

October 5, 2008

“In the Last Days”

The tension that exists between Jesus' promised return and the near two millennia that Christians have waited for this return is expressed in “imminence” versus “the distant future,” with both of these linguistic icon phrases pertaining to time or space-time, the defining characteristic of the creation ... it would be impossible for a trout or a bass to perceive life lived out of water. Although both species will jump into the air and can live for a short while out of water, neither species is able to envision life as mammals live life. Nor can human beings fully appreciate what it would be like to live life in “timelessness,” where there is no past, present, or future for the moment itself is unchanging. Because time can be written as a function of gravity, time is part of the creation: time was created when the Big Bang occurred or when potential energy was spun into mass. Thus, the supra-dimensional heavenly realm is timeless; i.e., without past or future. Change occurs but only change compatible with what-is in the ultimate dance of oneness. So it is as difficult for a bass to think like a human being as it is for a human being to think like God, a claim open to dispute for who knows the thoughts of a bass or of God?

On the night He would be taken, Jesus told His disciples, “I have said these things to you in figures of speech” (John 16:25). He told His disciples that the hour was coming when He would no longer speak to them in figurative language but would speak plainly to them. This hour did not come before Calvary regardless of what His disciples then thought. Throughout His ministry Jesus had spoken to them in metaphors that needed to be deconstructed, for since Babel no hard connection has existed between the linguistic signifier (or icon) and the signified (or object).

The tension between Jesus saying that “this generation will not pass away until all of these things take place” (Matt 24:34) and still no return by Jesus caused C. S. Lewis to call Jesus' words “the most embarrassing verse in the Bible” (*The World's Last Night and Other Essays*), but any such embarrassment can only come from not fully appreciating that Jesus only spoke in metaphorical language. Anyone who attempts to “read” Jesus' words literally instead of literarily sets him or herself up for embarrassment. Anyone who reads Scripture literally [*sola scriptura*] lacks wisdom and is without spiritual maturity. Anyone who reads passages that declared themselves *sealed and secret until the time of the end* and reads expecting to understand these passages prior to the time of the end is without understanding ... in the same discourse in which Jesus said *this generation will not pass away*, He also said, “So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains” (vv. 15–16). This abomination of desolation appears in Daniel's long vision (11:31) that is sealed and not understandable prior to the time of the end (Dan 12:4, 9). It

was still sealed when Jesus spoke; it had not been fulfilled so Antiochus Epiphanes IV's setting up of a statue of Zeus in the Holy of holiest is not the fulfillment of the vision, but the shadow that sealed the vision so that the vision could not be understood prior to the time of the end. Therefore, the time setting for Jesus' words about *this generation will not pass away* is the time of the end, not the 1st-Century CE.

In the context of the setting up of the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, Jesus said, "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he [the Son of Man] is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all of these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Matt 24:32–35).

Many, many Christians have not learned the lesson of the fig tree: to learn this lesson Christians must appreciate what it means for the branch to become tender and put out its leaves—

At Babel the whole earth had one language and the same words: humankind had the words Noah used, the words Noah and his sons and their wives used. There were no other words, nor the need for other words. So the fired bricks being made to construct the tower were known to every person by one linguistic signifier or icon (i.e., by one sound or utterance). One "word" represented these bricks in a mimetic relationship. The *word* was not the bricks. The *word* was the signifier that stood for the bricks in the minds of those human beings who were gathered on the plains of Shinar ... because of the physical properties of mass, the bricks themselves cannot enter the mind of a person, but must be represented in the mind of a person by non-physical imagery produced through language. Thus, a sound image or written image produced by utterance heard by the ears or by inscription seen with the eyes represents the actual brick within the mind of a person. And as long as only one utterance or one inscription is used to represent the "bricks" being made from mud and fired thoroughly, every person knows what every other person says when the person asks for a *brick*.

But a gap exists between the brick itself and the word *brick*, with this gap being absolutely unbridgeable because the brick itself can never enter the mind. If it enters the brain, death of the person is likely to occur, but the physicality of the brick prevents it from ever directly entering the mind. So the connection between the signifier [in Peircean linguistics, the *icon*] and the signified [*object*] is not a hard one-to-one lock but through a historical trace: this *word* has "always" meant this *thing*. And what happened at Babel is that God broke the historical trace or the element of *thirdness*.

When God confused the language at Babel, every mason was holding the same bricks as before. The bricks or the signifieds or objects did not change. What change was what the bricks were called; what changed were the signifiers used to represent the bricks. And because every family began suddenly to use differing signifiers for familiar signifieds, no family could understand another family. The people separated, and work on the tower was suspended.

Deconstruction is not about the destruction of a text but about expanding the gap that exists between signifier and signified to show that other signifieds can also be represented by the same signifier.

According to Jesus Himself, He spoke only the words of the Father, words that did not originate in this world, words that necessarily pertained to the things of heaven. But for Jesus to convey or speak the words of the Father, He had to use words that mimetically represented the things of this world. Thus, He could only speak in metaphorical language, using signifiers usually assigned to the things of this world for the things of heaven. And even then, the Father's words were too "large" to be conveyed through utterance hence the healings that occurred ... the healings were a significant portion of the utterance of the Father conveyed by His divine breath [πνευμα ἅγιον] when Jesus spoke His words. In other words, the gap between the words Jesus spoke and the meanings of these words reaches across two dimensions, making the thoughts of the mind the bridge between the things of this world that reveal the invisible things of God (Rom 1:20) and the invisible things of God that are in heaven.

So why would anyone pursue a literal reading of Scripture? Why would anyone expect Jesus to return before the time of the end, when a heavenly war occurs between the angelic kings of Persia and the angelic king of Greece; before when the angelic king of Babylon is cast from heaven and the single kingdom of this world is given to one like the Son of Man? Why would anyone expect Jesus to return before the good news that all who endure to the end shall be saved (Matt 10:22; 24:13) is proclaimed throughout world as a witness to all nations? It is this good news that Jesus references in His Olivet Discourse, not a gospel about Him or about His soon-coming millennial reign. But the poor reader of text will not believe the pronoun phrase τοῦτο τὸ εὐαγγέλιον — "this good news" has as its antecedent Jesus' preceding sentence. This poor reader will not understand that when Satan and his angels are cast from heaven (Rev 12:7–10), all of humankind will be born of spirit and born empowered by or filled with spirit. All will know God, and will have the laws of God written on hearts and minds, and will have their sins forgiven. No one will have to teach neighbor or brother to know the Lord (Jer 31:31–34; Heb 8:8–12). All will be under the not-yet-implemented new covenant [Christians can know this new covenant is not yet implemented for not everyone now knows the Lord]; so all a person must do to be saved once the Holy Spirit is poured out on all flesh is to endure to the end. And this is indeed good news that has not been understood because Jesus' words have been read literally rather than literarily.

Why would anyone expect Jesus to return before the seven endtime years of tribulation begin?

When an angel tells Daniel—when the angel Gabriel tells Daniel that the "vision of the evenings and the mornings that has been told is true, but seal up the vision, for it refers to many days from now" (8:26), and, "Understand, O son of man, that the vision is for the time of the end" (8:17), then should not a person reading the *words* recounting this vision expect that the signifieds for these signifiers will occur at the time of the end, that the vision is sealed until the time of the end?

Daniel is also told, “But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end” (12:4), and, “Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end. Many shall purify themselves and make themselves white and be refined, but the wicked shall act wickedly. And none of the wicked shall understand, but those who are wise shall understand” (12:9–10).

A dichotomy is established by the angel speaking to Daniel: the wicked shall not understand, but the wise shall understand. The *wicked* is now a grouping of humanity that is distinct from the *wise*. And returning to what Jesus said about the fig tree, the *wicked* will not understand the lesson while the *wise* will.

A timeline for when Jesus delivers His Olivet Discourse must be comprehended: Jesus entered Jerusalem on the 10th day of Abib as the Passover Lamb of God and as the future high priest of Israel (*cf.* John 12:1, 12; 19:31, 42). He ate the Passover meal on the dark portion of the 14th of Abib, and was crucified on the daylight portion of the 14th. Thus, Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem described in Matthew chapter 21 is on the weekly Sabbath, and His cleansing of the temple occurs on this same Sabbath day. He then leaves the city to go Bethany, which is hardly outside the city, to spend the night there. In Matthew’s account, Jesus looks for figs on Sunday morning, the first day of the week. He finds none and curses the fig tree, and the tree withers at once.

In Mark’s account, however, Jesus enters the temple on the same day that He enters Jerusalem, looks around, and as it is late, He goes out to Bethany with the twelve—all of this is on the Sabbath, the 10th of Abib. Mark then has Jesus returning to the temple Sunday morning, seeing the fig tree along the way, and cursing the tree Sunday morning, the same as Matthew has Jesus cursing the fig tree ... if disciples are to learn the lesson of the fig tree, does Jesus’ cursing the fig tree have significance?

Mark has Jesus cleansing the temple on Sunday midday or so, then when evening came again leaving the city. So it is Monday morning, the 12th of Abib, when the disciples see that the cursed fig tree has withered away (11:20).

In Luke’s account, Jesus enters Jerusalem and enters the temple and begins to drive out those who sold. The fig tree is not mentioned. John mentions the entry into Jerusalem, but doesn’t here mention either a cleansing of the temple or the cursing of the fig tree.

Because Jesus would have been getting ready to eat the Passover meal on the afternoon of the 13th of Abib, the Olivet Discourse has to occur on Monday evening, the later afternoon of the 12th, the day when Mark claims that the disciples saw the withered fig tree, which should still have been on their minds considering that as they left the temple they probably again passed this tree.

The two gospel accounts endtime disciples have agree that on Sunday morning, the 11th of Abib, that Jesus came to a fig tree, found only leaves, found no fruit, and cursed the tree, a seemingly unreasonable act if not done for its symbolic meaning, suggesting that the lesson to be learned from the fig tree somehow relates to Him cursing the one particular tree ... on the same day that Jesus tells His disciples, “From the fig tree learn its lesson” (Matt 24:32), these disciples saw the withered tree that brought forth no fruit when Jesus looked for fruit the previous day.

- Jesus looked for fruit on the fig tree on the first day of the week, but found none, for it was not yet the season for fruit.
- He desired fruit, and when He found none he cursed the tree, causing it to wither and die.

Was it the tree's fault that no fruit, only leaves were found on the tree when it was not yet the season for fruit (Mark 11:13)? Did the tree do anything wrong that would cause Jesus to curse it? Or again, was this unreasonable behavior on Jesus' part, behavior caused by Him knowing how little time He had left and what He must shortly endure?

Remembering that Jesus only spoke to His disciples in metaphors, and "fruit" is a metaphor used for human behavior as in Paul writing, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law" (Gal 5:22–23), what Jesus looked for can be read as *fruit borne out of season, borne before it's the time for fruit, before the Holy Spirit is poured out on all flesh*.

The lesson of the fig tree now is, when utterance is deconstructed, when Jesus looks for fruit, He will find fruit or He will curse the tree or person who should have borne this out of season fruit ... when summer is near and the end of the age is upon humankind because the good news that all who endure to the end shall be saved is being proclaimed throughout the world, then the fig tree is to bear fruit even before the time for fruit is yet upon the tree.

Jesus didn't look for fruit on every fig tree, but on one particular tree. Likewise, not everyone is today to bear fruit before the season for fruit. Only the person who has been drawn by the Father and called by Jesus is numbered among the firstfruits, with Christ Jesus being the First of these firstfruits. Only the person called to bear fruit out of season or beforehand is today of the household of God, with judgment upon this household. It is only the *wise* who understand the lesson of the fig tree. The *wicked* do not attempt to bear fruit even though they have been called by God to be numbered among the firstfruits: they say things like, *Christians do not have to keep the commandments because Jesus fulfilled the Law*. Well, if Jesus dwells within the person, how can the person not keep the Law when Jesus kept it? Is Jesus at war with Himself? No! John wrote, "No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God" (1 John 3:9). In the previous verse, John wrote, "Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil" (v. 8).

Disciples know who is of God and who is of the devil by whether the person makes a practice of sinning, or transgressing the commandments of God; so does Christ and so do the angels. The disciple who neglects the Sabbaths of God and attempts to enter into God's rest on the first day of the week is like the fig tree that is all leaves and bears no fruit ... this person needs to learn the lesson of the fig tree, for if no fruit is borne when Jesus looks for fruit, the person will be condemned to the lake of fire.

Now, how does all of this relate to the tension between *imminence* and *the distant future*: the time of the end has a specific set of signifieds that must occur before the signifier is in play. Those signifieds begin with a rereading of Daniel's visions, and Daniel's visions have been reread: the course of Near and Middle

East history between King Nebuchadnezzar and Antiochus Epiphanes IV sealed the visions that are about a war in that portion of the heavenly realm within the bottomless pit, a rift in the fabric of heaven that allows for the creation of space-time and a glorious death chamber in which all within it are condemned to death.

Jesus is asked specific questions by His disciples when they rested on the Mount of Olives. These questions are not about the course of history but about when the stones of the temple would be thrown down and what would be the sign of His coming and the close of the age. And the *wise* understand that Herod's temple is not the temple Jesus addresses, but only a type of the temple He addresses. Herod's temple contained neither the Ark of the Covenant nor the Urim and Thummim. It was a magnificent building, but it was a fraud from its beginning. Without housing the Ark of the Covenant, it was nothing but another house of trade. It was to be called a house of prayer (Matt 21:13; cite from Isa 56:7), but to whom would a prayer have been made if the glory of God never entered this house? Remember, it was not the Lord but the angel Gabriel who spoke to Zechariah when he was fulfilling his duties in the course of the priesthood. ... Once the prophet Ezekiel saw the glory of the Lord leave the temple (chaps 10 & 11) this glory doesn't return until Jesus is glorified, thereby building again the temple in three days.

Jesus' disciples asked for a sign of His coming ... asking for a sign is a testing of God as Israel tested the Lord at Massah (*cf.* Matt 4:7; Deut 6:16), or as Israel tested the Lord at Kibroth-hattaavah when the people asked for meat and died with the flesh of the quail still between their teeth. Asking for a sign is evidence of a lack of faith—

When Jesus' disciples asked for a sign, they had not yet received the Holy Spirit and would not receive the Holy Spirit until the glorified Jesus breathed on ten of His disciples (John 20:22). Despite having been with Jesus for three and a half years, they lacked faith, as evidenced by seven of them going fishing (John 21:2). They were spiritual infants that would grow to be gates into the house of God, but it did not fall to any of them to lay the foundation of this endtime house. Paul laid that foundation (1 Cor 3:10–11), and perhaps this is because they did go fishing.

The generation that will not pass away is the generation that sees the end of the age upon itself. The tension comes from those who have not been called by God teaching a literal reading of Scripture to those who may or may not have been called by God ... Christendom can be likened to a gaggle of geese alarmed by wars and rumors of wars when Jesus said not to be alarmed by the things that happen in this world. The racket raised by Christendom is deafening when no more needs to be said than that all who endure to the end shall be saved. It is the delivery of this good news that is presently being drowned in alarmist fears. Meanwhile, the Seventh Day Adventists are still flying their *third angel* message as if this angel were a kite on a string, pushed high by shouts of alarm that are building into a new trade wind that can be sailed to financial prosperity.

Jesus must be shaking His head in amazement that those who have been born of spirit as His younger siblings can be so easily stampeded by the Adversary.

The lesson of the fig tree is that when branch is tender and puts out its leaves, the end is near ... what sort of fruit is presently being borne by those who have been called out of season to produce fruit?

Without fruit, the tree will not be saved even if that *third angel* kite is tangled in its topmost branches.

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[[Home](#)]