

## When Prophecy Fails: Calculating the Time of the End

### Part I: Core Ancient Concepts

#### Thematic Concept: Messianic Apocalyptic Eschatology

##### Sources:

Hebrew Bible

Late Second Temple Judaism:

Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, New Testament, Dead Sea Scrolls, Rabbinic Literature

**Terminology:** “*end of the world*” “*world to come*” can be misleading KJV/ ‘Olam HaBa

“time of the end” “appointed time of the end”

“in the last/latter days”

“close of the age”

“age to come” or “age about to be”

Dan 12:4, 9 Shut up and seal the book “until the time of the end” (עַד־עֵת קֵץ)

8:17 “the vision is for the time of the end”

8:19 “for this pertains to the appointed time of the end”

11:35 “until the time of the end, for it is yet for the time appointed” (לְמוֹעֵד קֵץ)

11:40 “At the time of the end the king of the south shall attack him . .

Matt 24:3 Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age. Lit. συντέλιας Not “end of the world”

Mark 10:30 . . . who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.

Lit. “arriving age” but also “age about to be” μέλλω (Hebrew 6:5)

Heb. 2:5 For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. Lit. “inhabited earth about to be”

בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים 13x “in the latter days” or “in days to come” “days afterward”

Isaiah 2/Micah 4

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the YHVH shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, <sup>3</sup> and many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the YHVH, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the Torah, and the word of the YHVH from Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup> He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

**Gen. 49:1** Then Jacob called his sons, and said, “Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in days to come.

**Num. 24:14** And now, behold, I am going to my people; come, I will let you know what this people will do to your people in the latter days.”

**Deut. 4:30** When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the YHVH your God and obey his voice,

**Deut. 31:29** For I know that after my death you will surely act corruptly, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and in the days to come evil will befall you, because you will do what is evil in the sight of the YHVH, provoking him to anger through the work of your hands.”

**Jer. 23:20** The anger of the YHVH will not turn back until he has executed and accomplished the intents of his mind. In the latter days you will understand it clearly.

**Jer. 30:24** The fierce anger of the YHVH will not turn back until he has executed and accomplished the intents of his mind. In the latter days you will understand this.

**Jer. 48:47** Yet I will restore the fortunes of Moab in the latter days, says the YHVH.” Thus far is the judgment on Moab. **Jer. 49:39** “But in the latter days I will restore the fortunes of Elam, says the YHVH.”

**Ezek. 38:16** you will come up against my people Israel, like a cloud covering the land. In the latter days I will bring you against my land, that the nations may know me, when through you, O Gog, I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.

**Hos. 3:5** Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the YHVH their God, and David their king; and they shall come in fear to the YHVH and to his goodness in the latter days.

**Dan. 10:14** and came to make you understand what is to befall your people in the latter days. For the vision is for days yet to come.”

## **Messianic**

Ten passages mention this Davidic figure or “Messiah”—though he is never called that...

Isaiah 11:1 “There shall come forth . . .”

Jeremiah 23:5 “The days are coming when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch . . .”

Micah 5:1 Ruler from clan of Bethlehem Ephrathah/Judah...give them up “until the time when”

Isaiah 9:6-7; 16:5; Zech 3:8-10; Zech 6:12-13; Psalm 110; Zech 9:9-10; Amos 9:11-12

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## **Apocalyptic Eschatology**

Isaiah 24-27 the “Isaiah Apocalypse”

Ezekiel 37-40 Two Sticks; Gog and Magog; Restored Land

Zechariah 14 Final battle for Jerusalem

Jeremiah 30-31 Regathered Israel; New Covenant

Isaiah 65-66 New heavens and new earth

### *Thematic Overview:*

Gathering of all Nations against Jerusalem; their defeat and judgment

Davidic and Priestly Messiahs—ruling with justice and righteousness

Regathering of Israel, New Covenant

Nations coming up to Jerusalem; world peace

Lion and Lamb imagery; New heavens and new earth; knowledge of YHVH fills earth

Those who sleep in the dust awake; light falls on the “land of the Shades”

## Part II: When Prophecy Fails—The Final Age Prolonged

### The “When” of the Apocalypse: Timing, Signs, Calculations

“When will these things be and what will be the “sign” of the end of the age?”

#### Dreams and Visions of Daniel

Daniel 2, 7, 8, 9, 11-12

Historically rooted in the events of Antiochus IV Epiphanies and the Maccabees (2<sup>nd</sup> c. BCE)

Four Kingdoms and the establishment of the Kingdom of God (Daniel 2:44)

Final evil Ruler-Persecutor of God’s people, “little horn” (Daniel 7 & 8)

Holy Land Invaded—Desolating “sacrilege” set up: 1260; 1290; 1335 (Daniel 11-12)

2 Esdras 12:10-12 He said to me, “This is the interpretation of this vision which you have seen:

<sup>11</sup> The eagle which you saw coming up from the sea is the fourth kingdom which appeared in a vision to your brother Daniel. <sup>12</sup> But it was not explained to him as I now explain or have explained it to you.

Revelation 13 & 17: Beast with 7 heads and 10 horns

#### Calculating the End: A Prophetic Clock

Daniel 9:24-27 “Seventy Weeks” [of years] are determined...שְׁבַעִים שָׁבָעִים  
“Sevens” or “Heptads”

1 week of years=7; thus 70 “sevens” = 490 years (broken into 7+62+1)

v.24 restrain transgression; seal up sins; cover iniquity; bring in age-lasting *zedakah*; seal vision and Prophet; anoint a holy of holies (one or place?)

*The late Second Temple Period became the Heyday of Apocalyptic Messianic Expectation*  
200 BCE to 70 CE with the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple

Josephus, *Jewish War* 6.310-313:

“But what more than all else incited them to war was *an ambiguous oracle*, likewise found in their sacred scriptures, to the effect that **at that time** one from their country would become ruler of the world. This they understood to mean someone of their own race, and many of their wise

men went astray in their interpretation of it. The oracle, however, in reality signified the sovereignty of Vespasian, who was proclaimed Emperor on Jewish soil”

Repeated by the Roman historians Tacitus and Suetonius—world ruler to arise in Judea.

“People of the prince who is to come...shall destroy the city and the sanctuary...until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator”

The 490 years became a “sliding” time bracket—moving between the return from Exile under the Persian Cyrus the Great (539 BCE) down to Ezra and Nehemiah (450 BCE).

### **The Great Disappointment: 70 CE Roman Destruction of Jerusalem**

We have two well documented examples of late 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Messianic Prophecy Movements whose expectations failed.

#### Dead Sea Scroll Community

1QpHab VI-VII How long Oh YHVH?

...Write down the vision and make it plain upon the tablets, that he who reads may read it, and I will take my stand to watch, and I will station myself upon my fortress speedily [*Hab 2:1-2*]. [*VII*] *And God told Habakkuk to write down that which would happen to the final generation, but He did not make known to him when time would come to an end. As for that which He said, That he who reads may read it speedily: interpreted, this concerns the Teacher of Righteousness, to whom God made known all the mysteries of the words of His servants the Prophets. For there shall be yet another vision concerning the appointed time. It shall tell of the end and shall not lie. Interpreted, this means that the final age shall be prolonged, and shall exceed all that the Prophets have said; for the mysteries of God are astounding. If it tarries, wait for it, for it shall surely come and shall not be late. Interpreted, this concerns the men of truth who keep the Torah, whose hands shall not slacken in the service of truth when the final age is prolonged. For all the ages of God reach their appointed end as he determines for them in the mysteries of His wisdom. Behold, his soul is puffed up and is not upright. Interpreted, this means that the wicked shall double their guilt upon themselves and it shall not be forgiven when they are judged...But the righteous shall live by his faith. Interpreted, this concerns all those who observe the Torah in the House of Judah, whom God will deliver from the House of Judgment because of their suffering and because of their faith in the Teacher of Righteousness.*

#### Jesus Movement

Mark 13; 1 Corinthians 7; book of Revelation (see Appendix of Thirty New Testament Texts)

Caligula (37-41 CE) and Nero (54-68) followed by Vespasian, Titus, Domitian

## **Picking up the Pieces—The Final Age Prolonged**

### *When Prophecy Fails: Five Main Responses*

1. It did happen, but not in a literal way—the Kingdom of God is the Church triumphant
2. There is an undetermined “Gap” with the Prophetic clock stopped until the End
3. Recalculation of the prophetic times of Daniel:  $70 \times 49=3430$ ; 1260; 1290; 1335 years
4. Six days of Creation followed by a Sabbath=6000 years followed by the Millennium
5. No more calculations—the age is prolonged beyond all the Prophets foretold

### 2 Peter 3:3-4, 8-10

First of all you must understand this, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own passions <sup>4</sup> and saying, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation.”

But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. <sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. <sup>10</sup> But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up.

### Sanhedrin 97b

Rabbi Yonatan says: May those who calculate the end of days be cursed, as they would say once the end of days that they calculated arrived and the Messiah did not come, that he will no longer come at all. Rather, the proper behavior is to continue to wait for his coming, as it is stated: “Though it tarry, wait for it.”

### Sanhedrin 98a

(Isaiah 60:22) It is written: “In its time,” indicating that there is a designated time for the redemption, and it is written: “I will hasten it,” indicating that there is no set time for the redemption. If they merit redemption through repentance and good deeds I will hasten the coming of the Messiah. If they do not merit redemption, the coming of the Messiah will be in its designated time.

## **Two Thousand Years and Counting...**

Norman Cohen, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*

Arie Morgenstern, *Hastening Redemption: Messianism and the Resettlement of the Land of Israel*

Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*

*A historic warning and cautionary note from H. H. Rowley writing in 1943:*

“Yet where for more than two thousand years a hope has proved illusory, we should beware of embracing it afresh. The writers of these books were mistaken in their hopes of imminent deliverance; their interpreters who believed the consummation was imminent in their day proved mistaken; and they who bring the same principles and the same hopes afresh to the prophecies will prove equally mistaken. H. H. Rowley, *Relevance of Apocalyptic*, 173–74.

*Calculations of the “Time of the End” so far have a 100% failure rate*

## Appendix: Thirty New Testament Texts on the Imminence of the End

### *Synoptic Gospel Tradition*

1. Mark 1:15 — The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the Gospel.
2. Mark 9:1 — And he said to them, I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.
3. Mark 13:24 — But in those days, [immediately in Matt 24:29] following that tribulation, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. . . .
4. Luke 21:31-32 — Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. (Cf. Mark 13:29-30)
5. Matthew 10:23 — When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.
6. Luke 3:9 — The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.
7. [Acts 3:19-21 — Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you — even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.]

### *Paul's Letters*

8. Romans 13:11-12 — And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.
9. Romans 16:20 — The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.
10. 1 Corinthians 2:6 — We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing [present tense — doomed to pass away].
11. 1 Corinthians 7:26, 29, 31 — Because of the present distress, I think it is good for you to remain as you are [i.e., unmarried] . . .
12. 1 Corinthians 7:29 What I mean, brothers, is that the appointed time has grown very short
13. 1 Corinthians 7:31 For this world in its present form is passing away.
14. 1 Corinthians 10:11 — These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the end of the ages has come.
15. 1 Corinthians 15:52 — For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we [i.e., those alive, he includes himself, cf. 1 Thess. 4:15] will be changed.
16. Philippians 4:5 — Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is at hand!
17. 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 — . . . They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead — Jesus who rescues us from the coming wrath. Also, note references to Parousia in 2:19; 3:13; 5:1-10, 23 in which imminence is implied.



18. 1 Timothy 6:14 — . . . keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our God Jesus Christ.
19. Titus 2:13 — . . . while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God, and Savior Jesus Christ.

*Other Texts*

20. Hebrews 1:1 — In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.
21. Hebrews 10:37 — For in just a very little while, He who is coming will come and will not delay.
22. James 5:7-9 — Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. . . You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!
23. 1 Peter 1:20 — He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.
24. 1 Peter 4:7 — The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.
25. 1 John 2:18 — Dear children, this is the last hour, and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrist have come.

*Book of Revelation*

26. 1:1 — The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.
27. 1:3 — Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to hear what is written in it, because the time is near.
28. 2:25 — Only hold on to what you have until I come.
29. 3:11 — I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. I am coming soon.
30. 22:10, 12, 20 — Then he told me, 'Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. . . Behold I am coming soon! . . .' He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming soon.'