

Focus on the Kingdom

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Evangelism and the Kingdom of God¹

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While the Kingdom of God was the central theme of all preaching in the New Testament, it has been virtually ignored by modern-day evangelists. This absence of Kingdom-centered evangelism has had devastating effects on the Western church and has now reached critical mass. An anthropocentric gospel of American individualism, which traces its roots back no farther than to the American frontier, has replaced the God-centered “gospel of the kingdom.” The deficiency is so great that most evangelists and professors of evangelism would be hard-pressed even to define the “gospel of the kingdom” (Matt. 24:14; Mark 1:14). The result has been a watered-down message that has no power to change lives.

The Basis for Preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom

When John the Baptist came preaching, “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand!” (Matt. 3:2), his hearers understood he was referring to the eschatological age foretold by Old Testament prophets, a time when God would send a promised messianic king to defeat Israel’s enemies and usher in a new age of universal peace. John called people to break with the past as a requirement to enter the Kingdom and escape the coming judgment.

After John’s arrest, “Jesus came preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand’” (Mark 1:14-15). Luke tells us that when Jesus stood in the synagogue and read a messianic passage from the prophet Isaiah, he concluded by saying, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). Later, when asked if he were the promised messiah, Jesus replied, “I am” (Mark 14:62). The waiting period was over. The Kingdom had arrived in Jesus. It was no longer a distant hope, but it now had a name and a face connected with it.²

Soon after his synagogue discourse, Jesus told the crowds, “I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent” (Luke 4:43). Everywhere he went he proclaimed the “glad tidings of the kingdom of God” (Luke 8:1). The 12 apostles traveled with him.

Is it any wonder as he sent them out, he commissioned them “to preach the kingdom” (Luke 9:1-

2)? Mark’s parallel account of the event says, “So they went out and preached that people should repent” (Mark 6:12), showing the link between the Kingdom and the call to repentance. Jesus then appointed 70 others to “heal the sick there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near you’” (Luke 10:1, 9).

Prior to his ascension, the resurrected Lord spent 40 days with the apostles “speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). **Thus, he ended his earthly ministry the way he began it — declaring the Gospel of the Kingdom!**

On the mount, after assuring his followers that there would be a future dimension to the Kingdom, he told them that in the interim they were to be his witnesses (Acts 1:8). Therefore, it is not surprising to find them preaching “the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus” (Acts 8:12). The Apostle Paul, likewise, taught “concerning the things of the kingdom of God” (Acts 19:8). He reminded the elders at Ephesus that he spent three years “preaching the kingdom of God” (Acts 20:25, 31). While under house arrest in Rome, “Many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God” (Acts 28:23). The Book of Acts closes, significantly, with these words, “Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him” (Acts 28:30-31). There can be little doubt that the Good News of the Kingdom was the central theme of first-century evangelistic preaching. **Consequently, it should be our focus as well.**

The Nature of the Kingdom Message

The Gospel is not an invitation to “invite Christ into your heart,” although His Spirit indwells every believer. Neither does the Gospel center on the eternal bliss that awaits believers at death, although every follower of Christ will depart to be with the Lord.³ *Few, if any, New Testament sermons deal with heaven. Rather they focus on the Kingdom and what it means to be part of it, now and in the future.* The New Testament kerygma [Gospel] announces what God has ultimately done in and through Jesus and invites the hearers to become part of God’s great plan for history. It is primarily about God, not us.

Additionally, the authentic Gospel is an historical, not an ahistorical or existential message. Through the Old

³We will be “with the Lord” only at the rapture/resurrection (1 Thess. 4:16-17) — *ed.*

¹<http://empoweringkingdomgrowth.org/ekg.asp?page=11>

²Used with permission of Baptist Press. Emphasis added.

³It was of course very much still also in the future as the great event of the Second Coming — *ed.*

Testament prophets, God foretold a time when He would send a mighty deliverer to establish a new covenant with Israel and bring all things in subjection to Himself. All independent kingdoms to which people give their allegiance, both spiritual and material, will be destroyed...Jesus announced that God's Kingdom had arrived [was at hand], and then he called people to submit to his rule. On the cross he defeated Satan, offered his life as an atonement for sin, and regained dominion over God's creation which Adam had relinquished at the fall. Calvary was God's death blow to Satan's rule, sin's power and death's victory and, hence, it became the "hinge of history."

At his resurrection, Christ emerged from the cosmic battle victorious, proving that God, not the rebels, was in charge. After all, if Jesus could enter the heart of enemy territory and not be defeated, then their days are numbered!

From his exalted position at God's right hand, Christ now rules from his throne until his enemies become his footstool (Acts 2:35; 1 Cor. 15:23-24). The powers of evil may still function, but only under the authority of Christ (Col. 2:15; 1:15-16; 1 Cor. 2:6-8). As one theologian remarks, "All kingdoms are confronted with their rightful overlord."

As sovereign Lord, Christ now directs the course of history toward its victorious completion, i.e. *the future establishment of his Kingdom on earth and the judgment of all nations, which will take place at his coming.*

Finally the Gospel is corporate in scope as well as individualistic. The Kingdom now finds root in the church. Becoming a citizen of the Kingdom cannot be done in a vacuum, any more than a foreigner can become a citizen of the United States without rubbing shoulders with other Americans. There is a corporate or community aspect to citizenship. It includes responsibility and privileges that cannot be found by living in isolation. Likewise, it is incoherent to say one can enter that reign of Christ and remain outside the church. The church in turn, spreads the Gospel of the Kingdom to the entire world and summons humanity to submit to God's rule in Christ and align themselves with other believers in his Kingdom. Whenever and wherever the victory of Christ is proclaimed and obeyed, Satan must retreat. As God's rule expands, Satan's recedes.

When asked what would be the sign of his coming and the end of the age, Jesus replied, "And **this gospel of the Kingdom** will be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14).

...It is essential that we...re-examine the message we proclaim. Is it the same "gospel of the kingdom" preached by Jesus and the apostles?✧

Acts 13:46-48: Appointment to Life in the Coming Age of the Kingdom

"Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: 'We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us: "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed" (Acts 13:46-48).

Acts 13:48 has been used to back the idea that God has appointed by fixed, irrevocable decree some to eternal life and some to eternal loss. The second half of the verse has been taken as the basis of a form of determinism, making God the author of the loss of salvation for some human beings: "all who were appointed [Greek *tasso*] for eternal life believed."

But is human agency really excluded from the event of conversion? Context must not be ignored. Two verses earlier we have just read: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. *Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy [or 'judge yourselves unworthy'] of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.*" Paul and Barnabas show with these words that hostile Jews had made their personal choice to reject salvation. They judged themselves unfit for life in the coming age of the Kingdom. God must not be blamed! There can be no contradiction between verses 46 and 48. Human freedom to choose must be maintained, in the interests of the character of God. Otherwise the broad teaching of the Bible is sabotaged.

How did these Jews consider themselves unworthy of eternal life? No doubt in their own eyes they thought of themselves as fully fit for eternal life, just as Paul thought of himself as right before God as a Pharisee before his conversion. Later when confronted with Jesus and his Gospel, Paul became an intrepid minister of Jesus. Those who resisted Paul were making a fateful decision against themselves. They were showing that despite God's invitation to grace, they preferred their own form of Judaism.

What then of verse 48? It is possible to render the Greek word (*tetagmenoi*, from *tasso*) as "disposed," rather than "appointed." Rotherham gives us this sense when he translates Paul's thoughts: "And they of the nations hearing [this] began to rejoice, and to glorify God, and they believed — as many as had become disposed for life age-abiding."⁴ It is unnecessary to translate *tetagmenoi* as implying that God, without any human choice, had appointed some to be saved. Dr. Howard Marshall observed, "There is no suggestion that

⁴ Joseph Bryant Rotherham, Rotherham's Emphasized Bible.

they received eternal life independently of their own act of conscious faith" (*Commentary on Acts*). The "ordering" or "arranging" may involve the apostolic preaching which enabled the audience to become believers of the Gospel. It may involve the converts being disposed to believe. Thus life in the coming Kingdom did not exclude the cooperative effort of God, the preachers and the converts. Both human faith and divine appointment operated in regeneration and conversion. This understanding of Acts 13:48 reminds us of Jesus' words in his parable of the wedding feast: "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come'" (Matt. 22:8). Some, however, were worthy, and at the end of the salvation process are congratulated: "Well, done, good and faithful servant!" (Matt. 25:21, 23).

The word *deserve* is related to the Greek word *axios*, "worthy". The idea in Acts 13:46 is that those who refuse the Gospel are making light of the invitation to immortality. It is in this sense that the Jews made light of God's salvation offer by grace through faith in the Gospel teaching and the death and resurrection of Jesus. Luke describes how the Pharisees rejected the counsel of God: "But the Pharisees and experts in the law *rejected God's purpose for themselves*, because they had not been baptized by John" (Luke 7:30). There was no fixed divine decree of belief or unbelief. Some of those who heard Jesus preach the Gospel of the Kingdom, actively and deliberately decided against God's purpose for them, that is, that they should be saved. "How often I wanted to gather you," Jesus said, "but *you* were not willing" (Matt. 23:37).

The Greek word *tasso* in Acts 13:48 has a variety of meanings: to appoint or order someone to a task, put into proper order, command, draw up, ordain, prohibit, set, and in the middle voice, to fix, make disposition, set one's heart. All these imply that God or humans are the agents of the action. An example of the word is found in Paul's letter to Corinth: "You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted [*etaxan*, aorist of *tasso*] themselves to the service of the saints. I urge you, brothers, to submit [*upotasso*] to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it" (1 Cor. 16:15, 16).

The task of the interpreter is to discern the author's mind, not the theology of the Church or the church fathers. Every interpreter must bear in mind that words operate in a context and receive meaning from that context. In order to arrive at a correct understanding of a word, one must establish the meaning of a word and recognize, in some cases, its wide range of meanings.

To interpret the word *appointed* in Acts 13:48 to teach that God, irrespective of any human choice, consigned some to destruction and some to the Kingdom

of God contradicts the context, especially verse 46: "Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: 'We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.'" If one wants to be saved, one must choose this on the basis of the God who says to us "Choose life" (Deut. 30:19). If no choice is really involved then the command of God to us to choose is a deception. If we are to choose, a real choice is possible and necessary. That choice places us on the path which, if we persist, brings us into the Kingdom of God by resurrection at the return of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:23). All of this of course happens under the grace of God. The Gospel of the Kingdom is exactly the same as the Gospel of God's grace (Acts 20:24, 25). And "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17), that is through his gracious Kingdom of God gospel preaching and his later death and resurrection (Matt. 16:21). Confessing Jesus and believing that he is *Lord* means of course recognizing him as Messiah, Son of God and obeying his first command to repent and believe the Gospel of the Kingdom (Mark 1:1, 14, 15). Converts must not just hear "about Jesus" but *hear him preach his saving Message of the Kingdom* (Rom. 10:14). "How can they believe in him whom they have not heard [preaching]?" Note the wrong translation of the NIV here and the correct understanding in the NASV.

Everything grows from seeds, including human persons. Immortal persons are also sown through seed and the seed is the Gospel of the Kingdom of God (Matt. 13:19; Luke 8:11). That seed Kingdom message produces the fruit of the spirit, but none of this happens without our choice and cooperation with God's amazing immortality program. ✧

Hear, O Israel!

The First Principle of Good Theology

by Jan Salovsky

Ascribe asked Jesus which is the first commandment of all. The Messiah replied, "The first of all the commandments is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord. And you are to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You are to love your neighbor as yourself'" (Mark 12:29-31). It is critically important to note that the Messiah opened his answer with the basis of all the commandments — the *Shema*: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is *one* Lord." The Shema is like a gate into Christ's teaching. So to seek the right understanding of the Shema is essential for all of us who want to be true followers of Jesus and worship the God of Israel in spirit and truth. We need to know the One God of Israel. This begins by recognizing and understanding that He is indeed not three, mysteriously, but one. Sooner or later

every human being will need to recognize that God is one, the Father of Jesus, the “only one who is truly God” (John 17:3).

Notice that Jesus said God is “our God.” This further defines who the true God is. Jesus speaks as the Jewish founder of the Christian faith. The God of Israel is also the God of Jesus. Jesus did not merely quote those passages from the Torah; he lived them. Jesus loved his God with all his heart, all his mind, all his strength and all his soul; and Jesus loved his neighbor as himself. He gave us an example to follow. If we truly love Jesus, we must desire to follow his example by sharing his creed. We must desire to love God as Jesus did, as well as love our neighbor as Jesus did. But that means we must know who the only true God is. The Messiah himself declared this in no uncertain terms: “And this is eternal life, that they might know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You sent” (John 17:3).

In this verse Jesus talks to his Father and calls Him the *only* true God. Then he refers to himself as the one whom that true God sent. “Only” means of course that nobody besides the Father can also be the one true God. Absolutely nobody — no other person. Those words of Jesus provide us with a precious *unambiguous definition* and cannot mean anything else. The one God of Israel is the Father and nobody else. Jesus said it. The one God of Israel is also the God of Jesus:

“I ascend to my Father, and your Father; and to *my God, and your God*” (John 20:17).

“The *God of our Lord Jesus Christ*, the Father of glory” (Eph. 1:17).

“We know what *we* worship” (John 4:22). With other Jews, Jesus worshipped *his* God.

“*My God, my God*, why have You forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46).

And even after Jesus was taken to heaven, the Father is still his God: “Him who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of *my God*...and I will write on him the name of *my God*, and the name of the city of *my God*, the new Jerusalem, which will come down out of heaven from *my God*” (Rev. 3:12).

Through the centuries, many Christians have believed that Jesus was the true God *together* with the Father. And they are convinced that there are passages in the Bible that prove this. But if believers grasp and accept what Jesus says — his very simple statements — then they will find out that all those supposed “proofs” are no proofs at all. Will we believe what Jesus the Messiah says? Or will we reject his unmistakable words and replace them with Christian tradition?

Hear, O Israel! The LORD our God is one LORD, the Father and nobody else. No other person. The only true God of Jesus. “The one who alone is truly God.” “The only one who is truly God.” Can language

make it any clearer?

Will we embrace the one God of Israel and of Jesus, the Father, the eternal almighty Creator of everything, whose name is Yahweh? Or will we claim some other Gods beside Him?

Perhaps you fear that if you don’t believe that Jesus *is* God, you cannot be saved? Do not fear, because that is not what the Bible says. Notice the reason why from the apostle John, who wrote, “This has been written so that you may believe that *Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God*; and that believing you may have life through his name” (John 20:31).

The idea that Jesus must *be* God Himself is a much repeated slogan without any biblical basis whatsoever. God chooses the Savior on His terms, not ours.

The Messiah, the human Son of God. That is the definition of the Jesus we need for our salvation. God Himself revealed Jesus’ identity to the apostle Peter: “Simon Peter answered, ‘You are *the Christ, the Son of the living God*.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘You are blessed, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you. It was my Father who is in heaven’ (Matt. 16:16-17).

Jesus the Messiah, Son of God is the sacrificial Lamb whom God appointed and provided. His sacrifice is completely adequate. God so ordained it. You certainly don’t need any imaginary “God the Lamb,” a product of Gentile speculation centuries after the true Lamb of God was sacrificed. After all, God cannot die, and without a mortal Savior there is no atonement for sin. ✧

Focus on the Future

The literature dealing with Jesus and his view of the future is massive. No one person could encompass all that has been written. However, it is possible to reduce the subject to a rather small number of crucial issues.

Jesus was asked about the future by his disciples in the famous Olivet discourse reported in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. These thrilling passages describe the countdown to the future Kingdom of God. That Kingdom will resolve all of the world’s terrible problems and injustices. It will produce a longed-for world peace. The nations will sing for joy (Isa. 14:7). But until that Kingdom day arrives we are to expect an intense struggle between Jesus’ disciples, the members of his Kingdom, and the powers of evil led by the Devil.

Jesus made one thing very clear: There is to be a redoubling of the efforts of the wicked to oppose the Gospel and those who preach it, in the period of time *immediately leading up* to the end of the present age and the personal arrival on earth of Jesus himself.

The famous fifth discourse of Jesus presented by Matthew (Matthew arranges his material in five blocks of teaching showing the New Torah of Jesus) contains

Jesus' answer to the pointed question of his close disciples about the destruction of the Temple. Sadly, there has been so much conflict in commentary about what Jesus meant by his account of events leading to the Second Coming, that some throw up their hands in despair of understanding what Jesus had to say! But there is no good reason for such hopelessness. Jesus intended to be understood, and if we follow his directions carefully we may be enlightened as to the future. Such information is psychologically and spiritually valuable. It matters what we believe and we are to believe the words of Jesus and thus have his mind and spirit (2 John 7-9; 1 Cor. 2:16). We should know what is going to happen just before the Second Coming. We are to avoid two pitfalls: The one is an overheated expectancy causing us to adopt a nervous and unhealthy attitude to our future. On the other hand a careless indifference to the massive quantity of biblical instruction on the future would be equally destructive. We need to be biblically informed.

According to both Jesus and Paul certain very definite events are to precede the arrival of Jesus to establish his Kingdom on earth. Jesus will not return before lunchtime today!

From the thousands of books written on the question of the Antichrist, one is outstanding: the work of French scholar Beda Rigaux who in 1932 penned his famous *Antichrist: Opposition to the Messianic Kingdom in the Old and New Testament*.⁵ I will include some of his reflections as we work through the material given us by Jesus in the three gospels.

Jesus, near the end of his life, had just predicted the ruin of the Temple in Jerusalem. The apostles approached him and asked the following questions, as reported by our three evangelists: "Tell us when these things will be and **what is the sign** of your Second Coming [Parousia] and **the end** of the age?" (Matt. 24:3). "Tell us when these things will be and **what is the sign** when all these things will be **ended**?" (Mark 13:4). "So then when will these things be and **what is the sign** when these things will happen?" (Luke 21:7).

The form in which the opening questions are presented is of great significance for our understanding. The reference to "these things" points to Jesus' immediately preceding statement about the ruin of the Temple (the second Temple). In the very same breath the disciples ask not only *when* this will be but *what sign* will occur when "all these things," "these things," will be ended, happen.

Each of the three reports amplifies and explains the others. All three open with the same question about "these things." All three follow with a question about the sign. But while Mark and Luke speak of a sign when

"these events" are going to occur or be ended, Matthew substitutes, "What is the sign of your *Second Coming and the end of the age*?"

It is obvious from the variations provided by our three reporters that the sign when (all) these things are going to be **ended** or occur (Mark and Luke) is precisely the same as Matthew's version which speaks of "the sign of your Parousia and the **end** of the age." It would be incredible that a discourse on the Second Coming would omit any reference to the Second Coming in the opening question. Mark in fact has used the verb "to be **ended**" related to Matthew's word "the **end** of the age." And Mark's report of Jesus' words, if we listen carefully, reflects the angel's reply to Daniel's own question about the end in Daniel 12:7: "It shall be for a time, times and half a time, and when an end is made to the breaking in pieces of the holy people, all these things will be ended" (cp. Mark 13:4).

Although Mark and Luke do not contain the actual word for the Second Coming, they speak of that same event when speaking of "(all) these things." Thus "(all) these things being **ended**" includes the arrival of Jesus and the **end** of the age as Matthew understands it. In all three versions the question is prompted by Jesus' reference to the ruin of the temple.

Logically then, Matthew's "Second Coming and the end of the age" is equivalent in meaning to "the completion of all these things" (Mark and Luke). That equivalence is further proved by the fact that each evangelist reports the question about a *single sign* announcing "the second coming" or "these things." It makes no difference therefore whether one asks, "When will these things happen or be ended?" or "When will the end of the age and your second coming be?"

From these facts we establish the monumentally important truth that the Second Coming of Jesus is in the minds of the disciples closely connected to the event of the ruin of the Temple.

A Warning

It is not difficult to see that a large number of Bible readers today immediately conclude that since the temple fell in AD 70, that must also have been the Second Coming. A whole school of prophetic studies maintains this view with passion. The view is known as Preterism ("pastism"). The Parousia is past. It was in AD 70!

However, to any with even an elementary knowledge of the New Testament it should be clear that such a view is impossible. The *resurrection of the faithful* is going to happen at the Parousia (1 Cor. 15:23), and the Second Coming is a dramatic, public and visible event bringing to a crashing end the present system of human misrule and replacing it with the sane and sound government of Jesus himself and the faithful. To say then that the second coming occurred in AD 70 is out of the question. Jesus

⁵In French. The translation of the quotations is mine.

did not return to Jerusalem in AD 70 and the resurrection of the dead did not happen!

Nevertheless, the opening question of the disciples shows beyond any doubt that the ruin of the Temple is closely linked to the Parousia. How are we to deal with these facts? Rigaux observes correctly, “Matthew understands by ‘these things’ the ruin of the Temple, and he indicates that among these things he means *at the same time* the Second Coming and the end of the age” (p. 223). He quotes another commentator as saying, “At this time the Apostles made no clear distinction between the ruin of the Temple and the end of the age. They do not seem to have clearly disassociated in their perspective the glorious arrival of Christ at the Second Coming and the Jewish catastrophe [the ruin of the temple]” (p. 224).

We continue with Jesus’ reply. First Jesus warns against Christians being deceived by many coming falsely as his representatives, in his name (Matt. 24:5). But what can we say about the end? Matthew and Mark return to the word “end” a few verses into Jesus’ reply to their question. “The end is not yet” (Matt. 24:6; Mark 13:7). The end in question is of course the only “end” mentioned in the discourse. “What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?” (Matt. 24:3) or “When will all these things be ended?” (Mark 13:4).

What then is the sign of this great end? “With the Abomination of Desolation the end arrives” (Rigaux, p. 229). The Abomination is the central sign of the impending end of the age, and the signal also for those in Judea to flee to the mountains. “The whole of the rest of Matthew’s account is linked to the Abomination of Desolation.” “The ‘end’ here is the entire eschatological drama, of which the punishment of the Jewish city is an episode” (p. 230).

The one key sign of the end of the age is indeed the Abomination of Desolation. Matthew’s report makes this entirely clear. Having noted earlier in the account that “the end is not yet” (v. 6) he then reports Jesus as saying, “This Gospel of the Kingdom must be heralded in the whole world to all the nations and **then the end will come**” (v. 14). Once again the same “end of the age” as found in the disciples’ question (v. 3) is the subject. Of vital significance is the next event in the end-time program: “When you *therefore* see the Abomination of Desolation in a holy place...” (v. 15).

The word “therefore” (*oun*) occurs no less than 56 times in Matthew and it implies a direct inference. Jesus says that the appearance of the Abomination of Desolation marks the sign of the end of the age. This is not AD 70 which Jesus nowhere calls “the end.” The question of the disciples, and Jesus’ reply, recognizes only one end: “the second coming and the end of the age.”

As well as being the cue for the end of the age, the appearance of the Abomination is the signal for

immediate escape to the hills, if you are in Judea, because the Abomination will trigger the worst time of distress in the whole of history (Matt. 24:21; Mark 13:19). Never since the creation, and never again will there be a time as awful as this “great tribulation.” So bad are the conditions that unless God called a halt to it, “shortened those days,” no one would survive (Matt. 24:22; Mark 13:20).

Jesus clarifies his reference to “great tribulation” by quoting verbatim Daniel’s prophecy about the Great Tribulation found in Daniel’s closing vision (12:1). This is also the time of Jacob’s trouble, from which she will finally be saved and brought into the Kingdom. That day of Jacob’s trouble is likewise a day unparalleled. “There is nothing like it” (Jer. 30:7).

The story is not complicated: First the final Kingdom Gospel preaching worldwide, “and then the end will come.” What will the end look like? “When you *therefore* see the Abomination standing in a holy place,” or “standing where **he** ought not to” (Mark 13:14),⁶ then flee, for then there will be a time of great distress.

Then Matthew writes: “**Immediately after the tribulation of those days**, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of heaven will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the tribes of the land [or earth] will lament, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory” (24:29, 30).

There is an unbreakable sequence of events in Jesus’ marvelous discourse. Those who wish to find primarily a reference to the events of AD 70 in Jesus’ account have treated the time-markers and other connecting words in his discourse irresponsibly. Some commentators would like to think that the tribulation in the phrase “immediately after the tribulation of *those days*” is not the same “great tribulation” just mentioned but another longer one! But Matthew expressly speaks of the time “immediately after **the tribulation of those days**.” Which days? What tribulation? There is one option only — the great tribulation introduced by verse 21 as the awful period of unparalleled distress initiated by the Abomination of Desolation. “Immediately after the tribulation of *those days*” cannot mean the tribulation of some other days! There is only one “great tribulation” and it is a sign of the impending end of the age and the return of Jesus to our planet.

Mark’s account seems to exert equal effort to make sure no one would misunderstand that the “great tribulation” just mentioned (13:19) is the brief and awful

⁶The pronoun in the Greek is masculine and points to a single individual (see the commentaries, NAB, and Weymouth).

period of trouble after which the heavenly signs appear and Jesus returns in power and glory. Mark reports Jesus as saying, “In **those** days **after that** tribulation, the sun will be darkened...” (13:24). There is only one tribulation in the context to which Jesus obviously refers. The language bars all attempts to insert here long periods of time or another form of tribulation to fill, as commentators would like to do, the centuries which have elapsed since AD 70.

It is therefore an impossible reading of the discourse of Jesus to suppose that he begins by describing events in AD 70 and then jumps to the spectacular event of his Second Coming. With the phrase “*immediately* after the tribulation of those days” and “in those days, after *that* tribulation” Jesus blocks any attempt to insert long periods of time between the Abomination and the Second Coming. The conclusion is inevitable, therefore, that the Abomination, the Great Tribulation, the immediately following cosmic signs and the Second Coming form a short future series of episodes.

Jesus derived this schema from the prophecies given to Daniel six centuries earlier. Commentaries which pull Jesus’ words apart from their named source in the writings of Daniel inevitably misunderstand the Olivet Discourse. Jesus could not have made things plainer. He said, When I say Abomination of Desolation I am referring to “the Abomination of Desolation *prophesied by Daniel* — let the reader be attentive to this point” (Matt. 24:15).

Daniel’s phrase “the abomination of desolation” is repeated by Jesus as the key to the end-time. “Then comes the end. When you *therefore* see the Abomination...” (Matt. 24:14-15). It is hardly surprising, and also a great confirmation that we are following Jesus accurately, to find Jesus’ words “the abomination of desolation” quoted precisely from Daniel 12:11. In that verse this Abomination of Desolation is provided with its own very valuable chronological marker: “From the time that the sacrifice is removed and the Abomination of Desolation is set up, there will be 1290 days” until the end of the vision in question, which is completed at the resurrection of the faithful dead (Dan. 12:2)

Here then we have the biblical definition of the Abomination, confirmed by both Daniel and Jesus. The Abomination is associated with a removal of sacrifice by a wicked person, and its results will continue for 1290 days. If we further examine the context of this event we find that the same Abomination is set up in a temple fortress by the final wicked King of the North (Dan. 11:31) introduced by Daniel 11:21, in the vision which is under discussion also in Daniel 12.

The data is straightforward. An arrogant and aggressive King of the North will assault the temple fortress, remove the sacrifice and set up the Abomination

which causes desolation. In a debriefing session with the interpreting angel, Daniel asks about the final period of the vision and he is told, “From the taking away of the sacrifice and the setting up of the abomination which causes desolation, there will be 1290 days” (12:11). This is a great key to end-time events. Daniel 9:27 speaks likewise of “he [who comes] desolating on the wing of abominations.” Daniel 8:13 similarly points to a final awful desolating rebellion.

Revelation takes up that same period of “time, times and half a time” — 42 months or 1260 days (Rev. 12:14). This is the final half of the last “heptad” (period of seven) described in the prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27. Revelation 11:2 speaks of the trampling down of the holy city for 42 months, while for the same period (1260 days, Rev. 11:3) two witnesses will exercise a prophetic ministry. These too are crucial signs of the impending return of Jesus, but until they are realized, we must watch events, neither showing a careless disregard of world affairs nor an equally detrimental over-anticipation which ignores the events which Jesus said must happen before he comes back. May we be ready. The Kingdom of God is the whole point of our lives and our acceptance with God and Jesus in that Kingdom underlies all our Christian effort. ✧

Comments

“I’d like to thank you for your participation in ‘The Human Jesus’ documentary I’ve seen on the internet (Jesusishuman.com). My dear friend Danny Dixon told me it would challenge me, but I had no idea it would completely reverse my thinking! I was quite edified by your simple explanations of Hebrew idioms such as John 1:1 (‘the word was with God’) and other such verses. As someone who was raised to affirm the Trinity, I’m amazed at the sheer lack of knowledge I (and many others) had on the subject! The idea of ‘agency’ is a much more digestible concept than the Trinity, and I hope more people begin to question this deep-seated belief.” — *from email*

“I recently watched ‘The Human Jesus’ documentary and am very impressed. So much so, I am determined to spread the news far and wide and make sure others see it as well. I value the format as it covers the major issues of debate in casual conversation with both Trinitarians and monotheists. To all involved: Well done and thank you!” — *Alaska*

We hope to have a DVD of the documentary “The Human Jesus” available for sale in the next few weeks.

Anthony is heard on thebyteshow.com interviewed weekly by GeorgeAnn Hughes. You will also find there fascinating Bible conversations with pastors Greg Deuble, Sean Finnegan, Alex Hall, Chuck Jones, Don Smith and Dustin Smith.