

# CHAPTER 14: AN AGE OF PERSECUTION AND ALIENATION

## A) HEBREWS AND THE LOSS OF A NATION

### 1) NERO'S PERSECUTION

The book of Acts closed with Paul's fate still in doubt. Acts did not record the result of Paul's trial. II Timothy 4:8 and 4:16 suggest that Paul was released at his first trial around 61 AD, and Paul was facing his death when II Timothy was written a couple of years later. In the years between his first and second trials, Paul continued his mission to the west and may even have reached Spain.<sup>1</sup> Paul was eventually arrested again, and he was martyred in Rome shortly before the start of Nero's persecution.<sup>2</sup> Nero was a cruel and terrible ruler. He may have gained the throne because his mother Agrippina poisoned Emperor Claudius in 54 AD. Nero was her son by a former marriage, and he lacked Claudius' wisdom and compassion. Nero came to the throne when he was only 17 years old. For the first decade of his reign, he enjoyed himself while the government was actually run by the Stoic philosopher Seneca and the prefect Burrus.<sup>3</sup> These men were still in control of Rome during Paul's first trial. When Burrus died in 62 AD, Nero began taking the reigns of power for himself. Seneca retired from government at that time. Nero forced him to commit suicide by accusing him of a conspiracy to retain control of the government. Nero was a capricious despot. Paul had the misfortune of being tried before Nero's court after his second arrest and Paul was executed.

After 64 AD, Nero's reign became a terrible time for Christians in Rome. Conflicts between Jews and Christians during Claudius' reign had led to the expulsion of many Jews from Rome. This kind of civil unrest was perceived by Rome as being very dangerous and unacceptable. Even at the beginning of Nero's reign, Christians would have been viewed with suspicion by Rome. Then in 64 AD, a fire broke out that destroyed a large part of the city of Rome. Most of the buildings in Rome were built with wood frames, and the fire spread rapidly. Nero had wanted to build a new palace and the fire was at least convenient for his plans. It cleared the area where he had planned to build. This led to the rumor that Nero had been responsible for the fire for his own ends. To shift suspicion from himself, Nero blamed the fire on the Christians who had already caused so much trouble in the city.<sup>4</sup> To justify himself, Nero invented the most heinous tortures for Christians who were arrested. He almost destroyed the Christian church in Italy. After Nero accused the Christians of starting the fire, both soldiers and private citizens hunted down the Christians in Rome. They were brought before the judges, and they were burned at the stake, crucified, or torn apart by wild animals.<sup>5</sup> Nero's persecution was extremely brutal, but it only lasted for four years. It largely ended when Nero died in 68 AD. During this persecution, the apostle Peter was crucified in Rome as Nero destroyed the leadership of the church.<sup>6</sup>

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For the debate, see Lindsey P. Pherigo, "Paul's Life after the Close of Acts," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 70 (1951): 277-91.

Franzmann argued that Paul would not have summoned Timothy to certain death in Rome if Nero's persecution had already begun. Paul's complaint that none of the Roman Christians had stood by him at his trial would also seem inappropriate during Nero's persecution when so many were dying for their faith. This led Franzmann to conclude that Paul's death was either before the beginning of Nero's persecution or perhaps shortly after it. Franzmann, *The Word of the Lord Grows*, 150-51.

<sup>2</sup> George W. Botsford, *A History of Rome*, (New York: Macmillan, 1910), 228-30.

<sup>3</sup> The Roman historian Tacitus claimed that Nero had killed the Christians to shift blame on them for the fire. Tacitus had gathered good sources. He worked for emperor Hadrian in 120 AD, and he had access to the imperial records.

<sup>4</sup> Koenig, *Jews and Christians in Dialogue*.

<sup>5</sup> I and II Peter may have been written during Nero's persecution. Peter wrote I Peter to the churches of Asia Minor. I Pet. 4:12-13 warned the churches of Asia Minor of a fiery ordeal that threatened them, although they had not yet suffered physical harm from it. Christians in Italy were facing a fiery persecution already. Many were being burned at the stake to light Nero's evening garden parties. I Pet. 4:7 claimed that the end of all things was at hand. Peter may have believed

## 2) FLIGHT AND THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM

While the Christian church in Rome was in torment, the church in Palestine was increasingly under attack. In 62 AD, the high priest Ananus II took advantage of a temporary political power vacuum in Palestine to murder James who was still the head of the Jerusalem church.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, Zealots in Jerusalem were arguing for a revolt against Rome. When the Jewish Christians heard these words, they remembered Jesus' warnings. In Matthew 10:23, Jesus had told his followers to flee to a different city whenever they were persecuted. Jesus promised that they would not finish going through all the cities of Israel until the Son of Man would come. In Matthew 24:2, Jesus warned that not one stone in the temple would soon be left on top of another. Then Jesus warned that a great tribulation would begin. His description of this tribulation had clearly eschatological overtones, but the 1st century church applied the warning to their own lives. In Matthew 24:34, Jesus had promised that His generation would not pass away until all of these things had happened. In Matthew 24:15-22, Jesus warned His people in Judea to flee to the mountains when they saw the abomination and the tribulation of those times.

When James was killed in 62 AD, the generation that had seen Jesus was dying away. Jewish Christians in Palestine believed that the great tribulation had to begin in the near future. They interpreted James' murder as the beginning of this terrible time. In obedience to Jesus' words, much of the Jewish Christian church in Jerusalem fled from the city and moved north to the Decapolis.<sup>8</sup> Pixner argued that the Christians remained at the Decapolis until after 73 AD.<sup>9</sup> The city of Pella was located in the region that is now Jordan. It was outside of the region controlled by the high priest Ananus II in Jerusalem. So the high priest and his associates could not follow up on James' death by attacking the church. The community at Pella elected Symeon, the son of Clopas, to succeed James as the bishop over Jerusalem.<sup>10</sup> So the community at Pella still identified themselves with Jerusalem. The church in Pella faced different dangers by moving to the Decapolis. The northern part of Palestine had been victimized by robber bands and messianic rebels since the death of Herod in 44 AD. This guerilla violence would continue until the start of the Jewish revolt against Rome. Then Rome would bring death and destruction to the whole region. The church historian Eusebius described this flight to the Decapolis in these words.

Those who believed in Christ migrated from Jerusalem, so when holy men had altogether deserted the royal capital of the Jews, ... the judgment of God might at last overtake them for all their crimes against Christ and his apostles, and all that generation of the wicked be utterly blotted out from among men...Such was the reward of the iniquity of the Jews and of their impiety against the Christ of God.<sup>11</sup>

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that the tribulation of the end times had begun with Nero's persecution. In II Pet. 1:13-14, Peter said that the Lord had revealed to him that the time for his death was at hand. J. L. de Villiers argued that the problem of suffering ran through the whole letter of I Peter. He argued that while the theme of suffering was not always overtly expressed, it was never far below the surface of the letter. J. L. de Villiers, "Joy in Suffering in I Peter," 64-86 in *Proceedings of the Eleventh Meeting of Die Nuwe-Testamentiese Werkgemeenskap van Suid-Afrika*, (1975): 66.

Festus had died in office. The High Priest at the time was Ananus, the son of the High Priest Ananus who was mentioned in the gospels. Ananus had only been high priest for three months. Josephus called Ananus II "the captain of our salvation," indicating his importance on the political front. No Roman procurator was in control of Palestine because Festus's successor was still in route to Palestine. Ananus arrested James illegally. James was tried by the Sanhedrin. Then he was taken to the temple's south-east corner and he was stoned on unconsecrated ground. When he proved to be still alive after stoning, he was killed with a mallet. Josephus claimed that the leading citizens of the nation were disgusted with this action, and the Romans deposed Ananus from office. At about this same time, Paul's teacher Gamaliel died. Gamaliel had been a voice of tolerance in the Sanhedrin. With the loss of tolerance in Jerusalem, revolt against Rome soon followed. During the war, Ananus II was killed and disgraced by the zealots. His death resulted from the conflicts that had raged since 59 AD between the upper and lower class factions in the temple. The high priest represented the upper class Sadducees while the zealots supported the lower class priests.

The date of this flight has been debated. Some authors suggest that the flight to Pella actually happened in 67 AD. This would place the flight after the beginning of the Jewish revolt against Rome, which is probably too late.

<sup>9</sup> McRay, *Archaeology and the New Testament*, 203.

<sup>10</sup> L. E. Elliott-Binns, *Galilean Christianity*, (Chicago: Alec R. Allenson, 1956), 69.

As quoted by Neusner in *Judaism in the Beginning of Christianity*, 91.

Eusebius put the flight to the Decapolis in the context of God's judgment against Israel. That observation was not without an element of truth, but it was also somewhat unfair. After all the Christians who fled to Pella were largely Jewish believers.<sup>12</sup>

This was a very frightening time for the church. Two years after the flight to Pella, Nero's persecution decimated the largely gentile Christian church in Italy with the greatest brutality. With the deaths of Peter, James, and Paul, the church had lost its most important leaders and the Roman Empire had turned against the church. Two years after this, the growing messianic fervor in Palestine finally broke into violence. One of the earliest military actions in this was occurred in 66 AD when the Jews sacked Pella.<sup>13</sup> When Israel rebelled against Rome and the Roman 10th legion marched into Palestine. The population of Syria and Palestine was badly frightened and in great danger. As the war began, the cities of the Decapolis were destroyed by the Roman army and the Jewish Christians were endangered once more.<sup>14</sup> During the war, many Jews escaped the siege only to be sold into slavery. After a siege that lasted until 70 AD, the city of Jerusalem finally fell to Rome. The city was burned and the temple was completely destroyed. With the start of the Jewish revolt, the Romans began to hate the Jews as a nation. So both Jews and Christians were facing persecution from Rome at the same time.

This may have been the historical setting in which the book of Hebrews was written, although that can not be proven.<sup>15</sup> Hebrews could have been using something like a "historical present" instead.<sup>16</sup> While the date, authorship, and historical setting of Hebrews have been debated endlessly, the internal evidence in Hebrews may fit best with the flight of Jewish Christians from Jerusalem to Pella.<sup>17</sup> The anonymous

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Eusebius' description of the flight to Pella has been called into question by some authors. Murphy-O'Connor called it a myth and denied that Christians ever fled to Pella. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "The Cenacle and Community: The Background of Acts 2:44-45," 296-310 in Michael D. Coogan, et al, eds. *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Honor of Philip J. King*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 303-04.

<sup>13</sup>The Jewish destruction of Pella was noted in Elliott-Binns, *Galilean Christianity*, 67.

<sup>14</sup>Koenig argued that the Christians at Pella did not join the revolt against Rome and there is no evidence that they suffered in the battle. Koenig, *Jews and Gentiles in Dialogue*.

<sup>15</sup>Trotter summarized the evidence for an early date for the book of Hebrews. Trotter noted three main points. 1) The sacrificial system was described in the present tense in Hebrews. This suggests that the temple had not yet been destroyed. Trotter noted that this evidence is not very strong because the Greek tenses were not always consistent in their time orientations. Several other authors who wrote after 70 AD, still described sacrifices in the present tense. So the author of Hebrews could have done the same thing. Also, Hebrews described sacrifices in a rather abstract and theoretical way that need not be closely connected to the idea of "time." 2) The second evidence for an early date of Hebrews is that Heb. 13:23 mentioned Timothy's release from prison. This fits well in the 50's and 60's. However, Trotter noted that this is also rather weak evidence. The Timothy mentioned in Heb. 13:23 might not even be the same person mentioned in Acts. Even if it is the same person, Trotter noted that we know very little about Timothy's later life. 3) Trotter's third argument for an early date is that the temple's destruction is not mentioned in Hebrews. Trotter recognizes this as an argument from silence. However, he still believes that it was a decisive argument. Trotter believes that Hebrews intends to describe the present activity of the Jewish priests in Jerusalem. So he argued that Hebrews had to be written before 70 AD.

<sup>16</sup>Trotter noted that Heb. 2:3-4 gave evidence for the authorship of the book. These verses claimed that salvation had first been announced by the Lord and by those who had heard him. Then the author and his readers learned about salvation second hand from those who had heard the Lord. This suggested that the book could have been written after the death of Paul and most of the apostles. Trotter noted that the author identified himself as a preacher of the gospel, and he claimed to be living with those who came from Italy. Trotter added that the author was obviously a very well educated person. The book of Hebrews was written in the highest quality Greek of any of the New Testament books. The author also demonstrated that he was trained in rhetorical methods like diatribe and alliteration. Trotter noted that the author was also familiar with philosophy since he used terms that were used commonly in Philo and in Stoic thought. The author was also an outstanding Old Testament scholar. Trotter noted that the tone of the book suggests that the author assumed that his authority would be recognized by his readers. Trotter, *Interpreting the Epistle to the Hebrews*.

<sup>17</sup>Sandegren discussed the question of who the readers of the letter may have been. He noted that the book contains a huge number of Old Testament quotations and allusions. There are more Old Testament quotations and allusions in Hebrews than in the book of Revelation. Sandegren argued that normal Christians would not be familiar with so many Old Testament references. Sandegren noted that Hebrews also discussed a number of topics that would be unfamiliar to many Christian readers. Topics like the law, sacrifice, priesthood, and Melchizedek would have been unfamiliar to many

authorship of Hebrews may have been motivated by Nero's persecution. Since Rome was determined to destroy the leadership of the Italian church, it may have been too dangerous for a Christian to add his name to a document that could easily fall into Roman hands. If the book of Hebrews was written to the Jewish Christians who had fled Jerusalem for the Decapolis, the name "to the Hebrews" may have been surprisingly appropriate. In antiquity, the name "Hebrew" had carried the connotation of homeless wanderer, and the Jewish Christians had become disenfranchised aliens once more. The Jewish Christians at Pella had been cut off from several things that had identified them as Jews. They were condemned by the high priest and the leadership of the nation. They were cut off from Jerusalem, from the temple, and from its sacrifices. This must have been a very severe blow especially to the great number of priests who had joined the church. The Jewish Christian community at Pella faced serious problems. Could they continue to exist as a Jewish Christian community at all? What form would the believing community take if it was cut off from the synagogue, the temple, the temple sacrifices and the priesthood? The book of Hebrews was written to encourage Jewish Christians who wrestled with these questions.

It is rather easy to see that the book of Hebrews was written to a Jewish Christian audience. Beginning in Hebrews 1:5-6, the author of Hebrews consistently grounded all of his contentions in the Old Testament.<sup>18</sup> In this regard, the book of Hebrews resembled Matthew's gospel which was also intended for a Jewish audience. Hebrews also interacted with theological motifs that were common in Palestine during the 1st century. The first of these was the glory theophany theme that had played so important a role both in Merkabah mysticism and in Paul's theology. Timo Eskola argued that the book of Hebrews provided the strongest example of enthronement language in the New Testament. Eskola argued that Hebrews should be seen as a product of Jewish Christianity. While Eskola argued for a later date for Hebrews, he noted that Hebrews often parallels early traditions in Paul's letters and Acts. Eskola noted that Hebrews also stressed Psalm 110, and Eskola suggested that the book of Hebrews was a long commentary on this Psalm. Eskola argued that the book of Hebrews was written with an outline based on the theme of Christ ascending to the right hand of God's glory throne. Eskola wrote,

The Christology of the Hebrews reveals further several points of contact with Jewish merkabah mysticism and especially with the ascent pattern that we have detected in other passages containing early Christology. The basic structure of this Christology resembles that of Acts 2 and Pauline writings. Resurrected Jesus is the Davidic Messiah whose exaltation has been foretold e.g. in 2 Sam. 7 and Psalms 2 and 110. His resurrection is considered an act of enthronement as a fulfillment of Psalm 110:1. The idea of the heavenly court as well as descriptions of the heavenly throne are an essential part of the Christology....Crucified Jesus is exalted to heaven after his death. In his resurrection he is enthroned on the throne of glory.<sup>19</sup>

In Hebrews 1:3, the author of Hebrews described Christ as the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His nature. Hebrews noted that after Jesus had made purification for sins, He had sat down at the right hand of the throne of divine Majesty in heaven. This claim echoed Ezekiel's visions and Paul's Merkabah theology.<sup>20</sup> In Hebrews 12:1-2, the author of Hebrews urged the Jewish Christians to set

gentile Christians. These subjects received far more attention in Hebrews than anywhere else in the New Testament. The choice of topics suggests that these topics were of interest to the original readers. Sandegren noted that Hebrews also taught that its readers should have been teachers, but instead needed to be taught the basic elements of the faith. Sandegren interpreted this claim in the light of Mal. 2:7 which claimed that the priests should be teachers. Sandegren pointed to Acts 6:7 which claimed that many priests had joined the church. So Sandegren suggested that the book of Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians, and especially to priests who had joined the church. C. Sandegren, "The Addressees of the Epistle to the Hebrews," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 27 (1955): 221-24

C. H. Dodd noted that much of the book of Hebrews was either an interpretation or an application of the Old Testament. There has been a lot of discussion about the principles of interpretation used by the author of Hebrews. His interpretative principles have been compared to rabbinic interpretations, as well as the principles of interpretation used by Philo and the community at Qumran. Dodd suggested that the author of Hebrews used the Old Testament for two purposes: to provide practical guidance to believers, and to teach the superiority of Christ and the New Covenant. C. H. Dodd, *The Old Testament in the New*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963).

<sup>18</sup>Eskola, *Messiah and the Throne*, 209-10.

<sup>20</sup>Ronald Williamson argued for Merkabah influence in the book of Hebrews. He noted the stress in Hebrews of direct access to God's throne. He argued that the precise Jewish background of Hebrews should be sought in Merkabah

their eyes on Jesus Who had sat down at the right hand of the divine Majesty on high. Hebrews 12:14 continued the glory theophany and Merkabah theme. This verse reminded the Jewish Christians to pursue sanctification without which no one could see God. It may be that the clearest echo of Paul's revised Merkabah mysticism can be seen in Hebrews 4:16. In this simple verse, the author of Hebrews urged his readers to draw near the throne of grace. The author urged them to do so with confidence because they would receive grace and mercy from God. It would be hard to find in Scripture a more striking contrast to the Jewish Merkabah constructions. In them, only the most righteous and worthy men could risk ascending to God's presence, and even the righteous ones could only ascend with the help of magic formula. In Paul's revision of the Merkabah tradition, God's throne was available to all believers. It was a throne of grace and mercy. Access to it was a gift of God accepted by faith, and God's glory filled all who were "in" Christ. This became bedrock Christian theology.

Hebrews 5:11-6:20 almost echoed Paul's arguments in books like Galatians. Hebrews argued that the Jewish Christians would crucify Christ once more if they followed the rabbis like Yohanan ben Zakkai and their teachings about the law. Hebrews argued that the Jewish Christians should have been teachers of the Law. Instead they needed to be taught themselves once more the basic elements of Judaic Christianity.<sup>21</sup> Hebrews 6:4-6 also warned that if they fell away from the faith, they could not be restored again. By joining the rabbis at Jerusalem or Jamnia, they would be joining those who had personally been involved in Christ's crucifixion. They would then be crucifying Christ once more. This was a uniquely appropriate argument for a 1st century Jewish Christian church in the Decapolis.

The author of Hebrews also compared and contrasted Jesus with the angels. Both 1st century Pharisees and the Qumran traditions had stressed the importance of angels. The authors of the scrolls found at Qumran had tried to receive a vision of God by singing the songs that the angels were currently singing before God's throne. The Pharisees had given an important role to angels in their visions of God. In both apocalyptic and Merkabah mysticism, angels and figures like Metatron played a key role in Jewish mysticism.<sup>22</sup> Hebrews demonstrated from the Old Testament that the promised Son of David would be far greater than the angels. In Hebrews 1:6, the author of Hebrews quoted Deuteronomy 32:43 and the LXX version of Psalm 97:7.<sup>23</sup> These verses proclaimed about the promised Messiah, "Let all the angels of God worship Him."<sup>24</sup> Hebrews taught that all of the Merkabah speculations about the roles of angels in heaven were beside the point. Jesus was far superior to any angel in heaven, and he was far above and beyond the speculations of rabbinic mystics.

The Jewish Christian community at the Decapolis had fled from Jerusalem after the high priest had murdered James. The Jewish Christians knew very well that the office of high priest had been a corrupt political office since the days of the Maccabees. The high priests had been far more interested in political power than righteousness. When Israel revolted against Rome in 66 AD, the independent government

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mysticism. He argued that this could be seen in the book's emphasis on angels as well as its emphasis on God's throne. Williamson surveyed Merkabah themes, and suggested that the closest parallels to Hebrews could be found in *Numbers Rabbah* 12.12. This text claimed that when the tabernacle was built in the wilderness, the angels built an equivalent tabernacle in heaven. This heavenly tabernacle was intended for Metatron who functioned as a great heavenly high priest. Williamson also noted that Heb. 13:13 called the book's readers to seek the heavenly city. Williamson noted that the Merkabah texts were written long after the close of the New Testament, but he noted that the Merkabah texts themselves presupposed a long history of discussion about Ezekiel 1 before the Merkabah texts were written. Ronald Williamson,<sup>21</sup> "The Background of the Epistle to the Hebrews," *The Expository Times* 87 (1976): 232-37.

The basic elements described in this text maybe Jewish customs like washings. These basic elements had been given a new meaning in a Christian context which was built on the foundation of traditional Jewish beliefs and practices. Yet the Hebrew Christians should have grown beyond these superficial things.<sup>22</sup>

Eskola noted that a common theme in Jewish mysticism was the danger of worshipping angels. Eskola, *Messiah and the Throne*, 192.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>24</sup> This would be Ps. 96:7 in the LXX which often numbered the Psalms differently.

Hebrews reads "let all the angels of God worship Him." LXX of Deut. 32:43 reads "Let all the angels of God worship Him." However, the MT of Deut. 32:43 reads nothing similar. MT of Ps. 97:7 reads, "Worship Him all you gods (*elohim*). The LXX reads "Worship Him all ye angels. Thomas noted that Heb. 1:6 quoted Deut. 32:43. Hebrews did not quote from the form of this text in the LXX. However, Thomas noted that the Song of Moses was sung in the Temple as a Psalm. It was also sung in the early Christian church on Easter. Thomas suggested that this popular form of Deut. 32:43 stood behind the Hebrew text. Kenneth J. Thomas, "The Old Testament Citations in Hebrews," *New Testament Studies* 11 (1964-65): 303-25.

established in Jerusalem was led by the high priest.<sup>25</sup> By fleeing from Jerusalem, the Jewish Christians were cut off from the temple and its priesthood. Hebrews reminded the community that the Jerusalem high priest was simply not spiritually important. Beginning in Hebrews 4:14, the author of Hebrews reassured the Jewish Christian that they served a far better high priest. They served Jesus Christ, God's great high priest. They did not serve a high priest like Ananus II who had no sympathy for them. They served a divine high priest Who could sympathize with them because He had been tempted in all things like them, but without sinning against God. Beyond that, human high priests were only in office for a brief time. This was especially true after the Maccabean period when the office was purchased for a few years from the government. Jesus was a high priest forever. Jesus was not a Levite. The author of Hebrews quoted Psalm 110:4 to describe Jesus as a priest king after the order of Melchizedek in Genesis 14.<sup>26</sup> The author of Hebrews returned to the theme of Melchizedek in Hebrews 7:1-28. Hebrews stressed several points about Melchizedek. First, Hebrews stressed that Melchizedek was a historical person.<sup>27</sup> This was important because the 1st century Pharisees had begun to depict Melchizedek as a heavenly or angelic figure.<sup>28</sup> Hebrews stressed that even Abraham had given tithes to Melchizedek which suggested that all of Abraham's descendants had through Abraham respected Melchizedek as their priest. If Jesus was a priest after the order of Melchizedek, He was inherently superior to any high priest in Israel. His office of high priest had nothing to do with genealogy. It was his right from eternity to eternity. This contrasted markedly with the 1st century high priests cosmic claims for their own office. Hebrews stressed that Jesus was the true heavenly high priest and Israel's earthly high priests were only shadows of the true spiritual reality.

It is striking that book of Hebrews discussed the heavenly tabernacle instead of a earthly temple. The Jews in Jerusalem had not thought it possible that the temple could be destroyed because it was the earthly manifestation of God's heavenly temple. The author of Hebrews denied the Jerusalem temple's spiritual significance by describing instead a heavenly tabernacle that was manifested on earth by the wilderness tabernacle. Hebrews 8:5 called the temple and its furniture as a copy and shadow of the heavenly temple. Hebrews reminded the Jewish Christians of God's warning to Moses that he make the tabernacle according to the pattern that he had seen on Mount Sinai. Hebrews then went on to note that all of Israel's formal religion was only a shadow pointing to the true heavenly reality. In Hebrews 3:1-6 and 8:1-5, the author of Hebrews comforted the Jewish Christian church that had been cut off from the temple, the sacrifices, and the priesthood. Hebrews reminded the Jewish Christians that their traditions were not grounded in Moses and his Sinai glory but in Christ's greater glory. Hebrews reminded them that the true temple on earth was not in Jerusalem. The true temple was the Spirit's presence within His people. So

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Horbury shed interesting light on this passage. He noted that the Maccabees' revolt had given great political power to the high priests. After the first Jewish revolt started in 66 AD, the independent Jewish government was led by the high priest. During the bar Kochba revolt of 135AD, the high priest also had a strong political role. Horbury noted that the high priests central political role was mentioned in the book of Jubilees, the Testament of Levi, and Ecclesiasticus. Horbury added that the high priest's office came to be increasingly described in cosmic terms. The high priests robe was described as encompassing the whole world. The high priest's prayers not only preserved the whole world, but even preserved earth, air, fire, and water, the basic elements of the world. This claim was made by Philo, Josephus, and Wisdom. W. Horbury, "The Aaronic Priesthood in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 19 (1983): 43-71.

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The Maccabean rulers had always claimed to be priest/ kings.

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The figure of Melchizedek was being used in different ways during the first century AD. The original text of *II Enoch* was written in this century, although there has been endless debate about the extent that the text was altered during the Middle Ages. The text of *II Enoch* included a claim that Melchizedek was born in a supernatural way. His mother Sothonim was claimed to have conceived him without having intercourse with her husband Nir who was a priest. Melchizedek's mother died before he was born, and he came out of her dead body. The angel Gabriel announced his birth to Nir. Then Melchizedek was born with the badge of priesthood on his chest and a glorious appearance. The Lord promised Nir that He would send Gabriel to bring Melchizedek to Paradise. If these ideas were present in the original form of *II Enoch*, they may illustrate the theological background against which the author of Hebrews wrote. Hebrews assumed that the account of Sothonim and Nir was not correct because Melchizedek was claimed to be without parents. Hebrews also depicted Melchizedek in a far less supernatural way. For a discussion of the Melchizedek passage in *II Enoch*, see Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, I:23-25.

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The Qumran literature also treated Melchizedek as a divine mediator. 11 QMelchizedek predicted that Melchizedek would appear as "god," or as a strong angel, in the first week of the 10<sup>th</sup> Jubilee. Melchizedek would then proclaim remission of sins after the Day of Atonement. See the discussion in Davila, "Melchizedek, the 'Youth,' and Jesus," 250-51.

they could not be cut off from God's true temple. In Hebrews 8:1-5, the author of Hebrews then argued that Christ served as high priest in this true heavenly tabernacle.

The author of Hebrews argued that the heavenly reality was far better than its shadowy picture in Israel's worship. Hebrews 12:20 reminded the Jewish Christians of Exodus 19:12-13. This passage warned that no person or animal could approach God's presence on Mount Sinai. If even an animal wandered onto Sinai, it was to be shot with an arrow. No one was to touch the mountain to retrieve it. Hebrews noted that the Jews at Sinai were quite properly frightened by God's glory fire on Sinai. Then Hebrews 12:22-23 argued that the Jewish Christians at Pella had come to the heavenly Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, and the city of the living God. They had come to the assembly of those enrolled in heaven, and to the presence of God Himself. This was far better than the city that they had left behind. Hebrews 9:8 argued that the way into the true heavenly temple could not be disclosed while the earthly temple was still standing. The tabernacle's veil and incense cloud had hidden God's presence in His earthly dwelling place. Christ ministered in the true heavenly temple, not any earthly manifestation of it. So the loss of the Jerusalem temple was simply not important. It had always been at best only a temporary copy of the heavenly reality. The loss of the temple was also unimportant because its sacrifices had never really taken away sins. They had only "sanctified for the cleansing of the flesh." They had restored only ceremonial cleanness. Real forgiveness of sins could only be obtained through Christ's death for sin.

In Hebrews 10:1-39, the author of Hebrews then discussed in detail the proper role of Old Testament sacrifices. Hebrews argued that the Law and its sacrifices were only shadows of the true spiritual reality that was to come. The Old Testament itself had already claimed that God took no real pleasure in the death of animals. The blood of bulls and goats never could have taken away sins. Instead, the Old Testament sacrifices only taught men the nature of sin, drove them to repentance, and led them to faith. Hebrews claimed that the Jewish Christians at Pella had come to the true spiritual reality that had only been foreshadowed by the Old Testament's sacrifices. Hebrews 9:20 reminded the Jewish Christians of Exodus 24:8. This verse had claimed that the Sinai covenant had been ratified when Moses sprinkled the covenant's blood on the congregation. Hebrews contrasted this with the reality of Christ's own sacrifice as an eternal death for sins.

Hebrews also promised that God's judgment was about to fall on Israel. Hebrews 2:13 reminded the Jewish Christians in the Decapolis about Isaiah's words in Isaiah 8:17-18. Isaiah had children with prophetic names, and these names were signs to Israel about God's coming judgment. In Isaiah 8, the prophet describes how God's word had been hidden from Israel in judgment, but that he and his children were still present as signs to the nation. Hebrews applied these words to the historical context of the 1st century AD. Just as in Isaiah's day, the Jewish nation faced destruction in God's judgment. Hebrews 3:7-11 reminded the Jewish Christians of Psalm 95:7-11.<sup>29</sup> This Psalm had warned an earlier generation not to forget God's judgment against the wilderness generation. Moses' generation had seen God's works but has always gone astray. The 1st century generation had seen Christ Himself, but had continued to go astray in their hearts. Now God's judgment was at hand for the first generation as well. Along the same lines, Hebrews 10:37-38 applied Habakkuk 2:3-4 to the 1st century. Habakkuk had promised that Judah would be destroyed by Mesopotamia. Habakkuk had been commanded to record the vision of judgment so that those who believed it might run away and avoid suffering. Habakkuk warned that the vision would certainly come true in its own time, and warned believers to wait and watch for it. Habakkuk warned that only believers would live by their faith. The author of Hebrews applied this to Rome's coming judgment on the nation. Believers were warned to watch for the coming judgment. Hebrews warned that they would live only if they kept their faith. Hebrews 6:7-8 warned that a land that drank up spiritual water and brought forth fruit was blessed by God. A land which brought forth thorns was about to be burned. In the background behind this statement was the impending Roman invasion that would burn Jerusalem

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Heb. 3:7-11 reads essentially the same as the LXX of Ps. 95:7-11 (94:7-11 in LXX). The MT of Ps. 95:7-11 means about the same thing, but the wording differs in several ways. Heb. 3:7-11 and LXX of Ps. 95:7-11 reads: Today if you shall hear his voice, harden not your heart as in the provocation, like as in the day of the temptation in the wilderness where your fathers tempted me by proving me and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was displeased with this generation and said, they do always err in their hearts, but they did not know my ways, as I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter into my rest. MT of Ps. 95:7-11 reads: Today, *Oh that ye would hear his voice!* Harden not your heart, as at Meribah, as in the day of Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work. *Forty years long was I grieved* with that generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways, wherefore I swore in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest.

because it had rejected spiritual fruit for the Lord. Hebrews 12:26 reminded the Jewish Christians of Haggai 2:6-7. In this passage, Haggai promised that after the restoration from exile, God would once more shake the whole land and the whole earth. After that shaking, God would fill His temple with glory and begin the Messianic age. As Hebrews was being written, the land was about to be shaken once more by a Roman invasion. The author of Hebrews used this passage to promise that things like faith which could not be shaken would remain.

In the face of military peril, the author of Hebrews reassured the Jewish Christians at Pella that God was still in control. Hebrews 1:5 began the book with a reference to Psalm 2:7-12. This was a clearly messianic passage in the Old Testament. Psalm 2 promised that the anointed Son would be given dominance over the nations. So it suggested that the Jewish Christians at Pella worshiped a Lord who was in control of the historical threat facing the community.<sup>30</sup> Psalm 2 also warned the nations to worship the Lord and do homage to the Son lest they perish. This put Israel's threatened revolt against Rome in the context of God's judgment on the nation for rejecting the Son.

Hebrews 2:6-8 reminded the Jewish Christians of Psalm 8:6. This Psalm had noted how God had put all things in subjection under Christ's feet. Hebrews promised the Jewish Christian community in the Decapolis that Christ was able to help them. The whole world had been subjected to Christ. Now He was able to help those who were tempted to fall because they were enslaved through fear of death. Nowhere in the Old Testament did He give help to angels, but He often gave help to the sons of Abraham. He would continue to do so now. So they should put their trust in Him even in the face of the Roman army just as righteous men had done throughout the Old Testament. Hebrews also noted that Christ had shared danger and death so that He could bring many brothers into the faith. This was a strong encouragement for a church facing persecution and danger themselves. Even if the worst would happen, God was able to work through it to accomplish a great work, and God would only ask them to imitate their Lord

Hebrews consistently used the Old Testament to reassure and comfort the Jewish Christians at Pella. Hebrews 10:19-39 urged the Jewish Christians to remain faithful despite the persecution that they faced. Hebrews warned them that God's judgment was a far greater danger than any threat of persecution that they faced from Rome or Jerusalem. So it was only wise to keep the faith. Hebrews 10:32-36 reminded the community that in former days, they had endured much suffering for the faith. Some of them had been made a public spectacle and reproach. Others had supported those who had been imprisoned for the faith. They had accepted the seizure of their property with joy because they knew that they had a better possession in heaven. Hebrews called them to continue to endure in faith because Christ would soon return.

Hebrews 12:1-3 called on the Jewish Christians in the Decapolis to imitate Christ. He had endured opposition of men, and had endured the cross, so that He could sit at the right hand of God's throne in heaven. They were called to endure opposition in the same way so that they could also stand before God's throne in heaven. Hebrews 12:4 reminded the Jewish Christian church that they had not yet resisted to the point of the shedding of blood. This is a striking statement if Hebrews was written from Italy. Few Christians in Palestine had yet faced death for their faith. This was far from true for the church in Italy. Nero's persecution had murdered members of the Roman church in very large numbers with the greatest possible brutality. So writing from Italy, the author of Hebrews called the Jewish church to remain faithful just as the church in Rome had remained faithful. Hebrews 12:5-13 reminded the Jewish Christians that their sufferings partly acted as God's discipline to raise them into mature Christians.

Hebrews 12:5-6 reminded the Jewish Christians of Solomon's words in Proverbs 3:11-12. Solomon advised his son not to reject God's discipline because God always reproves His sons. The author of Hebrews claimed that these words could be applied also to the 1st century church, and used Proverbs 3 to encourage believers to stand firm in the face of persecution. Hebrews 13:5 reminded the Jewish Christians of Moses' words in Deuteronomy 31:6. In this verse, Moses encouraged the Israelites as they faced the conquest of the land. Moses assured them that God would be with them and would not forsake them. The author of Hebrews used this passage to encourage Jewish believers not to put their trust in money during the chaos of war, but to put their trust in Christ's presence among them. Hebrews 13:8 reminded them also of Psalm 118:6. In this verse, the Psalmist spoke about his trouble and distress. He

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II Sam. 7:14 was the background behind Ps. 2. In II Sam. 7:14-15, God decreed that He would build a house for David. He would be David's Father, and David would be His son. While this passage has messianic overtones, it was primarily a promise to David. God promised that He would correct David's sins with a rod of iron. However, He would not remove His loving kindness from David as He had removed it from Saul. Hebrews takes this as a clearly messianic passage.

noted that God had put him in a safe place. The Psalmist declared that he was safe in God's presence. What could anyone do to him when he was protected by God's presence. The author of Hebrews applied this passage as comfort to the Jewish Christians who had fled to the Decapolis from the persecutions and troubles in Jerusalem. Hebrews promised that they were safe because Christ was with them, and Christ had led them to a safe place.

Hebrews 13:12-14 reminded the Pella community that Jesus had Himself been crucified outside the gate of Jerusalem. The Jewish Christians at Pella had also come out of Jerusalem bearing Christ's reproach. They were reminded that they had no lasting city here, but sought a heavenly city to come. Then Hebrews encouraged them to continue to offer a sacrifice of praise in the face of persecution. They were called to offer sacrifices from the fruit of their lips instead of animal sacrifices in Jerusalem. Hebrews closed by noting that Timothy had been in prison suffering for his faith. However, Timothy would soon be released, and would come to them. Hebrews also sent them greetings from all of those who had been suffering persecution in Italy

Hebrews also reassured the Jewish Christians in the Decapolis by reminding them that they were part of the new covenant promised in the Old Testament. In Hebrews 1:1-2, the author of Hebrews made a chronological distinction between the past and the present. Now God spoke to "us" "in these last days" through His Son. This suggests the basic distinction between God's kingdom in the Old Testament and the new kingdom of God's Spirit in the "last days."<sup>31</sup> The churches in Italy and Palestine interpreted their suffering as "birth pangs of the messianic age." They believed that they lived "in the last days," and that they should expect tribulation in those days. In Hebrews 8:6-13, the author of Hebrews argued that the old covenant obsolete and ready to disappear as Roman armies prepared to invade Palestine, and the new covenant was at hand. Jeremiah had stressed that Israel had violated the covenant established at Sinai and presented formally in the book of Deuteronomy. As covenant breakers, Israel had brought on herself the treaty curses in Deuteronomy 27 and 28. They would be destroyed by the nations, and would be driven into exile as Deuteronomy had promised. Jeremiah then promised that God would call His people back from captivity. He would form a new covenant with them, which would write God's word on their hearts. The question is, when would God make this new covenant? The 1st century rabbis in Jerusalem assumed that Israel was righteous and deserved to be protected by God. To the extent that the "new covenant" was still in the future, they believed that it would be fulfilled in the messianic millennium that was about to begin. The new covenant would be for a Jewish nation that would rule the world from Jerusalem as God's Messiah reigned on Jerusalem's throne. Hebrews disagreed with this interpretation, and claimed that Jeremiah's New Covenant was the Jewish and gentile Christian church. With the Roman army in the field, the Old Covenant had become obsolete, and was ready to disappear. Hebrews 10:16-17 quoted Jeremiah 31:33-34 which had argued that Judah had broken the covenant and they would inherit the curses spelled out in that covenant. The new covenant would write God's law on their hearts. Hebrews taught that Jeremiah's promise was finally fulfilled in the 1st century AD.

Perhaps the greatest comfort and assurance in the book of Hebrews was written in Hebrews 11. This chapter was a long history of saints who had kept their faith in God despite all of their troubles. This chapter referred to men who had lived under both Noah's covenant and Abraham's covenant. It implied that both were equally God's people. The chapter seems to imply that both believing gentiles and believing Jews in the 1st century were also one people of God. Faith was the spiritual reality through all time. Hebrews 11 discussed the faith of men like Enoch and Noah who were being described in the Jewish world as strong angelic beings in heaven. Hebrews 11 used them as examples of only righteous men. Hebrews 11:10 stressed that Abraham looked for a city whose builder and maker was God. This brings an idea into the Genesis text that is not clearly present in it. However, it also strikes a strong cord with the Jewish Christian community in the Decapolis. They had fled Jerusalem, and Jerusalem was about to be destroyed. They should find comfort in the fact that they shared Abraham's search for a heavenly city

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Like all Jews and gentiles in the first century, the community at Pella would have thought that they lived in "the last days," since they believed that the last thousand years of history was beginning. C. K. Barrett argued that the author of Hebrews stood close to the mainstream of Christian thought. He suggested that the book was written for Christians who were not living up to their expected level of spiritual maturity. Barrett suggested that the author of Hebrews called them to live a consistent Christian life and avoid apostasy because they were living in "the last days." Barrett suggested that eschatology held a central place in the book. C. K. Barrett, "The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews," 363-393 in W. D. Davies and D. Daube, eds., *The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952).

made by God Himself. Hebrews 11:24-26 stressed that even Moses had to endure ill treatment because he knew the reproach of Christ to be better than all the riches of Egypt. Like Moses, the Jewish Christians were called to endure ill treatment for Christ's sake. Hebrews 11:32-40 stressed that the Old Testament saints were men of whom the world was not worthy. Yet they were forced to live in caves and holes in the ground because of the severe oppression that they faced. Yet even these could only look forward to the true spiritual reality that was shared by the 1st century Jewish Christian community. The author of Hebrews concluded his letter to the Jewish Christians at Pella in Hebrews 13:1-25 by giving them practical guidance for living their lives as believers. Hebrews encouraged them to support other Christians who were in prison or in flight. Hebrews advised them to live their lives with integrity, and avoid the foolish ideas that were being taught by some.<sup>32</sup>

## **B) JOHN IN A GENTILE WORLD**

After Paul died in Rome, the apostle John brought Jesus' mother Mary to Ephesus in Asia Minor.<sup>33</sup> There tradition claims that John served the church as bishop. Irenaeus claimed that John wrote his gospel during his years in Ephesus.<sup>34</sup> Near that time, he also wrote the letters of I, II, and III John. Just as the book of Hebrews had been written anonymously during Nero's persecution, John chose not to add his name to his gospel or his epistles. II and III John simply identified the author as "the elder." I John made no direct claim of authorship. It may have been too dangerous for John to add his name to his gospel and epistles during Domitian's persecution. John indicated his authorship instead with veiled comments like John 19:35. In this verse, John wrote, "he who has seen has borne witness, and his witness is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth so that you also may believe. Along the same lines in John 21:24, John wrote, "this is the disciple, the one bearing witness about these things, and (the one) writing these things. And we know that his witness is true." The whole Christian church would have recognized John's authorship in such claims. However, Roman authorities would have been less certain of the book's origin. John's gospel and his epistles can be contrasted in this regard to the Revelation. John wrote the Revelation after he had been tried and sentenced to Patmos. Since claims of authorship would no longer be problematic, John stated his name twice in the first four verses of the book.

The oldest surviving fragment of John's gospel is p<sup>52</sup> which can be found in the John Rylands Library in Manchester. P<sup>52</sup> contained John 18:31-33 and 18:37-38. This fragment of John's gospel was written in a small Egyptian provincial town in the first half of the 2nd century AD. Charlesworth discussed the origin of these two fragments. He wrote,

They most probably come from a book of the Gospel of John in final form; it did not come from a source utilized by the author of John. According to expert paleographers who have studied Papyrus 52, it dates to no later than 125 C.E. and may even be as early as 100 C.E. The Gospel of John, therefore, was already in final form by the end of the 1st century C.E.<sup>35</sup>

So within only a very few years after John's death, his gospel was already being used and copied even in small towns along the Nile River.<sup>36</sup> While John served the church in Ephesus, he had two disciples named

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Heb. 13:9 maybe the only direct reference in the book to the divergent forms of the faith which were already growing in the church.

It is striking that only John recorded the wedding at Cana in Jn. 1:1-12 and Mary's role in it. It is possible that this detail was added to John's gospel because Mary had lived out her life in his home as he served the church in Ephesus. Jn. 2:12 added also that Jesus, His mother, His brothers, and His disciples all traveled together from Cana to Capernaum.

<sup>33</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1971), 59.

James H. Charlesworth, "Reinterpreting John: How the Dead Sea Scrolls Have Revolutionized Our Understanding of the Gospel of John," *Bible Review* 9 (1993): 20.

<sup>36</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 38-9. Metzger noted that the earliest long portion of John's gospel was p66 which was copied around 200 AD.

Polycarp and Papias. Polycarp was martyred in 156 AD and Papias died around 140 AD. So both of John's disciples were alive as John's gospel was being copied throughout the ancient world.<sup>37</sup>

John lived to be roughly a hundred years old.<sup>38</sup> During Domitian's persecution, John was exiled to Patmos. In the third century AD, Victorinus claimed that John had written Revelation after Domitian had sentenced him to work in the mines on Patmos.<sup>39</sup> Jerome claimed that John had been banished to Patmos in the 14th year of Domitian, and Jerome claimed that the Roman senate had reversed Domitian's acts when he died because he had been so brutal. This general reversal had freed John to return to Ephesus.<sup>40</sup>

## 1) JOHN AS A LATE FIRST CENTURY GOSPEL

John's gospel was very different from the three synoptic gospels. John's gospel was written about half a century after the synoptics, and it was written for a very different world. Christianity's relationship with both Rome and Israel had changed completely. These changed relationships had been produced partly by the history of the 1st century. While Nero had been trying to destroy the Italian church in 66 AD, revolt had finally broken out in Jerusalem. A priest named Eleazer announced that sacrifices for Nero would no longer be offered in the Jerusalem temple. Rome interpreted this as an act of revolt. People had flocked to Jerusalem from every religious group in Palestine. The revolt had been supported especially by the lower classes who were convinced that the messianic age was at hand.<sup>41</sup>

The 10th legion under Vespasian marched into Palestine to quell the rebellion. These were troubled times both in Palestine and in Italy. Nero had neglected Rome's infrastructure while building his palace. He had left the city in poor repair and bankrupt. With rebellion breaking out in the east, the Roman army revolted against Nero. In 68 AD, Galba declared himself emperor and marched his legion from Spain to Italy. The senate was so disgusted with Nero's actions that they declared him a public enemy, and Nero was forced to commit suicide. However, Galba was unable to hold the reins of power. After Nero's death, Rome entered a period of political chaos. Over the next two years, the emperors Galba, Otho, and Vitellius rose and fell. This political chaos at Rome would have given hope to the Jewish rebels who were defending Jerusalem against Vespasian. During the siege of Jerusalem, Flavius Josephus saw the hand writing on the wall and decided to change his political allegiance. He had been in Rome during the fire and had seen Rome's vicious attacks against the Christians in Italy. He saw similar treatment on the horizon for Jerusalem. He fled Jerusalem and sought an interview with Vespasian. Josephus announced to Vespasian that although he was a Roman general, he was the Messiah promised by the Old Testament. This gained Josephus favor with Vespasian and Josephus became an official Roman court historian. Josephus wrote a very long and detailed history of the Jewish revolt, and most of what we know about the time period comes from his work.<sup>42</sup> Vespasian was crowned emperor in 69 AD which was shortly before Jerusalem fell. Vespasian left the destruction of Jerusalem to his son Titus, who followed him to the Roman throne from 79 to 81 AD. During Titus' reign, Vesuvius erupted in Italy burying the cities of Pompeii

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The critical world has often explained the gospels as the product of a long period of oral tradition that followed Jesus' death. Such a period of oral tradition did not actually exist. From the decade that saw Jesus' resurrection, the accounts of his life have always been written.

Irenaeus claimed that Papias was a hearer of the apostle John. Irenaeus also claimed that Papias was a companion of Polycarp who lived from 70 AD to 156 AD. Eusebius claimed that Papias was a contemporary of both Ignatius and Polycarp. Ignatius was martyred in 108 AD. Perumalil argued that Papias knew a different John, and that this account was not very reliable. A. C. Perumalil, "Are Not Papias and Irenaeus Competent to Report on the Gospels?" *The Expository Times* 91 (1979-80): 333. The claim that Papias knew a different John seems unlikely.

Life in the mines was brief and brutal. At John's advanced age, the work must have been torturous. He may have been in very poor physical condition when he heard a voice in Rev. 4:1 calling him up to heaven.

William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), I: 14.

<sup>41</sup> It has been argued that the Jewish war did lead indirectly to Rome's eventual fall. The Jewish war taught the rest of the Roman empire that Rome could be fought by even a small nation.

<sup>42</sup> Silver, *A History of Messianic Speculation in Israel*. Josephus had access to the annals of Vespasian and to the limited number of Roman court records that had escaped the Roman fire.

and Herculaneum.<sup>43</sup> This would have reminded Christians of Jesus' promise of calamities that would mark the end of history.

Titus was followed to the throne by his younger brother Domitian. He ruled from 81 to 96 AD. He was on the throne when John wrote his gospels, his epistles, and the Revelation. Domitian tried to restore Rome to the values of its ancestors. He punished vice with an iron hand and tried to enforce a strict moral code on the empire. At the same time, Domitian was guilty of megalomania. He called himself "Master and God," and demanded that he be worshiped as a god. When many in the Roman senate joined a conspiracy against him, Domitian brought terror to the Roman nobility and to the Stoic philosophers who had supported them. In this context, it is not surprising that Domitian instituted the first empire wide persecution of the Christian church. Jews and Christians alike who refused to worship the *genus* of the emperor were accused of atheism and were martyred for their faiths. This was a rather obscure period in church history since many Christians were hiding. Domitian intended to stamp out Christianity and to restore the traditional Roman religion.<sup>44</sup>

As the church faced its first global persecution, many in the church kept their eyes on John. In John 21:18-23, Jesus had warned Peter that he would die as a martyr. Peter had then asked Jesus about John. Jesus responded in verse 22, "If I desire him to remain until I come, what (is that) to You?" John noted in verse 23 that this statement led many in the early church to believe that Jesus would return before John died. John was now a very old man. So many Christians thought that the end of history was at hand. While John claimed that this was an improper interpretation of Jesus' words, John also believed it himself to some extent. In I John 2:18 John warned his church that they lived in the last hour. John reminded his church that the Antichrist's coming marked the end of the age. The appearance of antichrists like Domitian proved that the end of history was at hand. In the eyes of many, Domitian's persecution had to mark the beginning of the final tribulation and the end of history. As John suffered in the mines on Patmos, he wrote the Revelation. The vision was interpreted by the 1st century church as depicting Rome drunk with the saints' blood. This reflected the feeling of the 1st century church during Domitian's persecution.

Domitian died in 98 AD and he was followed by Nerva who could only hold the throne for two years. Nerva was followed by the emperor Trajan who ruled until 117 AD. He was an old soldier, and he was a wiser and more capable ruler. Trajan had little interest in emperor worship or in supporting an empire wide persecution of Christianity. In 111 AD, Pliny the Younger asked Trajan what to do about Christians. Pliny had tortured and executed a number of Christians. Yet Pliny was concerned that there seemed to be no compelling reason for such rash action.<sup>45</sup> Trajan thought that Pliny had been justified in his attempts to eliminate Christianity, but suggested that he may have been a little excessive. Trajan advised Pliny that the Christians should be left alone unless someone properly accused them in court. Near the end of Trajan's reign, the Jews in Egypt revolted against Rome. Roughly a million Jews lived in Egypt at this time and around 200,000 of them lived in Alexandria.<sup>46</sup> The Jewish revolt began in the summer of 115 AD. It lasted until the fall of 117 AD. This revolt caused considerable damage to the Jewish areas of Alexandria, a great loss of life among the Jews, and agricultural disruptions in Egypt that lasted for several years after the revolt ended.<sup>47</sup> The Jews in Egypt followed a messianic figure named Lukuas-Andreas.

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Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), 26.

<sup>44</sup> Kenneth S. Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1953), 80. Domitian's persecution may have been encouraged by the fact that one of his relatives was a Christian, who could have become emperor if he had not been executed by Domitian.

<sup>45</sup> Pliny tortured two Christian women to find out what they believed and why they were hated. Despite their administrative ability, the Romans were often ignorant of the beliefs and histories of the nations that they dominated. For example, the Roman historian Tacitus gave very strange explanations for the origin of the Jewish people. One explanation was that they were originally exiles from the island of Crete who settled in Libya. He argued for this explanation by noting that there was an island named Ida on Crete, and the name of this mountain was corrupted to Iuda. Tacitus offered other possible explanations for Israel's history that were equally impossible. *The Histories of Tacitus*, Book V. 1-3.

<sup>46</sup> Henry A. Green, *The Economic and Social Origins of Gnosticism*, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), Henry A. Green, *The Economic and Social Origins of Gnosticism*, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 91-3.

<sup>47</sup> A. Kashner, "Some Comments on the Jewish Uprising in Egypt in the Time of Trajan," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 27 (1976): 147-58.

When the book of Luke was written, persecution from Rome had not yet begun. Christianity had been persecuted severely by Jewish leaders who had been opposed to the gospel. Paul's whole argument in court had been that Christianity was simply a different kind of Judaism, and Seneca's Roman court had accepted the argument. Rome had seen no reason to act against Christians as a group before Nero's fire. When the book of Hebrews was written, Roman persecution was just beginning, but it was largely limited to Italy. John wrote for a different historical situation entirely. Now the Roman empire was determined to destroy the faith and persecution had become world wide.

## 2) JOHN AND THE JEWISH/CHRISTIAN CONFLICT

Christianity's relationship with Judaism had also changed greatly by the time that John wrote his gospel. This change was almost inevitable because Judaism itself had become radically different. Israel's failed war for independence had led to pervasive changes in Jewish life and Jewish religion. Neusner argued that Jews who survived the calamity in 70 AD reacted three ways to the despair caused by the destruction of Jerusalem. Some saw themselves as the rejected children of God who had been born to disaster. Others believed the prophets who had taught that suffering was a punishment for sin. They reconsidered the Old Testament prophets' claims in the light of this new catastrophe.<sup>48</sup> Jerusalem's destruction led them to read the covenant curses in Deuteronomy 28:47-48 and to ask if Israel's unworthiness had led to the disaster.<sup>49</sup>

Others within both the Jewish and Christian communions interpreted Jerusalem's fall within their own overview of history. The result was a preoccupation with the future and hope. If Jerusalem was destroyed because its people were unworthy, the Messiah might appear when Israel had become prepared for his arrival. With this impetus, messianic speculation in Israel took a different form. The Jewish revolt of 66 AD had been led by two messianic figures. The first was Simeon Bar Giora who had led the zealots from Galilee during the revolt of 66 to 70 AD. The second was Menachem ben Judah who had made messianic claims in Judah during the war. Both of these messianic figures had been violent and often wicked men. Josephus claimed that conflicts between the followers of these Messiahs had killed more people during the Jerusalem siege than the Roman army. Following these Messiahs had led to wide spread death, slavery, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the loss of the temple.<sup>50</sup> Israel's search for a Messiah would have to be conducted with more caution in the future. This can be seen in Yohanan ben Zakkai's attitude at Jamnia after 70 AD. Ben Zakkai taught that if someone had a sapling in his hand, and someone else said, "Here is the Messiah!" the first person should finish planting his sapling before greeting the Messiah.<sup>51</sup> Yet just before his death in 80 AD, ben Zakkai summoned his disciples to him. Ben Zakkai warned his disciples to prepare immediately because the Messiah was about to appear.<sup>52</sup>

The end of the 1st century and the beginning of the 2nd century saw a natural Jewish fascination with the length of Israel's suffering and the time when Israel's Messiah would appear. The Talmud recorded

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<sup>48</sup> Neusner, *Judaism in the Beginning of Christianity*, 89-90.

<sup>49</sup> Neusner, *Judaism in the Beginning of Christianity*, 93-4.

<sup>50</sup> Josephus claimed that these messiahs were wicked men. However, Josephus wrote to ingratiate himself with the Roman court. His spin on Israel's messianic leaders has not been accepted by everyone. Jacob Neusner wrote about the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Neusner argued that the generation that saw the fall of Jerusalem was not a sinning generation, but was a generation that was deeply faithful to God's covenant and the Scriptures. Neusner argued that 1st century Jews sinned only in their failure. If they had defeated Rome, they would have been highly praised. However, the temple was destroyed in a brave, courageous, but hopeless war. Neusner argued that this war was waged to remove pagan rule from the holy land. It was a war fought in the name of God. Neusner argued that this war called forth prophets and holy men who were followed courageously by the people. Neusner argued that the inhabitants of Jerusalem fought against impossible odds with amazing courage. Neusner argued that some explanation was needed by later generations to explain why the city fell. Later generations believed that God would not have allowed His temple to be destroyed without a reason. Just as after the fall of the temple in 586 BC, so again after 70 AD, the claim became popular that the fathers had sinned, bringing famine, exile, and slavery as a recompense for their sins. However, Neusner questioned whether this judgment was fair. Neusner, *Judaism in the Beginning of Christianity*, 20.

<sup>51</sup> Neusner, *Judaism in the Beginning of Christianity*, 93-4.

<sup>52</sup> Silver, *Messianic Speculation in Israel*, 13-24.

three rabbis who tried to calculate when the Messiah would appear.<sup>53</sup> Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus based his calculations partly on Psalm 95:10. This verse read, "For forty years, I loathed that generation, and said, they are a people who err in their hearts. They do not know my ways." Eliezer believed that this verse could be applied to the generation following Jerusalem's destruction in 70 AD. Eliezer believed that God would have compassion after 40 years and send his Messiah around 110 AD. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus lived during the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. He also justified his position with Deuteronomy 8:3 and Psalm 90:15. He understood the years of the Messiah to be the birth pangs of the messianic age, the years of suffering that would immediately precede the Messiah's appearance. The great rabbi Akiba shared this belief, which is why Akiba supported bar Kochba in his revolt against Rome in 132-135 AD. Silver noted that the apocalyptic work IV Ezra was put into its final form around 120 AD during Hadrian's rule. IV Ezra claimed that the Messiah would come either during Hadrian's reign, or shortly after it.<sup>54</sup>

Another rabbinic scholar was named Jose the Galilean. He believed that the Messiah would come three generations after Jerusalem was destroyed. Jose believed that three generations equaled 60 years. So he expected the Messiah around 130 AD. A third rabbinic scholar was named Eleazer ben Azariah. He believed that the Messiah would come 70 years after Jerusalem was destroyed. So he expected the Messiah to appear around 140 AD. One reason that rabbi Akiba supported bar Kochba was that messianic speculation expected the Messiah to appear at that time. Some rabbis in the decade even predicted the very day that the Messiah would appear. Bar Kochba, the son of a star, led a futile revolt between 132 and 135 AD. Neusner noted that bar Kochba's messianic army intended to enthrone the King-Messiah, bar Kochba. They intended to rebuild the temple, re-establish the priesthood, and restore the sacrificial cult.<sup>55</sup> Silver noted that the rabbis who lived before bar Kochba usually taught that the days before the Messiah would be very brief, and that the millennial age could begin at any time. Silver noted that the bar Kochba revolt shattered these messianic hopes and brought disillusionment with messianic speculation. After bar Kochba, the rabbis moved their messianic hope into the distant future. By doing so, they hoped to prevent a return of the kind of messianic speculation that had brought such suffering.<sup>56</sup> The next messianic figure to appear after bar Kochba would not rise in Israel for another 300 years. Messianic fervor in Israel was finally burned out by the terrible suffering and calamity of the bar Kochba revolt.<sup>57</sup>

By the time that John wrote his gospel, Israel as a nation had completely rejected the idea that Jesus was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. They had suffered bitterly by following other Messiahs. Yet many in Israel were determined to pursue the dream of a military Messiah who would defeat Rome and give Israel its rightful leadership of the world. There could be no greater contrast than the difference

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<sup>53</sup>

Sanhedrin 99a

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Silver, *Messianic Speculation in Israel*, 25.

<sup>55</sup>

Neusner, *Judaism in the Beginning of Christianity*, 36.

<sup>56</sup>

Silver, *Messianic Speculation in Israel*. Neusner noted that the Mishnah contained no eschatology or messianic theology. See the discussion in Jacob Neusner, "Mishnah and Messiah," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 14 (1984):4-5. The Mishnah was compiled near the end of the 2nd century AD. It became the foundation document for modern Judaism. The absence of any messianic theology in the Mishnah shows the Jewish hesitancy to deal with questions that had caused such destruction in the last two centuries.

<sup>57</sup>

Many believed a messiah would come 400 years later. Silver, *Messianic Speculation in Israel*, 25.

between this messianic hope and the Christians' risen Messiah and the Christians' hope for their Lord's imminent return.<sup>58</sup>

Many of the walls between Christianity and Judaism were erected by ben Zakkai's school at Jamnia. When Rome destroyed Jerusalem and its temple in 70 AD, the Pharisees at Jamnia had faced the same difficult questions that the Jewish Christians in Hebrews had faced. How could Judaism survive without a temple, priesthood, or sacrifice? Yohanan ben Zakkai founded a school at Jamnia to reform Judaism without a temple. One of the first changes that resulted from Jamnia was that the Pharisees became the dominant voice in Judaism. For all practical purposes, the Sadducees, Zealots, and Essenes came to an end after 70 AD. Neusner noted that the Pharisees had been a strong influence on the common people in Palestine for a long time. Then after 70 AD, the Pharisees finally became the dominant voice among the Jews in Palestine who had not become Christians. Neusner noted that among the Pharisees at Jamnia, the House of Hillel gained permanent ascendancy over the House of Shammai.<sup>59</sup> That was significant because the House of Hillel was generally milder and more peace loving than the conflict driven House of Shammai.<sup>60</sup> The Pharisees at Jamnia also emphasized visions of God far more than they had before Jerusalem was destroyed. This expanded interest in Merkabah was motivated partly by polemical dialogues against Christian interpretations of the Old Testament theophanies. It was also motivated partly by the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. This had led many Jews to seek hope in Ezekiel 40-48 with its promise of a restored temple.<sup>61</sup> The new interest in Ezekiel led also to a greater interest in Ezekiel's theophanies.

Neusner argued that after 70 AD, the survivors of the Roman war decided to avoid future wars by making a radical division between faith and history. Neusner argued that the Pharisees at Jamnia tried to construct a new reality that was above history. To do so, they sought meaning in the small events of life instead of large global events. Neusner argued rabbinic Judaism would eventually set itself against all messianic movements that claimed to know the secret meaning behind history and redemption. So the rabbis would eventually set themselves against both Christianity and militaristic forms of Judaism. In doing so, Neusner argued that the Pharisees claimed divine authority for their goals. They claimed to preserve an oral revelation that went all the way back to Sinai.<sup>62</sup> However, they believed that the law as a whole was older than this. It was perceived as cosmic and eternal. The law was believed to have been involved in creation itself.<sup>63</sup>

The Pharisees at Jamnia took strong measures to drive Jewish Christians out of Judaism. In 90 AD, the rabbis held a council at the school founded by ben Zakkai at Jamnia. This council officially rejected Christianity and drove a permanent wedge between Judaism and Christianity. The council accepted a change to Synagogue worship proposed by Samuel "the Small." Samuel wrote a prayer that was intended

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<sup>58</sup>

John made a strong case that Jesus was the promised Messiah. This case was made in passages like Jn. 1:43-51. In these verses, Philip said to Nathanael, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." The synoptic gospels had stressed Jesus' attempts to prevent people from calling Him the messiah. He did this to keep people from trying to force Him to lead a military revolution against Rome. By the time that John wrote His gospel, the Jewish revolt had been over for over two decades. John stressed Jesus' claims to be the promised Messiah. In Jn. 4:25-26 Jesus spoke with the woman at the well in Samaria. She told Him, "I know that the Messiah is coming. When that One comes, He will declare all things to us." Jesus responded to her, "I who speak to you am He." This was a direct claim to be the promised Messiah. Jn. 4:39 stressed that many of the Samaritans believed on Him. This contrasted strongly with passages like Matt. 10:5 and Lk. 9:52-53. The synoptic gospels recorded events that put the Samaritans outside of the kingdom. That may have been in part because Matthew wrote his gospel for a largely Jewish audience. John was writing for a largely gentile audience and he recorded in his account the events that justified gentile inclusion into the kingdom.

<sup>59</sup> Neusner, *Judaism in the Beginning of Christianity*, 64.

<sup>60</sup> Neusner, *Judaism in the Beginning of Christianity*, 27.

<sup>61</sup> Mackay argued that Christians living shortly before and after 70 AD must have remembered Christ's warning that not one stone of the temple would be left upon another (Matt 24). Mackay suggested that this led many people to think about Ezek. 40-48 and its vision of the restored temple. Cameron Mackay, "The Argument of Hebrews," *The Church Quarterly Review* 68 (1967): 325-38.

<sup>62</sup> Neusner, *Judaism in the Beginning of Christianity*.

<sup>63</sup> Davies, *Jewish and Pauline Studies*, 23-24.

to prevent heretics and Christians from worshiping in the Synagogue. The prayer included curses on Jesus and on Christians. So Jewish-Christians could not pray it. Samuel's prayer was inserted into the Eighteen Benedictions that were a part of the synagogue worship service. All synagogues in the Diaspora had added this condemnation of Christianity to their service by the end of the 1st century. From that moment, the Jewish Christian church could not participate in Jewish life. The Sanhedrin at Jamnia made another change in the synagogue service as well. The Jewish Christian church had used the Greek LXX in its services. The Sanhedrin rejected the use of the LXX. Heer noted that a Jewish Christian could still have claimed to be both Jewish and Christian after the flight to the Decapolis. However, after the 18 Benedictions were changed, this was no longer true. The Sanhedrin took the position that someone could not be both a Jew and a Christian.<sup>64</sup> Heer argued that the gospel of John reflected the feelings of a Jewish Christian community that had been cast out of Israel. Heer argued that this was a tragic event. The Jewish Christians should have served as a bridge between Jews and Christians, but they were rejected by both groups.<sup>65</sup>

### 3) JOHN'S PAULINE THEOLOGY

When John wrote his gospel, Christianity was becoming predominantly a gentile institution, and John wrote for a largely gentile Christian audience.<sup>66</sup> This can be seen in the fact that he needed to explain even the simplest Aramaic terms. For example in John 1:38, he even explained the meaning of the word "rabbi. In John 10:16, John recorded a claim by Jesus that was omitted from the synoptic gospels. In this verse, Jesus declared that He had other sheep that were not of the Jewish fold. Jesus promised that these gentile sheep would hear His voice and would become one flock with the Jews. This contrasted sharply with the account recorded in Matthew 15:22-28. In these verses, Jesus declared that He had only been sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and that it was not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs. Both John and Matthew recorded things that Jesus had actually said, but each selected statements that fit their own agendas. Matthew's agenda had been to convince Jews to accept that Messiah. John had largely given up on that goal. John's agenda was to convince gentiles to accept the gospel. So John's message to the gentiles was that Jesus had always predicted their entrance into the kingdom. In John 11:49-52, John interpreted Caiaphus' statement as a prophecy uttered unconsciously by the high priest. Caiaphus had argued that it was better for Jesus to die than the whole nation. Caiaphus meant that a revolt against Rome would bring destruction on the land, and it was better to kill one man than see a revolt break out. John interpreted Caiaphus' words as an unconscious statement of the gospel. Then John put another slant on Caiaphus' words. John claimed that Caiaphus was prophesying that Jesus would die for the nation and not for the nation alone. He would die to gather together into one the children of God who were scattered abroad. John was claiming that Caiaphus' words were not only a statement of the gospel for the Jews. It was also a statement of the gospel for the gentile church.

John had consistently taken a more negative view of Judaism than the synoptic gospels.<sup>67</sup> John's perspective on the Jews can be summed up in John 1:11-12. These verses stated that Jesus had come to His own, but His own had not received Him. Yet those who did receive Him were given the power to become sons of God. While the synoptic gospels depicted Jesus' foes as the Scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees, John depicted Jesus' foes consistently as "the Jews." For example in John 1:19, John said that "the Jews" had sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to question Jesus. John 3:25 mentioned a discussion between John the Baptist's disciples and "a Jew." In John 5:10, "the Jews" interrogated a man

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This assumption continues down to the present day. It explains why all Jews have a right to return to Palestine except Jewish Christians.

<sup>65</sup>

Heer, *God's First Love: Christians and Jews over Two Thousand Years*, 32-3.

<sup>66</sup>

Jn. 21:18 dated the composition of John's gospel after Peter's death. While the dates of all New Testament books are constantly debated, John's gospel may well have been written somewhere around 90 AD.

<sup>67</sup>

Friedrich Heer argued that Matthew was the Jewish gospel. Mark depicted the Jewish people as being sympathetic to Jesus while their leaders opposed Him. Luke reflected a community where Jews and Christians lived together in peace. However, John's gospel has often been used to justify anti-Semitism. Heer suggested that as hatred against the Jews grew in the Roman empire, Christians increasingly wished to distance themselves from the Jews. Heer argued that John's gospel was the most pro-Roman and anti-Jewish of the gospels. Heer, *God's First Love: Christians and Jews over Two Thousand Years*, 23.

who had been healed on the Sabbath. John 7:15 claimed that “the Jews” marveled at Jesus. Again and again through John’s gospel, “the Jews” were set over against the Jesus and His followers. John also added a number of other details to his account that were critical of the Jews. For example, in John 19:12-15, John added to the story of Christ’s crucifixion Pilate’s statement to the Jews, “Behold your king,” and the “Jews” response, “We have no king but Caesar!” John’s use of the name “Jew” differed markedly from the way that Paul had used the name three decades earlier. In Romans 2:28-29, Paul had claimed that a person was not a “Jew” because of an outward characteristic like circumcision. Paul said that being a “Jew” involved the heart and the Spirit, not the letter. Paul claimed that the Jews’ praise did not come from men but from God. By John’s time, the word “Jew” had gained a more negative meaning.<sup>68</sup>

John’s gospel stressed the themes that had become important for the 1st century church. In his gospel, John showed that he had been thinking through the nature of God just as Paul had thirty years earlier. John wrote at length about the implications of the unity of the Trinity. While John certainly believed that the Father and Holy Spirit were separate Persons,<sup>69</sup> John also recognized the unity between them. In John 15:26, John noted that the Spirit of Truth was not only sent from the Father, He also proceeded from the Father. In John 16:13, Jesus promised that the Spirit would not speak on His own initiative, but would speak whatever He heard and would disclose it. This resembled strongly Jesus’ claim that He did not do anything on His own initiative. He only did what He saw the Father doing.

While the Holy Spirit was of interest to John, he was far more interested in the relationship between Jesus and His Father. John stressed both the unity and the distinction between Jesus and His Father.<sup>70</sup> In John 1:14-18, John claimed that the disciples beheld Jesus’ glory, and John declared His glory to be the glory of the only begotten of the Father. John declared that no man had seen the Father at any time. This assumed that the glory theophanies seen in Ezekiel were Old Testament appearances of Jesus. John declared in John 3:34-36 that God had sent Jesus to speak His words and had given Him the Spirit. John claimed that God the Father loved the Son. In John 5:17-27, John recorded Jesus’ claim that both He and His Father were healing people on the Sabbath. Jesus was accused of blasphemy by His opponents for making this claim. It was understood to mean that He and His Father were equal. In passages like John 6:37-44, Jesus claimed that His Father had given Him authority to heal, to raise people from death, to judge rebellion against God, and to save those given to him by the Father.

In John 6:46, Jesus declared that no one had seen the Father except the One who came from God. He had seen His Father. This assumes again that the Old Testament theophanies were appearances of Jesus instead of His Father. In John 6:62, Jesus claimed to have existed in heaven before He was born in Bethlehem. Jesus asked, “What would you say if you saw the Son of Man ascending to where He was before?” In John 8:56-59, Jesus claimed directly to be Yahweh in Genesis. Jesus said, “Before Abraham was born, I Am.” The phrase “I Am” was related to the name Yahweh in Hebrew.

In John 10:29-33, Jesus declared His own divinity by saying, “I and the Father are One.” John noted that the Jews picked up stones to stone Him, saying, “You being a man make Yourself out to be God.” In John 10:36b-38, Jesus said,

Did you say that I blasphemed because I said that I am the Son of God? If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me, but if I do them, even if you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me and I am in Him.

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Heer noted that the animosity between Jews and Christians in the first century gave rise to very different explanations for the origin of Christianity. Jews now claimed that Jesus was an illegitimate child born to Mary and a Roman soldier named Panthera. Jesus was claimed to have learned magic in Egypt and to have used this magic to perform His miracles. Jesus’ disciples were claimed to have stolen Jesus’ body and to have invented the story of the resurrection. Heer, *God’s First Love: Christians and Jews over Two Thousand Years*, 33. This explanation for the resurrection was mentioned already in Matt. 28:11-15. Matthew grounded the story of the disciples’ theft of Jesus’ body in the explanation of the tomb’s guards.

John noted in Jn. 14:16-17 that Jesus promised to ask the Father to send the Spirit. The promised Spirit of Jesus had abided with them, but would in the future be within them. Jn. 14:26 promised that the Father would send the Holy Spirit in Jesus’ name.

John’s theme was quite different from the Synoptic Gospels. They agreed with John’s theology, but had a very different stress. In the Synoptics, believers were urged to pray to their Father in heaven. The believers’ relationship to the Father was more important in the Synoptics than a detailed analysis of Jesus’ relationship to His Father.

When Jesus declared, "I and the Father are One," the number One was an allusion to Deuteronomy 6:4. This verse had declared, "Hear of Israel, Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is One." This passage was the famous *Shema Israel*. It was read every Sabbath in the synagogue worship. By claiming that He and His Father were One, Jesus was claiming to be the God of the Old Testament. In John 12:44-45, John noted, "Jesus cried out and said, 'He who believes in Me, does not believe in Me alone but also in the One who sent Me. The one who sees Me, sees also the One who sends Me.'" Then in John 14:9-10, Jesus claimed that those who had seen Him had seen the Father because the Father abided in Him. Some of those who heard His words tried to stone Him for blasphemy because He was claiming to be God. Shortly before His crucifixion, Jesus claimed in John 16:15, "All things that the Father has are Mine. For this reason, I said that He takes of Mine and will announce it to you."<sup>71</sup> Then in John 16:32, Jesus claimed, "An hour is coming and now has come when each of you will all be scattered to his own place, and you will leave Me alone, but I am not alone because the Father is with Me." In John 16:27-28, Jesus claimed,

For the Father Himself loves you because you have loved Me, and you have believed that I have come forth from the Father. I came forth from the Father, and I have come into the world. I am leaving the world again and am going to the Father.

In John 17:5-6, Jesus prayed,

And now, glorify Me, Father, together with Yourself, with the glory that I had with You before the world began. I revealed Your name to the men whom You gave Me from the world. They belonged to You. You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word.

In John 17:10-11, Jesus prayed to His Father,

... but about the ones that You gave me, they belong to You. Everything that is Mine is Yours, and Your things are Mine. I have been glorified in them. I will no longer be in the world, but these are in the world, and I will come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name. Keep those You gave to Me that they may be One, just as We are One.

The unity of Jesus and His Father in the Trinity was a clearly a central focus of John's theology. In these and other verses, the apostle John was determined to construct a theology of the Trinity to defend Christianity against the heresies that were already attacking the church.

John was also very interested in the practical implications for believers of the relationship between Jesus and His heavenly Father. In some ways, John echoed Paul's "in Christ" theology, but John did so by quoting Jesus' words. In John 6:56, Jesus taught, "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood remains in Me and I remain in him." In John 14:19-20, Jesus taught His disciples, "In yet a little while, the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will also live. In that day, you will know that I am in My Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you." In John 14:23, Jesus taught, "If someone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make our abode with him." In John 15:4, Jesus urged, "Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. As a branch is not able to bear fruit of itself unless it remains in the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in Me." In John 17:20-26, Jesus prayed,

Not for these alone I ask, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, that they all may be one, just as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, and that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. I have given them the glory which you gave Me that they may be one just as We are One. I am in them, and You are in Me, that they may be made completely into one, that the world may know that You sent Me. You loved them just as You loved Me. Father, those that You have given Me, I desire that where I am, they also may be with Me, that they may see My glory, which you gave Me because You loved Me before the foundation of the world. Righteous Father, the world also does not know You, but I know You and these knew that You sent Me.

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The context for this claim was Jn. 3:35 where Jesus claimed that the Father loved Him and gave all things into His hand.

For John, Christianity was not just a set of laws or customs. It was also not just a belief system. For John, Christianity was the presence of Jesus Christ within His people. For John, this presence within believers echoed the Trinity and it was in some sense an extension of the Trinity. Just as the Father was “in” Christ, and Jesus was “in” the Father, so also Jesus was “in” His saints.

These words would one day split the Christian church. That split would begin in the days of the Roman emperor Diocletian. He would reign from 284 to 305 AD. Diocletian would split the Roman Empire in half, and this split soon became permanent. The western half of the Roman Empire would govern from Rome. Since Rome was the only dominant city in the West, the bishop at Rome soon became the chief religious figure in the western church. As this happened, the western church slowly developed into Roman Catholicism. The eastern Roman Empire established its capital at Constantinople. However, there were many important cities in the East. No one city would gain the kind of dominance exercised by Rome in the West. The Christian church in the East followed strong leaders in Sinai, Jerusalem, Alexandria, Antioch, and Constantinople. In theory, these leaders were equals. The Eastern church slowly developed into Eastern Orthodoxy. The two halves of the Christian church went their own ways in theology and practice. Since the Roman Empire was dominated by the idea of law, the Roman church became strongly interested in law and proper behavior. Salvation in the West came to be seen in legal motifs, and the Western religious ideal focused on doing something for the gospel. The East was far more mystical. In the East, the most important religious ideal was the attempt to gain a vision of Christ's glory within the world and within His people.<sup>72</sup>

This ideal was to some degree a continuation of the Merkabah mystics' goal, although it was shaped by Neo-Platonic philosophical presuppositions instead of a Semitic mind set. The Eastern church formulated this concern with the expression, “God became man so that man could become God.” By these words, the Eastern church only intended to express the mystic union of Christ and His people.<sup>73</sup> However, this expression was formulated in a way that was intended to infuriate the West, and it did so. Eventually the Eastern and Western halves of the Christian church excommunicated each other. The break between the Eastern and Western churches became so complete that the crusaders later besieged and pillaged Constantinople on their way to Palestine. To a large extent, the break within Christianity that began in Diocletian's time has continued down to the present day.

All of this historical data is important because it shapes the eyes with which people read John's gospel. Few authors in the West have understood John's case because mysticism is so alien to the West. At the same time, John's case has been understood more accurately in the East, although even Eastern Orthodox mysticism has been colored by Neo-Platonic presuppositions.<sup>74</sup> For John, Jesus was “in” His Father, and His Father was “in” Jesus. Both were “in” believers. Their presence within believers created in them the “new man” which alone would survive death to stand before God's throne. John did not invent “in Christ” theology. He inherited it from Paul. Yet it became a key theme of John's thought.

With John's interest in the presence of Christ within believers, it is not surprising that John was interested in the Christian form of Merkabah mysticism. Jey Kanagaraj argued that the gospel of John reflected the phraseological and conceptual apparatus of Merkabah mysticism. Kanagaraj saw Merkabah thought also in the themes of “seeing”, “glory”, and “king” in John's gospel.<sup>75</sup> Anthony Hanson also noted the links between John and Merkabah. Hanson argued that John 1:14 was pointing back to Exodus 34 in

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<sup>72</sup> See the discussion in Kirk, *The Vision of God*.

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This formula was not really heretical. Writing from a Roman Catholic perspective, Neal Flanagan commented on this claim in 1956. Flanagan wrote, “According to the traditional description of the Fathers, God became man to make men God. This doctrine, as applied to the *soul* of the Christian, is found at every turn in the writings of St. Paul. It must also be applied to the *body*. The glorious body-glorious as reflecting the intimate presence of God-which Christ did not demand at the time of His incarnation, will be given to us. What Christ, in His humility, did not insist upon for self at birth, He will bestow upon us. He will make divine even our corporal appearance.” Neal Flanagan, “A Note on Philippians 3, 20-21,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 18 (1956): 8-9.

The impact of Neo-Platonism on Christianity has been discussed in a number of books and articles. See for example Griffin and Paulsen, “Augustine and the Corporeality of God,” 97-118.

Kanagaraj argued that the ascent and descent of the Son of Man in John paralleled Merkabah thought. Kanagaraj argued that the mystical goal of seeing God was applied in a different way in John where God was seen on the cross. The person commissioned in John was not the visionary but the Son of God. Jesus was the messenger sent by God to reveal to men the hidden mysteries of God. Kanagaraj, *'Mysticism' in the Gospel of John*. Kirk claimed that John's whole Gospel could be understood as the record of a perpetual theophany. Kirk, *The Vision of God*, 50.

this verse. John 1:14 said that the Word became flesh and dwelled among them as they beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten Son.<sup>76</sup> This passage pointed back both to the Mount of Transfiguration in Luke 9:26-32 and to Sinai behind it.

John's use of the Merkabah tradition was also noted by J. A. Draper. He discussed John 1:14. This verse noted that the Logos became flesh and tabernacled among us. Draper argued that John was alluding to the tabernacle in the wilderness. Draper saw this as a rejection of the validity of the Jerusalem temple, and as a reinterpretation of temple theology in terms of Merkabah mysticism. God's glory presence in the temple was replaced by the experience of Christ's presence and by the Merkabah vision of the ascended Lord. Draper wrote,

In John's Gospel, the concept of Jesus as the tented wilderness presence of God with his people on earth, is supplemented it seems with the idea of Jesus constituting or building the heavenly temple on his return to the Father. In doing so, he opens up the way for his disciples to gain mystical experience of the heavenly throne room by means of ascent and descent obtained through the worship of the community.<sup>77</sup>

The Merkabah glory motif can be seen in several passages in John's writings.<sup>78</sup> In John 6:46, Jesus declared that no one had seen the Father except Him. This had strong implications for the nature of the Old Testament theophanies. In John 2:11, John noted that the beginning of Jesus' signs was performed in Cana of Galilee as He manifested his glory and His disciples believed in Him. In John 6:60-62, John noted that many of Jesus disciples (other than the 12) grumbled when He said that they would have to eat of the flesh of the Son of Man since He was the true bread that came down from heaven. Jesus asked them what they would do if they saw Him ascending to where He was before. His was a direct association of Himself with the Old Testament theophanies seen in passages like Ezekiel 1. At Lazarus' resurrection in John 11:40, Jesus said, "if you believe you will see the glory of God." In John 12:39-41, John drew on the Merkabah motif when he quoted Isaiah 6:10. John said that Isaiah saw His glory and spoke of Him. In John 13:19-20, Jesus told His disciples that the world would soon see Him no more. Yet they would continue to see Him. They would then know that Jesus was in His Father, and the Father was in Him, and Jesus was in them as well. This echoes Paul's "in Christ" theology.

John was not alone in his stress on the glory motif. Peter used it several times.<sup>79</sup> Then before John died in Asia Minor, an early Christian mystic in Italy named Hermas used Merkabah motifs in a Christian context. He wrote the *Shepherd of Hermas*. This text described visions of angels and heavenly emissaries. While the text was chiefly interested in post-baptismal sin, it also demonstrated the continued role of a Christian form of Merkabah in John's day.

John also wrote his gospel for a church that was fighting heresies that grew from Greek philosophy. Paul had fought the same battles decades earlier, but the war was far from over. Much has been made of the polemical and philosophical issues behind John's description of Christ as the *Logos*, or "the Word," in the prologue of his gospel. The word *logos* was used in a variety of ways among the Greek philosophers, although none used the word in exactly John's way. There have been a number of suggestions about the exact polemic in the background behind John's use of the term.

The concept of a divine Word was actually far older than that. In Genesis 1:3, God said, "Let there be light." When the divine Word was spoken, light appeared. Genesis 1 was ultimately in the background behind John's reference to the Word in the prologue of his gospel. The idea of a creative Word was handed down in Scripture in a number of ways. Old Testament texts like Joel 1:1 noted that "The Word of Yahweh" came to the prophets. Psalm 33:6 declared that the heavens were made by the Word of

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<sup>77</sup> Anthony T. Hanson, *Jesus Christ in the Old Testament*, (London: SPCK, 1965).

Draper argued that John put together a rejection of the temple from II Sam. 7 with Merkabah's heavenly temple visions. Draper noted that these two were also associated with each other at Qumran. Draper, "Temple, Tabernacle and Mystical Experience in John," 266, 270.

<sup>78</sup> Draper argued for the presence of Merkabah content in John 1:47-51; 2:12-22; 2:23-3:21; 4:1-42; 7:37-39; 10:3-5; 10:34-36; 12:28-30; 12:37-41; 14:1-6, and 15:1-10.

<sup>79</sup> I Pet. 1:21; 4:14; 5:1; 5:10; II Pet. 1:17

Yahweh. In Proverbs 8, the creative Word became the divine Wisdom which called men to learn from her. Wisdom had been possessed by God at the beginning of His ways, and Wisdom saw the earth created.<sup>80</sup>

John also ministered to a church that was being influenced increasingly by the 1st century precursor to Gnosticism. John addressed this heresy in a way that echoed Paul. In John 1:16, John noted that "of His fullness, or *pleroma*, we have all received." Leon Morris noted that John has often been dated quite late in the critical world because it contains so many Gnostic features. Morris argued that the ideas identified as "Gnostic" in John would be better described as "pre-Gnostic." Morris argued that John accepted ideas that were only superficially similar to Gnostic ideas. Under more careful examination, those ideas were radically different from Gnosticism.<sup>81</sup> Morris noted that the gospel of John became later the favorite gospel used by the Gnostics. In the early part of the 2nd century AD, John's gospel was well known and was accepted as authoritative by the Gnostics. Morris noted that the gospel of John also provided one of the best refutations of the Gnostic position. So John's gospel came to be used both by the Gnostics and those who opposed the Gnostics.<sup>82</sup>

Morris noted that some authors have seen John as a theological argument against Docetism which defended ideas similar to those that would appear later in Gnosticism. The Docetists believed that Christ never became incarnate. He just seemed to be human. Morris noted that Docetism itself was a heresy that appeared after the end of the 1st century, but it contained ideas that were common in the 1st century. This polemical purpose was especially apparent in the epistle of I John, but it was clear in the gospel of John as well. Morris noted that this polemic against a precursor to Docetism could be seen in John's stress in John 1:14 that the Word was made flesh. John was consistently concerned to prove the true humanity of Jesus. Morris noted that the polemic against Docetism was present in John's gospel, but it was not the central purpose of the gospel.<sup>83</sup>

## C) REVELATION AND THE LOSS OF IMMANENCE

John's Revelation was written either shortly before Jerusalem was captured in 70 AD<sup>84</sup> or two decades later during Domitian's persecution.<sup>85</sup> Both dates are possible, and both have had a wide variety of

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As the account of creation was handed down through the millennia in human history, it was adapted in different ways by different cultures. Mitchell Dahood argued that ancient Ebla divinized "The Word," "The Name," and "The Voice" in the context of creation. Dahood argued that the texts from Ebla even mentioned a temple for "The Word." Mitchell Dahood, "The Minor Prophets and Ebla," 47-67 in Carol L. Meyers and M. O'Conner, eds. *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth*, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 51-2. The ancient Egyptians taught that creation occurred as the god Ptah thought a thought in his mind, spoke a Word with his mouth, and things came into being. This was the theology that philosophers like Plato learned in Egypt. As they converted Egyptian principles into Greek philosophy, the concept of a divine Word reappeared in a number of ways. For example, Philo in Alexandria was a Jewish Platonist. He saw the Logos as an intermediary who prevented God from being contaminated by the corruption of the physical world. From ancient times, the divine Word was often linked to creation, and John continued this tradition. In John 1:1-3 he wrote, "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."

<sup>81</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 17.

<sup>82</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 24-5.

<sup>83</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 35-7.

<sup>84</sup> R. C. Sproul noted that the driving force behind preterism has often been the repeated claims in Revelation that the time was near when these events would be fulfilled. This would be true if the Revelation was intended to describe the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The promises of a rapid fulfillment seem at least awkward if they are interpreted as referring to events two thousand years in the future. See the discussion in R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), 134-39. Sproul noted that a number of passages stressed that the time was at hand and comings shortly. These passages included Rev. 1:1, 2:16, 3:11, 22:6, 22:7, 22:12, 22:20, 1:3, 22:10, 1:19, 3:10. For a preterist interpretation of prophecy, see John Noe, *Shattering the Left Behind Delusion*, (Bradford: International Preterist Association, 2000). Noe has recently changed his position in key ways.

<sup>85</sup> Sproul noted that the strongest evidence for a last 1st century date for the Revelation can be seen in the writings of Irenaeus and Clement. Irenaeus lived from 130 to 202 AD. Irenaeus was acquainted with Polycarp who knew John. In Irenaeus book *Against Heresies* book 5, Irenaeus claimed that the Revelation was written during Domitian's reign. Sproul noted that Gentry argued for a retranslation of Irenaeus' words. Clement of Alexandria lived from 150 to 215 AD. He

defenders.<sup>86</sup> The strongest evidence from the early Christian authors suggests that the Revelation was written near the end of the 1st century during Domitian's persecution. During this persecution, John was sentenced to work in the salt mines on the island of Patmos. Life on Patmos was hard, and John was cut off from his church. Tradition claims that John had been the bishop of Ephesus, and that he had lived there for many years. Exiling John to Patmos deprived the church of its greatest leader and deprived John of the community's support. John's advanced age may have made his life on Patmos very difficult. During John's years on Patmos, the skies were opened and John received heavenly visions.<sup>87</sup> The record of John's vision has intrigued the church for nearly two thousand years.

One of the key images in the Revelation is the holy mountain motif. The holy mountain tradition began in the Garden of Eden, and it was always at the heart of proper and improper believing traditions. In the Old Testament, it was represented by Noah's worship in the mountains of Ararat, Patriarchal worship sites like Bethel, Mount Sinai, high places like Gilgal, Jerusalem, Zion, and the New Jerusalem. Outside of the proper believing tradition, the holy mountain motif was represented by the Tower of Babel, the ziqqurats, Baal Zaphon, and Israel's idolatrous high places. This ancient motif reached its culmination in John's Revelation. Revelation 8:8 may have suggested God's judgment on improper forms of the holy mountain tradition. In this passage, something like a great burning mountain was cast into the sea. The proper holy mountain tradition culminated in the concluding chapters of the Bible. In Revelation 21:10-14, John was carried by God's Spirit to a great and high mountain. There John was shown the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. The city had God's glory. Revelation 21:22 noted that this future city would not have a temple because God's presence in it would be its temple. In Revelation 22:1-3, John saw a river of the water of life flowing from God's throne, and the river flowed past the trees of life. The first rivers flowing from the holy mountain came from the Garden of Eden. After that time, holy mountains often included water glowing from the sanctuary on top of the mountain. In the proper believing tradition, it can also be seen in the steam that flowed from Mount Sinai to bring life to the wilderness community.

A key part of the holy mountain tradition from Eden was the idea that the mountain top contained God's holy dwelling place. The holy mountain was a sanctuary and it was the location of a temple. This was true of earthly holy mountains, and it was true of heaven itself. As passages like Ezekiel 28:11-18 suggest, earthly holy mountains were manifestations of the heavenly holy mountain and the heavenly temple. Exodus 25:40 and Hebrews 8:5 suggested that Moses saw this heavenly temple as he stood amid the glory fire of Sinai. In the book of Revelation, this heavenly temple became a key motif. John recognized that God's people were a temple because God's Spirit lived within them. In Revelation 3:12, Jesus promised,

He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it any more, 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.

God's people were His temple, but the temple motif was also more than this. Depending on how the passage is interpreted, Revelation 11:1-2 could refer to Israel's temple in Jerusalem.<sup>88</sup> In most passages, the temple in Revelation is clearly God's heavenly temple instead of an earthly site.<sup>89</sup> Revelation 7:14-15 described those who came out of the great tribulation. They stood before God's throne and served Him in

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claimed that John left the island of Patmos after the tyrant died. However, the "tyrant" in his words could have been either Nero or Domitian. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus*, 141-45.

<sup>86</sup> An early date for Revelation is supported by those who want to see its message fulfilled completely in the Roman war of 70 AD, although an early date has also been defended for other reasons.

<sup>87</sup> Both Paul and John experienced heavenly visions and both stressed the glory motif from the Old Testament. John shared Paul's interest in Merkabah mysticism.

<sup>88</sup> This temple may have been "measured" either when Israel rejected Christ or in 70 AD. The court of the gentiles may have been given to the gentiles because the New Testament church would be fundamentally a gentile institution. Other interpretations of the text are equally possible.

<sup>89</sup> Similar visions have been claimed throughout the New Testament age, although the authority of these visions can be debated. For example, in 1847, Ellen G. White, who founded the Seventh Day Adventists, claimed to have been carried by an angel to the heavenly city and its temple. In the temple's holy of holies, she claimed to have seen Jesus standing beside the Ark of the Covenant.

His temple. Revelation 11:19 noted that the temple in heaven was opened and God's ark appeared in it. I Chronicles 28:18 called Israel's ark a model for God's chariot throne. So the ark appearing in the heavenly temple was probably closely related to God appearing on His throne in heaven.

In Revelation 15:5-8, the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened, and seven angels came out of the temple. Then in a scene reminiscent of Ezekiel 10:1-2, cherubim gave to these angels bowls full of God's wrath. The temple was filled with the smoke of God's glory, and even those in heaven could not enter the temple until the seven plagues were finished. In Revelation 16:1, John heard a voice from heaven telling these angels to pour God's wrath on the earth. The heavenly temple motif would finally climax in Revelation 21:1-3. When the New Jerusalem came down from heaven, God Himself would be the temple in it.

A closely related theme in John's Revelation is the Merkabah motif.<sup>90</sup> John inherited this motif from Paul, the Jewish Merkabah mystics, and the Old Testament prophets. The Merkabah vision was a vision of God reigning on His heavenly throne. John's visions of Christ in the Revelation resembled these Old Testament theophanies far more closely than the Gospels. In Revelation 1:7, John was promised that Jesus was coming on the clouds and every eye would see him. Then in John 1:12-18, John saw Christ in a radiantly glorious form that resembled Old Testament theophanies like Ezekiel 1. Images like this in Revelation tied together the Gospels with the Old Testament theophanies. In Revelation 4:1, John received a heavenly vision that was in the same tradition as Paul, the Merkabah mystics, and the Old Testament prophets. John saw a door standing open in heaven. Then John heard a voice saying, "Come up here and I will show you what it is necessary to happen after these things." In Revelation 10:1-2, John saw another strong angel who seems to be an image of Christ. This strong One came down from heaven clothed with a cloud. The rainbow was upon His head, and His face was like the sun. His feet were like pillars of fire. These descriptions seemed to come straight from passages like Ezekiel 1. This strong One had in his hand an open book because Jesus had just broken its seals.<sup>91</sup> Finally in Revelation 20:11-12, John saw the final Merkabah vision that would climax all human desire to see God's throne. In these verses, John saw a great white throne, and He who sat on it. Heaven and earth fled from His presence, and no place was found for them. Then John saw the dead standing before the throne.

Another closely related motif in Revelation was the theme of God's eternal kingdom. Perhaps before God created Adam in Eden, Satan had been cast out of heaven for his rebellion. He had come down to earth and claimed to be the prince of the power of the air. His rule over the earth would continue at God's tolerance until it was finally ended in God's eternal judgment on his revolt. John noted Satan's kingship in Revelation 9:9-11. John described locusts who had power to hurt men for five months. The locusts had a king who was the angel of the abyss. His name in Hebrew was Abaddon and in Greek Apollyon. Satan's kingship was exercised through men who served him, and the ten human kings of Revelation 17:12-18 served as his vassals.

Yet Satan's rule over the earth was never uncontested. Yahweh and His angels always struggled against the demonic realm, and God was always ultimately in control even of it. Adam himself may have been created in part for the battle against the demonic realm. The descendants of Adam's faith have always served Yahweh as His vassals and have struggled against Satan's power. They have served Yahweh faithfully through trial, persecution, and martyrdom. God promised that those who persevered to the end would rule the earth as His vassals. In Revelation 1:9, John identified himself as a fellow-partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus.

John described in his vision the final battle that would remove the devil and his servants forever from God's world. Then the earth would become the kind of place for which it was created. The great battle was described in Revelation 12:7-11. John noted that there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waged war with the dragon. The dragon and his demons waged war, and they were not strong enough, and there

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Richard Bauchman argued that John's Revelation belonged to a kind of Christianity that had its roots in both apocalyptic and Merkabah mysticism. Like the *Ascension of Isaiah*, the Revelation contained a vision of Christ in heaven and a prohibition against worshipping angels. Bauchman argued that John's Revelation resembled more closely the apocalyptic ideal of entering heaven to hear about the future instead of the Merkabah ideal of entering heaven for a private experience of heavenly worship. Richard Bauchman, "The Worship of Jesus in Apocalyptic Christianity," *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981): 321-41.

By this time, many of the Jewish Merkabah mystics were using the Shi'ur Qomah motifs to argue against Christian claims that the Old Testament theophanies must have been Christ. The Shi'ur Qomah motifs depicted God in anthropomorphic form. However, they saw God's body as being so huge that it was as tall as the sky.

was no longer a place found for them in heaven. And the great dragon who is called Satan and the Devil and who deceives the whole world was thrown down to the earth and his angels were thrown down with him. John heard a voice in heaven saying, the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come for the accuser of the brethren has been thrown down. John learned that the brethren overcame Satan because of the Lamb's blood, because of the word of their testimony, and because they did not love their life even at the cost of death. The end of this great battle was described in Revelation 19:11-16 John saw heaven opened, and he saw a white horse. The One who sat on it was called Faithful and True. In righteousness He waged war. His eyes were like a flame of fire and on His head were many diadems. From His mouth came a sharp sword. With this sword, He would smite the nations, and He would rule them with a rod of iron. On His robe and His thigh was a name written, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. In Revelation 19:6, John heard the sound of thunder saying, Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.

When God defeats Satan and removes his presence and power forever, Adam's sons will finally become the faithful vassal rulers that they were created to be. This could be the culmination of the vassal treaty motif that had flowed throughout the Bible. The promise of this great day ran throughout Revelation. It may have been given to John's first readers partly to give them the courage and strength to withstand the terrors of their own day as the church faced its bitterest persecution. The same promise would strengthen and encourage believers until the end of the age. In Revelation 3:21, John was promised that the Christian who overcame would be granted to sit with Christ on His throne just as He overcame and sat down with His Father on His throne. In Revelation 5:9-10, John heard Jesus being praised for purchasing men from every nation, and for making them a kingdom and priests to God. Jesus was promised that these would reign as faithful vassals on the earth. In Revelation 11:15-16, the seventh angel sounded. Then a loud voice in heaven declared that the kingdom of the world had become instead the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. He would rule forever and ever. In Revelation 11:17-18, thanks was given to God because He had taken His great power and had begun to reign. The nations were enraged, and God's wrath came. Then the time came for the dead to be judged. Then god's bondservants would be given their reward. Then in Revelation 20:4-6, John recorded that he saw thrones, and martyrs who sat on them. John saw that judgment was given to them. And martyrs came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. John was promised that the second death would have no power over these, but they would be priests to God and Christ. They would reign with Him for a thousand years.

When this time finally came, God's great mystery would finally be complete. In Revelation 10:6-7, a great angel who may have been Christ swore by Him Who lives forever that there would be no more delay. In the days of the seventh angel when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished as He had preached to His servants the prophets. In Revelation 16:17, the seventh angel poured out his bowl on the air, and a loud voice came from the temple from the throne, saying "It is done." Then in Revelation 21:5-8, all of redemptive history was finally summed up in Christ who became the all in all. In these verses, John recorded the words of the One sitting on the throne. He said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to John, "It is done. I am the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end." Then God's Spirit will fill the earth as the waters cover the sea, and Jesus will be all in all.