

New Testament Passages

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It will be evident that the New Testament contains no predictions of the end-times restoration of the nation of Israel, though a handful of ambiguous passages are sometimes brought to the defense of such an expectation. Since there is no Old Testament passage that depicts any restoration other than that of the exiles from Babylon (which occurred five centuries before Christ), to be followed by the coming of Messiah, we obviously cannot assume that such an expectation was held by the first century Christians to be anticipated after their time. Jerusalem existed as a theocratic city in their day, and the only thing that had been predicted for them to await was its destruction in AD 70 (as per Zechariah 14:1-2; Luke 21:20-22). There is no restoration after the destruction in AD 70 that is mentioned in either Testament.

Matthew 19:28

*28 So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that **in the regeneration**, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me **will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.***

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- What is "the regeneration"? In similar statements, it would seem more likely that Jesus would say "in the resurrection" (Matt.22:30; John 11:24)—if that is the timeframe of which He was speaking.

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- The word "regeneration" only occurs one other place in scripture, where it refers to being reborn into the new creation (Tit.3:5).
- Though the word "thrones" (like "crowns" and "scepters") are often used literally, the image is frequently used non-literally, simply as a reference to the phenomenon of ruling (e.g., 1 Kg.1:47; 2 Chron.7:18; Ps.89:4, 14, 44; 122:5; Prov.16:12; 20:28; 25:5; Isa.14:13; 16:5; 22:23; Hag.2:22; Col.1:16; Heb.1:8; Rev.2:13; 3:21; 13:2; 16:10)
- Perhaps this is referring to what the Jews called "the age to come," "the Messianic Age" (i.e., the Church Age)? Might not this refer to the position the twelve held as the leaders of the Jerusalem Church, referred to by Paul in Gal.2:7-9. See also Luke 22:30.

Matthew 23:39

*39 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!'***

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- What does "see me no more" mean in this context? Some think Jesus means these individuals will literally never lay eyes on Him again until they "see" Him again in the Second Coming. However, this is not true, since many of them saw Him a couple of days later in Pilate's court and called for His crucifixion—later "looking on Him" as He was "pierced" (John 19:37) on the cross.
- The phrase, "no more," suggests the cessation of a situation that had been going on until this time—namely, Christ's public ministry in Jerusalem.
- "You shall see me no more" would most naturally mean, "Though I have been publicly accessible, teaching among you for years, this will be my final public appearance—unless you become a disciple of mine." Thus, there is no reason to apply His statement to their "seeing Him" visibly at His Second Coming.

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- He told His disciples that there was a sense in which only believers (those who say, "Blessed is He...") would see Him (John 14:19,21-23; Heb.2:9). This fact was not presently true, at the time of its being uttered, but, from the standpoint of the last supper, would be true in "a little while" (John 14:19).
- These unbelievers would never see Jesus, in this sense, until and unless they would become believers themselves, like those who had hailed Him, days earlier, using the very words He here cites (Matt.21:9).
- Does "until" suggest a prediction or guarantee that such conversion would someday happen for these opponents? If so, then it probably failed to come true. It is unlikely that all of these Jews joined the Church a few weeks later.
- In many cases, as here, "until" carries the meaning of "unless." It is, therefore, not a prediction, but a condition. When a child is told by his parents, "You will not have dessert until you finish your kale," this is not a prediction that the child will finish his kale, nor that he will ever have his dessert. This kind of phrase carries a condition, not a prediction. Some of Jesus' audience may have later met this condition, and come to "see" Him as only Christians can. Others probably did not, and will never see Him in that manner.

<p><u>Luke 21:24</u></p> <p><i>24 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.</i></p> <p>-----Comments-----</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This describes what would happen to Jerusalem in AD 70, when the city began to be trodden underfoot by the Romans (see Luke 21:20-24). • The identification of “<i>the times of the Gentiles</i>” cannot be determined with certainty, since the phrase appears nowhere else in scripture. Is it limited to the period of the invasion? Does it refer to the thousands of years following during which Jerusalem was under Gentile control? Or might it refer to the fact that the destruction of Jerusalem launched a period during which God’s outreach and dealings with the earth would be focused primarily upon the Gentile nations? None of these (nor any other interpretation) can be proven to be the meaning of the phrase. <p><u>Continued in right column</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does “<i>until</i>” indicate here? Does it mean that the period of the trampling of Jerusalem will be limited until some point and then will no longer occur? • Perhaps, but this is neither stated nor implied. That “Thing A” will continue until “Thing B” occurs does not mean that the situation will be reversed, and that “Thing A” will necessarily cease when “Thing B” occurs. • Examples where “until” does not carry such a meaning may be found, e.g., in Gen.8:5; 28:15; 49:10; Num.35:12; Deut.1:31; 7:24; Josh.10:27; Jud.15:35; 2 Sam.23:10; 1 Chron.28:20; Ps.57:1; 71:18; 112:8; Matt.12:20; Acts 23:1; 2 Cor.3:14; Phil.1:5; 1 Tim.6:14. • There is no prediction that any reversal of the situation will occur at any time. If “the times of the Gentiles” refers to the whole period of “<i>the fullness of the Gentiles</i>” coming in (Rom.11:25), which is a realistic possibility, then this process may continue to the very last day of history (is there ever predicted to be a cut-off point for Gentile opportunity prior to Christ’s coming?). • Nor is there any prediction that Jerusalem would ever cease to be trampled by the Gentiles. God’s focus is clearly declared to shift from the apostate and destroyed Jerusalem toward Gentile significance. • In the absence of any New Testament prediction that Israel and Jerusalem will be restored to its original state in the future, none should be assumed or imagined.
<p><u>Acts 1:6-7</u></p> <p><i>Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” 7 And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.</i></p> <p>-----Comments-----</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The expectation of the Jews (and, apparently, the disciples) was that, after the exiles had returned from Babylon, the Messiah would come and establish a Davidic kingdom under Himself (Mark 11:10). Christ’s death had disappointed their dreams, but His resurrection excited their hopes that these expectations would now come to fruition. • It is clear that they had no concept in their minds of another restoration of Israel at the end of the world. Israel had been restored as a people in the land five centuries earlier, and all that remained was for Messiah Jesus to set up His kingdom among them. • It is thought by some that their expectations were not wrong in content, but only in timing. Jesus did not correct their notion of a future restoration of a theocratic kingdom in Israel. He only said that it was not for them to know the timing of its fulfillment, which would occur thousands of years hence. • But Jesus neither confirms nor denies the legitimacy of their expectation that the kingdom would be restored to Israel. He told them that the Spirit would be given to them, and that they should then focus on their world mission (v.8). <u>Continued in right column</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Without the Spirit, they were not yet in any position to understand or accept the spiritual aspect of the phenomena they were expecting—as He had told them in John 16:12. Paul says that spiritual things can only be received by spiritual men (1 Cor.2:13-14), which they were not yet. • They were not mistaken to expect the restoration of “<i>the kingdom to Israel</i>” (v.6), but they would later understand that both “<i>the Kingdom</i>” (John 3:3, 5; Rom.14:17; Col.1:13; Rev.5:10) and “<i>Israel</i>” (Rom.2:26-29; 9:6; Phil.3:3; Gal.6:16) were to be understood in an expanded, non-racial, non-political sense. Thus, they did not, at that time, have the frame of reference even to understand the answer to the question they were asking. • The Holy Spirit would soon come and begin to lead them into the pertinent truths (cuff., John 16:12-13), but the proper “<i>times</i>” and “<i>seasons</i>” of divine activities are only God’s to know (Deut.29:29), and were above their paygrade. • The means by which God will restore the kingdom to Israel was yet to be “<i>revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets</i>” and was not previously “<i>made known to the sons of men</i>” (Eph.3:5). This fulfillment would occur by the inclusion of Gentiles with Jews in one Body (Eph.3:6)—a concept difficult for the Jewish disciples to accept even years later (Acts 11:1-3, 18; 15:1-5).

<p><u>Acts 3:21</u></p> <p>[Peter speaking]: <i>“whom [i.e., Jesus] heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.”</i></p> <p>-----Comments-----</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some have thought that <i>“the restoration of all things”</i> refers, particularly, to the restoration of Israel at the end of the present age. The specific term is not found elsewhere, and does not, in itself, convey this idea. • We might ask, what “restoration” has been predicted by all the prophets from the beginning of the world? Zacharias referred to “redemption of God’s people” that was predicted by the <i>“holy prophets...since the world began”</i> (Luke 1:70). <p><u>Continued in right column</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redemption can be seen as the theme of the first prophecy in the Bible—the crushing of Satan’s head (Gen.3:15), and the “undoing of the works of the devil” is said to be the purpose of Christ’s mission (1 John 3:8). To redeem the world, and unravel the harm Satan has caused, can be said to be the purpose of everything God has done or predicted. This redemption can be seen as the purpose of the Abrahamic promises (Gen.12:2-3; Rom.4:13). The progressive and ultimate reconciliation of all things created and fallen (Eph.1:10; Col.2:20) certainly seems like a part of “restoring all things.” In the end, there is an earth entirely “liberated” from the curse (Rom.8:19-23; Rev.22:3). • If the scriptures do not predict the final restoration of Israel as a nation in the end times, then this can hardly be the subject spoken of by “all the prophets since the world began,” and is not likely to be the subject Peter has in mind in this statement.
<p><u>Rom.11:26</u></p> <p><i>²⁶ 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...”</i></p> <p>-----Comments-----</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While the prophets sometimes intermixed the concepts of the regathering of exiles with “salvation,” the New Testament does not identify being “saved” with any such regathering, nor with geography at all. • People are saved by being in Christ, not by being in Israel, so Israel being saved does not carry any connotations of a restoration to the land, which is never predicted in the New Testament. <p><u>Continued in right column</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Israel, in Paul’s time, was still scattered in the diaspora—even to a greater extent than is the case today. Yet, Paul never expresses the slightest interest in, nor expectation of, a Zionist movement. Instead, he said that his heart’s desire for Israel was that they be saved (Rom.10:1). • In the context of Romans 11:16-26, Paul has just described the olive tree, representing Israel (Jer.11:16), as consisting of believing Jewish and believing Gentile “branches.” He has spoken of part of Jewry being “hardened” and of a full number of believing Gentiles being grafted in. In this way (“Thus” or “So”), he concludes, “all Israel”—both the Jewish and the Gentile branches— “will be saved.” • This statement cannot refer to ethnic Israel as a whole, since Paul has clearly said, earlier (9:27), that only a remnant of Israelites will be saved. He should not be thought to contradict himself here.
<p><u>2 Thess.2:3-4</u></p> <p><i>...that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, ⁴who 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.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many think Paul is here referring to a rebuilt Jewish temple in the end times—suggesting a restoration of Israel. However, two considerations militate against such a conclusion: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Paul never mentions any expectation of such a third temple in any of his preaching or writings. If he was referring to a Jewish temple, his readers would assume that he meant the one standing in Jerusalem at that very time. 2) Paul never refers to the Jewish temple when using the phrase “the temple of God.” In all other places, he uses this term to speak of the Church (1 Cor.3:16; 2 Cor.6:16). It is most likely he is using the term the same way here, as the Reformers all believed.

