take the first two elements in this list of three as figurative and the last one as literal.

The first verse of the first chapter says, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show unto his servants, even the things which must shortly come to pass." And verse three says, "the time is at hand." Clearly Revelation is to be about things that will begin soon. In Revelation 22:6, John is told that the things he has been told about "will shortly come to pass" and in the next verse, "Behold, I come quickly."

But now back to the question of what "coming" He speaks? The coming quickly is a coming to carry out the prophecies written in the book. Just as Isaiah 19:1 speaks of the Lord "coming" to carry out his promise to overthrow Egypt, in the Book of Revelation Jesus uses the same type of terminology--I will come to overthrow the persecutor described in this book. The coming referred to is not His second coming to raise the dead but, rather, a coming to His use of power to overthrow a corrupt government which Satan has used as his instrument to try to persecute the church out of existence before it could get firmly established. The message of Jesus in Revelation is, "I will let Satan persecute the church because, eventually, that will strengthen not weaken the



church. As I overthrew nations in former days, however, I will also overthrow the Roman Empire and that it will not be long in coming. I will come quickly to begin to unfold the drama which I am describing in symbolic terms in the Book of Revelation. The persecution predicted began in about 90 A.D. and by 450 A.D. the Roman Empire was gone.

The references to Christ's coming in Revelation 1:7 and 22:7 and similar passages in the book, then, are not to Christ's final return, but, rather, are His assurance that He will "come" to carry out the promise of this book. The message given in the Book of Revelation will begin to unfold soon after the time it is written resulting eventually in the final overthrow of Rome. Our previous study of "coming on the clouds" as referring to this figurative type of coming rather than to an actual coming also bears on the meaning of Revelation 1:7 where similar terminology is used.

We have now examined carefully those passages cited by the advocates of the return of Christ in 70 A.D. which, they say, require a first century second coming. In each case, however, we have seen that the passage not only does not require a first century return but that the best explanation of the passage is some other meaning. In view of this, we do not have to have a return of Christ in 70 A.D. in order to fulfill the meaning of these passages and one cannot successfully argue that other passages in the Bible must be interpreted in a way to harmonize with a first century coming.

4. The 70 A.D. view is wrong because Jesus did "completely establish" His new covenant before 70 A.D. In the King-McGuiggan debate, Max King affirmed the proposition that "The New Covenant was not completely established until the fall of the Jewish commonwealth in A.D. 70." King stated that he believed the new covenant began to be established with the death of Christ and the proclamation of the gospel on Pentecost but that it was not fully established until 70 A.D. Along with this, King says that the Jewish law was not taken away until the fall of Jerusalem and, thus, that Jews were to keep the law until that time.

Do the scriptures teach a forty year transition period during which the law of Moses was still in force and the law of Christ was beginning but not yet fully established? Max King suggests that the law remained in full operation until 70 A.D. but that the new covenant was not fully established until that same date because then Christ returned to receive His kingdom. Can we believe that the Law was in full operation after the cross but the gospel was not? There are many passages which demonstrate the error of this view.

a. Hebrews 9:16 states that at the death of a "testator" his will takes effect. The inspired writer applies this to the death of Christ and the beginning of His covenant. So at Christ's death, His will went into effect--the gospel was preached, sinners were called to salvation, and the church was begun. Let those

who say Christ's covenant was not yet fully established tell us what spiritual benefits were available after 70 A.D. under the "fully established covenant" that were not available after Pentecost but before the destruction of Jerusalem. When a will goes into effect, all its provisions are in force and there is no indication in the scriptures that the covenant Christ established with His death would take effect gradually. It is true that not all details of Christ's plan were revealed on the day of Pentecost but there is a difference in when a will is in full effect and when all its provisions are known. How congregations were to be organized with elders and deacons, for example, was not revealed on Pentecost because it was not needed yet, the apostles being present with the believers to give them guidance. But this unfolding of such details as they became needed in no way means that the covenant was not in full force at the death of Christ.

b. Hebrews 4:14, 8:1, and many other passages in Hebrews, teach that Christ was completely active as a high priest at the time of the writing of that epistle, before 70 A.D. He had already offered Himself, He had already entered the Holy Place, He had already presented His blood, He already was interceding on behalf of His people. What more would he do as high priest after 70 A.D.? Since Hebrews 8:4 states that Christ could not be a priest "on earth" because he was not of the tribe of Levi, it is certainly strange that He would start His work as High Priest when He returned from heaven. But if the Old Law was still in force until 70 A.D., that is exactly what had to happen because Christ could not become a High Priest until it was taken away. Hebrews 7:12 states, "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law." In order for Christ to be a high priest, then, both the old priesthood and the old law had to be taken away. If they operated with God's approval until 70 A.D., then Christ could not have been a high priest until after that date. The book of Hebrews, written before 70 A.D., however, makes it very clear that Christ was at that time the high priest who had taken His place (Hebrews 4:14-16). So if the Law was in effect until 70 A.D., Christ was not a High Priest until after that time and become one only when He returned. Who was the High Priest for Christians from 30 to 70 A.D.? The Jewish High Priest who rejected Christ? or did they have none?

The Jews continued to observe the law after Christ's death because they did not believe it had been changed. After the fall of Jerusalem, of course, they were hindered in observing the law. But if an attempt to observe the Law of Moses means that the Law of Christ cannot yet be fully established, then Christ's law would not yet be fully established for some still try to carry out the law. Moreover, not all Jewish persecution of the church ended in 70 A.D.

c. Romans 7:1-7 is also a significant passage in this study. It likens the Jews and their relationship to the law to a woman and her husband. Without being an adulteress, she cannot be joined unto a second husband until the first husband is

dead. The point here is specifically made that "if the husband die, she is free from the law [of that husband], so that she is no adulteress, though she be joined to another man." According to Max Kings's view, however, Jews were allowed to be joined to Christ while their first husband, the Law of Moses, was still alive.

The truth is that the Law of Moses died when Christ died for "he hath taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross" (Col. 2:14). Had it not been so, the new covenant could not have begun to be in force. That some continued to follow the Law is not surprising for they did not understand that it had been abolished. When as tax law is changed, some still file their taxes as if it still existed for they do not understand the change. But that does not keep the new law from being fully established.

But let us ask, if the Law of Moses was still in force after Christ's death, who was subject to it? Gentiles never were so they were not under it. Jews who had become Christians certainly were not under it for Paul said that if they went back to the law after being joined to Christ they were severed from Christ (Gal. 5:4). They could keep some of their national customs, such as circumcision, if they wanted to and they were obliged to keep some principles that pre-dated the law such as not eating blood or worshipping idols. They were not, however, to consider themselves as subject to the law. This leaves only the Jews who did not become Christians as being subject to the law. If they were following a law that was acceptable, then why evangelize them, as Paul and others did, asking them to leave the Law of Moses and follow the law of Christ? If their service through the law was acceptable, why would Paul have offered to become anathema from Christ if it would mean their acceptance of Christ (Rom. 9:3)?

Finally, on this point, is it in harmony with the scriptures for Christ to return, whether in A.D. 70 or any other time, and receive a kingdom when He returns? I Corinthians 15:22-26 makes it very clear that Christ will not return to earth to receive a kingdom but, rather, when He returns the second time He will end His reign, turn the kingdom back to the Father, and usher in the new age with no death. Peter declared that Jesus was Lord and Christ, sitting at the right hand of God at the time of Pentecost (Acts 2:36). And in Daniel 7:13-14, one like a son of man comes to the Ancient of Days to receive a kingdom which shall not be destroyed. Thus Christ is pictured as coming to God in heaven to receive the kingdom, not returning to the earth to receive it.

These passages, and many others to which reference could be made, demonstrate that Christ fully established His law and His kingdom at the time of His death, burial, and resurrection and that the apostles began, a few days later to "read the will" by preaching the gospel. There is nothing that became available under this law after 70 A.D. that was not available before that and so the covenant was fully

established at Christ's death. Moreover, the Law of Moses had to end in order for Christ's law to take effect.

5. The 70 A.D. view is wrong because the resurrection of the dead described in the scriptures did not occur in 70 A.D. We have earlier discussed the meaning of I Corinthians 15 to show that the resurrection promised in the scriptures is not the coming of Christianity after the fall of Judaism but, rather, that the resurrection of the New Testament is a resurrection of the body from the grave. Let us carry this point a step further, however, by showing that the resurrection of the scriptures could not have occurred in 70 A.D.

a. In John 6:40, Jesus said that He would raise those who believe on Him "at the last day." In verses 44 and 54 of John 6, Jesus repeats the same words. What does He mean that He will raise the righteous "at the last day?" Does He mean that He will raise dead bodies in 70 A.D.? Not only did He not do this, but no one contends that He did. The 70 A.D. advocates suggest that the only resurrection of the New Testament, besides that of Jesus, is the "resurrection" of the kingdom. But surely Jesus is not saying that the kingdom, the new covenant will be raised up on the "last day" of time? That would not give long for the gospel to be preached.

The 70 A.D. advocates say that Jesus' reference to the "last day" is the same as the term "last days" and make it apply to the period between Pentecost and 70 A.D. (King, Spirit of Prophecy, p. 222.) Certainly there is a difference between "last day" and "the last days"--a phrase with a variety of meanings in the scripture. And "last day" cannot mean the day Jerusalem fell because it was certainly not the last day. By "last day," Jesus means that He will raise the dead on the last day of time--at the end of the world. He uses this phrase again in John 12:48 when He says that the wicked will be judged "in the last day." The judgment and the resurrection, then, will both be on the last day and that last day is the last moment of recorded time--not in 70 A.D. Then Christ will raise the dead and judge them.

b. In I Corinthians 15:22-26, Jesus says He will raise the dead and then give the kingdom back to God because all His enemies, including death, will have been conquered. But if the resurrection of which Paul here speaks does not occur on the last day of time, and there are other deaths that follow, then Jesus did not complete His work of destroying death when He came. Since the resurrection of this passage cannot be followed by more human deaths, then, it cannot have been in 70 A.D.

c. In John 5:25-29, Jesus refers to death in two ways. First there are the spiritually dead and these can pass out of death into life through hearing Jesus' words and believing them. The time for this kind of resurrection, Jesus says, is at the very

moment He is speaking. "The hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live." Even as He spoke, those who heard and obeyed would be able to enter the new kingdom in a very short time. But He speaks next of the dead who are "in the tombs." Of this resurrection, Jesus says "The hour cometh." Nothing about its being "now," for Jesus knew this was still future. From this resurrection, those who have done good will go away "unto the resurrection of life and those who have done evil will go away "unto the resurrection of judgment." Jesus here speaks of a resurrection of those in the tombs--not of the death of Judaism and a coming of the kingdom, and the result of this resurrection will be that some will go into life while others will go into judgment or having been judged as unworthy.

So the resurrection of the New Testament is not a figurative pronouncement about the death of Judaism and the rise of Christianity, but is rather a presentation of the real resurrection of the dead. And of this, Jesus says it will occur on the last day, that it will bring bodies out of the tombs, and that it will bring all before the judgment of God.

6. The 70 A.D. view is wrong because it does not correctly use Matthew 24 and 25. Max King, for example, says that in Matthew 24:3, "Jesus joined the end of the world (or consummation of the age) with the fall of Jerusalem." But a reading of the text will demonstrate that Jesus did not do this. Actually, Matthew 24:3 is a question from the apostles and is not even the words of Jesus. We do not know exactly what they meant by their question. In Matthew it is stated like this: "When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" In Mark 13:4 and Luke 21:7, which speak of the same event, the questioners ask: "When shall these things be and what shall be the sign when these things are about to come to pass?" By asking about "these things," the apostles, undoubtedly, had reference to what Jesus had just spoken of: the destruction of Jerusalem and, in particular, the temple. So they were asking, "When will this destruction take place and what will be the signs by which we will know it is coming?" The question in Matthew adds, "what shall be the sign of thy coming?" By this phrase they either meant the same thing as in Mark and Luke, that is, "What will be the signs by which we can tell this destruction of the temple, which to us is the end of the world, is approaching?" or they were asking about two different events--the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world. Since the prior context is so clearly on the destruction of Jerusalem from Matthew 23:29 through 24:2, the most obvious answer is that all of the question in Matthew, as it is in Mark and Luke, is about the destruction of Jerusalem. But even if we grant that the questions deal with both the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the world, King's statement that "Jesus joined the end of the world (or consummation of the age) with the fall of Jerusalem in Matthew 23:3 is not correct.

We need to be more concerned, however, about Jesus' inspired answer than with the apostle's uninspired question. In Jesus' answer, He does speak of both the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the world, but He sets the two events in complete contrast rather than making them the same or making them parallel. It is also interesting to note that King and others who hold the "70 A.D." view believe that all of Matthew 24 and 25 is about the destruction of Jerusalem and none of it about the end of time.

Having seen the question which began Jesus discourse in Matthew 24 and 25, let us now study it further because it is such a key passage in the whole question under consideration. Our study of these chapters falls into ten segments.

a. The occasion (Matthew 23:29-24:2). Jesus here condemns the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy and says that the retribution of the blood of all the slain prophets will come upon "this generation," those hearing him, who would slay the son of God. At this point Jesus weeps over Jerusalem saying, "Your house is left unto you desolate." Jesus' disciples then show Him the buildings of the temple and he replies that "There shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down."

b. The question (Matthew 23:4). As mentioned above, the apostles asked Jesus when such destruction would come and what would be the signs by which to tell it was coming. According to Matthew, they may also have asked about the end of the world although this part of the question may simply be a different way of asking about the signs for an event which they would have considered to be the end of their world (or age).

c. The possibly misleading and preliminary signs (Matthew 24:4-14). Notice that as Jesus begins His answer to the questions raised, He says, "Take heed that no man lead you astray" or "Be careful lest someone mislead you on this matter." Jesus will tell his disciples in verse 34 that everything he is saying before that verse will happen during the lifetime of "this generation." Think of what this means. He has told them that the temple will be completely destroyed--not one stone left upon another--and that it will happen while the generation to whom he is speaking is still alive. What he wants to prevent is their thinking that every time they hear of a problem somewhere in the world that such is a sign that the temple's destruction is upon them.

If, for example, a prophet told you your house would be destroyed before ten years passed, then every time you heard a tornado warning or of the possibility of a flood or even about an international crisis, you would think, "This is it." So Jesus begins His discussion of this topic by listing some things that will be happening during the times of that generation but from which they cannot draw any conclusions about when the fall of Jerusalem will be.

So, He says, do not be misled to the conclusion that the destruction will be soon just because you hear of people claiming to be the Christ, or of wars or rumors of wars, or of famines or earthquakes. Do not even conclude that the fall of Jerusalem is soon to come because Christians are persecuted or even when the gospel is preached throughout the world (as Paul declared it had been by the time of his writing to the Colossians--Colossians 1:23). These events will be happening, but none is a sign for making any predictions about the time of the fall of Jerusalem.

d. The real sign (Matthew 24:15). In this verse Jesus tells His disciples exactly how they can know that the destruction of Jerusalem is immediately at hand-- "When, therefore, ye see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" then you will know that the time has come. In the parallel passage as Luke records this same sermon Jesus says, "But when ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that her desolation is at hand" (21:20). So Jesus interprets Daniel's "abomination of desolation" as a foreign army coming to surround and eventually to destroy the city. So, Jesus says when you see a foreign army coming to surround the city, then you will know that the time of the destruction is near and you should do something about it.

e. What to do when the sign comes (Matthew 24:16-20). We can learn much about the subject Jesus is discussing here by noting carefully what He tells His disciples to do when the sign appears. He says those in Judea should flee to the hills and that they should leave so quickly that they do not even stop to pack a bag. Those on the housetops should leave by the outside stairs and not even go inside. Those in the field should leave from there, not going back to the house. They were also to pray that the time would not come in the winter when leaving quickly would be much harder and that it would not be on the Sabbath when the gates would be closed, making it harder to get out of the city. Jesus also says it will be hard on those with small children because they will have more difficulty in leaving quickly. All of these statements fit clearly an attempt to escape from a city when it is about to be besieged. None of them, however, would be applicable to the coming of the end of the world. Josephus states that Christians did escape from Jerusalem before the Roman army closed its noose and so avoided the terrible things that happened to those inside the city. So the early church properly understood these words.

f. The nature of the coming event (Matthew 24:21-28). The time will be one of great suffering when deceivers would try to give a false hope to many. From historical records we know that the people did suffer tragically and the description here of their pain is accurate. Jesus states, in this section, that if someone comes claiming to be the Christ, they should know immediately that

such a claim is false. How would they know? When Christ returns, Jesus says, it will not be in secret but as public as the lightning which strikes in the eastern sky and is seen even to the west. This statement is a clear warning to any who would say, ever, that Christ has come and it was not so public as to be known to all.

g. Striking events to follow immediately (Matthew 24:29-31). Jesus next explains events which will happen immediately. If we have been correct about the prior verses predicting the fall of Jerusalem, then we must apply the statements in verses 29-31 to the time immediately after this fall. This section is also prior to verse 34 which says that everything mentioned prior to that verse will occur during the lifetimes of those in the generation hearing this lesson.

Admittedly there are some expressions here that are difficult to interpret, but it is certainly possible to understand their meaning, particularly when we study similar phrases that are used elsewhere in scripture.

The first four listed are that the sun and moon shall be darkened, the stars shall fall, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. Similar expressions occur in such Old Testament passages as Isaiah 13:10; 34:4-5; Ezekiel 32:7-8; and Joel 2:28-32. In these places such expressions are used to underscore the great importance of an event, particularly the end of a nation. We might say, for example, that some event was "earth-shaking," without actually meaning that the earth would be literally shaking. In a similar way, Bible writers sometimes underscore the importance of an event by saying "the sun will be darkened" or "the stars will fall." None of the scriptures mentioned above which use such phrases is speaking of the end of the world so these expressions are not to be understood to mean that. What Jesus means to convey, then, is that the fall of Jerusalem will be a very important event--one similar in importance to the fall of Babylon or Idumea to which such phrases were applied in the Old Testament.

Then comes the statement, "then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven." Note carefully what is said--not that the Son of man shall appear but that His sign shall appear while He remains in heaven. One of Jesus most specific and striking predictions was of the fall of Jerusalem and when it came to pass, one of His most important signs or miracles was done--thus, this sign appeared.

"All of the tribes shall mourn." "Tribes" usually refers to tribes of the Israelites and certainly when their city was destroyed they would mourn.

"And they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." As we have studied earlier, whenever Christ is said to move "on the clouds" the reference is not to a physical presence but to a spiritual one. Just as God "came on the clouds" to destroy Egypt (Isaiah 19:1) so Jesus came on the



clouds to destroy Jerusalem. He predicted it, He told when it would be, He told His disciples how to recognize when it was upon them, and He told them how to escape it. He also worked through providential means to see that the Roman army, even as predicted by Daniel, would be the agent through which this destruction was done. Surely under such conditions Jesus may be identified as the force which brought such destruction about and, thus, He came on the clouds to do it even though He did not leave His place in heaven to carry it out.

"He shall send forth his angels " to "gather together his elect." The word "angel" means messenger and is applied in the scriptures to both human and heavenly messengers. The expression here, then, may mean either (1) that Christ has sent His human messengers throughout the earth to spread the call of the gospel with less hindrance from the Jews than before or (2) that in some way He has sent heavenly messengers. The former meaning certainly fits with the context of the passage as we have explained it and seems to be the best choice of the possible meanings.

So all of these striking events did take place immediately following the fall of Jerusalem and during the lifetime of the generation who heard Jesus deliver this message. But none of them was a miraculous occurrence and none of them requires the personal return of Jesus to fulfill. We are not required by this section of scripture, then, to believe in a personal coming of Christ in 70 A.D. in order to give proper meaning to this passage.

h. "In this generation" (Matthew 24:32-35). When a fig tree begins to put out leaves, Jesus says, you know that summer is coming. In the same way, when you see the sign I have told you about the coming armies, you will know that the destruction of Jerusalem is near. And, says Jesus, I will give you this additional clue. It will happen before "this generation" passes away. In Matthew 23:34-36, on that same day, as Jesus began His discussion of the destruction, He said that the punishment due to the Jews for killing a long line of prophets, concluding with their killing of the Son of God, would be heaped upon the ones to whom He was speaking. "Upon you," He said, "upon this generation," shall all these things come. So in 24:34, He repeats the same thing. "This generation shall not pass away until all these things be accomplished." And, of course, it did come with the destruction of Jerusalem.

i. "But of that day and hour" (Matthew 24:36-40). Having passed verse 34, we would naturally expect that the subject may change because we are no longer in the section which concludes with "this generation shall not pass away until all these things be accomplished." Before verse 34, also, Jesus uses the plural "days" to speak of the event while after He uses the singular "day." Such a change in terminology suggests a change in theme. Also the parallel passage in Luke ends

at this point. It is also of interest that He begins verse 36 with the word "but," which sets up a contrast.

But not only are there these indications of a change, the message is definitely different, too. Jesus had spoken at first of an event about which He knew. He knew the sign which would show its approach and He knew when it would happen for He said it would be in their lifetimes. Of the new event introduced in verse 36, however, Jesus says, "But of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only." Jesus knew of the first, but He did not know of the second. Clearly we are introduced to a different event and this event is called "that day." In Matthew 7:22, Jesus used the expression "that day" to mean the day of judgment: "Many will say to me in that day, Lord did we not prophesy in thy name. . ."

In Matthew 24:37, the very next verse, Jesus Himself names the event to which He is referring: "the coming of the Son of man." So now we are in a section of Matthew 24 which is not predicting the fall of Jerusalem but which is speaking of the second coming--and the two events are clearly distinguished. Notice the great differences suggested in Matthew 24-25 about the two events. Of the fall of Jerusalem, Jesus knew the time, but of His coming, He says He does not know when it will be. The fall of Jerusalem will be preceded by the coming of an army to encircle the city and make terrible times but before the coming of the Son of man, life will go on as usual as it did in the days before the flood--eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. Terrible events are connected with one while normal life precedes the other. There is a sign by which Christians can tell that the fall of Jerusalem is approaching--the coming of the army predicted by Daniel. But there are no signs to warn of the coming of the Son of man--life goes on as usual. In fact, it will come without warning--like a thief in the night. This expression surely is to convey to us the unexpectedness of His coming. Just as no one knows when a thief will come, even so no one knows when the Lord will return. Verse 50 even says, in an hour when he expecteth not the servant's lord will come. Thus, even Christ's servants will not know and will not expect. One more contrast: Christians were warned to flee from the fall of Jerusalem--"let those that are in Judea flee to the mountains." But of the coming of the Son of man, there will be no running--two men in the field and one is taken and the other left; two women grinding and one is taken the other left. There is a suddenness suggested here that is not true of the fall of Jerusalem.

To summarize, then. The fall of Jerusalem will come in bad times, and Jesus does not know when it will be. There will be a sign, however, to warn and those who understand can run and escape. The coming of the Son of man, on the other hand, will be when times are normal, there will be no signs to warn, there will be no running to escape and even Jesus does not know when it will come.

Some say that the fall of Jerusalem is a type of the second coming. But it is far more a contrast than a parallel. Those holding to the 70 A.D. return of Jesus say that only one event is described here because they believe that the destruction of Jerusalem and the second coming were at the same time. But, as this analysis shows, there are two separate events with greatly different characteristics.

j. "Watch therefore" (Matthew 24:41-25:46). The concluding part of Matthew 24 and all of Mathew 25 are centered around the theme of being prepared for the Lord's return. Just as a servant who does not know when his master may return should be constantly ready, so Christians, who do not know when Jesus will return, should live in a state of constant readiness. Even into chapter 25, still a part of the same discourse, Jesus speaks first of the foolish virgins who were not ready and then of the servants who were given talents (money) to invest until their Lord returned. Then in verse 31, Jesus speaks directly again of His coming and of the judgment when "all the angels" will be with him and He shall "sit on the throne of His glory and before Him shall be gathered all the nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats." Such an event did not happen in 70 A.D. Then Jesus did not sit on the throne of His glory with all His angels and gather all the nations before Him. So this description is of what will happen at His second coming but is not of the destruction of Jerusalem.

In sum, a careful study of Matthew 24 and 25 do not support the view of it taken by those who hold a 70 A.D. return of the Lord.

Conclusion:

A complete study of all aspects of the 70 A.D. theory would have to be more extensive than the topics covered here for it reaches into many elements of basic Christian beliefs. The topics covered here, however, are sufficient to show its fallacy because if this paper is correct on the points covered, then the heart is taken from the theory and it will not stand.

Summarizing, then, the matters covered:

1. the "spiritual" or "figurative" treatment given to a number of biblical concepts such as the resurrection, the new heaven and earth, and the world are not borne out by careful study.
2. a study of the second coming shows that what the Bible teaches will happen when Christ returns did not happen in 70 A.D. and the intent of the passages was that they would literally happen.

3. the passages given by 70 A.D. advocates to show that Christ's return had to be in the first century do not support that view.

4. the covenant Christ came to make was fully established at His death and the Law of Moses was taken out of the way then.

5. the resurrection of the dead did not occur in 70 A.D. for the passages that teach about the resurrection show it will be on the "last day" and give details about it which did not happen in 70 A.D. Christ did not come back to earth to receive His kingdom, rather He received it when He ascended to His place at the right hand of God following His resurrection and when He returns He will give the kingdom back to God for His last enemy, death, will have been destroyed by the resurrection of all the dead.

6. the view of 70 A.D. advocates on the Book of Revelation and Matthew 24-25 are not in harmony with the proper understanding of those passages.

In view of these findings, it is necessary to reject the view that Christ returned in 70 A.D., raised the dead and carried out judgment and received His kingdom at that time.

But what is the significance of holding this teaching. Is it a matter of important consequence. Certainly none of us expects every other person in the church to agree with him on every point, and certainly not in the meaning of every prophecy. Those who hold this view are often serious students of the Bible and hold it to be inspired.

Yet, their view changes the meaning of so many passages and concepts in the scriptures. It gives a different view to the meaning of the second coming, the resurrection, and the judgment. It creates a period of 40 years during which the kingdom is not yet fully established, thus confusing the establishment of the church, the nature of the kingdom, and the role of Jesus as high priest. This theory is so pervasive that it affects the approach one takes to many of the teachings of Jesus, to the meaning of many Old Testament prophecies, to much in the epistles of Paul, Peter, and John, and to the Book of Revelation.

While it is not our place to judge our fellow servants, we can say that this view has serious implications about one's treatment of the scriptures and those who hold it tend to focus on it to the point of dividing those who will agree from those who will not. It has caused troubles between brethren in many places. In view of all of this, surely this view is to be rejected.