

Chapter 14: The Second Coming of Christ and the Resurrection of the Dead

“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”¹

As is the case with many other beliefs, the doctrines of the second coming of Christ and the resurrection of the dead that come from the Bible differ in many respects from Orthodox understanding that arose under the influence of the later interpretations of the Church Fathers.

To form a clear picture of the errors of authorities during the Middle Ages from whom today’s Eastern Orthodoxy bases its teaching, it is necessary to carefully examine what the Scripture teaches about these issues. I am confident that by the end of this chapter my readers will see clearly why the Eastern Orthodox churches cannot properly be labeled a Church that upholds the teachings and traditions of the original apostles.

Before studying what the Bible teaches about the second coming of Christ, let us first examine the prophecies of the Old Testament that relate to the birth of Christ and His first coming to the people of Israel.

Old Testament Prophecies about the Coming of Messiah (Christ)

From the beginning of the history of fallen humankind, the Lord predicted the future birth of the Savior to people. Over several thousand years that elapsed from the creation of the world to the birth of Jesus Christ, God used His servants, the prophets, to record details about the origin and future role of the One who would save humankind by dying on behalf of their sins.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve heard directly from the mouth of the Almighty that in the future, there would come a Savior of the "seed of the woman", i.e., He would be conceived and born without the participation of man (Genesis 3:15, Isaiah 7:14). This prophecy later would be fulfilled (Luke 1:34-35, Galatians 4:4).

God announced to Abraham, one of the Old Testament heroes of faith, that through his seeds, e.g. his descendants, all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3, 18:18, 22:18). Abraham’s seed would be the physical line through which the Redeemer

¹ 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17.

came (Matthew 1:1, Galatians 3:16). The Messiah's family tree was to come through Sarah's son Isaac (and not the firstborn Ishmael, whom Abraham gave birth to his servant Hagar), his son Jacob (not Esau the firstborn), and Jacob's son Judah, of whom it is said that "The scepter shall not depart from Judah... and to Him shall be the obedience of the people." (Romans 9:7-13; Genesis 49:10)

Expectations of Israel for the Divine King (Messiah)

Several hundred years after the blessing of Jacob's children and the associated prophecies of the Messiah who was to come through the tribe of Judah, the people of Israel from its ranks spawned King David, the son of Jesse. The Jewish king, unlike his predecessor Saul, who was from the tribe of Benjamin, derived his ancestry from Judah (Ruth 4:18-22; Mt. 1:1-6). In fact, God said the following words to David, the descendant of Judah:

*"When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son... But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. **And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.**"²*

According to prophecy arising directly from the mouth of God, the Messiah will be the eternal Ruler sitting on the throne of King David. His kingdom will have no end. This prophecy has been repeatedly confirmed in the books of the Old Testament:

*"For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
**Of the increase of His government and peace
There will be no end,
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
To order it and establish it with judgment and justice
From that time forward, even forever.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.**"³*

*"And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up **a kingdom which shall never be destroyed**; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, **and it shall stand forever.**"⁴*

² 2 Samuel 7:12-16. Author's emphasis.

³ Isaiah 9:6-7. Author's emphasis.

⁴ Daniel 2:44. Author's emphasis.

*“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Though you are little among the thousands of Judah,
Yet out of you shall come forth to Me
The One to be Ruler in Israel,
Whose goings forth are from of old,
From everlasting.”*⁵

Centuries after the words of these prophets were recorded, the angel Gabriel announced to the Virgin Mary the birth of the Savior in Nazareth. He repeated the Lord’s decree which would involve the establishment of the kingdom of Israel and the setting of the eternal Ruler on the throne of King David:

*“Then the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. **And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.**”*⁶

The priest Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, uttered these prophetic words:

*“Blessed is the Lord God of Israel,
For He has visited and redeemed His people,
And has raised up a horn of salvation for us
In the house of His servant David,
As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets,
Who have been since the world began,
That we should be saved from our enemies
And from the hand of all who hate us,
To perform the mercy promised to our fathers
And to remember His holy covenant,
The oath which He swore to our father Abraham.”*⁷

According to Dragan Simov, author of the handbook for studying the Scriptures, the Old Testament contains about 660 generic prophecies of which 333 refer to Jesus Christ. At the time of the Lord’s first coming, 109 prophecies were fulfilled. The remaining 224 are future and will be fulfilled during His second coming.⁸

However, even with our limited knowledge of the future, we can notice the emphasis on the kingship of Jesus over Israel. Yet, He lived on the earth nearly two thousand years ago (He was crucified, resurrected, and ascended into heaven) and that the prophecy of His kingship over His chosen people remains unfulfilled! The true Biblical meaning of the fulfillment of this prophecy is still unknown to many interpreters of the Bible

⁵ Micah 5:2.

⁶ Luke 1:30-3. Author’s emphasis.

⁷ Luke 1:68-73. Author’s emphasis.

⁸ Dragan Simov, *What Do the Holy Scriptures Say?*, 236.

(including Orthodox churches and theologians) because they have spiritualized biblical texts that were intended to be understood and interpreted literally. Therefore, I am obliged to do a thorough exposition of the Gospel in order to demonstrate the credibility of these prophecies.

The Delayed Fulfillment of Prophecies

This subtitle mentions “delayed fulfillment of prophecy.” However, the reality is that since such developments were planned in eternity, to God in His knowledge of time, everything has already and fully been achieved.

Specifically, great is the Biblical truth that Israel awaited the arrival of the messianic kingdom and the privileged position over all other nations that it would receive. This all was revealed in Old Testament prophecies. The Kingdom of the Messiah was intended to be eternal, as shown by these biblical texts. This kingdom is also expected to cause many changes on the Earth. Indeed, the earth will experience true transformation. The consequences of the Lord’s curse upon the earth due to Adam’s transgression will be removed. Deserts will become fertile ground. Rivalry among the animals will no longer exist, to the extent that animals that today live as mortal enemies will dwell together peacefully in the future Kingdom. All the inhabitants of Earth will worship the Lord. The prophets of God spoke about this future:

*“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb,
The leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
The calf and the young lion and the fatling together;
And a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze;
Their young ones shall lie down together;
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole,
And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper’s den.
They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,
For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD
As the waters cover the sea.”⁹*

*“The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
The lion shall eat straw like the ox,
And dust shall be the serpent’s food.
They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,”
Says the LORD.”¹⁰*

*“The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them,
And the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose...*

⁹ Isaiah 11:6-9. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁰ Isaiah 65:25. Author’s emphasis.

*Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.
Then the lame shall leap like a deer,
And the tongue of the dumb sing.
For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness,
And streams in the desert.”¹¹*

However, before the onset of this wonderful event for the whole planet and all its people, especially the Israelites, human wickedness, which has ruled the earth for millennia by destroying it, will have to be punished. Scripture tells us that at the same time, while God will punish the godless world, including Jews, for their sins on earth, God sent the Old Testament prophet Elijah to preach repentance and the establishment of the messianic kingdom:

*“For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up, Says the LORD of hosts, That will leave them neither root nor branch... Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, With the statutes and judgments. **Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.** And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.”¹²*

The above prophecy tells us that before the great and dreadful day of the Lord, God will send Elijah. (Recall that the Old Testament teaches that Elijah did not die but ascended alive to heaven in 2 Kings 2:11.) God will bring positive results from Elijah’s preaching. Let us now ask a simple question.

Namely, if we know that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah of the God, why did all these events (the coming of the prophet Elijah and the suppression of the ungodly on the earth) not occur when He came to the earth? The answer to this question is written on the pages of the New Testament. The apostle Paul says:

*“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles... by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in **the mystery of Christ**, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has **now been revealed by the Spirit** to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel... **and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ.**”¹³*

As we see from the sayings of Paul, the “mystery of Christ” was not revealed to the Old Testament prophets. They did not know that the Messiah will have to come into the

¹¹ Isaiah 35:1, 5-6.

¹² Malachi 4:1, 4-6. Author’s emphasis.

¹³ Ephesians 3:1, 4-6, 9. Author’s emphasis.

world twice, not once. The first coming consisted of His baptismal suffering for the sins of all humankind (Jews and Gentiles). The establishment of the messianic kingdom over Israel, according to the proclamations of the ancient prophets, had to be "postponed" to the distant future, and would occur after His coming to Earth.

Such an interpretation of the Holy Scripture has plenty of biblical evidence. First, instead of the prophet Elijah (and the terrible Day of the Lord), John the Baptist appeared as a forerunner of the Messiah. John preached, in the words of the heavenly messenger addressed to his father Zechariah, "in the spirit and power of Elijah":

*“But the angel said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. **And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.**”*¹⁴

Additional proof is furnished by the Lord Jesus Christ in one of his sermons at the synagogue in Nazareth. He reveals the purpose of His first coming as for salvation, rather than condemnation on the future “terrible Day of the Lord”.

*“And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: ‘The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; **To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.**’ Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’”*¹⁵

When we examine the entire context of the passage in the book of Isaiah from which Jesus read, we see something very important. Jesus omits a detail that is crucial to our proper understanding of this topic. He omits part of the second verse of this chapter:

*“To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD,
And the day of vengeance of our God...”*¹⁶

Precisely because the fulfillment of His eternal plan was not revealed to the Old Testament prophets, they did not realize that a long period of time would elapse between Jesus' first coming (His death on the cross) and the establishment of the messianic kingdom of Israel (which would happen after His second coming). Jesus read only part

¹⁴ Luke 1:13-17. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁵ Luke 4:17-21. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁶ Isaiah 61:2. Author’s emphasis.

of the prophecies in Isaiah which He would fulfill in His first coming (the proclamation of “the acceptable year of the Lord”). After this reading, Jesus closed the book and told the audience that the Old Testament prophecy He had read was fulfilled.

Christ’s disciples and even His forerunner, John the Baptist, who preached in his sermons the recent establishment of the heavenly kingdom, were perplexed by these developments. Instead of establishing the kingdom, their teacher discussed more often His pending death and resurrection from the dead. This confused His disciples, who could not believe that the Messiah would have to suffer. Some of them even tried, out of ignorance, to prevent the suffering of Christ, which was appointed:

*“And they were all amazed at the majesty of God. But while everyone marveled at all the things which Jesus did, He said to His disciples, ‘Let these words sink down into your ears, for the Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men.’ **But they did not understand this saying, and it was hidden from them so that they did not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this saying.**”*¹⁷

*“From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, ‘Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!’ But He turned and said to Peter, ‘**Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.**’”*¹⁸

John the Baptist in prison sent his disciples to ask Jesus whether he truly was the Messiah to come, or else he should wait for another.¹⁹ So, even one filled with the Holy Spirit in his mother's womb and who personally witnessed the descent of God’s Holy Spirit and heard God’s voice during Jesus’ baptism had doubts in the identity of Jesus as Messiah. Events were not playing out as John had expected them.

After they saw the Transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain and His presence with the Old Testament prophets Moses and Elijah, they posed the following question:

*“And His disciples asked Him, saying, ‘Why then do the scribes say **that Elijah must come first?**’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘**Indeed, Elijah is coming first** and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands.’ Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.”*²⁰

As we can observe, the Lord uses both the future and present verb tense to describe Elijah. He speaks of the future when Elijah will come and establish all that is written of

¹⁷ Luke 9:43-5. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁸ Matthew 16:21-3. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁹ See Luke 7:18-23.

²⁰ Matthew 17:10-13. Author’s emphasis.

him. However, Christ also notes that “Elijah” already has arrived in the form of John the Baptist, who came in “the spirit and power of Elijah”. The Jews already “did whatever they wanted to him” by throwing him into prison, where he was eventually executed. Since the Old Testament prophecy of Elijah's arrival did not include his murder, yet John was murdered, the Old Testament prophecy states a future coming of Elijah the Prophet before the establishment of the kingdom of God. The Lord Jesus in His time was the only Person in all of Israel who understood how these events were to take place. In His first coming, the Messiah would come to earth to suffer for the sins of the people and not as King. In a similar way, instead of Elijah having entered this stage of history as the forerunner of the Messiah, another person – John the Baptist – had to come. Why? The answer is very simple. The Old Testament prophecies foresaw a herald who would precede the coming of the Messiah in order to announce His coming. The prophet Isaiah wrote about it:

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

*Prepare the way of the LORD;
Make straight in the desert
A highway for our God.
Every valley shall be exalted
And every mountain and hill brought low;
The crooked places shall be made straight
And the rough places smooth;
The glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
And all flesh shall see it together;
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”*²¹

When the Jews questioned John as to whether he was the prophet Elijah, John the Baptist denied it. However, John did explain the nature of his ministry:

*“Then they said to him, ‘Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?’ He said: ‘I am ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the LORD’ just as the prophet Isaiah said.’”*²²

Although it would appear to be somewhat "complicated", the answer to the question about the similarities and differences between Elijah and John the Baptist is quite simple. John the Baptist was not Elijah, because Elijah was not killed during the time of Christ. [Translator's note: the disciples had just seen the Old Testament prophet Elijah with Jesus in the Transfiguration. John was in prison and murdered. Elijah never tasted death, but was taken up to the Lord in a heavenly chariot of fire.] John was sent instead of Elijah before the first coming of Messiah. Elijah will come in the future, before the great and terrible Day of the Lord and proclaim the establishment of the Messianic kingdom on earth ushered in by Christ's second coming.

²¹ Isaiah 40:3-5. Author's emphasis.

²² John 1:22-3. Author's emphasis.

However, before proceeding to the study of biblical prophecies concerning the second coming of Christ and related events, I want once again to emphasize one very important fact in the final conclusion of this chapter. The Messianic (millennial) kingdom of the people of Israel certainly will be established in the future! I have to point this out because of the teaching of the Orthodox Church, which originated from the Holy Fathers, which fully denies the possibility of establishing any future kingdom of God that includes the Jewish people. Orthodoxy erroneously denies this despite numerous biblical texts that teach a future millennial kingdom of Israel. Later, we will analyze this false teaching of the Eastern Churches. For now, I leave with how the Lord Jesus Christ spoke to His disciples to clear similar misconceptions:

*“Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, ‘Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ And He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.’ Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? **This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.**”*²³

The above passage clearly shows that the apostles still awaited the coming of the Messianic kingdom in Israel. At that time, Jesus is the Messiah was with them standing on the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem. The apostles saw the resemblance to a prophecy spoken by Zechariah. He spoke of the events immediately preceding the establishment of the Messianic kingdom:

*“Then the LORD will go forth
And fight against those nations,
As He fights in the day of battle.
And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives,
Which faces Jerusalem on the east.
And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two,
From east to west,
Making a very large valley;
Half of the mountain shall move toward the north
And half of it toward the south...
And in that day it shall be
That living waters shall flow from Jerusalem,
Half of them toward the eastern sea
And half of them toward the western sea;
In both summer and winter it shall occur.
And the LORD shall be King over all the earth.
In that day it shall be—*

²³ Acts 1:6-11. Author’s emphasis.

***‘The LORD is one,’
And His name one.’²⁴***

Jesus' disciples thought that the kingdom would come very soon, for the Messiah's feet were standing upon the Mount of Olives. But the Lord answered, that He would not reveal the exact date of when His kingdom over the whole world would be established. The Father chose to withhold this information. Note that Jesus did not deny to them that the kingdom of Israel would be established at all. Rather, Jesus told them that ***“It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.”*** This certainly meant that the kingdom will certainly be established in the future. In the meantime, His disciples remained in Jerusalem to await the descent of the Holy Spirit who would empower them to preach the gospel of salvation throughout the world. Such gospel preaching has continued to our day and has reached millions of people both living and deceased. All of us await the time when Christ will come again!

What the Bible Teaches about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ

The previous section of this chapter demonstrated that the Old Testament prophecies are very clear about what Messiah (Christ) would do in His first coming to the earth. We also noted the fact that the “mystery of Christ” – God’s New Testament people in the Church, which would be comprised of members of both Jews and Gentiles – had not been revealed to the ancient prophets.

However, the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah as the king of Israel will be completely fulfilled. Additionally, the New Testament contains prophecies about the Messiah which speak of His establishment of the millennial kingdom on earth. The next section will analyze the blessed impact of Christ’s second coming. First, we will discuss the implications of His return in relation to the people of Israel, and then we will examine these implications for the New Testament Church.

The Second Coming of Christ and the People of Israel

To fully understand the blessings to be experienced by the nation of Israel at Christ’s second coming, we must study another Old Testament prophecy that will be completely fulfilled in history. This prediction was issued to the prophet Daniel in the first half of the sixth century B.C. At the time Daniel lived, his nation was in Babylon, the empire to which his people were led into captivity and exile. Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylon from 605 to 586 B.C. God sent the angel Gabriel to show the revelation of the time when God would establish the messianic kingdom, the kingdom of righteousness and peace. The text of the prophecy is as follows:

“And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, ‘O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand. At the beginning of your supplications the command went out, and I have come to tell you, for you are greatly beloved; therefore consider the

²⁴ Zechariah 14:3-4, 8-9. Author’s emphasis.

matter, and understand the vision:

Seventy weeks are determined

For your people and for your holy city,

To finish the transgression,

To make an end of sins,

To make reconciliation for iniquity,

To bring in everlasting righteousness,

To seal up vision and prophecy,

And to anoint the Most Holy.

Know therefore and understand,

That from the going forth of the command

To restore and build Jerusalem

Until Messiah the Prince,

There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks;

The street shall be built again, and the wall,

Even in troublesome times.

And after the sixty-two weeks

Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself;

And the people of the prince who is to come

Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.

The end of it shall be with a flood,

And till the end of the war desolations are determined.'''²⁵

As we see, the angel told Daniel that “*seventy seven’s*” (e.g. weeks) are determined for his people (the Jews) and the holy city (Jerusalem). This clearly refers to a defined length of time. The term “*seven’s*” (the literal translation), i.e., “*weeks*”, refers to a period of seven years (as defined in Leviticus 25:8). Thus, God determined that Daniel’s people would await 70 “*seven’s*” (e.g. 70 x 7 years, or 490 years) before the arrival of eternal truth and the anointing of the “*son of David*” to the throne of Israel. These 490 years would begin to be counted from the moment of “*the command to restore and build Jerusalem.*” It is also interesting that Gabriel prophecies the “*anointing of the Most Holy*” (referring to the Jewish word “*Messiah*” and the Greek word “*Christos*”) will occur after the 62 and 7 weeks, e.g. 69 weeks (483 years).

Historical records show that the command to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple was given by the Persian King Artaxerxes on March 14, 445 B.C. (Nehemiah 2:1-15). The prophecy dates the time when “*Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself*” 483 years later. In calculating the date of Jesus’ crucifixion from this prophecy, it is crucial to note that the Jewish year lasted 360 days (because it was a lunar year, e.g. based on the moon), and not like our solar year of 365 days and 6 hours.

This information leads to the calculation of the 69 weeks from the command of Artaxerxes to when the Anointed One would be murdered. This calculation totals 173,880 days (483 x 360 days). When we convert these 173,880 days from Jewish lunar into our modern solar year (which equates to 365 days and 6 hours), we derive the result

²⁵ Daniel 9:22-26. Author’s emphasis.

that 483 Jewish lunar years equate to 476 solar years (plus 21 days) by our modern calendar.

When we add 476 years and 21 days to the date of the edict of Artaxerxes of March 14, 445 B.C., we calculate that the prophecy sets the date of Christ's crucifixion to occur on April 6, 31 A.D.

This date is very important because in the year 31 A.D., Jesus Christ was actually executed by the Romans, whom the Jewish elders persuaded to do it. The date that fulfilled the prophecy of the 69 weeks (after which the Messiah is cut off) is the day of His entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, 31 A.D. That day also fulfilled the prophecy of the prophet Zechariah, who had written several hundred years before Christ was born:

*“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your King is coming to you;
He is just and having salvation,
Lowly and **riding on a donkey,**
A colt, the foal of a donkey.”*²⁶

Riding on a donkey, Jesus slowly approached Jerusalem:

*“And as He went, many spread their clothes on the road. Then, as He was now drawing near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen, saying: **‘Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD!’** Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!’ And some of the Pharisees called to Him from the crowd, ‘Teacher, rebuke Your disciples.’ But He answered and said to them, **‘I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out.’** Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, ‘If you had known, even you, **especially in this your day,** the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, **because you did not know the time of your visitation.**’”²⁷*

This text in verses 41-44 reveals that Christ the Lord, the Messiah of Israel, speaks of the same events mentioned by the angel Gabriel in a statement given to Daniel the prophet nearly six centuries before. He says that in the future, enemies will besiege Jerusalem and that they will destroy the city along with its population. Remember that Daniel's prophecy states that after the “Messiah” (Prince of Israel) is cut off, the people of another “Prince” will come to destroy the city and the sanctuary (the Temple in Jerusalem). This destruction occurred in the year 70 A.D. This very same generation of Israelites experienced both Jesus' crucifixion forty years earlier and this tragedy. Let us

²⁶ Zechariah 9:9. Author's emphasis.

²⁷ Luke 19:36-44. Author's emphasis.

briefly examine a few of Jesus' prophecies about this tragedy and the reasons that led to it.

Jesus' Prophecies about the Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple

As I showed in the second chapter of this book, God predestines historical events in terms of their fulfillment. The most obvious example is the predestination of Christ's passion and the salvation of certain people to eternal life. On the other hand, God in His wisdom allows for the free will of each individual. At the time of Jesus' arrest, as He stood before Pontius Pilate, who wanted to acquit him of His charges and release Him, the Jews, instead of accepting Jesus as King and Savior, were seduced by their false spiritual leaders and shouted, "Crucify Him!"

*"Pilate said to them, 'What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?' They all said to him, 'Let Him be crucified!' Then the governor said, 'Why, what evil has He done?' But they cried out all the more, saying, 'Let Him be crucified!' When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, 'I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it.' **And all the people answered and said, 'His blood be on us and on our children.'** Then he released Barabbas to them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified."*²⁸

*"Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, 'Behold your King!' But they cried out, 'Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!' Pilate said to them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, '**We have no king but Caesar!**' Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. Then they took Jesus and led Him away."*²⁹

*"And a great multitude of the people followed Him, and women who also mourned and lamented Him. But Jesus, turning to them, said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, **but weep for yourselves and for your children.** For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!' Then they will begin 'to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!' **For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?'**"*³⁰

A terrible fate awaited Jesus' contemporaries and those after them. Instead of giving loyalty to their Messiah, the Jewish people chose the Roman Caesars as lord. The Lord once said that because of their rejection of the Messiah, the Jewish people would receive the punishment as a consequence of having shed the blood of all the righteous who lived since the creation of the world. In His heaviest debate with the Pharisees recorded in the Gospels, Christ uttered the following:

²⁸ Matthew 27:22-26. Author's emphasis.

²⁹ John 19:14-6. Author's emphasis.

³⁰ Luke 23:27-31. Author's emphasis.

*“Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, **that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth**, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! **Your house is left to you desolate**; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’”³¹*

The Lord Jesus Christ assures that the “House of Israel” will be “left desolate”, e.g., it will be devastated by the Roman army and remain as such until the time comes when Israel will accept Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah and King. Christ foretold everything that came to pass with the Jewish people and their nation until the last days - the time of His second coming again to God’s people of the Old Testament and the final establishment of the kingdom:

*“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, **and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.**”³²*

The Fulfillment of these Prophecies

Before demonstrating the truth and fulfillment of the prophecies uttered by the Lord himself with regard to the fate of the Jewish people after His rejection and crucifixion, I wish to point out another important fact. In fact, the prophecy of Daniel shows that the Messiah (Christ) is to be “cut off” (executed) after the “*sixty-two weeks*” (after the expiration of the first seven weeks), i.e., after the 483 Jewish lunar years (173,880 days). What is important to note is that the prophecy does not claim that Messiah would be executed during the 70th week, but rather after the 69th week. In that case, a “countdown” after Jesus’ crucifixion would have meant that the kingdom of God should be established years after His ascension into heaven. In contrast, both Daniel and Revelation reveal that, after the end of the 69 weeks, a “time gap” in prophecy which lasts until the second coming of Christ for his Church. Notice that the Lord Christ Himself implies that the “seventieth weeks” will not take place soon. Instead of

³¹ Matthew 23:33-9. Author’s emphasis.

³² Luke 21:20-4. Author’s emphasis.

foretelling the establishment of the kingdom of God, Jesus predicts the fate of the Israelites - their diaspora and captivity throughout the world.

Slightly more than thirty years after the execution of the Messiah, the province of Judea broke out in a revolt against the occupying forces of Rome. This conflict ensued from 66-73 A.D. and became known as “the First Jewish-Roman War”. The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus writes about this revolt.

In 70 A.D., the Roman army surrounded Jerusalem. The population of the capital only numbered about 100,000 people. However, the population swelled by several multiples as visitors arrived on pilgrimage to Jerusalem in order to celebrate the ancient traditional holiday of Passover. The city gates were closed, and the siege lasted five months. During that time, the residents of the capital underwent terrible agony. Food became scarce. There were several gangs whose violence resulted in many deaths.

Other groups burned storehouses for grain which also depleted food. Because of the great famine that prevailed, there were reported cases of cannibalism in which mothers ate their little children as food. Starving people fled the city only to be captured and crucified on crosses. After they finally managed to penetrate the defensive line of the city walls, the Romans started a bloody crackdown against those who were still resisting. The bravest and most persistent Jewish rebels entered the holy temple and set up a last bastion of defense. However, after an unprecedented massacre, from which so much blood flowed that it covered the stairs, a fire broke out in the temple complex as well as in its very interior. The temple in Jerusalem burned down and was completely destroyed on the 9th of the Jewish month Ava (roughly July 29 or 30). This happened to be the same day more than 600 years earlier (586 B.C.) when the Babylonians destroyed the first temple. The Jews had commemorated the day of the destruction of the first temple as Tisha B’av for hundreds of years. Today, they also remember the destruction of the second temple.

Now, those Jews who had rejected Jesus suffered the identical fate of their ancestors. The siege of the city produced casualties of nearly 600,000 people. The First Jewish-Roman War resulted in the deaths of nearly 1,100,000 Israelites. Jesus' prophecies were fulfilled completely as “not one stone was left unturned” at the temple. The generation that attended and participated in His crucifying, along with their direct descendants on whom they accounted the blame of their crime, were brutally punished by the lord whom they had chosen in saying “We have no king but Caesar.” Indeed, their choice of the Roman Caesar as lord instead of the Carpenter from Galilee defies understanding.

The Suppression of the Bar-Kokhba Revolt

After the great defeat by the Roman army, many people in Israel were exiled from their country and taken into slavery, in line with Jesus' words. However, some of the people still remained in Jerusalem and throughout Palestine. Sixty years after the Jewish War in 133 A.D., the Jews staged another uprising against the Romans. The Jewish Rabbi Akiba was a false prophet and revolutionary who proclaimed another man to be the

Messiah of Israel. His name was Bar-Kokhba, which meant “the Son of a Star” in Aramaic. This "Messiah" led the Jews in the war against the greatest empire in the world. This fulfilled yet another prophecy of the Lord. Christ came in the name of His heavenly Father - and was rejected by His people. Yet, Bar-Kokhba came in his own name and was proclaimed Messiah by the religious authorities. The Lord spoke about this specifically:

*“I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive.”*³³

The historian Milovan Baletic lends some analysis to this self-proclaimed “messiah”, the “son of a star”:

“Hadrian deployed legions from the North against the rebels, but the Roman legions took three years to overcome the rebels. Bar Kokhba and his zealots were killed. In 135 A.D., Hadrian inflicted severe punishment by outlawing the Jewish religion and its laws. In order to take vengeance on the Jews, Jerusalem was rebuilt, but Jews were forbidden to appear on the streets. The Romans built a Roman temple with a statue of Jupiter. The city got a new name of Aelia Capitolina. This occurred in 138 A.D.”³⁴

Since that time up to the first half of the twentieth century, the Jewish nation has lived in Diaspora without its own land, thus fulfilling numerous prophecies of the Old and New Testaments.

Israel in the Diaspora

Because of its open opposition to God in declaring their Messiah to be a servant of the Devil and calling for His death by crucifixion, Israel finally received what it deserved. Even in Moses' time in the Old Testament, God told the Israelites what would happen to them if they went down the road of utter disobedience to Him:

*“Then, if you walk contrary to Me, and are not willing to obey Me, I will bring on you seven times more plagues, according to your sins... **I will lay your cities waste and bring your sanctuaries to desolation**, and I will not smell the fragrance of your sweet aromas. I will bring the land to desolation, and your enemies who dwell in it shall be astonished at it. **I will scatter you among the nations** and draw out a sword after you; your land shall be desolate and your cities waste.”*³⁵

“And among those nations you shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of your foot have a resting place; but there the LORD will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and

³³ John 5:43.

³⁴ Milovan Baletic, *The Return of the Jews to the Land of Israel*, (Globus/CGP Delo: Zagreb/Ljubljana, 1982).

³⁵ Leviticus 26:21, 30-3. Author’s emphasis.

*anguish of soul. Your life shall hang in doubt before you; you shall fear day and night, and have no assurance of life.”*³⁶

After the nearly complete destruction of the Jewish nation by the Roman Empire and the expulsion of the survivors from their homeland, the spiritual leadership of Israelites in the Diaspora was assumed by scholars and writers who arose as successors to the traditions of the Pharisees. The Jewish Encyclopedia explains:

*“After the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D., the Sadducees were destroyed, leaving decisions on all matters Jewish to the Pharisees. Because the Pharisees regulated Jewish life, the entire history of Judaism is viewed from their perspective, as well as a revised past history of the Supreme Jewish Council known as the Sanhedrin. A new chain of tradition replaced the old priestly traditions. Pharisaism shaped the character and life of the Jews and the thought of future generations.”*³⁷

In the period from II to IV century there appeared a collection of Jewish religious texts called the Talmud. Milovan Baletić explains:

*“The Talmud regulated the Jewish way of life in postbiblical times until the emancipation of the nineteenth century. In a narrow sense, the Talmud is the common name for two works: the **Mishnah** and the **Gemara**, a commentary on the Mishnah written by the Amoraim from 225 A.D. to the sixth century. The last edition was composed by the Saboraim in the first half of the sixth century. Later manuscripts and printed copies contain comments from Rashi and Maimonides. There was also a collection of Tosefta, i.e. additional tannaitic texts produced directly from the Mishnah... **The Talmud played a crucial role in preserving national unity in the Jewish Diaspora. Because of its rigor and meticulous moralism motivated by a strong Jewish nationalism and fierce opposition to Christian evangelism, for centuries the Talmud has been attacked, defamed, and been copied with forgeries by people both within and outside of Judaism.**”*³⁸

So we read that the Talmud, a book that has contributed much to the preservation of the national identity of the Jewish people of the Diaspora through the centuries, was attacked and forged both by Jews themselves and "Christians". Without doubt, the writers of the Talmud showed no sympathy to the religious streams arising from the Judaism of the first century that became Christianity. A consequence caused by the attitudes of the successors to the first century Jews who fiercely opposed Christ and the Apostles is the contempt that the Jews gave to fallen Christianity for more than a thousand years of church domination of medieval Europe. Returning the vitriol to the Jews "in kind" was John Chrysostom (nicknamed "the golden tongued"), one of the most famous theologians of the Christian Church in the fourth and fifth century:

³⁶ Deuteronomy 28:65-6.

³⁷ See: Rajko Ratibor and M. Djurdjevic, *Secret Destroyers of Judaism and Christianity*, (Ikhtus Christian Books: Belgrade, 1996), 48.

³⁸ Baletic, 34. Author's emphasis.

“The Synagogue is a brothel, a den of scoundrels, the temple of demons devoted to idolatrous cults, a criminal assembly of Jews, a place of meeting for the assassins of Christ, a house of ill fame, a dwelling of iniquity, a gulf and abyss of perdition.”³⁹

Norman Cohn writes in his excellent book about the origin of and the manner of persecution of Jews in modern history (in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) at the hands of “Christians”:

“For many people, the stereotype of the Jew has been traditionally viewed as a mysterious being, endowed with terrible and wicked powers. This attitude extends back to the time between the second and fourth century AD, when the church and synagogue competed for converts in the Hellenic world, especially when they fought to win converts over from each other. In their efforts to force the Christians of Antioch to renounce the faith of their fathers in favor of Judaism **brought St. John Chrysostom to label the synagogue as ‘a temple of demons... an infernal cave... and abyss of perdition.’** He painted Jews as murderers and hardened destroyers, people who were filled with an evil spirit. To protect his catechumens from Judaism, St. Augustine described how **those who were once the favorite sons of God were transformed into children of Satan...** Many of the church fathers taught that the Antichrist will be Jewish and that the Jews will be his most loyal followers.”⁴⁰

At that time, increasing levels of anti-Semitism in church circles gave rise to a special theology called "substitution theory" or "replacement theory". This theology grew increasingly popular and eventually became generally accepted. This "replacement theory" meant that the Jews are no longer God's people on any grounds, and that the Christian Church is the actual "new Israel of God". The Christian East began to believe that all Old Testament prophecies intended for Israel were transferred to the Church, in the future there will be no messianic kingdom for the Jews, nor would the Jewish people play any further role in God's plan for the salvation of mankind. Here is what the Orthodox theologian Bozidar Mijac says about this topic:

“**Christ gathers** the Church as God's chosen people, the New Israel. As the old Israel was an exclusive community in which God **revealed** Himself in a special way and **was** present, so **the New Israel, the Church**, is the place of God's particular revelation and presence.”⁴¹

Romanian author Dr. Dimitriy Staniloy also writes:

“Such teaching [about Christ’s future messianic kingdom in Israel] **is considered to have been fulfilled by the establishment of the Church as the spiritual Israel.** This

³⁹ See: Ulf Ekman, *The Jews: a People of the Future*, (Havel Publishing: Zagreb, 1999) 51.

⁴⁰ Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide*, (Serbian Publishing) 19. Author’s emphasis.

⁴¹ Bozidar Mijac, *Reason and Experience*, (Belgrade 1974) 143. Author’s emphasis.

fulfillment will be perfected in the life to come... And since Christ has already come, the resettlement of the Jewish people from the Diaspora into the land of Israel has no meaning to the history of salvation. For the Holy Land, Jerusalem, the Jewish kingdom, and its religious cult has lost all significance. Since His coming, the Jewish Diaspora has minimal theological significance, just as this people has been scattered throughout the world. **Israel, as a nation of history, no longer has any important theological greatness, nor does it play any role in the history of salvation;** through Christ, Israel has already fulfilled its mission in the salvation of the world.”⁴²

Both explanations of Mijac and Staniloj appear very interesting and acceptable to those who do not know the Scriptures. The only problem with them is that they find no support from any single text of the Old or New Testaments.⁴³ The idea that, on the one hand, the Church of Jesus Christ constitutes the "New Israel", and, on the other hand, that the Jewish people forfeited their role in the divine plan of salvation is very far from the truth. Writing about the future spiritual revival of the Jewish people, the Apostle Paul states that the Jews only temporarily became disobedient to God for the sake of the salvation of Gentiles. Eventually, Israel will accept salvation from God:

*“I say then, **has God cast away His people? Certainly not!** For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. **God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew...** I say then, **have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not!** But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!”⁴⁴*

At this point I want to briefly demonstrate the kind of troubles that all the descendants of Abraham endured through a long history of nearly 19 centuries. Ever since their falling away from God, the Biblical prophecies of their scattering amongst all nations have been fulfilled.

Joseph Linz wrote *The History of the Medieval Church*. After the complete destruction of Jerusalem 138 years after Christ, the Jewish people followed strictly their own religion even though they were completely broken and posed no threat to the empire. They were able to continue to exist and practice their religion, which was protected by law despite the scorn of the common people. However, when the Roman Empire became Christian, human rights of the Jews became worse rather than improving. Linz wrote:

⁴² Dimitriy Staniloj, *Orthodox Dogma III*, (Sremski Karlovtsi, 1997). 241-2. This author edited and corrected the grammar of this passage. Author's emphasis.

⁴³ The only verse to which the advocates of "replacement theory" can refer is Galatians 6:16. However, neither this verse in its context and outside it says nothing about the Church as the New Israel, but refers to "the Israel of God" apparently referring to the descendants of Jacob's faithful remnant who converted to Christianity. Thus, they themselves have experienced the blessings that they were already promised to the entire nation of Israel (See Romans 9:4-5).

⁴⁴ Romans 11:1-2, 11-12. Author's emphasis.

“When the Empire became Christian, the current tension of their ancient rivalry increased between Christians and Jews, **for both groups claimed themselves as the people of Israel that God had chosen...** Despite legal protection, neither the Jews as individuals nor their religion were considered equal to orthodox Christians and their Church.”⁴⁵

As history testifies to us, therefore, the position of the Jews became worse instead of better when the "Christians" came to power. Why should their position have improved? Christ's Gospel teaches the "Golden Rule" to His disciples:

*“Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”*⁴⁶

The violation of basic human rights and freedoms that the Jews experienced under pagan Rome was a "joke" compared to the persecution and crimes against Jacob's descendants later committed by the "Christian Church" in the West and East. Here are a few reports on the treatment by the Roman Catholic Church of God of the Jewish people in the period from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century:

“The influence of the Church was strengthened and spread hatred toward the Jews in that they taught ‘the denial of the dogma of the incarnation of the divine origin of Jesus’... Tomas de Torquemada was a priest, the prior of the monastery of the Dominicans in the city of Segovia and a fanatical supporter of the Inquisition. He distinguished himself in cruelty in the persecution and mass deportation of the accused, especially the Jews, to the auto-da-fe. In 1492, he procured a decree of King Ferdinand which expelled the Jews from Spain, and 300,000 were expelled and were deprived of their property... Everywhere in the Christian world lurked fanaticism of the Christian tradition to model Justinian’s Corpus Iuris Civilis legislation in persecuting Jews and seizing their properties... In medieval France, they burned the Talmud in 1242 on the order of King St. Louis, who blindly listened to the priesthood. The Inquisition in that country often fabricated accusations against Jews. They blamed them of murdering Christian children to make unleavened cakes for the Passover holidays. The Jews could do little to defend themselves, even though they were innocent.”⁴⁷

On the other hand, the situation in the Orthodox East (specifically Russia) was not much better. What is amazing above all is the fact that the persecution of the Jews in the East was most intense at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Starting from 1881 until 1920, hundreds of local pogroms against Jews broke out in Russia. Such pogroms by no means were merely spontaneous outbursts of popular anger. In fact, they resulted from meticulous planning:

“Russia was on the verge of having its own version of the Middle Ages. Having a Jewish community numbering over four million people, Russia had all the conditions

⁴⁵ *Today, Special Christmas Edition*, 2002, 18. Author’s emphasis.

⁴⁶ Matthew 7:12.

⁴⁷ Milovan Baletich, *The Return of the Jews to the Land of Israel*, 49-53.

necessary to propagate deep turmoil into anti-Semitism that up to the rise of Hitler manifested itself in a most radical form... In contrast to the anti-Semitism contemporaneous in Western Europe, **Russian anti-Semitism resembled the anti-Semitism from the Middle Ages.** In addition to its scale and cruelty, anti-Semitism in Russia often enjoyed the covert and open support of the state... This policy of the Russian state, **backed by the Orthodox Church** and the Russian intelligence, remained constant until the February Revolution of 1917.”⁴⁸

“Incidents in Moscow, St. Petersburg and Kharkov turned into mass pogroms. Jews were declared guilty of famine, cholera epidemics, and the like. That anti-Semitism was a constant policy in tsarist Russia is demonstrated in the bloody pogrom of April 1903 in Chisinau. This pogrom resulted in Jewish casualties of 45 deaths and about 1000 wounded, along with the looting and burning of about 2,000 homes and stores owned by Jews. The initiator of this repression was none other than the imperial Interior Minister Vyacheslav Konstantinovich von Plehve.”⁴⁹

“After the assassination in 1881 of the relatively liberal Czar Alexander II, persecution intensified. He was succeeded by his son, the ruthless and extremely reactionary Alexander III. Both Alexander III and his son Nicholas II, last emperor⁵⁰ **were fanatical anti-Semites.** During their reigns, everything possible, with official encouragement, was done to purge Russia of the Jews.”⁵¹

Historical data presented by Milovan Baletic and Zoran Pejašinić in their writings demonstrate the fanatical anti-Semitic policy of the Russian emperors. This policy was driven by the Russian Orthodox Church through its chief spokesman, the Chief Prosecutor of the Holy Synod, Konstantin Petrovich Pobedonostsev. He was a tutor of Emperor Alexander III. After Alexander's death, Pobedonostsev also “tutored” his son, Nikolai Romanov II. This Chief Prosecutor of the Synod of the Church promoted the idea of the "three thirds" as his answer to solving the "Jewish question" in Tsarist Russia. According to this idea, one third of the Jews would be killed, one third expelled from the country, and one third would be baptized and converted to Russian Orthodoxy.⁵² Various extremist organizations were formed to participate in organized pogroms against members of God's people of the Old Testament. One such organization was called the "Black Hundreds". Norman Cohn explains how the Russian Orthodox Church provided assistance to these violent gangs:

⁴⁸ Zoran Pejasinovic, *The Zionist Movement from Basel until the Balfour Declaration*, (Ars Libri: Belgrade, 1997) 17-18. Author's emphasis.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 62-3.

⁵⁰ Author's note: this "holy czar" is familiar to us from the chapter "Veneration of the Saints". His icons adorned the walls of Russian monasteries, where they stand next to those of the Almighty God.

⁵¹ Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide*, 49. Author's emphasis.

⁵² Serbs from Croatia are familiar with these ideas which were used against them during the Second World War by the NDH under the Ustasi regime of Ante Pavelich with the blessing of the Roman Catholic Church. Unfortunately, what they (the Serbs) clearly did not realize that the atrocious example of the Ustasi was adapted from the strategy of the Russian Orthodox Church and Czar Nikolai II used against the innocent Jews several decades earlier. See Baletic, 99 and Pejasinovic, 63.

“It is well known that hundreds of criminals were hired to commit robberies and lead pogroms. The political leaders of the Black Hundreds were never admitted into respected society, but that never stopped their organization from receiving generous support **from church and state. One Church bishop was among its leaders, monasteries printed leaflets in their support, their emblems and flags were displayed in churches, priests urged the faithful to pray for their success and to participate in their activities.**”⁵³

Cohn states that in the year 1905, the Russian Orthodox Metropolitan of Moscow ordered to be read in all 368 Moscow churches a sermon containing statements from the so-called "Protocols of the Elders of Zion". This document alleges a worldwide conspiracy by the Jews to enslave all nations and to rule the world. In fact, this document was a plagiarism of a satire from 1864 written for Napoleon III by the writer Morris Jolie. This satire was titled "A Dialogue in Hell between Machiavelli and Montesquieu". This forgery, which greatly fueled the pogroms committed against the Jews in Russia and later in Nazi Germany⁵⁴, was invented in Paris by the Russian secret police Okhrana.

Mainly due to the unfavorable position of the Jews were in Europe (although they enjoyed occasional periods of freedom), some circles arose in the nineteenth century that advocated the idea of re-establishing the nation of Israel in their homeland. Since that time, prominent Jews formed the so-called "Zionist movement". After several decades, their desires were realized - the re-establishment of the State of Israel in Palestine in the middle of the twentieth century.

The Return of the Jews to the Land of Israel

*“On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: ‘To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates...’*⁵⁵

*“Therefore prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, **and bring you into the land of Israel...** I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken it and performed it,” says the LORD...’ **Then say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will***

⁵³ Cohn, 111. Author’s emphasis.

⁵⁴ It is interesting to point out yet another detail that connects the Nazi Adolf Hitler (whom the Holy Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic compared to St. Sava before the Second World War) and the Holy Czar Nikolai Romanov II. Namely, the wife of the Russian Czar was a great admirer of the ancient symbols of happiness called "swastika" (the iron cross). This superstitious woman wore a necklace of precious stones in the shape of swastika, a carved symbol sent by friends as a gift. The swastika, which rendered (unforeseen until the twentieth century) "happiness" to the Jewish people, was painted on the window and door frame in the room where she and her husband, Czar Nikolai, slept. See: Norman Cohn, 115, 116.

⁵⁵ Genesis 15:18.

*make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again... Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them; **indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people.** The nations also will know that I, the LORD, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.”⁵⁶*

The efforts and eventual success of the aspirations of the Jews gathered under the Zionist movement to resettle in the land which the Lord promised to their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, found amazing fulfillment in another biblical prophecy over 2500 years old. Although the prophet Ezekiel had lived and prophesied during the scattering of Old Testament Israel through Babylon, the prophecy uttered on this occasion was not referring to their return to the land of Judah that took place during Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah in the sixth and fifth century B.C. Note verses 26 and 27 in the preceding passage, which clearly state that after the return of the Jews from the Diaspora, God would establish with them an "*everlasting covenant of peace*" and that they will be His people who will be recognized by their God. As is well known, God has yet to establish this "*everlasting covenant of peace*". The clear implication is that this prophecy refers to an event that will occur in the future.

The next section will elaborate on the conditions that led to the re-establishment of the nation of Israel in 1948.

The Jewish Zionist Movement

During the entire time throughout the Diaspora, the majority of Jews who avoided assimilation (being absorbed into other peoples) and sang the verses of Psalm 137, which reminded them of the time when their ancestors lived in exile in Babylon:

*“If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
Let my right hand forget its skill!
If I do not remember you,
Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth—
If I do not exalt Jerusalem
Above my chief joy.”⁵⁷*

The verses of this psalm depict the hope that one day the Jews will return to their country and the holy city. Every year during Passover, over many centuries, the Jews were used to saying goodbye with the words “L’shana haba’a biy’rushalayim”, which meant, “Next year in Jerusalem.” These words affirmed their aspirations for their future return to the country of their forefathers.

⁵⁶ Ezekiel 37:12-14, 21-22, 26-8. Author’s emphasis.

⁵⁷ Psalm 137:5-6.

First attempts to solve the Jewish question and change the status of Palestine are linked to the end of the eighteenth century. General Potemkin, a close friend of the Russian Empress Catherine II, dreamed of conquering the Holy Land. He sought the expulsion of the Turks and the settlement of Christians and Jews. Descendants of Jacob throughout the United States and Europe have been particularly active in thinking about the colonization of Palestine, especially after the “Damascus Affair” in 1840. At this time, the Jews were falsely accused of the ritual murder of a Catholic monk. The surrounding peoples massacred Jews out of a vengeance similar to what was done in the Middle Ages.

The first major agent of political Zionism was Rabbi Yehuda ben Zemun Shlomo Alkahaj Haj. This rabbi advocated the idea of acquiring land and creating agricultural colonies in Palestine consisting of Jews from the Ottoman Empire. Another big advocate of Zionism was a German philosopher named Moshe (Moses) Hess. He describes his vision for the nation of Israel in his book *Rome and Jerusalem* published in 1862.

However, the person who contributed most to the resolution of the repatriation of Jews to the Promised Land was Theodor Herzl. This reporter, who lived in Vienna and wrote articles, at first did not show much interest in the return of his compatriots to Palestine. He even criticized such ideas. However, he became a Zionist due to the false accusations directed against members of his people in the infamous “Dreyfus affair”. In October 1894, the French arrested Alfred Dreyfus, Captain of the General Staff, on charges of spying on the French army for Germany. Under pressure from enemies of the Jews, a trial with the help of false testimony and documents was fabricated against Dreyfus. He was sentenced to life imprisonment and sent to the notorious “Devil's Island” near French Guiana. People shouted loud slogans such as “Death to the Jews!” Herzl himself claimed that the Dreyfus case had a crucial influence on him and motivated him to become a spokesman for the Jewish national movement. Herzl organized the first Zionist Congress in 1897 in Basel, Switzerland, which brought together 204 delegates. The Congress adopted the Basel Declaration:

“Zionism aims at establishing for the Jewish people a publicly and legally assured home in Palestine. For the attainment of this purpose, the Congress considers the following means serviceable:

1. The promotion of the settlement of Jewish agriculturists, artisans, and tradesmen in Palestine.
2. The federation of all Jews into local or general groups, according to the laws of the various countries.
3. The strengthening of the Jewish feeling and consciousness.

4. Preparatory steps for the attainment of those governmental grants which are necessary to the achievement of the Zionist purpose.”⁵⁸

Another important event that contributed toward the eventual establishment of the Israeli state in Palestine was the First World War, which resulted in the British conquest of Palestine and its liberation from the Turks. At that time there lived in England a Jewish scientist named Chaim Weizmann, a proponent of Zionism. This scientist discovered acetone, a substance used by the British to make explosives. His discovery helped the British defeat the German and Austro-Hungarian armies. Out of gratitude to Dr. Weizmann, Zionist pressures, as well as his own personal political interests, the British government supported the return of the Jews to Palestine and the establishment of their own state. On this occasion the British government adopted a document to be remembered in history as the “Balfour Declaration”. The first English High Commissioner to Palestine was a Jewish man, Sir Herbert Samuel. He urged Jews who lived around the world to return to their homeland. Since that time, nearly half a million Jews settled in Palestine.

The Founding of the Modern State of Israel

The Second World War killed about six million members of God's Old Testament people. In 1948, three years after the War's end, Israel declared its state of independence in the territory of Palestine. Prior to and during the Second World War, the UK government opposed the Jews in favor of the Arab nations, from which it imported oil. However, after the war ended, the UK renounced its claims over Palestine. The British transferred responsibility over the controversy of the Israeli state and Jewish-Arab relations to the newly established United Nations.

The UN established a Special Committee on Palestine to find a solution regarding the division of land between Israelis and Palestinians. The majority of the committee agreed that Palestine should be divided into two fully independent states. Israel accepted the plan, which gave Israel 56.17% of the territory. The Palestinian Arabs, who were to receive 42.83% of the land, were unhappy. Other Arab states demanded that the Palestinians receive the entire territory and allow the Jews to gain status as a national minority.⁵⁹

As the day of May 14, 1948 approached, the UK announced the termination of its mandate over the territory of Palestine. On the morning of May 14, the last High Commissioner of Palestine Sir Alan G. Cunningham left Jerusalem. After inspection of the naval forces in Haifa at midnight, they pulled down the British flag, signaling the end of British rule in Palestine, which lasted 30 years, 5 months and 4 days. David Ben Gurion, on behalf of the Jewish National Council and the General Zionist Council, read a proclamation to proclaim an independent and sovereign Jewish state:

“Eretz Israel (the Land of Israel) was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here

⁵⁸ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Zionist_Congress .

⁵⁹ See Dusan Simic, *Sadat: Peace or Adventure*, (Politics: Belgrade, 1978).

their spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped. Here they first attained to statehood, created cultural values of national and universal significance and gave to the world the eternal Book of Books... Impelled by this historic and traditional attachment, Jews strove in every successive generation to re-establish themselves in their ancient homeland. In recent decades they returned in their masses... Accordingly we, members of the People's Council, representatives of the Jewish Community of Eretz-Israel and of the Zionist Movement, are here assembled on the day of the termination of the British Mandate over Eretz-Israel and, by virtue of our natural and historic right and on the strength of the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly, hereby declare the establishment of a Jewish state in Eretz-Israel, to be known as the State of Israel... Placing our trust in the Almighty, we affix our signatures to this proclamation at this session of the provisional Council of State, on the soil of the Homeland, in the city of Tel-Aviv, on this Sabbath eve, the 5th day of Iyar, 5708 (14th May, 1948).”⁶⁰

This declaration made a most significant step towards the future and complete fulfillment of the prophecy uttered by God’s servant Ezekiel. The Israelis once again, after almost two millennia, settled in the land from which their ancestors, in the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, were expelled because of the rejection of God's Messiah. The return of the Israelites to their land continues. Since the founding of the state to this day, several million people have returned to the land. The Word of God spoken through the prophet Ezekiel is being fulfilled before our very eyes.

The Arab Israeli Wars

A few days before the declaration of the modern Jewish state, Israel's first Prime Minister David Ben Gurion sent Golda Meir sent to a secret meeting with Abdullah, the Hashemite ruler whom the Jews honored as a moderate Arab leader. Abdullah immediately told Mrs. Meir that the Arab League was preparing to prevent by military force the formation of Israel. Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan had already mobilized their forces. However, the outcome of the war about to begin not only was unfavorable for the Palestinians, but God through His covenant gave His people the later opportunity to occupy new territory after each succeeding war:

“The first Arab-Israeli war was waged with various levels of intensity for eight months. Both sides combined suffered about twelve thousand deaths. At the beginning, the Arab armies, some of which were still commanded by British officers, achieved some success: the Jordanians, commanded by the famous Sir John Gubb Pasha, occupied the Jewish part of Jerusalem; the Egyptians penetrated into the Negev Desert, and the Iraqis came close to Haifa. But the more organized and powerfully motivated Israelis reversed the course of the war in the end. They ended up occupying nearly half the territory that the United Nations had allotted to the Palestinian Arabs.”⁶¹

⁶⁰ http://www.knesset.gov.il/docs/eng/megilat_eng.htm

⁶¹ Simic, 22.

Despite the brilliant victory of God's people against the aggressive armies of several Arab states, Jerusalem still did not fully belong to the Jews. One part of the city, the Old City where the Temple Mount and the "Wailing Wall" are located, fell into the hands of the Jordanians. Over the next nineteen years, Jerusalem was a divided city.

After the Suez Crisis and attacks by joint British, French, and Israeli forces against Egypt in 1956, the United Nations deployed troops ("Blue Helmets") on the Sinai Peninsula. Over the years, Israeli aircraft and artillery often performed retaliatory strikes over the territory of Syria for supporting Palestinians who carried out terrorist attacks. In May 1967, Egyptian President Nasser received warning from Damascus and Moscow that Israel was concentrating its troops on the Syrian border, probably in anticipation of an attack on that country. The Egyptian President then requested the UN to withdraw its peacekeepers from the Sinai Peninsula and redeploy them as a counterbalance to the Israeli troops amassing against Syria. To everyone's surprise, including that of President Nasser, the United Nations acceded to his request. Egyptian forces occupied the entire Sinai Peninsula, and Cairo renewed its blockade of the Arabian Gulf, from which it had withdrawn after the 1956 war. Here is how this Middle East crisis played out in 1967:

"On June 5, as an Egyptian mediator was preparing to go to Washington for talks, Israel suddenly made an aggressive attack with its border forces on Egyptian positions, citing the closure of the Arabian Gulf as *casus belli*. Israeli Mirage jets destroyed the bulk of the Egyptian Air Force on their runways literally within a few dozen minutes. Well-trained and extraordinarily armed Israeli soldiers, whose morale was inspired by propaganda broadcasts of Arab radio stations to 'throw Israel into the sea', within three days occupied the entire Sinai and reached the Suez Canal. In the next two days, at war with the army of King Hussein, they conquered the whole Transjordan and reached the river Jordan. On June 9 and 10, after the most bitter fighting of the war, Israeli forces occupied the entire Syrian Golan Heights.

Israel gloated over its victory; the Arab world was in the deepest state of shock."⁶²

What is particularly important for our consideration is the implication of the biblical prophecies about the imminent establishment of the Christ's messianic kingdom that gathers the people of Israel once again into their native land. Namely, in this war, Israeli troops liberated the entire city of Jerusalem, that is, the Old City that for nineteen years was occupied by the Jordanians. The Temple Mount and the Wailing Wall were once again in the hands of the Jews. Grand Rabbi Shlomo Goren recognized the signs of the times and said: "We have entered the messianic age." Professor Jeshua Praver of the Hebrew University added: "Nearly two thousand years this nation had to wait for its deliverance in order to be able to hear the footsteps of the Messiah approaching."

Obviously, these two distinguished men recognized the great significance of Israel retaking the entire city of Jerusalem. The full occupation of Jerusalem meant possession

⁶² *Ibid.*, 29.

of the Temple Mount, prelude to the great sign of the establishment of the future messianic kingdom over Israel. According to the narratives of the Old and New Testament, before the coming of the Jewish Messiah (Christ), the temple in Jerusalem will be built again, and the Old Testament sacrificial system will be reestablished.

Fulfillment of Daniel's Seventieth Week

In the words of the Lord Jesus Christ recorded in Luke 21:24, Jerusalem shall be trodden down by the Gentiles “until the time of Gentiles are fulfilled”. This “time” began long ago at the first destruction of the temple in Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. Since 1967, Jerusalem has belonged to the hands of the descendants of Jacob, but the “times of the Gentiles” have yet to be fulfilled. Luke tells us what will happen in the future:

*“And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.”*⁶³

This time filled with great tribulation, by which the Lord Himself will punish the ungodly people of the earth, is precisely the time that we talked about earlier in this study. Recall the “day of vengeance of our God” (Isaiah 61:2, Malachi 4:5). This day will occur after the arrival on the earth of Elijah the Prophet, who will preach the gospel of the Lord. What is important to know is the fact that today's Israel, as in the time of Jesus, still rejects Jesus of Nazareth as its true Messiah. They are still waiting for a different messiah. This messiah will come in the form of the Antichrist, who will probably be of Jewish origin.

Recall the earlier analysis of the prophecies of Daniel. After the triumphal entry into Jerusalem and crucifixion of Jesus, which fulfilled the prophecy of the 69 weeks, there was a major prophetic “gap” occupied by the New Testament Church of Christ. The last days of mankind will see its fulfillment in the final seventieth week, including all the events leading up to the establishment of the messianic kingdom. So, according to Old Testament prophecy and the statement of the Lord Jesus Christ that “Elijah must come first and prepare everything” (Matthew 17:11), the arrival on earth of God’s prophet will occur during the final seven years of sinful human civilization’s existence. Revelation 11 mentions some interesting details about this event:

*“Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, ‘Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. **But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months. And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.**’ These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands*

⁶³ Luke 21:25-8.

*standing before the God of the earth. And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. **These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy;** and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire. When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. Then those from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, 'Come up here.' And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them."*⁶⁴

The above prophecy (most likely the prophets are Elijah and Moses) emphasizes the fact that the temple in Jerusalem will exist again. The outer court (as in biblical times) will be given to the Gentiles, who will tread upon it for 42 months (1,260 days or three and a half years). It is interesting to observe that today in Jerusalem there will exist two religious sites right next to each other. According to Israeli media sources, the Jerusalem temple will be rebuilt in the near future, right next to the Islamic mosque with the golden dome called the Mosque of Omar. It is interesting also that the two prophets bear witness to 1,260 days, the duration when the Gentiles will tread the outer courtyard of the Temple. What will they actually be doing?

According to the prophecies recorded in the book of Daniel 9:27 and Revelation 11:3 and 12:14, the last "weeks" (from the prophecy of Daniel 9:24-26) are divided into two equal parts of three and a half years each. The first part consists of a three and a half year period distinguished by the rise of the man whom the Bible calls the Antichrist. The prophecy explains that this Antichrist will be the final ruler of a godless global empire before the establishment of the messianic kingdom. According to Scripture, the territory which this man will rule will be identical to that once occupied by the Roman Empire (Daniel 7:7-8, 19-27). It even mentions the city of Rome, a city that will play an enormous role in many political and religious events (Rev. 17:1-6, 18).⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Revelation 11:1-12. Author's emphasis.

⁶⁵ The Scriptures compare this city in Revelation to a female harlot "drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of Jesus' martyrs." Roman Catholic theologians interpret this passage to represent ancient pagan Rome during the first centuries of its persecution of Christians. However, because this event is future relative to the time John wrote Revelation, it is more likely to pertain to Papal Rome, which during the Middle Ages persecuted and sentenced to death many religious dissidents under the guise of preserving "the true faith." Among the hundreds of thousands and millions of innocent victims were many genuine, Bible-believing, born-again Christians who disagreed with the unbiblical doctrines promulgated by the Roman Church. (The former commentary from a Roman Catholic perspective can be found in: *Today's Christian Bible*, (Zagreb, Croatia, 1983), 1271.

At first, the rule of Antichrist will appear to be democratic and very popular with the broad masses. According to the prophet Daniel, the king will establish a political alliance with many countries and even with Israel for a period of seven years. In the middle of the “seven” (i.e., after three and a half years), Antichrist will abruptly terminate the alliance with the modern state of Israel, God’s people of the Old Testament. The persecution of the Jews will again begin. It is important to note that exactly during this (first) half of the final “seven” that the appearance of Moses and Elijah. During their time of three and a half years of preaching among the Jews, the descendants of Jacob, many will accept Jesus Christ as their Messiah and Savior. This time will fulfill the prophecy uttered by Joel hundreds of years before Christ was born:

*“Then you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel:
I am the LORD your God
And there is no other.
My people shall never be put to shame.
And it shall come to pass afterward
That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh;
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
Your old men shall dream dreams,
Your young men shall see visions.
And also on My menservants and on My maidservants
I will pour out My Spirit in those days.
**And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth:
Blood and fire and pillars of smoke.
The sun shall be turned into darkness,
And the moon into blood,
Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.**
And it shall come to pass
That whoever calls on the name of the LORD
Shall be saved.
For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance,
As the LORD has said,
Among the remnant whom the LORD calls.”*⁶⁶

This prophecy is partly fulfilled at the time of Christ’s church at Pentecost, but with the difference that the signs were not followed by cataclysms such as will occur in the latter days. The prophet Daniel also predicts “*the abolition of sacrifices and offerings*” in the second half of the “*weeks*”, which clearly indicates that in the future, the temple will be rebuilt where sacrifices could be made. Three and a half years after the establishment of the alliance with Israel, which equates also to the time of the preaching of the two prophets sent from Heaven, Antichrist will assassinate the two prophets. Their bodies will lie in the streets of Jerusalem a few days, after which the Lord will raise them to life again and carry them up to heaven (Revelation 11:7-12). Right at that time will yet another dramatic take place that was predicted by the Old Testament prophets, the Lord Christ, and His apostles. The Antichrist, who will ban the offering of sacrifices to the

⁶⁶ Joel 2:27-32. Author’s emphasis.

Lord God of Israel in accordance with the regulations of the Old Testament, will enter Jehovah's temple in Jerusalem, be seated, and make a claim that he is God. Thus say the Scriptures:

*“Then a mighty king shall arise, who shall rule with great dominion, and do according to his will... **And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days.**”*⁶⁷

*“Therefore when you see the ‘**abomination of desolation,**’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. **For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.** And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.”*⁶⁸

*“Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour... Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.”*⁶⁹

*“Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, **so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.**”*⁷⁰

The Lord Jesus Christ alludes to Daniel's prophecy in Matthew. He confirms the prophecy in saying that when the "*abomination of desolation*" will be set up in the holy place (temple), great distress would occur to men that never before occurred nor ever would occur again in history. In particular, this distress will affect the people of Israel, as Jesus tells them to "*flee to the mountains*" (hills and mountains) in order to save their lives.

John's Revelation teaches that the Antichrist will wage war against the Israelis. He will attempt to find those Jews who converted to Christianity by the testimonies of the two prophets and other descendants of Jacob. The war will last until the second coming of the Lord over the next three and a half years (Revelation 12). The prophet Daniel also predicted this behavior from the man of lawlessness:

⁶⁷ Daniel 11:3, 12:11. Author's emphasis.

⁶⁸ Matthew 24:15-22. Author's emphasis.

⁶⁹ 1 John 2:18, 22-23.

⁷⁰ 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4. Author's emphasis.

*“He shall speak pompous words against the Most High,
Shall persecute the saints of the Most High,
And shall intend to change times and law.
Then the saints shall be given into his hand
For a time and times and half a time.”⁷¹
But the court shall be seated,
And they shall take away his dominion,
To consume and destroy it forever.
Then the kingdom and dominion,
And the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven,
Shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High.
His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
And all dominions shall serve and obey Him.”⁷²*

What is even more important to point out is what the Lord Jesus Christ said to His countrymen at a time when they rejected Him as their Messiah:

“...for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’”⁷³

In fact, during the great war of Antichrist against Israel, Revelation tells us that the opposing sides will involve almost all the major world powers (Revelation 9). One third of the world’s population (i.e., more than two billion people) will die in this conflict. In Israel, nearly two-thirds of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will perish. The prophet Zechariah wrote about this terrible cataclysm and the future massacre of many Israelites:

*“And it shall come to pass in all the land,
Says the LORD,
That two-thirds in it shall be cut off and die,
But one-third shall be left in it:
I will bring the one-third through the fire,
Will refine them as silver is refined,
And test them as gold is tested.
They will call on My name,
And I will answer them.
I will say, ‘This is My people’;
And each one will say, ‘The LORD is my God.’”⁷⁴*

⁷¹ That is, for 3 and ½ years. Author’s note.

⁷² Daniel 7:25-27. Author’s emphasis.

⁷³ Matthew 23:39.

⁷⁴ Zechariah 13:8-9.

Christ's Second Coming and the Mission of the New Testament Church

In the same way that Eastern Orthodox theology regarding the end times denies any role for the people of Israel in connection with Christ's second coming, which is wrong, Eastern Orthodoxy also misinterprets the mission of the New Testament Church in relation to the Lord's return. During the study that follows, you will see that the theology of the Eastern Church differs from the teaching of Scripture on this question. As demonstrated in the previous section, the Lord Jesus Christ explained that His return would be preceded by great and mighty signs in Heaven and on earth. Such signs include the arrival of the Antichrist, great wars, and natural disasters, the scope of which had never occurred before in the history of mankind. However, if you pay close attention, Jesus uttered these words about future catastrophe to the Jewish people (Israel) – not to His Church, which He had not yet founded.

There is a great difference in the relation of Christ's return to the Church as opposed to the fate of the Jews in Israel. I emphasize this statement as Orthodox theology commits a serious error in this area. Specifically, the Lord Jesus speaks of believers who are Jews by nationality and will turn to God and His Messiah during the Great Tribulation, which occurs in the final of Daniel's weeks:

*“And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. **Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.**”⁷⁵*

The Lord clearly tells people that “*when these things begin to happen*” that they should “*lift up*” their heads because His return is “*near*”. The second coming of Jesus will be proclaimed in the glory of heaven with great signs. Anyone at that time familiar with the Bible knew how to identify these future events.

However, when the Lord Jesus Christ spoke of His second coming, He also explained that His day would come suddenly without any miraculous signs preceding it:

*“Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, **for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.**”⁷⁶*

In this text, the Lord warns His disciples that they should always be spiritually awake and waiting for His return, for He would appear suddenly. Jesus compares His coming with the illustration of a thief who breaks into a home and steals. Jesus uses the illustration of the thief, who comes suddenly and at a time when the owner least expects

⁷⁵ Luke 21:25-8. Author's emphasis.

⁷⁶ Matthew 24:42-4. Author's emphasis.

it. The thief attempts to make the least possible noise so he won't be caught. Clearly, the Lord states two conditions to His second coming. First, He says it will be rather mysterious and not visible to everyone. But then He states that it will become obvious to everyone through the glory of heaven. Let us examine other New Testament texts to explain.

The Rapture of the New Testament Church

*“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, **I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.**”⁷⁷*

In the words of the Lord Jesus Christ that are written in the New Testament, it is clear that the next event foretold by God's prophetic calendar is the mysterious rapture of born-again believers of Christ's Church to Heaven - the heavenly Jerusalem. A previous section pointed out the fact that we live in the prophetic "time gap" between weeks 69 and 70 of Daniel's prophecy. This gap will close at the end of history, 7 years before the establishment of Christ's messianic kingdom in Israel and on the entire planet. According to the providence of God, the Old Testament Jews rejected their Messiah and thus enabled the fulfillment of the Lord's plan hidden before Jesus was born. This plan involved the establishment of the New Testament Church of God's people which includes members of all nationalities. In Romans Paul affirms the biblical truth that the descendants of Jacob have become hardened and disobedient to God. The reason was to allow a certain number of Gentiles to be saved through faith in Christ (in the Church). The apostle then explains how these events will lead to the salvation of people from Israel and the Gentiles:

*“**For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:***

*The Deliverer will come out of Zion,
And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;
For this is My covenant with them,
When I take away their sins.”⁷⁸*

According to Paul, this development was a "mystery" to Old Testament believers – which he wants to reveal now to New Testament Christians. At the time of Jesus on the Mount of Olives, just before His ascension, his disciples asked Him the following question:

*“Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, ‘**Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?**’ And He said to them, ‘**It is not for you to***

⁷⁷ John 14:1-3. Author's emphasis.

⁷⁸ Romans 11:25-7. Author's emphasis.

know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.⁷⁹

According to the words of the Lord, before the establishment of the kingdom of Israel, His disciples must preach the Gospel “to the end of the earth.” Matthew mentions this command:

*“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. **Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.”*⁸⁰

Christianity and the gospel message has been shared around the world for almost twenty centuries. Today more than ever, mass media has helped (with the help of Bible distribution, Christian literature, films, radio and television shows). The preaching of the gospel of Scripture and its accessibility to the common person was greatly restricted up to the fifteenth century. Before this time, the process of transcribing Bibles was very slow. These Bible copies were very expensive and thus unavailable to the masses. Only in the fifteenth century, with the invention of the printing press, was there mass publication of the Book of Books. The translation of the Bible from Latin into the national languages made it more accessible to people.

However, the 20th century has been a milestone in the rapid spreading of the gospel around the world. During the last hundred years, many biblical established companies engaged in printing the scriptures in almost any language. In the last century, billions of copies of the Bible (or parts thereof, including the New Testament gospels), Christian books, brochures, and tracts have been distributed. Many films (documentaries, movies, and cartoons) with biblical themes have been seen by millions of people. Satellite transmissions of sermons of world famous evangelists have also contributed and still contribute to the communication of Christ’s message of reconciliation to God in every home, even in countries not friendly to Christianity. Christian missionaries have ministered in the deepest jungles of the Amazon, Africa and Indonesia to witness to people of Christ.

Today we are seeing fulfilled that which was predicted by Christ to His apostles - the time before the second coming of the Lord. Jesus closely connected the global preaching of the Gospel to the time of His return to earth:

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.”⁸¹

⁷⁹ Acts 1:6-8. Author’s emphasis.

⁸⁰ Matthew 28:18-20. Author’s emphasis.

⁸¹ Matthew 24:14. Author’s emphasis.

According to all the signs that we have examined, Christ's return is imminent. The resettlement of the Jews to their promised land, the preparation of the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple, the unification of the "Roman Empire", and the preaching of the gospel around the world suggest that we are one step away from the secret coming of the Lord and the rapture of His Church into Heaven. The text quoted at the beginning of this section (John 14:1-3) gives the Savior's clear statement that He prepares a place for His disciples. He will come again and take them with Himself to be where He is. (Note that Jesus says that He will come to be where they are on earth during the establishment of the kingdom, but He will take them to Himself.) This rapture of the Church into heaven will occur shortly before the final week of Daniel's seventy weeks. The Bible teaches us that the rapture will come before the time of the Great Tribulation, a disaster that will befall the world. The Apostle Paul writes about this event:

*"...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, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.**"*⁸²

Paul also writes about the mysterious second coming of Christ in the clouds on behalf of the rapture of the Church:

*"But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. **For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.**"*⁸³

*"But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. **For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.** For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape."*⁸⁴

The passages above are obvious. They announce the fulfillment of Jesus' promises in John 14:3 ("I will come and take you to Myself."). Paul teaches that at an unknown time in the future, the Lord Jesus will enter the earth's atmosphere (thus the word "clouds", not "earth") and invoke the "resurrection of the dead in Christ" (e.g., the deceased members of the Christian Church throughout history). Once deceased believers are resurrected, then the believers who are alive at this time will ascend with them to Heaven. The bodies of both groups of believers will be transformed into bodies that are

⁸² 1 Thessalonians 1:9b-10. Author's emphasis.

⁸³ 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. Author's emphasis.

⁸⁴ 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3. Author's emphasis.

immortal and incorruptible. They will dwell with the Lord forever. Paul explains this claim further in the epistle to the Corinthians:

*“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming... **Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed - in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.**”*⁸⁵

Announcing to Christian believers the mystery of the Old Testament, Paul denies the possibility of a future common (general) resurrection of believers and non-believers – something that the Jews believed in the Old Testament according to its limited disclosures. In contrast, Paul clearly distinguishes between two resurrections. First, Paul says that *“the dead in Christ shall rise first.”* (See 1 Corinthians 15:23, 1 Thessalonians 4:16) The Lord Jesus Christ announced His secret second coming and the ascension of believers to the heavenly Jerusalem before the Great Tribulation. He also indicated that unbelievers would remain on earth for the Great Tribulation. Here are His words:

*“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. **Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.**”*⁸⁶

Now that we have seen the true Biblical teachings about the mystery of Christ’s coming in the clouds, the resurrection of deceased Christians, and the rapture of the Church into Heaven, we next will examine the events leading up to the establishment of the Lord’s kingdom on the earth.

The Wedding of the Lamb and the Coming of Heavenly Glory

After the rapture of the Church to Heaven, an event which will mark the end of its mission to spread the Gospel of salvation to the unbelieving earth as well as its deliverance from *“the wrath to come”*, the time of Antichrist’s tyranny will come along with a time of the Great Tribulation (the time of *“the Great and Terrible Day of the Lord”*). Since it will have been freed from all earthly concerns before the time of the Great Tribulation of Antichrist’s tyranny, the Church, which is referred to as the Bride of Christ in Revelation 19:7, will sing to the Lord a song of praise:

⁸⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:22-3, 51-3. Author’s emphasis.

⁸⁶ Matthew 24:36-42. Author’s emphasis.

*“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’... Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, ‘Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?’ And I said to him, ‘Sir, you know.’ So he said to me, ‘These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’”*⁸⁷

Note John’s description of the people dressed in white robes as having come “*out of the great tribulation.*” This multitude of “*all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues*” undoubtedly represents the Christian Church which was raptured from earth to Heaven before the Great Tribulation. It is obvious that these multitudes do not include spiritual angelic beings. They also do not include the bodiless souls of Jews who died for their faith in God and in Jesus the Messiah (which was acquired through the preaching of Moses and Elijah) and were killed in Israel during the Great Tribulation. These people are in material glorified bodies in heaven before the throne of God and the Lamb (Christ).

During the time just before the last seven years of godless men’s rule over the planet Earth and the manifestation of a just God’s wrath against the earth’s population, the Lord Jesus Christ will be carried by the clouds, accompanied by the praise of the Church, return to earth, and establish His kingdom. Here is how the Lord answers the question of the Jewish high priest as to whether he is truly the Christ, the Son of God before His crucifixion:

*“Jesus said to him, ‘It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.’”*⁸⁸

He also said:

*“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”*⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Revelation 7:9-10, 13-17. Author’s emphasis.

⁸⁸ Matthew 26:64. Author’s emphasis. See also Mark 14:61-2.

⁸⁹ Matthew 24:29-30. Author’s emphasis.

John's Revelation reveals Christ's glorious return and gives many details about his fierce conflict with the army of the beasts:

*“Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. **And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war.** His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called **The Word of God.** **And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.** Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. **And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.**”⁹⁰*

After punishing the Antichrist and his servant, the false prophet, by casting them into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 19:20) and “binding” Satan in the abyss for a thousand years, Christ the Lord, according to the prophecy of the angel proclaimed to God's servant Zechariah (Zechariah 14:4, Acts 1:11-12), the Lord will descend from heaven with great glory and stand on the Mount of Olives. That moment will be followed by the resurrection of all the righteous people (believers justified by their faith) who have ever lived on the earth. They include people from the time of Adam to those who died during the reign of the Antichrist. The Apostle John gives details in Revelation 20:

*“And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. **And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.** But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. **This is the first resurrection.** Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, **and shall reign with Him a thousand years.**”⁹¹*

What is important to emphasize at this point is that the first seven verses of Revelation 20 emphasize that the future kingdom of Jesus lasts for a thousand years. This contrasts with the lack of such revelation in the Gospels and the Old Testament.

After Christ's earthly kingdom of righteousness and peace, Satan will shortly be released from his prison where he was interred for a thousand years. During his brief time of activity, Satan once again will manage to seduce a great many people who will have been born during this period of a thousand years. This new generation will be descendants of those people who survived the Tribulation.

This new generation is not descended from the raptured believers who return in the Millennium and already will have had received incorruptible bodies. (This group

⁹⁰ Revelation 19:11-16. Author's emphasis.

⁹¹ Revelation 20:4-6. Author's emphasis.

includes both New Testament and Old Testament believers, who experienced resurrection before the millennial kingdom and also transformation of their mortal bodies which will then be glorified in eternal bodies. Among such people, there will be no marriage, sexual intercourse, or childbirth. See 2 Corinthians 5:1-5 and Luke 20:33-36.)

The end of the rebellion described in Revelation 20:7-10 will be tragic. The rebels will be burned with fire, and Satan, who led them astray, along with his demons will be cast into the Lake of Fire (Matthew 25:41). This is the same Lake of Fire into which Antichrist and the False Prophet were cast a thousand years earlier. The Last Judgment will follow, which entails the resurrection of the wicked after the millennial kingdom. This event will be the last in the history of the earth when the godless will have any mention. All those who are not born again (whom the Lord Christ called lawbreakers – see John 5:29) will be resurrected for eternal condemnation. Penalties will be determined in accordance with the size of the sin committed. After the conviction that they deserve, they will all be thrown into the Lake of Fire where they will be tormented forever and ever - for eternity:

“But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished... Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books... And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”⁹²

After the end of the judgment of people who are lawless and disobedient to God, the Lord will destroy the universe known to us today and create a new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21 and 22). Christ will hand over the kingdom to His Heavenly Father (1 Corinthians 15:24-28), and resurrected believers will live and reign with the Lord and the angels of heaven forever.

So, we have finished examining the most important texts of Scripture that speak of future events, namely the Second Coming of Christ and the resurrection of the dead.

Now we move on to learning about what Eastern Orthodoxy teaches on these same topics. It will not take much time to see that the teaching of the Eastern Church, which developed under the influence of the Fathers, is quite different from the teachings of the eternal Word of God.

Eastern Orthodox Teaching about the Second Coming of Christ and the Resurrection of the Dead

As stated at the beginning of the chapter, the teachings of the Orthodox Church stand in stark contrast with what Christ taught His disciples about His second coming and the

⁹² Revelation 20:5, 11-12, 15.

resurrection of the dead. In short, Orthodox eschatology refuses to recognize the Biblical doctrine of the rapture of the Church of Christ, neither separate resurrections of the righteous and the wicked, nor the truth about the millennial kingdom on earth. According to the Orthodox, during the last days on earth Antichrist will appear, the (Orthodox) Church will be persecuted, and the coming of Christ will be followed by the general resurrection of the dead and the Last Judgment. But on which texts in the Bible does Orthodoxy base its beliefs? Does any such evidence even exist?

To present the “Orthodox argument”, let us once again refer to the book *Church and Sects* by Serbian Orthodox author Lazar Milin. He (unsuccessfully) uses Biblical texts for presenting “evidence” to invalidate “sectarian” (Evangelical Protestant) claims in a two-fold resurrection and the millennial kingdom of the Messiah. He attempts to persuade his readers of the veracity of the Orthodox understanding of the Bible and the error of evangelical Christians. Let us examine some of Milin’s allegations in his book:

“A second group of heretics, millennialists, on the contrary, believed in a sort of resurrection that is totally crude. They believe in the renewal of earthly life under Christ's millennial kingdom when He will reign on earth for a thousand years with righteous people. Only afterwards will the resurrection of sinners occur and God's Last Judgment will begin... Sectarrians also believe that all the dead will be resurrected, but on two occasions, not one. The first occasion is the resurrection of the righteous ones who will reign with Christ for a thousand years. After the end of these thousand years, sinners will be resurrected. These sinners will attempt to invade Jerusalem, the capital of Christ. Then Christ will destroy them... After all, Christ is the eternal king and for him a thousand years does not mean anything more than a day, just as the Bible says that to God, ‘...*a thousand years in Your sight Are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night.*’ (Psalm 90:4, 2 Peter 3:8) **The biggest issue that the sectarians fail to recognize is the fact that Christ never promised anyone any sort of earthly kingdom, not for a thousand years, not even for one hour.** When people wanted to make him king, He fled (John 6:15). When Jesus appeared before Pilate, He explicitly confessed that His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:6). If Christ ever had a millennial kingdom in mind, that time would have been a great opportunity for Him to reveal it... **The millennial kingdom of Christ demands the understanding of a period of human history since the founding of the Church (when Satan is “bound and thrown into the abyss”) until the second coming of Christ.** This millennium began after the end of the persecution of the Church and includes a relatively peaceful period of the Church’s growth while Satan remains in the Abyss until his release, when the Antichrist will appear.”⁹³

As we examine these allegations, let us first recognize that the Orthodox call them “heretics” people who read the words of Holy Scripture and believe the literal meaning of prophecy in the Bible. Then, Mr. Milin wrongly states that the Lord Jesus Christ did not promise anyone a kingdom, not for a thousand years nor for one hour. Apparently,

⁹³ Lazar Milin, *Scientific Justification of Religion – Church and Sects*, 285, 289, 293. Author’s emphasis.

Mr. Milin is unaware of verses including Matthew 21:4-9, Luke 19:38-40, 23:42, Acts 1:6-7, 1 Corinthians 15:24, and Revelation 20:6. These verses speak specifically about the future of Christ's (millennial) kingdom.

That Christ avoided being proclaimed as an (earthly) king at the time of his first coming (John 6:15) is not entirely accurate. It is true that He did not declare His kingdom, but only because the time for His kingdom had not yet arrived. After all, the Lord's intention was not to proclaim a kingdom that would satisfy the desires of His sinful contemporaries. (The text tells us that the Jews wanted to proclaim Jesus as king only because they were fed bread and ate the fish that He multiplied. In other words, they wanted to crown Him as king for their own selfish interests. See John 6:1-26.)

Furthermore, Christ's answer to Pilate that his kingdom is not of this "world" is also completely logical, for He would not assume the power of the throne by human means (in other words, through a military uprising and coup, which Pilate had feared based upon the false accusations of the Jewish elders. See John 19:7-12). Note Jesus' answer to Pilate: "*My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.*" (John 19:36) His answer clearly indicates that the kingdom certainly belongs to Jesus – but it would be established by divine, not human, methods.

However, the climax of this "Orthodox" interpretation of the Bible consists of Milin's claim that the millennial kingdom is actually the period of nearly two thousand years since the establishment of the Christian Church until the arrival of the Antichrist. Therefore, the period of 1000 years is not a literal millennium. According to the Orthodox interpretation, in some miraculous way they are able to multiply the millennium by two to come up with 2,000 years (or however many years will pass until the second coming of Christ)! How illogical Milin's interpretation is will be revealed by the following conclusion.

According to this view of Eastern Orthodoxy, it follows that Satan is already bound and in the prison of the Abyss since the time of Christ's resurrection and the establishment of the Church. Yet, if this were the case, from where came a deluge of evildoers and superstition, false religions, and occult practices widespread all over the world? Is Milin truly unaware of all that has transpired throughout history under the "millennial kingdom" of the "Church" in Europe in the dark Middle Ages? What about more recent events in the spiritual and material world? On the contrary, rather than the presumption that Satan is bound, we actually see that Satan is more active than ever (Revelation 12:12)!

The "distinctive interpretation" of Orthodox apologist Lazar Milin attempts to persuade us that the millennial kingdom is a symbolic image and should not be interpreted literally:

*“We have so far been repeatedly emphasizing that it is virtually impossible to understand Revelation literally for several reasons. First of all, it is obvious that Revelation uses symbolic images **that can never be understood literally.**”*⁹⁴

However, contrary to Milin’s claim, almost all of the prophecies relating to certain periods of time were fulfilled quite literally. We have already studied the prophecy of Daniel's 70 weeks. Also, we find a literal fulfillment of the Lord’s promise to Abraham that his descendants would be enslaved in Egypt for 400 years (Genesis 15:13, Acts 7:6). There is also a literal fulfillment of prophecy by Jeremiah regarding the duration of 70 years for the Jews in Babylonian captivity (Jeremiah 25:11-12, Ezra 1:1-3; Daniel 9:2). Since all these prophecies were fulfilled literally, it begs the question why we should interpret the prophecy of a thousand year kingdom to be an exception, especially because the notion of what one thousand years comprises is mentioned no less than six times in Revelation 20. This includes how long Satan is prisoner in the Abyss, the duration of Christ's kingdom with the blessed resurrection of the righteous, along with the time period that will elapse between the first and second resurrection. The utter misinterpretation of Eastern Orthodoxy becomes visible in the two contradictory ways that Milin analyzes the same text in Revelation 20. Depending on what his purposes are, Milin uses the familiar method of “Eastern Orthodox” ‘distortion of biblical texts and their misinterpretation beyond the proper context. We earlier examined his misinterpretation in the chapter on the sacraments, specifically with regard to the “sacrament” of priesthood. Wanting to prove that there will be a double resurrection, Milin says this about the Revelation of John:

“It should be particularly noted that Holy Scripture views a sinner to be spiritually dead (Luke 15:32) for *‘the wages of sin is death’* (Romans 6:28). Therefore, repentance and baptism are equal to resurrection. *‘For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.’* (Galatians 3:27) For those who have been resurrected in Christ, death no longer holds authority over them (Romans 6:9). Thus, the ‘first’ resurrection actually represents baptism. For that reason, one who has a stake in the first resurrection is blessed, because over him, the second death has no power. That person will not face condemnation by God at the second coming of Christ. The second ‘resurrection’ refers to a universal resurrection when all the dead will rise from their graves alive, transformed and spiritually incorruptible.”⁹⁵

So when Milin was unable to find a better explanation, he lobs in an interpretation of Revelation 20 to equate to Christian baptism! Of course, any reader of this prophetic book of the New Testament even with a cursory examination can recognize that Revelation 20 says nothing about baptism. Ironically, only 39 pages after Milin writes in defense of "Orthodoxy", he challenges yet another biblical truth believed by evangelical Protestants with regard to the universal Christian priesthood and the unbiblical teaching of a special hierarchy in the Church. Milin writes:

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 291. Author’s emphasis.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 294. Author’s emphasis.

“It should be particularly noted that **the writer of Revelation speaks of the age to come after the resurrection**, which is **clearly and specifically explained in Revelation 20:6**: *‘Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection: over these the second death hath no power, - but they will be priests of God and Christ, and will reign with him a thousand years.’* **It is obvious that they will be priests of Christ after the resurrection, not before the resurrection.**”⁹⁶

So, in this case, Milin interprets the prophecy of Revelation 20:6 properly, by saying that this right to priesthood comes after the resurrection from the dead, not baptism – as Milin wrote earlier. This time, in Milin’s view, the word of Scripture is **clearly and specifically explained**. The word literally means resurrection (and the first one)! How could it occur that the word of Scripture was not so “clear” in his interpretation of the double resurrection in the previous text (on page 294)? What happened to make the word “clear and specific” to Milin with regard to the priesthood (on page 333)?

Before examining more verses that the Eastern Orthodox use to misinterpret with regard to the future resurrection of the dead, I want to quote another Orthodox teacher who is very famous among our people. He is the Archimandrite, Abbot Justin Popović. To what extent the Orthodox actually arrive at a perverted and incorrect teaching of Sacred Tradition, let us read the following text. Abbot Justin tells us that the biblical doctrine of the thousand-year kingdom of Christ was actually a heresy invented by Satan himself:

“This led to heresy, for through them Satan relentlessly fought the Church of Christ... The Holy Apostles revealed to us the mystery of all heresies: they all come from the Antichrist (1 John 4:3, 2 John 7), because they led to antichrists, against Christ, against the truth. And to adhere to the Lord Jesus Christ, His Church, His truth, His life, His light – it means we must be Orthodox, Orthodox in the Gospel. For the Gospel truth, which is all-perfect, life-giving, immutable is found only in the Orthodox Church, and nowhere else. **Chiliasm is one of many heresies, many forms that are against Christianity...** Through them works the clever spirit of the first heretic, the very first apostate from the first Truth of God - Satan. His work is to twist, distort, and corrupt the gospel of Christ. In doing so, these heretics threw themselves under terrible anathemas from Christ’s Apostle: *‘But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.’* (Galatians 1:8).”⁹⁷

Russian Orthodox Bishop Innocent wrote in the same spirit on this subject. In his book, a "theological debate" 'with the Adventists, about the Sabbath and Sunday, the bishop mentions in his introduction to some "heresies" 'which Adventists observe. Among them was the belief in the future millennial kingdom of Christ. (Actually, Seventh-day Adventists believe that this millennial kingdom will be in heaven, not on earth. They believe the earth will become a wasteland desolated by Satan and his fallen angels.) The following excerpt demonstrates another example of the Orthodox tendency in religious

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 333. Author’s emphasis.

⁹⁷ *Orthodox Evangelist*, vol. 3, (Tselije Monastery: 1994) 3. Author’s emphasis.

disputes to appeal more to the opinions of the Church Fathers than to the arguments of Scripture:

“Adventism adheres to the **heretical teaching of the ancient chiliastic heresy** in a depraved version, **which teaches a millennial kingdom on earth and thus defines them as heretics**. Chiliasm believes that Christ's millennial kingdom will be on earth. Adventists based their belief in the millennial kingdom only from the Revelation of John, since no other book of the Bible teaches a single word about the millennial kingdom... According to the interpretation of Andrew, Bishop of Caesarea and other church fathers, the number of one thousand years mentioned in Revelation 20 should not be interpreted literally. Rather, it means an indefinite long period of time that spans from the Ascension of the Lord until His second coming to earth.”⁹⁸

We have just examined closely some of the arguments used by Orthodox apologists to attack Christians who believe in the Bible's teaching of a literal future thousand-year kingdom under Christ. I want to look back on several other biblical texts that Orthodox misinterpret to defend their teachings. Milin demonstrates some examples:

“The sectarian-chiliasts here overlooked a very important and obvious fact: Not even one book in the entire Bible, **apart from Revelation**, gives an allusion to a double resurrection. Christ often spoke about His second coming. Yet, Christ not even once ever mentions that there would be two more comings: the second time to judge the righteous and the third time to judge the wicked. Also, the apostles in their epistles never say that Christ would come two more times, but only once. In addition, when Christ speaks of the general resurrection, He portrays it as a single event that includes both the righteous and sinners. His words: *‘Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.’* (John 5:28-9) He could not express himself more clearly. The **hour** (not two hours) in which **all** who are in the grave will hear the voice of the Son of God, and then the single resurrection of the righteous into life and the condemnation of sinners will take place.

Here is another picture of the resurrection and the Last Judgment uttered from the mouth of the Savior. *‘But when the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then sit on the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and will place sheep on his right hand, and the goats on the left.’* (Matthew 25:31-33) Obviously, the Savior depicts the resurrection as a single event. How would the Savior be able to divide people on

⁹⁸ Bishop Innocent, *Why Christians Observe Sunday and Not Saturday*, (Skopje, 1940) 11. Author's emphasis.

the left and the right if both righteous and sinners were not present at the same time?”⁹⁹

Some of Milin’s statements are partly true. Namely, it is true that only Revelation mentions a dual resurrection (if you ignore Paul’s account in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 in which he describes the secret coming of Jesus in the clouds and the resurrection of the ‘dead in Christ’. It is obvious that Paul is not talking here about the ‘general’ resurrection, but only about the resurrection of believers, e.g., Christians). It is also true that the Lord Christ in John 5:28 speaks of the resurrection as a single event - without a time of separation of the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked. As for the assertions in Matthew 25:31-33, including the entire passage up to verse 46, they do not focus specifically on resurrection. Rather, Jesus spoke about the separation of the righteous and the wicked among people who will survive the Tribulation and await Christ’s glorious second coming. In this text, Jesus does not make any mention of the word “resurrection”.¹⁰⁰

However, if we were to accept Milin’s assumption that Jesus during his earthly ministry taught there would only be one resurrection in the future, yet after His ascension into heaven, He would have revealed there would actually be two resurrections, this would imply that Christ contradicted Himself. (It should be noted that Revelation is in fact “*the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John...*” Revelation 1:1)

What is going on here? My explanation will be a partial repetition of earlier material. Any careful student of the Bible must observe that the Old Testament says very little about the resurrection of the dead. The only text in the Old Testament that discusses in detail the resurrection of the dead is in Daniel 12:1-2, which says only that “*And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt.*” Based on this limited revelation of the future resurrection, the Old Testament Jews in Christ’s time believed in the “one time” resurrection, calling it the “*resurrection on the last day*” (John 11:23-24). Since the Lord Jesus Christ came to the Jews not to abolish but to fulfill the law and the prophets (Matthew 5:17-18), while He walked the earth, He neither did nor said anything not implied in the Old Testament. His every word and action were based on the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies that foretold that the Messiah would preach the gospel of the kingdom, do miraculous works, die, and rise from the grave. Emphasis on the

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 289-90. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁰⁰ Mr. Milin incorrectly associates this Bible text with the “general resurrection” taught by Orthodoxy. Because Orthodoxy denies the existence of a future millennial kingdom, Milin assumes that the resurrection of the righteous is identical to that of the wicked and that the text links this resurrection with the Last Judgment. He places these events immediately after the second coming of Christ. However, a careful reading of Matthew 25 and comparison with Revelation 20:11-15 (which describes the actual events of Judgment Day) will reveal something quite different. The evangelist Matthew quotes Jesus’ words in which He clearly says that at His glorious coming all the nations will be gathered before Him, while Revelation says that resurrected sinners great and small, as the text describes them, will be gathered before Him.

teaching on the future “double” resurrection, which had been previously unknown to his contemporaries, would have further confused his listeners.

Previously, we have already emphasized the fact recorded in the texts of the New Testament (Ephesians 3:3-11; Colossians 1:26-27) that the establishment of Christ's Church was a mystery to believers in the Old Testament before Jesus was born.

Also, Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 mentioned another mystery linked to the church, which involved the resurrection of the dead and the rapture of believers living at the moment of Jesus' secret arrival in the clouds (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

It is for this reason that the New Testament revelation was supposed to remain a mystery for the Old Testament believers. Jesus did not speak either of these revelations to them.

These mysteries were revealed only decades later to the apostles of the New Testament Church (Ephesians 3:3-5).

For this very reason that I stated (that the Lord hid some divine truths from Christ's contemporaries for reasons only He knows) the truth of the “two-fold” resurrection was revealed only in apostolic times - and most clearly expressed in Christ's Revelation to John in chapter 20. Scripture is the complete revelation of God given to men. The Scriptures were completed when the last book inspired by God called the Revelation of John was written.

Since many biblical truths were recorded progressively through history, that is, gradually more and more, it is certainly true that the Book of Revelation is the most complete and accurate prophetic book in which many details about the events of the earlier prophecies were more fully explained in John's book. Such, then, is the case with the complete revelation of the future resurrection, which Revelation clearly portrays as “two-fold” - as opposed to the previous revelation of this future event. The same is true of the duration of the prophecy of the future kingdom of the Messiah (Christ), which Revelation reveals to be a thousand years, in contrast to earlier predictions where the duration of this kingdom was not specifically measured.

Historical data will demonstrate that the original readers of the New Testament understood the apostolic doctrine taught of a future millennial kingdom on earth (including a “two-fold” resurrection). Historians of religion Colin McDannell and Bernhard Lang explain:

“Irenaeus' theology¹⁰¹, as explicated in his treatise *Against Heresies*, human history is divided into **three successive periods**: his contemporary time of persecution, **the kingdom of the Messiah** and the Kingdom of God the Father. **These three periods would follow one after the other.** It represented the historical stage in the plan of God for all Christians, not the fate of individual phases in the human soul. Irenaeus believed that history takes place on the earth.

¹⁰¹ Irenaeus of Lyons was a very famous teacher of the Church from the second century.

The earth would first be by pagans, **then the Messiah**, and finally God the Father. The compensation received by the martyrs did not consist of their spirits being elevated to a higher level of the universe, but rather the reacquisition of their earthly lives... The first historical period, therefore, was characterized by persecution. Although the world is seen as something good and is intended for the use of Christians, pagan society did not allow peace and prosperity to come. Irenaeus resolved this dilemma by predicting another period of human history, the kingdom of the Messiah. **God would begin this kingdom with the resurrection of righteous people from the dead** and return full material life to their bodies. This new life will not take place in a distant kingdom of heaven but on earth... Based upon the Old Testament Book of Daniel and the New Testament Book of Revelation, there was a connection between the situation of martyrdom and the millenary¹⁰² view... Irenaeus transferred his millenary views from Asia Minor to the West, where they gained new importance in his exile in southern France... **Millenary views of the future were not accepted by later scholars**, but their running polemic can sometimes serve as a guide to understanding this teaching... **By the fourth century, millenary views were rejected, but in the second century there was nothing unusual in imagining the future kingdom of Christ** in which the human body received His inheritance. **After a thousand years, the kingdom of the Messiah will be followed by the Kingdom of God the Father...** The doctrine of the spiritual realm only underlines the realistic, tangible, **golden nature of the Millennium that Irenaeus believed.**"¹⁰³

These historians assert that the early Church Father Irenaeus of Lyons, well-known and esteemed for his orthodox teaching and opposition to heresy, who lived in the years just after the apostolic era (born about half a century after the death of the apostle John, author of the book of Revelation), taught the coming of the kingdom of the Messiah that will last a thousand years. In these quotations we notice the mention of the very important fact that in the second century after Christ it was common for Christians to believe in the future coming of the kingdom of Jesus the Messiah - the way Irenaeus believed and preached. However, it happened that later church authorities, under the influence of some non-Christian philosophies and different interpretations of biblical truth, rejected the firm belief adhered to by the first century Christians and believers of the early centuries of Christianity.

Bishop Innocent admits that some of the Church Fathers "recognized" by the Orthodox Church taught the future establishment of the "golden" millennium:

"In the past, moreover, one (**and maybe more than one**) of the holy fathers of the church adhered to the teachings of the thousand-year kingdom of Christ."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² "Millenary views" believed in the coming future "Millennium", e.g., Christ's Messianic kingdom on the renewed earth.

¹⁰³ Colin McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *A History of Paradise*, 73-7. Author's emphasis.

¹⁰⁴ Bishop Innocent, 15. Author's emphasis.

Famous Serbian Orthodox writer and psychiatrist Vladeta Jerotić in his book *Faith and Nation* gives the same information that we have just noted. Based on proven historical sources, here is what he says:

“We can see how risky it is to link apocalyptic symbolism to specific historical events or a particular historical time. Various interpretations of Revelation 20 by the renowned Christian Fathers about the thousand years of bondage of Satan abound. **With few exceptions, we know that all the way to Saint Augustine, Christian teachers, such as Papias of Hierapolis, Irenaeus of Lyons, Tertullian, and Hippolytus (second and third century) understood John's vision literally.** They envisioned Christ's literal return to earth to reign with the faithful while Satan would be bound for a thousand years. This belief was based not only on the Revelation of St. John, but also on the prophecy of Isaiah 66:22: *'For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before Me, says the LORD, So shall your descendants and your name remain.'* As in other previous and subsequent eschatological expectations, the renewal of the earth will contain some elements of Paradise, and the pivot of the universe will be Jerusalem.

Although Augustine departed from this exegesis and opted for an original thesis – he believed the thousand years could be interpreted as an interlude between Christ's Resurrection and His return in glory - even this interpretation was never corrected.”¹⁰⁵

These excerpts show us that the majority of church leaders in the first centuries of Christianity believed in a literal millennial kingdom. It was not until Augustine in the fourth century (who, as explained in the chapter on monasticism, fell under the influence of the Neo-Platonists, who extolled spirit over matter), he departed from this belief – which would influence other later “Holy Fathers” and thus divert them from the path of the original Christianity and “the faith once and for all entrusted to the saints.” Although Jerotić considered Augustine's interpretation to be inaccurate, we actually find that today's Eastern Orthodox Church teaches exactly the same doctrine taught by

¹⁰⁵ Vladeta Jerotic, *Faith and Nation*, (Belgrade 2000) 269-270. Author's emphasis.

Orthodox author, Protodeacon Radomir Rakic, in one of his commentaries states: **“John's Revelation was highly valued by almost all writers of the second century of whom we know... In the fourth century, the Eastern writers outside of Alexandria rejected Revelation,** and the Western Syrian writers did not accept it until the fifth century. So far as we know, the Eastern Syrian writers never accepted it. Up until well into the ninth century many Greek-speaking Christians still had doubts about this book.” *Holy Prince Lazar*, no. 1-2, (Prizren, 2000) 29-30, Author's emphasis.

These texts clearly show that the error of rejecting the literal millennial reign of Christ originated later in history with the later Church Fathers and has remained in Eastern Orthodoxy to this day. These later revisionist teachers stand in stark contrast to the true direct successors of the Apostles, who without hesitation defended the literal views on the millennial reign and the God-inspired nature of John's Revelation. In contrast, these later teachers not only abandoned its original interpretation, but they also fell into the great sin of denying the books' inspiration from God: *“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him...”* (Revelation 1:1)

Augustine. This includes the rejection of apostolic doctrine believed by early Christians and their teachers.

In his book *The Holy Fathers and Teachers of the Church*, Russian Orthodox author Lev Karsavin admits that Irenaeus of Lyons, who firmly believed in and preached on Christ's literal thousand-year kingdom, was one of the theologians who had most faithfully preserved the apostolic tradition:

“Irenaeus (150-202) as a little boy remembered his old teacher Polycarp of Smyrna (155/156), a disciple of the Apostle John. Together with Meliton of Sardis, Apolinaris of Hierapolis, Rodon, and Meltiades, Irenaeus belongs to a group of seminarians from Asia Minor who faithfully preserved the tradition of the Apostles - Peter and Paul – that belonged to John’s church.”¹⁰⁶

Recognition that the apostolic doctrine and belief in the future establishment of Christ's millennial kingdom were very present in early Christian belief is also found in other Orthodox authors. For example, P. Malitski in his *History of the Christian Church* in the first three centuries highlights the fact that the above mentioned belief was widespread among early believers and their teachers:

“Confessions of the millenary view not only belonged to laity, but they also included some fathers and teachers of the church (Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Irenaeus, etc.). In some churches of Asia Minor, in Phrygia, and particularly in Egypt, chiliasm was rampant.”¹⁰⁷

The historian Eusebius Popovic confirms this same fact, and then introduces the real reasons why the belief in a future millennium was later discarded:

“The Ebionites and later the Montanists as well nurtured the thought of the thousand-year kingdom right from the start. Orthodox Christians converted from Judaism, and even Gentile Christians, also believed in chiliasm for reasons contained in the Apocalypse. From

¹⁰⁶ Lev P. Karsavin, *The Holy Fathers and Teachers of the Church*, (Virtue Library: Zlatna grana, Sombor, 1997) 64. Author’s emphasis.

As historical sources tell us, Irenaeus of Lyons was a disciple of Polycarp of Smyrna, and he believed in the establishment of Christ's millennial kingdom. Logically, it means that such a belief was also taught by his teacher Polycarp. Such an assumption is certainly not unfounded, especially considering that he knew Polycarp personally, and Polycarp was a disciple of the apostle John, the author of the book of Revelation. The confession of Irenaeus in the “golden millennium”, therefore, was retained as the natural consequence of the doctrine that Christ revealed to John, and later passed on by His disciples through the written and oral word. Lev P. Karsavina informs us correctly that Irenaeus was a member of John’s church, which clearly reveals that his belief stemmed from the teaching of the Apostle John. More importantly, the Apostle John had no doubt about whether the revelation of Christ's thousand year empire was literal or allegorical. The confession of Irenaeus of Lyons, which has faithfully preserved the apostolic tradition, simply reflects the teaching and beliefs of the writer of the last divinely inspired book of Scripture.

¹⁰⁷ P. Malitski, *History of the Christian Church*, (Belgrade 1933) 100.

the Orthodox Church, the most prominent teacher was **Papias**¹⁰⁸, which is based on the testimony of Irenaeus (d. 202). Papias was considered a **disciple of the apostle John**. Later, his contemporaries also taught of the millennial kingdom, including **Justin** (died about 165), later **Irenaeus**, and **Hippolytus** (died 235). And Methodius, sometimes called Tyre, but more properly called Olympus (died 311), along with Westerners such as Felix Minucius, presumably a contemporary of Irenaeus, Tertullian (died 240), Victorinus Petavius (died 303), and Lactantius (died perhaps only about 340th).”¹⁰⁹

So why did later Church authorities reject the belief that direct apostolic successors professed, like all Christians, right from the start? Eusebius Popovic claims that one of the first opponents of this study was a Roman elder, and maybe even a layman, named Gaius (died about 220). He was an opponent of religious movements, including the Montanists and their persistent belief in the coming millennium. Gaius believed that Revelation was not written by the Apostle John (contradicting the testimony of John’s direct personal acquaintances). Instead, Gaius alleged the authorship of this divinely inspired book to John’s contemporary, the Gnostic heretic Cerinthus.

On the other hand, Origen (died 254), though he opposed Gaius’ accusation of Gnostic authorship of the Revelation of John, also denied the validity of literal interpretation of the first verses of Revelation 20. Indeed, Origen taught that they should be interpreted allegorically. In Egypt there were many Christians who believed in the literal sense of the prophecy of Christ’s thousand-year kingdom, headed by Bishop Nepos. Origen’s disciple Dionysius the Great, Bishop of Alexandria, took it upon himself to destroy all the pillars that supported this belief. After numerous efforts, Dionysius (who also denied the authorship of the apostle John on the book of Revelation) largely succeeded, mainly because of his excellent debating skills. Additionally, the strongest defender of chiliasm, Bishop Nepos, was already dead.¹¹⁰ In later times, the belief in the future millennial kingdom of Christ on earth slowly disappeared and was replaced by different concepts that are still authoritative in the theology of the Orthodox Church and Roman Catholicism.¹¹¹

However, it is obvious that Eastern Orthodox authors, who follow the interpretations of Revelation by Origen and Augustine, commit a great sin by declaring the belief of the

¹⁰⁸ Papias, bishop of the church in Hierapolis in Phrygia, lived from 75-150 A.D., which means that he was able to interact directly with the apostle John, who was (according to Irenaeus) a disciple who learned and accepted by faith Christ’s revelation about the thousand-year kingdom to be established in the future.

¹⁰⁹ Eusebius Popovic, *General Church History*, vol. 1, 376. Author’s emphasis.

¹¹⁰ See *Ibid.*, 376-7.

¹¹¹ Roman Catholic theology, similar to Eastern Orthodoxy, also rejects the belief in the future kingdom of Messiah on earth, and considers it heresy:

“The doctrine of the thousand year kingdom of Christ and his followers, who had not worshiped the beast or receive its mark on his hand (20), was the reason **that the chiliasts were called heretics**. They interpreted these symbolic images and sayings interpreted as a literal earthly reign of Christ and his followers after a period of persecution.” Translated by Fr. Ivan Saric, “Introduction to Revelation”, *The Bible, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament*, 1st revised edition, (Croatian Bible Society: Zagreb 2006), 1195. Author’s emphasis.

early Church as “Antichristian” and alleging their inspiration to Satan himself. Thus, they send a message to all those who believe the Bible (i.e., Christ and the apostles) and follow the apostolic tradition that they are actually heretics (including early church teachers who along with all chiliasts are called “spiritually blind”). It is simply inconceivable and impossible to imagine that the earliest church teachers, such as Papias, Justin, Polycarp, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and others, some of whom were disciples of the first apostles, confessed heresy. (Orthodox teachers would de facto accuse the Apostle John himself of being a heretic.) Eastern Orthodoxy truly has been deluded into thinking only Origen, Augustine and others held the correct orthodox view on this issue and properly understood the meaning of Christ's revelation. How Orthodox teachers understand this issue has already been chronicled in the excerpts from Lazar Milin and other Eastern Orthodox authors.

This chapter should make clear to all of my readers once again that the Eastern Orthodox Church, since it deviates nearly completely from the sound doctrine taught by Jesus and His apostles, cannot possibly be considered the “Apostolic Church of Christ”.

The truth of this statement will be verified in the next chapters.