

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Journal of Biblical Literature* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_jbl-01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jbl-01.php)

## THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM

ROBERT M. GRANT

UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH

THE view is widespread among New Testament critics today that Schweitzer's "thoroughgoing eschatology" has long since been rejected as the key to the meaning of the mission of Jesus. Schweitzer held that at first Jesus expected the end to come during his lifetime; later he thought it would come with his death. But "such a distinction," writes Oscar Cullmann,<sup>1</sup> "cannot really be built on any texts in the New Testament."

The contention of this paper is that the theory of these two stages in Jesus' eschatology, both "thoroughgoing," is correct, and that this can be proved from passages central to the gospel of Mark but not discussed either by Schweitzer or by his opponents.

In the first place, it is plain from the pages of the gospels that Jesus expected the imminent coming of the kingdom, or at the very least used language which conveyed this meaning to his disciples, who shared this expectation. Its coming was not to be subjective or other-worldly; it was to fulfill the promises of the Old Testament literally and concretely. In no other way can we take seriously the promise made in Mark 10 30: "a hundred-fold in this present age." Moreover, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was made on a real animal, for a real occasion. And we shall see that his sayings at that time are susceptible of a literal and historical interpretation. The coming of the kingdom was to take place at any moment. To this generation no sign was to be given (Mark 8 12); instead the kingdom was very soon to come in power (Mark 9 1, cf. 1 15). Jesus' disciples would not

<sup>1</sup> O. Cullmann, *Christus und die Zeit* (Zurich, 1946), 130. But for Jesus' disappointment after the cleansing of the temple, cf. F. C. Burkitt, *JTS* 25 (1923-24), 386-90.

have gone through all the towns of Israel before the kingdom came (Matt 10 23, cf. 10 1). Satan had already fallen from heaven like lightning (Luke 10 18). When the end came it would be quite unexpected (Luke 17 24-35).

Mark describes Jesus' journey to Jerusalem as a time when the disciples were astonished and afraid. As Luke 19 11 points out, they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately. The twelve were to sit on thrones at the judgment (Matt 19 28; Luke 22 30), and two of them were anxious to have the thrones of authority next to Jesus himself (Mark 10 37). They were aware, that Jerusalem was a dangerous place; indeed Jesus had ironically pointed this out (Luke 13 33, with Creed's note). But Mark is not content to leave them in their genuine historical suspense. He feels that Jesus must have predicted his passion and resurrection, and as Celsus was the first to observe,<sup>2</sup> improves on his sources by inserting such a prediction.<sup>3</sup>

"They drew near to Jerusalem" (Mark 11 1). The next twenty-three verses are so closely parallel to the apocalyptic section of Zechariah (9-14, third century B. C.<sup>4</sup>) and to other apocalyptic writings that some literary relationship is certain. The evangelist has not constructed this scene, for he is apparently unaware of this relationship (cf. Mark 11 23 with the succeeding verses, connected *ad vocem*). As John 12 14-15 observes, the disciples did not understand the meaning of the triumphal entry. And one can hardly suppose that early Christians would invent parallels with unfulfilled prophecy. Therefore Jesus himself and/or the disciples around him must have believed that he was fulfilling the prophecies.

These parallels are as follows:

Mark 11	Parallel
1. They drew near to Jerusalem . . . at the Mount of Olives	Zech 9 9 Rejoice greatly, o daughter of Zion . . . behold, thy king cometh Zech 14 4 And his feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives

<sup>2</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum* ii. 13 (i. 141 28 Koetschau).

<sup>3</sup> F. C. Grant, *The Earliest Gospel* (Nashville, 1943), 179 n. 5.

<sup>4</sup> R. H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York, 1941), 607-12; on its universalist implications, cf. H. G. May in *JBR* 16 (1948), 103.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 2. a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat  | Zech 9 9 lowly and riding upon . . . a colt the foal of an ass (LXX: new colt); cf. C. W. F. Smith, <i>ATR</i> 27 (1945), 86-97; Ps Sol 17 37, cf. J. J. Brierre-Narbonne, <i>Exégèse apocryphe des prophéties messianiques</i> (Paris, 1937), 106 |
| 8-10. Tabernacles details; on "Hosanna" as messianic cf. Werner, <i>JBL</i> 65 (1946), 97-122                   | Zech 14 16-19 Tabernacles; month Tishri time of deliverance, Brierre-Narbonne, <i>Exégèse zoharique . . .</i> (Paris, 1938), 88  |
| 1. to temple with Twelve  | Zech 14 5 and the Lord my God shall come, and 'all the holy ones with thee (LXX: him)  |
| 13. seeing . . . a fig tree in leaf, he . . . found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs.     | Ezek 47 12 every tree for food, whose leaf shall not wither, nor shall its fruit fail; it shall bring forth new fruit every month; cf. Zech 14 8   |
| 14. May no one ever eat fruit from you in the age (cf. Mark 14 25) + 20 the fig tree withered away to its roots | Rev 22 3 quotes Ezek 47 12 and adds Zech 14 14 There shall no more be anything accursed. This is the earliest Christian exegesis of the tradition in Mark.   |

Miraculous fruitfulness was a prominent feature of the eschatological hope (En 24 4; 25 4-6; 4 Ezra 8 52; cf. R. Marcus, *JBL* 62 [1943], 118). The trees of the garden of Eden were expected to be especially productive. The trees of life and of knowledge were often mentioned (T Levi 18 11; En 32 3-6). The tree of knowledge was often identified with the grape or fig (L. Ginzberg, *Die Haggada bei den Kirchenvätern* [Berlin, 1900], 38-42; cf. Theodore of Mopsuestia, PG 66, 640 b-c). As Ginzberg observes (*The Legends of the Jews* V, 98): "the fruit which brought sin into the world will become a 'healing' in the world to come."

One can hardly maintain that the parable of the barren fig tree (Luke 13 6-9) is the source of the cursing of the fig tree here. In the first place, we know that Luke uses Mark and not vice versa. In the second place, it is more natural for Luke to remove an obvious difficulty (as he omits Mark 3 19-21; 6 45-52; 15 34) than for Mark to invent one. It is claimed that the "cursing" of the fig tree is not in harmony with Jesus' character. But Jesus was not ἀπαθής; on at least one occasion he viewed his opponents μετ' ὀργῆς (Mark 3 5; cf. 1 41 D with the note of K. Lake, *HTR* 16 [1923],

197 f.). And the expression "woe" (Amos 5 16; Matt 11 21; Luke 10 13; etc.) is clearly a curse. Such curses can devour the land and make the vine languish (Isaiah 24 6; unfruitfulness in messianic woes; En 80 3; cf. Bar 27 6; Or. Sib. iii. 539 f.; Philo, *Praem.* 130-33).

15. He began to drive out sellers, etc. Zech 14 21 In that day there shall be no Canaanite (Job 41 6; Prob 31 24) in the house of the Lord of hosts
16. And he would not allow anyone to carry any vessel through the temple Zech 14 20 In that day . . . the pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar
17. "A house of prayer for all the nations" Isaiah 56 7; cf. Zech 14 16; Ps Sol 17 37.
22. Have faith in God Eschatological; cf. Mark 1 15
23. Whoever says to this mountain, Be torn away (cf. Mark 2 21) and cast into the sea Zech 14 4 And the Mount of Olives shall be torn asunder toward the east and toward the west (lit. to the sea)

In further confirmation of the view here set forth we may adduce the eschatological pattern found in Psalm 46 (so W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Psalms I* [Cambridge, 1939], 254-58). "God is our refuge and strength . . . therefore we will not fear, though the earth change and the mountains be moved into the heart of the seas . . . There is a river whose streams gladden the city of God." Evidently there are eschatological woes which are succeeded by the flowing of the water of life. This picture seems to combine something like Zechariah 14 4 (Ezek 38 20; Isa 24 19) with Zech 14 8 (Ezek 47 1-12; Joel 3 18). Earthquakes are also found in En 1 6; 52 6; 4 Ezra 9 3; Or. Sib. iii. 675-81; Mark 13 8; one actually takes place in Matt 27 51-53, where it is purely eschatological.

Apparently there is an acceptance of such a pattern in a story told by Josephus (*Ant.* xx. 169, *Bell.* ii. 262, cf. Acts 21 38). When Porcius Festus was procurator of Judaea a "prophet" from Egypt stood on the Mount of Olives with a large band of followers. "For he told them that he wanted to show them from there that at his command the walls of Jerusalem would fall." Six hundred of his four thousand followers were lost in a Roman attack, while the "Egyptian" disappeared. Josephus calls him a false prophet, obviously because as in Deuteronomy 18 22 his predictions did not turn out successfully.

The following conclusion may be suggested. In Jesus' earlier ministry he found the powers of darkness already put to flight (Matt 12 28; Luke 11 20). He does not seem to have anticipated

a time of tribulation or "messianic woes," unless such a time was already present in his ministry. In Mark 10 30 his emphasis is laid on the reward "in this age" which his disciples will receive; the "persecution" is a minor element. When he came to Jerusalem, however, the reign of God did not appear. He realized then that only God knows the "day or hour" of the coming of the kingdom (Mark 13 32; cf. Zech 14 7).

At the Last Supper<sup>5</sup> he reinterpreted his mission in the light of the new covenant of Jeremiah 31 31-34 and the "blood of thy covenant" of Zechariah 9 11. Perhaps he believed that he himself, like the servant of Isaiah 53, would assume the tribulations before the messianic age. In any event, he would not drink again from the fruit of the vine until he drank it new in the kingdom of God (Mark 14 25). In the garden of Gethsemane he prayed God to ordain some other means of inaugurating his kingdom; but he proclaimed himself obedient to God's will.

#### *Additional Note 1.*

The apostle Paul takes the saying about moving a mountain (using language like that of Psalm 46 3) eschatologically or metaphorically in 1 Corinthians 13 2, while it is associated with exorcism in Matt 17 20 and with faith in general in Luke 17 6 (altered to a sycamine tree). For a century after him it is found in no Christian writing except perhaps the *Protevangelium Jacobi* (p. 262 6 Thilo), where Elizabeth is able to make a mountain split. In the *Acta Pauli* (M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, Oxford, 1924, 31 f.; cf. W. D. McHardy in *Exp. Times* 58, 279) the saying is quoted to illustrate the miracles which Christians can work; but oddly enough in the *Clementine Recognitions* v. 34 (p. 146 Gersdorf) it is taken to refer to the mountains of human passions. Clement of Alexandria understands it metaphorically (*Strom.* vii. 77. 4 [iii. 55 10 Stählin], cf. ii. 49. 1 [ii. 138 29], v. 2. 6 [ii. 327 5]). By allegorization Origen makes it really usable. Following the lead of the Valentinian Heracleon (*Comm. in Ioh.* xiii. 16, p. 239 32 Preuschen), he takes the moun-

<sup>5</sup> Eschatological: R. Otto, *Reich Gottes und Menschensohn* (München, 1934), 223-81.

tain to be a symbol of Satan (*Comm. in Matt.* xvi. 26, p. 563<sup>20</sup> Klostermann). In his work *On Prayer* (v. 3, p. 309<sup>18</sup> Koetschau) he denies that literal answers to such prayers are possible, and in commenting on 1 Corinthians 13<sup>2</sup> (C. Jenkins, *JTS* [1908-9], 32 f.=Cramer, *Cat.* v. 249) he takes advantage of the καθ' ὑπερβολήν of 13<sup>1</sup> to explain the expression as hyperbole, something not literally true and therefore allegorical (cf. Chrysostom, *Hom.* xxxii. 4 on 1 Cor., PG 61, 269).

Most later commentators follow Origen's lead (e. g., Jerome, PL 26, 130; Macarius Magnes, *Apocrit.* iii. 25). But some writers were spurred on by the attack of Porphyry, who claimed that the apostles' inability to move mountains proved their lack of faith (*frags.* 4 and 95 Harnack). Cyril of Alexandria (*Hom. in Luc.* 113-17, p. 527 Payne Smith) stresses the point that there must be some real need for such a miracle, as there presumably was in Acts 4<sup>31</sup>, Joshua 3<sup>16</sup> and 10<sup>13</sup>; otherwise no purpose is served, and neither the falsity of scripture nor the weakness of faith is proved. Similarly Chrysostom insists on the necessity for purposeful activity, and offers two apologetic replies to Porphyry. The apostles did more than move mountains, since they raised countless dead men; and probably they did actually move mountains, for not all their miracles are recorded (PG 58, 562).

Enough has been said to show the difficulties of the traditional interpretation. In *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York, 1937), C. H. Dodd revives an old suggestion that the mountain is the mountain of the Lord's house (Isa 2<sup>2</sup>, Mic 4<sup>1</sup>; Dodd, p. 63). I agree with him that the tradition has tended "to give a general and permanent application to sayings originally directed towards an immediate and particular situation"; I believe that this modification has occurred here; but the original meaning is to be sought through Zechariah and apocalyptic.

#### *Additional Note 2.*

To the motives analyzed in the preceding pages we must add another which is the creation of the early church. The church knew that Jesus like Jeremiah had predicted the destruction of the temple (Mark 13<sup>1-2</sup>; 14<sup>58</sup>; Acts 6<sup>14</sup>; John 2<sup>19</sup>), and it was only natural to assimilate the stories of their receptions.

Mark 11	Parallel
17. a den of robbers	Jer 7 <sup>11</sup> a den of robbers
18. the chief priests and the scribes heard it and sought how they might destroy him	Jer 26 (33) <sup>7-8</sup> the priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah . . . "Thou shalt surely die"
28. by what authority?	Jer 26 (33) <sup>9</sup> why hast thou prophesied in the name of the Lord?

Of course the situations were similar, but there seem to be overtones of Old Testament language. Mark is composing the temple scene to a certain extent out of old materials of his own; compare 11<sup>18</sup> with 1<sup>22</sup> and 6<sup>2</sup>.