

## WHEN THE SAINTS GO MARCHING IN: GOD'S ROADMAP TO PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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Let's say you could go back to Jesus' time. Say you were to tap a random Judean on the shoulder and announce to him that the Messiah was at last coming to deliver his people. Say he believed you. Would it surprise you if he was to direct his attention not upwards to heaven, nor inwards to Jerusalem, but outwards, to the wilderness which encompasses Israel to the east and to the south?

Of course, the Messiah was expected to be born in the city of David, but the mature anointed conqueror was expected to come in power, like Joshua, from across the Jordan.

Recent scholarship cautions us to adopt a critical stance towards sweeping statements which offer to open a window on the first-century Palestinian Jewish soul. Pluriformity seems to have been a defining characteristic of a people not accustomed as we Europeans are to murdering one another in pursuit of doctrinal homogeneity.

Yet, in spite of this, the expectation that the Messiah would come from the wilderness was a common view among the most disparate groups:

When post-biblical Judaism works within the compass of the Hoseanic desert typology, it awaits the redemption of Israel from the desert (Rabbinic attestations in SB I 85-88). That is why the Messianic disturbances originate in the desert (Josephus, War 2, 258-63). The Essenes understood their secession into the wilderness of Qumran eschatologically, i.e. in the sense of preparing the way (cf. 1QS 8, 12 ff.; 9:19 f.), and the same applied to John the Baptist (Josephus, Ant. 18, 116-119).<sup>1</sup>

Essene ascetics, militant revolutionaries and John the Baptist had little in common, yet they shared this conviction. How could it have gained such a firm footing in the popular imagination?

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<sup>1</sup> *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNT)*, Vol. 3, 1006.

### The Big Story

“The NT estimation of the desert is none other than that of the OT and Judaism. As ever, Israel’s forty years of wandering in the desert is counted as a momentous fact of God’s historical activity, and the idea that eschatological movements begin in the desert is still alive (Matt. 24:26; Acts 21:38).”<sup>2</sup>

The wilderness is an integral part of the context within which Israel’s identity as a nation uniquely elected and redeemed by God is rooted. It is not some abstract idea or philosophical principle but an actual event, grounded in history — the exodus. “The salvation-history approach has correctly perceived that an aspect of the desert motif in the OT derives from its setting within Israel’s story of national origins.”<sup>3</sup>

In other words, for millennia if a Jewish child asked his parents who they as a people were, or why they lived in a manner so different from the surrounding nations, the answer given would be a story.<sup>4</sup> In obedience to Deuteronomy 6:20-25, it would go something like this: “We were Pharaoh’s slaves in the blast-furnace of Egypt, but God had made a promise to the ancestor of our race...” Indeed, the many festivals and rituals that dominated the life of the *torah*-keeper were designed to evoke such questions and stimulate such memories.

“The desert motif attains theological value not primarily from semantic shifts for individual terms, as if they constituted a technical theological vocabulary, *but rather in broader relations to significant narrative patterns or poetic images.*”<sup>5</sup> So the image of the wilderness did not stand by itself as a clearly defined, self-contained unit. Instead its meaning and place in the heart of our Judean friend would have been derived from the role it played in the wider story Israel told herself about herself — the big story, which underpinned all others, of her history and destiny, which formed the very basis of who she understood herself to be.

What’s more, it defined not only where they as a people were coming from, but where all human history was heading to. They understood themselves to be a people living between two exoduses. (This is a simplification. In addition to the original exodus, the return from exile in Babylon was also spoken of in terms of

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<sup>2</sup> *NIDNT*, Vol. 3, 1007.

<sup>3</sup> *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis (NIDOT)*, Vol. 4, 521.

<sup>4</sup> Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God (NTPG)*, 39: “For most Jews, certainly in the first century, the story-form was the natural and indeed inevitable way in which their worldview would find expression, whether in telling the stories of YHWH’s mighty deeds in the past on behalf of his people, or creating new stories which would function to stir the faithful up in the present to continue in patience and obedience, or in looking forward to the mighty deed that was still to come which would crown all the others and bring Israel true and lasting liberation once and for all.”

<sup>5</sup> *NIDOT*, Vol. 4, 520.

an exodus. But at that time the picture remained incomplete, since the promised Kingdom did not materialize and still has not.)

David's throne remains vacant and the nations have not flocked to Jerusalem to receive Messiah's teaching. From the biblical description, two more events seem to be in view: 1. An organization of the theocratic Kingdom at Sinai, followed by a conquest of the land following the same route taken by Joshua. This is the focus of this article; 2. This event will be followed at some point by another exodus of the Jewish diaspora, returning to Israel from the north, south, east and west. At that time the wealth of the nations will be gathered to the promised land and they will be greatly revered for the sake of their God, whose arm will have been laid bare before the nations.

Since the earliest followers of Jesus were very much a part of this thought-world, we should expect a measure of consistency to continue into the New Testament. At the very least, the burden of proof should rest upon any suggestion otherwise.

### **Back to the Future**

While the place of the wilderness in the exodus narratives is clear enough, as is the place of the exodus in Israel's past, this still doesn't shed much light on how it came to play a part in eschatology. To gain some insight into that, we need to delve into the prophetic literature which informed and nurtured the Jewish vision of the future.

"In the Messianic speculations of Judaism concerning the desert, particular significance is attached to the passages Hosea 2:16, 12:10, Job 30:4 and Isaiah 40:3, the latter being encountered in Qumran as well as in John the Baptist."<sup>6</sup> Mentions of the wilderness occur throughout the prophets. Amos gives an idealized depiction of Israel's desert sojourn as a time of election and innocence which he sets in sharp contrast to the apostasy and corruption of his day.

Ezekiel is less nostalgic. The covenant people have been consistently unfaithful from the wilderness days up until the present. This will result in exile, portrayed as a return to the harsh conditions and dispossession which they suffered then.

Jeremiah manages to incorporate aspects of both. He looks with one eye, through a rose-tinted monocle, at Israel's past desert experience as a time during which they enjoyed God's guidance, care and protection. With the other eye he sees, with foreboding, a future in which they will experience a second wilderness desolation — one which, most sinister of all, will come to engulf the very land promised to the fathers. The pleasant land which flowed with milk and honey will be a waste, the habitation of jackals and other such spooky and solitary animals.

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<sup>6</sup> *NIDNT*, Vol. 3, 1006.

But it is Hosea and Isaiah whose messages reach beyond the exile to speak of the wilderness in eschatological terms. Hosea depicts Israel as the unfaithful wife who would be taken into the wilderness for a purgative sojourn which will result in a renewal of her covenant with Yahweh. It is there that she will be betrothed to him and finally be able to call him *ishi* — my husband. “The apocalyptic flight of the woman into the desert is to be explained from the high regard in which Israel’s time in the wilderness was held, and simultaneously *attests the expectation that the Messiah will come from the desert* (cf. Matt. 2:15, Hos. 11:1).”<sup>7</sup>

Such was the anticipation stirred by this message that Matthew, who had no shortage of material, deemed it important enough to include, at least symbolically, in Jesus’ early years narrative: “by means of the flight into Egypt [Matthew] *renders possible* the arrival of the Messiah from the Egyptian desert.”<sup>8</sup> It is as though he senses that his Jewish audience cannot conceive of the genuine savior arriving from anywhere else. More on this later.

Never one to be outdone, Isaiah’s vision is richer still:

The description of this new beginning for the community far transcends the old story that it recapitulates. All the hardships encountered on the first trek are excluded, all the miracles witnessed on the first journey are to be repeated on a much grander scale. The wilderness will be completely transfigured and become a paradise of the care and sustenance of the returning exiles (Isa. 40:3-5; 41:18-19; 43:19-20). *The wilderness sojourn has become a triumphant, miraculous procession.*<sup>9</sup>

So it is from Isaiah that the Jewish people learned to look with hope, not only to a return from the wilderness of exile, but to a final full-blown eschatological exodus after which they would be permanently forgiven, restored and settled in the land. From then on they would never again turn away from their God, neither would Yahweh cease to do good to them. The Gentiles would be drawn to their light and heathen kings to the brightness of their rising.

Here the global prophetic vision becomes prominent and Israel’s past and future exoduses are seen as instruments in the larger scheme of a Creator whose concern is to redeem not only His people Israel but the entire creation from bondage to sin and the curse. Viewed from this standpoint, human history across the span of the present age of darkness can be seen in terms of an exile from God which began with the expulsion from Eden of our ancient ancestors and will end with the return of God’s elect to a place where the tree of life is, finally, within their reach again.

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<sup>7</sup> *NIDNT*, Vol. 3, 1007.

<sup>8</sup> *NIDNT*, Vol. 3, 1007.

<sup>9</sup> *NIDOT*, Vol. 4, 524.

To summarize, scholarship informs us that sources around the time of Jesus from both inside and outside the Bible bear witness to Israel's expectation that their savior would come to them from the wilderness. Furthermore, they do so with an uncharacteristic degree of uniformity. We have learned that the reason this belief had come to be so widely spread and deeply rooted was twofold.

First it was due to the centrality of the desert to Israel's self identity, being drawn from their story of national origins. This was commemorated yearly in the three major festivals — Passover recalled the night of the exodus, Pentecost, the giving of the torah at Sinai and Tabernacles, the wilderness wanderings prior to the conquest of the land. Secondly it was due to the ministry of the prophets, most notably Hosea and Isaiah, who promised Israel's final and permanent restoration to the land in the age to come in terms of a recapitulation of the exodus events.

It should be clear from all this that the Messianic march through the wilderness is far from being a product of the American 19<sup>th</sup>-century adventist movement. It is the recovery of a genuine glimpse into the thoughts and symbols which animated the minds of Jesus, John the Baptist and their contemporaries. Ironically, it is modern scholarship combined with recent historical research methods and assisted by documents unearthed subsequently that has come to confirm much of this. Truly the witness of these serious academics who now find themselves endorsing such “wacky” speculation is evidence of the fact that the secret of Yahweh is indeed with those who stand in awe of him. As Peters himself states: “when these things are realized, men will be amazed to find how largely and minutely all this has been described in the word, and yet how little it has been noticed and appreciated, just as the things relating to the First Advent were overlooked.”

The scene is now set for the arrival of the apostles and prophets of the NT. We have a fair idea what their contemporaries expected; the question that remains unresolved is: According to the NT documents, were they right or wrong to do so?

### **Choose Ye This Day**

“Anyone collecting people in the Jordan wilderness was symbolically saying: this is the new exodus.”<sup>10</sup>

While Matthew drew typological inspiration from Hosea, John the Baptist found his entire vocation in the vision of Isaiah: “I am ‘the voice of one crying in the wilderness make straight the way of the Lord,’ as said the prophet Esaias” (John 1:23 quoting Isaiah 40:3).

At this point it might be a good idea to ask a couple of searching questions about a key interpretative issue: Does the fact that John the Baptist applied Isaiah

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<sup>10</sup> N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God (JVG)*, 161.

40 to himself mean that the events described in this passage have already taken place? While they may shed light on our understanding of his ministry, have they anything to tell us about the future?

According to Peters “the offer of the Kingdom at the First Advent necessitated a *typical representation* of this act in the wilderness (and hence applied to John), but owing to the foreknown unbelief and sinfulness of the nation both the Kingdom and the real preparatory acts here predicted were postponed. Jesus did not exhibit himself as the king. His glory was concealed under humiliation.”<sup>11</sup>

Could this be true? Were John’s actions the symbolic enactment of a far greater event which is yet to take place?

We have seen that the prophets who gained a following often engaged not only in teaching and oracular pronouncements, but also in the *symbolic actions*. *These regularly involved leading people into the wilderness, often around the Jordan*. They sometimes appear to have focused on a *stylized symbolic entry into the land*, with the apparent expectation and promise that Israel’s God would act dramatically as he had done at the time of the exodus. These symbolic actions were not random. No historical purpose is served by ignoring the fact that people who act in this way, as leaders or as led, *do so in obedience to a controlling story, a metanarrative which underlies their whole program and agenda*. The sense of expectation which induced this strange behavior is, quite simply, only explicable if we understand those involved to have been obedient to an *underlying story within which their actions made sense*.<sup>12</sup>

John’s actions and the place of Isaiah 40 in his self-understanding only make sense in the light of a bigger picture, the big story which included a future event which did not take place in his ministry and has not to this day. More importantly, this is the only way in which the response of his contemporaries to his call can be accounted for. This is the real litmus test.

To put it a different way, imagine the reaction a person would get if he were to follow John’s example today in, say, the River Thames. Aside from the obvious health and safety implications, he would be either ignored or sectioned under the mental health act as a danger to himself. Within the worldview of our day, the only speculation concerning John’s ministry would likely revolve around what he was “on.”

But the crowds who went out to see John took him very seriously indeed and they did so based upon the role they recognized him as playing in what for them

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<sup>11</sup> George N.H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom (TTK)*, Vol. 3, 22.

<sup>12</sup> Wright, *JVG*, 154.

was the story of stories — that of their national destiny, of future hope based upon past deliverance.

“*Retelling, or re-enacting*, the story of the exodus, then, was a classic and obvious way of *pre-telling, or pre-enacting*, the great liberation, the great ‘return from exile’, for which Israel longed.”<sup>13</sup> So to write off the predictive potential of Isaiah 40 because of what John did 2,000 years ago is to completely misunderstand him. His symbolic actions do not replace the expectation of a literal exodus. Quite the contrary, they were designed to be an enacted confirmation and proclamation of it.

The same would go for other symbolic actions in the NT. The last supper did not replace the literal breaking of Jesus’ body or shedding of his blood. The cursing of the fig tree and the tantrum in the temple did not replace the literal judgment on national unbelief or the destruction of Jerusalem which those actions foretokened.

That being the case, neither should the triumphal entry rule out a future coming of Jesus from the direction of Jordan to take his rightful place on David’s throne at a time when ethnic Israel will have finally learned to say “blessed is he who comes in the name of Yahweh.”

Symbolic, typical — call them what you will. Actions such as these provide endorsement, not redefinition or replacement of the literal realities they represent.

### **Straight Out of Egypt**

So what about Matthew? He has attracted more flack from modern commentators than anyone else for playing “fast and loose” with his Hebrew Bible. The text in question is of course Matthew 2:14-15: “So Joseph got up and took the child and his mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. He remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘Out of Egypt I called my son.’”

The bearing this has on our current discussion is obvious and a similar dilemma demands to be resolved: How in the world can the infant Jesus’ return from Egypt be a “fulfillment” of Hosea 11:1 when in that text the prophet is speaking of the past exodus? Is Matthew guilty of wresting passages out of their original context and distorting their meaning to serve his Christian apologetic agenda?

The question that speaks to the heart of the issue is this: has the Messiah already come from the wilderness, in an allegorical and largely unrecognized way? Should we check off that box and conclude that what Hosea had to say about the desert has been fulfilled, in the sense that it has no more to say about the future? The lesson John the Baptist has just taught us offers us a key to understanding Matthew.

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<sup>13</sup> Wright, *JVG*, 154.

After all, isn't it a little anachronistic to demand of him that he conform to the literal-grammatical interpretation we use today? Wouldn't judging Matthew by such standards be rather like dismissing John, based upon the fact that if he did today what he did back then he would be deemed mad? It would be based upon a misunderstanding on our part.

Perhaps the real difficulty arises from the way in which "fulfillment" is often thought of today in terms of something being foretold and then happening. Not only does this concept confine "fulfillment" to predictive prophecy alone, it also tends to equate one prediction with one event, after which it becomes unavailable as a referent to anything else. Such a restrictive understanding of "fulfillment" just doesn't fit with what Matthew is doing here and forces the unnecessary choice between what Hosea obviously meant and Matthew's application of it to the life of Jesus.

After all, there were no shortage of verses which Matthew could have used to "proof text" events in Jesus' life in order to assert his Messianic credentials. This is hardly theological rocket science even for a new believer, much less a Jew who had been steeped from childhood in his Hebrew Bible. He would have been well aware that choosing a spurious text and bending it to mean something it patently does not would undermine his credibility and be counterproductive to say the least. So how are we to account for the fact that he went so far beyond neatly lining events up with predictions?

Matthew seems to have been at least equally concerned with presenting a Jesus who fitted into the big story of Israel and her future mentioned previously. To return to an earlier quote, he seems to be telling his audience something about Jesus' "broader relations to significant narrative patterns or poetic images."<sup>14</sup> If we extend our earlier findings about symbolic praxis in the first-century Jewish thought world to encompass what Matthew meant when he said a Scripture was "fulfilled," suddenly his use of it in connection with Hosea 11:1 starts to make better sense.

If humans such as Ezekiel and John the Baptist can engage in symbolic acts, hasn't God also used historical events in the same way? Israel's God defines Himself very much in terms of His ability, unlike the false gods, to guide history in order to fulfill His promises. It is from this that certain of His interventions, including the exodus, derive their typological value. Matthew saw God doing this and using the word "fulfilled" was his way of pointing this out to his readers. In doing so he would have been appealing to an approach that was standard in his time and place. "[Second temple Jews] believed that their national history, their communal and traditional story, supplied them with lenses through which they

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<sup>14</sup> *NIDOT*, Vol. 4, 520.

could perceive events in the world, through which they could make some sense of them.”<sup>15</sup>

When Matthew says that Hosea 11:1, or for that matter Jeremiah 31:15, is “fulfilled” it needn’t mean that Hosea or Jeremiah were predicting anything, either consciously or unconsciously. Instead, Matthew is drawing out the symbolic significance of a historical event and pointing out the way in which it finds a parallel in the life of Jesus. Matthew is, by means of the symbolic significance which he sees in this event, retelling the exodus story in such a way as to cast Jesus in the role of the hero. If he is the son who comes up out of Egypt, then the narrative grammar implies that he is also the true heir of the land which he has been empowered by God his Father to take possession of.

This is far less arbitrary than adopting an allegorical approach since it is firmly located within the checks and balances provided by the narrative context. This broader framework provides a sense of the big picture, the sum of Scripture. It demands that the events and symbols exist in a dynamic space and cohere with a far more integrated view of what the Bible is really “on about.” As Psalm 119:160 puts it, “the *sum* of your word is truth.”

When we set this awareness of Scripture in the context of the prevailing second-temple belief that the real return from exile had not yet occurred, the idea of scriptural fulfillment takes on a meaning which transcends the mere proof-texting of which first-century Jews have often been accused. It was not simply a matter of ransacking sacred text for isolated promises about a glorious future. The entire story could be read as Story, namely, as the still-unfinished story of the creator, the covenant people, and the world. *In that context, an event that happened “according to the Scriptures” would be an event in the story itself. The explicit prophecies of the great age to come fitted into the broader pattern...*The stories which characterize the worldview itself are thus located, on the map of human knowing, at a more fundamental level than explicitly formulated beliefs, including theological beliefs.<sup>16</sup>

It is the sense in which the symbolism of Jesus’ return from Egypt fits like a piece into this puzzle that defines “fulfill” in contexts such as this. Matthew is standing in the prophetic tradition of using the past to say something about the present and future.

Now he may have chosen Hosea for no other reason than that the two words “Egypt” and “son” are brought together so succinctly in the same verse. It recalls that the first place in the Bible where Israel is called God’s son is precisely in connection with Moses’ demand that Pharaoh release them. But from our present standpoint it becomes immediately obvious that he is telling us something more.

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<sup>15</sup> Wright, *NTPG*, 41.

<sup>16</sup> Wright, *NTPG*, 242, 38.

The story didn't end with Israel coming out of Egypt and as we have already seen the quote was chosen from among the messages of a prophet who also promised a future wilderness sojourn.

So God's Son had arrived from Egypt's direction and Elijah had come to herald his passing through the River Jordan. He went on to announce the Kingdom of God, offering it to his generation, and warning them that, though the time was ripe for Israel to receive her king, the consequences of rejecting him would be dire. So for those who had eyes to see, when the joyful cries of "hosanna to the Son of David" turned into jeers and calls of "crucify him; we have no king but Caesar," the opportunity had, for the present time, been forfeited. Would it be unreasonable to conclude from this that Israel's attention should continue to be turned to the wilderness for the true realization of her national hope?

The passage John drew from still has something to say about events near to the close of this age. Let's examine the text in a little more detail.

### **Isaiah 40:3-11: The Highway of Yahweh**

"If we turn to Isaiah 40:3, it is extremely doubtful whether we have more than a mere typical fulfillment in John's mission."<sup>17</sup>

The rendering of the verse is worth mentioning. Peters cites Lowth and Nowes who separate the clause as follows: "A voice cries: 'In the wilderness prepare ye the way of Yahweh; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'" He then quotes Barnes as saying that "the parallelism seems to require the translation proposed by Lowth":<sup>18</sup>

קול קורא  
במדבר פנו דרך יהוה  
ישור, בערבה מסלה, לאלהינו

There is also a rhythmic balance in the Hebrew vocalization when the verse is set out this way which is lost in the conventional arrangement. All this serves to underline the fact that the desert was not just the location of the herald's proclamation. It was the place from which the salvation so announced would come.

The opening section makes it clear that the message is related to a time of comfort for Israel when her warfare is accomplished and her iniquity pardoned. Because of this, it can only reasonably be assigned to a period in the future.

The verses immediately following describe what it is that we should expect to see coming down that highway in the wilderness. An examination of them supports Peters' observation. "The glory of Yahweh will be revealed, and all

<sup>17</sup> Peters, *TTK*, Vol. 3, 22.

<sup>18</sup> Peters, *TTK*, Vol. 3, 24.

flesh will see it together” (Isa. 40:5). This fits much better with passages which speak of the second, as opposed to first, coming, such as Revelation 1:7: “Behold, he is coming with clouds, and every eye will see him.”

Get yourself up on a high mountain, O Zion, bearer of good news. Lift up your voice mightily, O Jerusalem, bearer of good news. Lift it up; do not fear. Say to the cities of Judah, “Here is your God!” Behold, the Lord GOD will come with might, with His arm ruling for Him (Isa. 40:9-10).

“This cry in the wilderness is taken, as commentators, Barnes, etc., inform us, from the approach of a mighty conqueror, and is expressive of irresistible power and of a triumphant march...and the results of this triumphal appearance in deliverance and rule.”<sup>19</sup>

This picture of an unstoppable advance in the power of God, resulting in the rule of His chosen agent, certainly fails to match the Jesus we have seen so far — a meek man who submitted himself to death at the hands of his enemies. Also, the detailed description of the rule of this “arm of Yahweh” which the prophet goes on to provide in subsequent chapters further reinforces the fact that the salvation heralded by John has not yet come to pass.

“Behold, His reward is with Him and His recompense before Him” (Isa. 40:10). Revelation 22:12 alludes to this text in connection with a future coming at the end of the age: “Behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me.”

At the first advent, Jesus’ adversaries triumphed. The reward for his faithful followers was imprisonment and death. The revelation of the glory of God in the transfigured Christ was limited to an inner circle within the 12. The nation was not delivered and the one destined to conquer was led as a lamb to the slaughter.

So what did John mean by his use of Isaiah 40? He was pointing out the Messiah to Israel, and giving his own inspired endorsement of their expectation that Yahweh would come triumphantly, in the person of His anointed agent, along a highway through the wilderness to save them. We have already touched on the fact that the location of John’s ministry at the River Jordan ties in with another layer of meaning which lay implicitly within the desert typology.

### **Prelude to Conquest**

The River Jordan was the point at which Israel passed over to possess the promised land (Josh. 1:2, 11). The cycle of Isaianic prophecies which begins with the herald’s voice move, through the servant songs, on to the description of an anointed conqueror. It is understandable, on account of this broader context of the prophecies which defined John’s role, that the anticipation of the crowds who witnessed and heard him should have been aroused. According to Luke “the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he was the Christ [i.e. that anointed conqueror]” (Luke 3:15).

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<sup>19</sup> Peters, *TTK*, Vol. 3, 22.

Of course, John denied this. But how appropriate that at the very place where Joshua had demanded of Israel covenant loyalty to Yahweh by challenging them to choose there and then who they would serve, John should command the crowds to renew their commitment to their God, be baptized and follow another Joshua!<sup>20</sup>

So widespread was the speculation concerning this place among the general population that it had not escaped the attention of the ruling powers. N.T. Wright quotes Dominic Crossan: “Desert and Jordan, prophets and crowds, were always a volatile mix calling for immediate preventive strikes.”<sup>21</sup>

All this brings to the fore the fact that the journey through the wilderness is not the end of the story. It is the prelude to conquest. After all, if the desert was the place from which God would come to deliver His people, then it was also, by implication, the place where they were prepared for war.

Speaking of the wilderness sojourn in the Pentateuch:

The other major metaphor is martial, hinted at in Exodus 13:17 and explicitly celebrated in the Song of the Sea (Exod. 15). As Numbers 1-10 makes clear, the remaining part of the wilderness trek involves the arrangement and formation of Israel into an invasion force under the leadership of the divine warrior, Yahweh. Note also the martial terminology of the community as *saba*, army, host, repeatedly in Numbers 1-10, or as *hamusim*, in battle array, in Exodus 13:18.<sup>22</sup>

“It is a form ready for action before it emerges from the wilderness...sudden and overwhelming [in its] appearance.”<sup>23</sup>

In line with this picture of war and conquest we find another text relevant to this subject from the midst of the very section of the prophecy of Isaiah devoted to describing the anointed conqueror.

### **The Grapes of Wrath**

Q: Who is this who comes from Edom,  
With garments of glowing colors from Bozrah,  
This One who is majestic in his apparel,  
Marching in the greatness of his strength?

A: “It is I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save.”

Q: Why is your apparel red, and your garments like the one who treads in the wine press?

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<sup>20</sup> The Greek *Iesous* being the equivalent of the Hebrew *Y'shua/Y'hoshua* — in English, Jesus/Joshua.

<sup>21</sup> Wright, *JVG*, 161.

<sup>22</sup> *NIDOT*, Vol. 4, 525.

<sup>23</sup> Peters, *TTK*, Vol. 3, 23.

A: "I have trodden the wine trough alone, and from the peoples there was no man with me.

I also trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath;  
And their lifeblood is sprinkled on my garments, and I stained all my raiment.

For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and my year of redemption has come (Isa. 63:1-4).

Peters says that this passage "cannot possibly, without the grossest inconsistency, be applied to the First Advent of Jesus. For aside from other reasons it is not true that he then came in anger, fury and vengeance and shed the blood of his enemies. But at his Second Advent numerous passages expressly mention wrath, vengeance on enemies, and a fearful slaughter and supper."<sup>24</sup>

At the first advent, the only blood Jesus shed was his own. He did not come to condemn, but to save. In this terrible vision he is not atoning for sins. He is punishing them.

Noteworthy here are the specific places named. The conqueror shows up, coming from Edom, the desert land which stands between Sinai and Israel, along the Exodus route taken by Joshua on his way to capture the land. His garments are stained with the blood of his enemies, compared in simile to the juice of grapes.

What is more, according to the NT, the fulfillment of this vision is clearly located in the future, at the second advent: "And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and wages war...He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood...and he treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty" (Rev. 19:11-15).

Peters quotes Steir who states that Isaiah 63 is "the fulfillment of what is related in Revelation 14:20 and 19:18, 21."<sup>25</sup> Mattison also provides a full list of notable parallels between Isaiah 63 and Revelation 19 in *The End-Time Time Line*.<sup>26</sup>

It has sometimes been suggested that this passage is symbolic, with the crushing of Edom standing for Gentile enmity to God's people being finally overthrown. However, in John's vision Edom's destruction takes place prior to the battle of Armageddon. Christ turns up for this battle with his garments already stained with Edomite blood! And it is Armageddon that is generally equated with the decisive defeat of the assembled enemies of God from all nations. So two separate, literal events are depicted here. Further evidence of this is the fact that both Armageddon and Edom/Bozrah are names of distinct, literal

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<sup>24</sup> Peters, *TTK*, Vol. 3, 22.

<sup>25</sup> Peters, *TTK*, Vol. 3, 23.

<sup>26</sup> Jim Mattison, *The End-Time Time Line (ETTL)*, 145.

places. So Messiah is to arrive at the great battle not from heaven, but from Edom.

Peters then links Isaiah 63 and Revelation 19 with a prophecy from the Torah: “Messiah is the conqueror of Edom as Balaam of old predicted.”<sup>27</sup>

### **The Crouching Lion of Judah**

“Come, and I will advise you what this people will do to your people in the days to come” (Num. 24:14).

Numbers 24:17-18 is evidence of this:

I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; a star shall come forth from Jacob; *a scepter* shall rise from Israel, and shall crush through the forehead of Moab, and tear down all the sons of Sheth. *Edom shall be a possession; Seir, its enemies, also will be a possession*, while Israel performs valiantly. Out of Jacob shall come he that will have dominion.

In the preceding verses, however, there is mention of a coming out of Egypt: “His king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. *God brings him out of Egypt*; He is for him like the horns of the wild ox. He will devour the nations who are his adversaries, and will crush their bones in pieces, and shatter them with his arrows” (Num. 24:7-8).

There then follows some symbolism drawn directly from Jacob’s blessing of Judah: “*He couches; he lies down as a lion. And as a lion, who dares rouse him?* Blessed is everyone who blesses you, and cursed is everyone who curses you” (Num. 24:9).

This is found in Genesis 49:9-10: “*Judah is a lion’s whelp...He couches; he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who dares rouse him up?* The scepter [also mentioned in Num. 24:17] shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.”

It was this text which came to form the basis of the expectation that Israel’s great leader would come from Judah’s line. And this blessing, amazingly, is rounded up with some imagery which takes us, full circle, back to Isaiah 63 and Revelation 19: “he washes his garments in wine, and his robes in the blood of grapes” (Gen. 49:11).

If it is indeed Genesis 49 that underpins the imagery of Numbers 24, then the Messianic overtones of this passage actually begin before verse 17, at least in verse 7. Combining this with Isaiah 63/Revelation 19 we see that Israel’s king, described here as a lion, is actually the holder of Judah’s scepter, the Messiah, coming out of Egypt to take possession of Edom/Seir and smite the corners of Moab.

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<sup>27</sup> Peters, *TTK*, Vol. 3, 23.

### An Oracle Against Moab

“Send the lamb to the ruler of the land, from Sela to the wilderness, to the mount of the daughter of Zion” (Isa. 16:1).

This is a cryptic passage and its translation is disputed. The reason for this is that in the Hebrew there is no preposition between “lamb” and “ruler,” resulting in some ambiguity in the relationship between the two words:

שְׁלַחוּ-כֹר מֵשֶׁל-אֶרֶץ מִסְּלַע מִדְּבָרָה אֶל-הַר בֵּת-צִיּוֹן

On the basis of this, an alternative reading has been favored by some, including Seiss, the Latin Vulgate and Luther: “I will send the Lamb, the ruler of the land, from Sela of the wilderness unto the mount of the daughter of Zion” (Isa. 16:1).<sup>28</sup>

Though neither translation can conclusively exclude the other, the second reading makes perfect sense both in the context of Messianic conquest here presented and the rest of the oracle. It describes the sending as taking place during a time of hostility against Israel, during which Jews will flee into the territory of Moab, seeking refuge.<sup>29</sup> After this “the throne shall be established in mercy; and he shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David, judging, and seeking judgment, and hastening righteousness” (Isa. 16:5). Who could “he” be but the Lamb of God and Lion of Judah? The Chaldees concur, making it refer to “the Messiah, the Anointed of Israel” and the timing of the prophecy, by extension, to the days of Messiah.<sup>30</sup>

### The Prayer of Habakkuk and the Divine Warrior

Habakkuk provides an account of both the march through the wilderness and the conquest of the land that is detailed and broad. But first it is necessary to establish the place of that vision in the context provided by the rest of the book.

The book of Habakkuk takes the form of a dialogue between the prophet and his God. His opening imprecatory prayer seems to be directed against the sinners among his people. God’s response is the announcement that He will send in the Chaldeans to be the instruments of His judgment on them. This is followed by another imprecatory prayer and at the beginning of chapter 2 Habakkuk states his intent to station himself at his guard post until he sees how God will answer him. And God does. This time he is given a vision “for an appointed time” (*lamowed*), even “the end” (*lakets*, obscured in some translations). It concerns the “proud one,” a wicked man whom God promises to judge. The remainder of the chapter which leads into the prophet’s final prayer describes the taunt that will be taken up against him.

<sup>28</sup> Peters, *TTK*, Vol. 3, 26.

<sup>29</sup> This hinges on the rendering of verse 4 found in the Masoretic text.

<sup>30</sup> Peters, *TTK*, Vol. 3, 27.

The question arising from this is: Who is this wicked one? In Proposition 163 of *The Theocratic Kingdom*, Peters notes in Habakkuk's (2:3-5) description of Israel's enemy some notable parallels to the antichrist, which indicate that this text may be more than just the depiction of a typical "bad guy." I have combined his observations with some of my own.

First, he is "the proud man." It is hardly exaggerated to describe a man who declares himself to be god as befitting this description (2 Thess. 2:4; Dan. 7:8, 20; 8:11, 25: Daniel's vision was similarly assigned "to many days," *leyamim rabbim*, i.e. the distant future).

Also, he "enlarges his appetite as Sheol, and he is like death, never satisfied" (Isa. 28:14-22). He gathers to himself "all nations and collects to himself all peoples" so becoming "the head over the house of the wicked" (Rev. 17:12-17; 19:19). That he does so by means of making people "drunk" with his "wine" (Hab. 2:5, 15) strongly implies that he is one and the same as the beast of Revelation (14:8, 18:3).

The overall structure here is similar to the Assyrian passages surrounding Isaiah chapter 10. The wicked person is raised up in order to execute God's terrible punishment of His people but is in turn judged for his pride and failure to acknowledge that his success is owed entirely to his place in the divine plan.

If the antichrist is indeed the one described here, this alone would necessitate placing the account of his destruction, which follows for the rest of the prophecy, including the route God will pursue on His way to the climactic showdown, as pertaining to that final battle at the time of the end.

After declaring various woes upon the proud man, the prophet prays once more. But here too his words seem to take on a prophetic twist which goes beyond a recollection of the glories of the past exodus. For example, in Habakkuk 3:16 the prophet is still awaiting the "day of trouble." At the time of writing it had not yet occurred. Habakkuk 3 offers us an eschatological description of God going forth from Teman and Paran with His glory covering the heavens and the whole earth being full of His praise.

From there He sets out to "drive asunder nations and scatter the mountains" (Hab. 3:6), "march through the land in indignation" and "thresh the heathen in anger" (3:12), doing all this "for the salvation of his people, even for the salvation of your anointed" (3:13). Now the conquest of Canaan at the time of the first exodus took place after God had already delivered his people from Egypt at the Red Sea. Yet this deliverance takes place in the land that the enemy's troop will invade (3:16), the promised land itself.

The emerging picture is this: At the end of the age, God will stir Himself to action, storming into the land in order to free His people from their Chaldean oppressor, the man of sin. The whole tenor of this is much more in line with the future march of the Isaianic anointed conqueror described above, than the original exodus.

Going back to 3:9, the “oaths of the tribes, even thy word” may, coupled with the mention of God setting out from Paran, provide a link to the prophetic blessing of Israel’s tribes by Moses in Deuteronomy 33. Consider verse 2: “Yahweh came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, and He came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones; at His right hand there was flashing lightning for them.” Note here the further geographical references to Seir and Sinai. We have already examined the former and will encounter the latter further on. Peters asserts that the blessings proclaimed in Deuteronomy 33 will “only be fully realized at the restoration of the nation at the second coming of its king (Acts 1:6; 3:21).” “Such a coming,” he adds, “with myriads of saints is only predicated of the still future advent. We have no account of any other, and this correspondence with what will occur at the predicated second advent is indicative of its intended application.”<sup>31</sup>

Though Jim Mattison suggests that this Scripture has a dual fulfillment and I would be inclined to agree with him, Cowie endorses Peters’ view:

Deuteronomy 33:2: “Yahweh came from Sinai.” Though much of this chapter is couched in the past tense it is nevertheless evident that Moses is speaking prophetically, not historically. Note the unfulfilled prophecy concerning Israel’s future security and glory in verses 26-29...

“and rose up from Seir unto them.” The word “rose up” is *zarach* in the Hebrew signifying to irradiate (or shoot forth beams), i.e. to rise (as the sun)...

“he shined forth from Mt. Paran.” Again the analogy is that of the sun, now risen high in the sky. The exact location of Mt. Paran is difficult to determine but it was somewhere in the region of Kadesh-Barnea. Christ and his saints are seen moving rapidly across the region of the Sinai peninsula, northwards, then eastwards and then north again to enter the land from the east.<sup>32</sup>

The imagery is unmistakable and parallels other texts. In Malachi 4:2, Christ is presented to us as the sun of righteousness who will arise, and in 2 Peter 1:19 he is the day star whose appearance heralds the dawn of the new and glorious Messianic age. These all combine to remind Israel to look up for a redemption that will come from the direction of the ascending sun, arising from the other side of the Jordan in the east.

### **The Man from the East**

“Who raised up the righteous *man* from the east, called him to his foot, gave the nations before him, and made *him* rule over kings?” (Isa. 41:2).

This passage has troubled interpreters since the description doesn’t fully

<sup>31</sup> Peters, *TTK*, Vol. 3, 21.

<sup>32</sup> J.A. Cowie, *Events Subsequent to the Return of Christ (ESRC)*, 25-26.

match either of the two prominent contenders, Abraham and Cyrus. It seems best suited to the Christ and Peters claims support for this from Barnabas, Tertullian and Augustine.<sup>33</sup> Yet even these expositors are at a loss to explain how he can come “from the east.” The route here proposed resolves this difficulty and provides further attestation to the Messianic march through the wilderness. Peters also suggests in connection with this that the “kings of the east” in Revelation 16 may be Jesus, accompanied by his transfigured saints arriving for battle.<sup>34</sup>

We now have a collection of prophecies related to the return of Jesus that specifically mention Sinai, Edom and Mt. Paran in Kadesh-Barnea. A course is being charted which retraces Israel’s steps in the exodus and the conquest of the land under the leadership of Joshua.<sup>35</sup> We have been offered a glimpse of God’s roadmap to peace in the Middle East. One of the strengths of this view is the way that it draws together such a range of disparate and “difficult” texts in a coherent way.

### Marching Upwards to Zion

“Extol him who rides through the wilderness by his name, Yah!” (Ps. 68:4).

This hymn of praise opens with the prayer of Moses said at the outset of each day’s wilderness journey.<sup>36</sup> It was originally written by David to celebrate a momentous occasion. After the Ark of the Covenant’s construction at Sinai, its journey through the wilderness and long sojourn in temporary homes within the borders of Israel, it was finally headed to the place God had chosen for it, the place where He would cause His name to dwell. This seems, at first glance, to be what he is recounting.

But this depiction contrasts strongly with the historical account, which is littered with the corpses of doubters and rebels, and took several generations. The progress here is dynamic and unhindered. It appears that, instead of being confined to a description of the events unfolding during his day, the spirit of God has inspired David to describe the glories of the future march through the wilderness (v. 7). I will leave it to the reader’s judgment which fits the account best.

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<sup>33</sup> Peters, *TTK*, Vol. 3, 27.

<sup>34</sup> Peters, *TTK*, Vol. 3, 27.

<sup>35</sup> Peters, *TTK*, Vol. 3, 22: “Prophecy distinctly mentions Mt. Sinai, Paran, the wilderness, Mt. Seir, Edom, Teman or the South, Bozrah, giving us a direct route from Sinai northward to Palestine.” Mattison, *ETTL*, 144: “When we compare scriptures it appears we have the route taken by Jesus from Mount Sinai to the Mount of Olives (then Megiddo): Sinai, Paran, Mt Seir, Teman, Edom, Bozrah, Mount of Olives.”

<sup>36</sup> With two differences: 68:1 is jussive instead of imperative and God is addressed as *elohim* instead of Yahweh.

The wilderness theme is obscured in some translations of the Bible by an incorrect rendering of the word *arabah* in verse 4 as “heavens.” Everywhere else in the Bible, notably Isaiah 40:3 as we have already seen, it is rendered “wilderness.” That being the case, we are exhorted to extol him who “rides through the waste plains” or “through the deserts.” This creates a further tie with Deuteronomy 33: “This compares beautifully with Deuteronomy 33:2 as the Arabah is the arid region south of the Dead Sea, to the east of Paran and in the proximity of Seir.”<sup>37</sup>

Peters provides several reasons why Psalm 68 points to the future, to which I have added some comments of my own:

**It is not the first time this has happened.** The twofold reference to the bringing of God’s people “again” in verse 22 means that the Psalm does not refer to the original exodus, but another in the future.

**The Psalm is Messianic.** Paul attributes verse 18 to the work of Christ (Eph. 4:9). That alone is enough to establish the Messianic credentials of Psalm 68, and its application to a time later than David’s. This begs a further question. If verse 18 was fulfilled so long after the writing of the Psalm, when can we expect to see the rest of it take place?

At the ascension of Christ the Kingdom had not been restored to Israel — yet (Acts 1:6). And after the day of Pentecost, apostolic preaching still reflected the fact that they awaited the promised restoration of all things (Acts 3:21). Therefore the description of the conquest of the land must relate to a period subsequent to his return. This leads to the next point.

**The description is too exalted.** There is a great gulf between the Israel of the exodus and the unstoppable juggernaut of holiness and victory described to us here. The rebellion of the exodus generation caused them to suffer both defeat from their enemies and direct judgment at the hands of their God. Such was the scale of their failure that, of the generation which stood before God at Sinai, only two souls remained when the time came to enter the land.

**The resurrection is in view.** In verse 20 God’s salvation is described in terms of the “issues from death.” Could this allude to the resurrection?

**The Kingdom is established.** The descriptions in verses 21 to 31 of the overthrow of the enemies of God and the nations submitting themselves to His rule find scriptural parallels among depictions of the future Kingdom of David’s son, such as Psalm 72.

Lastly, the Psalm provides us with two explicit references to Mt. Sinai: “The earth quaked; the heavens also dropped rain at the presence of God; Sinai itself quaked at the presence of God, the God of Israel” (v. 8). “The chariots of God are myriads, thousands upon thousands; the Lord is among them as at Sinai, in holiness” (v. 17).

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<sup>37</sup> Cowie, *ESRC*, 26.

It should be noted that the Hebrew of verse 17 is ambiguous in the extreme. In regard to this Cowie states:

While this is literally correct there are other translations which appear to throw light on David's meaning. In his margin Rotherham quotes Ginsburg who translates, "the Lord hath come from Sinai into the sanctuary." The Companion Bible has, "Yahweh among them (the chariots and the angels) hath come from Sinai into his sanctuary." The Jerusalem Bible has, "the Lord has left Sinai for his sanctuary."<sup>38</sup>

Jim Mattison provides further illumination, citing Jude 14-15 in connection with this.<sup>39</sup>

### **Holy Mount Sinai**

A recurrent feature in the texts we have studied so far has been Sinai. Even Matthew's quotation of Hosea 11:1 is pregnant with the implication that, if Jesus is indeed the elect Son, in the mold of the true Israel, then his coming out of Egypt is not an isolated event but instead forms part of a sequence of events which we can still expect to see unfold.

The location has unique standing within the complex of symbols relating to both past and future exodus events and it would be in keeping with the designation of Jesus as the "prophet like Moses" that he too should organize the theocratic government at the very location the original Moses did: "The Ancient of Days did, at one time, visit Mt. Sinai when his Kingdom was instituted, and it is most reasonable, aside from the Scripture intimations, to believe that when it will be gloriously reorganized with the Son of Man at its head, that he will again manifest himself, as predicted, in the same place."<sup>40</sup>

Consider the task set before Moses. The people needed to be ready and equipped before they entered the land, not only to capture it, but to live in it as God intended. So the time of preparation wasn't just dedicated to the assembly of a fighting force; the foundation upon which a new society was to be built was also laid.

Therefore at Sinai the people of God received guidance on how to live as a kingdom of priests, how the business of government should be conducted. They were instructed in the laws they were to live by and the principles by which they were to order their society. Even the Levites were given their instructions on how to carry out their duties at Sinai.

### **The Judgment Seat of Christ**

"Then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness" (Isa. 32:16).

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<sup>38</sup> Cowie, *ESRC*, 27.

<sup>39</sup> Mattison, *ETTL*, 142.

<sup>40</sup> Peters, *TKK*, Vol. 3, 26.

There could be no more suitable time and location for the resurrected faithful to stand before the judgment seat of Christ to receive our rewards (1 Cor. 3:13-15). When we are already saved and made immortal and standing secure in the fact that our place in the Kingdom is guaranteed, each individual's work will be tried and rewarded accordingly. In this setting, there is no reason to suppose that Jesus was speaking figuratively when he described the good and faithful servants in the parable of the pounds as being given rulership over cities (Luke 19:11-27). After all, God had sworn to Abraham that his descendants would possess the gates of their enemies (Gen. 22:17).

At this time "positions are assigned, the kingship and priesthood inaugurated, the instructions given preparatory to the ushering in of the dispensation of the fullness of times."<sup>41</sup> Jim Mattison asks the question: "What better place would there be for Christ to organize his Kingdom with its leaders for various works than here in this secret and remote uninhabited region away from Jerusalem and Palestine where Antichrist and his legions hold sway?"<sup>42</sup>

It appears that this will be the period of overlap between the setting up of the glorious Messianic Kingdom and the sweeping away of the last kingdoms of the present evil age, intimated by the prophet Daniel.

Daniel 2:44 particularly declares that "in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom." That is, previous to the final ending of the Roman Empire [which Peters equates with the feet of the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream], of Gentile domination, of the horns that arise, this kingdom will be already commenced, organized.<sup>43</sup>

This also exposes a problem which the explicit mention of Sinai in the context of an exodus at the end of the age resolves, and raises the issue as to how the Messianic march through the wilderness fits into the wider geopolitical landscape at the time of the end. Specifically, the view is that Jesus will only come back to raise the just dead and establish a reign of peace on earth, to last a thousand years, after a period of unparalleled suffering and hostility towards the people of God and in the midst of a time of great turmoil and perplexity.

According to this outlook, before any of the events outlined so far can take place, the Jews will rebuild their temple and begin sacrificing there. Some time after this an individual will come to dominate the political scene of a country or countries currently occupying the territory of old Assyria/Babylon (at this time, Syria/Iraq). He will enter Israel with an overwhelming multinational military force and forbid temple worship, setting himself up in the holy place and demanding the worship that belongs to the Most High God.

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<sup>41</sup> Peters, *TKK*, Vol. 3, 19.

<sup>42</sup> Mattison, *ETTL*, 143.

<sup>43</sup> Peters, *TTK*, Vol. 3, 18.

This will initiate the time of great agony and suffering for the Jewish people and the saints which will continue for several years. Only after this will signs in the heavens herald the beginning of the Day of Yahweh. Terrible judgments from God will then ensue, reminiscent of the plagues with which He struck Egypt, only on a far greater, possibly global, scale.

The entire period outlined here, beginning with Assyria/Babylon's invasion of Israel and desecration of the future temple, will be a time of great political instability in the Middle East. During this time the northern power will be waging unceasing war with the head of the southern kingdom of Egypt, passing through Israel on his way, like a devastating flood.

And so it is that, in the midst of these events, Jesus will return from the Father's right hand in heaven and give imperishable life to his elect, gathering them at Sinai in order to organize his Kingdom — not in heaven, but on earth! "But this is done here on the earth — as the representation in its entire scope demands — even while the Antichristian power, so arrogant and hostile, is in existence and holds sway over the nations."<sup>44</sup>

All of this necessitates a location away from the ensuing conflicts, in an area remote enough for the preparations of the Messianic campaign and the inauguration of the Kingdom to take place undisturbed. Sinai's credentials are impressive: It is mentioned by name in the context of an eschatological exodus. It is spiritually suitable, on account of its being the very location where the first kingdom was inaugurated and the holy nation prepared for service. It also provides resolution to the practical demands of an earthly location for the gathering and organization of the theocratic community in the midst of the intense war and conflict that will mark the birth pangs of the Kingdom age.

Furthermore, Cowie is of the opinion that the very layout of Sinai itself makes it uniquely suitable for such a purpose:

[It is] like a huge altar set in a sanctuary, and is faced by a large plain capable of containing an immense concourse of people. In Sinai and Palestine, Dr. Stanley comments:

"That such a plain should exist at all in front of such a cliff is so remarkable a coincidence with the sacred narrative as to furnish a strong internal argument, not merely of its identity with the scene, but of the scene itself having been described by an eyewitness. The awful and lengthened approach, as to some natural sanctuary, would have been the fittest preparation for the coming scene. The low line of alluvial mounds at the foot of the cliff exactly answers to the 'bounds' which were to keep the people off from 'touching the Mount.'

"The plain itself is not broken and uneven and narrowly shut in like almost all others in the range, but presents a long retiring sweep, against

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<sup>44</sup> Peters, *TTK*, Vol. 3, 25.

which the people could ‘remove and stand afar off.’ The cliff rising like a huge altar in front of the whole congregation, and visible against the sky in lonely splendor from end to end of the whole plain, is the very image of the ‘mount that might be touched,’ and from which the ‘voice’ of God might be heard far and wide over the stillness of the plain below, widened at that point to its utmost extent by the confluence of all the continuous valleys.”

The experience had a profound effect upon the people of Israel when they gathered there under Moses, so that they entreated with him to intercede for them whilst they retired afar off. How much more awe-inspiring will be our visit to that Mount. Already the power of Yahweh will be visibly manifested in that the majority of the innumerable host then assembled will have been raised from the dead. We will be re-united with loved ones who have died but then will live again. Each one there assembled will doubtless be impressed by his or her unworthiness for eternal life.<sup>45</sup>

One further conclusion that we have to draw from this is that, if Sinai is indeed the place where Jesus will finally receive the Kingdom from his Father and, in turn, hand it to his saints, then it follows that the vision of Daniel 7 must be located there as well.

#### **The Ancient of Days and the Son of Man**

“The prophet [Daniel] looks in vision at the horn [antichrist], and then, looking away from him, turns to gaze upon the prophetic picture presented at Mt. Sinai without specifying the locality; thus passing from one to the other without a commingling of them.”<sup>46</sup>

The vision is awe-inspiring to say the least. Thrones are set up and the Ancient of Days takes his seat. The throne-chariot of the Divine Warrior is ablaze with flames and a river of fire flows out from before him. He is attended by a countless multitude. As Daniel continues to look, one “like a son of man” comes before him, on the clouds of heaven. To him is given dominion, glory and an everlasting Kingdom over all nations and places under heaven. The prophet also witnesses that through this investiture, the saints of the Most High receive the Kingdom and possess it “for all ages to come.”

There are enough parallels between this and the establishment of the original theocracy to make a comparison. Yet at the same time it is clear that even the amazing manifestation of God’s presence then is a mere preview of this future event.

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<sup>45</sup> Cowie, *ESRC*, 30.

<sup>46</sup> Peters, *TKK*, Vol. 3, 25.

When the theocracy was originally established, it was done amid the most solemn and glorious manifestations, and Mt. Sinai was purposely selected for the same; now when the same theocracy is to be reorganized in the most august manner under the leadership of the King specially provided, is it not reasonable that (instead of the third heaven or the air, etc.) it should be effected in precisely the same place and with exhibitions of splendor and power far more impressive than any hitherto given.<sup>47</sup>

Though I have presented this topic in the context of my own convictions concerning eschatology, this does not have an enormous bearing on the matter since the events outlined all take place after the return of Christ, and therefore subsequent to both Daniel's 70th week and the rapture of the church. They therefore need not be affected by pre-, mid- or post-tribulation rapture positions.

As a result its proponents include people from all camps. Of the writers quoted in this article there are, first and foremost, Peters, author of *The Theocratic Kingdom of the Messiah*, who expected a pre-tribulation rapture, and many Christadelphian writers, including Cowie, author of *Events Subsequent to the Return of Christ*, who are historicists. James Mattison, author of *The End-Time Timeline*, holds a futurist view of prophecy and an expectation that the rapture will take place after the tribulation, the view I share.

Peters himself begins the 166th proposition of his *Theocratic Kingdom of the Messiah* — the section that deals with the Messianic march — by stating that, whether or not one chooses to accept the march in all its details, the promise of the millennial Kingdom of David's son, covenanted by God to Abraham, stands independent of this.

### **The Two-Part Coming and the Marriage Supper**

“Yahweh Tsevaot will prepare a lavish banquet for all people on this mountain...And on this mountain he will swallow up the covering which is over all people...He will swallow up death for all time, and Adonay Yahweh will wipe tears away from all faces” (Isa. 25:6-8).

“If there are two parts to Jesus' second coming, one *for* his people and one *with* his people to fight the kings of the earth, between these two will Christ pass the interval of time at Mount Sinai in organizing his Kingdom?”<sup>48</sup>

The insight offered into the events described here also offers some resolution to the contrast noted by some commentators between Matthew 25:1 and Luke 12:36. The first speaks of Jesus' followers going *to* the wedding and the second offers a caution to wait for the Lord, when he will “return *from* the wedding.” It may be that these words of caution are directed to two different groups. The first

<sup>47</sup> Peters, *TKK*, Vol. 3, 25.

<sup>48</sup> Mattison, *ETTL*, 140.

are the dead in Christ and those faithful to the testimony of Jesus who live through the period during which these events unfold and will be gathered by the angels to Sinai. The second would be the ethnic Jewish remnant who have turned to their Messiah at the close of the great tribulation. They will be in dire straits, surrounded by the hostile armies of the northern power and awaiting the governor who Micah promised would save them in the days when the Assyrian treads down their land.

This imagery of a wedding taking place during this time is attested to by Hosea who, you will remember from the outset of this article, promised that God would betroth His people to Himself in the wilderness.

The turmoil and violence in the surrounding regions frames a contrasting picture of captivating beauty and tranquility:

The wilderness and the solitary place will be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. The wilderness will be a fruitful field...for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together: That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the Yahweh has done this, and the Holy One of Israel has created it (Isa. 35:1; 32:15-16; 35:6; 41:19-20; 43:18-21).

The barren wilderness blossoms into bud, flowing with rivers and pools of water, as the privileged guests from across the ages take their seats along with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob at the marriage supper of the lamb. “God in view of this may, as we anticipate, adorn the wilderness and make it a place of resort.”<sup>49</sup>

But there can be no peace without justice. Before this harmony can be extended to embrace the whole earth, there is the small matter of human rebellion and opposition to be dealt with. Satan must be removed and those who have allied themselves with him must be destroyed in order for captive humanity to be set free.

### **What Happens Next?**

Daniel 11 would seem to indicate that at some stage the king of the North recognizes the threat posed to his dominion, presumably once the Messianic army, consisting of Jesus and the immortalized saints, is organized and on the move.

After a march northwards through the wilderness and the bloodbath in Edom, they proceed along the route taken by Joshua, eventually entering Israel across the Jordan and approaching Jerusalem from the east, via the Mount of Olives

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<sup>49</sup> Peters, *TKK*, Vol. 3, 20.

(Zech. 14:1-5; Ezek. 43:1-2, 4-5, 9). Further to the north is the location of the conclusive battle where the enemy and his host are destroyed at Mt. Megiddo.

With all opposition finally overcome and his people prepared for the task of governing, the stage is set for the Prince of Peace to take his place on the ancestral throne in Zion and, with it, inherit the nations, dispensing true justice to them at last (Isa. 2:1-4; 42:4). Then and only then will the time finally come for the kingdoms of this world to become the Kingdom of our God and of his Christ.

### **In Conclusion**

What does this mean for us today? What is the benefit of trying to get back into the mindset of these people who lived so long ago, in circumstances so different to ours?

Perhaps the answer lies in the way in which it reminds us that God has always had something in store for His people, which He sets before us like a beacon of hope. His desire is that we get more acquainted with it, allowing its reality to take root in our hearts. It should influence our values and convictions, giving us a sense of perspective on the temptations and challenges of our day-to-day lives.

Any small glimpse of that vision that can make it more real and vivid to us should be seized upon with both hands as an inestimable treasure.

So the real moral of the story is that ideally this message should have the same impact on us today as it would have had on our Judean friend and all God's people across the broad span of this age. It should encourage us to go out to meet both the seductions and sufferings of this present time with the attitude expressed by Habakkuk, whose vision we considered earlier, in his prayer:

Though the fig tree should not blossom  
And there be no fruit on the vines,  
Though the yield of the olive should fail  
And the fields produce no food,  
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold  
And there be no cattle in the stalls,  
Yet I will exult in Yahweh,  
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation (Hab. 3:17-18).