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“YOUR HOUSE IS LEFT TO YOU DESOLATE”:
THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM AND THE VINDICATION OF JESUS

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Introduction

There has been a growing interest and consensus in NT scholarship around the idea of "inaugurated eschatology," that the kingdom of God has already been inaugurated with the advent of Jesus Christ but is not yet in its final, consummated state. Much work has been done in the fields of biblical theology and typology to show that the eschatological hopes of the OT (e.g. a restored kingdom, the end of exile, the new exodus, a new covenant, the coming of the Spirit, the new temple, the defeat of evil and Israel's enemies, the resurrection and new creation) had begun to be fulfilled in the life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus.¹ From his interaction with the disciples on the Emmaus road we see that Jesus himself understood all of Israel's Scriptures to be about him (Lk. 24:25-27, 44-47) and that he was bringing Israel's story to a climax. France sums up this Christ-centered view of the OT well:

Jesus saw his mission as the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures; not just of those which predicted a coming redeemer, but of the whole sweep of Old Testament ideas. The patterns of God's working which the discerning eye could trace in the history and institutions of Israel were all preparing for the great climax when all would be taken up into the final and perfect act of God which the prophets foretold. And in the coming of Jesus all this was fulfilled. That was why he could find 'in *all* the scriptures the things concerning himself'.²

In other words, eschatology is Christology. To rightly understand God's purposes of salvation and judgment in history, we must begin with and center on Christ.

¹ See Gregory K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012); Chris Bruno, Jared Compton, and Kevin McFadden, *Biblical Theology According to the Apostles: How the earliest Christians told the story of the Old Testament*, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 52, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2020); R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament: His Application of Old Testament Passages to Himself and His Mission* (1971; repr. Vancouver, B.C.: Regent College Publishing, 1998); James M. Hamilton, *Typology: Understanding the Bible's Promise-Shaped Patterns* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2022); Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016); Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008); N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1992).

² France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, 79-80, emphasis original.

While we are quick to recognize that God’s purposes of salvation have begun to be realized, the same attention has not been given to how God’s purposes of *judgment* have also begun to be fulfilled because of Christ’s kingdom-inaugurating life, death, and resurrection. We know that the bodily resurrection of Jesus is proof that the new creation has broken into the present age (1 Cor. 15:20-23). His ascension and the success of his gospel are a sign of his exaltation and saving reign. Thus, it seems reasonable to expect an event in history to serve as a sign that Christ has also begun to put his enemies under his feet, specifically those who persist in their rejection of him and opposition to his church (1 Cor. 15:24-25). As Richard Hays observes, both in the OT and the gospels, “the theme of *eschatological restoration* is inextricably interwoven with the theme of *inbreaking judgment*.”³

It is my contention that the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70 is a fitting counterpart to the exaltation of Jesus as a sign of his inaugurated kingdom. According to Jesus, this was an act of vengeance (Luke 21:22) on the city that did not know the time of its salvific visitation (Luke 19:44), rejected Jesus and shed the blood of His church (Matt. 23:35; Luke 13:34-35), and was guilty of unbelief, hypocrisy, and corruption. Yet, this event remains largely overlooked, neglected, and deemed irrelevant to redemptive history.⁴ Several scholars have drawn attention to the significance of this event, most notably R. T. France, Peter Leithart, R. C. Sproul, Peter W. L. Walker, and N. T. Wright.⁵ But overall, when it comes to the fulfillment of

³ Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, 19.

⁴ James M. Hamilton Jr., who has written extensively in the field of biblical theology and typology, recently posted on a social media site: “What changed everything [in redemptive history] was the incarnation...and the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus, when the veil was rent, the tomb was empty, and the Spirit was poured out. AD 70 is irrelevant.” James M. Hamilton Jr. (@DrJimHamilton), X, July 20, 2023, <https://x.com/DrJimHamilton/status/1682075077678972943>.

⁵ See France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*; Peter J. Leithart, *Revelation*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, vols. 1-2, *The International Theological Commentary* (London; Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018); R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days according to Jesus: When Did Jesus Say He Would Return?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015); P. W. L. Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City: New Testament Perspectives on Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids:

any NT passage about judgment, we often make a mortar shot to the final days of history, ignoring any potential instance of fulfillment leading up to that point.⁶

A good example of how the destruction of Jerusalem is neglected in evangelical scholarship is seen in the ESV Study Bible note on Matthew 16:28. Here, Jesus tells his disciples, “Truly I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”⁷ The study note by Micheal Wilkins argues that the immediate context indicates the transfiguration is primarily in view. Wilkins rightly goes on to say that “at the same time,” the resurrection, the coming of the Spirit, and the growth of the church through the preaching of the gospel “are also quite possible, *for they are all instances where Jesus ‘came’ in the powerful advance of his kingdom, which was partially but not yet fully realized.*”⁸ However, when it comes to the destruction of Jerusalem, Wilkins says this view “is less persuasive because the judgment on Jerusalem does not reflect the positive growth of the kingdom.”⁹ But if a general reference to the manifestation of Christ’s kingly reign is in view, then the destruction of the city which opposed and rejected Jesus could certainly be indicative of his kingdom coming in power along with the other more “positive” options.

Eerdmans, 1996); N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1996).

⁶ This metaphor comes from Mark S. Gignilliat, *Reading Scripture Canonically: Theological Instincts for Old Testament Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019) 31 n. 23.

⁷ All Bible references are to the English Standard Version (ESV) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016).

⁸ Michael J. Wilkins, “Matthew”, *The ESV Study Bible, Personal Size* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 1856, emphasis mine. Carson takes a similar view in D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew–Mark (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 432-434.

⁹ Ibid. See also Fred Zaspel, “Preterism: Has All Prophecy Been Fulfilled?”, The Gospel Coalition, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/preterism-prophecy-fulfilled/>. Zaspel does several things which deserve commendation. First, he distinguishes between “full” and “partial” preterism (the former being the focus of his essay, the latter being the focus of this paper). Second, he argues that the Messianic age of fulfillment has been inaugurated. Third, he rightly concludes that that AD 70 is not the climatic consummation of *all* biblical prophecy. However, Zaspel fails to see AD 70 as an initial fulfillment and sign of the final judgment.

Thesis

In this paper I will argue that the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70 is a theologically significant event in redemptive history that is foundational to New Testament eschatology. The cumulative evidence will show that this event must be understood along with the resurrection, the coming of the Spirit, and the growth of the church as an eschatological sign that the kingdom has been inaugurated, that the old covenant order has come to an end, that Jesus truly is the Christ and cornerstone of a new temple, and that God's plans and purposes of salvation for the world are now located in Christ and his church.

This argument will be advanced in three sections. The first section will demonstrate that the theme of judgment on Jerusalem was central to the OT prophets and Jesus' own prophetic ministry. The second section will contend that this event served as the culmination of God's judgment on Israel and the vindication of the Son of Man. In the third and final section I will argue that this event is a sign of the end of the old covenant order and also a sign of the final eschatological judgment. To conclude, I will briefly consider several implications of understanding this event as significant for eschatology.

Ultimately, my aim is to provide a more robust understanding of the profound impact that Jesus had on the role of Jerusalem and its temple in redemptive history. If the Bible is all about Jesus Christ, and if the eschatological hopes of Israel have begun to be fulfilled in the advent of Israel's Messiah, then the theological significance of Jerusalem and its temple must be re-evaluated in light of his kingdom-inaugurating life and ministry.

Judgment on God's House: A Central Theme of the Prophets

In this section we will consider judgment on Jerusalem as a central theme of both the OT prophets and Jesus' own ministry. I will argue that Jesus is not only in line with the OT prophets but brings their ministries to a climax in his prophetic messages, actions, and predictions.

Judgment on Jerusalem in the OT Prophets

It is hard to overstate the significance of Jerusalem and its temple. It was the heart and symbol of Israel's religious, political, and economic life, a microcosm of the entire cosmos.¹⁰ The temple was on Mt. Zion, "the mountain of the house of the Lord" (Isa. 2:1-4). According to Ezekiel, Jerusalem was set "in the center of the nations" and at the "center of the earth" (Ezek. 5:5; 38:12). And yet, messages of imminent judgment for Jerusalem and its temple are a major component of the prophetic writings. Promises of redemption and future glory are all set against the backdrop of this judgment on Israel. The prophets were clear that Jerusalem, like all the other nations, was not exempt from God's judgment. Israel's utter disregard for Yahweh, evidenced in their idolatry, hypocrisy, corruption, and oppression, would result in catastrophic disaster for the holy city. The day of the Lord would not only come for Babylon (Isa. 13:6-9), Egypt (Jer. 46:10), and Edom (Obad. 15), but for Israel as well (Amos 5:18-20; Ezek. 7).

The OT prophets use a wide variety of images to describe the seriousness of Jerusalem's sin. Jerusalem had become a whore (Isa. 1:21), a faithless bride (Ezek. 16), a city like Sodom and Gomorrah (Isa 1:10), and an Egyptian prostitute (Ezek. 23). The city was a fruitless vineyard (Isa. 5), a useless vine (Ezek. 15), a barren and withered fig tree (Jer. 8:13) that only produced bloodshed and abominations. If Israel continued to defile God's house and turn the temple into a

¹⁰ A comprehensive discussion of the symbolism and significance of the temple can be found in G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 17 (England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2004) 29-50.

den of robbers (Jer. 7:8-15); if they continued to stiffen their necks (Jer. 7:25-27), God would forsake his house and make it desolate, just like the sanctuary at Shiloh in the days of Eli and his wicked sons (Ps. 78:60; Jer. 12:7; 22:5; 44:1-6; Ezek. 5:11-14; 6:14; 12:20; 15:8; 23:33).

The prophets also employed apocalyptic imagery to describe the magnitude of the holy city's desolation. Hosea says the inhabitants of Israel "shall say to the mountains, 'Cover us,' and to the hills, 'Fall on us'" when the Lord comes in judgment (Hos. 10:8). Jeremiah describes it as a tragic reversal of creation: "I looked on the earth, and behold, it was without form and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light. I looked on the mountains, and behold, they were quaking" (Jer. 4:23-24). Like the ten plagues of Egypt, the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple was seen as an act of de-creation.¹¹

But the good news is that, though the generation alive at the time of the prophets would face judgment (Jer. 7:29), the Lord would not make a full end of his people. Isaiah and Malachi saw that the Lord would come to his temple again to judge his people who had become his enemies, but the end would only be the beginning for Mount Zion (Mal. 3:1-2; Isa. 66:1-11). According to Barry Webb, "The death-throes of Israel as it existed under the old covenant turn out to be the birth-pangs of the new age."¹²

Judgment on Jerusalem in Jesus' Ministry

Any careful study of the Gospels will reveal that Jesus regarded his ministry as not only in continuity with the OT prophets but also bringing their work to a climax in his announcement

¹¹ See the discussion of apocalyptic language in N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 4, *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 165-175. When Jerusalem was destroyed in 587 BC, Jeremiah was vindicated as a true prophet even though the world did not come to an end.

¹² Barry Webb, *The Message of Isaiah: On Eagles' Wings*, ed. J. A. Motyer and Derek Tidball, *The Bible Speaks Today* (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 248.

of the arrival of the kingdom.¹³ Like the “prophets of old” before him (Mark 6:15; Matt. 16:14), Jesus came to God’s people not only with a message of salvation but with prophetic messages, actions, and predictions of imminent judgment if the nation did not repent.¹⁴

Prophetic Messages: Warnings and Woes

Part of Jesus’ prophetic ministry included denunciations of Israel’s religious leaders and warnings of impending disaster for the nation (Matt. 11:20). In his parable of the vineyard Jesus condemns the religious leaders as tenants who fail to provide the owner with fruit and instead kill his beloved son (Matt. 21:3-46; Mark 12:1-12). Speaking to the chief priests and elders, Jesus says, “Therefore I tell you, *the kingdom of God will be taken away from you* and given to a people producing its fruits” (Matt. 21:43, emphasis mine). Similarly, in the parable of the wedding feast, the king destroys and *burns the city* of those who refuse to attend the wedding feast for his son, choosing to kill his messengers instead (Matt. 22:1-10).¹⁵

In Matthew 23 Jesus issues his most vehement criticisms of the scribes and Pharisees through a series of woes. They had become corrupt hypocrites, greedy blind guides, men of lawlessness, stumbling blocks to the kingdom of heaven, and children of hell (Matt. 23:1-31). After the final woe, Jesus speaks emphatically about the finality of judgment that they would experience. Because they were a brood of vipers that persecuted God’s people and prophets, all the blood of the saints shed on earth would come *upon them* (Matt. 23:32-36).

¹³ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 166-168.

¹⁴ For an excellent survey of Jesus as prophet, see Alistair I. Wilson, *When Will These Things Happen?: A Study of Jesus as Judge in Matthew 21–25* (Milton Keynes; Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2004).

¹⁵ The parables of the tenants and the talents (Matt. 25:14-30), which are both about a master returning to his servants, are not primarily about the second coming but Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem, which he saw as “*the symbol and embodiment of YHWH’s return to Zion*” Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 639.

Throughout the gospels, Jesus uses the phrase “this generation” to refer to his contemporaries as those who failed to recognize and respond to God’s messengers (Matt. 11:16; 12:39, 41, 42, 45; 16:4; 17:17). Like the OT prophets before him, his prophetic ministry was primarily for the people alive in his day, the people to whom he was sent (John 1:9-11; cf. Jer. 7:29). This is made especially clear in Luke when Jesus says the Son of Man “must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation” (Luke 17:24-25). He is not speaking about a future generation of unbelievers, nor is he speaking generically about a particular *class* of unbeliever.¹⁶ Rather, the emphasis is on *his* generation; he is speaking to the faithless and twisted generation of Jews alive in his day who opposed, rejected, and wanted to destroy him, and who would do the same to his disciples.¹⁷ And just as Jeremiah promised that God’s house would become a desolation if Israel did not repent (Jer. 22:5), so Jesus warned his generation that their house would be left desolate and their temple destroyed (Matt. 23:38; 24:34).

Prophetic Actions: Cleansing and Cursing

Like the prophets Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, Jesus also carried out prophet actions which symbolized the judgment coming on Jerusalem and its temple. After his triumphal entry into Jerusalem as its long-awaited king, Jesus “went into the temple” and “looked around at everything” (Mark 11:11). Jesus is not a tourist, admiring the great buildings; he is Israel’s God who has suddenly come to his temple (Mal. 3:1). If a priest discovered a disease of mold spreading through a house, the house would be torn down (Lev. 14). I suggest this act was an

¹⁶ Of course, his warnings of judgment apply to those following in *that* generation’s footsteps.

¹⁷ Stephen picks up this theme when he accuses the same generation of not just being like the crooked and twisted wilderness generation, but also of betraying and murdering the long-awaited Righteous One (Acts 7:51-53). For a discussion of Stephen’s speech and its connection to the temple sayings of Jesus, see Steve Smith, *The Fate of the Jerusalem Temple in Luke-Acts: An Intertextual Approach to Jesus’ Laments over Jerusalem and Stephen’s Speech*, ed. Chris Keith, vol. 553, Library of New Testament Studies (London; Oxford; New York; New Delhi; Sydney: Bloomsbury T&T Clark: An Imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc; Bloomsbury, 2017), 140-189.

inspection of the temple, a “house” which had been contaminated beyond restoration by the current regime and would need to be dismantled until not one stone was left upon another.

The next symbolic action of the temple’s judgment is Jesus cursing a barren fig tree (Mark 11:12-14, 20-21). This action “sandwiches” the cleansing of the temple incident which shows that the unsuccessful search for figs and the cursing of the fig tree serve as a picture of God’s evaluation of Israel and his judgment of the temple (cf. Jer. 8:11-13). James Edwards concludes, “The leafy fig tree, with all its promise of fruit, is as deceptive as the temple, which, despite its religious commerce and activity, is really an outlaws’ hideout (v. 17).”¹⁸

The most significant prophetic action that Jesus performs is the event traditionally known as the “cleansing of the temple” (Mark 11:15-19). Upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that this was a sign of judgment. First, this event alludes to Hosea, where the prophet likens Israel to a fig tree and says that God will drive them out of his house (Hos. 9:10, 15). Second, Jesus calling the temple a “den of robbers” indicates the temple was as corrupt as in Jeremiah’s day (Mark 11:17; Jer. 7:11).¹⁹ Finally, the fact that the temple cleansing is sandwiched by the cursing and withering of the fig tree means “this was not an attempt at short-term reform of the system but a symbolic declaration of eschatological judgment.”²⁰

Another prophetic action which signaled the desolation of the temple, though not directly carried out by Jesus, was the tearing of the temple curtain at the moment of his death (Matt.

¹⁸ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 340.

¹⁹ See Nicholas Perrin, *Jesus the Temple* (Grand Rapids, MI; London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; Baker Academic, 2010), 98. “The historical evidence indicates that the temple regime of Jesus’ day had made a practice out of dipping into temple funds, extorting from lower-level priests, soliciting bribes, neglecting tithes, and grossly overcharging faithful Jews requiring temple services.”

²⁰ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2002), 438.

27:45-54; Mark 15:31-39; Luke 23:44-45). While this event is normally considered a sign of “open access to God”, Steve Smith persuasively argues that it is primarily a sign of the temple’s desolation and abandonment by God because each of the synoptic writers connects the tearing of the veil to a period of darkness over the land and the death and rejection of Jesus.²¹

Prophetic Predictions: Visitation and Vengeance

The prophetic messages and actions of Jesus inevitably led to predictions of Jerusalem’s desolation and the destruction of its temple (Mark 13:1-2). Because Jerusalem chose the way of violence against Rome and failed to recognize its divine visitation, the Lord would visit them in judgment (Luke 19:41-44). The temple, like the religious leaders who represented it, was a whitewashed tomb. It had become a rotting and corrupt religious system, and Jesus predicted that it would be utterly dismantled (Mark 13:1-2; Matt. 24:1-2), and that it would happen within a generation (Mark 13:30; Matt. 23:34).

The primary text for the prediction of Jerusalem’s destruction and the tribulation which accompanied it are found in the Olivet Discourse, which is arguably the most controversial passage in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). Scholars have fiercely debated how much of the discourse pertains to the destruction of Jerusalem, the second coming, and when (or if) the focus shifts between the two.²² While this paper cannot engage in a

²¹ Smith, *The Fate of the Jerusalem Temple in Luke-Acts*, 131-139. The tearing of the veil “represents the end of the separation between the holy of holies and the rest of the sanctuary, not as an open way to the divine, but as a negation of the special place of the holy of holies”, 137. However, I would argue that this event represented *both* judgment on the temple *and* open access to God for all as a result.

²² For a helpful catalog of scholars based on their views of the Olivet Discourse, see Robbie Booth, "First Jerusalem, Then Parousia: A Case for a Simple Preterist-Futurist Interpretation of Matthew 24-25" (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021), 110-115. The view argued in this paper most closely aligns with the views of Charles Quarles and R. T. France. See Charles Quarles, *Matthew*, Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2022); France, *The Gospel of Mark*; cf. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 339-368.

comprehensive exegetical analysis of the discourse, I want to suggest that the literary and canonical contexts necessitate the conclusion that Jesus is *primarily, though not exclusively*, speaking about the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70.

When we consider the *literary context* of the Olivet Discourse we see that Jesus' prediction of the temple's destruction in Mark 13:1-2 acts as a hinge in the narrative. It serves as an introduction to his discourse about the temple but also as the *conclusion* to his provocative actions in Jerusalem, his denunciation of the temple regime, and his lament over Jerusalem (Mark 11-12; Matt. 21-23). *This* is the context of the Olivet Discourse and the disciples' questions about "the end." The temple's destruction was such a theologically significant event that the disciples connected it to his "coming" and the end of the age (Matt. 24:3). And they were right—but Jesus replies in a way so as to extend their horizons (cf. Acts 1:6-8).

If we consider the *canonical context* of the Olivet Discourse, we discover echoes and allusions to the OT prophets and their messages of judgment on Jerusalem and the nations. For example, Jesus' departure from the temple to the Mount of Olives echoes Ezekiel's vision when God's glory departs from the city and rested on "the mountain that is on the east side of the city," which signified the temple being abandoned and left unprotected (Mark 13:1-2; Ezek. 10:18-19; 11:22-23). The language of unparalleled tribulation echoes Ezekiel's description of Jerusalem's fall at the hands of the Babylon (Ezek. 5).²³

Furthermore, the apocalyptic imagery of the sun being darkened, the moon not giving its light, stars falling from heaven, and the Son of Man coming on the clouds also comes from the OT prophets (Mark 13:24-27; Matt. 24:29-31). This language describes the historical fall of

²³ The parallels between the Olivet Discourse and Jerusalem's destruction in Ezekiel 5 are striking. Because of Israel's abominations, God says "I will do with you what I have never yet done, and the like of which I will never do again (Ezek. 5:9). Israel has defiled his sanctuary (v. 11), and God will make them a desolation (v. 14).

Babylon (Isa. 13:9-13), Egypt (Ezek. 32:7-8), and Jerusalem (Jer. 4:23-26). Even the Son of Man “coming on the clouds” is clearly an allusion to Daniel 7:13-14, which is a crucial text for NT eschatology. In its original context, this is not describing a “coming to earth” but a coming to the Ancient of Days to receive vindication, authority, and an everlasting kingdom.²⁴

If the literary and canonical contexts are taken seriously, and if we fully appreciate the OT imagery, this discourse must be primarily, though not exclusively, about the end of the old covenant order with Jerusalem and its physical temple at the center of the world.²⁵ The apocalyptic imagery is *initially* a reference to the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, as well as Jesus’ ascension, vindication, and the worldwide conquest of the gospel. This is the sign that the Son of Man is in heaven.²⁶ However, even if the majority of the Olivet Discourse is fulfilled in the first century (Mark 13:1-31), this is not in any way a denial of the second coming (Mark 13:32-36). It is likely that this apocalyptic language can also be applied to the *parousia*, as the final fulfillment of Jesus “coming on the clouds” (cf. Acts 1:11). One does not need to present these “comings” as a false choice, for multiple fulfillments of prophecy is the hallmark of all biblical prophecy.

The final instance of Jesus predicting the fall of Jerusalem is on his way to the cross:

And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. But turning to them Jesus said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?” (Luke 23:27–31).

²⁴ Wright points out the “interesting spectacle of fundamentalist interpreters taking the metaphorical language in Mk. 13:26, 30 (‘the coming of the son of man’) literally, and literal language (‘within a generation’) metaphorically. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 224 n. 96.

²⁵ The imagery of Matt. 24:29-31 is “a highly symbolic description of the theological significance of the coming destruction of the temple and its consequences.” R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 349.

²⁶ The Greek text of Matt 24:30 literally reads, “τότε φανήσεται τὸ σημεῖον τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ.” These events are the sign, or proof, that the Son of Man is in heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father.

Here, Jesus quotes Hosea to describe the severity of the judgment once again coming upon Jerusalem. Scholars are divided on whether “they” refers to the Jews or Romans. But in either case the point is clear: the tragic rejection and crucifixion of Jesus, who was innocent, is going to lead to something far worse for the revolutionary city of Jerusalem and its inhabitants.²⁷

The Final Verdict: Judgment for Israel and Vindication for the Son of Man

In this section, my argument is that the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70 is a theologically significant event because it serves as God’s “final verdict” on Israel and Jesus. For Israel, this event was the culmination of God’s judgment for their rejection of the Son. For Jesus, it was part of his vindication as the Son of Man along with his resurrection. This will be established through key NT passages conveying the fulfillment and finality of judgment.

AD 70 as the Culmination of God’s Judgment on Israel

Several passages in the NT attest to Israel’s unbelief being fulfilled or completed in their rejection of Jesus. The first instance comes in the explanation of the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:10-17). Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9-10 to describe Israel’s failure to respond to his message. The introductory phrase is striking: “Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled” (Matt. 13:14). In its original context, Isaiah 6:9-10 was not about the future but Isaiah’s own experience. However, the unbelief of Israel in Isaiah’s day came to its fullest expression in Jesus’ ministry with “this generation.” France explains that “[Isaiah’s] experience formed a typological pattern which is now *fulfilled* as Jesus re-enacts the role of the Old Testament prophet.”²⁸

²⁷ For an excellent in-depth discussion of this saying from the cross, see Smith, *The Fate of the Jerusalem Temple in Luke-Acts*, 119-131.

²⁸ France, *Matthew*, 226, emphasis original.

The finality of judgment is also emphasized in the parables of the tenants and the wedding feast (Mark 12:1-12; Matt. 21:1-10). Jesus is not just another servant; he is the *only* and *beloved* son. After he is killed, the owner sends no one else, for the son was sent *last* of all (ἔσχατον, Mark 12:6). In other words, the sending of the Son is God's final appeal to his people. Similarly, in the parable of the wedding feast, after the son is rejected and the king's messengers killed, there are no more chances; their city will be burned to the ground. Interestingly, in both parables the kingdom is given to others in response to the death and rejection of the son.

The strongest evidence for seeing the fall of Jerusalem as the culmination of judgment is found in Luke's Olivet Discourse. Jesus describes the coming siege as *the days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written* (Luke 21:22). Not only are all the Scriptures fulfilled in Jesus (Luke 24:44-47), but all that is written about judgment in the Scriptures is fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem. This event is not merely *like*, or even *greater* than, the judgments in the OT; it will be the *final* and decisive judgment on the nation. John Nolland writes: "The vengeance to be exacted will be the culmination and completion of all God's acts and threats of judgment recorded in Scripture."²⁹

This is not to say that God's purposes for Israel as a nation have concluded (cf. Rom. 11:11-32). Nevertheless, the fall of Jerusalem served as the climax to Israel's unbelief because they had rejected and murdered Jesus, the Righteous One (Acts 7:51-53), the beloved Son, Israel's long-awaited King, the One greater than all the OT prophets, Solomon, and the temple (Matt. 12:6, 41-42). And to make matters worse, *that* generation not only killed Jesus but persecuted his Bride as well. Paul's description of his fellow countrymen sums it up: "[They]

²⁹ John Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53*, vol. 35c, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1993), 1001.

killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last” (1 Thess. 2:15-16).

AD 70 as the Vindication of the Son of Man

The previous section argued that the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 was the culmination of God’s judgment on Israel. In this section I want to suggest that for Jesus, this event, along with the resurrection and ascension, serves as his vindication as the Son of Man. To establish this, we will consider Jesus’ use of Daniel 7 in two key passages: Mark 13:24-27 and Mark 14:62.

After Jerusalem is surrounded by armies and the tribulation in those days, Jesus says the Son of Man will be seen “coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Mark 13:24-27; cf. Matt. 24:30; Luke 21:27), and that this will happen within a generation. While this passage is highly contested, what is clear is the allusion to Daniel 7:13-14. This famous chapter in Daniel describes a vision of four beasts, representing oppressive kingdoms, and “one like a son of man,” representing the people of God. This son of man comes *to the Ancient of Days*, not to earth, to receive an everlasting kingdom and worldwide dominion. As a result, the suffering saints are vindicated, exalted, and possess the kingdom.

The fact that Jesus references an OT passage about a “son of man,” defeated enemies, exaltation, enthronement, and vindication in a discourse that has, up until that point, been about the fall of Jerusalem, seems to indicate that these two events are connected. France states: “Jesus is using Daniel 7:13 as a prediction of that authority which he exercised when in AD 70 the Jewish nation and its leaders, who had condemned him, were overthrown, and Jesus was vindicated as the recipient of all power from the Ancient of Days.”³⁰ Jesus’ heavenly

³⁰ France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, 236.

enthronement (cf. Acts 2:32-36) and his worldwide authority (cf. Matt. 28:18) would thus be “seen” *negatively* in the destruction of the temple and *positively* in the worldwide ingathering of the people of God as the gospel is proclaimed (Mark 13:27). Of course, the final fulfillment of Daniel 7 and the ultimate manifestation of the Son of Man’s dominion will be seen at the second coming when our Lord returns. But like the majority of biblical prophecy about judgment, there can be multiple, escalating instances of fulfillment.³¹

The second passage where Jesus alludes to Daniel 7 is before Caiaphas the high priest during his trial (Mark 14:53-65). Jesus is silent as many Jews bear false witness against him, bringing up his temple remarks (v.55-59; cf. 15:29; John 2:19).³² Jesus breaks his silence to state clearly and climactically that he *is* the Christ, the Son of the Blessed (Mark 14:61). To back up his claim, Jesus quotes from Psalm 110 and Daniel 7, both of which deal with themes of enthronement, exaltation, and divine authority: “You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:62). Jesus not only affirms that he is the Christ but also that the temple *would be destroyed* as he predicted, and that he would be proved to be in the right. What is striking about this response is that Jesus tells Caiaphas and the religious leaders that they will somehow see this heavenly event! Matthew’s account emphasizes the imminent nature of this event with the phrase, “from now on” (ἀπ’ ἄρτι, Matt. 26:64). In

³¹ The fact that a minority of interpreters have understood AD 70 to be the fulfillment of *all* biblical prophecy, even the second coming, seems to make interpreters wary of giving *any* significance to the events of AD 70, even if it makes contextual sense. To believe that Jesus is speaking figuratively about his exaltation and vindication in a discourse that is about events happening within a generation does not necessarily imply a denial of the second coming. It just means Jesus has the inauguration of his kingdom in mind, rather than its consummation, which is clearly taught throughout the NT.

³² Regarding the false witnesses, Perrin is helpful: “the witnesses were ‘false’ not because they fabricated the truth, but because they twisted it in competing directions with spiteful intent.” Perrin, *Jesus the Temple* (Grand Rapids, MI; London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; Baker Academic, 2010), 103.

other words, a new period of time was beginning when Jesus would be seated and coming with the clouds, and *they* would soon see it.³³ Wright is worth quoting at length:

Jesus is not, then, suggesting that Caiaphas will witness the end of the space-time order. Nor will he look out of the window one day and observe a human figure flying downwards on a cloud. It is absurd to imagine either Jesus, or Mark, or anyone in between, supposing the words to mean that. Caiaphas will witness the strange events which follow Jesus' crucifixion: the rise of a group of disciples claiming that he has been raised from the dead, and the events which accelerate towards the final clash with Rome, in which... Jesus will be vindicated as a true prophet. In and through it all, Caiaphas will witness events which show that Jesus was not, after all, mistaken in his claim, hitherto implicit, now at last explicit: he is the Messiah, the anointed one, the true representative of the people of Israel, the one in and through whom the covenant god [sic] is acting to set up his kingdom.³⁴

In summary, Jesus used Daniel 7 in its original sense in Mark 13:26 and Mark 14:62 not to speak of his return to earth, but of his exaltation. He is fulfilling Daniel's prophecy, and this heavenly reality and vindication of the Son of Man would be seen on earth in the resurrection of Jesus, his ascension, the growth of his church, as well as the destruction of the temple. This would be the sign that the Son of Man was in heaven, seated at his Father's right hand (Matt. 24:30). These events, all of which Jesus predicted, served as confirmation of his ministry—that he was who he said he was, that he was a true prophet, and that God was overturning Jerusalem's verdict. This divine reversal would happen not only through the destruction of the old temple but by the construction of a new temple, one built on a new Cornerstone.

AD 70 as a Sign of “The End”

In this final section I will argue that the fall of Jerusalem serves as a sign of “the end” in two ways. First, it signals the end of the old covenant order. Second, it is an instance of “the day of the Lord” and a type of the final eschatological judgment at the end of history.

³³ France points out that “a literal ‘sitting’ and a literal ‘coming’ could hardly be envisaged together!” France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, 141.

³⁴ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 525.

AD 70 as a Sign of the End of the Old Covenant Order

The NT is clear that the advent of Jesus is the climax to Israel's story. All that Israel was waiting for—the restored kingdom, the new covenant, the end of exile, a new exodus—Jesus had inaugurated in his death and resurrection. A new era was beginning; the time was fulfilled, the kingdom of God was at hand (Mark 1:14; cf. Luke 11:20; 17:21).³⁵ Thus, Jesus had a significant impact on Jerusalem and its temple, which played a key role in the life of Israel and redemptive history up until that point (Luke 2:38). Peter Walker writes, “If Jerusalem at the dawn of the NT period was associated with the presence of the divine Name, the throne of the true King, the place of true sacrifice, the centre of Israel's life and the focus of its eschatological hope, then it was inevitable that the mission of Israel's Messiah would be integrally connected with this unique city.”³⁶ My argument is that the fall of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70 was not only the culmination of Israel's judgment but also a sign of the end of the old covenant order.

The coming of Jesus led to a new understanding of Jerusalem and its significance in redemptive history. Jesus not only pronounced divine judgment on the city (Luke 13:33–35; 19:41–44; 21:20–24; 23:28–31), but also indicated that the promises of its restoration would be fulfilled in him. The city and its temple at the heart of the old covenant order would no longer serve the same role in God's plan of salvation. Matthew tells us something greater than the temple had arrived in Jesus (Matt. 12:6). John confirms this when he tells us the tabernacling presence of God had returned to Zion in him (John 1:14) and that “the hour had come” when worship would no longer be restricted to Jerusalem (John 4:21–24). Jesus was the new and greater temple, the fulfillment of the sacrificial system, the place where cleansing, forgiveness,

³⁵ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 467–471.

³⁶ P. W. L. Walker, “Jerusalem,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 590.

and salvation would now be found. According to Walker, “Jesus was offering in reality what Jerusalem had previously offered only in shadow, and which she was now failing to offer.”³⁷

Furthermore, Jesus was not just the fulfillment of the temple but also the messianic builder of the eschatological temple (John 2:19). He is the Son of David, the anointed “Shepherd,” and the “Branch” who were each connected with building God’s house (2 Sam. 7:12-13; Isa. 44-45; Zech. 6:12-13).³⁸ The church, as the body of Christ, would be the living stones raised up for Abraham in this new building, with Jesus as the Cornerstone (Matt. 3:9-10; Mark 12:10; Eph 2:19-22; 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 1 Pet. 2:4-7). Those who are in Christ, citizens of his kingdom under the New Covenant, have come to the new “Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb 12:22; cf. Gal. 4:26). In other words, the shadow gave way to the substance; the old was passing away and the new had come. The desolation of Jerusalem was a sign that the kingdom had been inaugurated and that God’s presence, along with his plans and purposes of salvation for the world, were now located in Christ and his church.

AD 70 as a Sign of the Final Eschatological Judgment

The phrase “the day of the Lord” is used throughout the Bible to refer both to instances of divine judgment in history on various nations (e.g., Babylon [Isa. 13:6-9]; Egypt [Jer. 46:10]; Edom [Obad. 15]; Israel/Judah [Amos 5:18-20]), and also to the final judgment at the end of time. The *New Bible Dictionary* defines this day as “the occasion when Yahweh actively intervenes to punish sin that has come to a climax.”³⁹ Jason DeRouchie’s definition is helpful as

³⁷ Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City*, 288.

³⁸ Perrin, *Jesus the Temple*, 102.

³⁹ J. S. Wright, “Day of the Lord,” ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 261.

well: it refers “both to the ultimate time when Yahweh will punish and restore the whole world through Christ’s first and second comings *and to the periodic pen-ultimate days that clarify and anticipate it.*”⁴⁰ If this understanding is accepted, then the climactic judgment on Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70 certainly is a candidate for the day of the Lord.

The prevailing understanding of divine judgment in Scripture is that the NT is concerned primarily, even exclusively, with the final eschatological judgment. Motyer asserts that, “The OT emphasizes judgment within history, while the NT emphasizes eschatological judgment, filling out the concept of the Day of the Lord (Amos 5:18) with the larger perspectives of the Day of Christ (2 Thess. 1:5–10; 2 Pet. 3:7–13).”⁴¹ However, such a sharp distinction between the OT and NT is unnecessary. The NT undoubtedly emphasizes the final Day, but it also predicts the fall of Jerusalem and describes it as an act of divine judgment *within history*, using apocalyptic language from the OT prophets (Matt. 24:29-31; Mark 13:24-27; Luke 21:25-28; cf. Acts 2:14-21). If Jesus was the last and greatest of the prophets, then at least part of his focus would include judgment within history, especially if he believed he was actually inaugurating the kingdom of God before the end of history.

In summary, the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 is a “penultimate” day of the Lord that clarifies and anticipates the final day when Christ returns to eradicate all evil and fully consummate his kingdom. It serves as a sign or type of the final eschatological judgment.⁴²

⁴⁰ Jason S. DeRouchie, “The Day of the Lord,” The Gospel Coalition, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-day-of-the-lord/>, emphasis mine. He adds that the biblical authors apply the apocalyptic language of “the day of the Lord” to instances where “Yahweh typologically intrudes into space and time to reconstitute right order through punishing wickedness.”

⁴¹ J. A. Motyer, “Judgment,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 612.

⁴² Beale acknowledges the possibility that “the AD 70 coming of Christ in judgement as portrayed by the Synoptics is a typological foreshadowing of his final coming in judgment. . . Surely, there is an abundant testimony to Christ’s final coming to conclude history elsewhere in Acts, Paul’s writings, and the rest of the NT.” Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 396 n. 27.

Walker maintains that “*the fall of Jerusalem functions theologically as an advance paradigm of the final judgment of the world*. It is a revelation in microcosm of what ultimately awaits us all.”⁴³ Jerusalem is the city which represents all who reject Jesus, refuse his gracious offer of salvation, and persecute his people (cf. John 1:9-12). This means that Jesus’ rejection of the temple and his woes against the religious leaders of his day can also be read in a broader sense to apply beyond the first century. Patrick Schreiner concludes:

In the historical context the Jewish leaders are the referent, but in the eschatological context it is also all earthly systems opposed to Jesus as king. These two interpretations don’t have to be at odds, but can fit together. If Israel is a microcosm for the rest of humanity, then Jesus’ woes upon the Pharisees and Sadducees are not only woes to the Pharisees and Sadducees living in the first century. The woes are to all those who “tie up heavy burdens upon people,” and “do their deeds to be seen by others.” The judgment is coming upon the Jewish leaders, but also those who construct space in a similar way.⁴⁴

The NT is clear that the resurrection of Jesus is the firstfruits of the resurrection at the end of the age, and that anyone who is in Christ is a new creation (Acts 26:23; 1 Cor. 15:20-25; 2 Cor. 5:17; Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5). The gift of the Holy Spirit is the guarantee or down payment of our inheritance (Eph. 1:14; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5). Paul proclaims that Christ has already disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them, even as we wait their final destruction on the last day (Col 2:15; 1 Cor. 15:26). In the same way, the destruction of Jerusalem is best understood as the firstfruits or down payment of the judgment that is coming upon the world for its rejection of and rebellion against Christ and its persecution of his Bride.

⁴³ Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City*, 317, emphasis original.

⁴⁴ Patrick Schreiner, “People and Place: A Spatial Analysis of the Kingdom in Matthew” (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), 151.

Concluding Implications

The purpose of this paper has been to argue that the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70 is a theologically significant event in redemptive history that is foundational to New Testament eschatology. Even if only partially successful, this study has demonstrated how this event can be understood along with the resurrection, the outpouring of the Spirit, and the growth of the church as an eschatological sign that Christ has inaugurated his kingdom, that God's plans and purposes of salvation for the world are now located in Christ and his church, and that Christ is even now putting his enemies under his feet. To conclude, I will briefly consider several implications of understanding AD 70 as significant for NT eschatology.

A Solution for Problematic Passages and Perplexing Prophecy

First, this can bring clarity to several difficult passages regarding the coming of the kingdom and the Son of Man. In addition to those already mentioned, another controversial passage is Matthew 10:23, where Jesus tells his disciples: "When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes." If we admit the possibility that Jesus is referring to the fall of Jerusalem, we have the solution to the *timing* of the kingdom in these verses. In the case of Matthew 10:23 this seems highly likely, especially considering that this statement follows a prediction of persecution by Jesus that virtually describes the book of Acts (Matt. 10:16-20)!

Second, this can help us more accurately understand several prophetic passages in the OT. For example, in Isaiah 66 the prophet sees that Jerusalem would once again face the Lord's judgment and vengeance for their rebellion (Isa. 66:6). But then, Isaiah describes Zion as a mother suddenly and miraculously giving birth to a son (lit., a male child, cf. Rev. 12:1-6) and many children in the hour of her judgment, before she goes into labor. Commenting on the

fulfillment of this vision, Barry Webb writes: “There is profound prophetic insight here, for in the fullness of time the new age came to birth just as Isaiah predicted. Out of the Israel of the old covenant, judged and rejected by God, emerged the church of Jesus Christ. It was already ‘born’, as it were, before Jerusalem’s destruction; that was simply the severing of the umbilical cord.”⁴⁵

Another example of a thorny OT passage is Daniel’s vision of the seventy weeks (Dan. 9:24-27). This vision is about the future of Jerusalem, the end of exile, and the time required to put an end to sin, atone for iniquity, and establish everlasting righteousness (Dan. 9:24). It describes the coming of a *prince* and an *anointed one* who would be cut off, make a covenant with many, put an end to sacrifice and offering, and whose people would also destroy the city and sanctuary. Rather than understand this to be primarily about the work of an “antichrist” figure at the end of history (!), it seems better to see this about the work of Christ, which has recently been argued by Meredith Kline and Peter Gentry.⁴⁶ He is the Anointed One who is cut off, who makes a covenant, and puts an end to sacrifice through his vicarious death on the cross (Isa. 53; Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; Heb. 8:6-13; 9:11-10:25). As for the destruction of city and sanctuary by the “people of the prince,” this refers to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, whom God sovereignly used to accomplish his purposes of judgment, as he did before with Assyria, Babylon, and Persia. Understood this way, Daniel’s vision of the seventy weeks lines up remarkably with the kingdom-inaugurating life and ministry of Jesus and God’s judgment on the holy city.

⁴⁵ Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*, 248.

⁴⁶ See Meredith G. Kline, *God, Heaven and Har Magedon: A Covenantal Tale of Cosmos and Telos* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006), 146-54; Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 531-564.

A First-Century Framework for the Book of Revelation

If the destruction of Jerusalem is a theologically significant event that is foundational to the inaugurated eschatology of the NT, as I have sought to demonstrate, then I would argue that AD 70 and the events leading up to it would also be described in the book of Revelation. According to Richard Bauckham, Revelation is the *culmination of biblical prophecy*⁴⁷, and Brian Tabb has also persuasively argued that it the *canonical capstone* and *climax of Christian Scripture*.⁴⁸ If John's apocalypse is truly understood in this way, then the judgment on Jerusalem, which Jesus said fulfills the Scriptures (cf. Luke 21:22), would naturally be foundational to it.

I propose that a first-century framework for Revelation not only makes the most sense of the internal evidence but holds some promise for harmonizing the various interpretive approaches to the book. This approach understands the majority of John's vision to be describing events which will soon take place, namely the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, which is then followed by the millennium and second coming. But this apocalyptic vision, as Leithart notes, "discloses a *pattern* of events that will be nonidentically repeated until the final judgment."⁴⁹

Of course, one of the biggest hurdles in accepting that Revelation is remotely concerned with Jerusalem is the debate regarding the dating of the book. However, an early date is not essential for adopting a first-century framework for the majority of John's vision. Even if John wrote after Jerusalem fell, he could still be showing the theological significance of AD 70 and

⁴⁷ Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993); see also Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁴⁸ Brian Tabb, *All Things New: Revelation as Canonical Capstone*, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 48, New Studies in Biblical Theology (England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2019).

⁴⁹ Leithart, *Revelation*, vol. 2, 198.

offering an interpretation of current events *in light of that event*. Sam Storms, who holds to a late date for Revelation, understands the significance of AD 70 for the book in a similar way:

The pattern of events that transpired in the period 33-70 a.d., leading up to and including the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, functions as a local, microcosmic foreshadowing of the global, macrocosmic events associated with the Parousia and the end of history. The period 33-70 a.d. provides in its principles (though not necessarily in all particularities), a template against which we are to interpret the period 70-Parousia.⁵⁰

A detailed defense of an early date is not within the scope of this paper. However, a few salient strands of evidence are worth mentioning that will hopefully provide motivation for a reevaluation of the internal evidence for a first-century framework.

First, it is an established fact that Revelation echoes or alludes to nearly every book of the OT. The prophetic messages against all the nations, but especially Jerusalem, are repeated throughout John's vision. For example, when the sixth seal is opened, apocalyptic language is used to describe what appears to be the end of the world, which we know is used to also describe nations being judged in history (Rev. 6:12-14; Isa. 13; Ezek. 32). When this happens, the people begin "calling to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us'" (Rev. 6:16). While this surely describes the response of all those who will face the great day of the wrath of the Lamb, whenever it comes, this is the exact verse from Hosea 10:8 that Jesus quotes on his way to the cross to describe what *Israel* will say when it faces judgment for rejecting him (Luke 23:30).

Second, while many commentators are quick to identify the "great city" with Rome, there are many reasons to identify this city as *first* being Jerusalem. For example, when we first meet the "great city," we learn that it is symbolically (or "spiritually," πνευματικῶς) called Sodom and Egypt, which is how Israel was described in the prophets (Isa. 1:10; Ezek, 23). More importantly,

⁵⁰ Sam Storms, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, the Ruler of Kings on Earth - Revelation 1:8," <https://www.samstorms.org/all-articles/post/the-revelation-of-jesus-christ-the-ruler-of-kings-on-earth>. This is how Storms also understands the Olive Discourse. See Storms, "Matthew 24 and the Olivet Discourse - Part III," <https://www.samstorms.org/all-articles/post/matthew-24-and-the-olivet-discourse---part-iii>.

we learn it is also the city *where the Lord was crucified*. If that is not clear enough, the next time we meet this city, it is called the harlot city Babylon (Rev. 16-18). This “great prostitute,” is arrayed in the colors and jewels of the priests and tabernacle, who is “drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (Rev. 17:1-6). Many scholars identify this as a picture of the goddess Roma. But in the OT, which is the pallet John uses to paint his apocalypse,⁵¹ the most famous harlot was *Israel* (Ezek. 16; 23). Leithart reminds us that, “In the biblical perspective, only a people or a city in covenant with Yahweh can be guilty of harlotry.”⁵² Based on the OT, the harlot is Jerusalem, who rides the back of the Roman beast (cf. Luke 23:12). If the woman is Jerusalem and the beast is Rome, this would explain why John sees the beast turning on the woman to “make her desolate” and “burn her up with fire” (Rev. 17:16-17).

The most compelling evidence for identifying the harlot Babylon as Jerusalem is found in chapter 18. Here we discover not only that this is the city where the Lord was crucified, but in this city “was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth” (Rev. 18:24). This is a remarkably close parallel to what Jesus said about Jerusalem in his woes:

Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, *so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.* (Matt. 23:32-35).

If John is alluding to Jesus’ statement, it is highly likely that Jerusalem is the city in view.

Furthermore, if Jerusalem is the harlot Babylon, then the contrasting vision of the *New Jerusalem*

⁵¹ Leithart, *Revelation*, vol. 1, 5.

⁵² Leithart, *Revelation*, vol. 2, 172. Interestingly, the only other two cities called harlots are Nineveh (Nah. 3:4) and Tyre (Isa.23:15-17). While these cities were not directly in covenant with Yahweh, like Israel, Leithart observes that Nineveh was a repentant city that became apostate, and Tyre initially helped built the Temple by providing supplies. But Jezebel, the daughter of the king of Tyre and Sidon (1 Kgs. 16:31), married Ahab, who helped build a house for Baal in Israel. “Like Nineveh, Tyre is an apostate Gentile city, not a pagan one.” *Ibid.*, 173.

as the Bride of the Lamb becomes all the more compelling. Smalley writes: “If Jerusalem were about to be destroyed, the vision in Rev. 21–22 of a stunning and emphatically new holy city, where God’s people will dwell eternally in a close covenant relationship with him, would have provided exactly, and at the right moment, all the spiritual encouragement they needed.”⁵³

This brief look at a first-century framework for Revelation barely scratches the surface, and may have only muddied the waters. The point, however, is that if we take Revelation seriously as the canonical capstone of Scripture and the climax of biblical prophecy, then we should reconsider the role that Jerusalem plays in the final book of the canon that “brings the scriptural narrative concerning God, his people and his world to its grand conclusion in the already-not-yet reign of Christ and the glorious new creation.”⁵⁴

Ultimately, my aim has been to provide a more robust understanding of the profound impact that Jesus had on the role of Jerusalem and its temple in redemptive history. If the Bible is all about Jesus, and if the eschatological hopes of Israel have begun to be fulfilled in the advent of Israel’s Messiah, then the theological significance of Jerusalem and its temple must be re-evaluated in light of his kingdom-inaugurating life and ministry.

⁵³ Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (London: SPCK, 2005), 3

⁵⁴ Tabb, *All Things New*, 24.

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