

**PHIL  
BAKER**



**THE FINAL  
ABOMINABLE  
TEMPLE**



# The Final Abominable Temple

Phil Baker

Baker Books

The Final Abominable Temple

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Published by

Baker Books

Spring, Texas

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ISBN: Library of Congress:

Edited by: Phil Pattillo and Phil Baker

Cover design by: Kurt Kuss

For the Church:

May we encourage one another every day, while it  
is still called "Today," so that none of us will be hardened  
by the deceitfulness of sin.



# Contents

Prologue	1
1. God's Original Earthly Tabernacle	5
2. Abominations, Apostasy, and Solomon's Temple	22
3. The Branch and the Second Temple	48
4. The Desolation of God's True Temple	66
5. God's Temple from Pentecost to Constantine	93
6. Can a Genuine Christian Apostatize?	131
7. The Final Abominable Temple	173
8. Concluding Questions Pt. 1	207
9. Concluding Questions Pt. 2	226
Epilogue	257
About the Author	271



# Prologue

The earliest Christian document outside of the New Testament is almost certainly *The Didache*, also known as *The Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations*. In the last chapter, the reader is given incredible insight into the eschatological beliefs of the first century Church. Unlike many today, the earliest Christians did not hold the belief that it doesn't matter what one believes as long as one believes Jesus is coming back. They taught that knowing and watching for the events surrounding the Lord's return could play a crucial role in determining one's eternal destiny. As you read this excerpt from *The Didache*, note the author's multiple references to the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles.

"Watch over your life. Do not let your lamps burn out, nor your waist be ungirded, but be ready, for you do not know when our Lord is coming. And gather together frequently, seeking what is necessary for your souls, for all your years of faith will count for nothing unless you are perfected in the last days. In the last days, false prophets and corrupters will multiply, and the sheep will turn into wolves, and love will be turned into hate. As lawlessness increases, men will hate and persecute and betray one



another. And then the Deceiver of the world will appear as a son of God, and will do signs and wonders, and the earth will be delivered into his hands. He will commit abominations which have never been seen since the world began. Then all mankind will come to the fire of testing, and many will fail and perish.”<sup>1</sup>

The sheep will turn into wolves, and the Deceiver of the world will commit abominations which have never been seen since the world began. The conjoined ideas of an eschatological apostasy and abomination recall Jesus’ Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24:10, 15-16. “At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. ... 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), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.”

Paul also links the two ideas apostasy and abomination in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 as he tells his readers that these signs will precede the Parousia, or Second Coming of Christ. “We request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken. ... Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship,

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1. The Didache, 16, <https://legacyicons.com/content/didache.pdf>

so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.” Both Paul and the author of the Didache seem to be to be getting their information from Jesus’ Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24, which in turn is leaning on the book of Daniel.

Remember, the Didache also states that, “the Deceiver of the world will appear as a son of God, and will do signs and wonders, and the earth will be delivered into his hands.” That statement is also similar to Jesus’ words in Matthew 24:4-5, 24, “See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will mislead many. ... For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.” The Antichrist (which can be translated as ‘in place of Christ’) appears to deceive the world by having a ministry similar to Jesus’; however, he operates with malice and deceit. This brings to mind Isaiah 14:14 where Lucifer says in his heart, “I will make myself like the Most High.”

The biblical writers call both Jesus (John 2:19-21) and His followers (1 Corinthians 3:16) God’s temple. If the devil seeks to make himself like Jesus, will the Antichrist serve as a temple of Satan, convince a mass of genuine Christians to forsake the Lord and in some way become his temples too? Will a rebuilt third temple that is called the temple of God serve as a distraction for a far more sinister abomination of desolation? Are the coming apostasy and abomination of desolation events when the sheep turn into wolves, as stated in the Didache? I believe

the answer to all of these questions is 'yes', though I would love to be proven wrong in the end.

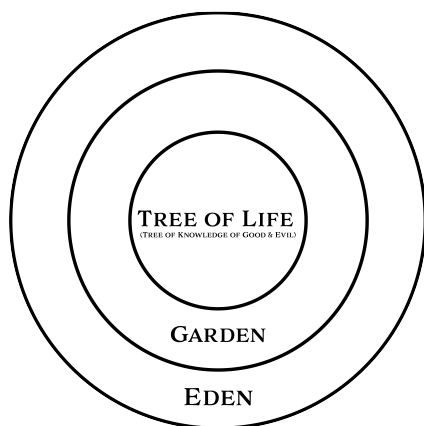
In the chapters that follow, we will trace through the Scriptures the ideas of abominations in God's temple and apostasy from the Lord. We will also see how the early Church looked at these ideas. Finally, we will discuss what I believe Paul had in mind in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4. By doing so, I believe we can better understand and prepare for what is soon to come upon the world. Will you join me?

# Chapter One

## God's Original Earthly Tabernacle

### **The Tabernacle of Eden**

The ideas of abominations in God's temple and apostasy from the Lord can be seen from the earliest passages of Scripture, but in order for apostasy and abominations to occur, things must begin in wholeness and purity. Beginning on the sixth day of creation, God dwelt with mankind in a land He called Eden. Within this paradise there was a garden, which is where the Lord placed Adam and Eve and walked with them. In the midst of the garden, the Lord planted the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Excluding the rest of the earth, we can view Eden like this: three concentric circles drawing humanity into increasing levels of intimacy with the Lord God.



In Genesis 1:28, the Lord God told His image-bearers to, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” Though the earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it (Psalm 24:1), the original couple was called to steward the earth as its functional king and queen. Additionally, Genesis 2:15 tells us that God gave Adam the command to cultivate and keep the garden. The words ‘cultivate’<sup>1</sup> (*abad*) and ‘keep’<sup>2</sup> (*shamar*) are also paired when the Lord instructs Moses concerning the duties of the Levitical priests in the tabernacle (Numbers 3:6-8).

Was Eden to be considered as the Lord’s original earthly tabernacle? Gordon Wenham writes, “The garden of Eden is not viewed by the author of Genesis simply as

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1. <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/5647.htm>

2. <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/8104.htm>

a piece of Mesopotamian farmland, but as an archetypal sanctuary, that is a place where God dwells and where man should worship Him. Many of the features of the garden may also be found in ... the tabernacle or Jerusalem temple. These parallels suggest that the garden itself is understood as a sort of sanctuary."<sup>3</sup>

If the garden in Eden was an earthly tabernacle, was Adam essentially a kingly priest of the place where heaven met earth? G. K. Beale believes so. "The writer of Genesis 2 was portraying Adam against the later portrait of Israel's priests, and that he was the archetypal priest who served in and guarded (or 'took care of') God's first temple. While it is likely that a large part of Adam's task was to 'cultivate' and be a gardener as well as 'guarding' the garden, that all of his activities are to be understood primarily as priestly activity is suggested not only from the exclusive use of the two words in contexts of worship elsewhere but also because the garden was a sanctuary."<sup>4</sup>

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3. Gordon J. Wenham, "Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story," cited in "I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood": Ancient Near Eastern and Literary Approaches to Genesis 1-11, ed R. S. Hess and D. T. Tsumara, (SBTS 4: Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 19-25.

4. G. K. Beale, "The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God," (IVP Academic, 2004), 68.



As Beale notes, 'to keep' (*shamar*) carries the idea of watching over or guarding something. Why would the Lord tell Adam to act as a priestly watchman over the garden in Eden, the place where he and Eve communed with Him? The answer follows in Genesis 3, when we are introduced to mankind's first adversary. In the midst of the garden, the serpent, whom Revelation 12:9 identifies as the devil and Satan, approaches Eve and deceitfully convinces her to rebel against the Lord.

Within the words of the devil, we see what motivates the couple's treasonous actions: a question concerning God's true character and a desire to achieve their own divine status. In Genesis 3:5, Satan tells Eve concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, from which the Lord had commanded them not to eat, "God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." First, the serpent challenges God's goodness, and in doing so paints himself as the couple's true benevolent benefactor. Next, he promises that they can become gods like the Most High, a role the adversary actually sought for himself.

Isaiah 14:4, 12-15 describes the envy which propelled the serpent into apostasy by comparing him to the king of Babylon. "Take up this taunt against the king of Babylon. ... How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, you who have weakened the nations! But you said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount

of assembly in the recesses of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.' Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol, to the recesses of the pit."

Ezekiel 28:12-17 is even more descriptive of the devil's downfall, and similarly to the passage in Isaiah, the prophet uses the king of Tyre as a type of Satan. "You had the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God. ... You were the anointed cherub who covers, and I placed you there. You were on the holy mountain of God; you walked in the midst of the stones of fire. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created until unrighteousness was found in you. By the abundance of your trade you were internally filled with violence, and you sinned; therefore I have cast you as profane from the mountain of God. And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor. I cast you to the ground."

The Lord cast the anointed, but now corrupt, cherub from Eden. The early Christian, Lactantius, writes between A.D. 304-313 about the corruption of the devil, "He (God) made another being, in whom the disposition of the divine origin did not remain. Therefore he was infected with his own envy as with poison, and passed from good to evil; and at his own will, which had been given to him by God unfettered, he acquired for himself a contrary name. From which it appears that the source of all evils is envy. For he envied his predecessor, who

through his steadfastness is acceptable and dear to God the Father. This being, who from good became evil by his own act, is called by the Greeks *diabolus*.”<sup>5</sup>

Though there are differing opinions as to the timing of Satan’s rebellion, the manner of his apostasy is unambiguous. He fell in a manner similar to Adam and Eve. In the midst of God’s original earthly tabernacle, they all envied the position which is rightfully the Lord’s and they all treasonously rebelled against Him, forsaking their original place of standing. The trio’s actions are the original type of the coming abomination of desolation and accompanying apostasy.

Ray Vander Laan defines the word ‘abomination’ as, “Anything associated with the worship of other gods, or any behavior that distorted the standard of living God intended for humans.”<sup>6</sup> Comparing the first two of the 10 Commandments with Deuteronomy 13:12-15, we can see just how seriously the Lord takes misplaced worship. The Lord commands the Hebrews in Exodus 20:2-6, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol,

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5. Lactantius, “Book II. Of the Origen of Error,” 9, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/history/early-church-fathers/ante-nicene/vol-7-third-fourth-centuries/lactantius/book-ii-origin-of-error.html>

6. Ray Vander Laan, “Holy, Common, and Abominable,” <https://www.thatttheworldmayknow.com/holy-common-and-abominable>

or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."

Then in Deuteronomy 13:12-15, "If you hear in one of your cities, which the Lord your God is giving you to live in, anyone saying that some worthless men have gone out from among you and have seduced the inhabitants of their city, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods' (whom you have not known), then you shall investigate and search out and inquire thoroughly. If it is true and the matter established that this abomination has been done among you, you shall surely strike the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying it and all that is in it and its cattle with the edge of the sword."

Idolatry, whether through the posture of our hearts or the actual setting up of an image, is abominable to God. In the Lord's garden sanctuary, the Serpent rebelled against the Lord, seeking worship for himself. Adam and Eve also apostatized in their abominable and idolatrous quest of achieving godhood through obeying the Serpent's voice. The couple's actions cost them dearly. Far worse than the curses delivered by the Lord to Adam and Eve was the loss of His presence. Genesis 3:23-24 records, "The Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken.

So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life." Idolatry leads to being exiled from the presence of the Lord.

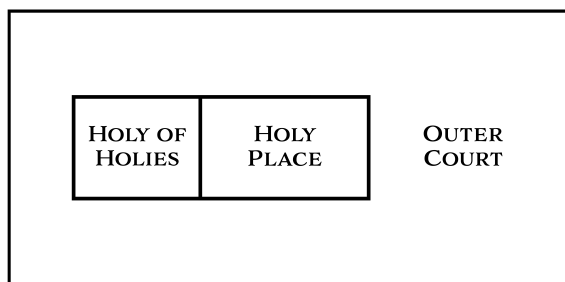
## **A Post-Eden Tabernacle**

Though the first couple was exiled east of Eden, our merciful Maker had not abandoned humanity. Thousands of years later, the Hebrew race found themselves enslaved in the land of Egypt. Yet, the Lord graciously sent his servant, Moses, to the sons of Israel. In Exodus 6:6-8 the Lord said, "I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession; I am the Lord."

After pouring out the 10 plagues on the kingdom of Egypt and miraculously delivering His chosen people through the Red Sea, the Lord God brought the sons of Israel to Mt. Sinai to enter into a covenant with them. With the people camped around the mountain, the Lord called Moses to say to them, "You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles'

wings, and brought you to Myself. Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:4-6).” What an incredible opportunity the Israelites were given to experience intimacy with the Lord of heaven and earth!

The Lord God invited His elect people into covenantal relationship where they could be a kingdom of priests similar to the original earthly kingly priest, Adam. Then in Exodus 25, God began giving Moses instructions as to how to construct a portable tabernacle, that the Lord might dwell in their midst. There was an outer court, the holy place and the most holy place, also known as the Holy of Holies, where the ark of the testimony would rest (Exodus 25:8-16, 27:9-21; Hebrews 9:1-5). Though the tabernacle was rectangular in shape, it was laid out in a design similar to Eden.



In addition to the layout, there were several aspects of the tabernacle that would draw one's mind back to Eden. When the Lord God drove the first couple eastward out of



Eden, Genesis 3:24 tells us, "He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life." Concerning the cherubim guarding the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle, Wenham writes, "That the entrance of the garden was guarded by *kerubim* is another indication that it is viewed as sanctuary, for *kerubim*, Akkadian *kuribu*, were the traditional guardians of holy places in the ancient Near East. ... Two others on top of the ark formed the throne of God in the inner sanctuary (Exodus 25:18-22) and pictures of *kerubim* decorated the curtains of the tabernacle (Exodus 26:31)."<sup>7</sup>

K. L. Sparks further elaborates on the ark, "Placed within the most holy place of the tabernacle, it represented the throne of Yahweh. ... The primary distinction of the tabernacle in comparison with other ancient shrines was that its cela contained God's 'throne' (the ark) but no divine statue. This reflected Israel's strong aniconic tradition, so vividly expressed in the Decalogue: 'You shall not make for yourself a graven image' (Exodus 20:4; Deuteronomy 5:8)."<sup>8</sup> Although the ark represented God's imminent ruling presence in creation among His people, He transcends creation. The elements of the tabernacle were just shadows of the true substance. As the Lord declares in Isaiah 66:1, "Thus says the Lord, 'Heaven is

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7. Wenham, 19-25.

8. K. L. Sparks, "Ark of the Covenant," (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 88-89.

My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest?"

Wenham identifies another link between the garden in Eden and the tabernacle, "The third feature that suggests the garden should be viewed as an archetypal sanctuary is the tree of life, whose fruit gives eternal life. ... The tabernacle menorah was a stylized tree of life."<sup>9</sup> Beale expands on this thought, "Early Jewish commentators also compared either the tree of life with Israel's temple or Eden with the later lampstand. The early Jewish book of *1 Enoch* says the tree of life would be transplanted from Eden, which was on a 'high mountain', to the 'Holy Place beside the temple of the Lord' in Jerusalem (*1 Enoch* 24-25), implying that the tree's former location in Eden was also a sanctuary."<sup>10</sup>

The combination of encountering both tree of life and cherubim imagery would certainly produce in the viewer a numinous experience. Describing such, Donald Gowan notes that there are always two aspects of a person's encounter with God: fear and attraction. The numinous experience usually involves terror because it is dangerous; however, this experience draws one close because it involves discovery of the nature of God, and God is

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9. Wenham, 19-25.

10. Beale, 79.

good.<sup>11</sup> C. S. Lewis communicated the same thought in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* when speaking of Aslan, "He isn't safe. But he's good."<sup>12</sup>

Thus, just as was the case in the garden, the priests of the tabernacle were charged with being watchmen over this sacred space, for it is precisely the Lord God's goodness that causes Him to detest and judge sin. We read in Numbers 3:6-8, "Bring the tribe of Levi near and set them before Aaron the priest, that they may serve him. They shall perform (*shamar*) the duties for him and for the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, to do (*abad*) the service of the tabernacle. They shall also keep (*shamar*) all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, along with the duties of the sons of Israel, to do (*abad*) the service of the tabernacle." Again, the words 'cultivate',<sup>13</sup> (*abad*) and 'keep',<sup>14</sup> (*shamar*) are also paired when the Lord God instructs Moses of the duties of the Levitical priests in the tabernacle.

## **An Abominable Feast to the Lord**

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11. Donald Gowan, "Theology in Exodus: Biblical Theology in the Form of a Commentary," (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 26-28.

12. C.S. Lewis, "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe," (New York: Macmillian Publishing Co., Inc., 1980), 76.

13. <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/5647.htm>

14. <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/8104.htm>

Surely the newly chosen and delivered people of God would have learned from Adam and Eve's mistakes. But no. Unfortunately, it did not take long for abominable idolatrous activity to develop in the camp. At the base of the Lord God's holy mountain, while Moses received instructions from the Lord concerning the construction of the tabernacle, the people began to grow restless. Exodus 32:1 records, "Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, 'Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.'"

Aaron took up a collection of gold from the people, melted it and formed a golden calf. He then told the people, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt. ... Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord (Exodus 32:4-5)." It's an interesting move, to say the least: celebrating your deliverance by the merciful arm of Lord God by breaking the second commandment. Not surprisingly, Aaron's dereliction of duty brought about disastrous and swift judgment.

The Lord God told Moses in Exodus 32:7-10, "Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!' ... I have seen this people, and behold, they are an

obstinate people. Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them." The destruction brought about by the people's abominable act was not merely physical, for the Lord then told Moses in verse 33, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book." Thus, Aaron's failure to keep watch and guard sacred space caused irreparable damage for many in the congregation of Israel.

Surprisingly, the people as a whole still did not learn from these tragic events. A short time after departing from Sinai, the people arrived in the wilderness of Paran. There, the Lord blessed the Israelites with an opportunity to enter the Promised Land. However, when the people saw the Anakim, the descendants of the Nephilim, they began to grumble against Moses and Aaron.

In an almost unbelievable display of disdain for the Lord God who had brought them out of slavery, the whole congregation of Israelites cried out, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the Lord bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt? ... Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt (Numbers 14:2-4)." Moses and Aaron pleaded with the people to think rationally about their proposed apostasy, but the entire multitude responded by calling for them to be stoned. However, at that exact moment, "The glory of the Lord appeared in the tent of meeting to all the sons of Israel (Numbers 14:10)."

Again, because the Lord God is good, He abhors and judges sin. He said to Moses and Aaron, "Say to them, 'As I live, ... just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will surely do to you; your corpses will fall in this wilderness, even all your numbered men, according to your complete number from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against Me.'" They asked for death, so that's what they received, a foreshadowing of future horrors to be discussed later in this book.

Unfortunately, the spiritual condition of God's chosen people only worsened in the wilderness. The Lord spoke through His prophet in Amos 5:25-27, "Did you present Me with sacrifices and grain offerings in the wilderness for forty years, O house of Israel? You also carried along Sikkuth your king and Kiyyun, your images, the star of your gods which you made for yourselves. Therefore, I will make you go into exile beyond Damascus." The Lord God says that His people carried the tabernacle of their king, Sikkuth, who is the detestable god, Molech.<sup>15</sup> Kiyyun corresponds to Saturn.<sup>16</sup> Both were abominable in His sight, to be sure, and eventually led to exile.

When reading these accounts, there is a temptation to say either in our hearts or out loud, "How foolish were those Israelites! If I were there, I would have been like Joshua and Caleb and remained faithful to the Lord." Undoubtedly, the Apostle Paul has this mentality in mind

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15. <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/5522.htm>

16. <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/3594.htm>



when he addresses believers in Jesus at Corinth. Please read these words with humility of mind and a sober spirit.

"For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play.' Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry (1 Corinthians 10:1-14)."

Notice what the Apostle Paul said. Those things happened to the Israelites in the wilderness as an example

for us. They were written down to warn and instruct us, who are living in the last days. Therefore, we should not be arrogant and think that we are beyond that end. We must flee from idolatry, and humbly cling to the Lord our God. History has a way of repeating itself, and we will see in the next chapter that those who fail to learn from the mistakes of our predecessors find themselves following in their footsteps. If you think the abominations and apostasies of Eden and the Exodus generation were detestable, wait until you read what occurred in Solomon's temple.

# Chapter Two

## Abominations, Apostasy, and Solomon's Temple

### **God's People Reject Him As King**

As we discussed in the previous chapter, envy is an exceedingly destructive emotion, and one of the primary ways humanity has followed in the footsteps of the devil. After being in the Promised Land for hundreds of years, the Israelites began to grow restless again. This time, they cried out to the Lord's new Prophet/Judge, Samuel, "Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations (1 Samuel 8:4)." Their demand may seem benign or even logical on the surface, but God sees the heart behind all things.

The Lord counseled an infuriated and dejected Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they

have rejected Me from being king over them. Like all the deeds which they have done since the day that I brought them up from Egypt even to this day—in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods—so they are doing to you also (1 Samuel 8:7-8).” In response to their asking for a king, God accused His people of rejecting and forsaking Him, as well as serving other gods. So, He gave them what they wanted, which the people would soon recognize as disastrous. Yet, it would be too late, for the Lord said, “Then you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the Lord will not answer you in that day (1 Samuel 8:18).”

Jeff Cook writes in his book, *Seven*, “Envy ... is not only a rejection of the good that God has given to me; this is a desire to become someone I’m not, was never made to be, and will not enjoy becoming if my jealousy ever were to succeed. ... Envy invites you and me to put on glasses that see the world as though God has not given us everything we need to be fully drenched in his redeeming, soul-restoring, son-and daughter-creating, joy-producing, exquisitely wonderful love. Envy is a deadly sin.”<sup>1</sup> It wouldn’t take long for the Israelites to see the folly of their envious demand.

Though the people initially loved Saul, the first king, he quickly proved his inward disposition to be vastly different from his outward appearance. Graciously, the Lord soon had Samuel anoint a young shepherd named

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1. Jeff Cook, “Seven: The Deadly Sins and the Beatitudes,” (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 52, 55.

David as the heir apparent to the throne. God recognized David as a man after His own heart, and blessed him exceedingly. However, David also fell into significant sin, breaking the sixth through tenth commandments in a prolonged extramarital affair, which led to the premeditated killing of one of David's friends. Therefore, even though David desired to build a permanent house or temple for the Lord in Jerusalem, God did not allow him to actualize that dream.

At the end of his life, with all of the leaders of Israel assembled around him, David explained, "I had intended to build a permanent home for the ark of the covenant of the Lord and for the footstool of our God. So I had made preparations to build it. But God said to me, 'You shall not build a house for My name because you are a man of war and have shed blood.' ... He said to me, 'Your son Solomon is the one who shall build My house and My courts; for I have chosen him to be a son to Me, and I will be a father to him. I will establish his kingdom forever if he resolutely performs My commandments and My ordinances, as is done now (1 Chronicles 28:2-3, 6-7).'" What were the commandments that God gave specifically to the king?

In Deuteronomy 17:14-20, Moses spoke to the people on behalf of the Lord, "When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it, and you say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me,' ... he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since the Lord has said to you, 'You

shall never again return that way.' He shall not multiply wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself. Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. It shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left, so that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel."

## **The Exaltation and Descent of Solomon**

I didn't take long for Solomon to begin disobeying those divine directives. Concerning the Lord's command for the king to not multiply horses, and especially to not go to Egypt to multiply horses, we read in 1 Kings 4:26, "Solomon had 40,000 stalls of horses for his chariots." Also, 2 Chronicles 1:16 tells us, "Solomon's horses were imported from Egypt and from Kue; the king's traders procured them from Kue for a price."

What about the Lord's command for the king to not greatly increase gold and silver for himself? 2 Chronicles 1:15 states, "The king made silver and gold as plentiful in Jerusalem as stones." More alarming than that sentence is what 2 Chronicles 9:13-14 records. "Now the weight of gold which came to Solomon in one year was 666 talents

of gold, besides that which the traders and merchants brought; and all the kings of Arabia and the governors of the country brought gold and silver to Solomon.” This numerical detail is no doubt a piece of theological messaging that a later biblical author will use to describe a future ruler.

Finally, there is the prohibition against multiplying wives for himself, which would turn his heart away from the Lord. How did Solomon fair in keeping this command? We read in 1 Kings 3:1, “Then Solomon formed a marriage alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh’s daughter and brought her to the city of David.” Aligning oneself with Pharaoh through marriage doesn’t seem like the best way to begin one’s reign. Not surprisingly, Solomon’s romantic life quickly descended into chaos.

1 Kings 11:1-3 says, “Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the sons of Israel, ‘You shall not associate with them, nor shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods.’ Solomon held fast to these in love. He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away.” How much further could Solomon’s heart be turned away from the Lord?

Continuing in that same chapter, “Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians and after Milcom the detestable idol of the Ammonites. Solomon did what

was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not follow the Lord fully, as David his father had done. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable idol of Moab, on the mountain which is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the detestable idol of the sons of Ammon. Thus also he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods (1 Kings 11:5-8).” Did you notice the word ‘detestable’ repeated over and over? In Hebrew, it is *shiqquts*, and is the word used in Daniel chapters 9, 11 and 12 when speaking of the coming Abomination of Desolation event.<sup>2</sup>

Why does God take the worship of other gods so seriously? A number of valid answers come to mind, but for this chapter we will focus on only one. We become like what we worship.<sup>3</sup>

## Heavenly Apostates

Who were these detestable gods? The simple answer is that they are the apostate sons of the Most High God, and those apostates’ progeny. That explanation may appear strange or even absurd to some of you. I understand, for that is how I once felt. However, this is second-temple Judaism and the early Church’s position. There are nu-

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2. <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/8251.htm>

3. See Psalm 115:2-8; Ezekiel 14:4-5; Romans 8:29-30; and 1 John 3:1-3.



merous quotes I could reference, but will only include two here.

Ancient Jewish and Roman historian, Josephus, wrote in A.D. 93, "For many angels of God accompanied with women, and begat sons that proved unjust, and despisers of all that was good, on account of the confidence they had in their own strength; for the tradition is, that these men did what resembled the acts of those whom the Grecians call giants."<sup>4</sup>

In A.D. 160, Justin Martyr wrote in his Second Apology, "God ... committed the care of men and of all things under heaven to angels whom He appointed over them. But the angels transgressed this appointment, and were captivated by love of women, and begat children who are those that are called demons; and besides, they afterwards subdued the human race to themselves, partly by magical writings, and partly by fears and the punishments they occasioned, and partly by teaching them to offer sacrifices, and incense, and libations, of which things they stood in need after they were enslaved by lustful passions; and among men they sowed murders, wars, adulteries, intemperate deeds, and all wickedness. Whence also the poets and mythologists, not knowing that it was the angels and those demons who had been begotten by them that did these things to men, and women, and cities, and nations, which they related, as-

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4. Josephus, "Antiquities, 1.3.1"

, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/history/flavius-josephus/antiquities-jews/book-1/chapter-3.html>

cribed them to god himself, and to those who were accounted to be his very offspring, and to the offspring of those who were called his brother), Neptune and Pluto, and to the children again of these their offspring. For whatever name each of the angels had given to himself and his children, by that name they called them.”<sup>5</sup>

What Justin wrote is the orthodox position of Christianity for its first 400 years. As Genesis 6 states, a group of angelic beings disobediently left their heavenly abode, copulated with human women, and produced offspring that were giants. Both 2 Peter chapter 2 and Jude directly cite this event. Justin then picks up on the tradition of 1 Enoch, saying that when the progeny of the angels and women died, those hybrid beings became evil spirits, which the Bible calls demons.<sup>6</sup>

One mission of these demons is to encourage humanity to engage in abominable, idolatrous worship, which the torah makes quite clear. We read in Deuteronomy 32:15-19, “But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked—You are grown fat, thick, and sleek—then he forsook God who

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5. Justin Martyr, “Second Apology,” 10,  
<https://www.biblestudytools.com/history/early-church-fathers/ante-nicene/vol-1-apostolic-with-justin-martyr-irenaeus/justin-martyr/second-apology-of-justin.html>

6. 1 Enoch, 15,  
<http://wesley.nnu.edu/sermons-essays-books/noncanonical-literature/noncanonical-literature-ot-pseudepigrapha/book-of-enoch/>

made him, and scorned the Rock of his salvation. They made Him jealous with strange gods; with abominations they provoked Him to anger. They sacrificed to demons who were not God, to gods whom they have not known, new gods who came lately, whom your fathers did not dread. 'You neglected the Rock who begot you, and forgot the God who gave you birth.' The Lord saw this, and spurned them because of the provocation of His sons and daughters." Paul cites this passage in 1 Corinthians 10:20, "I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons."

Whether they were named Neptune, Pluto, Molech, Chemosh or Ashtoreth, they were either the original angelic apostates or their children who followed their lead. Again, we become like what we worship and share in the blessings or curses that follow. Leviticus 18:2-3, 24-25, 29-30 states, "I am the Lord your God. You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you. ... Do not defile yourselves by any of these things; for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled. For the land has become defiled, therefore I have brought its punishment upon it, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants. ... For whoever does any of these abominations, those persons who do so shall be cut off from among their people. Thus you are to keep My charge, that you do not practice any of the abominable customs ... I am the Lord your God."

If we follow the abominable apostate gods of the nations, we will share in their fate. Irenaeus speaks to this truth, “Eternal fire was not originally prepared for man, but for him who beguiled man, and caused him to offend—for him, I say, who is chief of the apostasy, and for those angels who became apostates along with him; which [fire], indeed, they too shall justly feel, who, like him, persevere in works of wickedness, without repentance, and without retracing their steps.”<sup>7</sup>

## **The Rise of Solomon’s Temple**

Just as the garden tabernacle in Eden remained incomparably wonderful and untainted for quite some time, the temple Solomon built for the Lord God was originally an earthly picture of beauty and holiness. J. Monson writes concerning this point, “For the Israelites the temple of Solomon was a return to Eden. It brought a piece of paradise to the Israelite homeland that permanently anchored Yahweh not to Sinai but to Zion. This concept manifested itself in the gourds, leaves, flowers, fruit and cherubim that decorated the temple, and it animated the ceremonies that took place there. It was an affirmation of the presence, virility and moral supremacy of Yahweh. ... In the eyes of the ancient Israelites, therefore, Solomon’s

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7. Irenaeus, “Against Heresies Book 4,” 3.23,  
<https://www.biblestudytools.com/history/early-church-fathers/ante-nicene/vol-1-apostolic-with-justin-martyr-irenaeus/irenaeus/book-iii.html>

temple was an earthly residence for Yahweh, a meeting point between heaven and earth.”<sup>8</sup>

To convey a sense of God’s glory, almost every stationary aspect of the temple was covered with gold. We read in 1 Kings 6:21-22, 30, “So Solomon overlaid the inside of the house with pure gold. And he drew chains of gold across the front of the inner sanctuary, and he overlaid it with gold. He overlaid the whole house with gold, until all the house was finished. Also the whole altar which was by the inner sanctuary he overlaid with gold. ... He overlaid the floor of the house with gold, inner and outer sanctuaries.”

Solomon sought to give the viewer a strong feeling of the holiness and power of God by filling the temple with carvings and statues of cherubim. “Also in the inner sanctuary he made two cherubim of olive wood, each ten cubits high. ... He placed the cherubim in the midst of the inner house, and the wings of the cherubim were spread out, so that the wing of the one was touching the one wall, and the wing of the other cherub was touching the other wall. So their wings were touching each other in the center of the house. He also overlaid the cherubim with gold. ... Then he carved all the walls of the house round about with carved engravings of cherubim. ... He made two doors of olive wood, and he carved on them carvings of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers, and overlaid them with gold (1 Kings 6:23, 27-29, 32).”

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8. J. Monson, “Solomon’s Temple,” (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 934.

It's important to remember that the Lord commanded neither David nor Solomon to build this temple in Jerusalem. The building of the tabernacle was commanded, but not the first temple. 1 Chronicles 28:2-3 implies God was expecting someone to build Him a house. However, God's foreknowledge of an event does not necessarily equate to Him commanding it happen. The Lord appears to enjoy working with His people, and loves to give His children gifts. David desired to build a house for the Lord, so even though God did not command the building of the temple, He allowed it to be built.

2 Chronicles 5:11-14 records that once Solomon's temple was completed and the ark of the covenant was brought into the holy of holies, "The priests came forth from the holy place ... and all the Levitical singers ... and with them one hundred and twenty priests blowing trumpets ... with one voice to praise and to glorify the Lord, and when they lifted up their voice accompanied by trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and when they praised the Lord saying, 'He indeed is good for His lovingkindness is everlasting,' then the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God."

Immediately following Solomon's prayer of dedication, an even more spectacular demonstration of the glory of the Lord occurred. "Now when Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the house. The priests could not enter into the

house of the Lord because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's house. All the sons of Israel, seeing the fire come down and the glory of the Lord upon the house, bowed down on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave praise to the Lord, saying, "Truly He is good, truly His lovingkindness is everlasting (2 Chronicles 7:1-3)."

It was quite an impressive beginning, to say the least. However, like many blessings from the Lord, the promise of His perpetual presence in the temple was tied to the people's faithfulness. Less than a month after the fiery demonstration of God's glory, He appeared to Solomon at night with a conditional promise. What follows would give any careful first-time reader a strong sense that the newly dedicated temple wouldn't last long.

We read in 2 Chronicles 7:16, 19-22, "For now I have chosen and consecrated this house that My name may be there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually. ... If you turn away and forsake My statutes and My commandments which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will uproot you from My land which I have given you, and this house which I have consecrated for My name I will cast out of My sight and I will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples. As for this house, which was exalted, everyone who passes by it will be astonished and say, 'Why has the Lord done thus to this land and to this house?' And they will say, 'Because they forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers who brought them from the land of Egypt, and they adopted other gods and worshiped

them and served them; therefore He has brought all this adversity on them.”

## **The Fall of Solomon’s Temple**

After Solomon’s death, the kingdom split into two parts: Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Both kingdoms did a great amount of evil, but Judah showed a willingness to repent and seek the Lord after being disciplined by the Lord for their transgressions. The kingdom of Israel stubbornly refused to repent, and in 722 B.C. the ten tribes were carried off into exile by the Assyrians. During this time, King Hezekiah of Judah helped the southern kingdom cling to the Lord, and God miraculously delivered them from Sennacherib’s Assyrian army. However, when Hezekiah died, his son, Manasseh, led Judah in a kingdom-wide rebellion against the Lord.

2 Chronicles 33:1-5 records, “Manasseh ... did evil in the sight of the Lord according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord dispossessed before the sons of Israel. For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down; he also erected altars for the Baals and made Asherim, and worshiped all the host of heaven and served them. He built altars in the house of the Lord of which the Lord had said, ‘My name shall be in Jerusalem forever.’” For he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord.” Sin hardens our hearts and, as it’s been said, takes us further than we were willing to go, keeps us longer than we were



willing to stay, and costs us more than we were willing to pay.

Demonstrating this progressive descent into the depths of sin, the passage continues, "He made his sons pass through the fire in the valley of Ben-hinnom; and he practiced witchcraft, used divination, practiced sorcery and dealt with mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking Him to anger. Then he put the carved image of the idol which he had made in the house of God, of which God had said to David and to Solomon his son, 'In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever; and I will not again remove the foot of Israel from the land which I have appointed for your fathers, if only they will observe to do all that I have commanded them according to all the law, the statutes and the ordinances given through Moses.' Thus Manasseh misled Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the sons of Israel."<sup>9</sup>

Not only did Manasseh personally worship the abominable gods of the nations and sacrifice his children to them, he brought their detestable idols into the temple itself, a clear foreshadowing of the final Abomination of Desolation. Thus, the Lord responded by sending the Assyrians who captured the king and led him with

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9. 2 Chronicles 33:6-9,

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Chron+33%3A1-9&version=NASB1995>

bronze hooks and chains into Babylon. Perhaps Manasseh remembered the warning God gave Solomon in 2 Chronicles 7:19-20, "If you turn away and forsake My statutes and My commandments which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will uproot you from My land which I have given you." For, while in great distress in Babylon, Manasseh, "entreated the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. When he prayed to Him, He was moved by his entreaty and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem to his kingdom (2 Chronicles 33:12-13)."

Manasseh, whose name means 'forget', definitely has a story worth remembering. God is rich in mercy, and will forgive even the worst of sinners who genuinely repent. Unfortunately, even though Manasseh made several repentant reforms, his son, Amon, went right back to sacrificing to the gods of the nations. Amon was soon murdered by his own servants, which allowed for Manasseh's grandson, Josiah, to take the throne at age eight. At age 20, Josiah began to do his part in ridding the land of visible idolatrous practices. Despite Josiah's reforms, the next year the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, revealing that wide-spread apostasy was present beneath the surface, even amongst the leadership of Judah.

Before getting into what Jeremiah has to say, it's important to note that the prophet Isaiah spoke of this apostasy in Judah's leadership 100 years earlier. He wrote, "Hear the word of the Lord, O scoffers, who rule

this people who are in Jerusalem, because you have said, 'We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we have made a pact. The overwhelming scourge will not reach us when it passes by, for we have made falsehood our refuge and we have concealed ourselves with deception.'"<sup>10</sup>

Let that sink in. During the godly reign of king Hezekiah, a secret group of leaders in Judah made a covenant with death and Hades, and thought their abominable pact would remain hidden as they helped steer the nation away from the Lord. But God saw it all because what hides in darkness is revealed to the Lord, and the night is as bright as the day.<sup>11</sup> Also, as the prophet Habbakuk wrote, God is too holy to look upon sin and not act.<sup>12</sup> Because God is good, He will patiently give us time to repent, but if His call for repentance remains ignored, He will bring judgment.

By the time Jeremiah began his prophetic ministry, God's patience toward idolatrous and apostate Judah had almost run out. Though Josiah did his best to bring about nation-wide repentance, the people's hearts were

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10. Isaiah 28:14-15, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+28&version=NASB1995>

11. Psalm 139:12, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+139%3A12&version=NASB1995>.

12. Habakkuk 1, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Habakkuk+1&version=NASB1995>

still far from God. The Lord told Jeremiah about the people of Judah, "I will pronounce My judgments on them concerning all their wickedness, whereby they have forsaken Me and have offered sacrifices to other gods, and worshiped the works of their own hands (Jeremiah 1:16)."

What was the judgment the Lord pronounced? We read in Jeremiah 7:8-11, 14-15, "Behold, you are trusting in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery and swear falsely, and offer sacrifices to Baal and walk after other gods that you have not known, then come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered!'—that you may do all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your sight? Behold, I, even I, have seen it. ... Therefore, I will do to the house which is called by My name, in which you trust, and to the place which I gave you and your fathers, as I did to Shiloh. I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brothers, all the offspring of Ephraim."

Notice how the leaders treated the temple. They appeared to believe in some of God's promise that He made to Solomon. For instance, they seemed to only remember these words, "For now I have chosen and consecrated this house that My name may be there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually (2 Chronicles 7:16)." Thus, they thought that they could commit unimaginable abominations in the temple and even apostatize from the Lord, yet the Lord's presence would remain and they would be saved.

However, those words to Solomon are deceptive when isolated, for there was more to God's promise in that passage. "But if you turn away and forsake My statutes and My commandments which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will uproot you from My land which I have given you, and this house which I have consecrated for My name I will cast out of My sight and I will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples (2 Chronicles 7:19-22)."

## **The Lord Leaves His House**

Roughly 350 years after God spoke to Solomon, the Lord showed Himself true to His word. "For the sons of Judah have done that which is evil in My sight, ... they have set their detestable things in the house which is called by My name, to defile it. They have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, and it did not come into My mind. Therefore, behold, days are coming ... when it will no longer be called Topheth, or the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of the Slaughter; for they will bury in Topheth because there is no other place. The dead bodies of this people will be food for the birds of the sky and for the beasts of the earth; and no one will frighten them away. Then I will make to cease from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the

bridegroom and the voice of the bride; for the land will become a ruin (Jeremiah 7:30-34)."

In 605 B.C., king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invaded Judah, and the first wave of Judeans were taken to Babylon. Among those captives were Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Then, in 597 B.C., a second wave of captives were deported to Babylon, with the prophet Ezekiel a part of that horde. It is through Ezekiel that we are given a detailed look at the abominable practices of the apostate Judean leadership, the Lord's departure from Solomon's temple, and the spiritual assault waged by the Lord against Jerusalem.

Years after his deportation to Babylon, the prophet Ezekiel was sitting in his house with the exiled elders of Judah. There, one of the strangest events in all of Scripture occurs. Ezekiel writes, "The hand of the Lord God fell on me ... and caught me by a lock of my head; and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem (Ezekiel 8:1-3)." Though physically in a different kingdom, Ezekiel is shown, perhaps in realtime, the abominable things being practiced by those in Solomon's temple.

The Lord first showed Ezekiel an idol of jealousy at the entrance to the north gate of the inner court, the court of the priests. There are differing opinions as to what this idol actually was. Some believed it was the idol set up in the temple by Manasseh, while others view it as an Asherah pole. Regardless, the Lord God said to Ezekiel, "Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations which the house of Israel are com-

mitting here, so that I would be far from My sanctuary? But yet you will see still greater abominations (Ezekiel 8:6)." Notice that the Lord said these abominations would have the consequence of His leaving the temple. It is unclear if the priests set up the image in order to drive the Lord away. Walther Eichrodt believes that is the case, "The probable interpretation of 'to drive me far from my sanctuary' is that Yahweh is being driven out of the place consecrated to him."<sup>13</sup> If that was their desire, they soon receive exactly what they wanted, though it leads to their destruction.

Next, the Spirit of the Lord brought Ezekiel inside the court of the priests. We read in Ezekiel 8:9-11, "And He said to me, 'Go in and see the wicked abominations that they are committing here.' So I entered and looked, and behold, every form of creeping things and beasts and detestable things, with all the idols of the house of Israel, were carved on the wall all around. Standing in front of them were seventy elders of the house of Israel, with Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan standing among them, each man with his censer in his hand and the fragrance of the cloud of incense rising."

Shaphan was a scribe for King Josiah who helped bring national reform. Jaazaniah was clearly not following the way of righteousness modeled by his father, and this apostate son of Shaphan was later identified by the Lord

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13. Walther Eichrodt, "Ezekiel: A Commentary," (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970, ePub), 123.

as one of the men, “who devise iniquity and give evil advice in this city.”<sup>14</sup> Again, we are shown that there is no such thing as a secret to God, for, “He said to me, ‘Son of man, do you see what the elders of the house of Israel are committing in the dark, each man in the room of his carved images? For they say, ‘The Lord does not see us; the Lord has forsaken the land (Ezekiel 8:12).’”

And yet, it gets worse. The Spirit of God leads Ezekiel back to the northern gate’s entrance of the inner court, and there he is shown women weeping for Tammuz. Thomas Constable writes of this abominable scene, “Tammuz was an ancient Sumerian and then Akkadian fertility deity, the husband and brother of Ishtar. The Sumerian and Akkadian civilizations preceded the Babylonian civilization in Mesopotamia. Tammuz had ties to the Canaanite Baal and the Greek Adonis and Aphrodite gods.”<sup>15</sup> The most powerful nation on earth was oppressing Judah, so in Ezekiel 8, we see the people of Judah turning to the gods of the nations for provision and protection. Whether their idolatry was due to a sense of desperation, hedging their bets or a feeling of being betrayed by the Lord does not matter. These practices were detestable to God.

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14. Jeremiah 11:1-3, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ezekiel%2011&version=NASB1995>

15. Thomas Constable, “Dr. Constable’s Expository Notes,” Ezekiel 8, <https://www.studylight.org/commenaries/eng/dcc/ezekiel-8.html>.



Lastly, the Lord brings His prophet to the entrance of the temple. There, "between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs to the temple of the Lord and their faces toward the east; and they were prostrating themselves eastward toward the sun. He said to me, 'Do you see this, son of man? Is it too light a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they have committed here, that they have filled the land with violence and provoked Me repeatedly? For behold, they are putting the twig to their nose. Therefore, I indeed will deal in wrath (Ezekiel 8:16-18).'"

In the court of the priests with their backs to the temple, the men who were called to be a kingdom of priests and a light to the nations idolatrously worshipped the creation rather than the Creator. It doesn't matter if some believed they were worshipping the Lord by bowing to the sun, as some think. Remember the golden calf incident in Exodus 32. The people used a molten calf to celebrate a feast to the Lord, and three thousand were destroyed because of that abominable act.<sup>16</sup>

The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 1:18-23 that those who refuse to repent of idolatry receive the wrath of God, which is exactly what transpires. The next section of Ezekiel has many parallels to God's protection and wrath in both the original Passover of Exodus and the coming Great Tribulation. However, the following events are probably best understood as Ezekiel witnessing the

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16. Exodus 32, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passages/?search=Exodus+32&version=NASB1995>

spiritual reality behind the physical assault by the Babylonians against Jerusalem.

Just as the Lord commanded His death angel to execute His judgment on the firstborn of Egypt, He commanded His angelic executioners to slay the idolaters and apostates of Jerusalem. Also, as certain people were protected from God's wrath in the last plague of the Exodus, a group was protected from the fierce anger of the Lord against Jerusalem. In Egypt, the people had to slaughter a lamb and place its blood over their doorposts. In Ezekiel 9:4, the Lord instructed an angel to, "put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst."

Once the faithful remnant was marked by the Lord, the rest of the executioner angels were commanded in Ezekiel 9:5-7, "Go through the city after him and strike; do not let your eye have pity and do not spare. Utterly slay old men, young men, maidens, little children, and women, but do not touch any man on whom is the mark; and you shall start from My sanctuary. ... Defile the temple and fill the courts with the slain. Go out!" The angels did as the Lord commanded, yet what was seen by the inhabitants of Jerusalem was most likely the Babylonian army putting the people of Judah to death.

Then came a horrific and heartbreaking reversal. Though the glory of the Lord graciously answered Solomon's prayer and filled the temple, He now departed His former place of rest. "The glory of the Lord went up from the cherub to the threshold of the temple, and the

temple was filled with the cloud and the court was filled with the brightness of the glory of the Lord. ... Then the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim. When the cherubim departed, they lifted their wings and rose up from the earth in my sight with the wheels beside them; and they stood still at the entrance of the east gate of the Lord's house, and the glory of the God of Israel hovered over them (Ezekiel 10:4, 18-19)."

Nebuchadnezzar began to lay siege to Jerusalem in 589 B.C., and with the Lord's presence and protection removed, the Babylonian king utterly destroyed Jerusalem and its temple two years later. 2 Chronicles 36:18-19 records, "All the articles of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king and of his officers, he brought them all to Babylon. Then they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem, and burned all its fortified buildings with fire and destroyed all its valuable articles." The people apostatized from the Lord, so the glory of Lord departed. Thus, the city and house of the Lord was left desolated.

## **The Lord Will Reclaim His Earthly Throne**

The Babylonians may have either taken or destroyed the treasures of the temple, but they almost certainly didn't get the ark of the covenant, the physical representation of the throne of God. Several theories exist as to its location, but no one truly knows its whereabouts, which

is by divine design. In fact, Ezekiel's vision in chapter 10 depicts the true throne of the Lord God departing Solomon's temple with the cherubim. The prophet Jeremiah told the people to expect the loss of the ark, yet he framed the news in what would have been a strangely positive way for his readers and hearers.

"It shall be in those days when you are multiplied and increased in the land ... they will no longer say, 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord.' And it will not come to mind, nor will they remember it, nor will they miss it, nor will it be made again. At that time they will call Jerusalem 'The Throne of the Lord,' and all the nations will be gathered to it, to Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord; nor will they walk anymore after the stubbornness of their evil heart. In those days the house of Judah will walk with the house of Israel, and they will come together from the land of the north to the land that I gave your fathers as an inheritance (Jeremiah 3:16-18)."

In Jeremiah's mind, the future loss of the ark of the covenant would signify the coming of a glorious age. The divided kingdoms would come together. Jerusalem itself would be the temple and throne of the Lord, the place where heaven and earth intersect. It almost sounds edenic, doesn't it? Not only that, but the people of God would be transformed into men and women who follow the Lord out of a pure heart. Perhaps that's because we become like what we worship. What an incredibly hopeful promise! Something far greater than Solomon's temple was coming.

# Chapter Three

## The Branch and the Second Temple

Just as Adam and Eve's unfaithfulness to the Lord God led to their exile from Eden, Judah's unfaithfulness brought about a 70-year exile in Babylon.<sup>1</sup> However, similar to the way that God brought Abraham out of the land of the Chaldeans to worship Him on Mount Moriah (Jerusalem), the Lord used Cyrus, the Persian king of Babylon, to bring His people back to His holy mountain.<sup>2</sup>

Ezra 2:64-65 states that almost 50,000 people initially returned to Jerusalem from Babylon. However, they were more concerned with rebuilding the city and their houses than the house of the Lord. Thus, a little less than two decades later, the word of the Lord came to His prophet, Haggai, to correct His people. The book of Hag-

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1. Jeremiah 25:8-12, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jeremiah+25&version=NASB1995>

2. 2 Chronicles 36:20-23, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Chronicles+36%3A20-23&version=NASB1995>

gai sheds additional light on to two important characters first found in the book of Ezra: Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, and Joshua, the high priest.<sup>3</sup>

In Haggai chapter one, the Lord of hosts tells the governor, high priest and inhabitants of Jerusalem, "This people says, 'The time has not come, even the time for the house of the Lord to be rebuilt.'" Then the word of the Lord comes by Haggai saying, "'Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies desolate? ... Consider your ways! Go up to the mountains, bring wood and rebuild the temple, that I may be pleased with it and be glorified,' says the Lord. ... So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God (Haggai 1:2-4, 7-8, 14)."

## **The Glorious Second Temple?**

Unlike Solomon's temple, the Lord commanded that this second temple be built in Jerusalem. Also in contrast to Solomon's temple is the fact that there would be no ark of the covenant in the second temple. It was lost to

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3. Ezra 3, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ezra%203&version=NASB1995>

history and never recovered.<sup>4</sup> Remember, the ark of the covenant represented the throne of the Lord God and, “the place of forgiveness and of God’s presence with His people.”<sup>5</sup> However, in Haggai 2 the Lord promises that despite there being no ark, there would be an even more glorious temple than the one built by Solomon.

We read, “Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? Does it not seem to you like nothing in comparison? But now take courage, Zerubbabel, ... take courage also, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all you people of the land take courage, ... and work; for I am with you. ... I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory. ... The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine. ... The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former ... and in this place I will give peace (Haggai 2:3-9).”

How could the second temple be more glorious than Solomon’s without the ark of the covenant? Through a contemporary of Haggai, Zechariah the prophet, we begin to understand what God has in mind. The Lord God will dwell among His people in bodily form. There will be

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4. 2 Maccabees 2 depicts Jeremiah the prophet hiding the ark of the covenant in a cave and sealing the entrance. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2%20Maccabees%202&version=NRSVCE>

5. G. K. Beale, David Campbell, “Revelation: A Shorter Commentary”, (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2015, ePub)

no need for the ark of the covenant, because the Lord Himself will be incarnated in Israel's midst. As Jeremiah prophesied several decades earlier, "It shall be in those days when you are multiplied and increased in the land ... they will no longer say, 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord.' And it will not come to mind, nor will they remember it, nor will they miss it, nor will it be made again. At that time they will call Jerusalem 'The Throne of the Lord (Jeremiah 3:16-17).'"

Zechariah 2:10-13 builds upon Jeremiah's foundation, "'Sing for joy and be glad, O daughter of Zion; for behold I am coming and I will dwell in your midst,' declares the Lord. 'Many nations will join themselves to the Lord in that day and will become My people. Then I will dwell in your midst, and you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent Me to you. The Lord will possess Judah as His portion in the holy land, and will again choose Jerusalem. Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord; for He is aroused from His holy habitation.'"

Did you catch what Zechariah prophesied? When the Lord dwells in the midst of Jerusalem, the nations (the Gentiles) will become the people of God. Also, God's people will know that the Lord sent the Lord to them. The Lord will be sent by the Lord. Later, Zechariah explains that this human ark of the covenant figure, known as Branch, will be the one who will build God's temple.

The Lord says in Zechariah 6:11-13, "Take silver and gold, make an ornate crown and set it on the head of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Then say to him, ... 'Behold, a man whose name is Branch, for He will



branch out from where He is; and He will build the temple of the Lord. Yes, it is He who will build the temple of the Lord, and He who will bear the honor and sit and rule on His throne. Thus, He will be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace will be between the two offices.”

There’s much to unpack in these three verses. First, we see Joshua the high priest be given a crown. This is strange because the office of High Priest was supposed to be kept separate from that of king. However, as we discussed in chapter one, Adam functioned as a king/priest in Eden. Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, the king/priest of Salem (an early name for Jerusalem).<sup>6</sup> By wearing the linen ephod, David also appeared as a king/priest when he brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem.<sup>7</sup> Adam, Melchizedek, David and Joshua the High Priest are all clearly seen as foreshadowing the ultimate, eternal King and High Priest who is to come.

Also in Zechariah 6, the Lord God says that the Branch will build the temple of the Lord and sit on its throne. Interestingly, the book of Zechariah is not the first time a messianic figure called Branch has appeared in Scripture. Several decades earlier, Jeremiah also wrote about the Branch. “The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall

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6. Genesis 14, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passag e/?search=Genesis+14&version=NASB1995>

7. 2 Samuel 6, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passag e/?search=2+samuel+6&version=NASB1995>

reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness (Jeremiah 23:5-6)."

According to Jeremiah, the Branch would be a descendant of David, the king and savior of a united kingdom, and also serve as the righteousness of God's people. Zechariah 3:8-9 hints at this righteous substitution when the Lord says, "I am going to bring in My servant the Branch. ... I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day." Isaiah the prophet also talks about an exalted righteous servant who saves God's people by taking away their iniquity.

"Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted. Just as many were astonished at you, My people, so His appearance was marred more than any man and His form more than the sons of men. ... He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. ... As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will

see it and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities (Isaiah 52:13-14, 53:3-6, 11)."

Isaiah 49:3-7 further depicts the salvific ministry of this despised, yet vindicated Servant of the Lord. "He said to Me, 'You are My Servant, Israel, in Whom I will show My glory.' But I said, 'I have toiled in vain, I have spent My strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely the justice due to Me is with the Lord, and My reward with My God.' And now says the Lord, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, to bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him (For I am honored in the sight of the Lord, and My God is My strength), He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up 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.' Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and its Holy One, to the despised One, to the One abhorred by the nation, to the Servant of rulers, 'Kings will see and arise, princes will also bow down, because of the Lord who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen You.'"

Let's put together what we've determined about God's righteous Servant called the Branch. He is the Lord, and He is a man. He builds God's temple and sits on the throne of God's temple. He is a descendant of David, the king of a united kingdom, and also serves as a priest who brings forgiveness to the people of God's sins in one day. However, Isaiah hints at the fact that this righteous and kingly God-man is going to die in bringing salvation to the

ends of the earth. He uses the word pierced to describe God's Servant's murder.

Who would pierce the Lord? Zechariah 12:10-11 answers this question. The Lord declared, "I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn. In that day there will be great mourning in Jerusalem." Zechariah writes that it is those dwelling in Jerusalem who would pierce their righteous ultimate High Priest and King: Messiah the Branch, the glorious true temple of the Lord.

## **The Initial Corruption of the Second Temple**

We've seen through Biblical history that as the leaders go, so goes the people. Roughly 80 years after the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah, the priests and rulers of Judah again descend into egregious rebellion.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the Lord God sent Malachi the prophet to deliver a scathing message of rebuke to Judah's leadership.

We read in Malachi 2:1-3, 8, "'And now this commandment is for you, O priests. If you do not listen, and if you do not take it to heart to give honor to My name,' says the Lord of hosts, 'then I will send the curse upon

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8. <https://www.esv.org/resources/esv-global-study-bible/introduction-to-malachi/>

you and I will curse your blessings; and indeed, I have cursed them already, because you are not taking it to heart. Behold, I am going to rebuke your offspring, and I will spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of your feasts; and you will be taken away with it. ... But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi."

This is one of the most shocking passages in the Bible. Not only does the Lord say He is cursing the blessings of the Judean priests, but He will spread excrement on their faces. Thomas Constable explains, "The disgusting picture is of God taking the internal waste of the sacrificial animals and smearing it on the priests' faces. Consequently both sacrifices and priests would have to be taken outside for disposal. This play on words communicates a double curse."<sup>9</sup> The priests corrupted the covenant with abominable deeds, so the Lord God said they would reap what they sowed. They profaned the Lord's sanctuary, so the Lord would make them profane.

The Lord further details their rebellion, "Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord which He loves and has married the daughter of a foreign god (Malachi 2:11)." Robert Alden comments on this verse, "The daughter of a for-

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9. Thomas Constable, "Dr. Constable's Expository Notes: Malachi", <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/dcc/malachi-2.html#verse-1-9>

eign god' may mean that literally they married foreigners or that they adopted all or part of a pagan religion. Hosea often mixed the ideas of idolatry and adultery, or physical and spiritual intermarriage. Perhaps Malachi was touching on both points by his intentionally ambiguous remarks in this section."<sup>10</sup> Thus, their relational rebellion was an overflow of their spiritual rebellion.

## **Antiochus Epiphanes' Abomination of Desolation**

A century after Malachi's calls for repentance, a world leader emerged known as Alexander the Great, and with him, an influential worldview and culture known as Hellenism. Ray Vander Laan explains, "Hellenism as a worldview is based on a belief that human beings are the ultimate source of truth and authority in the universe. ... Alexander the Great brought Hellenism to the Jewish people in 330 B.C. when he conquered Judea. For the next two hundred years, the Jewish people were part of Hellenistic kingdoms. Much of Jewish aristocracy was attracted to the new way of thinking. Greek institutions like the gymnasium were founded in Jerusalem. Toleration of the pagan Greek religious practices was encouraged. But many Jewish people recognized Hellenism as antithetical

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10. Robert Alden, "Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 7: Daniel, (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1985), 716.

to the Bible. Humans were not the ultimate in the universe: God is. Life is not to be lived for self but for him.”<sup>11</sup>

This battle for Judah’s allegiance to the Lord is well-depicted in the books of 1 and 2 Maccabees. From 170-167 B.C., a Greek/Selucid ruler named Antiochus IV (Antiochus Epiphanes) became king of an area stretching from Egypt to Syria, which also included Judea. At the beginning of Antiochus’ reign, a man from Jerusalem named Jason used bribery to obtain the high priesthood. When speaking to Antiochus, Jason promised the king, “three hundred sixty talents of silver, and from another source of revenue eighty talents. In addition to this he promised to pay one hundred fifty more if permission were given to establish by his authority a gymnasium and a body of youth for it, and to enroll the people of Jerusalem as citizens of Antioch. When the king assented and Jason came to office, he at once shifted his compatriots over to the Greek way of life (2 Maccabees 4:8-10).”

Spiritual compromise often results from seeking power and safety. Jason sought and obtained both (for a while), and with that, the people’s hearts began to drift away from the Lord. 1 Maccabees 1:14-15 records their descent into apostasy, “So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom, and removed the marks of circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant. They joined with the Gentiles and sold them-

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11. Ray Vander Laan, “Hellenism: Center of the Universe”, <https://www.thatttheworldmayknow.com/hellenism-center-of-the-universe>

selves to do evil." This is difficult to think about, but in that time of extreme temptation many followers of the Lord God reversed their circumcision, a procedure called epispasm.<sup>12</sup>

Circumcision was the sign that one belonged to the Abrahamic Covenant. One could view it as foreshadowing the seal of the Holy Spirit for believers in Jesus. In the Talmud, we read that reversing one's circumcision was an unpardonable sin. "Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi says that for all transgressions in the Torah, whether one repented or did not repent, Yom Kippur atones, with the exception of rejecting the yoke of Torah and mitzvot; and denying the Holy One, Blessed be He; and interpreting the Torah falsely; and violating the covenant of the flesh, i.e., circumcision."<sup>13</sup> Thus, a great apostasy took place in Judea in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes, the man who would soon desolate God's temple.

Antiochus IV sought unity in his kingdom, commanding that all people should give up their religious and cultural practices to follow those he prescribed. 1 Maccabees 1:43-52 records, "All the Gentiles accepted the command of the king. Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the sabbath. And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and

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12. Robert G. Hall, "Epispasm: Circumcision in Reverse", <http://www.cirp.org/library/restoration/hall1/>

13. Talmud, Yoma 85b, <https://www.sefaria.org/Yoma.85b.11?lang=bi>



the towns of Judah; he directed them to follow customs strange to the land, to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane sabbaths and festivals, to defile the sanctuary and the priests, to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and other unclean animals, and to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane, so that they would forget the law and change all the ordinances. He added, 'And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die.' ... He appointed inspectors over all the people and commanded the towns of Judah to offer sacrifice, town by town. Many of the people, everyone who forsook the law, joined them, and they did evil in the land."

However, the king was not satisfied with the response to his orders. He desired total allegiance and compliance. So, "Not long after this, the king sent an Athenian senator to compel the Jews to forsake the laws of their ancestors and no longer to live by the laws of God; also to pollute the temple in Jerusalem and to call it the temple of Olympian Zeus, and to call the one in Gerizim the temple of Zeus-the-Friend-of-Strangers, as did the people who lived in that place. Harsh and utterly grievous was the onslaught of evil. For the temple was filled with debauchery and reveling by the Gentiles, who dallied with prostitutes and had intercourse with women within the sacred precincts, and besides brought in things for sacrifice that were unfit. The altar was covered with abominable offerings that were forbidden by the laws. People could

neither keep the sabbath, nor observe the festivals of their ancestors, nor so much as confess themselves to be Jews (2 Maccabees 6:1-6)."

Paul Lederach comments on this passage, "The greek name for the Olympian Zeus when rendered into Semitic language becomes 'baal shamem' (2 Macc. 6:2). Literally, this means 'Lord of Heaven.' ... Shamem had two meanings: 'to be appalled' in the sense of overwhelming dread or amazement, and 'to be desolate' in the sense of no longer inhabited. ... For the Jews, the altar of Zeus had emptied the temple not only of true worshippers but also of God himself."<sup>14</sup> Thus, Antiochus' detestable and idolatrous actions became known as the Abomination of Desolation.

Hundreds of years earlier, the book of Daniel prophesied this event being paired with Judah's widespread apostasy. Daniel wrote that the king, "will be disheartened and will return and become enraged at the holy covenant and take action; so he will come back and show regard for those who forsake the holy covenant. Forces from him will arise, desecrate the sanctuary fortress, and do away with the regular sacrifice. And they will set up the abomination of desolation. By smooth words he will turn to godlessness those who act wickedly toward the covenant, but the people who know their God will display strength and take action. Those who have insight among the people will give understanding to the many;

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14. Paul M. Lederach, "Believers Church Bible Commentary: Daniel", (Herald Press: Scottdale, 1994), 276.

yet they will fall by sword and by flame, by captivity and by plunder for many days (Daniel 11:30-33)."

In this passage, those who forsake the covenant are also labeled as those who turn to godlessness. Obviously, someone who was never part of the Abrahamic covenant could not forsake that covenant. However, like the oppressed Hebrews in Egypt, the faithful among the people cried out to the Lord and He sent a deliverer. Judas Maccabeus organized an army, and by God's grace was able to take back Jerusalem.

The Lord then struck Antiochus with an incurable disease, the faithful Jews were able to cleanse and rededicate the temple, and after two years they celebrated the feast of Tabernacles.<sup>15 16</sup> Unfortunately, just as in the days of Haggai and Zechariah, a cleansed and rededicated temple didn't bring in a golden, messianic age. Also, Judas Maccabeus wasn't the fulfillment of their prophecies. Maccabeus wasn't the Lord, and didn't die for the forgiveness of all people. Someone greater was still to come.

## **The Arrival of God's True Temple**

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15. 2 Maccabees 9,  
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2%20Maccabees%209&version=NRSVCE>

16. 2 Maccabees 10,  
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2%20Maccabees%2010&version=NRSVCE>

In a stunning move, a brother of Judas Maccabeus named Simon was soon made both high priest and ruler of the Jewish people. The idea was that the high priest would serve as a steward of both offices until the Messiah arrived.<sup>17</sup> 1 Maccabees 14:43 states that the high priest, "should be obeyed by all, and that all contracts in the country should be written in his name, and that he should be clothed in purple and wear gold." Unfortunately, it is quite rare that a person given so much power and authority will relinquish it when the time comes.

That day would arrive less than two centuries later, and the true allegiances of those in power (particularly the high priest) would be revealed. Malachi prophesied of the judgment the incarnated God-King would bring. "And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple. ... But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness (Malachi 3:1-3)." Precious metals are purified by fire, but wood, hay and straw are

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17. 1 Maccabees 14:41-43,  
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Maccabees+14%3A41-43&version=NRSVCE>

consumed by the flames. The true light that reveals all people was about to arrive.<sup>18</sup>

Suddenly, while the inhabitants of the world went about their business as usual, the Lord appeared in His temple just like He promised. "His name was then called Jesus. ... And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord. ... And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God (Luke 2:21-22, 25-28)."

What Simon said next is an inspired weaving-together of Isaiah's prophetic words about the Lord's Servant in chapters 49-52 of his book. "My eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a Light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel. ... Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed — and a sword will pierce even your own soul—to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed (Luke 2:30-32, 34-35)." As the prophets foretold,

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18. John 1:9-13, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+1&version=NASB1995>

God's messianic Servant, the Branch, the embodiment of God's temple, would face all manner of opposition, even from His own people.

# Chapter Four

## The Desolation of God's True Temple

The Gospel of John does not contain a standard birth story for the Lord Jesus Christ. Instead, John reframes the opening book of the Bible, Genesis. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. ... The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:1-3, 14)." Here we see John call Jesus the uncreated Creator of all things, the God of Genesis 1:1.<sup>1</sup>

John's use of 'only begotten' is important because it conveys Jesus' divinity and oneness with the Father.<sup>2</sup> The early Christians help explain the Son's uncreated divinely begotten nature through the analogy of the sun. Since its

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1. Genesis 1, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+1&version=NASB1995>

2. <https://biblehub.com/greek/3439.htm>

creation, the sun has emanated light. The sun's rays of light are not greater than the sun, but are coexistent with and part of the sun. The light of the sun is not created by the sun, but rather begotten of the sun. Jesus is like the light, which reveals or glorifies the sun (Father).<sup>3</sup> Thus, we read in Hebrews 1:3 that Jesus is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His nature. As Jesus said to His disciples in John 14:9, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father."

Gregory Thaumaturgus wrote of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit's relationship in the mid-third century A.D., "There is one God, the Father of the living Word, who is His subsistent Wisdom and Power and Eternal Image: perfect Begetter of the perfect Begotten, Father of the only-begotten Son. There is one Lord, Only of the Only, God of God, Image and Likeness of Deity, Efficient Word, Wisdom comprehensive of the constitution of all things, and Power formative of the whole creation, true Son of true Father, Invisible of Invisible, and Incorruptible of Incorruptible, and Immortal of Immortal and Eternal of Eternal. And there is One Holy Spirit, having His subsistence from God, and being made manifest by the Son, to wit to men: Image of the Son, Perfect Image of the Perfect; Life, the Cause of the living; Holy Fount; Sanctity, the Supplier, or Leader, of Sanctification; in whom is man-

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3. Tertullian, "Against Praxeas," 8, ,  
<https://www.biblestudytools.com/history/early-church-fathers/ante-nicene/vol-3-latin-christianity/tertullian/against-praxeas.html>.



ifested God the Father, who is above all and in all, and God the Son, who is through all. There is a perfect Trinity, in glory and eternity and sovereignty, neither divided nor estranged."<sup>4</sup>

John says that our Creator became flesh and dwelt with mankind. The word 'dwelt' is the word 'tabernacle' in verb form. Thus, the Lord God tabernacled among us. As Zechariah prophesied, God's glorious Servant, the Branch, built the true temple of the Lord when Messiah Jesus took on flesh and blood to serve as our faithful High Priest and King.

G. K. Beale writes, "It would be wrong to conclude, as some do, that Jesus was merely like a temple. It is true enough that he, indeed, is 'like' a temple, but that is because he is the beginning fulfillment of the end-time prophecies concerning the building of the temple. ... The special revelatory presence of God, formerly contained in the holy of holies of the tabernacle and temple, has now burst forth into the world in the form of the incarnate God, Jesus Christ."<sup>5</sup>

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4. Gregory Thaumaturgus, "A Declaration of Faith," "<https://www.biblestudytools.com/history/early-church-fathers/ante-nicene/vol-6-third-century/gregory-thaumaturgus/a-declaration-of-faith.html>

5. G. K. Beale, "The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God," (IVP Academic, 2004), 195.

## **The Rejection of God's True Tabernacle**

The Apostle John says that the Lord, "was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:10-13)." Almost immediately, John displays both acceptance and rejection of Jesus, for while the Lord is received by many disciples in Galilee, He is despised by the leaders of Jerusalem.

John chapter 1 describes many people, including several disciples of John the Baptist, begin to follow Jesus. He is called the Son of God, Lamb of God, Messiah, and King of Israel. We see a new title for Jesus in John 2: God's Temple. Like the other gospel accounts, John records Jesus entering and cleansing the temple in Jerusalem on Passover. However, John places this event at the beginning of Jesus' ministry rather than the end, as is the case with the Synoptic Gospels. Though Jesus could have cleansed the temple twice, the discrepancy is most likely due to John being more concerned with theology than chronology.

As with Luke's birth account of Jesus, the prophecy from Malachi 3 again finds a partial fulfillment. "'The Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,' says the Lord of hosts. 'But who

can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap (Malachi 3:1-2).” The Lord of the armies of heaven suddenly appeared in His temple, and a fiery judgment commenced.

John 2:14-22 records, “He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; and to those who were selling the doves He said, ‘Take these things away; stop making My Father’s house a place of business.’ His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘Zeal for Your house will consume me.’ The Jews then said to Him, ‘What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ The Jews then said, ‘It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?’ But He was speaking of the temple of His body. So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.”

Here, Jesus calls Himself God’s temple (*naos*), which either refers to the Holy Place of the Temple, or the Holy of Holies.<sup>6</sup> This is the special place on earth where

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6. <https://biblehub.com/greek/3485.htm>

God has chosen to dwell. Equally interesting is that Jesus says that if they destroy God's temple, Jesus Himself will rebuild it. Undoubtedly, John is seeking to draw His readers' minds back to Zechariah chapters two and six. In Zechariah 2:10-11, the Lord says that He is coming and will personally tabernacle (*kataskénoó*) in the midst of Zion.<sup>7</sup> Zechariah 6:11-13 states that the messianic king/priest figure known as the Branch will be the one who rebuilds the temple of the Lord. Thus, John declares that in Jesus these prophecies have found their fulfillment.

The reason for Jesus' indignation toward the Jewish leadership is disputed amongst scholars, but two hypotheses are most probable. First, concerning God's desire to reclaim the nations, Craig Keener writes, "Gentiles were welcome in the temple. ... But due to increased sensitivity to purity considerations, Gentiles ... were excluded from courts nearer the holiest place. ... Thus the commercial activity in the outer court, by treating it as less sacred than the courts of women and Israel which were also part of Solomon's outer court, risked marginalizing the worship of the Gentiles."<sup>8</sup>

As to the second possibility, Keener continues, "Most likely, Jesus' act in the temple challenged the Jerusalem

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7. <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/apostolic/zechariah/2.htm>.

8. Craig S. Keener, "The Gospel of John: A Commentary, Volume 1," (Baker: Grand Rapids, 2003), 524.

aristocracy that controlled the temple system, hence related in some way to Jesus' prophecy of the temple's impending destruction. Thus the Markan Jesus, while overturning the tables, cites Jeremiah 7:11 concerning the temple's destruction (Mark 11:17)."<sup>9</sup> Several hundred years earlier, God commanded Jeremiah to stand in the gate of the Lord's house and confront the leadership for their abominable actions. And, just as they persecuted Jeremiah, the leaders of Jerusalem sought the destruction of the true temple of the Lord.

John describes the corrupt Jewish leaders' persecution of God's Servant by quoting Psalm 69.<sup>10</sup> "Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head; those who would destroy me are powerful, being wrongfully my enemies; what I did not steal, I then have to restore. ... Because for Your sake I have borne reproach; dishonor has covered my face. I have become estranged from my brothers and an alien to my mother's sons. For zeal for Your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me (Psalm 69:4, 7-9)." Just as the destruction of Solomon's temple served as a sign of Judah's idolatry and apostasy from Yahweh, the first-century Jewish leadership's contempt for the Lord would soon fall upon the one who embodied God's temple.

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9. *ibid*, 524.

10. John 2:17, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+2&version=NASB1995>

Jesus is next seen near the Second Temple in John 5, but it is unclear which feast has brought Him there. On the Sabbath, the Lord sees a man who has been crippled for 38 years lying by the pool of Bethesda. He heals the man, which should bring much rejoicing to the people. However, John writes, "For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. But He answered them, 'My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.' For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God."

Perhaps it is at this point that Jesus' own family has had enough. John 2:12 tells us that at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, His brothers were amongst His disciples. However, Jesus' healings on the Sabbath combined with His identification of Himself with the Lord God seem to have crossed a line in their minds. Thinking Jesus had lost His mind, His mother and brothers tried to take custody of Him when He came back to His hometown (Mark 3:20-21). Yet, when Jesus learned of their arrival, He told those gathered to hear Him teach, "'Who are My mother and My brothers?' Looking about at those who were sitting around Him, He said, 'Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother (Mark 3:33-35).'"

For Jesus' brothers, the feelings of embarrassment and shame were now almost certainly too much to bear. In John 7, the Feast of Tabernacles (also known as the

Feast of Booths) is approaching, and every Jewish male's attendance is mandatory. John writes, "After these things Jesus was walking in Galilee, for He was unwilling to walk in Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill Him. Now the feast of the Jews, the Feast of Booths, was near. Therefore His brothers said to Him, 'Leave here and go into Judea, so that Your disciples also may see Your works which You are doing. For no one does anything in secret when he himself seeks to be known publicly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world.' For not even His brothers were believing in Him (John 7:1-5)."

Did you notice the resentment, sarcasm, and mockery in those words? Though James, Jude, and the others were certainly godly men, they were fed up with their older brother. Jesus' response, though, is quite strange on the surface. "Jesus said to them, 'My time is not yet here, but your time is always opportune. The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil. Go up to the feast yourselves; I do not go up to this feast because My time has not yet fully come.' Having said these things to them, He stayed in Galilee. But when His brothers had gone up to the feast, then He Himself also went up, not publicly, but as if, in secret (John 7:6-10)."

Did Jesus lie to His brothers by saying He wouldn't go up to the feast? If so, He could not have been the Messiah. Yet, the New Testament books unanimously affirm both His messiahship and sinlessness. 1 Peter 2:21-22 summarizes these beliefs as he implores us to walk as Jesus walked, "For you have been called for this purpose,

since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth." Therefore, what did Jesus mean when He said, "I do not go up to this feast?" One explanation is that the living Tabernacle of the Lord doesn't go up to the Feast of Tabernacles; He is the fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles. We are supposed to go up to Him.

At some point in the Second Temple period, Sukkot took on a water ceremony based on Isaiah 12:2-3: "Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation.' Therefore you will joyously draw water from the springs of salvation." Jesus did eventually go to the festival, and twice during that week, the Jewish authorities tried to seize Him. Then, on the last and greatest day of the feast, while the crowd was celebrating the living water God had brought them, Jesus stood and implored the people to come to Him for salvation. "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water (John 7:38)."

Not surprisingly, the Jewish authorities again tried to seize Jesus, yet no one was successful because His time had not yet come. Later that day, while still in the temple, Jesus again attested to His divinity by saying that He was the one who spoke to Moses in the burning bush



.<sup>11</sup> Again, the Jewish leadership unsuccessfully tried to kill Him. Then, Jesus left the temple and gave sight to a man who had been born blind. This happened on a Sabbath, so naturally, the leadership's rage only grew. A few months later, they again tried to kill Jesus, this time at the Feast of Dedication, which served to celebrate Judas the Maccabean's cleansing of the Second Temple after Antiochus Epiphanes' abomination of desolation.<sup>12</sup> They sought to destroy God's true Temple on a holiday celebrating the defeat of the man who desecrated the Jerusalem temple.

## **The Motive for Jesus' Murder**

The conspiratorial plot to murder God's righteous Servant King became official after He raised Lazarus from the dead. We read in John 11:47-53, "The chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, 'What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.' But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all, nor do you take into account that it is expedient for

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11. John 8:58, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%208&version=NASB1995>

12. John 10:22-39, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2010&version=NASB1995>

you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish.' Now he did not say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. So from that day on they planned together to kill Him."

Here, the Sanhedrin formally agreed to put Jesus to death. The reason they conspired to murder the Messiah was two-fold. First, they were losing followers to Jesus. Keener writes, "Ultimately, their very plan to have Jesus killed to prevent all from coming to him (11:48-50) will have the opposite result (12:32)."<sup>13</sup> Second, they feared their means for maintaining power and control would be removed from them. "'Our Place' probably means the temple (so in Acts 6:13-14; 21:28). It was in a special sense the place for the Jews. ... The nation, too, they feared, would cease to exist, and with it, of course, their own special position."<sup>14</sup> Just as Keener observed, the irony behind the Sanhedrin's stated motive for Jesus' murder is unmistakable: the very things they hoped to avoid soon came to pass.

Another interesting aspect of the leaders' discussion is the possessive way they described the nation and tem-

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13. Keener, 854-855.

14. Leon Morris, "NICNT: The Gospel According to John", (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1995, ePub), 1,148.

ple. "If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both **our** place and **our** nation (John 11:48)." That doesn't square well with Psalm 22:1-2, which says, "The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it. For He has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers." There is no aspect of creation where the Lord does not stake His claim. Jerusalem and its temple were particularly holy to the Lord, as He Himself declared, "In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever (2 Kings 21:7)."

Laying claim to what is rightfully the Lord's sounds dangerously similar to what Isaiah and Ezekiel wrote concerning our ultimate adversary, who sought to rule God's domain. Like the certain end of the devil, the idolatry, covetousness, and pride of the Jewish leadership would eventually bring about their own destruction. Lovingly, Jesus warned them of the certain end of their murderous endeavor. Perhaps one of His clearest warnings came by way of a parable.

Jesus addressed the chief priests, scribes, and elders of Jerusalem in Mark 12:1-11, "A man planted a vineyard and put a wall around it, and dug a vat under the wine press and built a tower, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. At the harvest time he sent a slave to the vine-growers, in order to receive some of the produce of the vineyard from the vine-growers. They took him, and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Again he sent them another slave, and they wounded

him in the head, and treated him shamefully. And he sent another, and that one they killed; and so with many others, beating some and killing others. He had one more to send, a beloved son; he sent him last of all to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But those vine-growers said to one another, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours!' They took him, and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vine-growers, and will give the vineyard to others. Have you not even read this Scripture: 'The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner stone; this came about from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

The owner of the vineyard is clearly God, the owner's son is Jesus, the slaves are the prophets, and the vine-growers are the leaders of Jerusalem. Again, the Jewish leadership wanted what rightfully belonged to Jesus. Their envy soon gave way to murder, which brought about an outpouring of wrath. The Lord Jesus then told the scribes and Pharisees seeking His execution, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord (Matthew 23:37-39)!"

Notice that Jesus called the temple their house, not God's house. It's like Jesus was warning them, "If you re-

ally want this temple without your Lord, you can have this temple without your Lord.” They got to have their temple for 40 more years, but when Titus desolated Jerusalem and destroyed their temple in A.D. 70, they reaped what they had sown. Jesus prophesied this event explicitly in Luke 21:20, “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near.”

## **Consecration Before the Desolation**

Six days before His execution, Jesus went to fellowship with His cousins at a house in Bethany, which is just outside of Jerusalem. As they were sharing a meal, “Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume (John 12:3).” The nard she used to anoint Jesus’ feet was almost certainly her dowry.<sup>15</sup> Thus, Mary demonstrated her trust in Jesus as her Savior by emptying her object of worldly security in an outpouring of worship. Her actions were in stark contrast to those of the panic-stricken Sanhedrin, who desperately clung to the temporal treasures of the world, even at the cost of their souls.

Another important aspect of this passage is John’s use of the phrase, “the house was filled.” The apostle made a direct callback to 2 Chronicles 7:1-3, “Now when Solomon

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15. Charles R. Swindoll, “Insights on John”, (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2010), 213.

had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the house. The priests could not enter into the house of the Lord because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's house. All the sons of Israel, seeing the fire come down and the glory of the Lord upon the house, bowed down on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave praise to the Lord, saying, 'Truly He is good, truly His lovingkindness is everlasting.'"

One thousand years earlier, the glory of the Lord filled Solomon's temple; now, the glorious Lord Himself filled that simple abode in Bethany. Also, similar to the way the Israelites prostrated in worshipful reverence of the Lord, Mary literally bowed at the Lord Jesus' feet. In this short pericope, John clearly illustrates the point Jesus made to a group of Pharisees a couple of years earlier, "I say to you that something greater than the temple is here (Matthew 12:6)." However, just as corruption soon entered Solomon's temple, a follower of Jesus was defecting to the kingdom of darkness.

Watching Mary's extravagant act of devotion was a disciple and apostle named Judas. John writes, "But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, said, 'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor people?' Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it (John 12:4-6)." This passage is a heartbreaking example of Hebrews 3:12-13,

"Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

## **The Worst Abomination and Apostasy in Human History**

The Gospel of Mark records that after Mary's act of worship, Judas decided to go ahead with his plan to betray Jesus.<sup>16</sup> A few days later, Jesus shared the Passover meal with His closest followers, including Judas who was sitting in the place of honor. Then, in a last act of love and service for His betrayer, Jesus washed Judas' feet. However, shortly thereafter, Satan entered Judas and he immediately left to gather the conspirators.

After eating the Passover meal with His disciples, Jesus led them to a garden across the Kidron Valley. John writes, "Judas then, having received the Roman cohort and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. So Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said to them, 'Whom do you seek?' They answered Him, 'Jesus the Nazarene.' He said to them, 'I am He.' And Judas also, who was betraying Him, was

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16. Mark 14:6-11, <https://www.biblegateway.com/pass-age/?search=Mark+14&version=NASB1995>

standing with them. So when He said to them, "I am He," they drew back and fell to the ground (John 18:3-6)."

When the divine Servant and Son of God briefly revealed His glory to those who opposed Him in the garden, both Jews and Gentiles were forced to kiss the dirt in an epic display of Psalm 2 finding a partial fulfillment. "Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, 'Let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!' He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them. ... Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; take warning, O judges of the earth. Worship the Lord with reverence and rejoice with trembling. Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him (Psalm 2:1-4, 10-12)!"

Though being in very nature God, Jesus emptied Himself of His right to exploit His divine power and humbly allowed Himself to be blasphemed, mocked, spit on, tortured, and executed almost naked on a cross for our sakes.<sup>17</sup> It's important to remember the incredible meekness and gentleness of our Lord as He underwent this extreme humiliation. It is also crucial to keep in mind that at the same time there was a building called God's

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17. Mark 14:53-65,

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+14%3A53-65&version=NASB1995>



temple, and a man with the title of High Priest, the true Temple of God and true High Priest was being desolated by those who claimed allegiance to Yahweh. After a sham trial before the false High Priest, Caiaphas, and his father-in-law, Annas, our Lord was brought before Pilate, the governor of Judea.

After questioning Jesus, Pilate realized that Jesus was innocent and had been falsely accused by the Jewish authorities. John then records that Pilate, "made efforts to release Him, but the Jews cried out saying, 'If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out to be a king opposes Caesar.' Therefore when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out, and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, 'Behold, your King!' So they cried out, 'Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!' Pilate said to them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but Caesar (John 19:12-16).'"

Merrill Tenny writes of the leaders' apostasy, "As the people clamored for Jesus' crucifixion, Pilate scornfully asked, 'Shall I crucify your king?' The reply of the chief priests is astonishing: 'We have no king but Caesar.' The official heads of the nation, who would gladly have welcomed independence, put themselves on record as subjects of the pagan emperor. Even allowing for the fact that the Sadducean priesthood was willing to compromise with the Romans for the sake of political advan-

tage, nothing revealed their lack of spiritual principles so vividly as this act of betrayal. It was the final step in the process initially described in the Prologue: 'He came to that which was his own, but his own [people] did not receive him (John 1:11).'"<sup>18</sup>

This was a defining moment in Jewish history. With those blasphemous and idolatrous words, the chief priests pledged their allegiance to Caesar, whom the Priene Calendar called savior, god, and the bringer of the gospel to the world.<sup>19</sup> It is no wonder Jesus told Jewish religious leaders a few months earlier, "The blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation (Luke 11:50-51)." Then, inflamed with rage against the One who had given them life and breath, all the people gathered around the King of the Universe and cried out, "His blood shall be on us

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18. Merrill C. Tenney, "The Expositor's Bible Commentary: John, 9, (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1981), 178.

19. Craig A. Evans, "MARK'S INCIPIT AND THE PRIENE CALENDAR INSCRIPTION: FROM JEWISH GOSPEL TO GRECO-ROMAN GOSPEL," *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism*, Vol. 1, [http://www.jgrchj.net/volume1/JGRChJ1-5\\_Evans.pdf](http://www.jgrchj.net/volume1/JGRChJ1-5_Evans.pdf)

and on our children!"<sup>20</sup> Making a covenant with Death and Sheol may initially get you what you want, but eventually produces unimaginable waves of destruction.

With the Jewish leadership's abominable apostasy complete, the desolation of God's true temple found its final stage. Matthew records the Roman soldiers' mockery of the Messiah, "Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole Roman cohort around Him. They stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. And after twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they knelt down before Him and mocked Him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' They spat on Him, and took the reed and began to beat Him on the head. After they had mocked Him, they took the scarlet robe off Him and put His own garments back on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him (Matthew 27:27-31)."

Even while being tortured and in excruciating pain, the true High Priest interceded for His enemies. Luke writes, "When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. But Jesus was saying, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves. And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, 'He saved others; let

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20. Matthew 27:25, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2027&version=NASB1995>

Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One (Luke 23:33-35).”

Here, Luke records another occurrence of biblical prophecy finding fulfillment. The Jewish leaders derided their true King by sarcastically calling Jesus God’s Chosen One. This is a nod toward Isaiah 42, where God vindicates His righteous suffering Servant.

The Lord declares, “Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. ... I am the Lord, I have called You in righteousness, I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You, and I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon and those who dwell in darkness from the prison. ... I have kept silent for a long time, I have kept still and restrained Myself. Now like a woman in labor I will groan, I will both gasp and pant. I will lay waste the mountains and hills (Isaiah 42:1, 6-7, 14-15).”

In fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, as God’s Servant gave one last final groan, God’s holy mountain shook violently, and a spiritually blind and enslaved Gentile came out of the kingdom of darkness and into God’s kingdom of light. Matthew writes, “Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour. ... And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split. ... Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the

earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, 'Truly this was the Son of God (Matthew 27:46, 50-51, 54)!'"

Similar to the way Jesus mercifully ministered to Judas at the Last Supper by giving him a final demonstration of God's love, the Lord graciously gave the chief priests a sign that Jesus truly was the Branch of Zechariah, the divine Priest/King.<sup>21</sup> Thomas Constable writes, "The tearing happened at 3:00 p.m., the time of the evening incense offering. A priest would normally have been standing in the holy place offering incense when it tore (cf. Luke 1:8-10). ... This was a supernatural act that symbolized the opening of access to God and the termination of the Mosaic system of worship. This event marked the end of the old Mosaic Covenant and the beginning to the New Covenant (cf. Matthew 26:26-29). Jesus Himself now replaced the temple (cf. Matthew 26:61). He also became the great High Priest of His people. The rent veil also prefigured the physical destruction of the temple, a necessary corollary to its spiritual uselessness from then on."<sup>22</sup>

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21. Zechariah 6:11-13,

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Zechariah%206&version=NASB1995>

22. Thomas Constable, "Dr. Constable's Expository Notes: Matthew), <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/dcc/matthew-27.htm>

## **Foreshadowing God's Renewed Earthly Temple**

As we have discussed, the Lord prophesied through Zechariah centuries before Jesus' incarnation, "Behold, a man whose name is Branch, for He will branch out from where He is; and He will build the temple of the Lord. Yes, it is He who will build the temple of the Lord, and He who will bear the honor and sit and rule on His throne. Thus, He will be a priest on His throne (Zechariah 6:12-13)." This Priest/King figure (initially embodied in the persons of the high priest Joshua and governor Zerubbabel) nicknamed Branch would be the one who would build the temple of the Lord.

John certainly had Zechariah's prophecy in mind when He recorded Jesus' interaction with the Jews in John 2:18-22, "The Jews then said to Him, 'What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews then said, 'It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?' But He was speaking of the temple of His body. So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken." The religious leaders who helped orchestrate Jesus' murder thought Friday's crucifixion meant an end to their anxiety over the potential loss of their worldly security. However, everything changed on Sunday morning when the Branch rebuilt His temple.

John 19:41-42 tells us that Jesus was buried in a garden tomb near the place He was crucified. Very early Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene, Peter and John came to the tomb and found it empty except for, "the linen wrappings lying there, and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself (John 20:6-7)." Eventually, Peter and John went back to their homes, but Mary stayed in the garden. What follows is an incredible reversal of the tragic events recorded in Genesis 3.

John writes, "As she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. And they said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.' When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?' Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, 'Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, 'Rabboni!' (which means, Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, "I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God."' Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord,' and that He had said these things to her (John 20:11-18)."

In Genesis 3, the Lord stationed Cherubim to guard the way to the Tree of Life, and in John 20, two angels were stationed at the garden tomb. The original woman was the first to believe the counterfeit gospel of the serpent, and a woman was the first to believe the good news that Jesus had fulfilled His promise to rise from the dead. Adam and Eve lost the opportunity to walk with the Lord in the cool of the morning in Eden, and in John humanity is once again able to fellowship with their Creator in the garden. The first couple's joy turned to shame and grief after they disobeyed the Lord, and in John, Mary Magdalene's grief turned to joy when she met her righteous risen Lord! Through the first Adam, death's curse was brought into the world, but through the obedience, death, and resurrection of the greater Adam, grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.<sup>23</sup>

Another connection to events in God's original Tabernacle, Eden, is found in John 20. "So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.' And when He had said this, He

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23. Romans 5:12-21, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans+5&version=NASB1995>.



breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit (John 20:19-22).'"

In Genesis 2:7, we read, "Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." There on God's holy mountain, Eden, the Lord originally breathed life into man, creating a people for His name. Now in an upper room upon God's new holy mountain, Jerusalem, the Lord breathed His regenerating Spirit upon mankind again, that we might fill the earth with His glory.

These events in the upper room fulfilled a promise Jesus made to His disciples in John 14:16-17, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you." The word 'another' is *allon*, meaning another of the same kind.<sup>24</sup> In other words, there in the upper room, God began to tabernacle in, not just with, humanity. Thus, the Second Temple in Jerusalem just became unnecessary, and one could argue a blasphemous and abominable deception.<sup>25</sup>

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24. <https://biblehub.com/greek/243.htm>

25. Hebrews 8, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews%208&version=NASB1995>.

# Chapter Five

## God's Temple from Pentecost to Constantine

Each day, sincere Jews gather to pray at the Western Wall in Jerusalem because they believe that is where God's presence dwells. This belief is derived from passages like 2 Chronicles 6:1-2, where Solomon prays to the Lord concerning the newly built temple in Jerusalem, "The Lord has said that He would dwell in the thick cloud. 'I have built You a lofty house, and a place for Your dwelling for ever.'" Additionally, in Zechariah, the Lord spoke through His prophet, "Sing for joy and be glad, O daughter of Zion; for behold I am coming and I will dwell in your midst. ... The Lord will possess Judah as His portion in the holy land, and will again choose Jerusalem (Zechariah 2:10, 12)."

Surprisingly, the Christian organization *Christians United for Israel* espouses the same belief for modern Christians. "By having your prayer placed in the Western Wall, even if you cannot physically be in the land, you express

your faith that the Lord will hear your cry and answer your prayer. His Word declares that His presence is in Jerusalem and that He dwells with His People now and forevermore.”<sup>1</sup> I find that statement shocking for Christians to utter because the New Testament writers explicitly state that God’s presence has a new dwelling place. In his first letter to the Church at Corinth, the Apostle Paul wrote, “Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>2</sup> We will discuss this passage later; but for now, notice how Paul explicitly says each Christian has become a temple of the Holy Spirit.

As noted in chapter four, Jesus laid the groundwork for this doctrine during His earthly ministry. However, it took some time for His followers to grasp its implications. In the last chapter of his Gospel, Luke records that after Jesus’ ascension, the disciples, “were continually in the temple praising God.”<sup>3</sup> Initially, they remained in the city because Jesus, “commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised. ... He said, ... ‘John baptized with water, but you will be

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1. <https://cufi.org/engage/pray/westernwall-prayer-request/>

2. 1 Corinthians 6:19, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+corinthians+6&version=NASB1995>

3. Luke 24:53, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+24&version=NASB1995>

baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now (Acts 1:4-5)."

## **Pentecost and God's New Address**

Ten days after Jesus' ascension back to the Father, the day of Pentecost arrived. Pentecost (The Feast of Weeks) was one of three Feasts of the Lord where all Jewish men were required to come to Jerusalem to worship at the temple.<sup>4</sup> Luke records that when the day of Pentecost came, Jesus' disciples, "were all together in one place (Acts 2:1)." Luke continues, "And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance (Acts 2:2-4)."

As John did in 12:3 of his Gospel, Luke says that a noise like a violent rushing wind, "Filled the whole house." Again, this is a callback to what occurred at the dedication of Solomon's temple where, "the glory of the Lord filled the house (2 Chronicles 7:1)." In verse two, we again see this phrase, "The priests could not enter into the house of the Lord because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's

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4. Deuteronomy 16:16,  
[https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=D  
euteronomy%2016&version=NASB1995](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=D%20euteronomy%2016&version=NASB1995)

house." The house of the Lord is not only 'the Lord's house', it is '*the* house'. Is Luke signaling that the disciples were in the temple courts on the day of Pentecost?

2 Chronicles 7:1 says that at the dedication of Solomon's temple, "fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices." Interestingly, Acts 2:3 states that tongues of fire came down upon each of the disciples. Also, Luke records that this event happened at the third hour, or 9 am, the exact moment when the priests were performing the morning temple sacrifices (Acts 2:15). Was the Lord dedicating His new temple and priests in view of the multitudes gathered at the building called the Lord's temple?

Perhaps an even better reference point in Luke's mind is what transpired at the base of Mount Sinai in Exodus 19. With the sons of Israel camped at the base of God's holy mountain, the Lord instructed Moses to tell the people, "Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." As He did with Adam, God desired that His people would be set apart for Him as royal priests in the world.

Then on the morning of the third day, "Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder Moses spoke

and God answered him with thunder (Exodus 19:17-19)." Smoke, fire, violent shaking, and the roar of trumpets all accompanied the Lord's descent upon His holy mountain and commissioning of His people as royal priests.

However, as we've previously discussed, the Lord's chosen people did not faithfully live out their high calling. They desired to be like the idolatrous surrounding nations and began worshipping the gods of those nations in the Lord's house. Thus, though the Lord was exceedingly patient with His people, He eventually departed the temple, and the abominable house was desolated. Unlike Exodus 19 and 2 Chronicles 7, the tragic events of Ezekiel 10 display a striking inversion of Acts 2.<sup>5</sup>

"Then the glory of the Lord went up from the cherub to the threshold of the temple, and the temple was filled with the cloud and the court was filled with the brightness of the glory of the Lord. Moreover, the sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard as far as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when He speaks. ... Then the cherub stretched out his hand from between the cherubim to the fire which was between the cherubim, took some and put it into the hands of the one clothed in linen, who took it and went out. ... Then the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim. When the cherubim departed ... the glory of the God of Israel hovered over them (Ezekiel 10:4-5, 7, 18-19)."

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5. Ezekiel 10, , <https://www.biblegateway.com/passag e/?search=Ezekiel+10&version=NASB1995>

In Ezekiel 10, the temple was filled with a cloud. The sound of wings was heard like the voice of God Almighty speaking. The fire of the Lord was present. The glory of the Lord hovered over His servants as He departed from the temple. In Acts 2, allusions to all of these elements exist, yet now the Spirit of the Lord descends upon His new temple which is not made by human hands. With the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, "In some sense, that was the day God changed His address."<sup>6</sup> From this point in time, the second temple began losing its prominence as the holiest place on earth in the minds of followers of Jesus.

## **The Birth of Christianity**

There are several Old Testament references in Peter's address to the thousands of onlookers there in the temple courts on Pentecost, but for this book, I will focus on his citation of Psalm 110.<sup>7</sup> After referencing Psalm 16 to prove that Jesus' resurrection was prophesied a millennium prior, Peter says, "This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit,

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6. Ray Vander Laan, "Shavuot", <https://www.thatttheworldmayknow.com/shavuot>

7. Psalm 110, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passagel/?search=Psalm+110&version=NASB1995>

He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."' Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified (Acts 2:32-36)." Though only seven verses long, Psalm 110 was exceedingly important to the early Christians. "Thirty-three quotations and allusions are scattered through the NT, and seven more may be found in other Christian writings produced before the middle of the second century."<sup>8</sup>

This Psalm synthesizes several important descriptors of who Jesus is. Look at verses one through four. "The Lord says to my Lord: 'Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.' The Lord will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, saying, 'Rule in the midst of Your enemies.' Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power; in holy array, from the womb of the dawn, Your youth are to You as the dew. The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.'" These verses show that Jesus is Lord and seated at the right hand of the Lord, which demonstrates His divinity. It also shows that He is the ruler of Zion, and will serve as High Priest forever.

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8. David M. Hay, "Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity," (Society of Biblical Literature: Atlanta, 1989), 15.



There is much we could discuss concerning this passage, but notice the similarities between it and the prophecies from Zechariah 6:12-13. "Behold, a man whose name is Branch, for He will branch out from where He is; and He will build the temple of the Lord. Yes, it is He who will build the temple of the Lord, and He who will bear the honor and sit and rule on His throne. Thus, He will be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace will be between the two offices." Messiah the Branch, the eternal High Priest and King of Zion built the temple of the Lord in His incarnation, resurrection, and now, in the outpouring of the Spirit upon His people.

When the people hear Peter's address, Luke records that, "they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?' Peter said to them, 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself (Acts 2:37-39).'" Three thousand people believed the gospel that day, and almost immediately we see them acting like God's human temple, Jesus. However, they still spent significant time at Jerusalem's temple. "Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart (Acts 2:46)."

## **The Church as God's Temple**

Though the Christians continued to spend significant time in and near the physical temple in Jerusalem, the book of Acts increasingly shows how God's resting place has moved away from the building and into Jesus' disciples. In Acts 3-4, Peter and John are arrested for healing a man at a gate of the temple who had been crippled from birth and preaching the gospel to the crowds who had gathered. Whether despite or because of the persecution, the number of Christian men in Jerusalem grows to about 5,000.

The next morning, the Sanhedrin bring out Peter and John to question them, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?' Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health. He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief corner stone. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:7-12).'"

In response to these words, Luke records that as the Sanhedrin, "observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize

them as having been with Jesus.”<sup>9</sup> Again, we become like what we worship. Just like His Lord, Peter exhibits both respect and unwavering courage as he preaches the gospel and calls the leaders to repent. Then, Peter contrasts the physical temple with God’s true temple, Jesus, whom they destroyed but God raised from the dead.

Keener writes, “Peter interprets this reversal as fulfilling a principle of Scripture (4:11; Ps 118:22) learned from Jesus himself (Luke 20:17). Scholars have debated whether reference is to the cornerstone or to the top-stone (a final stone that held the others in place); in either case, ... Peter’s hearers probably recognized that he was comparing the elect community to a temple. Such a challenge could enrage those who viewed themselves as guardians of the one God’s exclusive physical temple.”<sup>10</sup>

Even after being threatened, the vast multitude of disciples continued meeting daily in Solomon’s Portico, a porch near the court of the Gentiles in the eastern part of the temple (Acts 5:12). Later in Acts 5, the Sanhedrin has all of the apostles arrested and flogged, yet, “every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ (Acts 5:42).” However, followers of Jesus start to break away from the

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9. Acts 4:13, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+4&version=NASB1995>

10. Craig S. Keener, “Acts,” (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2020), 195-196.

physical temple in Jerusalem after the trial and murder of Stephen in Acts 6-7.

Luke writes, "The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith. And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people. But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, including both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen. But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking (Acts 6:7-10)." In John 11, the Sanhedrin worried that if they let Jesus live, they would lose their place and their nation. Ironically, their treasonous actions against the Lord were beginning to actualize those fears as a large number of priests believed in the Lord's true temple, Jesus.

Not only were the Apostles doing the same works as Jesus by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, but now their disciples were as well. Stephen, one of those disciples who walked as Jesus walked, underwent the same manner of persecution from the Jewish leadership as his Lord. Luke writes of the Jews' interactions with Stephen, "they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. Then they secretly induced men to say, 'We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.' And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came up to him and dragged him away and brought him before

the Council. They put forward false witnesses who said, 'This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law; for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us (Acts 6:10-14).'"

Notice that they accused Stephen of speaking against the temple, just as they did of Jesus. In a way, both Jesus and Stephen were speaking against the physical temple, because something (or someone) greater than the temple had come, and they killed Him. Stephen then boldly and lovingly called the Sanhedrin to repent for their idolatry and murder of the Messiah. We won't look at the entire address here but will address Stephen's citation of Isaiah 66.

Stephen proclaimed, "David found favor in God's sight, and asked that he might find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built a house for Him. However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; as the prophet says: 'Heaven is My throne, and earth is the footstool of My feet; what kind of house will you build for Me?' says the Lord, 'Or what place is there for My repose? Was it not My hand which made all these things?' You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it (Acts 7:46-53)."

Here, Stephen quoted Isaiah 66:1, but if we read the first four verses, we can see the greater implications of Stephen's point. "Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest? For My hand made all these things, thus all these things came into being,' declares the Lord. 'But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word. But he who kills an ox is like one who slays a man; He who sacrifices a lamb is like the one who breaks a dog's neck; he who offers a grain offering is like one who offers swine's blood; he who burns incense is like the one who blesses an idol. As they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations, so I will choose their punishments and will bring on them what they dread.'"

With the advent, destruction, and resurrection of Jesus, God's true Temple, the sacrificial system of the temple cult was now not only unnecessary but had become abominable. Beale writes, "These idolaters profess faith but hate the true people of God, and they will be judged by God from his heavenly temple (66:5-6). All idolatry must be removed before the new creation is ushered in."<sup>11</sup> Also, because they chose the physical temple over

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11. G. K. Beale, "The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God," (IVP Academic, 2004), 223.

God's true temple, God would soon answer them according to their idols by destroying their preferred temple.<sup>12</sup>

Like the crowd on the day of Pentecost, the Jewish authorities were cut to the heart. However, instead of repenting, they responded to Stephen with a torrential flood of malice. "They cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse. When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul (Acts 7:57-58)." Luke concludes this scene with Stephen using phrases similar to those of Jesus while He was being crucified by these same leaders. "They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!' Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them!'"<sup>13</sup>

B. L. Blackburn notes the many correlations between Stephen and the Lord's true temple, "Stephen, like Jesus ... is a Spirit-filled man whose empowerment is manifest in both speech and miracles. ... Stephen is especially at one with Jesus ... with respect to the opposition that they endured at the hands of Jewish unbelievers, particularly the authorities. Stephen, like Jesus, was rejected in the synagogue, arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin,

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12. Ezekiel 14, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ezekiel+14&version=NASB1995>

13. Acts 7:59-60, , <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=acts+7&version=NASB1995>

faced trumped-up charges, appealed to the Son of Man at God's right hand, committed his spirit to the Lord, prayed that his executioners would be forgiven and died as a martyr outside Jerusalem's walls."<sup>14</sup> Again, we become like what we worship.

## **Paul's Understanding of God's Temple**

Luke's account of Stephen's speech and murder likely relied heavily on the young witness named Saul, eventually known as the Apostle Paul. There is no doubt that Stephen's martyrdom served as an inspiration for Paul's theology of God's temple. Haggai prophesied that the latter days' temple would be more glorious than Solomon's temple. As demonstrated with Stephen, the Lord of Glory had now caused His presence to fill His followers, transforming them into temples of His Spirit that reflected His glory in a manner far more personally and experientially than that of Solomon's temple. In this section, we will look at the way Paul and other early Christians understood God's temple. Doing so will help us understand Paul's statements in 2 Thessalonians 2 about the man of lawlessness declaring himself to be God in God's temple.

## **1 Corinthians**

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14. B. L. Blackburn, "Stephen," *Dictionary of the Latter New Testament and Its Developments*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997) p. 1123.



In 1 Corinthians 3:5-9, Paul writes to the Christians of Corinth, "What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building."

Here Paul describes Christians as God's οἰκοδομή, or God's building. When used as a noun, οἰκοδομή means, "a building (edifice) serving as a home," or, "where the Lord is 'at home.'"<sup>15</sup> In the Gospels, this word is only used to describe the structures within the temple in Jerusalem. When Paul employs οἰκοδομή as a noun, it is exclusively used to describe Christians as God's building.<sup>16</sup> We are the house in which God dwells.

Later in the same chapter, Paul writes in verses 16-17, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are." In these verses, Paul uses a different noun to describe Christians: ναός: God's temple or sanctuary. When paired with the word Θεοῦ, or God, ναός is, "used specifically of the Holy

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15. <https://biblehub.com/greek/3619.htm>

16. See 2 Corinthians 5:1 and Ephesians 2:21.

place, where the priests officiated," or, "of the Holy of holies."<sup>17</sup> Thomas Constable writes of these verses, "The local congregation was ... a sanctuary (Gr. *naos*) that God inhabited. The presence of the Spirit alone marked them off as God's sanctuary in Corinth."<sup>18</sup>

The verbiage of 1 Corinthians 3:9-17 should immediately take a reader familiar with the Old Testament to Zechariah 2. At that point in history, the people were starting to build Zerubbabel's temple in Jerusalem. In Zechariah 2:10-11, we read, "'I am coming and I will dwell in your midst,' declares the Lord. 'Many nations will join themselves to the Lord in that day and will become My people. Then I will dwell in your midst.'" The Gentiles will become God's people and He will dwell in their midst. That sounds a lot like Paul telling the Jew and Gentile believers in Corinth that they have become the dwelling place and temple of the Spirit of God.

Additionally, in Zechariah 2:8, the Lord says to His people, Zion, "For thus says the Lord of hosts, 'After glory He has sent me against the nations which plunder you, for he who touches you, touches the apple of His eye. For behold, I will wave My hand over them so that they will be plunder for their slaves.'" The Lord, who will dwell in Zion, promises that those who plunder His people will

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17. <https://biblehub.com/greek/3485.htm>

18. Dr. Thomas Constable, "Dr. Constable's Expository Notes: 1 Corinthians, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/dcc/1-corinthians-3.html>.

themselves be plundered. It seems quite probable that Paul has this specific verse in mind when he tells the Corinthian believers in Jesus, "If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are." Those who believe in Messiah Jesus are the apple of God's eye.

Moving forward to 1 Corinthians 6:15-20, we read, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, 'The two shall become one flesh.' But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body."

In this passage, Paul calls the individual believer, not just the local congregation, the temple of the Holy Spirit and exhorts each believer to not defile God's temple through sexual immorality. Beale comments on this passage, "Paul resumes his argument that the church is the 'temple of the Holy Spirit' (6:19). Paul underscores this point to remind the Corinthians about why they are to avoid immorality: they are part of the latter-day temple, and just as the Old Testament temple was to be kept clean from defilement, how much more so are they to

keep their bodies clean and separate from immorality (6:18)."<sup>19</sup>

With both of these passages, it's important to remember that the Old Testament writers frequently equated idolatry with spiritual sexual immorality. For instance, we discussed earlier how the Lord spoke through His prophet, Malachi, "Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord which He loves and has married the daughter of a foreign god. As for the man who does this, may the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob everyone who awakes and answers, or who presents an offering to the Lord of hosts (Malachi 2:11-12)." With that Scriptural framework in his mind, it is easy to understand why Paul would write that if anyone defiles God's temple, God will destroy that man.

## 2 Corinthians

In his second letter to the Christians at Corinth, Paul wrote, "Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the

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19. G. K. Beale, "The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God," (IVP Academic, 2004), 252.

living God; just as God said, 'I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,' says the Lord. 'And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you (2 Corinthians 6:14-17)."

In this passage, Paul masterfully weaves together thoughts from the Essene community in Qumran with sections of Leviticus, Isaiah, and Ezekiel. Concerning the Essenes, Ray Vander Laan writes that after the appointment of Jonathan as High Priest in the mid-second century B.C., "Godly priests decided the Temple was now defiled and the true worship of God had ended and formed a separatist movement called by others the Essenes. They declared the religious establishment invalid and established a religious movement dedicated to the restoration of the true worship of God."<sup>20</sup>

The Essenes drew a proverbial line in the sand separating godly Jews from those they saw as basically following the devil. Notice how Paul follows that approach in 2nd Corinthians 6 as he contrasts believers and unbelievers, righteousness and lawlessness, light and darkness, Christ and Belial, and the temple of God and idols. These phrases are present in Essenic writings like the War Scroll, which opens with the sentence, "The first attack of the Sons of Light shall be undertaken against

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20. Ray Vander Laan, "Sons of Light," <https://www.thatttheworldmayknow.com/sons-of-light>

the forces of the Sons of Darkness, the army of Belial.”<sup>21</sup> Of Belial, S. D. Sperling writes in the *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, “In pseudepigraphic literature, Belial is especially well-attested ... as the proper name of the Devil, the powerful opponent of God.”<sup>22</sup>

Another Essenic document called the Manual of Discipline also speaks of Belial’s war against the Sons of Light. Interestingly, the Manual of Discipline states that the Sons of Light will, in some way, become the temple of God. “At that time, the men of the community will constitute a true distinctive temple—a veritable holy of holies—wherein the priesthood may fitly foregather, and a true distinctive synagogue made up of laymen who walk in integrity.”<sup>23</sup> Though Paul most likely has these Essenic documents in mind when writing 2 Corinthians 6, as previously stated, the foundation of his argument comes from Scripture.

First, Paul plainly states in 2 Corinthians 6:16 that Leviticus 26:11-12 has now been fulfilled in the church. There, the Lord says to the sons of Israel, “I will make My dwelling among you, and My soul will not reject you. I

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21. The War Scroll (1QM) 1.1, <https://www.qumran.org/js/qumran/hss/1qm>

22. S. D. Sperling, “Belial,” *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1999), 171.

23. Manual of Discipline, <https://www.essene.com/History&Essenes/md.htm>

will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people." As an implication of this truth, Paul then cites Isaiah 52:11, which says, "Depart, depart, go out from there, touch nothing unclean; go out of the midst of her, purify yourselves, you who carry the vessels of the Lord." From where are they to depart? Isaiah 48:20 gives us the answer, "Go forth from Babylon! Flee from the Chaldeans!"

Paul's final phrase in 2 Corinthians 6:17, "and I will welcome you," is a direct reference to Ezekiel 11:17. Though the NASB renders the phrase, "I will gather," the same verb for 'welcome' is used in the Septuagint.<sup>24 25</sup> To understand Paul's reasoning for adding this phrase, one must include verse 16 from Ezekiel 11. We read, "Thus says the Lord God, 'Though I had removed them far away among the nations and though I had scattered them among the countries, yet I was a sanctuary for them a little while in the countries where they had gone. ... I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries among which you have been scattered (Ezekiel 11:16-17).'"

Beale comments on this reference by Paul, "Intriguingly, Ezekiel 11:16 says that when Israel was in captivity God 'was a sanctuary for them a little while in the countries where they had gone'! This assertion is made in direct connection with Ezekiel 10:18 in which, 'the glory

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24. <https://studybible.info/interlinear/Ezekiel%2011:17>

25. <https://biblehub.com/greek/1523.htm>

of the Lord departed from the threshold of the temple' in Jerusalem. ... It is likely not coincidental that God's glorious presence departed from the temple and then is said to be with the remnant, who have gone into captivity. His presence would return with the restored people and would once again take up residence in another temple. ... God's tabernacling presence expressed itself in the coming of Christ. ... Those who identify with Christ become like the Corinthians, part of the true temple."<sup>26</sup>

## Ephesians

In Acts 21, Paul returned to Jerusalem after his third missionary journey knowing that persecution was coming from the Jewish authorities there. He was soon arrested, beaten, and accused of desecrating the temple by bringing a Gentile from Ephesus named Trophimus past the dividing wall which separated the courts of the Gentiles from the courts of the Jewish women and men.<sup>27</sup> Keener explains, "In the Herodian temple, stricter understanding of biblical purity codes led to the biblical outer court being divided into three sections. The first was for only Jewish men; outside this, on a lower level, was the court for Jewish women. Outside that, separated from the court of women by a 4-foot-high stone balustrade,

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26. Beale, 255.

27. Acts 21, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+21&version=NASB1995>



was the only place gentiles could enter. Signs posted in Greek and reportedly Latin warned that gentiles who entered the court of Jewish women would be executed.”<sup>28</sup>

Paul certainly had this traumatic moment in mind as he wrote to the Church at Ephesus several years later about the symbolic nature of the dividing wall. “Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called ‘Uncircumcision’ by the so-called ‘Circumcision,’ which is performed in the flesh by human hands — remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall ... so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross (Ephesians 2:11-16).”

However, Paul doesn’t stop there. He pushes the analogy of the temple even further, explaining that through Jesus, we have become the true temple of God. “And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fel-

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28. Keener, 520-521.

low citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:17-22)."

In this passage, Paul quotes Isaiah 57:19, "Peace, peace to him who is far and to him who is near." But this is not just a signal that both Gentiles and Jews will be saved. We read two verses earlier, "For thus says the high and exalted One who lives forever, whose name is Holy, 'I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.'"<sup>29</sup> Though God dwells in heaven, He also dwells with the humble.

The same word translated 'dwell' is used in Zechariah 2:10-11, where the Lord prophesies of a future day when He dwells in the midst of His people, who are made up of both Jew and Gentile. "'Sing for joy and be glad, O daughter of Zion; for behold I am coming and I will dwell in your midst,' declares the Lord. 'Many nations will join themselves to the Lord in that day and will become My people. Then I will dwell in your midst, and you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent Me to you.'"

Additionally, when Paul calls Jesus the corner stone in Ephesians 2:20, he is citing Isaiah 28, a passage we

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29. Isaiah 55:17

have already discussed which deals with corrupt Jewish leaders who made a covenant with death and Sheol. After calling out their dastardly plan, the Lord says, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, a costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes in it will not be disturbed (Isaiah 28:16)." As we saw in John 11, the Jewish leaders placed their hope in the wrong temple. By rejecting God's true Temple and true cornerstone, they would soon lose their place, nation, and positions of leadership. Instead, those who humbly received the Lord became His new dwelling place.

With these prophetic passages in mind, it is easy to see why the early Christians believed that so many aspects of the Mosaic and Levitical systems were merely shadows of what is to come, with the substance belonging to Christ.<sup>30</sup> If these prophecies had come true in Jesus, the temple in Jerusalem, now an idolatrous symbol of apostasy, would have to be destroyed. Though Jewish followers of Jesus in Jerusalem continued to meet in the temple courts for the next four decades after His death and resurrection, they knew it wasn't necessary for their faith and would soon be destroyed. As the author of Hebrews wrote in the years just before the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, "Whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear." The followers of Jesus had become the true temple of God.

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30. Colossians 2:16-17, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+21&version=NASB1995>

## **The Early Church's View: The Epistle of Barnabas**

The Epistle of Barnabas was highly regarded in the early Church and faithfully preserves Christian theology of the Jewish temple at the end of the first century A.D. Clement of Alexandria and Jerome both thought the document was written by the traveling companion of Paul named Barnabas, but that is most likely not the case. Written by a Jewish believer in Jesus, the Epistle of Barnabas often reads like the book of Hebrews, demonstrating how aspects of the temple, its feasts, and practices all point us to greater realities found in Christ. In this section, I will quote and discuss two lengthy sections within the epistle to demonstrate early Christianity's theology of the temple.

"Antichrist is at hand: let us therefore avoid Jewish errors. ... We take earnest heed in these last days; for the whole [past] time of your faith will profit you nothing, unless now in this wicked time we also withstand coming sources of danger, as becometh the sons of God. That the Black One may find no means of entrance, let us flee from every vanity, let us utterly hate the works of the way of wickedness. Do not, by retiring apart, live a solitary life, as if you were already [fully] justified; but coming together in one place, make common inquiry concerning what tends to your general welfare. For the Scripture saith, 'Woe to them who are wise to themselves, and prudent

in their own sight!' Let us be spiritually-minded: let us be a perfect temple to God."<sup>31</sup>

Here, we see the author believes that Christians are either currently or will be living in the time of the Antichrist. Therefore, he implores followers of Jesus to stay faithful to the Lord so the devil won't gain entrance to them. Finally, he urges the Christians to view themselves as God's temple and to truly depend on one another since entrance into the faith does not necessarily equal an eternity with Jesus. We must keep the faith to the end of our lives, and need the help of our brothers and sisters in Christ to do so.

"Let us inquire, then, if there still is a temple of God. ... I find, therefore, that a temple does exist. Learn, then, how it shall be built in the name of the Lord. ... Having received the forgiveness of sins, and placed our trust in the name of the Lord, we have become new creatures, formed again from the beginning. Wherefore in our habitation God truly dwells in us. How? His word of faith; His calling of promise; the wisdom of the statutes; the commands of the doctrine; He himself prophesying in us; He himself dwelling in us; opening to us who were enslaved by death the doors of the temple, that is, the

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31. Epistle of Barnabas, 4,  
<https://www.biblestudytools.com/history/early-church-fathers/ante-nicene/vol-1-apostolic-with-justin-martyr-irenaeus/barnabas/epistle-of-barnabas.html>

mouth; and by giving us repentance introduced us into the incorruptible temple."<sup>32</sup>

This passage helps date the Epistle of Barnabas to after the destruction of the Second Temple. When the temple in Jerusalem was demolished in A.D. 70, Judaism had to make a drastic change similar to the time of the Babylonian exile. Even though the Second Temple's lack of the Ark of the Covenant didn't allow the Day of Atonement to be practiced biblically, now the High Priest had no Holy of Holies to enter. However, for followers of Jesus, the physical temple's destruction was of no consequence. God's Spirit already dwelt in His new temple: believers in Messiah Jesus.

## **Ignatius to the Ephesians**

According to tradition, Ignatius was the bishop of Antioch for almost 40 years, lasting from A.D. 69-107.<sup>33</sup> On his way to be martyred, Ignatius wrote several letters to churches in the Roman empire, imploring them to live faithfully for the gospel. Ignatius calls the Ephesian Christians, "stones of the temple of the Father, prepared for the building of God the Father, and drawn up on high by the instrument of Jesus Christ, which is the cross.

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32. *ibid*, 16.

33. Maxwell Staniforth, "Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers," (Dorset Press: New York, 1986), 64.

... Ye, therefore, as well as all your fellow-travelers, are God-bearers, temple-bearers, Christ-bearers, bearers of holiness, adorned in all respects with the commandments of Jesus Christ, in whom also I exult that I have been thought worthy, by means of this Epistle, to converse and rejoice with you, because with respect to your Christian life ye love nothing but God only.”<sup>34</sup>

Here, Ignatius calls the Ephesian Church back to the second chapter of the letter penned to them by the Apostle Paul, “You are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-21).” Additionally, Ignatius says that they, as God’s true temple, are adorned in all respects with the commandments of Jesus Christ. That sounds like they live out the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20.

“It is better for a man to be silent and be [a Christian], than to talk and not to be one. It is good to teach, if he who speaks also acts. There is then one Teacher, who spake and it was done; while even those things which He

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34. Ignatius to the Ephesians, 9,  
<https://www.biblestudytools.com/history/early-church-fathers/ante-nicene/vol-1-apostolic-with-justin-martyr-irenaeus/ignatius/epistle-of-ignatius-ephesians.html>

did in silence are worthy of the Father. He who possesses the word of Jesus, is truly able to hear even His very silence, that he may be perfect, and may both act as he speaks, and be recognised by his silence. There is nothing which is hid from God, but our very secrets are near to Him. Let us therefore do all things as those who have Him dwelling in us, that we may be His temples, and He may be in us as our God, which indeed He is, and will manifest Himself before our faces. Wherefore we justly love Him."<sup>35</sup>

Ignatius continues on the themes of the Christians being God's temples, and as such, needing to reflect Jesus in both word and deed. In fact, he says that if we truly are God's temples, we will in some sense manifest His holiness. Again, we become like what we worship.

## **Irenaeus**

Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lyons, was a disciple of Polycarp, who, like Ignatius, was a disciple of the Apostle John. Similar to Polycarp, Irenaeus was widely respected by his peers, and he provides us with an example of how the faith once for all delivered to the apostles continued to be upheld and taught by their disciples. Irenaeus is most famous for his five-book work, *Against Heresies*, where he counters many of the heresies of the Gnostics and others. In this section of book five, Irenaeus uses Paul's

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35. *ibid*, 15.



teaching in 1 Corinthians and Jesus' words in John 2, to support the biblical teaching that Christians are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

"Whence also he says, that this handiwork is 'the temple of God,' thus declaring: 'Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man, therefore, will defile the temple of God, him will God destroy: for the temple of God is holy, which [temple] ye are.' Here he manifestly declares the body to be the temple in which the Spirit dwells. As also the Lord speaks in reference to Himself, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. He spake this, however,' it is said, 'of the temple of His body.' And not only does he (the apostle) acknowledge our bodies to be a temple, but even the temple of Christ, saying thus to the Corinthians, 'Know ye not that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot?' He speaks these things, not in reference to some other spiritual man; for a being of such a nature could have nothing to do with an harlot: but he declares 'our body,' that is, the flesh which continues in sanctity and purity, to be 'the members of Christ.'"<sup>36</sup>

## Origen

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36. Irenaeus, "Against Heresies: 5.6.2,"

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/history/early-church-fathers/ante-nicene/vol-1-apostolic-with-justin-martyr-irenaeus/irenaeus/book-v.html>

Origen was a disciple of Clement of Alexandria at the beginning of the third century A.D. At merely 18 years old, the elders of Alexandria made Origen the head of the discipleship training school in that city.<sup>37</sup> Though being tortured for the faith, Origen refused to renounce Jesus as his Lord. Origen is well-known for his series of books against a second-century Jewish opponent of Christianity named Celsus. The following excerpt is from book eight of that series.

"We do refuse to build lifeless temples to the Giver of all life, let any one who chooses learn how we are taught, that our bodies are the temple of God, and that if any one by lust or sin defiles the temple of God, he will himself be destroyed, as acting impiously towards the true temple. Of all the temples spoken of in this sense, the best and most excellent was the pure and holy body of our Saviour Jesus Christ. ... And in other parts of holy Scripture where it speaks of the mystery of the resurrection to those whose ears are divinely opened, it says that the temple which has been destroyed shall be built up again of living and most precious stones, thereby giving us to understand that each of those who are led by the word of God to strive together in the duties of piety, will be a precious stone in the one great temple of God. ... For as if in some cities a dispute should arise as to which had the finest temples, those who thought their own were the best would do their utmost to show the excellence

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37. David Bercot, "Origen: Respected Teacher," <https://earlychurch.com/origen/>

of their own temples and the inferiority of the others,-in like manner, when they reproach us for not deeming it necessary to worship the Divine Being by raising lifeless temples, we set before them our temples.”<sup>38</sup>

Here, in A.D. 248, Origen affirms the New Testament tradition that because Jesus was the true temple of God, followers of Jesus have now become the temple of God through the indwelling Holy Spirit. Origen then uses this doctrine to explain why Christians don’t build physical temples. For the first 300 years, the early Christians almost universally gathered together in homes for their assemblies.<sup>39</sup> In fact, Origen says Christians were mocked by the pagans for gathering together in such simple houses of worship. As the Apostle Paul taught, the early Christians truly believed they were the temple of God.

## Constantine the Great

The last great persecution of the early Christians began in A.D. 303 in the 19th year of the rule of the Roman Emperor, Diocletian. In addition to burning all the Christians’ sacred books, it is recorded that, “A general sacrifice was commenced. ... No distinction was made of age or sex.

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38. Origen, “Against Celsus, 8.19-20”,  
<https://www.biblestudytools.com/history/early-church-fathers/ante-nicene/vol-4-third-century/origen/book-viii.html>

39. Scriptural examples include: Acts 2:46; Acts 5:42, Acts 8:3; Acts 18:7; Romans 16:23

... Many houses were set on fire, and whole Christian families perished in the flames; and others had stones fastened about their necks, and being tied together were driven into the sea. ... As it lasted ten years, it is impossible to ascertain the numbers martyred, or to enumerate the various modes of martyrdom. ... Racks, scourges, swords, daggers, crosses, poison and famine were made use of in various parts to dispatch the Christians."<sup>40</sup>

When Emperor Constantine brought the persecution to an end by making Christianity a legal religion in A. D. 313, some Christians viewed him as almost a salvific figure. Not only did Constantine end the persecution of Christians, . He employed many Christians in prominent positions of the State, including some as his personal advisors. Constantine also began paying a salary to numerous Christian leaders out of the State treasury.

Additionally, he constructed magnificent buildings for Christians out of Roman tax money.<sup>41</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, a Christian historian who witnessed these events writes in his panegyric work, *In Praise of Constantine*, "Our emperor, discharging as it were a sacred debt, has performed the crowning good of all, by erecting triumphant

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40. Foxe's Book of Martyrs, "The Tenth Persecution, Under Diocletian, A.D. 303",  
<https://www.biblestudytools.com/history/foxs-book-of-martyrs/the-tenth-persecution-under-diocletian-a-d-303.html>.

41. David Bercot, "Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up," (Scroll Publishing: Tyler, 1999), 122-124.

memorials of its value in all parts of the world, raising temples and churches on a scale of royal costliness, and commanding all to unite in constructing the sacred houses of prayer.”<sup>42</sup>

The crowning good of all is taxing Romans to pay for the erecting of Christian temples on a scale of royal costliness? That doesn't sound like something Paul would affirm. Perhaps one of the most outlandish, and possibly blasphemous, things written by Eusebius during this time is another panegyric, this time concerning the newly built 'Christian' temple in Tyre. Here, he cites the prophecy from Haggai 2:9, "The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former," says the Lord of hosts." We discussed in the last chapter how this passage was fulfilled not in Zerubabel, but in Jesus, the true temple of God. Eusebius has it being fulfilled in the amazing Christian temples erected because of Constantine's rule.

"A Certain one ... stepped forward in the presence of many pastors who were assembled as if for a church gathering, and while they attended quietly and decently, he addressed ... a most excellent bishop and beloved of God, through whose zeal the temple in Tyre, which was the most splendid in Phoenicia, had been erected. ... 'Friends and priests of God who are clothed in the

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42. Eusebius, "In Praise of Constantine, 9.12," <https://www.biblestudytools.com/history/early-church-fathers/post-nicene/vol-1-eusebius-pamphilus/eusebius-pamphilus/oration-in-praise-emperor-constantine.html>.

sacred gown and adorned with the heavenly crown of glory, the inspired unction and the sacerdotal garment of the Holy Spirit; and thou, oh pride of God's new holy temple, endowed by him with the wisdom of age, and yet exhibiting costly works and deeds of youthful and flourishing virtue, to whom God himself, who embraces the entire world, has granted the distinguished honor of building and renewing this earthly house to Christ, his only begotten and first-born Word, and to his holy and divine bride; - one might call thee a new Beseleel, the architect of a divine tabernacle, or Solomon, king of a new and much better Jerusalem, or also a new Zerubabel, who added a much greater glory than the former to the temple of God."

Did God bring about a new dispensation of revelation to Christendom, or was the faith once delivered to the saints perverted? In my opinion, the exaltation and reign of Constantine the Great was a masterful play by our adversary. Under the intense pressures of the Diocletian persecution, the Christians longed for relief. They envied the ease and happiness with which their pagan neighbors went about their lives. So, the devil offered the Christians a savior from their worldly troubles, and they fell for him hook, line, and sinker.

Christian leaders were so star-struck by their triumphant emperor that they completely lost their spiritual discernment. Never mind that in A.D. 330, Constantine had a 35-meter column erected in Constantinople

of himself naked as the god Sol Invictus.<sup>43</sup> Never mind that Constantine had one of his sons and one of his wives murdered.<sup>44</sup> Never mind that Constantine didn't get baptized until he knew he was about to die.<sup>45</sup>

Soon, the people who for 300 years laid down their lives for the sake of their enemies became adept at torturing those deemed God's enemies. The oppressed became the oppressors. The dominated became the dominators. The persecuted became the persecutors. And why did that happen?

We become like what we worship.

Surely that won't happen again. Surely history won't repeat itself. Yet, it seems the Apostle Paul says something similar, but far worse is going to happen to God's temple.

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43. Column of Constantine, <https://www.thebyzantinelegacy.com/constantine-column>

44. G. P. Baker, "Constantine the Great: and the Christian Revolution," (Cooper Square Press: New York, 2001), 250-256.

45. Eusebius, "The Life of Constantine, 4.51-54," <https://www.biblestudytools.com/history/early-church-fathers/post-nicene/vol-1-eusebius-pamphilus/eusebius-pamphilus/book-iv-2.html>

# Chapter Six

## Can a Genuine Christian Apostatize?

In his early 20s, Joshua Harris wrote the Christian book, *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*, which has sold over 1.2 million copies.<sup>1</sup> Since that time, Harris went on to write the books *Boy Meets Girl*, *Stop Dating the Church* and *Sex Is Not the Problem (Lust Is)*. He also became the senior pastor at Covenant Life Church and founded Sovereign Grace Ministries.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, it was shocking to millions of Christians when, in July of 2019 Harris posted on Instagram that he and his wife were getting a divorce. The next week, he posted

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1. Albert Mohler, "The Tragedy of Joshua Harris: Sobering Thoughts for Evangelicals," <https://albertmohler.com/2019/08/01/joshua-harris>

2. <https://www.exodusbooks.com/joshua-harris/14>



even more unsettling news to his account. "I have undergone a massive shift in regard to my faith in Jesus. The popular phrase for this is 'deconstruction,' the biblical phrase is 'falling away.' By all the measurements that I have for defining a Christian, I am not a Christian."<sup>3</sup>

How do we understand this situation theologically? It's easy to be dismissive of his decades of ministry with phrases like, "If he went out from us, he was never of us." Or, "He was just a wolf in sheep's clothing." Or, "He had a type of faith, but not a true, saving faith." Of course, those are all possible, but are they probable given Harris' background and story? What is more likely, that Joshua Harris was never actually a saved follower of Jesus, or that he was a saved follower of Jesus who then divorced himself from the faith?

## Apostasy as Divorce

The concept of divorce (*apostasion*)<sup>4</sup> is an excellent analogy for the word apostasy (*apostasia*).<sup>5</sup> Douglas Hamp writes, "Apostasy is an action not a document. Re-

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3. Morgan Lee, "Responding to Josh Harris's Announcement," <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/podcasts/quick-to-listen/leaving-faith-church-christianity-falling-away-josh-harris.html>.

4. <https://biblehub.com/greek/647.htm>

5. <https://biblehub.com/greek/646.htm>

linquishment / abandonment are actions that are sealed with a document that makes the action official. For example, divorce is a separation sealed with a document that makes it official. Apostasy by extension means abandonment of previously established relationship. ... The '*apostasion*' is the document that recorded the apostasy/falling away [αποστασία *apostasia*], abandonment of a contract, such as a divorce certificate (e.g. Deut 24:3). ... Thus, the *apostasia* is not a casual 'falling away,' ... rather, it is 'giving up one's claim.'"<sup>6</sup>

When asked by a group of Pharisees if it was permissible for a man to divorce his wife for any reason, Jesus told them, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate. ... Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery (Matthew 19:4-6, 8-9)."

For Jesus, the only lawful reason a man can divorce his wife is marital unfaithfulness. Thus, it's interesting that Paul writes in Ephesians 5 that God created marriage as

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6. Dr. Douglas M. Hamp, "Corrupting the Image III: Singularity, Superhumans and the Second Coming of Jesus," (Eskaton Media Group, 2022), 61.

a picture of the gospel. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her. ... For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:25, 31-32)."

Thomas Constable writes about this passage in Ephesians, "The mystery in view is the truth previously hidden but now brought to light. The relationship that exists between a husband and his wife is the same as the one that exists between Christ and His church. The church has as close a tie to Christ spiritually as a wife has to her husband spiritually. Paul revealed that Genesis 2:24 contains a more profound truth than people previously realized. The mystery is great because it has far-reaching implications. One of the purposes of marriage is to model Jesus Christ's relationship with the church."<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, the Apostle John portrays the marriage supper of the Lamb (Jesus) with His bride taking place at His return.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, perhaps a slightly better biblical picture of our current relationship with the Lord is betrothal, which is similar to engagement. Ray Vander Laan writes about

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7. Thomas Constable, " <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/dcc/ephesians-5.html>

8. Revelation 19:7-16.  
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+19&version=NASB1995>

first-century Galilean betrothal ceremonies, "When it was time for a man and woman to marry, both fathers would negotiate the bride price, recognizing that the bride would be a precious loss to her family. Taking a cup of wine, the groom drank from it and offered it to the woman, symbolically saying that he wanted to make a covenant and would be willing to give his life for her. The woman sealed the engagement by drinking from the same glass. From that moment, she was referred to as one who was 'bought with a price,' distinguishing her as an engaged woman. The groom then returned to his father's house and built new rooms, adding on to the family insula."<sup>9</sup> Does that bring any New Testament passages to mind?

Vander Laan continues, "Jesus compared himself to a bridegroom who paid a bride's price and went to his Father's house to prepare a place for her. ... Jesus made this comparison especially clear during the Last Supper. Taking a cup of wine in his hands, he told his disciples, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you' (Luke 22:20). ... By using marriage imagery, Jesus said, in effect, 'I love you as my bride, so I'll pay the bride price. I'll give up my life for you and to go my Father's house to prepare a place for you. And one day I will return and take you to be with me forever.' Writing to the Corinthians, Paul used the bridegroom picture as well: 'You are not your own; you were bought at a price' (1

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9. Ray Vander Laan, "No Greater Love," <https://www.hattheworldmayknow.com/nogreaterlove>

Cor. 6:19). His words reminded Jesus' believers that they were his brides-to-be, waiting for the day when he would return and take them home."<sup>10</sup>

Have you ever thought of the Lord's Supper that way? The cup of wine at the Last Supper was the seal of Jesus' engagement. Essentially, the Lord's Supper now functions as a reminder of the great bridal price He paid for us, and a renewing of our covenantal vows to stay faithful to Jesus as His bride-to-be until He returns for the wedding. As Paul writes, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes."<sup>11</sup>

The first time the concept of betrothal is mentioned in the New Testament concerns Jesus' parents. Matthew writes, "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:18-21).'"

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10. *ibid.*

11. 1 Corinthians 11:23-26,

Matthew explains that a betrothed Mary was found to be with child, thus making her appear to have conceived the child out of wedlock. David Bercot writes, "If a man was betrothed to a young woman who represented herself to be a virgin, ... he would have clear grounds to sever the contract if evidence were later presented that she was not a virgin."<sup>12</sup> Joseph sought to follow the Law by sending Mary away in the least disgraceful way possible. The phrase, "send her away," is from the Greek word *apoluó*, which is translated as 'divorce' the next three times it is used in Matthew.<sup>13</sup>

If biblical betrothal and marriage are pictures of the gospel, and Jesus says the only grounds for divorce is marital unfaithfulness, wouldn't it be reasonable to assume that spiritual unfaithfulness to Jesus would also be grounds for a legal spiritual divorce? We have previously discussed that biblical authors analogize the idolatrous actions of God's people to spiritual unfaithfulness and adultery. Also, we demonstrated how Satan and many angelic beings apostatized. We have seen how some of God's people have, at times, renounced the Lord for other lords or gods, thus becoming apostates. Since the primary passage of concern in this book is authored by the Apostle Paul, did he believe it is possible for a legitimate Christian to divorce Jesus and apostatize?

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12. David Bercot, "Matthew: Vol. 1, Matthew 1-13, (Scroll Publishing Co.: Amberson, 2020), 24-25.

13. <https://biblehub.com/greek/630.htm>

## Galatians 5

A large portion of Paul's first missionary journey was spent in the province of Galatia. There, he received both significant reception and rejection by preaching the gospel. When Paul wrote this letter, the Jerusalem Council had already determined which aspects of the Mosaic Law Gentile Christians needed to keep (Acts 15); none of which included circumcision. However, some Jewish followers of Jesus in Galatia did not agree with this decision and were teaching things contrary to the gospel. Douglas Moo writes, "The agitators therefore were probably insisting on circumcision as a necessary step for the Galatian Christians to be considered as belonging to the covenant people and therefore to be found "righteous" on the day of judgment."<sup>14</sup>

In response to these heretical teachings, Paul wrote the Christians in Galatia, "It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. You have been severed from Christ, you

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14. Douglas Moo, "Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Galatians, (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, 2013), 292-293.

who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace (Galatians 5:1-4)."

Craig Keener comments on this passage, "Paul has already warned against seeking to be justified by works of the law (2:16; 3:11). Now he warns that if they pursue this course they will be cut off from Christ, and will have fallen away from grace. Cut off (from *katargeô*) is the language of annulling something (as in 3:17) or rendering it ineffective (as in 5:11). It follows naturally from the idea of Christ no longer being of benefit to them (5:2). 'Falling' or 'stumbling' can designate apostasy (Rom 11:11, 22; 14:4, 13; 1 Cor 8:9, 13; 10:12). Paul's warnings of apostasy envision a real possibility (cf. Rom 8:13; 11:22; 1 Cor 9:27; 2 Cor 13:5–6; Col 1:23; 1 Thess 3:5)."<sup>15</sup>

According to Keener, Paul is saying that a genuine Christian who turns to the works of the Mosaic law for his or her justification will apostatize from Christ and lose the benefits of his or her prior salvation. Douglas Moo details how this passage reverses marital imagery employed by Paul elsewhere in Scripture. "In Rom. 7:1–6, Paul employs the marriage relationship as an analogy for the believer's transfer from one binding relationship to another (see v. 2). We believers, once bound to the law, have been 'released from [*κατηργήθημεν ἀπό*, *katērgēthēmen apo*]' the law in order to be joined to Christ and serve in the new way of the Spirit (vv. 5–6).

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15. Craig S. Keener, "New Cambridge Bible Commentary: Galatians," (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2018), 233-234.



Tragically, the Galatians are flirting with the possibility of reversing this situation: binding themselves to the law and becoming alienated from Christ. This alienation from Christ entails also a 'falling away' from grace."<sup>16</sup>

In his massive work, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, James Dunn writes, "Apostasy remains a real possibility for the Pauline believer for the duration of the eschatological tension. ... We are not surprised then at the equivalent warnings elsewhere where Paul envisages the possibility of 'destroying' the work of salvation in a person. Or at Paul's concern lest his evangelistic work might come to be in vain, or lest his converts be 'estranged from Christ' and 'fall away from grace' (Gal. 5.4). Or at the warning to the Gentile Christians in Rome that they could be cut off from the olive tree of Israel just as easily as the unbelieving of Israel have been (Rom. 11.20-22)."<sup>17</sup> For Paul, we must continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast to the end of our lives, and not move away from the hope of the gospel (Colossians 1:23).

## 1 Corinthians 9-10

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16. Douglas J. Moo, "Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Galatians," (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, 2013), 300-301.

17. James D. G. Dunn, "The Theology of Paul the Apostle," (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1998), 497.

In one of the most shocking portions of his letters, Paul writes to the church at Corinth, "I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it. Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified (1 Corinthians 9:23-27)."

In verse 23, Paul states that he desires to *become* a fellow partaker of the gospel. Isn't he already a partaker of the gospel? He then says that though athletes run for a perishable crown, he hopes to receive one that is eternal, or imperishable. Moving ahead to chapter 15, we again see the idea of the necessity of persevering in the gospel in order to receive an imperishable reward. Paul writes, "Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain (1 Corinthians 15:1-2)."

Notice that Paul says the Corinthians currently stand in the gospel he preached to them, but they must hold fast to it to be saved, otherwise, they will have believed in vain. He then continues, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for

our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)." It is eternally imperative that we cling to this gospel to the end of our lives, otherwise, we will have believed in vain.

At the end of the chapter, Paul discusses the gospel's hope of our imperishable inheritance: receiving a resurrected body in the likeness of Jesus' and being with Him forever. "Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly. Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 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 15:49-52)."

Coming back to 1 Corinthians 9, Paul stated that it is possible for him to be disqualified from receiving that imperishable reward. *Adokimos* (disqualified) is first used by Paul in Romans 1:28 when he talks about idolaters being given over by God to a reprobate mind.<sup>18 19</sup> It is also used in 2 Corinthians 13:6-7, when the apostle calls the Corinthian believers to test themselves to see whether they are in the faith. Here, *adokimos* is the word

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18. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+1&version=NASB1995>

19. <https://biblehub.com/greek/96.htm>

used to describe one who has failed the test. Thus, is Paul doubting his salvation in 1 Corinthians 9:27? Not at all. However, he appears to believe in the possibility that even he could end up not inheriting the kingdom of God.

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul warns the Corinthian church of the disastrous consequences of idolatry. To set up his point, Paul analogizes the Corinthian believers to the Exodus generation of Israelites. "For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved (1 Corinthians 10:1-6)."

Keener comments on the way Paul links the Corinthian believers to the elect Israelites who were delivered out of Egypt, "Paul appeals to Israel's history because even the Gentile Christians have been grafted into that history as spiritual proselytes, no longer Gentiles (10:1, 32; 12:2; cf. Rom 2:28-29; 11:17-24; Gal 3:28-29; 1 Thess 4:5). The Israelites consumed food and drink provided by God (10:1-4), but God destroyed them because they practiced immorality (10:8) and idolatry (10:6), just as some Corinthian Christians were doing (6:9, 13-18; 8:1-10). In other words, as Paul soon declares explicitly, partaking of the Lord's table is meaningless if one also

partakes of idols (10:14–21)! Paul is not antisacramental in 10:1–4 ... but does challenge complacency by showing that baptism (cf. 1:13–17; 15:29) and the Lord's supper (the focus here; 10:14–22) no more protected them from divine judgment for idolatrous suppers than had their equivalent done among the Israelites."<sup>20</sup>

Paul continues, "Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play.' Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come (1 Corinthians 10:7–11)."

Again, Paul tells the Corinthians that what happened to the Israelites was recorded for Christians' instruction because they happened as an example for us. Gordon Fee comments, "Paul does not want what happened to Israel to be repeated in their case; the danger lies in their repetition of Israel's sins (vv. 7–10), which if persisted in will then lead to similar judgment. ... The warning, which began with the analogies in 9:24–27, is that they, too, might 'fall,' just as the Israelites who had their own form of 'sacraments.' This can only mean that the Corinthians, too, as Israel, may fail of the eschatological prize, in this

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20. Craig S. Keener, "1–2 Corinthians," (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2005), "84.

case eternal salvation (see on 6:9-11). Their way of placing themselves in this jeopardy is through their idolatry."<sup>21</sup> God will not permit spiritual marital unfaithfulness from His betrothed bride.

Finally, Paul brings his typological warnings to a conclusion with a final exhortation. "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry (1 Corinthians 10:12-14)."

The word 'fall', which Paul uses in verse 12 is also used in Romans 11:22, where Paul speaks of Jewish people who rejected Jesus as the Messiah as being rejected by God. We will deal with Romans 11 later, but be aware that Paul gives Gentile believers in Rome a similar warning as he does with the Corinthians, "Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either." If you think you stand, take heed lest you fall. Thus, we must flee from both unbelief and idolatry.

Adam Clarke writes, "In a state of probation every thing may change; while we are in this life we may *stand* or *fall*: our standing in the faith depends on our union with

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21. Gordon D. Fee, "New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle to the Corinthians," (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1988), 452, 459.

God; and that depends on our watching unto prayer, and continuing to possess that faith that worketh by love. The highest saint under heaven can stand no longer than he depends upon God and continues in the obedience of faith. He that ceases to do so will fall into sin, and get a darkened understanding and a hardened heart: and he may *continue* in this state till God come to take away his soul. Therefore, *let him who most assuredly standeth, take heed lest he fall; not only partially, but finally.*"<sup>22</sup>

## 1 Timothy 1

The letters of 1 and 2 Timothy were written by Paul to Timothy, who was one of the leaders of the Church at Ephesus. In Acts 20, Paul warned the Ephesian elders, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert (Acts 20:28-31)."

Evidently, by the time 1 Timothy was written, Paul's prophetic warning had begun to come true. Philip Town-er writes concerning the letters of 1 and 2 Timothy, "If

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22. Adam Clarke, "Clarke's Commentary: 1 Corinthians," <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/acc/1-corinthians-10.html>

there is one thing about these letters on which scholars do agree, it is that they purport to address church or mission situations in which false teachers or opponents figure quite prominently. ... More scholars today are inclined to view the opposition as actual ... and the letters consequently as a response to the rise of heretical opponents in these Pauline churches at some point in time."<sup>23</sup>

In 1 Timothy 1:18-20, we read about two prominent men in Ephesus who have been excommunicated from the Church by Paul due to their rejection of Jesus. "This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme."

Paul says that Hymenaeus and Alexander 'rejected' the faith. The word *apostao* (rejected), is first used in Acts 7:27, where it conveys the idea of shoving something away from oneself.<sup>24</sup> "But the one who was injuring his neighbor pushed him away, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and judge over us?'" William Mounce writes of the

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23. Philip H. Towner, "New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Letters to Timothy and Titus," (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2006), ePub.

24. <https://biblehub.com/greek/683.htm>



two men's actions, "One would expect rejection of personal faith to precede the consequences to the Christian faith. Within the overall context ... it seems that Paul is saying that the opponents rejected their personal faith and as a result have brought the Christian faith into reproach."<sup>25</sup>

Paul also informs us that Hymenaeus and Alexander, "suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith." Paul is clearly speaking of a disastrous outcome overtaking the two men. It's understandable that some would want to rationalize such a horrific event happening in a Christians' life by suggesting these two men must not have ever been saved. However, when we consider stories like that of Joshua Harris, the analogy of shipwreck seems apropos.

John Wesley comments on the catastrophic spiritual state of Hymenaeus and Alexander, "Indeed, none can make shipwreck of faith who never had it. These, therefore, were once true believers."<sup>26</sup> Clarke agrees, "Hence we find that all this was not only *possible*, but did *actually* take place, though some have endeavoured to maintain the contrary; who, confounding eternity with a state of probation, have supposed that if a man once enter into the grace of God in this life, he must necessarily continue

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25. William D. Mounce, "Word Biblical Commentary: Pastoral Epistles," (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2000), 67.

26. John Wesley, "Wesley's Explanatory Notes: 1 Timothy," <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/wen/1-timothy-1.html>

in it to all eternity. Thousands of texts and thousands of facts refute this doctrine.”<sup>27</sup>

## 1 Timothy 3

In the third chapter of 1 Timothy, Paul lays out mandatory qualities or characteristics for Overseers and Deacons. In verse 6, he writes that an overseer must not be, “a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil.” We see the devil’s condemnation brought to fulfillment in Revelation 20:10, where he is thrown into the lake of fire and, “tormented day and night forever and ever.”

Mounce comments on verse 6, “A new convert does not belong in a position of authority because the temptations and punishments are great. If the following phrase, ... “into the judgment of the devil,” refers to the judgment Satan incurred because of his pride, then most likely τυφωθὲς should be translated ‘conceited’ because of the comparison being made between the neophyte and Satan.”<sup>28</sup>

Towner writes, “The hope is that with experience in the faith and age would come the maturity and sense of proportion that would prevent leaders from self-ab-

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27. Clarke, “Clarke’s Commentary: 1 Timothy,” <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/acc/1-timothy-1.html>

28. Mounce, 181.

sorption with position and authority. Second is the danger of the judgment or condemnation that follows from this delusion or conceit. Paul portrays this as a situation into (or under) which someone might 'fall' (3:7; 6:9), and the term 'judgment, condemnation' includes not only the condemnation of guilt but also the punishment that follows (5:12). ... Translating this as an objective genitive, Paul is understood to mean that the deluded, conceited overseer is headed for the same condemnation/punishment 'as the devil.'"<sup>29</sup>

Is Paul really implying that a converted Overseer of the Church could end up in the lake of fire with the devil? It appears that understanding of the text is at least possible.

## 1 Timothy 4

Perhaps the clearest example of the tragic reality of apostasy being used by Paul is found in 1 Timothy 4:1, where he writes, "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons." Mounce comments, "'Some of the faith will apostatize' seems preferable. ... 'Will apostatize,' refers to active rebellion against God. ... Again, we see an indication that

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29. Towner, ePub.

the Ephesians are not being tricked into the heresy but are actively rebelling against God.”<sup>30</sup>

The first time Paul uses the root word of *apostēsontai* (will fall away from), is in 2 Corinthians 12:7-8, where Paul writes, "Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me.”<sup>31</sup>

There are many conflicting ideas as to what this ‘thorn in the flesh’ was that afflicted Paul. However, it is not debatable that the thorn had to first be present in him in order for him to pray for its departure. Similarly, in order for a person to fall away from or leave the faith, he or she would have to first be in the faith. Thus, Paul is not only saying that genuine apostasy for Christians is possible, but that it will definitely happen in the last days.

## 2 Timothy 2

2 Timothy is widely believed to be the last letter Paul wrote before his execution. Knowing he is about to enter his final contest, Paul implores his spiritual son to depend on the Holy Spirit, not be ashamed of the truth of the gospel, and prepare himself to suffer and die as a witness

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30. Mounce, 235.

31. <https://biblehub.com/greek/868.htm>

to the truth. He writes, "For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God (2 Timothy 1:7-8)."

In 2 Timothy 2:8-10, Paul reminds Timothy of the historical fact of Jesus' ancestors and resurrection, which proved His messiahship. Paul tells his disciple that the gospel is worth suffering and dying for because it encourages the elect to endure in their faith and obtain salvation. He then explains the consequences of both dying for Christ and denying Him. "It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we endure, we will also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us; if we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:11-13)."

The first two promises contained in this passage are both easy to understand and accept. The third phrase, though, often proves more difficult for some to swallow as being an actual warning for believers: "if we deny Him, He also will deny us." In his commentary on 2 Timothy, Towner explains how Paul's warning is free of ambiguity. "The meaning is clear: disowning Christ, whether as desertion caused by fear of suffering for the faith or as apostasy, carries fearful eternal consequences."<sup>32</sup>

But what should we make of Paul's last statement? "If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot

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32. Towner, ePub.

deny Himself.” Mounce writes, “For God to remain faithful (v 13b) means that he is faithful to his character (v 13c). It is a magnificent promise and comfort to believers struggling in their Christian walk.”<sup>33</sup> It is good news that our sinful actions don’t diminish the efficacy or dependability of God’s promises. That being said, Keener gives a balanced view of God’s faithfulness to His word, “Although God’s character is immutable, his dealings with people respond to their response to him (2 Chron 15:2; Ps 18:25-27). The faithfulness of God to his covenant is not suspended by the breach of that covenant by the unfaithful; but those individuals who break his covenant withdraw from the covenant’s protection.”<sup>34</sup>

It seems that the safest interpretive approach to Paul’s warnings in 2 Timothy 2, whether one is currently a believer or unbeliever, is to take them at face value.

## Romans

The Church at Rome was founded by Jews who heard Peter’s sermon in Acts 2 and took that message back home to the members of their synagogue. The Roman fellowship mostly consisted of Jewish Christians until A.D. 49, when Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from

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33. Mounce, 518.

34. Craig S. Keener. “The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament,” (IVP Academic: Downers Grove, 2014), ePub.

Rome. Suddenly, the Church became entirely Gentile. In A.D. 54, the Jews were allowed to return. However, with Gentiles being in leadership for five years, one can imagine the conflict that would have then ensued. Thus, Paul wrote his letter to the Church at Rome from Corinth in A.D. 56-57 to help bring unity to the fellowship.

Another major issue Paul addressed was God's promise that through Abraham, the Messiah would come and the world would be blessed. Messiah Jesus did come, and the nations were brought in. However, the vast majority of the Jews rejected the Messiah and apostatized. Paul strongly warned Gentile believers to not be arrogant about their standing in Christ, which depends on faith. John Toews writes, "Presumption, whether Jewish or Gentile, is fatal. ... Inclusion in God's salvation and peoplehood depends entirely on continuous faithfulness, on trust in the grace and goodness of God. Presumption is 'unfaith;' it replaces dependence on the grace of God with claims upon God."<sup>35</sup> Note that the Gentile presumption Paul is reacting to is not a presumption that they are saved when in reality they are not. Instead, Paul is warning against an arrogant disposition that they are saved in such a way that nothing could cause them to be cut off.

Analogizing Israel to an Olive tree, Paul exhorts the believers in Rome in Romans 11:17-23, "But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with

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35. John E. Toews, "Believers Church Bible Commentary: Romans," (Herald Press: Scottdale, 2004), 281.

them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, 'Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.' Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again."

Here, Paul reiterates a point he has made repeatedly throughout Romans. People become children of God through faith in the Abrahamic promise that one of his descendants would be the Messiah. Messiah has now come, so those Jews who continued in faith in Yahweh through believing in Jesus Christ remained on the vine of Israel. Those who rejected Jesus through unbelief in the manifested Abrahamic promise were cut off. The same dynamic is in play for Gentiles but in reverse. Thus, Romans 11 clearly describes the situation with Joshua Harris. As a Gentile, he was grafted into the Olive Tree of Israel through faith in Jesus. However, he has now fallen away, and been cut off due to his rejection of Jesus as the promised messianic descendant of Abraham.

James Dunn comments on this passage, "The appropriate response for the gentile believer to the present stage of salvation-history is not pride in status, but fear



- ... fear of the Creator who is also Judge, and whose response to the pride and presumption of the creature will always be one of wrath and condemnation (chaps. 1-2). ... And if God's electing purpose for Israel can comprehend within it the rejection of so many Jews, ... how much more easily could a few Gentile branches be lopped off without modifying God's overall purpose one whit. ... Individual gentile Christians should not assume that what has happened to them is something final and irreversible; the only security derives from a sustained and unreserved reliance on God's grace alone."<sup>36</sup>

Some may push back upon all of these passages by Paul by citing Romans 8:35-39, where the Apostle lists several things that are incapable of separating believers from the love of Christ. "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, 'For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be

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36. James D. G. Dunn, "Word Biblical Commentary: Romans 9-16," (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1988), 674-675.

able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”<sup>37</sup>

However, Dr. Michael Heiser demonstrates how both Romans 8 and 11 are in perfect harmony with one another. “The bottom line is that, regardless of what profession we make or have made in terms of faith in Christ, we must believe to have eternal life. ... I think at this point it is important to point out that a person can sin — and very badly — and still be believing. ... Unbelief is a decision of the heart that one no longer believes the gospel, that one no longer wishes to follow Christ / Yahweh. It is spiritual apostasy — choosing another god or no god at all. No one is in heaven who does not believe. ... I think it noteworthy in light of this that, in the long list of what cannot separate us from God’s love, unbelief does not appear. Why? Because that can separate us from God’s love — in fact it keeps us from God’s love shown to us in Christ. No sins of the flesh can remove us from the family of God. The only thing that keeps us from God’s family is unbelief. Salvation is BY grace, THROUGH faith; God’s part and our part. Both are essential.”<sup>38</sup>

Just as divorces and broken engagements are tragic, but real possibilities, so is apostasy from one’s betrothed

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37. Romans 8, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+8&version=NASB1995>

38. Dr. Michael Heiser, “Election, Salvation, Unbelief, and Eternal Security,” <https://drmsb.com/election-salvation-unbelief-and-eternal-security/>

relationship with Jesus. This is neither a matter of losing one's salvation nor of a works-based soteriology. This is about security for the believer in Jesus and wrath for the non-believer in Jesus. Keener states it well, "Paul certainly did not teach the popular doctrine today of 'once-saved-always-saved'; a convert does not regularly move in and out of the saved community, but a convert who deconverts is again a nonbeliever."<sup>39</sup>

But what about the earliest Christians? Did they believe genuine Christians could apostatize and forsake their hope of salvation? What would they say about someone like Joshua Harris?

## The Didache

As discussed in the Prologue, the earliest Christian document outside of the New Testament is almost certainly *The Didache*, also known as *The Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations*. In its last chapter, we are given insight into first-century A.D. orthodox eschatological beliefs. Additionally, we find an interesting passage about the security of believers.

"Watch over your life. Do not let your lamps burn out, nor your waist be ungirded, but be ready, for you do not know when our Lord is coming. And gather together frequently, seeking what is necessary for your souls, for all your years of faith will count for nothing unless

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39. Keener, "Galatians," 234.

you are perfected in the last days. In the last days, false prophets and corrupters will multiply, and the sheep will turn into wolves, and love will be turned into hate. As lawlessness increases, men will hate and persecute and betray one another. And then the Deceiver of the world will appear as a son of God, and will do signs and wonders, and the earth will be delivered into his hands. He will commit abominations which have never been seen since the world began. Then all mankind will come to the fire of testing, and many will fail and perish. But those who endure in their faith will be saved by him who was accursed. And then shall the signs of the truth appear: First a sign of a rift in the heavens, then a sign of a voice of a trumpet, and thirdly the resurrection of the dead.”<sup>40</sup>

From a soteriological standpoint, it's easy to understand how wolves can turn into sheep. For instance, the lost are found, the dead are given new birth, the blind receive sight, etc. It's also common to cite the phrase, “wolves in sheep's clothing.” Yet, the earliest Christian document outside of the New Testament, the document that was used as a catechism for first-century believers of Jesus, says that in the last days, sheep will become wolves. Thus, the writer then explicitly states how imperative it is for followers of Jesus to endure in their faith until the end in order to be saved.

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40. The Didache, 16,

<https://legacyicons.com/content/didache.pdf><https://legacyicons.com/content/didache.pdf>

## Clement of Rome

The Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians is not actually written by Clement, the Bishop of Rome. Rather, the document's first chapter reveals it was a joint effort written by Clement and the elders of Rome about A.D. 95-97. This Clement may very well be the Clement whom Paul describes as his fellow worker in Philippians 4:3.<sup>41</sup>

"He does not forsake those that hope in Him, but gives up such as depart from Him to punishment and torture. For Lot's wife, who went forth with him, being of a different mind from himself and not continuing in agreement with him [as to the command which had been given them], was made an example of, so as to be a pillar of salt unto this day. This was done that all might know that those who are of a double mind, and who distrust the power of God, bring down judgment on themselves and become a sign to all succeeding generations. ... It is right and holy therefore, men and brethren, rather to obey God than to follow those who, through pride and sedition, have become the leaders of a detestable emulation. For we shall incur no slight injury, but rather great danger, if we rashly yield ourselves to the inclinations of

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41. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians+4&version=NASB1995>

men who aim at exciting strife and tumults, so as to draw us away from what is good."<sup>42</sup>

The authors affirm God's promise that He will never leave nor forsake those who believe in Him. However, they also state that believers who forsake the Lord and cling to seditious leaders will bring down great judgment upon themselves similar to what happened to Lot's wife.

## **Justin Martyr**

Justin's Dialogue with Trypho is a fictional recreation of what actual evangelistic conversations with Jews looked like in the mid-second century A.D. In chapter 47 of this work, Justin describes a similar situation to that which Paul addressed in his letter to the Galatians: Christians turning to circumcision or the Mosaic Law for their justification. Here, Justin comes to the same conclusion as Paul, yet holds out hope for such a person if he or she will repent.

"And I hold, further, that such as have confessed and known this man to be Christ, yet who have gone back from some cause to the legal dispensation, and have

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42. "The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians," 11, 14,  
<https://www.biblestudytools.com/history/early-church-fathers/ante-nicene/vol-1-apostolic-with-justin-martyr-irenaeus/clement-of-rome/first-epistle-of-clement-corinthians.html>

denied that this man is Christ, and have repented not before death, shall by no means be saved.”<sup>43</sup>

## Irenaeus

Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp of Smyrna (a disciple of the Apostle John), and eventually became the Bishop of Lyons. Around A.D. 180, he wrote a five-book work entitled, *Against Heresies*, where he used both polemics and apologetics to counter false beliefs and promote the true doctrines of the Christian Church. In chapter eight of book five, he discusses the seal of the Holy Spirit, which Paul writes about in Ephesians and 2 Corinthians. As you read, note all of the wonderful Scriptural blessings Irenaeus affirms are given to believers through the indwelling and sealing of the Holy Spirit.

“But we do now receive a certain portion of His Spirit, tending towards perfection, and preparing us for incorruption, being little by little accustomed to receive and bear God; which also the apostle terms ‘an earnest,’ that is, a part of the honour which has been promised us by God, where he says in the Epistle to the Ephesians, ‘In which ye also, having heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation, believing in which we have been sealed

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43. Justin, “Dialogue with Trypho,” 47,  
<https://www.biblestudytools.com/history/early-church-fathers/ante-nicene/vol-1-apostolic-with-justin-martyr-irenaeus/justin-martyr/dialogue-of-justin.html>

with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance.' This earnest, therefore, thus dwelling in us, renders us spiritual even now, and the mortal is swallowed up by immortality. 'For ye,' he declares, 'are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.' ... If therefore, at the present time, having the earnest, we do cry, 'Abba, Father,' what shall it be when, on rising again, we behold Him face to face; when all the members shall burst out into a continuous hymn of triumph, glorifying Him who raised them from the dead, and gave the gift of eternal life? For if the earnest, gathering man into itself, does even now cause him to cry, 'Abba, Father,' what shall the complete grace of the Spirit effect, which shall be given to men by God? It will render us like unto Him, and accomplish the will of the Father; for it shall make man after the image and likeness of God."<sup>44</sup>

The Koine Greek word, "*Sphragízō* signifies ownership and the full security carried by the backing (full authority) of the owner. 'Sealing' in the ancient world served as a 'legal signature' which guaranteed the promise (contents) of what was sealed."<sup>45</sup> This is what Irenaeus calls 'the earnest'. Paul uses this word in noun form in Romans

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44. Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," 5.8,  
<https://www.biblestudytools.com/history/early-church-fathers/ante-nicene/vol-1-apostolic-with-justin-martyr-irenaeus/irenaeus/book-v.html>

45. <https://biblehub.com/greek/4972.htm>



4:11 when stating that circumcision was the outward sign of the Abrahamic covenant.<sup>46</sup> However, remember that we discussed how certain Jews reversed their circumcision during Antiochus IV's reign of terror in the second century B.C. So, it is possible to break or destroy the seal of God's covenant, but the punishment for engaging in such a seditious act is death. Thus, though Irenaeus affirms Paul's words about believers being sealed with the Holy Spirit, he also believes that genuine believers can apostatize, as we read below.

"And to as many as continue in their love towards God, does He grant communion with Him. ... But on as many as, according to their own choice, depart from God, He inflicts that separation from Himself which they have chosen of their own accord. But separation from God is death, and separation from light is darkness; and separation from God consists in the loss of all the benefits which He has in store. Those, therefore, who cast away by apostasy these forementioned things, being in fact destitute of all good, do experience every kind of punishment. God, however, does not punish them immediately of Himself, but that punishment falls upon them because they are destitute of all that is good. Now, good things

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46. Romans 4:11, <https://www.biblegateway.com/pass-age/?search=romans+4&version=NASB1995>

are eternal and without end with God, and therefore the loss of these is also eternal and never-ending.”<sup>47</sup>

## Origen

As we discussed in a previous chapter, Origen was asked by the elders of the church in Alexandria to lead what was effectively their new convert class. In mid-life, he wrote a four-book work called *De Principiis*. In book 3, there is a fascinating discussion of many aspects of Romans 9, and Origen contrasts the Orthodox Christian understanding with error.

“Let us begin, then, with what is said about Pharaoh—that he was hardened by God, that he might not send away the people; along with which will be examined also the statement of the apostle, ‘Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth.’ And certain of those who hold different opinions misuse these passages, themselves also almost destroying free-will by introducing ruined natures inca-

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47. Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” 5.27,  
<https://www.biblestudytools.com/history/early-church-fathers/ante-nicene/vol-1-apostolic-with-justin-martyr-irenaeus/irenaeus/book-v.html>.

pable of salvation, and others saved which it is impossible can be lost."<sup>48</sup>

Here, Origen describes two ways this passage is used incorrectly, both of which involve removing the doctrine of free will. First, he says humanity's nature has not been so ruined that they are incapable of confessing with their mouths that Jesus is Lord and believing with their hearts that God raised Him from the dead. Additionally, Origen writes that even after a person has been saved, they maintain free will and can choose to reject Jesus, which would place them once again in the category of 'lost'.

## Cyprian

Cyprian was the Bishop of Carthage in the mid-third century A.D. In *Epistle 6*, he exhorts followers of Jesus who have already confessed Christ during the Decian Persecution to not relax in their faith.<sup>49</sup> In the face of potential torture and even death, these courageous men and women refused to deny that Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords. Yet, Cyprian reminds these genuine

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48. Origen, "De Principiis," 3.8,  
<https://www.biblestudytools.com/history/early-church-fathers/ante-nicene/vol-4-third-century/origen/book-iii.html>

49. The Seventh Persecution, Under Decius, A.D. 249,  
<https://www.biblestudytools.com/history/foxs-book-of-martyrs/the-seventh-persecution-under-decius-a-d-249.html>

followers of Jesus that their race has not yet been completed.

"I exhort you by our common faith, by the true and simple love of my heart towards you, that, having overcome the adversary in this first encounter, you should hold fast your glory with a brave and persevering virtue. We are still in the world; we are still placed in the battle-field; we fight daily for our lives. Care must be taken, that after such beginnings as these there should also come an increase, and that what you have begun to be with such a blessed commencement should be consummated in you. It is a slight thing to have been able to attain anything; it is more to be able to keep what you have attained; even as faith itself and saving birth makes alive, not by being received, but by being preserved. Nor is it actually the attainment, but the perfecting, that keeps a man for God."<sup>50</sup>

Here, Cyprian writes in a similar way to Paul in his letter to the church at Rome. In Romans 8, Paul urges the Roman Christians to persevere through persecution and not forsake their heavenly inheritance, "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider

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50. Cyprian, "Epistle 6,"

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/history/early-church-fathers/ante-nicene/vol-5-third-century/cyprian/epistle-vi.html>

that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ... With perseverance we wait eagerly for it (Romans 8:16-18, 25)." Like Paul, Cyprian believes there is a yet-but-not-yet-tension that exists for our salvation, and its fulfillment in our lives depends on our loyalty to Jesus and reliance upon His grace to the end of our time on earth.

## **Celerinus**

Also in the midst of the Decian Persecution in Carthage was a Deacon named Celerinus. He wrote to a leader of the church named Lucian, asking for prayer for his sister who had recently apostatized. When given the option of torture or release, Celerinus' sister, a Christian, chose to commit the idolatrous and traitorous act of sacrificing to the Roman gods.

Celerinus writes to Lucian, "I ask that you will grant my desire, and that you will grieve with me at the (spiritual) death of my sister, who in this time of devastation has fallen from Christ; for she has sacrificed and provoked our Lord, as seems manifest to us. And for her deeds I in this day of paschal rejoicing, weeping day and night, have spent the days in tears, in sackcloth, and ashes, and I am still spending them so to this day, until the aid of our Lord Jesus Christ, and affection manifested through you, or through those my lords who have been crowned, from whom you are about to ask it, shall come to the help of so terrible a shipwreck. For I remember ...

Numeria and Candida, for whose sin, because they have us as brethren, we ought to keep watch. For I believe that Christ, according to their repentance and the works which they have done towards our banished colleagues ... will have mercy upon them.<sup>51</sup>

Notice that Celerinus says his sister is now spiritually dead, fallen from Christ, and has suffered shipwreck in her faith: all terms used by Paul for people who are in danger of receiving the wrath of God. However, Celerinus holds out hope for her. He believes that the prayers of God's people, combined with her genuine repentance could restore her to the faith, as he believes has been the case with two others of their fellowship.

## Lactantius

David Bercot writes that Lactantius was a, "prominent Roman teacher of rhetoric who later converted to Christianity. In his old age, he was summoned by Emperor Constantine to Gaul (France) to tutor Constantine's son, Crispus."<sup>52</sup> In chapter 19 of his book, *Of Justice*, Lactantius describes why Christians in the early fourth century A.D. are viewed as foolish by the nations for not sacrificing

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51. Celerinus, "Epistle 20,"

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/history/early-church-fathers/ante-nicene/vol-5-third-century/cyprian/epistle-xx.html>.

52. David Bercot, "A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs," (Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.: Peabody, 1999), xviii.

to the Roman gods, and for choosing to be tortured and killed instead.

"For to choose to be tortured and slain, rather than to take incense in three fingers, and throw it upon the hearth, appears as foolish as, in a case where life is endangered, to be more careful of the life of another than of one's own. For they do not know how great an act of impiety it is to adore any other object than God, who made heaven and earth, who fashioned the human race, breathed into them the breath of life, and gave them light. But if he is accounted the most worthless of slaves who runs away and deserts his master, and if he is judged most deserving of stripes and chains, and a prison, and the cross, and of all evil; and if a son, in the same manner, is thought abandoned and impious who deserts his father, that he may not pay him obedience, and on this account is considered deserving of being disinherited, and of having his name removed for ever from his family, how much more so does he who forsakes God, in whom the two names entitled to equal reverence, of Lord and Father, alike meet? ... Of what punishments, therefore, is he deserving, who forsakes Him who is both the true Master and Father, but those which God Himself has appointed? who has prepared everlasting fire for ... the impious and the rebellious."<sup>53</sup>

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53. Lactantius, "Of Justice,"

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/history/early-church-fathers/ante-nicene/vol-7-third-fourth-centuries/lactantius/book-v-of-justice.html>

## Closing Thoughts

Like Paul, the early Christians neither believed in a works-based entrance to the kingdom of God nor the doctrine of once-saved-always-saved. Thus, it's clear the Christians of the first 300 years would not have dismissed Joshua Harris as having never been a genuine Christian. They would have said that he has forsaken the faith and become an apostate through his unbelief and rejection of Jesus as Messiah. However, there would be disagreement as to whether hope still remains for him to repent.

So, for Joshua Harris or any family member or friend you know who has apostatized, we should follow Paul's advice in 1 Timothy 2:1-6. "I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all." I believe we need to pray for apostates to repent because Jesus died for them and wants them to be saved.

Or, if you are reading this and would describe yourself as someone who has apostatized, please heed Paul's exhortation from Acts 17:30-31, "God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in



righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." Please, reconsider the historical veracity of Jesus' resurrection and return to Him.<sup>54</sup>

At some point in the future, though, a dividing line will be drawn across humanity. A false Christ will take his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. He will have his own John the Baptist-type prophet who will precede him and cause all people everywhere to be given a mark (or seal) on their right hand or forehead, showing their allegiance to this deceiver. At that point, the Bible says repentance will be unattainable for anyone who receives the lawless one's seal.<sup>55</sup> Tragically, the Scriptures state that many Christians will apostatize, divorce Jesus, worship the Antichrist and receive his seal of ownership. The sheep will become wolves. We will discuss this great apostasy and abomination of desolation in the next three chapters.

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54. Capturing Christianity, "2 Top Historical Scholars PROVE that Jesus Rose (Gary Habermas and Mike Licona)," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mc6XhMySxdY>

55. Revelation 14:9-11,  
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation%2014&version=NASB1995>

# Chapter Seven

## The Final Abominable Temple

In this book, we have discussed a prominent theme that repeats throughout the Scriptures, which the Apostle Paul certainly had in mind when writing 2 Thessalonians. Where there is a tabernacle or temple of the Lord, abominations and apostasies soon follow. We also discussed what Paul and the early Christians believed about the temple of the Lord, and spent a significant amount of time demonstrating their shared belief that genuine Christians can apostatize. In the final three chapters, I will give my opinion concerning what Paul meant in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, and answer some questions you, the reader, may be asking in response.

### **What is the background of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4?**

Understanding context is imperative when interpreting Scripture. There is a natural flow in Paul's eschatological thinking from the first chapter of 2 Thessalonians

to the second. In 2 Thessalonians 1:3-5, Paul encourages the local believers in Jesus and gives God thanks for their perseverance through persecution. He commends them for the way they have faithfully endured great affliction for the sake of obtaining the kingdom of God. Paul then reminds them of the justice of God, which will be made visible to all when the Lord Jesus returns.

We read in verses 6-10, "It is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed."

When does Paul say that Christians will receive relief from their affliction and persecution? "When the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus (vs. 7-8)." Alan Kurschner explains that in this passage, Paul, "instructs that the church will experience affliction right up to the initial day of the revelation of Christ. We know from his previous teaching in his first Thessalonian epistle that this deliverance is the rapture (1 Thess. 4:15-18). ... In other words, there will not be

any delay between the rapture of the righteous and the day of the Lord's judgment upon the ungodly. The Lord's coming will be simultaneously twofold."<sup>1</sup> Are we prepared to remain faithful to Christ through tribulation far greater than anything in human history? If Christians will remain on earth until Jesus' second coming, what we believe about the end times truly matters.

In InterVarsity Press' *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, J. W. Simpson Jr. explains Paul's eschatological purpose in writing his second letter to the Church at Thessalonica. "2 Thessalonians ... reveals that central to Paul's concerns for the Thessalonian Christian community were questions regarding eschatology (2 Thess 2:1-12). Here the problem seems to be that some believed that 'the day of the Lord' had already occurred (2 Thess 2:2)."<sup>2</sup> We can see Simpson Jr.'s thesis clearly expressed by a simple reading of Paul's statement in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2, "Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a

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1. Alan E. Kurschner. "Antichrist Before the Day of the Lord: What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Return of Christ," (Eschatos Publishing: Pompton Lakes, 2013), ePub.

2. J. W. Simpson Jr., "Dictionary of Paul and His Letters: Thessalonians, Letters To The," (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, 1993), 933.

message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.”

Notice that Paul pairs the second coming of Jesus and our being gathered to Him with the day of the Lord. Gordon Fee writes of these conjoined events, “The concern itself is then expressed as a kind of ‘two sides of a single coin.’ The more significant ‘side’ of the event is mentioned first: ‘the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,’ and thus the readers are introduced once more to the key word *Parousia*. That this refers to what the later church referred to as ‘the second coming’ is made certain by the second ‘side’: ‘our gathering unto him.’ At this point the person who has read 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 will see that this is simply a condensed version of what Paul had said there, without any of the trimming.”<sup>3</sup>

Let us pause and read Paul’s description of the coming of the Lord Jesus and our being gathered to Him in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17. “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 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. For the

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3. Gordon D. Fee, “New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians,” (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2009), 272.

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. 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."

In 1 Thessalonians 4:15, Paul declares that this prophecy came, "by the word of the Lord." Why did he use that phrase? G. K. Beale states in his commentary on 1 Thessalonians, "The likelihood is that Paul is recollecting the words of the earthly Jesus and paraphrasing him. This is apparent from noticing that 4:15-5:7 has numerous parallels that demonstrate a high probability that Paul is dependent on Jesus' teaching on the last things."<sup>4</sup> On the next page of his commentary, Beale provides a chart showing 13 similarities between 1 Thessalonians 4-5 and Matthew 24.<sup>5</sup>

F. F. Bruce writes of this passage that Paul, "seems to draw on a primitive Christian tradition of eschatological teaching which can be discerned also in the Olivet discourse of the synoptic Gospels, especially in its Matthew form. This tradition speaks of the coming of the Lord as his Parousia (cf. Matt 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 1 Thess 2:19; 3:13; 5:23; 2 Thess 1:7; Matt 24:30 par.), with clouds (cf. Matt

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4. G. K. Beale, "Intervarsity Press Commentary Series: 1-2 Thessalonians," (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, 2003), 135-136.

5. *ibid*, 137.

24:30 par.; Rev 1:7), accompanied by angels (cf. 3:13; 2 Thess 1:7; Matt 24:31 par.) and announced by a trumpet blast (cf. Matt 24:31; 1 Cor 15:52). ... The Thessalonian Christians had presumably been taught much of this tradition, but were not sure how their departed friends figured into the program."<sup>6</sup>

Charles Wanamaker also comments on 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, "it seems plausible that the basic content of the verses, but not their present wording, stems from an apocalyptic discourse by Jesus concerning the end of the age. The similarities between Mt. 24:29-31, 40f. in particular, and the images and language used in vv. 16f. suggest that Paul was utilizing what he took to be the teaching of the Lord regarding the end of the age."<sup>7</sup> Alan Kurschner shares Beale, Bruce and Wanamaker's perspective on Paul's eschatology, "There are thirty parallels between Jesus' teaching on the second coming in the Olivet Discourse and Paul's teaching on the second coming in the Thessalonian letters. ... We should not be surprised by these parallels since Paul explicitly claims dependence on Jesus: "by the word of the Lord" (1 Thess.

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6. F. F. Bruce, "Word Biblical Commentary: 1 & 2 Thessalonians," (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1982), 95.

7. Charles A. Wanamaker, "The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text," (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1990) ePub.

4:15). This demonstrates that Jesus intended the Olivet Discourse to be a teaching for the church.”<sup>8</sup>

Keener and Brown list 15 similarities between Matthew’s Olivet Discourse and Paul’s eschatological writings in 1 Thessalonians 4-5 and 2 Thessalonians 1-2. “Paul is still apparently interpreting Jesus’ teaching: Too many parallels exist to dismiss these as coincidence, in both 1 and 2 Thessaonlians. These parallels are crucial in showing that, contrary to what skeptics say, Jesus’ teachings were preserved very early: They influenced some of the earliest New Testament writings within twenty years of Jesus’ public ministry. Yet they also reveal that Paul applied Jesus’ teachings about His post-Tribulational coming to the gathering of believers.”<sup>9</sup>

In 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul counters the false eschatological teaching creeping into the Church by reminding the Thessalonians how Jesus Himself taught that at least two events must take place before He returns and we are gathered to Him. These two future events are summarized in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, “Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his

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8. Kurschner, ePub.

9. Michael L. Brown & Craig S. Keener, “Not Afraid of the Antichrist,” (Chosen: Minneapolis, 2019), 151-152.



seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.”

Paul then asks the church he planted, “Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things (2 Thessalonians 2:5)?” Evidently, the eschatological teachings found in 1 and 2 Thessalonians were not new teachings. Charles Wanamaker writes of the eschatological foundation Paul already provided the Thessalonians, “Whatever the precise question is that Paul seeks to clarify, it does not reflect a major aberration in the beliefs of the Thessalonians, as Paul simply reminds them of what they already know.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, Paul says to remember that Jesus taught there will be a final great apostasy of God’s people and an ultimate abomination of desolation of God’s temple before Jesus returns and we are gathered to Him.

## **Jesus’ Version of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4**

Most likely, both letters to the Thessalonians were written before Matthew’s gospel. However, Jesus’ Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25), which Matthew heard first-hand, was delivered to the Apostles almost two decades before Paul wrote to the Thessalonians. So, it’s reasonable to conclude that Jesus’ understanding of eschatology was already well-established by the time Paul was

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10. Wanamaker, ePub.

planting churches.<sup>11</sup> I won't spend much time in this section but want to highlight sections from Matthew 24, which demonstrate Jesus teaching that a great apostasy and abomination of desolation of God's temple must take place before we are gathered to Him.

"Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. 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. 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), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains (Matthew 24:9-16)."

Here, Jesus says tribulation is coming for His followers, at which time many will fall away from the faith. He also prophesies that lawlessness will increase, love will grow cold, and many will be deceived by false prophets. Then, Jesus says His followers are going to see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel find its ultimate fulfillment in the holy place.

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11. We have already demonstrated this hypothesis by citing the last chapter of the Didache, which is called The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles to the Nations.

He continues, "For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. 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. Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There He is,' do not believe him. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. ... 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. 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. 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 24:21-24, 29-31)."

Jesus states that immediately following the ultimate abomination of desolation event, a great tribulation begins. Again, Jesus' followers are targeted by persecution and deception, except this period is far worse than anything that has happened previously. Then, at some point after all these things, Jesus returns in the clouds with a great trumpet blast and gathers His people to Himself. Just as Paul summarized, before Jesus returns and believers are gathered to Him in the air, there will be a great apostasy and the man of lawlessness will be revealed in God's temple, declaring himself to be God.

## **Daniel: Jesus' Reference Point**

When Jesus discusses His return upon the clouds and our being gathered to Him in Matthew 24, He calls Himself the Son of Man. This is a direct reference to Daniel 7:13-14, which Paul also references in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. If you have studied the book of Daniel, you have surely noticed many references to that prophetic book in the Olivet Discourse. True, Jesus draws on other Old Testament books in that sermon as well, but Daniel does appear to be His main reference point. For the sake of space, I will keep our focus limited to the main passage that succinctly highlights our themes of apostasy and the abomination of desolation.

"He will be disheartened and will return and become enraged at the holy covenant and take action; so he will come back and show regard for those who forsake the holy covenant. Forces from him will arise, desecrate the sanctuary fortress, and do away with the regular sacrifice. And they will set up the abomination of desolation. By smooth words he will turn to godlessness those who act wickedly toward the covenant, but the people who know their God will display strength and take action. Those who have insight among the people will give understanding to the many; yet they will fall by sword and by flame, by captivity and by plunder for many days. Now when they fall they will be granted a little help, and many will join with them in hypocrisy. Some of those who have insight will fall, in order to refine, purge and make them

pure until the end time; because it is still to come at the appointed time. Then the king will do as he pleases, and he will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will speak monstrous things against the God of gods; and he will prosper until the indignation is finished, for that which is decreed will be done. He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the desire of women, nor will he show regard for any other god; for he will magnify himself above them all (Daniel 11:30-37)."

In his commentary on Daniel, Chris White describes how Antiochus Epiphanes served as a type of Antichrist in verses 30-35, "This paints an interesting picture of Antiochus. ... His main goal seems to have been the stabilization and consolidation of what parts of his empire he had left. This would necessarily include (as he saw it) making an example of the Jews who did not embrace Hellenism, and who were a part of the recent rebellion against his Hellenist puppet. The fact that he is twice referred to as being kind to those who got with the program is evidence that he was not acting in blind rage, but with a sense of political savvy. This also perhaps gives us some insight into the Antichrist, who also will cause a great apostasy, not just by deception, but also by providing incentives to apostatize. In the case of the Antichrist, the ones who leave their faith will have their lives spared, but they will also be able to buy and sell again. This is a deal that is

hard to refuse, and will require steadfast faith on the part of the saints to do so.”<sup>12</sup>

J. Paul Tanner describes the direct prophetic connection in Daniel 11:36 to the man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians 2, “Rather than promoting the deities of the Greek pantheon (as Antiochus did), this future king ‘will exalt and magnify himself above every deity.’ This would suggest that the ‘abomination of desolation’ will have already occurred. ... At this point, he is clearly revealed as the ‘man of lawlessness’ who ‘opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship and as a result he takes his seat in God’s temple, displaying himself as God.’”<sup>13</sup>

Beale synthesizes the two ideas of a great apostasy and the abomination of desolation in the Daniel 11 passage, “According to Daniel 11:30-45, a final enemy of God will attack the covenant community. The attack is to take two forms. The first will be a subtle attack of deception by influencing with ‘smooth words’ some within the community ‘who forsake the holy covenant’ and ‘who act wickedly toward the covenant’ (11:30, 32 NASB). All of this stands behind Paul’s reference to ‘the apostasy’ in 2:3. The antichrist will influence these people to become godless themselves (Dan 11:32), fostering deception and compromise among others. Second, the end-time foe

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12. Chris White, “Daniel: A Commentary,” .

13. J. Paul Tanner, “Commentary on the Book of Daniel,” p. 105-106, .

will persecute those who remain loyal to God's covenant (11:33-35, 44). This eschatological antagonist will appear openly before the community, 'exalt and magnify himself above every god' (11:36), then meet his final end under God's judicial hand (11:45). The parallels between Daniel's prophecy and Paul's teaching in 2:3-4 are clear<sup>14</sup>.

## **What Is Paul Saying in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4?**

After six-and-a-half chapters tracing the themes of apostasy and abomination of God's temples through Scripture, it's time to land this plane. Two questions will be answered in this section. First, what does Paul mean by 'the apostasy'? Second, what does he think is happening when the man of lawlessness 'takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God'?

Let us begin by reminding ourselves of the passage at hand, with verses one and two included for the sake of context. "Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of de-

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14. Beale, 206-207.

struction, 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)."

In 2 Thessalonians 2:3, Paul uses the word, *apostasia*, which is a noun carrying the ideas of apostasy, rebellion or defection.<sup>15</sup> The only other time it is used in the New Testament is in Acts 21 when James says Paul has been accused of encouraging Jews to forsake Moses by no longer circumcising their children.<sup>16</sup> F. F. Bruce believes Paul is saying a world-wide rebellion will occur against God's authority in the last days. He writes, "It appears more probable from the context that a general abandonment of the basis of civil order is envisaged. ... Any assault on it is an assault on a divine ordinance (Rom 13:1, 2). It is, in fact, the whole concept of divine authority over the world that is set at defiance in 'the rebellion' par excellence."<sup>17</sup>

The main problem with Bruce's argument is that, according to the New Testament authors, the world is already engaged in mass rebellion against God. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:1-2, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the

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15. <https://biblehub.com/greek/646.htm>

16. Acts 21:21, .

17. Bruce, 167.



sons of disobedience." Similarly, 1 John 5:19 says, "We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." Everyone who is not a follower of Jesus is currently in the domain of Satan, as Paul explains in Colossians 1:13-14, "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." In a sense, when we confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead, we apostatize (or defect) from the devil's domain.

In chapter six of this book, we discussed Paul's prophetic words in 1 Timothy 4:1 that in the latter days, people would fall away from faith in Jesus. Perhaps 2 Thessalonians 2:3 is the ultimate fulfillment of that Spirit-given prophecy. Again, Paul is certainly leaning on Daniel 11 and Jesus' words recorded in Matthew 24 when writing of this ultimate, last days large-scale defection from the faith. Additionally, notice that Paul does not say *an* apostasy must come before the day of the Lord, he says *the* apostasy must come first. He uses a definite article, which matters. Though there have been many historical examples of apostasy in the Church, Paul says that the apostasy of all apostasies will come about in the days of the lawless one.

Speaking of the man of lawlessness, what does Paul mean that he will take his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God? This might be tough to swallow but think back to chapter five of this book. When Paul wrote about God's temple, the temple of the Lord or

the temple of the Holy Spirit, to whom was he referring? Paul either meant Jesus or genuine Christians.

G. K. Beale discusses this point in his commentary on 2 Thessalonians, "That 2:3 is about a massive apostate movement toward the end of history in the church and not in Israel is apparent from the phrase God's temple in 2:4. This reference to the temple shows that the church community is in the place where end-time prophecies about Israel and its temple will take place. The same phrase, God's temple, is found nine other times in the New Testament outside of 2 Thessalonians, and it almost always refers to Christ or the church. Not once in Paul (five other times in outside 2 Thess) does it refer to a literal temple in Israel of the past or the future. ... Consequently, 2:3-4 teaches that the latter-day assailant will come into the midst of the church and cause it to become predominantly apostate and unbelieving."<sup>18</sup>

Similarly to the way Fee calls the second coming of Jesus and our being gathered to Him two sides of a single coin, Beale appears to pair the apostasy with the abomination of desolation. This event can be illustrated by what the devil attempted to do with his third temptation of Jesus in Matthew 4:8-9. "Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; and he said to Him, 'All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me.'"

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18. Beale, 207-208.

Here, Satan encourages Jesus (the embodiment of God's temple) to become a defector and defile God's true temple by committing the abominable act of pledging allegiance to the prince of darkness. If Jesus had given in to that temptation, the devil would have, in a way, taken his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself as God. However, as we know, our Lord humbly and faithfully stood firm, resisted the devil, and he fled from Him. Unfortunately, I understand Scripture to be prophesying a large portion of the last days Church falling away in the days of the lawless one.

Unlike Beale, though, I do believe there will be a third temple built in Jerusalem, and part of the Antichrist's plan to deceive Jews necessitates its construction.<sup>19</sup> However, I think the lawless one declaring himself to be God while standing in a physical building called the temple of God is actually the lesser of two horrific evils; for the true temple of God, according to Paul, is followers of Jesus. That would be quite a deception, wouldn't it? Everyone is looking at a building while the devil is coming after souls.

Satan tried to get the Bridegroom in the wilderness to apostatize but was defeated. However, if he can get the betrothed bride to divorce her Bridegroom, that's a consolation prize he will gladly accept. Thus, when Paul says the lawless one will sit in the temple of God, I think the Antichrist will do more than stake his claim over many Christian gatherings worldwide. I believe that in

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19. *ibid.* 207-210. Beale believes it is possible, but not likely.

the last days, a vast multitude of apostate Christians will defect from Jesus' kingdom, pledge allegiance to the final false Christ as their savior and king, and become like what they worship.

## **Can There Be Two Earthly Temples Simultaneously Called the Temple of God?**

Perhaps you've been wondering if there is any Scriptural precedent for there being two earthly temples simultaneously called the temple of God, with only one being genuine in God's eyes. I will give three examples. Soon after King Solomon died, his kingdom was divided between the 10 northern tribes (called Israel) and two southern tribes (called Judah). Because the true temple of the Lord was found in Jerusalem of Judah, Jeroboam the king of Israel had a problem. According to the Scriptures, much of the Jewish religion required worshipful practices at the temple in Jerusalem.

We read in 1 Kings 12:26-32, "Jeroboam said in his heart, 'Now the kingdom will return to the house of David. If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will return to their lord, even to Rehoboam king of Judah; and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah.' So the king consulted, and made two golden calves, and he said to them, 'It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt.' He set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. Now this thing became a sin, for the

people went to worship before the one as far as Dan. And he made houses on high places, and made priests from among all the people who were not of the sons of Levi. Jeroboam instituted a feast in the eighth month on the fifteenth day of the month, like the feast which is in Judah, and he went up to the altar; thus he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves which he had made. And he stationed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made."

What Jeroboam did was actually quite similar to what Aaron did in Exodus 32.<sup>20</sup> William Nicoll writes of King Jeroboam, "He never dreamed either of apostatizing from Jehovah, or of establishing the worship of idols. He broke the Second Commandment under pretence of helping the people to keep the first. The images which he set up were not meant to be substitutes for the one God, the God of their fathers, the God who had brought them from the land of Egypt; they were regarded as figures of Jehovah under the well understood and universally adopted emblem of a young bull, the symbol of fertility and strength."<sup>21</sup> Additionally, the first city where Jeroboam set up worship for the Lord was Bethel, which

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20. Exodus 32, .

21. William R. Nicoll, "The Expositor's Bible Commentary: 1 Kings 12," .

means 'house of God'. *Bet-el* is a shortened form of what the true temple at Jerusalem was called.<sup>22 23</sup>

Moving forward roughly 1,000 years, the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us. I've already spent a significant amount of time on this issue, so I won't belabor the point. However, it's important to remember that though every Jew around Jesus called the second temple God's temple or the Holy Place, Jesus was the true Holy Place. He was the true Holy of Holies and Temple of the Lord, even though a physical building was called by the same name.

That same physical structure remained for four more decades, during which time the New Testament authors referred to Christians as being the true temples of the Lord or temples of the Holy Spirit. Thus, from A.D. 30-70 a physical building existed known as the temple of God, which was actually not the temple of God, while the true temple of God, Jesus' born-again disciples, were thriving throughout the known world.

Finally, if another temple is erected in Jerusalem known as the temple of God, how should we as Christians understand it? Shouldn't we view it as a building that blasphemes who Jesus is and what He has done as our true High Priest and final sacrifice for sins? Shouldn't we understand it as an idolatrous and abominable structure?

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22. 2 Chronicles 3:3, .

23. [https://biblehub.com/interlinear/2\\_chronicles/3-3.htm](https://biblehub.com/interlinear/2_chronicles/3-3.htm)

In my opinion, Christians who support its construction may have noble intentions but are not in line with God's worldview on this matter.

## What Did the Early Christians Believe?

What about the early Christians? What did they believe concerning the coming great apostasy and man of lawlessness who will proclaim himself to be God in God's temple?

### The Didache

Since I have already discussed chapter 16 of *The Didache* (the first-century document known as *The Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations*), permit me to simply remind you of these sentences. "In the last days, false prophets and corrupters will multiply, and the sheep will turn into wolves, and love will be turned into hate. As lawlessness increases, men will hate and persecute and betray one another. And then the Deceiver of the world will appear as a son of God, and will do signs and wonders, and the earth will be delivered into his hands. He will commit abominations which have never been seen since the world began. Then all mankind will come to the fire of testing, and many will fail and perish."<sup>24</sup> Clearly, the early Church believed sheep (Christians)

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24. The Didache, 16, .

would turn into wolves in the days when the lawless one commits the abomination of desolation. However, this chapter leans much more upon Matthew than Paul, so let's move forward roughly 100 years to a document that directly cites 2 Thessalonians.

## Irenaeus

Earlier, we discussed how Irenaeus agreed with Paul in Volume 5, chapter 6 of his work, *Against Heresies*, that Christians are the temple of God.<sup>25</sup> However, later in volume 5, he discusses the Antichrist sitting in the temple of God by writing this:

"He wishes himself to be proclaimed as a king. For he (Antichrist) being endued with all the power of the devil, shall come, not as a righteous king, nor as a legitimate king, [i.e., one] in subjection to God, but an impious, unjust, and lawless one; as an apostate, iniquitous and murderous; as a robber, concentrating in himself [all] satanic apostasy, and setting aside idols to persuade [men] that he himself is God, raising up himself as the only idol, having in himself the multifarious errors of the other idols. This he does, in order that they who do [now] worship the devil by means of many abominations, may serve himself by this one idol, of whom the apostle thus speaks in the second Epistle to the Thessalonians: 'Unless there shall come a failing away first, and the man of sin

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25. Irenaeus, "Against Heresies: 5.6.2," .



shall be revealed, the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself as if he were God.' The apostle therefore clearly points out his apostasy, and that he is lifted up above all that is called God, or that is worshipped-that is, above every idol-for these are indeed so called by men, but are not [really] gods; and that he will endeavour in a tyrannical manner to set himself forth as God."<sup>26</sup>

In this quote, Irenaeus appears to call the Antichrist the embodiment of the abomination of desolation, suggesting there does not need to be any image or idol set up in a physical temple in Jerusalem. However, five chapters later, he adds another wrinkle to his eschatological thoughts.

"We will not, however, incur the risk of pronouncing positively as to the name of Antichrist; for if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been announced by him who beheld the apocalyptic vision. For that was seen ... towards the end of Domitian's reign. But he indicates the number of the name now (666), that when this man comes we may avoid him, being aware who he is. ... But when this Antichrist shall have devastated all things in this world, he will reign for three years and six months, and sit in the temple at Jerusalem; and then the Lord will come from heaven in the clouds, in the glory of the

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26. Irenaeus, "Against Heresies Vol. 5.25.1," .

Father, sending this man and those who follow him into the lake of fire."<sup>27</sup>

This passage is fascinating for several reasons. First, Irenaeus, who is in the spiritual lineage of the Apostle John, says he isn't going to waste time trying to figure out the name of the Antichrist. Also, he tells us that John wrote Revelation toward the end of the reign of Domitian, which would place it around A.D. 95. Next, he portrays the Antichrist as taking his place in a physical temple at Jerusalem, even though he believes, like Paul, that the Church is the temple of God. Finally, he cites Matthew 24 and 1 Thessalonians 4, where Jesus returns in the clouds, and Irenaeus shows this happening after the three-and-a-half-year reign of the Antichrist.

## Hippolytus

Like Irenaeus, Hippolytus also followed the spiritual tradition of the Apostle John. Around A.D. 205, he wrote a lengthy work called *A Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*, where Hippolytus described numerous ways the Antichrist will seek to replicate Jesus' ministry.

"Now, as our Lord Jesus Christ, who is also God, was prophesied of under the figure of a lion, on account of His royalty and glory, in the same way have the Scriptures also aforetime spoken of Antichrist as a lion, on account of his tyranny and violence. For the deceiver seeks to

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27. Irenaeus, "Against Heresies Vol. 5," 30, .

liken himself in all things to the Son of God. Christ is a lion, so Antichrist is also a lion; Christ is a king, so Antichrist is also a king. The Savior was manifested as a lamb; so he too, in like manner, will appear as a lamb, though within he is a wolf. The Savior came into the world in the circumcision, and he will come in the same manner. The Lord sent apostles among all the nations, and he in like manner will send false apostles. The Savior gathered together the sheep that were scattered abroad, and he in like manner will bring together a people that is scattered abroad. The Lord gave a seal to those who believed on Him, and he will give one (in) like manner. The Savior appeared in the form of man, and he too will come in the form of a man. The Savior raised up and showed His holy flesh like a temple, and he will raise a temple of stone in Jerusalem."<sup>28</sup>

First, notice the way Hippolytus leans on Isaiah 14:14, where Lucifer says in his heart, "I will make myself like the Most High." Also, two lines are of particular interest from this passage of *A Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*. First, as Jesus gave a seal to those who believed in Him, the Antichrist will give one in like manner. Also, like Irenaeus, Hippolytus believed the Antichrist would help rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.

Hippolytus continues, "Having the mystery of God in our heart, we ought in fear to keep faithfully what has been told us by the blessed prophets, in order that when

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28. Hippolytus, "Treatise on Christ and Antichrist," 6, .

those things come to pass, we may be prepared for them, and not deceived. For when the times advance, he (the Antichrist) too, of whom these things are said, will be manifested. ... For he will allure mankind to himself, wishing to gain possession of those who are not his own, and promising deliverance to all. ... He then, having gathered to himself the unbelieving everywhere throughout the world, comes at their call to persecute the saints, their enemies and antagonists. ... And he, being puffed up with pride by their subserviency, will begin to despatch missives against the saints, commanding to cut them all off everywhere, on the ground of their refusal to reverence and worship him as God."<sup>29</sup>

First, Hippolytus wrote that Christians need to prepare themselves for the persecution of the Antichrist so that they are not deceived. He did not say that Christians cannot be deceived, or that we would not be on the earth during the Antichrist's reign. Next, Hippolytus said one of the main goals of the Antichrist is to gain possession of those who are not his own. We either belong to the kingdom of darkness or the kingdom of God's Son.<sup>30</sup> So, how would the Antichrist gain possession or ownership of Christians? Hippolytus says the Antichrist will pressure believers to forsake Christ by promising them either deliverance or destruction; a tactic that has worked for

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29. Hippolytus, "Treatise on Christ and Antichrist," 50, 55-56, 58, .

30. Colossians 1:13, .

earthly rulers for thousands of years.<sup>31</sup> Paul alludes to the Antichrist's empty offer of security to his followers in 1 Thessalonians 5:3, "While they are saying, 'Peace and safety!' then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape."

## Cyprian

We previously discussed Cyprian Bishop of Carthage in the chapter about apostasy. In his 54th epistle, he discusses the Antichrist and how the mid-third century Church should respond if they encounter him.

"Antichrist, when he shall begin to come, shall not enter into the Church because he threatens; neither shall we yield to his arms and violence, because he declares that he will destroy us if we resist."<sup>32</sup>

Here, Cyprian says that the Antichrist, like Satan, cannot force his way into a believer or church. Thus, the Church should resist the Antichrist just as it is called to resist the devil, through humility and the spiritual weapons provided to us by the Lord. However, Cyprian

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31. If you'd like to see why that tactic didn't prove as effective on the early Church, consider reading my book, "Faithful Witness: The Early Church's Theology of Martyrdom," .

32. Cyprian, "Epistle 54," 19,

did think there is at least one scenario where it is possible for the devil to gain entrance into a Christian.

"When, however, they come to the water of salvation and to the sanctification of baptism, we ought to know and to trust that there the devil is beaten down, and the man, dedicated to God, is set free by the divine mercy. For as scorpions and serpents, which prevail on the dry ground, when cast into water, cannot prevail nor retain their venom; so also the wicked spirits, which are called scorpions and serpents, and yet are trodden under foot by us, by the power given by the Lord, cannot remain any longer in the body of a man in whom, baptized and sanctified, the Holy Spirit is beginning to dwell. ... It is manifest that the devil is driven out in baptism by the faith of the believer, and returns if the faith afterwards shall fail."<sup>33</sup>

In this, his 75th epistle, Cyprian describes the common early Christian belief that people were transferred out of the kingdom of darkness and brought into Jesus' kingdom at water baptism. However, Cyprian does say that the devil could return to that person if his or her faith should fail.

## **Victorinus**

Late third-century Christian writer, Victorinus of Pettau, produced a commentary on the book of Revelation

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33. Cyprian, "Epistle 75," 15-16, .

that is well worth your time. He does seem to lean toward what would eventually be called Amillennialism, which runs counter to Historic Premillennialism, the majority early Christian eschatological view. Regardless, when discussing the 13th chapter of Revelation, Victorinus appears to link aspects of Revelation 13, Matthew 24, and 2 Thessalonians 2.

"Hence here he places, and by and by here he renews, that of which the Lord, admonishing His churches concerning the last times and their dangers, says: 'But when ye shall see the contempt which is spoken of by Daniel the prophet standing in the holy place, let him who readeth understand.' It is called a contempt when God is provoked, because idols are worshipped instead of God, or when the dogma of heretics is introduced in the churches. But it is a turning away because steadfast men, seduced by false signs and portents, are turned away from their salvation."<sup>34</sup>

Victorinus writes that when Jesus spoke of the ultimate abomination of desolation event committed by the Antichrist, He was doing so to warn Christians. Victorinus then references the 'turning away' of steadfast men from their salvation through the seduction of false signs and portents. When placed in context, this is certainly the apostasy mentioned by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2, which occurs in connection with the revealing of the man of

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34. Victorinus, "Commentary on the Apocalypse of the Blessed John: From the Thirteenth Chapter," .

lawlessness in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.

## **John Chrysostom**

Though just outside the Ante Nicene period, I want to provide one additional reference from John Chrysostom. Chrysostom was born to pagan parents in Antioch of Syria in the year A.D. 349. At this point in history, Christianity was a legal religion, no longer a target of persecution, and receiving many favors from the Roman Empire. However, it would not be declared the official religion of the State for three more decades.

David Bercot writes, "A few years after his conversion, John Chrysostom was ordained as a deacon in the church of Antioch. Between the years 386 to 397, Chrysostom served as an elder or presbyter in the same church. During this period, he quickly established a reputation as one of the best exegetical teachers of his day. As a result, various listeners took down his sermons or homilies in shorthand and transcribed them."<sup>35</sup>

It is true that John Chrysostom spoke very harsh things about the Jewish religion. However, he was impartial in his calls for repentance toward Christians, Jews, pagans, and the wealthy. Bercot continues, "Chrysostom's uncompromising preaching against the vanities of the rich brought him into conflict with Eudoxia, the wife of the

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35. David Bercot, "John Chrysostom: An Introduction," .



eastern Roman Emperor. Eudoxia used her political power to eventually force Chrysostom out of office and have him sent into exile. ... In recent times, Chrysostom has come under fire for a series of sermons he gave against Judaism and Judaizing Christians. ... Although I won't defend the harsh tone of the sermons in question, what Chrysostom said is an uncomfortable truth for today: that Christ is the only way to salvation."<sup>36</sup>

What follows is an excerpt from his third sermon on 2 Thessalonians.

"'Let no man beguile you in any wise: for it will not be, except the falling away come first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, he that opposeth and exalteth himself against all that is called God or that is worshiped; so that he sitteth in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God.' Here he discourses concerning the Antichrist, and reveals great mysteries. What is 'the falling away?' He calls him Apostasy, as being about to destroy many, and make them fall away. So that if it were possible, He says, the very Elect should be offended. (From Matt. xxiv. 24) And he calls him 'the man of sin.' For he shall do numberless mischiefs, and shall cause others to do them. But he calls him 'the son of perdition,' because he is also to be destroyed. But who is he? Is it then Satan? By no means; but some man, that admits his fully working in him. For he is a man. 'And exalteth himself against all that is called God or is worshiped.' For he will

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36. *ibid.*

not introduce idolatry, but will be a kind of opponent to God; he will abolish all the gods, and will order men to worship him instead of God, and he will be seated in the temple of God, not that in Jerusalem only, but also in every Church."<sup>37</sup>

This quotation is a good example of Chrysostom's impartiality. Clearly, he believes Christians throughout the world are going to be deceived by the Antichrist. When he cites Jesus' words in Matthew 24:24, "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect," Chrysostom thinks, at the very least, the elect of the last days can be deceived. However, let us also take note of the way Chrysostom interprets Paul to see two fulfillments of this passage. First, he views the apostasy as being both a falling away of Christians from the faith and embodied in the person of the Antichrist. Also, he believes Paul to say that the temple of God, in which the Antichrist will sit, is both a physical structure in Jerusalem and every Church in the world. In the days of the Antichrist, the sheep will turn into wolves, and become like the ultimate wolf that they worship.

## **More Questions Ahead...**

We've come to the end of chapter seven. In the final two chapters of this book, I will address eight questions

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37. John Chrysostom, "Homilies on Second Thessalonians: Homily 3," .

that you, the reader, may have in response to what I have proposed. These are the questions:

1. Why is Satan doing these things?
2. Doesn't the Bible say that the elect cannot be deceived? If so, how can a great apostasy of Christians occur in the days of the Antichrist?
3. Satan is not omnipresent like God. Thus, how can the Antichrist sit in God's temple if God's temple is actually believers in Jesus?
4. Do we find these ideas in the book of Revelation?
5. If God is good, why would He allow this to happen?
6. Why does God judge evil?
7. Why is God so slow to judge evil?
8. What good can come out of a great apostasy occurring in Christianity?

# Chapter Eight

## Concluding Questions Pt. 1

Before addressing these final questions, I want to emphasize that I don't claim to have the corner on the truth. I don't claim to have special revelation from God. However, I arrived at these conclusions after much study, prayer, reflection, and dialogue, and I hope you will thoughtfully consider them.

### **1. Why is Satan doing these things?**

In chapter seven, we discussed Hippolytus' quote about the deceiver wanting to liken himself to the Son of God in all things. The Antichrist shares the same desires as his father, the devil, who, being deceived by his own envy once declared, "I will make myself like the Most High."<sup>1</sup> In chapter one, we described Satan's apostasy and fall, his realization that he can't defeat God, and

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1. Isaiah 14:4-15, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+14&version=NASB1995>

his relentless pursuit to deceive and corrupt beings who bear God's image.

Scripture demonstrates that the devil is very much aware of the Bible, and uses it to try to convince people to apostatize from God. Satan employed this very tactic in Matthew 4:5-7, where he quotes Psalm 91 to Jesus, twisting it in an attempt to get Jesus to sinfully put God to the test.<sup>2</sup> Though the devil failed to tempt our heavenly Bridegroom into joining his apostasy, his backup plan was to keep as many people as possible from becoming part of God's betrothed bride. During the last days, I believe the two primary targets of his attack will be Christians and Jews.

In Jesus' Olivet Discourse, He warns His followers that after they see the abomination of desolation, "then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. 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. Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There He is,' do not believe him. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect (Matthew 24:21-24)."

Here, Jesus says that in the days of the great tribulation, false Christs, prophets, and wonders will be unleashed to deceive the elect. Is He talking about elect Jews

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2. Matthew 4:5-7, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+4&version=NASB1995>

or Christians? Is He talking about Israel or the Church? According to Paul in Romans 9-11, Israelites and Gentiles who believe in Jesus as the promised seed of Abraham are the true spiritual Israel, with physical Israelites being the main vine onto which Gentile believers in Jesus have been grafted. Paul also says the Israelites that rejected Jesus as Messiah have been broken off that family tree; yet they too, in a sense, are elect (11:28-29). A common interpretation of this passage is that Paul holds a strong conviction that a significant portion of physical Israelites who do not currently believe in Jesus will eventually repent, receive Him, and be saved. The devil knows these passages and will expend a massive amount of energy seeking to deceive and destroy the elect in the last days.

Chris White writes in his book: *False Christ*, "The Antichrist will attempt to present himself as the Jewish Messiah and that he will try his best to appear as if he is instituting what Jewish believers know as the Messianic Age and what Christians know as the millennial reign. ... Everything we know about the Antichrist, such as his destruction of the enemies of Israel in Daniel 11:40-45, his seven-year covenant, his rebuilding of the temple and starting the daily sacrifice, his eventual stopping of the sacrifices and sitting in the temple to accept worship, his making Jerusalem the capital of the world, even his promotion by the False Prophet (who, I will argue, claims to be Elijah) points to the conclusion that his goal is to deceive the world into believing that the Messiah has come,

that the Messiah is in fact God, and that He deserves the worship of the world.”<sup>3</sup>

One of the primary ways that the Antichrist will deceive people is by appearing to fulfill Messianic prophecies. For instance, consider Zechariah 6:12-13, “Behold, a man whose name is Branch, for He will branch out from where He is; and He will build the temple of the Lord. Yes, it is He who will build the temple of the Lord, and He who will bear the honor and sit and rule on His throne. Thus, He will be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace will be between the two offices.”

Previously, we discussed how the New Testament authors view Jesus as fulfilling this prophecy, as our King/Priest who rebuilt the temple of His body at His resurrection. However, many Jews believe this prophecy to be saying that the one who builds the third temple in Jerusalem will be the actual Messiah. Sadly, many will be deceived and believe this lie, especially when this man of lawlessness backs up his divine claims with incredible false signs and wonders.

## **2. Doesn't the Bible say that the elect cannot be deceived? If so, how can a great apostasy of Christians occur in the days of the Antichrist?**

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3. Chris White, “False Christ,” Preface, <https://bibleprophecytext.com/books/false-christ/preface/#thesis-of-this-book>

I've heard these two questions posed many times. The supposition driving them comes from a particular interpretation of Matthew 24:24. However, does Matthew 24:24, or even the Bible as a whole, teach that the elect cannot be deceived?

Deuteronomy 7:6-8 is a wonderful passage that demonstrates Israel being elected or chosen by God to be His people. "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."

However, three chapters earlier, Moses warns God's elect people to keep watch so that they are not led astray. "So watch yourselves carefully, since you did not see any form on the day the Lord spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire, so that you do not act corruptly and make a graven image for yourselves in the form of any figure. ... And beware not to lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven (Deuteronomy 4:15-16, 19)."



Even though they are God's elect, they are still charged to keep watch over themselves so they are not drawn away into idolatry and rejection of the Lord. Unfortunately, as we have discussed throughout this book, Israel did not keep watch over themselves, was drawn away to worship the creation rather than the Creator, and a significant portion of God's elect people rejected Jesus as Messiah. When Jesus begins His Olivet Discourse, He says to His followers, "See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many (Matthew 24:4-5)."

The word 'mislead' in verses four and five come from the root, *planaó*.<sup>4</sup> It is the same word used in Matthew 24:24 concerning the enemy's desire to mislead or deceive the elect. Jesus does not comfort His chosen followers by instructing them to not worry about being deceived since they are the elect. Quite the opposite is true. In fact, it is because they are His chosen followers that He strongly warns them to make sure they are not led astray.

When we come to Matthew 24:24, Jesus has given His followers many warnings and several events to watch for so they will understand what is happening around them. He has given His disciples many resources to be able to resist the devil and stand firm in times of tribulation. R. T. France comments on verses 24-25, "Even the 'chosen people' may not be immune to such deceit, though the

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4. <https://biblehub.com/greek/4105.htm>.

addition of 'if possible' suggests that they, unlike the rest of the people in the city, have the spiritual resources to resist it. They have been forewarned (v. 25), and their memory of Jesus' miracles ought to enable them to see the difference."<sup>5</sup> Thus, it appears that the elect can be deceived if they do not rely on the resources provided to them by the Lord.

Do we see evidence of elect Christians being deceived or misled in the New Testament books outside of the Gospels? Let us recall Paul's purpose for writing 2 Thessalonians. "Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction (2 Thessalonians 2:1-4)."

Evidently, false teachers had come into the Church and convinced some members of the fellowship that Paul sent a letter asserting that the Day of the Lord had already come. Did Paul think his Thessalonian audience was of the Elect? He addressed his letter, "To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 1:1)." Though he proba-

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5. R. T. France, (New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Matthew," (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2007), ePub.

bly wouldn't affirm the election of the false teachers in Thessalonica, Paul clearly believed the members of the church's fellowship were chosen in Christ. Yet, it is evident that Paul believed these genuine Christians were in danger of being deceived and led astray.

An even more profound example of Paul's belief that Christians can be deceived is found in Galatians 3:1-2, where he writes, "You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed *as* crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?" Douglas Moo comments on this passage, "What has caused them to be so foolish? Witchcraft, Paul implies. Someone has "bewitched" them. ... While it is unlikely that Paul means to say that the Galatians are under a spell cast by a sorcerer, his choice of this word does suggest that the Galatians' turnaround in their thinking can only be explained by recourse to an evil spiritual influence."<sup>6</sup> Obviously, Paul believes many Christians in Galatia are being deceived.

Many portions of the book of Revelation are written in an Apocalyptic style, with John using imagery, symbolism, and numerology to convey his theological points. However, chapters two and three are epistles from Jesus to seven churches in Asia Minor, and we should read them as we read letters from Paul or Peter. In Revelation

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6. Douglas Moo, "Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Galatians, (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, 2013), 151.

2:19-21, Jesus says to the church in Thyatira, "I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first. But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds."

Notice that Jesus rebukes the church for allowing a false prophetess named Jezebel to deceive and mislead His bond-servants into committing acts of sexual immorality and idolatry. The term 'bond-servant' is one of the primary ways New Testament writers identify themselves. Paul, Peter, James, Jude, and John all refer to themselves as bond-servants of Jesus. Yet, the Lord says the false prophetess of Thyatira deceives and misleads His bond-servants into committing sin which will bring about God's judgment, unless they repent. Clearly, Jesus believes it is possible for the elect to be led astray by spiritual enemies, and those who do will incur judgment from the Lord.

We see God bring judgment upon those who reject the truth and cling to falsehood in our primary passage of 2 Thessalonians 2. After warning believers of the coming apostasy and abomination of desolation, Paul writes about the Antichrist and his followers, "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; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders 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. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness (2 Thessalonians 2:8-12)."

Again, Paul references the Olivet Discourse, as he says the lawless one will be operating, "with all power and signs and false wonders." This runs parallel with Matthew 24:24, "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect." However, in 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul expands on Jesus' words by saying these signs and wonders will occur, "with the activity of Satan," and, "with all the deception of wickedness (9-10)." It's almost as if the devil is playing every card he has to destroy God's image-bearers.

However, Paul goes even further in describing the coming great deception. For those who reject the gospel and embrace the lawless one, God Himself, "will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness." These words have a familiar ring to Romans 1:18, 22-25. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who sup-

press the truth in unrighteousness. ... For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen."

In his *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*, Hippolytus describes Jesus' judgment upon the world at His second coming as being a fulfillment of Romans 1:18. "These things, then, being to come to pass, beloved, and the one week being divided into two parts, and the abomination of desolation being manifested then, and the two prophets and forerunners of the Lord having finished their course, and the whole world finally approaching the consummation, what remains but the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ from heaven, for whom we have looked in hope, who shall bring the conflagration and just judgment upon all who have refused to believe on Him. ... 'For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth of God in unrighteousness.'"<sup>7</sup>

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7. Hippolytus, "Treatise on Christ and Antichrist," 64, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/history/early-church-fathers/ante-nicene/vol-5-third-century/hippolytus/part-ii-dogmatical-and-historical.html>.

In the days of the Antichrist, those who suppress and exchange the truth of God for a lie (the man of lawlessness), will be given a strong deception by God Himself. He will make sure these idolaters are strengthened in their chosen deception. This applies to everyone, even those of the elect community. We must endure in our faith to the end. Thus, the overwhelming testimony of the Bible is that God's elect people can be misled and deceived.

Consider the many doctrines about which Christians passionately disagree. Are believers in Jesus raptured before a literal seven-year tribulation, or will believers remain on earth until the Lord's visible return? Is Jesus' second coming before or after His 1,000-year reign? Is the 1,000-year reign of Christ literal or figurative? Did God determine and cause every aspect of history before creation, or does genuine human and spiritual free will exist within God's sovereign rule? Was the universe created in six literal days, or is the universe billions of years old? Is the doctrine of once-saved-always-saved accurate, or can genuine Christians apostatize and renounce their inheritance of everlasting life?

These are only a handful of issues that frequently divide Christians, and both sides of each issue cannot be simultaneously true. If we hold to the belief that God's elect cannot be deceived, then we must be consistent in saying that those who are wrong are not God's elect. One can take that stand, but will inevitably end up looking foolish as any honest Christian will at some point look back on his or her time as a believer and say, "I was misled about that aspect of doctrine." If one is consistent, one

must then conclude that he or she was not actually a Christian during that time. What a mess!

In light of the truth that the elect can be deceived, let us heed the exhortation of the writer of Hebrews 3:12-14, "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end." Sin is a deceiving force in the world that leads astray both Christians and nonChristians. Especially in these last days, we followers of Jesus need to make good use of the innumerable resources available to us in the body of Christ and lean on each other so that we can hold our confidence and assurance firm until the end.

### **3. Satan is not omnipresent. Thus, how is it possible for the Antichrist to sit in God's temple if God's temple is actually believers in Jesus?**

In chapter 6, I discussed how the Bible portrays Christians as being symbolically betrothed or engaged to Jesus, not married yet. Satan attempted to draw Jesus, the Bridegroom, into committing idolatry and apostasy in the wilderness, but was defeated. However, if he can get the betrothed bride to divorce her Bridegroom, that's a



consolation prize he will gladly take, but it must be done legally. Remember that the only biblical reason for divorce to occur is marital unfaithfulness. Thus, if believers fall into temptation and choose to worship the Antichrist, they can legally divorce Jesus and make a covenant with the devil.

If you recall, a picture of this eschatological event occurred thousands of years ago, when the many leaders of the people of God literally forsook Him and made a covenant with death. During the reign of King Hezekiah, a secret group of leaders in Judah made a covenant with death and Hades. They thought their abominable pact would remain hidden as they steered the nation away from the Lord. The prophet Isaiah spoke of this apostasy in Judah's leadership 100 years earlier when he wrote, "Hear the word of the Lord, O scoffers, who rule this people who are in Jerusalem, because you have said, 'We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we have made a pact. The overwhelming scourge will not reach us when it passes by, for we have made falsehood our refuge and we have concealed ourselves with deception.'"<sup>8</sup> These things have been written for our instruction.<sup>9</sup>

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8. Isaiah 28:14-15, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+28&version=NASB1995>

9. 1 Corinthians 10:1-22, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+10%3A1-22&version=NASB1995>

I have previously hypothesized that when Paul says the lawless one will sit in the temple of God, the Antichrist will do more than stake his claim over many Christian gatherings worldwide. I think he will stake his claim over a multitude of apostate Christians who have forsaken the Lord and chosen to worship the Antichrist as their savior and king. Additionally, just as the Bible teaches we become like what we worship, *The Didache* states that in the last days, the sheep will turn into wolves. Also, in comparing the many similarities of Jesus' ministry to the Antichrist, Hippolytus wrote that just as Jesus gave a seal to those who believed in Him, the Antichrist will give one in like manner. The Holy Spirit, Jesus' seal for His followers, changes believers into His image from glory to glory.<sup>10</sup> Will the Antichrist's seal, or mark, somehow change his worshippers into his image-bearers?

In Genesis 3:15, we see what is referred to as the Protoevangelion, or the first gospel.<sup>11</sup> The Lord says to the Serpent, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel." We often focus on the seed of the woman

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10. 2 Corinthians 3:17-18,

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+3%3A17-18&version=NASB1995>

11.

[https://www.christianity.com/jesus/is-jesus-god/old-testament-prophecies/what-is-the-protogospelion.html](https://www.christianity.com/jesus/is-jesus-god/old-testament-prophecies/what-is-the-protogospel-m-protogospelion.html)

but neglect that the Lord said that the serpent would be able to produce offspring as well. This promise from the Lord is most likely why many angels left their proper abode, intermarried with human women, and produced offspring which the Bible calls the Nephilim.<sup>12</sup> Half of the DNA of these first-generation hybrid creatures came from their angelic parents, which is why 1 Enoch says that upon their death, those hybrid beings became evil spirits or demons.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, there is a biblical precedent for angels being able to insert their DNA into humans. The Protoevangelion tells us that Satan will also give his seed to a man, who will then share his DNA. Dr. Douglas Hamp discusses how modern medicine has already produced chimeric humans, "Three months after his bone marrow transplant, Chris L. of Reno, Nevada discovered that 'the DNA in his blood had changed. It had all been replaced by the DNA of his donor, a German man.' Then four years after the bone marrow donation, he discovered 'swabs of his lips and cheeks contained his DNA – but also that of his donor.' The biggest shock was that "all of the DNA in his semen belonged to his donor.' The researchers concluded that Chris 'had become a chimera, the technical

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12. Genesis 6:1-4, <https://www.biblegateway.com/pass-age/?search=Genesis+6&version=NASB1995>

13. 1 Enoch, 15,  
<http://wesley.nnu.edu/sermons-essays-books/noncanonical-literature/noncanonical-literature-ot-pseudepigrapha/book-of-enoch/>

term for the rare person with two sets of DNA.’ The team monitoring Chris stated: ‘We were kind of shocked that Chris was no longer present at all.’<sup>14</sup> Chris, the man, did not go away, but genetically he did.”<sup>15</sup>

Hamp continues, “In like manner, Satan could transmit his DNA into the man of his choosing. Thus, when this DNA transfer occurs, the man becomes what the Bible calls ‘The Beast’ or the ‘Son of Perdition.’ Satan’s DNA becomes the Beast’s; The Beast becomes a god—Satan’s avatar. ... Their fates become intertwined, or symbiotic; Satan’s power, throne, and authority are the Beast’s.”<sup>16</sup> Perhaps this is another reason why the man of lawless proclaims himself to be god. He actually becomes like the god of this world.<sup>17</sup> Then, those who worship him and take his mark will perhaps undergo a similar process of becoming like what they worship.

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<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/dna-bone-marrow-transplant-man-chimera-chris-long-forensic-science-police-a9238636.html>

15. Dr. Douglas M. Hamp, “Corrupting the Image III: Singularity, Superhumans and the Second Coming of Jesus,” (Eskaton Media Group, 2022, pdf.), 48-49.

16. *ibid*, 49.

17. 2 Corinthians 4:4,  
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2%20Corinthians%204%3A4&version=NASB1995>

I don't pretend to know how that transfer of DNA and subsequent transformation will ultimately take place; however, one possibility could be the use of gene editing technology such as CRISPR/Cas9. Hamp writes, "Once Satan has merged with the Beast into his Avatar with hybridized DNA, ... the next step is to make this same genetic advancement available to everyone on a mass scale. Using the tools of CRISPR/Cas9, the hybridized gene would need to be extracted from the Beast, and then deciphered and replicated billions of times. ... To fundamentally alter a person's humanity, the new hybridized DNA would need to change the person's DNA on the germline level, that is the cells that pass on information to the next generation of cells. The new DNA replicates and virtually overrides the original. ... A person must want the change, and therefore take it as an act of worship offered to the Beast."<sup>18</sup>

As many authors have pointed out, Jesus said in Matthew 24:37, "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah." In those days, the human genome had been so corrupted that there were only a handful of pure image-bearers left. In response, God brought a cataclysmic judgment upon the world. Perhaps, a similar situation will play out in the days of the Antichrist's rule. If that is the case, though Satan would not have his spirit within billions of people, his DNA would be present in them physically. Concerning those

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18. *ibid*, 96-97.

who divorce Jesus, make a covenant with the Antichrist, and take his mark, he can thus claim to declare himself to be their god in God's former temple. However, just as in the days of Noah, catastrophic judgment will overtake the Antichrist, his false prophet, and their followers. They will become like what they worshipped, burning with the devil in the lake of fire and brimstone.<sup>19 20 21</sup>

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19. Revelation 14:9-10,  
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+14&version=NASB1995>

20. Revelation 19:11, 16,  
20, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+19&version=NASB1995>

21. Revelation 20:10  
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+20%3A10&version=NASB1995>

# Chapter Nine

## Concluding Questions Pt. 2

### **4. Do we find the ideas of 2 Thessalonians 2 in the book of Revelation?**

#### **Revelation 1**

In 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul describes events that must take place before the Lord Jesus returns and His people are gathered to Him. John, the author of the book of Revelation, first describes Jesus' return in Revelation 1:7-8. "Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen. 'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.'"

Here, John quotes Daniel 7:13-14, where one like a Son of Man comes upon the clouds of heaven and approaches the Ancient of Days. "I kept looking in the night

visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven one like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed."

Additionally, John cites Zechariah 12:10, where the Lord God says, "I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn." In his Gospel, John says this literally happened when Jesus was nailed to the cross. In Revelation, he says this passage from Zechariah will find its ultimate fulfillment at Jesus' return.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, John again emphasizes Jesus' divinity when he calls Jesus the Alpha and the Omega who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty. He cites Isaiah 44, where the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts says in verses 6-8, "I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides Me. Who is like Me? Let him proclaim and declare it; yes, let him recount it to Me in order, from the time that I established the ancient nation. And let them declare to them the things that are

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1. John 19:36-37, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+19&version=NASB1995>



coming and the events that are going to take place. Do not tremble and do not be afraid; have I not long since announced it to you and declared it?" He is coming back just like He said He would.

## **Revelation 3**

The first time John explicitly mentions God's temple is in Revelation 3:11-12, where Jesus tells the Church of Philadelphia, "I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name." This instruction is given to believers, which is why Jesus tells them to hold fast to what they already have. While they are currently God's people, they must overcome and stay faithful to the end in order for the promises made to them to find their permanent positive fulfillment.

G. K. Beale writes about this passage, "The four promises Christ now gives to the one who overcomes are really (as in 2:17) four aspects of the one promise. Writing upon him the name of my God, the name of the city of My God, and My new name are all expressions of eternal union with God and fellowship with His presence. Note that the name of the city of God in Ezek. 48:35 is 'the Lord is there.' It is the place of the presence of God and the location of His temple, which brings us to the

fourth element in the promise, that Christ will make the overcomer a pillar in the temple of My God. ... This line of thought in which Jesus' followers persevere through tribulation and are then rewarded with the presence of God and Christ in the temple is also found developed in 7:14-17. In fact, the believer's permanent identification with the temple in v. 12 is the consummation of the process which began with Christ unlocking the doors of the invisible sanctuary of salvation to them, as expressed in vv. 7b-8a."

John describes an already/not yet dynamic for believers in all seven of these churches. They are His people, but must overcome in order to experience the fullness of grace promised to followers of Jesus. Though they are currently God's temple, they must endure in their faith and remain in Christ to the end of their lives in order to become permanent fixtures in the temple of God. As Beale mentioned above, we see the fulfillment of this promise made to the seven churches in Revelation 7.

## **Revelation 7**

John writes in Revelation 7:9-10, 13-15, "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.' ... Then one of the elders an-

swered, saying to me, 'These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?' I said to him, 'My lord, you know.' And he said to me, 'These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them.'"

Keener comments on the tabernacle language used in this passage, "God's tabernacle as a refuge over them directly echoes Isaiah 4:5-6, which in turn alludes to a new exodus of salvation in the future time. When God redeemed his people from Egypt and they wandered in the wilderness (the time commemorated in the Feast of Tabernacles; see comment on Rev 7:9-12), he made such a cloud over them as Isaiah describes. Revelation also borrows the language of Isaiah 49:10 (again the salvation of the future age); cf. Psalm 121:5-6. What differs from Isaiah 49:10 here is that God's people now include representatives of many nations (Rev 7:9) and that the lamb fills the divine role."<sup>2</sup> It appears that these believers are experiencing the blessings of Jesus' promise made to believers in Philadelphia, for they are now permanent residents of His heavenly temple.

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2. Craig S. Keener. "The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament," (IVP Academic: Downers Grove, 2014), ePub.

## Revelation 11

The already/not yet reality for Christians seems to occur again in Revelation 11:1-2. John writes of God's temple, "Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, 'Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it. Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months.'" John is clearly citing Ezekiel's vision of God's temple in Ezekiel 40-47, yet he also brings in elements of Daniel 7:25 and 12:7, where God's people are persecuted by a powerful adversary for what are most likely three-and-a-half years.<sup>3</sup>

John appears to make a distinction between believers who are already fully within God's heavenly temple, and Christians who have not yet finished their earthly race (those in the court). Those inside the heavenly temple cannot be trampled upon by the nations, but those who are still in the court must remain faithful through tribulation. Is John saying that God's temple on earth, the followers of Jesus, will be persecuted by adversarial forces in the last days? Alan Johnson believes this to be the case. "While to take the temple in this verse (11:1) as representing the church in the Great Tribulation is not without problems, this seems the best view. ... To

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3. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Daniel+7%3A25%2C+12%3A7&version=NASB1995>

sum up, John's words 'given to the Gentiles' refer to the defiling agencies that will trample down the outer court of the church, leading either to defection from Christ or physical destruction."<sup>4</sup>

G. K. Beale agrees with Johnson, "In 11:1, the focus is now on the whole covenant community dwelling in a spiritual temple in which God's presence dwells (so also 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21-22; 1 Pet. 2:5). ... Christians, who are identified with Christ, are also presently identified with the temple. Without exception, "temple" (Greek *naos*) elsewhere in Revelation refers not to a literal or historical temple, but either to the heavenly temple of the present (7:15; 11:19; 14:15, 17; 15:5-6, 8; 16:1, 17) or to the temple of God's presence dominating the new age of the future (3:12; 21:22). ... If the temple signifies the church dwelling in the midst of Christ's and God's presence, the outer court (which is part of the temple) must therefore represent the church in its exposure and vulnerability to the world system in which it lives."<sup>5</sup>

It is true that the Church has been experiencing tribulation since its beginnings.<sup>6</sup> However, Jesus says the

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4. Alan F. Johnson, "The Expositors Bible Commentary: Revelation," (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1981), 501-502.

5. G. K. Beale, "Revelation: A Shorter Commentary," (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2015), ePub.

6. See Revelation 1:9, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+1&version=NASB1995>

persecution which occurs after the abomination of desolation event will bring about tribulation greater than anything in human history. "For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will (Matthew 24:21)." As is often the case in the Olivet Discourse, Jesus is pulling this teaching from Daniel 12:1, "And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time."

## **Revelation 12**

What has prevented this great persecution of believers from occurring? Paul answers this question in 2 Thessalonians 2:5-7. After describing the man of lawlessness declaring himself to be God in God's temple, Paul writes, "Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way." Paul says a restraining influence, which is a 'he', must first be taken out of the way.

In his masterful work on 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Colin Nicholl uses Paul's main Old Testament source to explain who this restrainer is. "That the author of 2 Thessalonians is dependent on Daniel in his portrayal of the man of lawlessness is indicated by his allusion to Dan. 11:36-7 in 2 Thess. 2:4a and by his reference to a final, literal desecration of the Jerusalem temple in 2 Thess. 2:4b,

which is rooted in Daniel's prophecies (Dan. 9:27; 12:11; cf. 8:13; 11:31). ...We propose then that Michael could legitimately have been viewed as a celestial restrainer, on the basis of Daniel 10–12, and indeed that there is good reason to conclude that he was thought of by at least some contemporaries of the author of 2 Thessalonians in precisely this way."<sup>7</sup>

Daniel 12:1 links the Michael the archangel arising with the worst period of tribulation in human history. We read, "Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time." Of this passage, Chris White comments, "Many see this verse as a reference to Michael standing up, in the sense of getting ready to defend Israel during the 'time of trouble' that immediately follows this phrase. But this is a problematic interpretation. One reason is because if that is his mission, to protect them, then he fails at it. ... This time is linked to the same period described by Jesus in Matthew 24:15-22. If this is the case, then the very moment that Michael tries to protect them, he loses more of them than ever before in history. Such a conclusion is unlikely to be true. Contextually, it would appear more likely that

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7. Colin R. Nicholl, "From Hope to Despair in Thessalonica: Situating 1 and 2 Thessalonians," (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2004), 232-233, 236.

Michael's 'standing up' is what allows the 'time of trouble' to begin."<sup>8</sup>

In Revelation 12, John also connects the actions of Michael with what appears to be a three-and-a-half-year period of great wrath from Satan and great persecution upon the followers of Jesus.

"And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war, and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, 'Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night. And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death. For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time.' And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted

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8. Chris White, "Daniel (A Commentary) by Chris White," 12, <https://bibleprophecytext.com/books/daniel/chapter-12/>



the woman who gave birth to the male child. But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. ... So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus (Revelation 12:7-14, 17)."

Returning to the book of Daniel, in 12:1 we are given a clue as to when Michael the restrainer will be taken out of the way. "Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time." Daniel says, "at that time." What time? Remember, there were no chapter breaks in the original manuscripts of the Bible. Thus, we need to look at what previously occurred in Daniel 11:45, the verse immediately before chapter 12. Speaking of the great end-times enemy, Daniel writes, "He will pitch the tents of his royal pavilion between the seas and the beautiful Holy Mountain; yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him."

According to Daniel, the Antichrist is going to come to his end before this great period of tribulation. However, Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 that the man of lawlessness won't ultimately be defeated until Jesus returns. "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." Thus, many people

believe that the Antichrist will be killed, in some way resurrect from the dead, and then unleash the greatest persecution of God's people in human history.

## **Revelation 13**

In Revelation 13, the Antichrist is described as having been slain, yet recovering from that mortal wound. "And the dragon 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. And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority. I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed (Revelation 13:1-3a)."

Of the resurrection of the Antichrist, Chris White writes, "We should take a moment to consider the theological problem the resurrection of the Antichrist poses. I do not believe that Satan has the power to raise the dead, but at the same time, I don't see any way around the many verses that say the Antichrist really dies; it just doesn't seem to allow for a fake death to me. I recommend the paper, 'Can Satan Raise the Dead? Toward a Biblical View of the Beast's Wound' by Gregory H. Harris to anyone who's interested in this subject. To sum the paper up, it seems that God is the one who resurrects

the Antichrist for the purpose of condemning those who do not believe the truth.”<sup>9</sup>

White then connects this idea to Paul’s prophetic words in 2 Thessalonians 2:11, “For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.” Whether God is the one directly responsible for resurrecting the Antichrist, or whether it happens through some other means, this event is the main way the Antichrist attempts to prove that he is not only the Messiah, but also God. In my opinion, this is the culmination of what is often called the great deception.

We noted in chapter seven that Irenaeus alluded to the Antichrist being the embodiment of the abomination of desolation. In a later portion of the same work, he says the Antichrist embodies the apostasy, and appears to suggest that the Antichrist himself is the lie that Paul says many people will believe in the last days. “The apostle says: ‘Because they received not the love of God, that they might be saved, therefore God shall also send them the operation of error, that they may believe a lie, that they all may be judged who have not believed the truth, but consented to unrighteousness.’ For when he (Antichrist) is come, and of his own accord concentrates in his own person the apostasy, and accomplishes whatever he shall do according to his own will and choice, sitting

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9. White, “False Christ,” 7.

also in the temple of God, so that his dupes may adore him as the Christ. ... God by His prescience foreseeing all this, and at the proper time sending such a man, 'that they may believe a lie, that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but consented to unrighteousness.'"<sup>10</sup>

Paul writes in 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10 that the lawless one's, "coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, 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." As stated earlier, it appears that Paul is saying the Antichrist will play every card he has to deceive the world (particularly believers), into worshipping him as God. As the embodiment of apostasy, the Antichrist will most likely be possessed by Satan himself, similar to the way Judas became possessed by the devil in John 13:27.

Also akin to Judas is the terminology used by Paul about the lawless one in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, where he calls him, "the son of destruction." The word 'destruction' is *apóleia*, which is also translated as 'perdition'. Jesus uses *apóleia* this way in John 17:12, where he calls Judas the son of perdition. The idea is that the one who would betray Jesus is doomed for destruction. Jesus elaborates on this idea in Matthew 26:24, "The Son of Man is to go,

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10. Irenaeus, "Against Heresies Vol. 5," 28,

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/history/early-church-fathers/ante-nicene/vol-1-apostolic-with-justin-martyr-irenaeus/irenaeus/book-v.html>

just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born." Thus, Judas serves as a type of the greater son of perdition, the Antichrist. He also serves as a picture of a sheep becoming a wolf.

With that background in mind, Revelation 17:7-8 depicts the Antichrist, like Judas, as being destined for destruction. "And the angel said to me, 'Why do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns. The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction.'" This is the same beast as John describes in Revelation 13:1, which also has seven heads and ten horns. This is the Antichrist, the lawless one, the ultimate son of destruction.

Unlike Judas, the Antichrist will be operating with all the power of Satan to turn as many people as possible against Jesus and His followers. Revelation 13:3b-8 describes this situation well. "And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast; they worshiped the dragon 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?' There was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him. And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, that is, those who dwell in heaven. 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. All who dwell on the earth will worship him.”

John appears to say that after the resurrection of the Antichrist, the whole world is amazed and worships him. He is then given the authority to rule for 42 months or three-and-a-half years. The New American Standard Bible says that during this time, the Antichrist will open, “his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, that is, those who dwell in heaven.” Beale comments on this verse, “The equation of the saints with the heavenly tabernacle is virtually the same as the equation already in 11:1-2 of true believers living on earth and dwelling in the invisible, indestructible sanctuary of God. Paul similarly views the whole church as seated in heaven (Eph. 2:6; Col. 3:1). The saints are oppressed because loyalty to their heavenly citizenship demands disobedience to their earthly citizenship.”<sup>11</sup>

In Revelation 13:6, John draws from Dan. 7:25-27, which says, “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.” Interestingly, in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament and the Bible that Jesus and the Apostles used), Daniel 7:25 says that the Antichrist will mislead

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11. Beale, “Revelation,” ePub.

God's holy people.<sup>12</sup> The word translated as 'mislead' is a derivative of *planaó*, which is the same word used in Matthew 24:24, "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect."

Again, I believe that the main motivation of the Antichrist is to deceive the elect, which is why he appears to have a ministry so similar to that of Jesus. Beale makes this point in his commentary on Revelation. "Note the parallels between Christ and the beast: both were slain and rise to new life (5:6 and 13:3), both have followers with their names written on their foreheads (13:16 and 14:1), both have horns (5:6 and 13:1), both have authority over every 'tribe, tongue, people, and nation' (5:9; 7:9 and 13:7; 17:12, 15), both receive worldwide worship (5:8-14 and 13:4, 8), and both have a final coming or manifestation, though one is to destruction and the other to eternal victory (17:7-18). The beast's career is thus a kind of parody of Christ's death and resurrection."<sup>13</sup>

However, after his resurrection, Revelation 13:11-15 tells us that the Antichrist will work together with an individual known as the false prophet (Rev. 19:20) to do something similar to that of Antiochus Epiphanes in the

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12. <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/apostolic/daniel/7.htm>

13. G. K. Beale and David Campbell, "Revelation: A Shorter Commentary," (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2015), ePub.

second century B.C. There, John writes that this false prophet, “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. 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.”

The word ‘image’ derives from the Greek *eikón*, which is the same word Paul uses in Romans 1:22-23, “Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man.” Basically, the false prophet attempts to lead the world to worship the Antichrist, who is claiming to be the Jewish Messiah, by breaking the second commandment.<sup>14</sup> This is very similar to the heinous sin Aaron committed in Exodus 32, where he led Israel to break the second commandment in a festival to the Lord. Though many people will fall for this deceptive act of idolatry, this will hopefully serve as a major wake-up moment for many sincere Jewish people!

Like Moses descending the mountain to see Aaron and the people engaged in abominable idolatry, I think that this may be the big event where many Jews begin to realize that Antichrist is not the messiah, but rather the man of lawlessness. For the sincere Jews, this will

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14. Exodus 20:4-6, “ <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exodus+20&version=NASB1995>



probably be viewed as an abomination of desolation moment that causes them to cry out for deliverance from the true Messiah, Jesus. Perhaps, this will be the moment when Zechariah 12:10 begins to find its ultimate fulfillment, "I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn."

As Jesus prophesied to the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem in Matthew 23:39, "For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'" However, like the Hebrews crying out for deliverance from the new cruel Pharaoh of Egypt, their situation will get much worse before it gets better. Finally, though, at the end of the Antichrist's three-and-a-half-year reign, the Lord will slay the lawless one with the breath of His mouth and bring the Antichrist and his false prophet to an end by the appearance of His coming.

During those three-and-a-half years, I believe Christians will play a crucial role in helping sincere Jews turn to Jesus. We previously discussed Daniel 11:32-35, which discusses the events that will take place in Christendom after the abomination of desolation event. Speaking of the Antichrist, Daniel writes, "By smooth words he will turn to godlessness those who act wickedly toward the covenant, but the people who know their God will display strength and take action. Those who have insight

among the people will give understanding to the many; yet they will fall by sword and by flame, by captivity and by plunder for many days. Now when they fall they will be granted a little help, and many will join with them in hypocrisy. Some of those who have insight will fall, in order to refine, purge and make them pure until the end time; because it is still to come at the appointed time.”<sup>15</sup>

Here, Daniel says that though some of God's people will be deceived and fall into hypocrisy, others will help people come to know Him. As Revelation 12:11 says, followers of Jesus will overcome the devil, "because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death." In the last days, Satan and his Antichrist will expend a massive amount of their energy seeking to separate Israel from Jesus. However, faithful Christians who willingly give their life for the sake of unbelieving Jews will play a vital role in helping many come to know Jesus.

That is the testimony of the early Church. As Justin Martyr wrote in A.D. 160 in his *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*, "Now it is evident that no one can terrify or subdue us who have believed in Jesus over all the world. For it is plain that, though beheaded, and crucified, and thrown to wild beasts, and chains, and fire, and all other kinds of torture, we do not give up our confession; but the

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15. Daniel 11:32-35,

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Daniel+11%3A32-35&version=NASB1995>

more such things happen, the more do others and in larger numbers become faithful, and worshippers of God through the name of Jesus. For just as if one should cut away the fruit-bearing parts of a vine, it grows up again, and yields other branches flourishing and fruitful; even so the same thing happens with us.”<sup>16</sup> Or, as Tertullian wrote in his *Apology* in A.D. 197, “The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed.”<sup>17</sup>

## Revelation 19

We read in 2 Thessalonians 2:8, “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.” Revelation’s most obvious parallel to Paul’s account of the destruction of the Antichrist at Jesus’ second coming is found in Revelation 19, a passage I briefly mentioned in the last chapter.

First, John describes Jesus’ return, “And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He

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16. Justin Martyr, “Dialogue of Justin: Philosopher and Martyr, with Trypho, a Jew,” 110, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/history/early-church-fathers/ante-nicene/vol-1-apostolic-with-justin-martyr-irenaeus/justin-martyr/dialogue-of-justin.html>

17. Tertullian, “The Apology,” 50, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0301.htm>

judges and wages war. His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, 'KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS (Revelation 20:11-16.)'

Then in verses 19-20, John focuses on the destruction of the Antichrist and False Prophet by the presence of Jesus. "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. 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." For two other passages which, to a lesser degree, parallel 2

Thessalonians 2:8, see Revelation 6:12-17 and Revelation 11:15-19.<sup>18 19</sup>

## **5. If God is good, why would He allow this to happen?**

Yes, God is good. David writes in Psalm 86:5, "For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon You." In Psalm 119:68, the writer says, "You are good and do good; teach me Your statutes." Out of God's goodness, He made humanity in His image and to display His image to the world. According to the early Christians, one aspect of being made in God's image involves possessing free will.

In A.D. 180, Irenaeus wrote in book four of his work, *Against Heresies*, "God made man a free [agent] from the beginning, possessing his own power, even as he does his own soul, to obey the behests of God voluntarily, and not by compulsion of God. For there is no coercion with God, but a good will [towards us] is present with Him continually. ... God therefore has given that which is good, as the apostle tells us in this Epistle, and they who

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18. Revelation 6:12-17,  
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+6%3A12-17&version=NASB1995>

19. Revelation 11:15-19,  
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+11%3A15-19&version=NASB1995>

work it shall receive glory and honour, because they have done that which is good when they had it in their power not to do it; but those who do it not shall receive the just judgment of God, because they did not work good when they had it in their power so to do. ... But because man is possessed of free will from the beginning, and God is possessed of free will, in whose likeness man was created, advice is always given to him to keep fast the good, which thing is done by means of obedience to God.”<sup>20</sup> C. S. Lewis said it well of this incredible gift from God, “Free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having.”<sup>21</sup>

With free will comes deserved rewards and punishments. Some of those consequences become visible in this lifetime, while others are fulfilled after we die. Two biblical principles that display these God-designed universal laws are 1: we reap what we sow,<sup>22</sup> and 2) we

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20. Irenaeus, “Against Heresies: Book 4,” 37, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/history/early-church-fathers/ante-nicene/vol-1-apostolic-with-justin-martyr-irenaeus/irenaeus/book-iv.html>

21. C. S. Lewis, “Mere Christianity,” (Macmillan Publishing Company: New York, 1986), 37.

22. Galatians 6:7-9, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galatians+6&version=NASB1995>

become like what we worship.<sup>23 24</sup> These are incredible opportunities with which God has graced us. Those who end up conformed to the image of Jesus receive exactly what they most longed for. Those who end up conformed to the image of the Antichrist receive exactly that for which they most longed as well. Additionally, those who endure with Christ will reign with Him, while those who cling to the Beast descend with him into destruction. We reap what we sow, and we become like what we worship.

## **6. Why does God judge evil?**

Pay attention to what makes you angry. Sometimes, your anger is the result of your own sinful desires; however, at other times it is due to witnessing the occurrence of injustice. A drunken driver puts others' lives at risk. A corrupt judge lets a murderer of multiple people out on bail and back into the community he just ravaged. When the rich, popular, and powerful are treated with unequal scales, injustice rightly produces a cry for justice to be done. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 says, "The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will

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23. Psalm 135:15-18,  
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+135%3A15-18&version=NASB1995>

24. 1 John 3:1-3, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+John+3&version=NASB1995>

bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil." Put simply, the reason God judges evil is because He is a good judge.

It's interesting that while we judge God for not punishing others for the evil they have done, we also judge Him at the thought of being punished in the future for the evil we have done. We want God to be just in His treatment of others, but merciful toward us. The good news is that God is both just and merciful. John 3:16-21 beautifully displays the justice and mercy of God in the midst of the corrupt human race.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."

Will you come into the light and believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ? He has mercifully taken the condemnation you deserve so that



you can be made justified in the Lord's sight. Our God is a good judge.

## **7. Why is God so slow to judge evil?**

Persecuted Christians don't seem to have a problem with the doctrines of hell and judgment. They don't ask why God judges evil; they often ask why God takes so long to judge evil. We see a variation of this question in Revelation 6:9-10, "When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?'"

These martyred saints reflect the prayer of the prophet Habakkuk, who cries out to the Lord, "How long, O Lord, will I call for help, and You will not hear? I cry out to You, 'Violence!' Yet You do not save. Why do You make me see iniquity, and cause me to look on wickedness? Yes, destruction and violence are before me; strife exists and contention arises. Therefore the law is ignored and justice is never upheld. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore justice comes out perverted. ... Are You not from everlasting, O Lord, my God, my Holy One? ... Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You can not look on wickedness with favor (Habakkuk 1:2-4, 12-13)."

It's true. A good God will not allow wickedness to remain forever. A good God will deal with sin, oppression,

and injustice. A good God will avenge the persecution of His people. Paul clearly details these truths in 2 Thesalonians 1:6-10, "For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day."

A just judge rightly punishes evildoers. However, because God is good, He mercifully gives people time to repent. Peter explains this dynamic in his second letter, "Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.' ... But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:3-4, 7-9)."

With the martyred saints under the heavenly altar in Revelation 6, we too must wait, "a little while longer, until

the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also (Revelation 6:11)." But we wait in hope, knowing that, "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28)." And, "'For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us (Romans 8:36-37)."

## **8. What good can come out of a great apostasy occurring in Christianity?**

Two major themes of this book are that history repeats itself and God is not partial. What follows is not something I would be dogmatic about, but something I would like you to consider. In Jesus' day, the vast majority of Jews rejected Jesus as Messiah and were thus removed from being spiritual descendants of Abraham. However, in Romans 11 Paul says this mass falling away of Jews was necessary so that the Gentiles could be grafted into God's family.

Paul writes of the Jews of his generation, "I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then

as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead (Romans 11:11-15)?”

Later in Romans 11, Paul strongly warns Gentile Christians about the real danger of being cut off from Christ due to unbelief. Then he states that Jews who currently do not believe in Jesus as Messiah can be grafted back into God’s family if they will repent and believe in Jesus. He then appears to say that a large number of Jews will in fact repent and believe in Jesus in the last days. “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 fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, ‘The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob.’ ‘This is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins (Romans 11:25-27).”

“All Israel will be saved,” is a contentious phrase that does not have a clear, obvious interpretation. Does it mean that every Jew alive on earth will be saved when the Deliverer comes from Zion? Will every Jew in the history of humanity be saved? Are only a remnant of living Jews going to be saved when Jesus returns, completing the full number that God foreknew would receive Him? Is Paul using ‘Israel’ to describe the full number of believers, whether physically Jews or Gentiles, that will be saved? Does Paul have something completely different in mind?

I believe that in the end, after the last of the Gentiles receive Jesus as their Lord, a remnant of sincere physical Israelites (perhaps symbolized by the 144,000 of Revelation 7:1-8) will also turn to faith in Jesus as the Messiah. A historical correlation could be made to Ezekiel 9:4, where just before Jerusalem and Solomon's temple are destroyed, God instructs an angel to place a mark of protection, "on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst." This sincere remnant of physical Israelites will rejoin spiritual Israel, which is made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus, with the Jewish segment being the 'root'.

If we combine this great last days repentance of the Jews with the great last days apostasy within the Church, an amazing display of symmetry unfolds. In Jesus' first advent, there was a great apostasy of Jews and a great ingathering of Gentiles. In Jesus' second advent, will there be a great apostasy of Gentiles and a great ingathering of Jews? It is a tragedy that so many Christians will fall away in the days of the Antichrist. However, if the angels rejoice over one sinner who repents, words can't describe the celebration that will be the marriage supper of the Lamb when all Israel is saved!

However things end up playing out, please remember these three things: history repeats itself, we become like what we worship, and there is no partiality with God. So, fear the Lord Jesus Christ and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment is coming very soon. Worship Him.

# Epilogue

In Revelation 21:1-4, John is given a vision of a renewed and restored creation, which has many similarities to the pre-curse nature of Eden in Genesis 2. We read, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. 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, 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.'"

Much could be discussed here, but notice that as it was in Eden, God again tabernacles and dwells among humanity. There is no more death or suffering, and there will no longer be any alienation from the Lord, for His followers will forever be His people. Thus, the world is Edenic again, yet better. Verses 22-23 of the same chapter display the same dynamic, "I saw no temple in it, for

the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb." As it was in Eden, there is no temple building, for the city has become a temple. It is where the Lord Himself dwells. However, the New Jerusalem has surpassed Eden, for due to the Lord's literal, glorious presence in its midst, there is no need for the sun's light.

In the coming of the New Jerusalem, we see the final fulfillment of Zechariah 2:10-12. "Sing for joy and be glad, O daughter of Zion; for behold I am coming and I will dwell in your midst," declares the Lord. 'Many nations will join themselves to the Lord in that day and will become My people. Then I will dwell in your midst, and you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent Me to you. The Lord will possess Judah as His portion in the holy land, and will again choose Jerusalem.'"

Revelation 19:7 has an interesting connection to chapter 21, for John writes, "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." Remember, chapter 21:2-3 said, "I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. 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.'" The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb have now become the holy city's temple, and God's people from every tongue, tribe, and nation now have their glorified,

transformed bodies that are able to enjoy the fullness of fellowship with the Lord as He eternally dwells among them. Thus, the glorious bride shines just like the glorious new Jerusalem and our glorious Lord.

Also, Jesus' High Priestly prayer in John 17:22-23 is finally answered in full, "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity." It is no wonder the angel showing this vision to John tells him to write, "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb."<sup>1</sup> This will be the greatest wedding celebration of all eternity!

In light of this glorious future awaiting those who endure in their faith to the end, I find it prudent to briefly discuss four things we followers of Jesus can do to prepare ourselves for the great deception that is soon coming upon the world.

## **1. Spend more time thinking about eternity.**

It has been said that we should guard ourselves from becoming too heavenly-minded, lest we become no earthly good. However, I believe the Apostle Peter would push back against such teaching. He implores us in his first epistle, "Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the

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1. Revelation 19:9, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+19&version=NASB1995>



grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:13)."

Peter is not using the word 'grace' here to mean unmerited favor. He is speaking more about the incredible wedding gifts Jesus gives His bride when He returns. Resurrected and glorified bodies. Death, the devil, and sin will be defeated. No more tears. No more loss. Eternal, unfathomable fellowship with the King of kings. Peter tells us to place our hope completely upon what our Lord will do when He returns. Our problem is not that we are too heavenly-minded, it is that we are too earthly-minded.

The author of Hebrews exhorts his readers in a manner similar to Peter's, "But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised." They, like us, needed to remember the love they had at first when they focused more on what is unseen and waiting in heaven, where thieves cannot break in and steal. Sorrow may last for the night, but unending joy will come in the morning.

## **2. Watch out for Constantines and Augustines.**

By 'Constantines', I refer to political leaders promising God's people peace, safety, and prosperity. As we covered in chapter five, this is basically what transpired within the Church of the early fourth century, and they fell for it hook, line, and sinker. These political messiahs encourage Christians and non-Christians alike to fix our hope completely on the grace that the State can give us, and many renew that hope and allegiance every two-to-four years. By falling for these little Constantines, we condition ourselves to receive the ultimate Constantine, the Antichrist.

By 'Augustines', I mean spiritual leaders who have made their bed with the State, and use Scripture to justify the mistreatment of others for the good of the State. For the most part, Augustine wrote and taught like an Ante Nicene Christian from his conversion in A.D. 386 until A.D. 411. However, that year, Rome was sacked by the Visigoths under King Aleric, which sent shockwaves throughout the empire.

Robert Holmes writes, "The fall of Rome in 410-411 was a calamity of staggering proportions to the citizens of the Roman Empire. Civilization itself had been shaken to its foundations. ... Hadn't critics warned for years that Christians' pacifism would weaken the empire? Didn't this confirm the fears that Christianity was too other—worldly for its followers to be responsible citizens of the state? Though church and state had worked together for nearly

a century (since the conversion of Constantine), Augustine still felt that he needed to establish once and for all that Christians could in conscience assume the full obligations of citizenship, including participation in warfare."<sup>2</sup> This was a major undertaking by Augustine, considering that the early Church stood in direct opposition to his goals.

We see Augustine begin to develop his theology of Just War in his enormous work, *City of God*. However, Augustine's extreme perversion of Jesus' teachings was on full display in his *Letter 185*, which he penned in the year A.D. 416 about the Christian splinter group known as the Donatists. The Donatists were a group of North African Christians around the time of Constantine who left the Catholic Church for several reasons, one being they believed in the separation of Church and State.<sup>3</sup> Augustine implored the Donatists to return to the Catholic Church, but they refused. Eventually, Augustine had enough and wrote that if the Donatists wouldn't repent willingly, the Church should literally torture them until they changed their mind.

He writes, "There is a righteous persecution, which the Church of Christ inflicts upon the impious. ... It is indeed

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2. Robert Holmes, "War - How Good Christians Can Be Good Citizens," <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/what-would-augustine-say>

3. David Bercot, "The Donatists," <https://www.scrollpublishing.com/store/Donatists.html>

better (as no one ever could deny) that men should be led to worship God by teaching, than that they should be driven to it by fear of punishment or pain; but it does not follow that because the former course produces the better men, therefore those who do not yield to it should be neglected. For many have found advantage (as we have proved, and are daily proving by actual experiment), in being first compelled by fear or pain, so that they might afterwards be influenced by teaching, or might follow out in act what they had already learned in word. ... While those are better who are guided aright by love, those are certainly more numerous who are corrected by fear.”<sup>4</sup> To Augustine, the ends justify the means, even if the means are torture and murder. After all, we’re trying to build the city of God.

Beware of Constantines and Augustines. They seem like your friends, but they are your enemies. Eventually, those types will find their fulfillments in the Antichrist and False Prophet.

### **3. Humbly Pray**

On the night He would be betrayed, Jesus warned His disciples in the upper room, “You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, ‘I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered.’ ... But Peter said to Him, ‘Even though all may fall away

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4. Augustine, “Letter 185,” 2.11, 6.21, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102185.htm>

because of You, I will never fall away.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Truly I say to you that this very night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.’ Peter said to Him, ‘Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You.’ All the disciples said the same thing too (Matthew 26:31-35).” They were all quite confident in their ability to remain faithful, even though Jesus warned them they were all being targeted by the devil himself. Luke records Jesus telling them, “Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat (Luke 22:31).”

Matthew describes what transpires next, “Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, ‘Sit here while I go over there and pray.’ And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed. Then He said to them, ‘My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me.’ And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will (Matthew 26:36-39).”

In the Garden of Gethsemane, we see Jesus basically having a panic attack. Matthew says he began to be grieved (*lupeó*), which is first used in Genesis 3:16 in the Septuagint to describe the agony of giving birth to a child.<sup>5</sup> Jesus then reveals to Peter, James, and John what is going on inside of Him, saying that He is deeply grieved to the point of death. The words ‘deeply grieved’ are *per-*

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5. <https://biblehub.com/greek/3076.htm>

*ilupos*, which means to be overwhelmed with sorrow.<sup>6</sup> If you've ever felt the emotional eruption of a panic attack, embrace the truth that Jesus can fully empathize with you.

However, notice how Jesus deals with this emotional onslaught of agony. First, He immediately tells His closest friends exactly what He's going through. Then, He asks them to pray (keep watch) with Him. Next, He falls down on His face and draws near to His Father in an incredible display of authenticity, trust, and submission. Matthew states that after pouring His heart out to His Father, Jesus arises to find His three closest friends sleeping instead of praying. "So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour? Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak (Matthew 26:40-41)."

Here Jesus reminds them of the warning He gave earlier in the evening. Satan had asked to sift all of them as wheat, yet, they evidently felt taking a nap would be more beneficial than prayer in resisting the devil. Jesus, however, went humbly back to His Father in prayer twice more before His betrayer arrived with the Roman cohort. In contrast to their previous boasts, Peter and the other disciples quickly fell into temptation there at Gethsemane. However, our faithful High Priest, who called upon His Father in His time of trouble, was able to resist the devil. May we walk as Jesus walked.

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6. <https://biblehub.com/greek/4036.htm>

#### 4. Receive the love of the truth.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12, Paul writes that the Antichrist's, "coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, 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. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness." Here, Paul says that in the days of the Antichrist, God will send a deluding influence upon people who 1) did not receive the love of the truth, and 2) did not believe the truth.

The Koine Greek root word translated 'receive' in this passage, *dechomai*, carries a word picture of hospitably welcoming someone into your home.<sup>7</sup> Jesus repeatedly uses this term in Matthew 10 when sending out His apostles to proclaim the kingdom of heaven. "He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward (Matthew 10:40-41)."

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7. <https://biblehub.com/greek/1209.htm>

According to Paul, the Thessalonians believers originally received the Word of God this way. He writes, "You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ... For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come (1 Thessalonians 1:6-7, 9-10)."

Here, we see what receiving the love of the truth looks like. It looks like repentance. We turn to God and away from idols. We serve the Lord God and place our hope fully on the grace to be brought to us at the return of Jesus Christ. Paul uses the word *dechomai* again in the next chapter to again affirm the Thessalonians' reception of the truth. "For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out (1 Thessalonians 2:13-15)."

In this passage, we see that receiving the love of the truth means treating God's word for what it is. The word



of God. It is not just wise sayings for living well. It is not the mere thoughts of men. It is God's word, and we should treat it that way. God's word is worth enduring suffering and loss. It is worth enduring ridicule and shame. "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field (Matthew 13:44)." That is what it looks like to receive the love of the truth.

Receiving the love of the truth is not equivalent to pointing out deception. Imagine that someone sets before you both a counterfeit and actual dollar bill, and says they are gifts for you to take. Merely distinguishing between the two does not constitute reception of the gift. You must actually take possession of what is true. Loving and receiving the truth is not equivalent to writing Christian books, recording podcasts, or making documentaries that expose deception. We can spend so much time pointing out errors that we neglect to actually welcome and internalize God's truth for ourselves.

A picture of this unfortunate dynamic is found in Luke 10. Luke records that Jesus' cousin, Martha, "had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word. But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, 'Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me.' But the Lord answered and said to her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only one thing

is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her (Luke 10:39-42)."

To be clear, serving Jesus is a good thing. Pointing out errors is a good thing. However, one thing we see in this passage is that a consuming drive to do good things for Jesus can cause us to neglect the most important thing: worshipping Jesus. The book of Revelation is not so much a book about eschatology as it is about the proper response to Jesus' divinity. The book of Revelation is about worshipping God.

It begins with Jesus' best friend on earth seeing Him in His glorified state. What was John's response? "When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man."<sup>8</sup> The picture of the word translated as 'fall' (*piptó*) is of a man prostrated on the ground in worship.<sup>9</sup> In fact, the first time *piptó* is used in the New Testament is when the magi worship the newborn Jesus in Bethlehem.<sup>10</sup>

After John receives the final vision in chapter 22, we again are shown the primary purpose of the book and of our lives. "And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. But he said to me, 'Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and

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8. Revelation 1:17, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+1&version=NASB1995>

9. <https://biblehub.com/greek/4098.htm>

10. Matthew 2:11, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%202&version=NASB1995>

of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God (Revelation 22:8-9).” The purpose of the book of Revelation, and the purpose of our lives, is clearly stated here. We are created to worship God.

What do you worship? Whom do you worship? For better or worse, we become like what we worship. So, be like Mary in Luke 10. Sit at the Lord’s feet, receive the love of the truth, and worship Jesus. He is coming quickly, and His reward is with Him.

# About the Author

Phil Baker lives in Texas with his wife, two children, and two dogs. He is the host of the podcast *Reclaiming the Faith*, and the author of the books *Faithful Witness: The Early Church's Theology of Martyrdom* and *New: Wineskins and the Simple Words of Christ*. He has also produced several albums of original songs.

To find links to all of Phil's resources, please visit his website at [philsbaker.com](http://philsbaker.com)

The earliest Christian document outside of the New Testament is almost certainly *The Didache*, which is also known as *The Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations*. In its final chapter, the author says that in the last days, the sheep will turn into wolves and the Deceiver of the world will commit abominations that have never been seen since the world began. Is this what Paul had in mind when he wrote 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12?

In *The Final Abominable Temple*, Baker traces the ideas of God's temple, abominations, and apostasy through the Scriptures. He also discusses how the earliest Christians thought and wrote about these themes. By doing so, we get a better understanding of what Paul believed would come upon the world and the Church in the times of the Antichrist. Finally, Baker highlights several ways to stay faithful to Jesus in the days when the sheep become wolves.

# WHEN SHEEP BECOME WOLVES



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