

Chapter 15: The Second Coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

The end

It was late May and Professor Ho was waiting for what he knew would be his last meeting with the boys, at least for that semester. Their final exam period would begin the following week and they wouldn't have time to come anymore. As usual, Professor Ho was praying for them, especially for Xiao Wang.

When the boys walked in the door, Professor Ho greeted them with his usual warmth. He was sincere in that; the boys had become very dear to him across the weeks of their meetings. Xiao Li returned his greeting in a friendly way, but Xiao Wang looked at him silently for a moment, as though he were debating about saying something. But finally he just gave a slight smile and nod, and said, "Good afternoon Professor Ho."

Professor Ho wondered what was on his mind, but since Xiao Wang didn't seem to want to say any more, he cleared his throat and launched in. "Well boys, today I'd like to discuss the event which will put me and all other historians out of a job: the end of the history of the world."

"The endtimes and the Second Coming," said Xiao Li enthusiastically. "I have a lot of questions about that!"
"Then let's begin."

Jesus Christ ascends into heaven

"After Jesus's resurrection, He continued to appear on earth in a physical body for 40 days. At the end of that period, He ascended into heaven in the presence of His disciples:

9 And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10 And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. 11 They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven." [Acts 1:9-11 NAS]

Subsequently, the disciples announced that Jesus was in heaven and would later return to earth:

20 [Peter said] ... Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, 21 whom heaven must receive until *the* period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. [Acts 3:20-21 NAS]

Xiao Wang was confused. "So where is Jesus's body now? In outer space?"

Professor Ho shook his head with a laugh. "I don't think so! As we discussed last week, before the resurrection, Jesus's body was an ordinary human body, subject to death. In contrast, the Bible states that after His resurrection Jesus had a glorified or 'spiritual' body [see 1 Corinthians 15:20-23, 35-53]. It seems that His resurrection body transcended the natural laws. Certainly He was able to appear and disappear at will, and there is no record of His doing that before His resurrection. At the ascension, Jesus's body disappeared—you won't find it in outer space! But it continues to exist.

"Part of the issue is the meaning of the word 'heaven.' Among the first century Jews, the term 'heaven' included three places: the atmosphere, outer space, and the spiritual abode of God [see 2 Corinthians 12:2-4]. The first two meanings were physical, but the 'third heaven' was a spiritual state, not a place; it was the state of being in the presence of God. When the Bible says that Jesus is in heaven, it is referring to this spiritual state. When Jesus returns to this world, His body will literally reappear in the atmosphere and descend to the earth."

"When is this going to happen?" Xiao Wang asked. "You showed us how Daniel predicted the actual year Jesus began to preach; that was the Messiah's first coming. Does the Bible tell us when Jesus will return?"

"We'd all like to know, wouldn't we?" Professor Ho replied with a smile. "But I'm afraid I have to disappoint you: Jesus unambiguously said we can't know exactly when He will return."

No one knows when Jesus will return

"The disciples were the first to ask that question, just before Jesus ascended:

6 So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; [Acts 1:6-7 NAS]

When the disciples asked about 'restoring the kingdom to Israel' they meant the beginning of the millennial reign of the Messiah, Jesus, on earth. Their question was equivalent to our question about when Jesus will return. Jesus's answer was plain: they weren't allowed to know! In fact, Jesus had already told them this a few days before the crucifixion:

26 "Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN CLOUDS with great power and glory. ... 32 "But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father *alone*. 33 "Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the *appointed* time will come. [Mark 13:26, 32-33 NAS]

Jesus unambiguously and emphatically warned the disciples that they could not know when He was going to return to earth, so they had to be careful to be ready at all times. The same thing applies to us today!"

Xiao Li wrinkled his brow. "But I've heard of preachers predicting when Jesus would come back!"

Professor Ho sighed and shook his head. "Yes, I know! It seems that every year some 'big name' in the Church

predicts that this will be the year when Jesus returns. Some set a date more than once, like a famous American evangelical who predicted Christ's return would be in 1994, and then came back around later and slated it for 2011! These things are embarrassments to the Church and only provide ammunition to the enemies of Christianity."

"But if Jesus said you can't know, why do they make such predictions?" asked Xiao Wang.

"A good question! Perhaps for two reasons. First, some of them take an overstrained interpretation of Jesus's statement that no one knows 'that day or hour.' They suggest that the day and time of day can't be known, but the year and month can be! Of course, this ignores Jesus's other statements that even the general 'time' or 'epoch' can't be known with certainty, much less the year [Acts 1:7]. A mistake like that is obviously a violation of a basic principle of scriptural interpretation: you must take into consideration *everything* the Bible says on a topic, not just one verse.

"That's their error. But this frequently encountered error of Christians trying to precisely predict the time of Christ's Second Coming actually has its roots in a correct recognition that Jesus *did* give some broad, general indications about when He would return."

The Olivet Discourse

"A few days before the crucifixion, the disciples asked Jesus a question:

1 And Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. 2 And He answered and said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down." 3 As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" [Matthew 24:1-3 NAS]

The disciples asked two different questions: one about the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, and the other about Jesus's coming in glory to rule as king at 'the end of the age.' Perhaps they thought these two sets of events would happen at about the same time, but Jesus made it clear that they weren't necessarily simultaneous. Jesus's reply included an outline of some of the major events which would occur after His resurrection to the time of His Second Coming. This teaching is called the Olivet Discourse and is recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. We must read all three of these chapters together and integrate them before we can fully understand what Jesus meant. [See appendix 15-1 for a harmonization of the Olivet Discourse chapters.]

"To understand the Olivet Discourse, we need to understand how the Bible divides up human history. The Old Testament period came to an end with Christ's death, resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, all of which occurred in about 30AD. Since then we are living in the New Testament period, which is often referred to as the Church Age. The Church Age will culminate in what is called the endtimes,^A when Jesus will return.^B

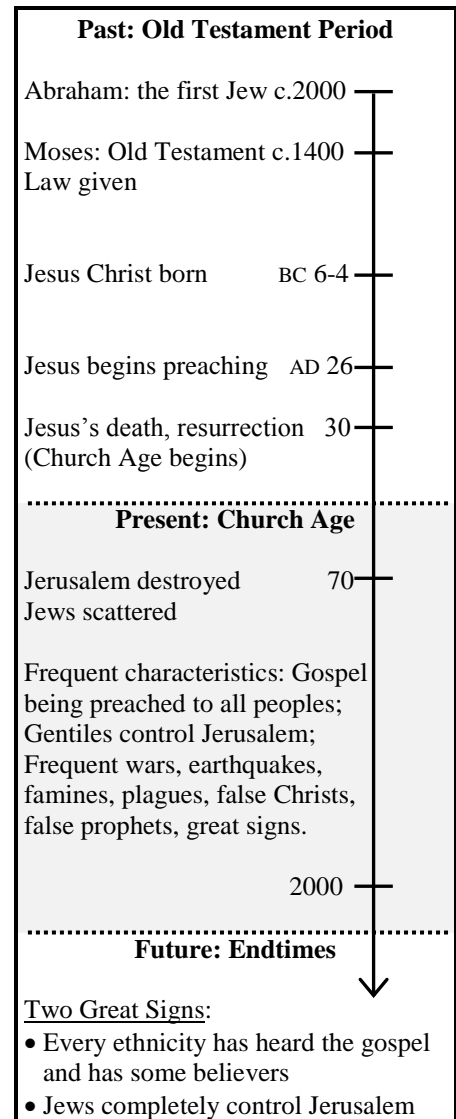
"Jesus predicted three major sets of events in the Olivet Discourse:

1. The destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD and subsequent scattering of the Jews;
2. The ongoing conditions of the Church Age;
3. The events of the Endtimes."

Olivet Discourse: Destruction of Jerusalem, scattering of the Jews (70AD—present)

"You may remember, boys, that some weeks ago we discussed Jesus's prediction about the destruction of Jerusalem and the scattering of the Jews [see chapter 9]. It was this prediction that prompted the disciples to question Jesus:

5 And while some were talking about the temple, that it was adorned with beautiful stones and votive gifts, He said, 6 "As for these things which you are looking at, the days will come in which there will not be left



^A This author recognizes that the New Testament uses terms like 'last days' or 'end of the age' in two different ways. One use refers to the period beginning with Jesus's First Coming and continuing until the eternal state, and includes the entire Church Age (e.g. Acts 2:17; Hebrews 1:2, 9:26). The other use of such terms is restricted to the period which starts near the end of the Church Age and continuing until the eternal state (e.g. Matthew 13:39-40, 28:20; 2Timothy 3:1; 2Peter 3:3). This chapter will use these terms in the latter sense.

^B This author is *not* claiming that an absolute, hard and fast line can be drawn between the end of the Church Age and the beginning of the events included this chapter's discussion of the Endtimes.

one stone upon another which will not be torn down." 7 They questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, when therefore will these things happen? And what *will be* the sign when these things are about to take place?" 8 And He said... 20 "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. ... 23 ...there will be great distress upon the land and wrath to this people; 24 and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. [Luke 21:5-8, 20, 23-24 NAS]

We can't go into all the details of this prophecy again today. Obviously it was fulfilled in 70AD when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the Jews were subsequently scattered [see chapter 9 for a detailed discussion].^C For today, I want you to especially notice Jesus's prediction that Gentile control of Jerusalem will last 'until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.' At a minimum this means that in the endtimes the Jews will be free to rebuild their temple on it's ancient site. The complete end of the 'times of the Gentiles' might imply the establishment of the millennial kingdom with Jesus the Jew ruling in Jerusalem."

"But the Jews control Jerusalem now," Xiao Wang objected.

"They do and they don't," Professor Ho replied. "The key point is control of the Temple Mount, where the Jewish temple was in Jesus's day. In 1948, when the Jews established the state of Israel, they controlled about half of the city of Jerusalem, not including the site of the former temple. Since the 'Six Day War' in 1967, the Jews have held the entire city. However, very importantly, the Islamic holy site known as the 'Dome of the Rock' mosque (also known as the Mosque of Omar), still occupies the site of the ancient temple. Although the Jews control Jerusalem, Muslims still worship at the site of the former temple, and do not permit any Jew to enter. [See chapter 6 for additional details.] If the Jews tried to force their way in, there would be an immediate uprising of Palestinians and probably attacks from most of the Muslim nations of the Middle East. Thus the most important place in Jerusalem is still 'trampled under foot by the Gentiles' because the 'the times of the Gentiles' are not yet 'fulfilled.' A sign of the endtimes is the Jews' recovery of complete control over Jerusalem."

Olivet Discourse: Ongoing conditions during the Church Age (30AD—present)

"The second major set of predictions in the Olivet Discourse concerns the ongoing characteristics of the Church Age. Jesus made it clear that these things are *not* indicators that the end is near:

8 And He said, "See to it that you are not misled; for many will come in My name, saying, 'I am *He*,' and, 'The time is near'. Do not go after them. 9 "When you hear of wars and disturbances, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end *does not follow* immediately." 10 Then He continued by saying to them, "Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, 11 and there will be great earthquakes, and in various places plagues and famines; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. 12 "But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name's sake. 13 "It will lead to an opportunity for your testimony. 14 "So make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves; 15 for I will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute. 16 "But you will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put *some* of you to death, 17 and you will be hated by all because of My name. [Luke 21:8-17 NAS]

This passage is often misunderstood. Jesus's point is *not* that the events listed here signal the end, nor that they will increase in intensity or frequency at the end. Instead, Jesus emphasizes that things like these—widespread persecution of Christians, terrible wars, natural disasters, so-called 'great signs' appearing in the heavens, false prophets, false Christs—will be *commonly* seen during the Church Age. Not surprisingly, the past 2,000 years of history is filled with events like these, and they're still happening today. But none of them constitute a sign that the end is near: 'these things must take place first, but the end does not follow immediately.' "

"But aren't there more earthquakes than in the past?" Xiao Li asked.

Professor Ho shook his head. "Although we sometimes hear that in Christian circles, there's actually no basis for it. A careful review of seismic records by a Christian geologist found no evidence for an increase in the number or severity of earthquakes during the 20th century."¹²

"Oh." Xiao Li almost sounded disappointed. "But what about all the cults and false Christs? There are more and more of them these days!"

"There are plenty of cults and false Christs," Professor agreed, "but that's the case for every page of human history. There's really no reason to think they are more numerous now. Take an example from our own history. In the late Qing dynasty, millions of people followed Hong Xiuquan during the Taiping Rebellion. We know that history well, but often we forget that Hong Xiuquan was a false Christian who claimed to have received visions and to be the younger brother of Jesus Christ. His ordinary followers may have been sincere in their religious and social zeal, but they were following a false prophet who led them astray and certainly did not preach or practice the actual Christian gospel. Twenty million people, about 5% of China's population at that time, died in the Taiping Rebellion, while Hong Xiuquan played with his many concubines and killed his own generals. But that was not a sign that the Second Coming

^C Although many Jews were scattered in 70AD, the diaspora was not complete until 135AD, when all remaining Jews were expelled from Palestine after the Second Revolt under Bar Kochba.

was near. Ordinary natural disasters, social or political disasters, and the appearance of cults are not signs of the end-times, not even if several disasters happen at the same time. Jesus's warning, 'see to it that you are not misled' applies here [Luke 21:8]."

Olivet Discourse: The endtimes and the Second Coming

"In the final section of the Olivet Discourse, Jesus describes events specifically related to the endtimes:

14 "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.

15 "Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), 16 then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains; 17 Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. 18 Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. 19 "But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! 20 "But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath. 21 For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. 22 "Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

23 "Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There *He is*,' do not believe *him*. 24 "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. 25 "Behold, I have told you in advance. 26 "So if they say to you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness,' do not go out, *or*, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe *them*. 27 "For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. 28 "Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

29 "But 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 the heavens will be shaken. 30 And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. 31 "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. [Matthew 24:14-31 NAS]

There's more here than we can possibly go into today, but I want you to especially notice two points:

1. In the endtimes, the Jews will be in Israel with a 'holy place,' Jewish temple in Jerusalem (v.15-16);
2. At the endtimes, the work of preaching the gospel to the world will be completed (v.14);

these two factors show that we can have some idea when Jesus's return is coming closer.

We can have some idea when we are nearing Christ's Second Coming

"As I mentioned a moment ago, we definitely can't tell with any certainty or precision when Jesus will return. Jesus Himself emphasized that point:

6 ... [the disciples] were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; [Acts 1:6-7 NAS]

26 "Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN CLOUDS with great power and glory. ... 32 "But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father *alone*. 33 "Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the *appointed* time will come. [Mark 13:26, 32-33 NAS]

It's not only the 'day or hour' which is uncertain; the 'times or epochs' are hidden. Thus no one can predict the year or the decade or even the century with certainty. I reemphasize that here to prevent you from misunderstanding what I'm about to say next.

"Although Jesus made it perfectly clear we can't be sure when He's coming back, He didn't say we could have absolutely no idea. On the contrary, right before warning us no one knows 'that day or that hour,' Jesus told us:

28 "Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. 29 "Even so, you too, when you see these things happening, recognize that He is near, *right* at the door. [Mark 13:28-29 NAS]

Jesus said we 'see these things happening' we would know that His return was 'near.' He pictures a slow process, that of new leaves unfolding in springtime. The rising of sap and the budding and opening of leaves is a gradual process, and yet we all recognize it as a sure sign of the change of seasons. So it must be across some period of time that believers will 'see these things happening.' During the process, we should realize that He's almost here. It's as though He will have reached our doorstep and be about to open the door. We will not have seen Him yet—He'll be on the other side of the door, He won't have opened it yet—but we will know that He's close. The door could open at any moment."

"What does Jesus mean by 'these things'?" Xiao Wang asked. "Which 'things' is He referring to?"

"An excellent question!" Professor Ho affirmed. "Obviously those must be events happening *before* Jesus appears

‘coming in the clouds.’ And the parable about new leaves implies those events will occur over a period of time, not instantly. It seems clear to me that Jesus gives us two specific indicators or signs that His Second Coming is near: the Jews in Israel with a temple, and the preaching of the gospel all over the world.”

Sign of the endtimes: The reestablishment of the state of Israel

“Jesus emphasized that the temple was going to be destroyed and the Jews scattered. Thus their presence in ‘Judea’ with a ‘holy place,’ a temple, in the endtimes [Matthew 24:15-16] necessitates a return of the Jews to Israel in appreciable numbers. It’s not surprising, then, that the Bible not only predicted the diaspora of the Jews which happened in 70 AD, but also predicted their return to Israel. We can’t examine all the relevant prophecies at length today [see chapter 4]. But just for one example, Ezekiel predicted the Jews would be regathered to Israel in the endtimes:”

21 "Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; ... 24 "My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances and keep My statutes and observe them. 25 "They will live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons and their sons' sons, forever; and David My servant will be their prince forever. 26 "I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. [Ezekiel 37:21, 24-26 NAS]

“Professor Ho, Ezekiel lived during the Babylonian captivity,” Xiao Wang pointed out. “How do we know he wasn’t talking about the restoration from Babylon?”

“A valid question,” Professor agreed with a nod. “Part of the answer is in verse 24. Ezekiel, who accurately predicted the ‘scraping’ of Tyre and the permanent weakness of Egypt, here predicts that after this regathering ‘My servant David’ will be king over them ‘forever.’ Nothing like that happened after the Babylonian captivity. It obviously refers to the Messiah, Jesus, reigning in Jerusalem, and sets the timeframe for the event as the endtimes. Furthermore, in the very next chapter, Ezekiel goes on to describe the battle of Armageddon:^D

8 "After many days you [a coalition of Gentile armies] will be summoned; in the latter years you will come into the land that is restored from the sword, *whose inhabitants* have been gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel which had been a continual waste; but its people were brought out from the nations, and they are living securely, all of them. [Ezekiel 38:8 NAS]

If you check the context of Ezekiel chapter 38 and 39, you’ll see that nothing like it happened in the years after the Babylonian restoration. Note here that Ezekiel places these events long after his own time, ‘after many days,’ ‘in the latter years.’ But before the battle comes, Jews will have been ‘gathered from many nations’ after the land of Israel ‘had been a continual waste.’

“That fits the situation in the 20th century when the Jews reestablished their nation. They didn’t come from few places in the Near East, like after Babylon. They arrived from all over the earth. And the land they returned to hadn’t just been underpopulated for a few decades, but had been a ‘continual waste’ for centuries.

“One of the remarkable things about Palestine after the Jewish diaspora is how desolate it became. In Jesus’s day, there may have been over two million people living in Israel,^E and that was based on 1st century technology. But by the Middle Ages the population had fallen to just a few hundred thousand, and even at the beginning of the 20th century it was only about half a million. Palestine apparently didn’t recover its 1st century population level until the Jews began moving back to Israel in substantial numbers during the 1940s. As Ezekiel predicted, Israel ‘had been a continual waste’ until ‘its people were brought out from the nations.’

“Consider the situation about 300 years ago. William Whiston, the English mathematician who succeeded Isaac Newton as professor of mathematics at Cambridge, did a translation of Josephus’s historical works about the Jews. In a footnote to the section about the Babylonian captivity, Whiston compared the situation of Israel in 586BC to that in his own day, 1736AD:

We see here that Judea was left in a manner desolate after the [Babylonian] captivity of the two tribes and was not re-peopled with foreign colonies, perhaps as an indication of Providence that the Jews were to re-people it without opposition themselves [in the restoration under the Persians]. I also esteem the latter and present desolate condition [in the year 1736 AD] of the same country, without being re-peopled by foreign colonies, to be a like indication, that the same Jews are hereafter to re-people it again themselves, at their so long expected future restoration.³

^D The use of the terms ‘Gog’ and ‘Magog’ in Ezekiel 38 and 39 does not indicate that Ezekiel is predicting the same battle described in Revelation 20:8-9, which will occur at the *end* of the Millennium. It’s very clear that the subsequent events of Ezekiel 39 do not happen in the new heavens and new earth of Revelation 21 and 22. Ezekiel 38 and 39 occur just before the *beginning* of the Millennium and describe the battle of Armageddon which is also predicted in Revelation 19:11-21. The use of the term ‘Gog and Magog’ in Revelation 20:8 simply refers to the assembled unbelievers of the entire world who gather against God’s people at the *end* of the Millennium, as their ancestors had gathered against Jerusalem at Armageddon just before the *beginning* of the Millennium.

^E Estimates vary, but the population certainly exceeded one million in Jesus’s day and was probably over two million.

When Whiston wrote those words in 1736 there were perhaps a quarter of a million people in Palestine—and apparently less than ten thousand of them were Jews. There was no movement among the Jews scattered throughout the world to return to desolate, impoverished Palestine! Nothing like that even began until over a hundred years later. I know that Whiston’s theology in other areas had quite a few problems, but he saw this much clearly: the Bible predicted unequivocally that the Jews would return to Palestine and reestablish the nation of Israel. And so he was betting on it in 1736, when there wasn’t the faintest human indication that it would happen. He interpreted what he *could* see in his day—an underpopulated Palestine—as preparation for what the Bible said *would* happen later—the return of the Jews. And he was right! Over two hundred years later, in 1948, it happened.

“My conclusion is this: the return of millions of Jews to Palestine and the reestablishment of the state of Israel is both a major fulfillment of prophecy and a strong indicator that we are getting closer to the end.”

“But the Jews don’t have a temple yet!” objected Xiao Wang.

“No they don’t—and the end hasn’t come yet, either!” replied Professor Ho with a laugh. “But I’m sure you can see that the reestablishment of Israel was one of the necessary prerequisites for the eventual rebuilding of the temple. In that respect, our situation is a lot like Whiston’s. In his day, Palestine was mostly empty, and Whiston was expecting what hadn’t happened yet, the return of the Jews to Israel. In our day, the Jews have already returned, and we’re expecting the next step, the rebuilding of the temple.”

Sign of the endtimes: A Jewish temple in Jerusalem

“Let’s look more closely at Jesus’s prediction involving the endtimes temple in Jerusalem:

15 "Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), 16 then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains; ... 21 For then there will be a great tribulation, ... 29 "But immediately after the tribulation of those days... 30 ...then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. [Matthew 24:15-16, 21, 29-30 NAS]

“Professor Ho,” said Xiao Wang with a smile, “the text here in verse 15 says ‘let the reader understand.’ But this reader doesn’t!”

Professor Ho chuckled. “Yes, I used to have exactly the same feeling! Jesus is using a past historical event familiar to all Jews to predict what would happen in the future. In 165BC, Israel was controlled by the Grecian Seleucid Empire. The king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, erected an idol of a pagan god in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem and forbade the Jews to worship Yahweh. The Jews rose in revolt, expelled the Greeks and restored their temple. This was well known history to Jesus and His disciples. Here Jesus predicts that something similar will happen during the endtimes: a pagan idol, ‘the abomination of desolation,’ will be erected in the Jewish temple, ‘the holy place.’^F

“This is very significant, because, as we just discussed, it necessitates that the Jews *have* a temple during the endtimes. Remember, Jesus had just predicted the destruction of the temple, the diaspora of the Jews, and Gentile control of Jerusalem [Luke 21:5-6, 20-24]. But His statement here makes it clear the Jews will be back in Jerusalem worshipping at their own temple.

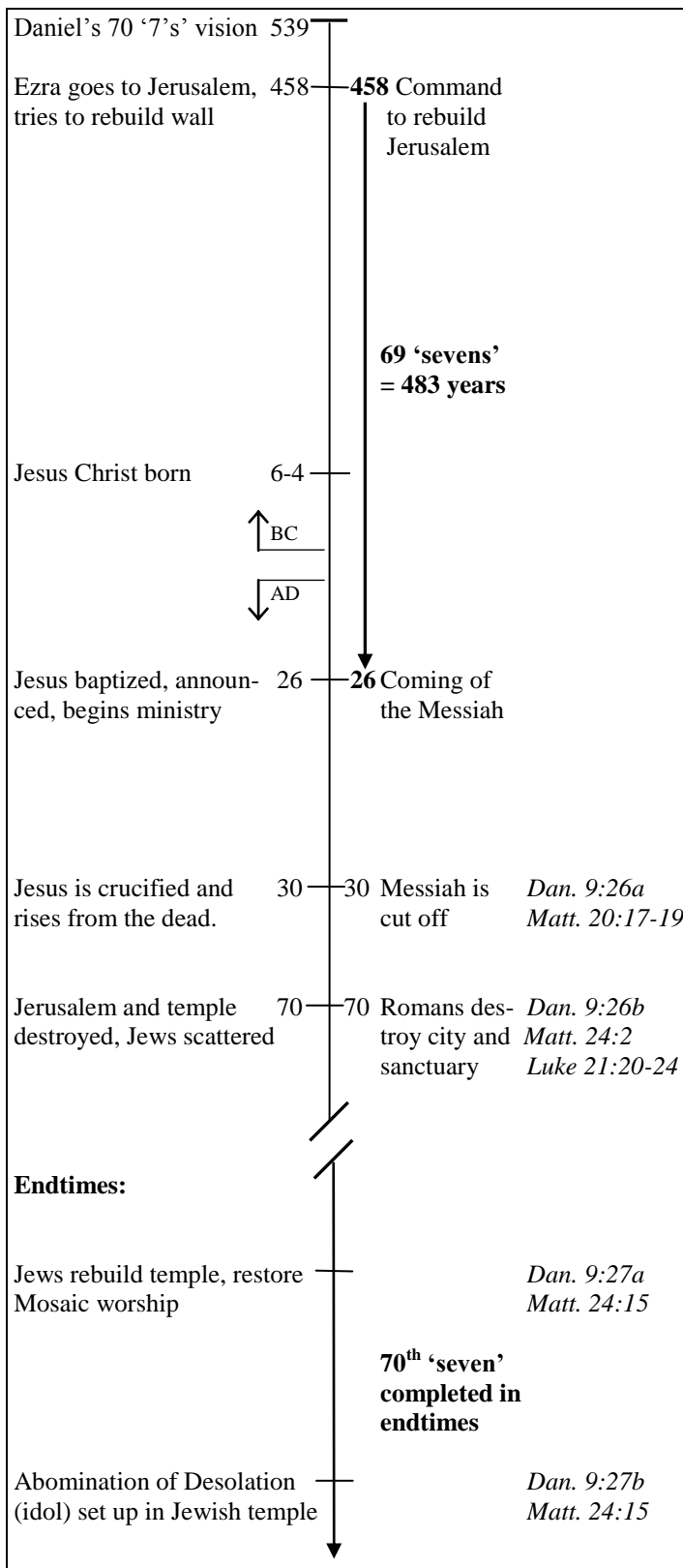
“Jesus’s prophecy here correlates directly with the end of Daniel’s ‘70 Sevens’ prophecy [see chapter 9].

26 "Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end *will come* with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. 27 "And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations *will come* one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate." [Daniel 9:26-27 NAS]

The order of events predicted by Daniel is just the same as that predicted by Jesus:

1. **v.26a (30 AD):** ‘the Messiah,’ Jesus, ‘will be cut off’ by crucifixion. Jesus repeatedly predicted His crucifixion [Matthew 12:40, 16:21, 17:22-23, 20:17-19].
2. **v.26b (70 AD):** ‘the people of the prince who is to come,’ the Romans, ‘will destroy the city,’ Jerusalem, ‘and the sanctuary,’ the temple. Jesus explicitly predicts this destruction in the Olivet discourse [Matthew 24:2; Luke 21:20-24].
3. **v.27a (endtimes):** at some later point, the temple rituals, ‘sacrifice and grain offering,’ have been restored. In the Olivet discourse, Jesus indicates that there will be a Jewish temple in the endtimes [Matthew 24:15].
4. **v.27b (endtimes):** the temple worship will be stopped and there will be ‘abominations’ and desolation in Israel. Daniel doesn’t specify the abominations but Jesus says they will include an idol erected in the temple [Matthew 24:15].

^F Some have suggested Matthew 24:15-28 (and the parallel passage Mark 13:14-23) are not about the endtimes but rather predict the Romans’ destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. That interpretation is not reasonable. See Appendix 15-2 for a refutation.



In Daniel chapter nine, verse 26 was fulfilled in the 1st century AD by the death of Jesus in 30 AD and the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in 70 AD. Verse 27 leaps forward to the endtimes.”^G

“Do you mean Jesus can’t come back until the Jews build their temple?” Xiao Li asked sharply.

“No, I’m not saying that,” Professor Ho replied mildly. There’s a whole cluster of events predicted to happen in the endtimes, including the completion of the Great Commission, the resumption of Jewish temple worship, the rise of the Anti-Christ, and the Rapture of the Church. But I don’t think I can work the exact sequence in detail. I’m sure it will be clear when the time comes! But the details I can understand clearly right now are enough for me to recognize that I’m living near the end.

“You’ll notice that both Jesus’s and Daniel’s prophecies require the Jews to be free to build a temple in Jerusalem in the endtimes. In other words, the ‘times of the Gentiles,’ when Jerusalem can be ‘trampled underfoot by the Gentiles’ with impunity, must be ‘fulfilled,’ already completed and at an end [Luke 21:24]. Of course, political control over Jerusalem implies a restoration of the nation of Israel. That national restoration has already happened; the rebuilding of the temple hasn’t started yet, but it’s easy to see how it could suddenly happen in our own day. The situation with the Jews in Israel is: almost completed, but not quite! The sap has risen, the branch is soft, the leaves are budding—but we’re not quite to the end yet. Let’s tabulate the predictions:

1. The Jews will return from all over the world and reestablish the nation of Israel [Ezekiel 37:21, etc.]: This has already been fulfilled.
2. The Jews will regain complete control over Jerusalem [Luke 21:24]: This has been partially fulfilled. The Jews gained physical control of the entire city in 1967, but despite that, the Muslims still hold actual control over the all important Temple Mount area.
3. The Jews will rebuild the temple and restart Old Testament Mosaic worship [Daniel 9:27, Matthew 24:15, etc.]: This is still awaiting fulfillment.

There’s one more important prediction Jesus made about the endtimes which is ‘almost but not quite’ completely fulfilled. That’s the spread of the gospel everywhere in the world.

Sign of the endtimes: Completion of the Great Commission

“Jesus understood, of course, that He was the only Savior for all humanity, not just for the Jews. As we’ve seen before, it’s predicted throughout the Bible that the blessings which would come through the offspring of Abraham, the Jewish Messiah, would be for the entire world [see chapters 4 and 7]:

18 "In your [Abraham's] seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." [Genesis 22:18 NAS]

6 He [God] says, "It is too small a thing that You [Messiah, Jesus Christ] should be My Servant to raise up

^G For a discussion of why this gap occurs, see Appendix 15-3: Why is there a break between the 69th and 70th ‘Seven’ in Daniel chapter 9?

the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth." [Isaiah 49:6 NAS]

Thus is it's not surprising that after His resurrection and before His ascension, Jesus gave the disciples, and all Christians, the responsibility for spreading throughout the entire world the good news about salvation by faith in Him. This is often called the 'Great Commission':

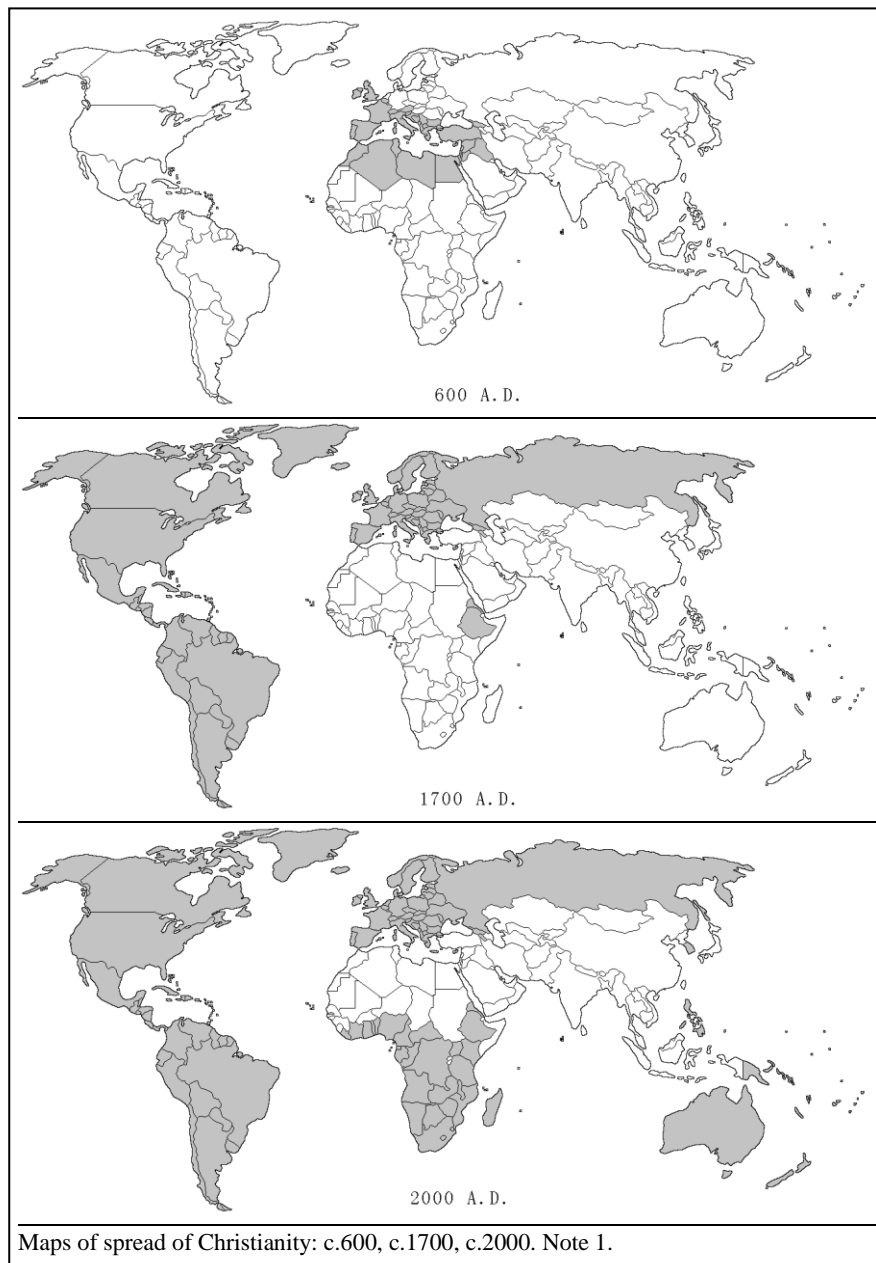
18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.
19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations... [Matthew 28:18-19 NAS]

8 ... you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." [Acts 1:8 NAS]

Jesus was totally sure that this Commission would eventually be completed. In the middle of the record of the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24, after the section about the Church Age but before the discussion about the endtimes and His Second Coming, Jesus made a specific prediction:

14 "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come. [Matthew 24:14 NAS]

"During the first several centuries AD, the gospel spread rapidly through the Roman world and beyond it, reaching at least as far as India. But then there was a terrible stalling and even retrogression for a thousand years and more. Then the geographical and ethnic range of the gospel began to expand again after about 1500. Things especially picked up after about 1800 with the beginning of the modern missionary movements. A mere 200 years ago, all of East and



Maps of spread of Christianity: c.600, c.1700, c.2000. Note 1.

Southeast Asia, as well as most of India and Africa, were essentially untouched by the gospel, with few or no believers and no self-sustaining, indigenous churches. Now the situation is radically different. Beyond any possibility of question, we are far closer to the fulfillment of this prophecy than at any time since Jesus made it—perhaps very close, though there's still lots of work to be done."

Xiao Li looked troubled. "Professor Ho, do you mean Jesus can't come back right now because the Great Commission isn't completed yet?"

"No, I'm not saying that," Professor replied. "I've asked myself that same question, but it immediately implies a series of other questions. What counts as 'preached in the whole world?' It can't mean every individual hearing; there are an awful lot of babies born every day who can't understand language yet! And what counts as 'all the nations'? The word in Greek refers to different ethnicities. Here in China, the national government recognizes exactly 55 ethnicities besides the Han. But is that the definition God will use to decide the prophecy is fulfilled? And how many 'disciples' do we need to 'make' in each ethnicity before it counts for the fulfillment of the prophecy? Just one believer? Or a self-sustaining ethnic church?"

"The largest unfinished task for world evangelism is probably the

Muslim ethnicities. I strongly affirm the importance of evangelism to them! But all of them have heard of Jesus Christ. He's mentioned more than once in the Koran—albeit while explicitly denying that He is the Son of God and the Savior of sinners. Still, they've heard of Him, and of Christianity, and there's at least a tiny handful of believers in virtually every Muslim nation and ethnic group. Could that perhaps count as enough for the fulfillment of the prophecy?

“Christians today who research missions have tried to make a list of all the ‘people groups’ in the world and define them as ‘reached’ or ‘unreached’ based on the size of the known Christian population in each group. That might be a good approach for helping Christians decide where they should focus their efforts. But we can't be confident God's definition is the same as a research institute's.

“So my conclusion is this. I don't think we can be sure at what moment God will consider the Great Commission completed and the prediction fulfilled. But we can be confident that it is far closer to fulfillment now than at any time in history—and it's finally possible to envision the completion of our task. Meanwhile, we should be especially concerned for areas and groups within China where there are few or no Christians and no churches.

“Remember, Jesus compared the events of the endtimes to sap rising and leaves budding on a tree in springtime—a gradual process. Although I can't tell you how long we have to go to the end, it seems clear to me that advances in world evangelism indicate it is not so very far off.”

World evangelism and Jewish control of Jerusalem: Two independent ‘signs’ both nearing fulfillment in our time

Professor Ho paused and sat back in his chair with a thoughtful look on his face. “Consider for a moment how unlikely each one of these two predictions is—the worldwide spread of the gospel, and the restoration of the Jewish nation of Israel, including control of Jerusalem.

“In 30 AD when Jesus predicted that the gospel would be ‘preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations,’ humanly speaking it would have seemed exceptionally unlikely. At that point the peoples of the world essentially either opposed the gospel (most of the Jews), or ignored it (most of the Romans and Greeks in the area), or had never heard of it (the rest of the world). Who could have foreseen in 30 AD that all humanity would hear the Galilean peasant's message and every people group would have believers? Especially considering the primitive communications technology available to them? They didn't even know about the existence of North and South America at that point, much less have a way to reach them! But the message of the Galilean peasant did spread across a hardened and cynical world. Now we see the prophecy of worldwide evangelism mostly fulfilled, with the final completion within sight. It's almost finished, but not quite.

“Likewise, the predicted return of the Jews really is remarkable. For nearly 1,900 years they were scattered all over the world with no homeland, no political identity of their own. They even forgot their own language! They were a vanishingly small minority wherever they went, often oppressed, sooner or later always persecuted, and frequently expelled from the countries they were living in. These things happened repeatedly, including in the 20th century. The Nazis slaughtered six million Jews just because they were Jews. Subsequently, during 1948-57, over half a million Jews were forced to leave Arab Muslim countries where they had lived for generations. They had suddenly become *persona non grata* after the establishment of the state of Israel. Through the centuries God made sure they were not destroyed, nor assimilated, nor able to establish a secure nation-state of their own outside of Palestine. They were preserved as a scattered, despised minority all over the world until the moment set on God's prophetic timetable arrived. And now they are just barely short of having complete control over Jerusalem. Almost, but not quite.

“These two signs are completely independent of one another. One, the Great Commission, concerns the entire world—hundreds if not thousands of different people groups across the globe. The other, the restoration of Israel, is limited to a single, tiny people group and a single point on earth: the Jews and the city of Jerusalem. But for the first time in nearly 2,000 years of history, both of them are just barely short of fulfillment—at the very same time! That's what I want you to understand: to fulfill the prophecies, it's not enough for these things just to happen. They have to happen in the same timeframe. And right now, in our own day, the groundwork for the nearly simultaneous fulfillment of those two prophecies has already been laid. That's what makes me think we're near the end.

“And there's one more ‘almost but not quite’ situation that indicates the endtimes are not far off. The political situation in Europe seems to be the preparation for the final fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy about the four successive kingdoms controlling the Middle East.”

The endtimes political federation

Professor Ho turned the Bible on the desk toward the middle and found a heavily annotated page. “You will remember that when we studied Daniel we saw the prediction of four successive empires which would rule Palestine from Daniel's time onward [see chapter 9]. In Daniel chapter 7's vision of four successive beasts representing the empires, we find that the fourth kingdom, the ‘dreadful and terrifying beast’ with ‘iron teeth’ and ‘ten horns,’ would later be fragmented:

23 ...The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth, which will be different from all the *other* kingdoms.... 24 As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise... [Daniel 7:23-24 NAS]

The fourth beast starts as a unitary empire, but is then divided into ten kingdoms. Corresponding to that, in Daniel chapter 2's statue vision, we also find the fourth kingdom separated into two forms, which are two successive phases: ‘legs of iron,’ followed by ‘feet and toes’ of mixed iron and clay.

2:40 Then there will be a fourth kingdom as strong as iron... 41 In that you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it will be a divided kingdom; but it will have in it the toughness of iron, inasmuch as you saw the iron mixed with common clay. 42 As the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of pottery, so some of the kingdom will be strong and part of it will be brittle. 43 And in that you saw the iron mixed with common clay, they will combine with one another in the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, even as iron does not combine with pottery. 44 "In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever. [Daniel 2:40-44 NAS]

The 'legs of iron' stage was the Roman Empire, which ruled Palestine in the 1st century AD when the Messiah came and was rejected. Shortly after that, Israel ceased to exist as a political state. So the various empires which controlled Palestine in the succeeding centuries are skipped over by Daniel; they're irrelevant because they don't impact the history of national Israel. That's why the fourth empire in Daniel's statue vision has a gap between the 'legs of iron' empire and the it's final form, the 'feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron' federation. In this gap, Daniel's vision skips over both the Church Age and the Jewish diaspora right to the endtimes, when the iron and clay federation is in power."

"How do you know the feet and toes of iron and clay stage is in the endtimes?" Xiao Wang queried.

"Because of what happens next," explained Professor Ho. "Notice verse 44: 'In the days of those kings' God will set up an *eternal* kingdom—therefore it's obviously the endtimes."

After looking at the verse, Xiao Wang agreed: "I see."

Professor Ho continued. "So there's a gap here between the 'legs of iron' Roman Empire and the 'feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron' endtimes federation. That gap is caused by the destruction of the political state of Israel in about 70AD. It continues down to the present, since full control over Jerusalem has not yet been regained by the Jews. Thus this gap corresponds directly to the gap at the end of the 70 'sevens' in Daniel chapter 9.

"Let's summarize what we see in Daniel about this endtimes political federation:

1. It is a successor to the former Roman Empire;
2. It is fragmented into ten different nation states;
3. Its members have voluntarily united into a confederation crossing ethnic lines.

Well boys, does that remind you of anything in the 21st century?"

Xiao Wang smiled. "I remember you said it was the European Union!" [See chapter 9.]

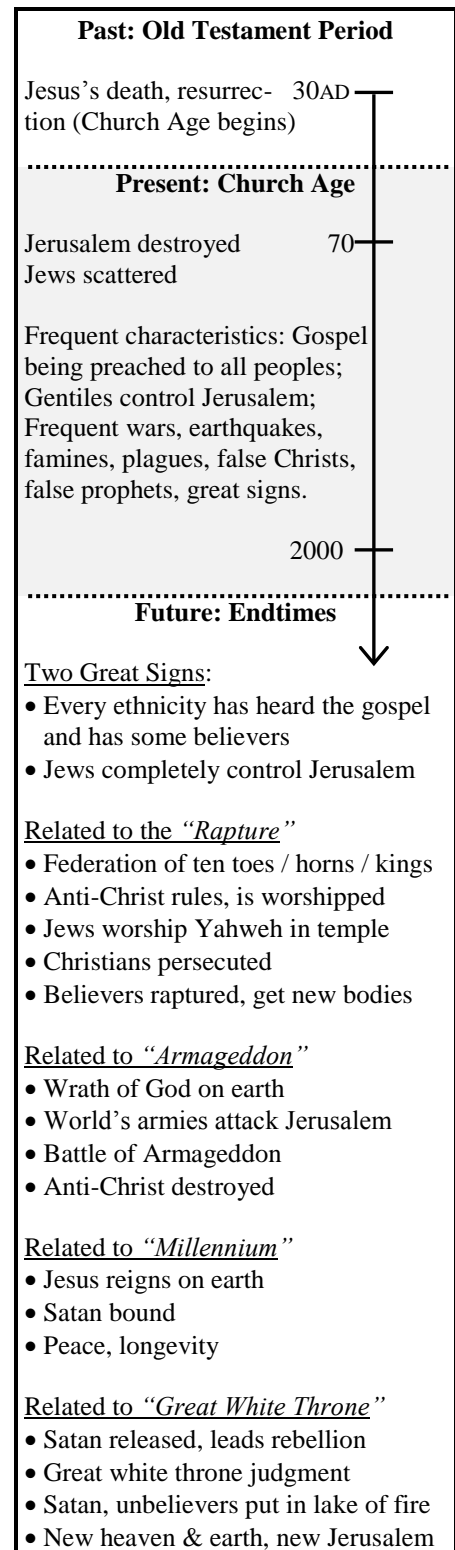
"Not quite," Professor Ho objected with a raised finger. "I said the European Union might very well evolve into the fulfillment of the prophecy. Consider it's characteristics.

"The E.U. may reasonably be regarded as the successor to the Roman Empire, since it is based in Europe and includes most of the European territory which was formerly ruled by Rome. Thus it is the 'feet and toes' which arise from the 'legs of iron.' It is composed of separate nations, like the 'ten kings' in Daniel. These nations have voluntarily joined themselves together in a coalition—'they will combine with one another in the seed of men.' At the same time, the confederation does not completely remove their national identities or combine them into a single nation—'but they will not adhere to one another.'"

"But there are more than ten countries in the E.U." Xiao Wang objected.

"Quite so," Professor Ho agreed, "at the moment! But that doesn't guarantee the future. A multi-ethnic alliance like the E.U. is always very prone to fracture along national lines whenever significant stress is encountered. It is very easy to envision circumstances which would cause the sudden withdrawal of many of the present member states. As a historian, I would tend to expect such a fragmentation sooner or later, quite apart from the Bible's predictions. Of course, some interpreters take 'ten' as a round number, but I'm inclined to see it as literal.

"I can't be absolutely sure the E.U. will develop into the fulfillment of the ten horns prophecy. But when I consider the history of Europe since the Roman Empire, the E.U. really is a unique development. Most of the time



since the fall of Rome, the European nations have been incessantly fighting with each other. Even the members of the so-called ‘Holy Roman Empire’ were constantly warring amongst themselves. Unity across ethnic and national boundaries was only attained by force—and then was generally short lived, like Napoleon’s empire or Hitler’s Reich. Even within the last hundred years, two massive bloodbaths in the first half of the 20th century were followed by a ‘cold war’ that threatened the world with nuclear destruction. But now, at long last, the war-weary Europeans are voluntarily associating themselves in a federation. The idea had been around for centuries, but even as late as the mid-20th century, who would have thought it would finally be realized?

“It’s important to note that this new era of European unity begins just after the Jews reestablish their nation. In 1948 the state of Israel was established. The first concrete move toward the European Union was the Treaty of Rome in 1957, which laid the basis for what later became the European Common Market. Way back then, Christian believers with insight were predicting it would develop into the fulfillment of Daniel’s feet and toes / ten horns endtimes empire. The subsequent developments have supported that interpretation.

“So here again we see the groundwork being laid for the fulfillment of two separate, independent endtimes prophecies: The Jews are back in Israel, and the Europeans are voluntarily forming a federation. The prophecies require both to be true in the endtimes. Meanwhile, nothing like those two developments had existed for over a thousand years before the 20th century. It seems to me that the European Union is another example of ‘almost but not quite’ preparation for the fulfillment of endtimes prophecy. It’s another leaf in the bud which warns me we are very probably near the end.

Sign of the endtimes: Spread of uniformitarianism and philosophical materialism / atheism

“In addition to these international political developments, there have also been social changes which were predicted to occur during the endtimes. The first one is what is sometimes called ‘uniformitarianism.’ This philosophy or religion begins by asserting that nothing exists except the material universe, just matter and energy acting according to natural laws. Recently some who hold this view are claiming that there might be multiple universes [see chapter 1, Appendix 1-1: Multiple universes and green cheese], but that doesn’t fundamentally change things; it’s still just mass and energy rolling through space and time, driven by blind physical laws. Naturally, this means that nothing from outside the universe started it up or ever intervened in it—or ever will!”

“It just sounds like atheism,” pointed out Xiao Wang.

“Exactly,” agreed Professor Ho. “Strict uniformitarianism is simply atheism applied to the physical world—or, more to the point, jammed down onto the physical world like a cookie cutter, and whatever observations don’t fit get cut off! You’ll remember we saw this tendency when we discussed the geological and other evidence for a relatively ‘young’ age of the earth [see chapter 3]. Most ‘mainstream’ scientists simply ignore that data!”

“What’s fascinating here is that this so-called ‘modern’ viewpoint of uniformitarianism was predicted over 1,900 years ago in the New Testament.” Professor Ho turned back to the New Testament and read:

“3 Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with *their* mocking, following after their own lusts, 4 and saying, “Where is the promise of His [i.e. Christ’s] coming? For *ever* since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.” 5 For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that (or: they are willfully ignorant of this fact, that) by the word of God *the* heavens existed long ago and *the* earth was formed out of water and by water, 6 through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. [2 Peter 3:3-6 NAS]

The contents of this prophecy are amazing. Firstly, note the essential worldview of these ‘mockers’ who are predicted to come: ‘all continues just as it was from the beginning.’ That is precisely the viewpoint of uniformitarianism: a closed physical system of natural cause and effect. God has never intervened or done anything in the world, and He never will. *If* He exists, He may as well not—He has nothing to do with our world.

“The attitude of these people is very supercilious towards Christians. They are ‘mocking’ at the idea that Jesus will come again, that there will be a judgment: ‘where is the promise of His coming?’ ‘Science,’ they say, ‘has proven that there is no God beyond this universe controlling things. You Christian nuts are always predicting the end of the world!’ ”

“That’s exactly what a lot of my friends say to me!” exclaimed Xiao Li with a pained look on his face.

“Yes,” agreed Professor Ho with a sympathetic frown and nod. “They tend to be very arrogant about it. But the ironic thing is, it is they who are overlooking the scientific data: ‘they are willfully ignorant of’ two facts. Firstly, the world around them, especially living things, demonstrates that there must have been a Creator [see chapters 1-2]. Secondly, the geological record gives ample evidence that there was a global flood, ‘through which the world at that time was destroyed’ [see chapter 3]. They are ‘willfully ignorant’ of these things because they do not want to have to answer to God for their behavior; they are ‘following after their own lusts.’

“Finally, note the timeframe. Peter clearly indicates that this worldview will be prevalent ‘in the last days.’ Thus I take it as a sign of the endtimes.”

“But Professor Ho,” Xiao Wang objected, “I remember you said that evolutionary atheism has existed for a long time.”

“Absolutely!” affirmed Professor Ho. “As we discussed before, the ancient Greeks had spun out such theories based purely on philosophical speculations, without any scientific observations at all. These were picked up by the Romans and transmitted down all the way to the time of Charles Darwin’s grandfather, who wrote a book expounding evolution before Charles was even born.” [See the section in chapter 1 titled Evolution is a myth and a religion.]

“Then how can you say Peter is prophesying about the endtimes?”

“I see why you’re confused. Peter’s point is not that atheistic uniformitarianism would first arise among humanity in the endtimes. That idea existed in Peter’s day—in fact, it had already been around for several hundred years by then! But it was mostly confined to a handful of philosophers. It never gained widespread acceptance until the 20th century. A historian searches in vain for general acceptance of atheistic uniformitarianism in any corner of the globe before 1900. Even just a strict atheism is rare before then, and certainly never socially common or acceptable. Most people were pagans who viewed nature as subject to the caprices of various deities [see chapter 5]. Meanwhile it was theists, specifically Christian theists, who founded modern science based on their belief that God was rational and had set up and sustained a system of rationally understandable natural laws [see chapter 4]. But the strict uniformitarians—atheists—only gain prominence during the past hundred years or so.

“Today, of course, the ‘uniformitarian’ worldview is so common that it’s often taken for granted as the only correct or ‘scientific’ outlook—despite the fact that it’s patently wrong.”

“True,” agreed Xiao Wang with a sober nod as he recalled himself just half a year ago.

“So we can see that Peter is not predicting the *emergence* of uniformitarianism, but it’s wide *scope* and *influence*. That’s a sign of the endtimes, and it definitely doesn’t appear until the mid-20th century. It comes during the same period in which the Jews returned to Israel, the Great Commission is finally nearing completion, and the Europeans seem to be organizing themselves into the ‘ten horns’ federation. Remember, Jesus told us we would see certain things falling into place when the end was nearing, like a fig tree’s leaves budding before the actually starts summer starts [Mark 13:28-29]. I think uniformitarianism is another ‘leaf.’”

Sign of the endtimes: Moral decay with a philosophical backing

“As I’m sure you boys both understand very well, uniformitarianism teaches human beings to regard themselves as nothing more than highly developed animals. A natural consequence of this worldview is a severe decay in moral standards. That is a second major social indicator of the endtimes predicted in the Bible: an unprecedented moral change.” Professor Ho turned back a few pages and read:

“1 But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. 2 For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, 4 treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these. [2 Timothy 3:1-5 NAS]

Just like the passage in 2 Peter we just looked at, here in 2 Timothy it is very clear that the apostle Paul is referring to what had not yet happened when he wrote, referring to the future ‘last days.’ He predicts a unique decline in moral standards.”

Xiao Li wrinkled his forehead. “You know Professor Ho, I’ve never understood this passage. There have always been people doing those things. So what’s special about the last days?”

“I’ve asked myself the same question,” Professor Ho replied. “If it weren’t for some of the moral developments in the past few decades, I’m not sure I would be able to understand it. But because of what I’ve observed happening, I think I know what the passage means. You’re quite right that there have always been people committing these sins. And there have always been some so depraved that they would commit every sin in the list above without feeling the least bit ashamed. But there has never been a society which openly excused or approved all these evil behaviors. Even when, as they say, ‘everybody was doing it,’ most of the items on this list were still considered bad morality. Most people doing these things would either hide it, or at least make up some kind of excuse for it.

“But I’ve watched a strange development across the past few decades. It started, I believe, in the West, but has now been spreading to China. More and more of the sins listed in the passage seem to no longer be regarded as morally wrong. Society in general feels no need to be ashamed of them.

“Take the first item on the list for example. People have always been ‘lovers of self,’ consumed with a self-love which seeks above all its own personal safety, comfort, prosperity, and pleasure, even at the cost of neglecting or outright harming others. That’s not unique to the endtimes; it’s the very fountainhead of all our sins! But this kind of selfishness has been universally regarded as a bad thing and condemned by the morality of all societies. But now what has always been called ‘selfishness’ has been repackaged as ‘a proper self-love’ and elevated almost to the level of a virtue. A pop star makes a hit singing that she’s ‘learning to love myself.’ We are told that we can’t love others until we learn how to love ourselves—which in practical terms turns out to mean we are justified in putting ourselves first. We are assured it is unhealthy to sacrifice ourselves for the good of others. Thus people today can wallow in selfishness without a trace of guilt.

“For a more blatant example, take the prediction that in the last days people will be ‘conceited.’ Surely there’s nothing new here! But every religion, philosopher, and moral teacher has always condemned arrogance and urged humility. Of course our Chinese traditions have particularly emphasized this point, enshrining it in proverbs such as ‘one loses by pride and gains by humility’ [满招损, 谦受益] and ‘heaven doesn’t boast of its height and earth doesn’t boast of its depth’ [天不言自高, 地不言自厚]. But now we are told that a healthy self esteem is the one character trait absolutely necessary to a healthy personality. Self-confidence, we are told, is the key to success in everything. Low self-esteem is the root of all evil, the cause of everything from violent crime and drug abuse to teenage pregnancy and obesity. Thus many of the psychologists tell us!

“I certainly have sympathy for those who struggle with depression, fearfulness, and feeling worthless. I suffered bitterly from such feelings when I was young. But the real solution is not pretending that we are wonderful people. The real solution is discovering how much God really loves us.

“Meanwhile the present emphasis on self-esteem and self-confidence leads to a self-satisfied arrogance being regarded as a virtue. No one feels the need to cloak it or be ashamed of it anymore.

“Or consider the state of the family today. Obviously, children have always been ‘disobedient to parents.’ But parents understood that that type of rebellion was wrong, understood that they legitimately exercised authority over children. If children were rebellious, society in general condemned them for it. But today you will read authoritative child psychologists solemnly assuring parents that ‘obedience is not the goal.’ The real fear is that one might squash the child’s individuality by insisting on obedience! As a result, parents have no confidence in their own authority and are afraid to discipline. We’ve all seen it: a small girl screaming in her hapless father’s face, a mother unable to tear her little boy away from computer games, a parent begging or trying to coax their child to come home from the playground—we take these things as normal, as inevitable, as ‘natural’ and ‘healthy’ expressions of independence! Children have always been rebellious, but no generation of the human race before now has thought was inevitable or allowable. But now children are disobedient without ever feeling a trace of guilt or even knowing that they are doing wrong.

“The final endtimes characteristic listed is that people will be ‘lovers of pleasure.’ Here again, there have always been people sunk in the gratification of sensual pleasures. But hedonism has been universally condemned by the prevailing religion and morality of every society. It is amazing to me, however, the degree to which the present society is being told to maximize pleasure by all means possible. Much of the popular media presents sensual pleasure as the greatest goal and highest achievement in life!

“The change is especially evident in the sexual area. I know of no major civilization before the 20th century which morally permitted sex before marriage and promiscuous behavior. To be sure, there was often a ‘double standard’ for men and women. But there was no generalized acceptance of what used to be called ‘promiscuity’ or ‘fornication.’ That doesn’t arise until the late 20th century.

“Xiao Wang, you probably don’t realize it, but a just a couple of decades ago, sexual activity was considered immoral and shameful among college students. Of course it happened sometimes, but not with one tenth the frequency it does now. The few who did it regarded it as something to keep quiet about for shame’s sake. And it was unheard of among high school students! Now a teacher I know at a junior college in tells me that *every* girl in the class she teaches is not only sexually active, but has had an abortion—thirty or so 18-20 year old girls, all of them got abortions at the same hospital. No one thinks anything of it!”

“I never thought anything of it,” admitted Xiao Wang, “until I started reading the Bible.” A cloud passed over his face as he recalled his own struggle with changing that area of his behavior a month ago; it had finally resulted in breaking up with his girlfriend. Professor Ho didn’t know how far he had come!

Professor Ho continued. “It seems to me that the difference in the endtimes is just that: not new sins, but a new social acceptance of sins which theretofore were at least theoretically condemned by human societies. The result is easy to predict. If people frequently committed such sins when they were universally condemned, to what greater extremes will they go when everyone says such behavior is morally acceptable?”

“Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold”

“I’m not completely sure, but it seems to me that this same endtimes moral decline is also referred to by Jesus in the Olivet discourse. At a point which I take to be a transition from discussing the Church Age to discussing the endtimes, Jesus predicts:

12 And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. [Matthew 24:12 NAS]

‘[L]awlessness is increased’ implies that the moral standards in society have fallen greatly; many behaviors formerly considered a violation of moral rules have become acceptable. In fact, truly ‘lawless’ people deny that there are any standards at all! As a result, ‘most people’s love’ grows ‘cold.’ I take ‘most people’ here to refer to believers, or at least professing believers.”

“Why would low morals in society make believers grow cold?” Xiao Li wondered.

“To answer that, consider what makes our love grow warm,” Professor Ho replied. “What warms up your heart toward God?”

“Seeing how much He loves me,” Xiao Li promptly replied.

“Me too. And where do you see His love most clearly?”

“Because He died on the cross to forgive my sins.”

“Exactly! Every Christian feels that way. When we think how bad our sins really are, at those rare moments when we feel some small part of their awfulness and filth, it’s amazing to think that God not only still loves us, but loved us enough to take our punishment on the cross. That warms up our frosty hearts.

“I think that’s where the problem comes in when ‘lawlessness is increased.’ When societal moral standards are low, even Christians might be influenced. Their consciences might be dulled; they might tend to think their sins aren’t so very serious, since all the people around them are doing even worse things and no one is ashamed. We can begin to underestimate the severity of our sinfulness, and then not appreciate the price Jesus had to pay on the cross to redeem us [see chapter 13]. Grace isn’t amazing to us anymore! As a result, our love for God grows cold.”

Professor Ho paused a moment, then looked earnestly at Xiao Li. “Let’s not let ourselves forget what a price Jesus

paid, what love He showed when He became sin for us on the cross [2 Corinthians 5:21]. Let's not grow cold, even if the world around us sinks into depravity."

Out of the corner of his eye, Professor Ho was surprised to see Xiao Wang nodding slightly, his lips pressed together into a line. All three were silent for a while.

Professor Ho cleared his throat and began again. "So much for the signs that we may be seeing the beginning of. Now let's go forward to events that will explicitly signal the end."

The Beast / Anti-Christ / Man of Lawlessness: World ruler in the endtimes

"The endtimes ten nation federation we talked about a few minutes ago is not only predicted by Daniel, but also in the book of Revelation. As in Daniel chapter seven's vision, it is personified as a beast." Professor Ho flipped to the back of his Bible and read:

"13:1 And the dragon [Satan] stood on the sand of the seashore. Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns *were* ten diadems, and on his heads *were* blasphemous names. . . . 5 There was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies. . . . 7 It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him.

...

17:12 "The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour. 13 "These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast. [Revelation 13:1, 5, 7; 17:12-13 NAS]

The ten crowned horns representing ten national leaders here in Revelation correspond to the ten horns / kings in Daniel's beast vision [Daniel 7], as well as the ten toes of Daniel's statue vision [Daniel 2]. They are leaders of separate nations, but they unite themselves together and give dictatorial power to a figure called 'the Beast.'"

"Professor Ho," Xiao Li interrupted, "I'm confused. First it says the beast *has* ten horns, then it says the ten horns give their power *to* the beast. Is the beast the ten member federation? Or is it a single individual?"

"I can understand your confusion," Professor Ho replied. "If you look carefully you'll see that in the book of Revelation, the term 'beast' is used to refer to two different things:

1. a *federation*, the coalition of ten nations which is the final form of Daniel's fourth empire; and
2. an *individual*, the dictatorial ruler of that coalition.

When Christians talk about *the* Beast, they are usually referring to the individual. The corresponding passage in Daniel gives more details about this individual, referring to him as another, 'little' horn:

7 ... a fourth beast... it had ten horns. 8 "While I was contemplating the horns, behold, another horn, a little one, came up among them, and three of the first horns were pulled out by the roots before it; and behold, this horn possessed eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth uttering great *boasts*. . . . 21 "I kept looking, and that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them...

...

23 "Thus he [the angel explaining the vision to Daniel] said: 'The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth... 24 'As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings. 25 'He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. [Daniel 7:7-8, 21, 23-25 NAS]

Here we find that sometime *after* the rise of the ten horns or kings, another 'little horn' arises from among them and gains control of three of the ten nations in the confederation. This 'little horn' is an individual; he has 'eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth uttering great boasts.' He actively opposes God—"speaks out against the Most High"—and persecutes believers, waging 'war against the saints.' This 'little' horn is the same as the *individual* 'Beast' figure in Revelation 13 and 17. The 'Beast' in Revelation is likewise supported by the ten nation confederation, boastful, and fighting against God's saints. Thus we see that the final head of the ten nation coalition is the Beast [Revelation 13:3, 14-15, 18; 17:11-13, 17], an individual human being who gains control first over three nations [Daniel 7:8, 24], then over the entire federation [Revelation 17:13], then over the entire world [Revelation 13:7]. This person is called 'the Beast'.

"How will the Beast gain control of the federation and the world? By Satanically energized miracles which deceive and intimidate people."

The Beast / Anti-Christ / Man of Lawlessness: Performs false miracles and is worshipped as a god in the endtimes

The Beast is the same figure who elsewhere in the Bible is called the 'anti-Christ.' He is a false Christ, and in order to imitate the real Christ, he has to perform miracles—including faking his own death and resurrection:

3 *I saw*... [the beast] as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed *and followed* after the beast; 4 they worshiped the dragon [Satan] because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?" ... 8 All who dwell on the earth will worship him, *everyone* whose name has not been written from the foundation

of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain. ... 12 ...[the false prophet] makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed. 13 He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men. 14 And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life. 15 And it was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed. [Revelation 13:3-4, 8, 12-15 NAS]"

Professor Ho turned back a few pages in his Bible. "Elsewhere the Beast or Anti-Christ is referred to as the 'Man of Lawlessness':

1 ... with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ... ... 3 ...the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, 4 who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. ... 8 Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; 9 *that is*, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, 10 and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. [2 Thessalonians 2:1, 3-4, 8-10 NAS]

Notice the attitude of the people of the world: they're busy worshipping! They worship both the Beast, and his idol statue, and the Devil himself who stands behind and empowers the Beast. When I was your age, boys, everyone around me confidently assured me that so-called 'scientific atheism' would eventually triumph, and religion would 'gradually wither away.' At the time, I believed them! But it won't turn out that way. In the endtimes, there will be absolutely *no* atheists—at least not in the traditional sense of philosophical materialists. Everyone will believe in miraculous powers which transcend the natural laws as we have known them, because everyone will have seen the Beast do miracles. And everyone will be worshipping a transcendent being: the Beast.

"And, for the most part, they'll worship willingly. The Beast will doubtless be regarded at the savior of humanity. He'll achieve world peace, of a sort, by destroying anyone who opposes him [Revelation 13:4]. And he'll provide an outlet for the innate human longing to worship a transcendent being, a longing intrinsic to our spiritual nature because we really were created by God.

"Yes, humanity desires an object of worship, but we don't like to worship the one true God, for at least two reasons. He's too far above us, and He demands too much from us. In contrast, one of the things which will attract most people to the Beast is that he'll be transcendent, but not *too* transcendent. He'll still be a human being who can legitimately be represented by and worshipped through a tangible idol statue—unlike Jesus, who is both fully God and fully Man.

"In addition, the Beast won't make excessive moral demands on his worshippers. He is called 'the man of lawlessness' in the 2 Thessalonians passage we just looked at. He won't be demanding that people tell the truth, control their lusts, or love their enemies as Jesus commands us to.

"How might this play out in modern China? I'm not sure, of course, but if I had to guess, I think the Beast might present himself as a more highly evolved person, someone who is consciously in touch with the 'force' and/or the 'space aliens' that have been driving evolution all along. That would finally solve the evolutionists' problems, since it's increasingly obvious that life could not arise or develop by the workings of the Natural Laws alone [see chapters 1-3]. It would also fit nicely with belief and practice of qigong and other so-called 'powers.'

"At the same time, I expect that the Beast will claim to be the combined fulfillment of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, and all other religions. Today more and more people assert that 'all roads lead to Rome,' that every religion is really saying the same thing in different words. As that idea gains wider and wider acceptance, we can readily see how the Beast could present himself as the 'next step' in revelation to humanity, which will facilitate his acceptance by people of various religions. That includes nominal Christianity; perhaps the Beast won't so much deny Christ as claim to replace Him.

The Beast / Anti-Christ / Man of Lawlessness: '666,' the mark of the Beast required for commerce in the endtimes

"I said I expect most of humanity to willingly worship the Beast. But for those who are inclined not to, the worship will be enforced with total economic control:

16 And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, 17 and *he provides* that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, *either* the name of the beast or the number of his name. 18 Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six. [Revelation 13:16-18 NAS]

Many tyrants and dictators in the past have tried to establish coercive power by total economic control. But there was always the problem that people who were not part of the legal, registered economy might still have ways of obtaining money. Obviously drug dealers and other criminals do it all the time. Furthermore, in the past much of the world lived by self-sufficient subsistence agriculture.

"But now we live in an era when such control could finally be effectively established. Fewer and fewer people in

the world could survive by themselves on their farms. Here in China, the percentage of people like that is shrinking every day as we urbanize. Even more strikingly, for the first time in history we have reached a point where the world has the technology to abolish currency completely and establish a ‘cashless economy.’ Many are already suggesting doing so as a means of controlling crimes such as drug dealing and theft, and to ensure tax payments. With our present infrastructure, it would be feasible right now to implement such a system in the better developed areas of the world, including most of China. It could probably be done here in China with little more than a year’s concerted effort by the government. Think of simply making everyone’s I.D. card their personal bank card, and then installing card readers in every cell phone. Even more fascinating is the radio frequency identification (RFID) technology now in use, the kind found in the cards you swipe to get on the bus or open electronic doors. The technology already exists to invisibly implant an RFID chip under your skin—say, in the hand or forehead! Alternately, invisible tattoos which only show under ultraviolet light also exist already and could easily be used for commercial transactions instead of a bank card.

“The Beast will put some such system into practice. But the price of participation will include having the Beast’s name or number inscribed on your body as an assertion of your worshipful devotion to him.”

The Beast / Anti-Christ / Man of Lawlessness: Worldwide persecution of Christians and the Apostasy in the endtimes

“No true Christian can worship anyone except the true, triune God. As a result, Christians will be the special targets of the Beast’s hatred:

5 There was given to him [the beast] a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him. 6 And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, *that is*, those who dwell in heaven. 7 It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him. 8 All who dwell on the earth will worship him, *everyone* whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain. 9 If anyone has an ear, let him hear. 10 If anyone *is destined* for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints. ... 15 And it was given to him [the false prophet] to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed. [Revelation 13:5-10, 15 NAS]

At this point in history, there will be no way to live an ‘easy’ Christian life. The choice for every believer on earth will be either repudiate Christ, or have no way to make a living and be under constant threat of imprisonment and death.

“Under pressure like that, only the real Christians will hold out and refuse to worship the Beast. The rest will fall away from the faith in what the Bible calls the Apostasy.

1 ...with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, 2 ...the day of the Lord... 3 ...*will not come* unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, 4 who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. [2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 NAS]

During the Apostasy, millions of people who formerly professed Christianity will abandon it and worship the Beast. At present, somewhere between one fourth and one third of the world’s population would call itself ‘Christian.’ That’s about two billion people; if there really were so many Christians, this world would be very different! Of course the vast majority of them have not been born again and do not really believe in Jesus. Here God tells us that in the endtimes these will openly repudiate even their nominal profession of faith. But the genuine believers will endure, refuse to worship the Beast, and be persecuted for it.

“You’ll notice the first verse of this passage mentions ‘our gathering together to Him.’ That’s a reference to one of the key events of the endtimes: the Rapture of the true Church.”

The Rapture of believers

“But Professor Ho, I thought the Christians all get raptured before the Beast takes over,” Xiao Li pointed out. “Who are the Christians refusing to worship the Beast and being persecuted? People who believe after the Rapture?”

“Many people think so,” affirmed Professor Ho, “but I’m not so sure. There’s a group of events predicted for the endtimes that include the rise of the Beast, the restoration of temple worship by the Jews, and the persecution of Christians by the Beast. Sincere Christians disagree about whether the Rapture of the Church occurs before, during or after these events. I don’t claim to know for sure. But one thing *does* seem very clear to me: the time of the Rapture is closely associated with a time of widespread persecution of Christians. Therefore I often give Christians this solemn warning: don’t bet on the Rapture coming and sparing you from persecution. And that especially applies to younger people! The endtimes will be perilous times for believers; if you’re going to follow Jesus, you must be ready to suffer for it.” Professor Ho dropped his eyes to his desk and paused for a moment, then looked earnestly at Xiao Wang. “That’s a serious consideration for you, Xiao Wang, as you think about Christianity!”

Xiao Wang said nothing in reply, but gave a strange smile, once more making Professor Ho wonder what was on his mind that day.

“One thing I am sure of,” Professor Ho continued, “is that there will be a Rapture. As we saw earlier, Jesus spoke about it in the Olivet discourse:

29 "But 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 the heavens will be shaken. 30 And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. 31 "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. [Matthew 24:29-31 NAS]

Christians may disagree about exactly what Jesus means by ‘the tribulation of those days’ and exactly when in the series of endtimes events the Rapture occurs, but all agree that there will be a Rapture, in which Jesus Himself will appear in the atmosphere in His resurrection body and gathers all genuine believers to Himself. The apostle Paul describes this event:

51 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep [i.e. physically die], but we will all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. [1 Corinthians 15:51-52 NAS]

15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep [i.e. died]. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. [1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 NAS]

At that moment, all Christians who have already died will rise in their immortal, resurrection bodies and be caught up to meet Jesus in the air. Next all the Christians alive on earth at that time will also have their bodies transformed into immortal ones, and be caught up to Jesus.”

“And that’s the end of the world?” Xiao Wang asked.

“Not quite,” Professor Ho replied, “or, more to the point, not nearly! There’s still a thousand years or so to go, and Jesus hasn’t even returned to the earth.”

Armageddon / Second Coming

“The Rapture and the Second Coming are such closely associated events that sometimes Christians use the terms almost interchangeably. But strictly speaking, they are two different events. At the Rapture, the Church goes *up* to Christ, but at the Second Coming, Christ comes *down* to the earth.

“Earnest Christians disagree about whether the Beast begins ruling before or after the Rapture. I’m not taking a position on that today. But I think it’s clear that the Beast is definitely ruling during the period right *after* the Rapture. I said earlier that everyone except genuine Christians will worship the Beast. Perhaps that’s not quite 100% accurate. It seems there will be a one stubborn people group who will hold out even after the Church is removed: the Jews in Israel.

“At some point, the Jews will rebuild their temple and resume Mosaic worship rituals in Jerusalem. They will refuse to allow the Beast’s idol to be placed there. Needless to say, this ‘exception’ will be intolerable to the Beast. He will lead the united armies of the world in an attack on Jerusalem:

13 And I saw *coming* out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs; 14 for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. ... 16 And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon [i.e. Armageddon]. [Revelation 16:13-14, 16 NAS]

This will result in the battle of Armageddon. At first the Beast and his armies will be successful against the Jews [see Zechariah 14:2], but at the decisive moment, Jesus Christ Himself will return to the earth in His glorified physical body, leading heavenly armies. He’ll touch down on the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem, the same place from which He ascended [see Zechariah 14:3]. Then Christ will destroy the Beast and his legions:^H

11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it [Jesus Christ] *is* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. ... 14 And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white *and* clean, were following Him on white horses. ... 19 And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. 20 And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. 21 And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh. [Revelation 19:11, 14, 19-21 NAS]

The battle of Armageddon really isn’t much of a battle at all—it’s a slaughter. It’ll be so bad that it’ll take the Jews seven months just to bury the corpses leftover from the Beast’s armies [see Ezekiel 39:11-16]. Right after it, Jesus will

^H Readers interested in more details about the battle of Armageddon may consult Old Testament passages including Isaiah chapter 34 and 63:1-6; Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39; Daniel 7:11, 26; and Zechariah chapters 12 and 13, 14:1-7, 14:12-15.

begin His reign on earth. The Millennium or Kingdom Age which the Jews were hoping for at Christ's first coming will finally begin."

The return of Christ to earth will be immediately obvious to everyone

"If that's what the Second Coming will be like, how can some groups say Jesus has already returned?" Xiao Li wondered.

"I'm always amazed by that," Professor Ho replied. "Consider some of the things we've just looked at. A world-wide coalition attacking Jerusalem; Jesus appearing in the sky with the saints; the world's armies destroyed in a single stroke—could it be that these things happened but we didn't hear about them? Or even if you just consider the Rapture: the sun and moon shrouded, a massive meteor shower, Jesus appearing in the sky, the saints caught up to Him—did that somehow escape our notice? The text explicitly says, 'the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn' [Matthew 24:30]; in other words, *everyone* will see it and know about it.

"In fact, Jesus Himself explicitly warned us to pay no attention to people claiming He has already returned. Speaking about the time just before the Rapture, Jesus said:

23 "Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There *He is*,' do not believe *him*. 24 "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. 25 "Behold, I have told you in advance. 26 "So if they say to you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness,' do not go out, *or*, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe *them*. 27 "For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. [Matthew 24:23-27 NAS]

Consider the metaphor Jesus used. Think of what it's like to be outside on a sultry, cloudy night in the summer. If lightning suddenly flashes in the sky, do you need someone to point it out to you? In fact, when conditions are right, you can see the flash reflecting in the sky from over 100 kilometers away. Jesus's point is that everyone will see it when He comes back!"

Professor Ho knit his brows and looked serious. "It's not just amusing when people claim that Jesus has already returned. In fact, it's a classic technique of pseudo-Christian cults. Consider the truly vicious cult known as Eastern Lightning. They are known to have practiced bribery, sexual immorality, intimidation, and even kidnapping. They claim to be Christians, but their distinguishing doctrine is that Jesus Christ has already returned again—this time as a woman hidden away somewhere in Henan province! This cult takes its name from their willful twisting of Matthew 24:27, claiming that Jesus said His Second Coming would begin in the East and spread over the world. Meanwhile the immediately previous verse warns us, 'if they say to you... "Behold, He is in the inner rooms," do not believe them'—and that includes any 'inner rooms' in Henan!

"So the only rational conclusion is this: if anyone ever tells you 'Jesus has come back already,' you can be sure that He hasn't yet, because when He does, you won't need anyone to tell you—you'll see it yourself!"

Millennium

"As we discussed a moment ago, when Jesus really *does* come back, He'll quickly dispose of the Beast and his armies. Afterwards, Jesus will begin His ruling the earth for a period of 1,000 years, what is called the Millennium:

1 Then I saw an angel... 2 And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; 3 and he threw him into the abyss, and shut *it* and sealed *it* over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time. 4 Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I *saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. 5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. ... [Revelation 20:1-5 NAS]

The Millennium will be a period of universal peace, prosperity and longevity.¹ Jesus in a physical body will rule the entire world from His capital at Jerusalem. Some part of the curse on creation will be partially lifted. No animals will prey on others; even lions will eat grass like oxen [Isaiah 11:6-7, 65:25]. Lifespans of 100 years or more will be the norm [Isaiah 65:20]. Satan will be bound in the abyss, unable to deceive and tempt people. And everyone will acknowledge Jesus, Yahweh, as Lord—at least outwardly!"

"I would like to have been born then!" exclaimed Xiao Li.

Professor Ho nodded, but added a caveat. "The Millennium will be a wonderful time, but it won't be heaven. The two essential problems of life on this earth will still be there: sin and death. Although people will live long, they will still die. And although Jesus's rule will prevent overt rebellion, people will still have sinful natures and still choose to sin."

"But won't everybody be a Christian then?" Xiao Li objected.

Professor Ho shook his head and pursed his lips. "No, I'm afraid not. You can know it for sure because of what happens at the end of the Millennium when Satan is briefly released and set loose in the world again. As soon as people

¹ Readers interested in more details about the Millennium may consult Old Testament passages including Isaiah 2:1-4, 11:4-16, 19:16-25, chapter 35, 65:18-28; Ezekiel chapters 40 to 48; Daniel 2:44-45, 7:13-14, 22, 27; and Zechariah 9:10, 14:9-11, 14:16-21.

have a rallying point for rebellion against God, most of them choose to follow Satan. Look what happens:

7 When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, 8 and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. 9 And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. 10 And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. [Revelation 20:7-10 NAS]

“But since they all know about Jesus, know that He is God, why would they rebel?” Xiao Li was puzzled.

“Because most of them weren’t really saved,” Professor Ho explained. “You see, unredeemed humanity hates God and always rebels as soon as it has the chance! When Jesus came the first time in humility, the Jews and the Gentiles worked together to kill the God-Man—to kill Yahweh! They hated God when He came and manifested Himself in the flesh. When Satan is released at the end of the Millennium, most people will only be too glad to believe whatever story he concocts to convince them that it’s safe to fight against Jesus. Consider how gullible human beings are, what ridiculous myths they’ve believed, like the one about Pangu, where the eyes of a dead god turn into the sun and moon—or the one about Darwin, where evolving bacteria turn into human beings!

“Motivated by centuries of pent-up resentment against God, most of humanity will join the released Satan in the final, futile rebellion against God. But like the battle of Armageddon a thousand years before it, the fight will quickly end when God intervenes from heaven.

“After that comes the final end of the history of this sin-cursed earth: the last judgment.”

The final judgment

Professor Ho continued reading in Revelation chapter 20.

10 And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one *of them* according to their deeds. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. [Revelation 20:10-15 NAS]

Every human being who has ever lived will have to stand before Jesus Christ to be judged for his or her deeds. Here will be the final separation of all humanity into two groups: the saved and the lost. Notice especially the distinction here between ‘books’ plural and ‘book’ singular. Each person is judged based on his or her deeds as recorded in the books: everything one has thought and said and done, as judged against one’s own moral conscience, one’s knowledge of good and evil.^J Think of it; all the misdeeds of your entire lifetime accurately recorded and publically displayed. Every lustful or hateful or greedy thought—things we were ashamed to say out loud; every angry outburst and subtle lie, every act of violence or theft or sexual immorality, all of them brought to light in painful detail with no hope of denial or excuse. There will be immense individual variation, of course, but there will also be one terrible universal: ‘all have sinned and fall short’ [Romans 3:23].

“Because of the fact of our sin, no one will be justified based on what is written in the ‘books’ recording human deeds. But there is another ‘book,’ a book recording God’s grace, not humans’ sins, the Lamb’s book of life.”

“That’s the list of Christians!” Xiao Li exclaimed.

“Yes, the list of those who have repented of their sins and put their faith in Jesus. The presence or absence of your name in that book will determine whether your sins are forgiven and you are allowed to live in God’s presence in heaven, or whether you are removed from God’s presence and cast into the lake of fire, the permanent hell.”

“Are people annihilated in the lake of fire?” Xiao Wang asked.

Professor Ho’s face was solemn and he shook his head. “No. The Bible is very clear on that. Notice back in verse 10 how the situation in the lake of fire is described:

10 And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. [Revelation 20:10 NAS]

The Beast and the false prophet are human beings who had already been thrown into the lake of fire a thousand years earlier, right after the battle of Armageddon [Revelation 19:20]. At the end of the thousand years, they are still there, and still conscious. After the devil is thrown in with them, it says that ‘they’ plural ‘will be tormented day and night forever and ever.’ There is no question that the Bible warns us there will be eternal punishment for sin unless we repent and put

^J Concerning the fact that God’s judgment will be based on what a given individual actually knew and understood about right and wrong, see Romans 2:12-16.

our trust in Jesus. Jesus Himself, who is tender and full of love for sinners, said it repeatedly [e.g. Matthew 25:41-46; Mark 9:43-48; Luke 16:23-24; John 5:29]. God has made us in His own image, and we cannot escape being eternal beings. If we don't receive God's grace, His justification by faith, we will have to endure the horror of being sinful forever.

"But for those who repent and believe, an eternity of joy is awaiting them. That's the final prophecy of the Bible: the new heavens and new earth."

New heavens and new earth

"You may remember that after Adam and Eve sinned, God had to curse the physical universe, both as a punishment for sin and as a limitation on how far evil would be able to develop in a human being [see chapter 2]. With all the saints redeemed and completely purified from sin, and with all those who refused to repent and believe safely locked away in hell, God will finally be able to free His creation from the pain and death resulting from the curse:

21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away... 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, 4 and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." 5 And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."... 22:3 There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; 4 they will see His face... [Revelation 21:1, 3-5, 22:3-4 NAS]

No more pain; no more death; and face to face communion with God! What the human race lost by Adam and Eve's sin, God will recreate for His people: the Garden of Eden, and better than the Garden.

"By an act not of restoration, but of complete recreation, the effects of the curse will be removed from the physical universe, recovering the intention of God's original 'very good' design. Never forget that: the world as you see it is not what God originally intended." Professor Ho flipped back to the beginning of his Bible and read:

"17 Then to Adam He said, "...Cursed is the ground because of you... 18 Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you... 19 ...you are dust, and to dust you shall return." [Genesis 3:17-19 NAS]

Everything changed after the Fall. Ever since then, everything has been waiting for the great restoration at the end of the ages. In a sense, even the non-spiritual creation is waiting, and groaning in frustration at what it must endure." Professor Ho turned back to the New Testament and read:

"19 For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. [Romans 8:19-22 NAS]

All around us now we can hear the creation, human and subhuman, groaning. I have often been to the cancer ward as a visitor of family and friends; there's an excellent chance I'll go there someday soon as a patient. This is not what God originally intended for humanity. When you go to the hospital, or even to the meat market, realize that what you see is an indirect result of sin. God will not leave things this way forever. He will recreate it all.

"And that's not all. The other great blessing of Eden, direct interaction with God, will also be restored in the new heavens and new earth. God's 'bond-servants' 'will see His face.' What you were created for, what you long for most deeply, what in the end you simply cannot live without, is to know God and experience His love. This God will give to all believers without limitation forever. 'And so we shall always be with the Lord!' [1 Thessalonians 4:17]"

Professor Ho was smiling, and his eyes were shining brightly under his white brows. He turned toward Xiao Wang, and the smile faded and his brows drew together. "Well Xiao Wang?" he asked soberly. "You've seen so much and studied so long! What do you think? What will you do with the truth that you have?"

Xiao Wang looked back at him and replied, "Professor Ho, I—
[Each reader must complete the sentence for him or herself.]

Appendix 15-1: A harmonization of the Olivet discourse.

| | <u>Matthew 24</u> | <u>Mark 13</u> | <u>Luke 21</u> |
|---|--|--|---|
| <i>The disciples' two questions:</i> <i>1. When will the temple be destroyed, and what sign will precede it?</i> <i>2. What will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?</i> | 1 And Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. 2 And He answered and said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down." 3 And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" | 1 And as He was going out of the temple, one of His disciples *said to Him, "Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" 2 And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another which will not be torn down." 3 And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew were questioning Him privately, 4 "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?" | 5 And while some were talking about the temple, that it was adorned with beautiful stones and votive gifts, He said, 6 "As for these things which you are looking at, the days will come in which there will not be left one stone upon another which will not be torn down." 7 And they questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, when therefore will these things be? And what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?" |
| <i>Events common throughout the Church Age:</i> <i>From</i> <i>30 A.D.</i> / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / <i>To the present</i> | 4 And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. 5 "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many. 6 "And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. 7 "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. 8 "But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. 9 "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name. 10 "And at that time many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another. 11 "And many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many. 12 "And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. 13 "But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved. | 5 And Jesus began to say to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. 6 "Many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He!' and will mislead many. 7 "And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be frightened; those things must take place; but that is not yet the end. 8 "For nation will arise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will also be famines. These things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. 9 "But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them. 10 "And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations. 11 "And when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not be anxious beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit. 12 "And brother will deliver brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. 13 "And you will be hated by all on account of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved. | 8 And He said, "See to it that you be not misled; for many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and, 'The time is at hand'; do not go after them. 9 "And when you hear of wars and disturbances, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end does not follow immediately." 10 Then He continued by saying to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, 11 and there will be great earthquakes, and in various places plagues and famines; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. 12 "But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name's sake. 13 "It will lead to an opportunity for your testimony. 14 "So make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves; 15 for I will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute. 16 "But you will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death, 17 and you will be hated by all on account of My name. 18 "Yet not a hair of your head will perish. 19 "By your endurance you will gain your lives. |
| <i>Sign of end-times: gospel preached to all nations</i> | 14 "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come. | [See verse 10 above: "And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations."] | |
| <i>1st century Jerusalem destroyed, the Jews scattered:</i> <i>66-70 A.D.</i> / / / / / / / <i>To the present</i> <i>Sign of end-times: Jews fully control Jerusalem</i> | | | 20 "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is at hand. 21 "Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are in the midst of the city depart, and let not those who are in the country enter the city; 22 because these are days of vengeance, in order that all things which are written may be fulfilled. 23 "Woe to those who are with child and to those who nurse babes in those days; for there will be great distress upon the land, and wrath to this people, 24 and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. |

| | <u>Matthew 24</u> | <u>Mark 13</u> | <u>Luke 21</u> |
|---|---|---|---|
| <i>Endtimes: Idol in Holy Place.</i> | 15 "Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), 16 then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains; 17 let him who is on the housetop not go down to get the things out that are in his house; 18 and let him who is in the field not turn back to get his cloak. 19 "But woe to those who are with child and to those who nurse babes in those days! 20 "But pray that your flight may not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath; | 14 "But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where it should not be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 15 "And let him who is on the housetop not go down, or enter in, to get anything out of his house; 16 and let him who is in the field not turn back to get his cloak. 17 "But woe to those who are with child and to those who nurse babes in those days! 18 "But pray that it may not happen in the winter. | |
| <i>Endtimes: Worst tribulation in history</i> | 21 for then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall. 22 "And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short. | 19 "For those days will be a time of tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created, until now, and never shall. 20 "And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect whom He chose, He shortened the days. | |
| <i>Endtimes: False Christs and false prophets performing great signs</i> | 23 "Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There He is,' do not believe him. 24 "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. 25 "Behold, I have told you in advance. 26 "If therefore they say to you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness,' do not go forth, or, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe them. 27 "For just as the lightning comes from the east, and flashes even to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. 28 "Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather. | 21 "And then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ'; or, 'Behold, He is there 'do not believe him; 22 for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order, if possible, to lead the elect astray. 23 "But take heed; behold, I have told you everything in advance. | |
| <i>Endtimes: Signs in the heavens</i> | 29 "But 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 the heavens will be shaken, | 24 "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, 25 and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken. | 25 "And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, 26 men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. |
| <i>Endtimes: Jesus appears in the sky, the church is raptured</i> | 30 and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. 31 "And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. | 26 "And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27 "And then He will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth, to the farthest end of heaven. | 27 "And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. |
| <i>Warning to disciples: "when these things begin to take place," get ready</i> | 32 "Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; 33 even so you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door. 34 "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. 35 "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away. | 28 "Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. 29 "Even so, you too, when you see these things happening, recognize that He is near, right at the door. 30 "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. 31 "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. | 28 "But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." |
| <i>BUT no one can know exactly when He will come</i> | 36 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. | 32 "But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. | 29 And He told them a parable: "Behold the fig tree and all the trees; 30 as soon as they put forth leaves, you see it and know for yourselves that summer is now near. 31 "Even so you, too, when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near. 32 "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all things take place. 33 "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. |

| | <u>Matthew 24</u> | <u>Mark 13</u> | <u>Luke 21</u> |
|---|---|---|--|
| <i>A parable warning the disciples to be ready at all times for Jesus's second coming</i> | 37 "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. 38 "For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39 and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. 40 "Then there shall be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. 41 "Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. 42 "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. 43 "But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. 44 "For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will. 45 "Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? 46 "Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. 47 "Truly I say to you, that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. 48 "But if that evil slave says in his heart, 'My master is not coming for a long time,' 49 and shall begin to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards; 50 the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, 51 and shall cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; weeping shall be there and the gnashing of teeth. | 33 "Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time is. 34 "It is like a man, away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert. 35 "Therefore, be on the alert-- for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, at cock-crow, or in the morning-- 36 lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. 37 "And what I say to you I say to all, 'Be on the alert!'" | 34 "Be on guard, that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day come on you suddenly like a trap; 35 for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. 36 "But keep on the alert at all times, praying in order that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man." |

Appendix 15-2: In the Olivet Discourse, Matthew 24:15-28 and Mark 13:14-23 cannot be referring to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD.

Some interpreters suggest that Jesus's predictions in Matthew 24:15-28 and Mark 13:14-23 of the Olivet Discourse were fulfilled by the Romans when they besieged Jerusalem and destroyed the temple in 70AD. These interpreters usually assert that the Bible does not predict a rebuilding of the Jewish temple in the endtimes. According to this interpretation, the 'abomination of desolation' 'standing in the holy place' refers to the idols on the standards of the Roman soldiers which were taken into the temple after the fall of Jerusalem. A careful examination of the passage and comparison to the known history of the period shows that the events Jesus is talking about definitely did not happen in 70AD.

Firstly, Jesus instructs His hearers in Judea to 'flee to the mountains' when the abomination is set up. Most of the Jews who died in Judea in 70AD were trapped inside Jerusalem. By the time the Roman army succeeded in taking and entering the besieged, starving Jerusalem, it was far too late to flee! In fact, during the siege, the Romans build a huge encircling wall around the city district to prevent entrance or exit [see chapter 9].

It is instructive to contrast Matthew 24:15-28 with Luke 21:20-24. The Luke passage actually *is* predicting the events of 66-70AD. In Luke, the sign to flee is the surrounding of Jerusalem. At the initial surrounding of Jerusalem by the Roman armies in 66AD, there really *was* a chance to flee, because the army subsequently withdrew.

Secondly, note that Jesus says after the idol is set up, there will be a tribulation 'such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall.' The debacle of 70AD was severe, but it wasn't unprecedented in history. To give just one example, the Flood was far worse. Even if we (unreasonably) take Jesus's word to refer only to the Jewish nation, 70AD was not the worst tribulation in their history. According to Josephus's possibly overstated figure, a maximum of a little more than a million Jews died during the siege of Jerusalem in 69-70AD. At that time there were at least several million Jews in the Roman Empire. In terms of percentage reduction of Jewish population, the Babylonian captivity was almost certainly as bad or worse. And much later, Hitler killed about half of the Jews who had been alive in 1939, far more in both absolute numbers and percentage than died in 70AD.

Thirdly, in the next section, Jesus states that 'immediately after the tribulation of those days' the sun and moon are to be darkened, every ethnicity in the world will be terrified, and Jesus Himself is to return in the clouds [Matthew 24:29-30; Mark 13:24-26]. Obviously none of these things happened after the tribulation of 70AD!

Appendix 15-3: Why is there a break between the 69th and 70th 'Seven' in Daniel chapter 9?

As was noted earlier in this chapter, there is a gap in Daniel's '70 Sevens' prophecy between the cutting off the Messiah at the end of the 69th 'seven' [Daniel 9:26] and the Second Coming of the Messiah at the end of the 70th 'seven'

[Daniel 9:26]. [See the section entitled Sign of the endtimes: A Jewish temple in Jerusalem above.]

26 "Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end *will come* with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. 27 "And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations *will come* one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate." [Daniel 9:26-27 NAS]

Firstly, note that it is easy to demonstrate that there must be a gap between verses 26 and 27. None of the events of verse 27 happened in 70 AD. We have abundant details about that time period from multiple historical sources, both Jewish and Roman. There was no 'firm covenant' made for seven years by the Roman leader or anyone else. There was no breaking of the covenant 'in the middle of the' seven years which 'put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering.' And there was no 'complete destruction' poured out on the Romans who destroyed Jerusalem, nor on their leaders. The main Roman leaders at the siege of Jerusalem, Vespasian and his son Titus, both later reigned as emperors.

Why would there be a stop in the countdown of the '70 sevens'? To understand this, we need to understand what God's revelation to Daniel encompassed.

The Jewish nation was established by God to be His representatives to the world. His goal was to teach spiritual truths through the physical nationality of Israel, Abraham's offspring [see chapter 4]. This involved many things, including the Exodus, the Ten Commandments, the Mosaic sacrifice rituals, and the coming of the Messiah who would redeem the world. In the '70 sevens' God was giving Daniel an outline of everything outstanding that He was still going to do in the world *through the Jews* until the beginning of the Millennium. At the beginning of the prediction, the angelic messenger told Daniel:

24 "Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy *place*." [Daniel 9:24 NAS]

The '70 sevens' are all about the Jews, 'your people'—God's representatives in the world. Sixty-nine 'sevens' were taken up from Ezra's first attempt to build the wall of Jerusalem 458 BC to the beginning of Jesus's public ministry in 26 AD. However, the majority of the Jews, the Jews as a national group, never acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah. At that point, *they stopped being God's representatives in the world*. Therefore the prophetic clock count to the Millennium had to pause.^K

Jesus Himself explicitly predicted this change in the status of the Jewish nationality. A few days before His crucifixion, Jesus was teaching in the temple. Using a parable, He predicted His rejection and execution by the Jews. Then He publically warned both the leaders and the common people of Israel:

43 "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it." [Matthew 21:43 NAS]

And that's exactly what happened a few days later when the Jewish leaders caused and the Jewish masses allowed Jesus to be crucified. When the Jews, as a group, rejected Jesus the Messiah, they stopped being God's representatives or spokespeople to the world. That responsibility passed to the Church, a *spiritual* chosen people made of both Jews and Gentiles, not a physical ethnicity.

The apostle Paul writes about this change in the status of the Jews in the book of Romans:

9:2... I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. 3 ...for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, 4 who are Israelites... 11:1 I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite... 25 For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery -- so that you will not be wise in your own estimation -- that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in; 26 and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." 27 "THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS." 28 From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of *God's* choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; 29 for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. [Romans 9:2-4, 11:1, 25-29 NAS]

Paul is grieved about the spiritual state of the Jews, with most of them rejecting the Messiah. This hard hearted rejection is only 'partial'—Paul and the other first century Jewish believers were an exception to the general 'hardening,' and a minority of Jews has believed in Jesus in every century since then. Furthermore, it is only temporary—'until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in,' that is, until all the Gentiles who will be saved during the Church Age have come to Christ. Then comes the Rapture and the end of the Church Age. Afterwards, the long awaited universal acknowledged

^K The exact time of the stopping of the countdown of the 70 'sevens' is difficult to precisely pinpoint. Most interpreters think it happened when the Messiah came, leaving a full 'seven' still to be fulfilled before the Millennium begins. A minority suggest that the first three and one half years of the 70th 'seven' were taken up by Jesus's three and a half years of ministry, and therefore the prophetic clock didn't stop until the crucifixion. In this latter viewpoint, only three and one half years (the second half of the 70th 'seven') still remain outstanding to occur during the endtimes period.

gement of the Messiah by all the Jews will occur; that is the minimum indicated by verse 28’s ‘and so all Israel will be saved.’ At that point, since the Jews as a corporate group will acknowledge Jesus, they will once more be God’s representatives on earth, and the prophetic clock of 70 ‘sevens’ will start ticking again.

In theory, if the Jews as a group had acknowledged Jesus at His first coming, the 70 ‘sevens’ could have run down to the end and the Kingdom Age, the Millennium, could have started right away. Of course God foreknew that they would freely choose to reject Jesus, and He used their free will choice to make the cross happen for our salvation. But it is because of this rejection that the Jews’ prophetic clock stopped ticking. It was put on hold until the Church Age is completed.

The existence of this gap is indicated in three of the major prophecies about the future of the Jews and the endtimes:

1. In Daniel’s statue vision [Daniel 2]: The gap between the two legs of iron and the feet and toes of mixed iron and clay;
2. In Daniel’s 70 ‘sevens’ vision [Daniel 9]: The gap between the 69th and 70th ‘seven’;
3. In the Olivet Discourse [Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21]: The gap between the destruction of Jerusalem, fulfilled in 70AD, and the setting up of the ‘abomination of desolation’ in the temple during the endtimes.

All three of these gaps cover essentially the same time period: the Church Age (30AD to the present), during which “the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached” and the “times of the Gentiles” (70AD to the present) during which “Jerusalem is trampled underfoot by the Gentiles.”

| The Church Age / “Times of the Gentiles” gap in prophecy | | |
|--|--|--|
| Four empires (Daniel 2 and 7) | 70 ‘sevens’ (Daniel 9) | Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21) |
| | <p>Jerusalem wall 458BC rebuilding begins 70 ‘sevens’ start</p> <p>The Messiah, Jesus, comes 26AD 69th ‘seven’</p> <p>Messiah is cut off 30AD 70 ‘sevens’ countdown stops</p> <p>Jerusalem and its temple are destroyed 70AD</p> | <p>Matthew 24:4-14, Mark 13:5-13, Luke 21:8-19:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church Age, 30AD to present • Christians being persecuted • Gospel being preached <p>Luke 21:20-24:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Times of Gentiles, 70AD to present • Jerusalem “trampled underfoot” by the Gentiles |
| <p>Gap: No national Israel 70AD to 1948</p> | <p>Gap: No temple 70AD to present</p> | <p>Gap—Church Age: Jews not God’s representatives 30AD to present</p> <p>Gap—Times of the Gentiles: Jews not in control of Jerusalem, 70AD to present</p> |
| <p>Endtimes:</p> <p>Endtimes Confederation</p> | <p>Endtimes:</p> <p>Temple rebuilt 70th ‘seven’ completed</p> <p>Abomination of desolation (idol) in temple</p> | <p>Endtimes:</p> <p>Gospel has been preached to all nations</p> <p>Temple rebuilt (necessarily implied);</p> <p>Abomination of desolation (idol) set up in temple.</p> |

¹ Pictures come from:

Maps of spread of Christianity: edited on edited on maps from www.outline-world.map.com.

² Austin, Steven A. "Twentieth Century Earthquakes – Confronting an Urban Legend." icr.org/article/424/ Accessed 2012-07-26.

³ Whiston, William. Translation of Josephus's Antiquities of the Jews, footnote at Book 10, Chapter 9, Section 7.