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ABSTRACT

THE TIME OF THE SECOND COMING AND
THE MEMBERS OF THE SANHEDRIN

by

Alina-Roxana Lupu

Chair: Laurențiu Florentin Moț, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Thesis

Andrews University

Master of Arts

Title: THE TIME OF THE SECOND COMING AND THE MEMBERS OF THE SANHEDRIN

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Problems

The aspects related to the time of the Second Coming of Jesus were a constant concern of the believers and Bible's scholars. There are many challenging verses in the Scripture that are talking about the Parousia in temporal terms. This present study was to determine to what extent Jesus' answer before the Sanhedrin (Matt 26:64) was related to the time of the Parousia and with that generation of his accusers.

Method

An historical perspective over the process of date setting for the Parousia and over the eschatological theology create the framework for understanding the problem of Parousia's time. The exegetical study of verse 64 in Matthew 26 answers the question about what Jesus intended to say before the Sanhedrin referring to his Second Coming.

Conclusion

The study reveals that even if Jesus is using an eschatological language, he is not saying that his return on the clouds of heaven will happen in the members of the Sanhedrin's generation. The emphasis of Jesus' sayings is not on the time, but on the fact that the Parousia will happen for sure, and the accusers will see him coming. Therefore, the verse is not talking about a certain time, but about a certain event.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

THE TIME OF THE SECOND COMING AND
THE MEMBERS OF THE SANHEDRIN

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfilment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Alina-Roxana Lupu

April 2018

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NIV New International Version

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Second Coming of Christ represents a subject of interest throughout the ages. Ordinary people wanted to know more about the return of Jesus, primarily for personal reasons: whether it is fear, faith, or something else. Theologians' searching for the topic, on the other hand, is part of their attempt to understand God and his actions in history. The literature about the Second Coming of our Savior, written by researchers, theologians, preachers, or simple Bible students, is of theological, religious, or devotional nature.¹ Beside the preoccupation with the time of Second Coming of Christ and its preceding events, there are quite a number of books which look at the Second Coming from the perspectives of the problem of hope, the problem of sin, standards of Christian life, to name some of the most important.

More than any other churches that believe in Jesus' return in the future, the identity of the Seven-day Adventist Church is closely related to the subject of Second Coming. In the very name of the church is the idea of Christ's Second Advent² as an

¹ E.g., H. C. Morrison, *The Second Coming of Christ* (Louisville, KY: The Pentecostal Publishing Company, 1914); Charles Spurgeon, *The Second Coming of Christ* (Springdale, PA: Whitaker House, 1996); Len G. Broughton, *The Second Coming of Christ* (Philadelphia, PA: The Pepper Publishing Company, 1902), L. Berkhof, *The Second Coming of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953), Norman Gulley, *Christ is coming! A Christ-Centered Approach to Last-Day Events* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1998); David A. Kroll, *When Will Christ Return? A Scriptural and Historical Examination of the Second Coming* (Colorado Springs, CO: Bimillennial, 2004); Clarence Larkin, *The Second Coming of Christ* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2005); Clay McConkie, *The Drama and Majesty of the Second Coming* (Springville, UT: CFI, 2010), etc. Here are only few of the books, older and newer that are talking about the Second Coming of Christ.

² The term is coming from Latin language where the noun *adventus* means "coming," and it was used frequently in the Latin version of the Bible, Vulgata. See also Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), 218

assurance that his work of salvation on the cross of Calvary, the First Advent, is fulfilled, and had a purpose that implies the whole world. But in the same time, the existing literature about the Second Coming of Christ proves that this is a subject of interest for almost every Christian Church in the world.

Questions about the Second Coming of their Master were even in the mind of the apostles, because during his earthly ministry, especially in the last discourses, but not only³, Jesus talked about this great event and also about the signs that will precede his return, wishing to help his followers to be prepared themselves for his return, and also to have the necessary ability to prepare other people to understand this important issues.

The Statement of the Problem

The most important issue in the minds of the apostles (and after that in every believer's mind over the centuries) related with the Second Coming of Christ was the problem of the time when this event should happen.⁴ From the Gospels to the Book of Revelation, through Jesus' words or through the apostles, the Bible is talking about the second coming as happening in the near future. "Yes, I am coming soon," are the last words of Jesus on the pages of the Scripture. Some of his declarations were even more enigmatic suggesting that the people who lived during his earthly life will be able to see him coming on the clouds of heaven, as it happens when in front of the

³ See also some of Jesus' parables and his urges for his disciples to watch (Matt 24: 42, Mk 13:33, Lk 21:35-36, Matt 10:23, Matt 24:34, etc.).

⁴ As Sakae Kubo puts it, "the resurrection of Christ guarantees His future appearing. It is no longer a question of *if* but simply of *when*." Sakae Kubo, *God meets man: A theology of the Sabbath and Second Advent* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Association, 1978).

Sanhedrin during his trial, seeming to state that the priests and the high priest will see his coming in glory (see Matt 26:64).

The idea of Second Coming's time was not only in the mind of the apostles, it is also in the contemporary minds, especially in the minds of conservative people. In his book *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness*, where he is talking about how the liberal and conservative Christian writers are interpreting the Biblical End Time prophecies, Samuele Bacchiocchi emphasized very well the problem of time's interpretation in our days:

“Liberal writers generally reject much of what the Scripture teaches about the Second Advent. They interpret the notion of Christ's Return to this earth as a mythical expression designated to make eternity real in the present experience of the believer. Some of them view the Parousia as a symbol of God's final triumph [...]”

Conservative writers accept the reality of Christ's Second Coming to this earth. However, much of their writings show more interest in formulating timetables and / or sequence of events [...]

Much of the discussion in books written by conservative authors center around such topics as the time of the translation of the Church [...]”⁵

Over the years, as the time of waiting became extended longer and longer, the Christians started to talk about two aspects of the Parousia: nearness and delay. In this context of nearness and delay of the Coming of the Lord we try to understand the statement Jesus made in his last hours before death in front of the Jewish Council who judged and condemned him.

Background and Importance of the Study

If we have a correct and truthful interpretation of the Bible, than we will have a real and clear image of God. Therefore, a proper answer to the question about what

⁵ Samuele Bacchiocchi, *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness* (Berrien Springs: MI, Biblical Perspectives, 1986), 12.

Jesus intended to say on occasion of his trial will help us to understand that the Bible does not contradict itself about the time of the Second coming (saying that nobody knows the time of the Second coming, and seeming to place it in the generation of Jesus, in the same time).

It is well known the story of one of the first members of the Millerite movement, Joshua V. Himes. An illuminated mind of his time and a great reformer, Himes found in Millerism “the ultimate cause, the cause that made all other reforms appear insignificant in comparison... Adventism was the reform of reforms. The second coming of Christ would be the complete and final solution to all earthly problems.”⁶ Even after the Great Disappointment in October 1844, he continued to fight for the Advent Movement. But few years later, his theology concerning the time of the Second Coming changed and he concluded that “Christ would return between 1866 and 1868.”⁷ In his tradition, many Adventists, beside other Christians, continued the process of setting dates for the Second Coming of Christ.⁸

Even in our days, Seventh-day Adventist believers, based on their own interpretation of the scriptural prophecies and on their own understanding of Bible verses, continue to set dates and to spread their ideas through any means of mass communication.⁹ In the era of the Internet, it is not enough for us to know the truth about the Bible, but it is also crucial to have an answer for everybody who is

⁶ George R. Knight, *William Miller and the Rise of Adventism* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2010), 62.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 247.

⁸ In his work *Date-Setting in America, for the Second Coming of Christ During the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century* (Takoma Park, MA: Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 1947), 1, Wayne Albert Scriven states that “Perhaps, the outstanding period of date-setting was during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. During that time, there was a general advent awakening throughout the world.”

⁹ Nowadays, in Romania, for example, it is well known the case of a young former pastor, who by a personal interpretation of biblical prophecies, established the Parousia in December 2016, and he popularized his ideas via internet.

searching for the truth, and becomes confused because of such popular ideas in the online environment. This study can be therefore very useful for everybody (members of the church or not) who have been misguided regarding the interpretation of some difficult verses in the Scripture.

Purpose of the Study and Methodology

There are verses in the Bible which are not easy to be understood, and the different Bible translations do not help too much for interpretation. Many times, we have to go back to the Greek or Hebrew originals in order to understand such ambiguous verses. Sometimes it is not enough to know a certain language to solve such problems, but you need to use more detailed information: linguistic, theological, cultural, historical, etc.

Citing the statement in Matthew 26:64 which seems to bring Parousia in the lifetime of Sanhedrin's members, and using a diachronic analysis of the subject of eschatology, this thesis starts following the idea of the nearness and delay of Jesus' Coming as it appears in the religious and theological literature, as a background for understanding Matthew's assertion.

It is also an exegetical research of verse 64 in chapter 26 from Matthew's gospel, the only verse that brings together the issue of the Second Coming of Christ and the members of the Sanhedrin during the process before his crucifixion. It is an attempt to find a proper answer for the questions about the relationship between the time of Jesus' return on earth and the people of his generation, more exactly the members of the Sanhedrin.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Because the time of the Second Coming of Christ represent a large topic in the Bible (see only Jesus' declarations about it) and also in the theological and religious literature, this study, as its title suggests, will focus only on the problem of the time of Parousia presented in relationship with the activity of earthly judges of Jesus—the members of the Sanhedrin. This relationship is presented only in one verse in the Gospel of Matthew, and it has almost the same form in the Gospel of Mark. Therefore we will limit the study to this one verse in Matthew's Gospel presenting also in comparison, the similar verses in the other two synoptic gospels.

We used for the study the existent literature on the subject written in English, or in Romanian language. The works written in the last decades gives to the reader updated information about the subject.

Key Terms

The concept of Second Coming of Christ is usually known in the religious literature as the End Times, the Second Advent, or Parousia¹⁰. Another term used especially in the Protestant Scholastic Theology¹¹ is *eschaton*, being related to other

¹⁰ The term, coming from a Greek verb that means “to be present,” is used by the New Testament's writers with its general meaning “coming,” similar with the Latin word advent. In classical Greek, beginning with the Ptolemaic period it was used as “a technical expression for the arrival or visit of the king and emperor” (Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (New York and London: Hader and Stoughton, 1910), 372.

¹¹ Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms Drawn Principally From Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), 105.

Latin theological expressions like *adventus Christi*,¹² *consummatio saeculi*,¹³ *dies novissimus*,¹⁴, and with the theological concept of eschatology.¹⁵ Eschatology is connected with apocalypticism; “historians of Christian thought have sometimes used eschatology and apocalypticism as interchangeable terms,”¹⁶ although they are not since “Apocalypticism is a species of the genus eschatology”.¹⁷

¹² The expression refers to the second coming of Christ which is, in Muller words, “personal (*personalis*), visible (*visibilis*), blessed (*beatificus*) for believers, terrible or terrifying (*terribilis*) for unbelievers, and glorious (*gloriosus*)”. The author continues affirming that in Protestant orthodoxy there are three advents of Christ: in the flesh (*in carne*)—his first coming and his incarnation on the earth—, an advent in grace (*in gratia*)—referring to Christ’s invisible presence with his people from his ascension until his second coming—, and in glory (*in gloria*)—referring to his second visible coming on the earth. *Ibid.*, 28.

¹³ Or the end of the world, with the “destruction of the sinful old order by fire and the creation or recreation of the world in the new age” *Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁴ Equivalent to the last day when the kingdom of God will be inaugurated by “the second visible coming of Christ,” and other specific signs called signs of the time. *Ibid.*, 92.

¹⁵ The term comes from two Greek words: *eschatos* meaning “last,” and *logia* meaning “a discourse, a study of.” In terms of the dictionary, it means “the part of theology concerned with death and final destiny” or “beliefs about the destiny of humankind and of the world,” and “the study of this” (Judy Pearsall and Bill Trumble (eds.), *The Oxford English Reference Dictionary*, s.v. *eschatology*. See also Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 105.

¹⁶ Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3. Citing Maurice Goguel (*La Vie de Jesus*), George E. Ladd presents the difference between the two concepts: “Eschatology looks forward to a future separation of men and the coming of a new order displacing the present world. Apocalyptic attempts to picture in advance the form which the cosmic drama will take and the succession of events which will accompany the transition. Therefore, apocalyptic tries to calculate the time of the end by the study of signs.” George E. Ladd, *The Presence of the Future; the eschatology of biblical realism* (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans: 1974), 6.

CHAPTER 2

TIME OF THE SECOND COMING:

LITERATURE REVIEW

Even if Jesus is very clear about the definite time of his coming declaring that nobody knows the day and the hour of it—“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” (Matt 24: 36)—, as the days have turned into years, and the years turned into centuries, and then into millennia, the Christians wanted more and more to understand the statements of the Bible related with the time of the Second Coming. More than that, neglecting Jesus’ words, they started to point to a year or another, even to a day and an hour, for Parousia’s fulfilment.

As a result, when it comes to time of Parousia we can talk about two main concepts: the nearness and the delay of the Second Coming.

The Date Setting

After Christ’s Ascension, as the church began to develop, people started to set dates for the event they were waiting for according to the promise of their Savior. There were many Christians who tried to calculate the precise time, but we will try to see here only the most important and well-known attempts. The first of them was in the Thessalonian church. They emphasized the idea that they will see Christ coming in their day, and is shown here in his second Epistle where Paul corrects them in this issue:

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us—whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter—asserting that the day of the Lord has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. (2 Thess 2:1-3)

Paul exhorts them “not to be troubled with this idea, and warns them against being deceived by it.”¹

Soon after Paul's death, it appears that a series of heretical movements whose main concern was to talk about Lord's return emphasizing the problem of time began to appear. At the end of the first century, a gnostic named Cerint believed that, in the immediate future, “Christ will establish a 1,000-year reign of the saints on earth (the millennium) before the Last Judgment.”² This was one of the first eschatological heresies in the church about the Second Coming, named Millennialism (also named Millenarianism, or Chiliasm).³

Another heretical movement emerged in the middle of the second century was the Montanism, who's founder, Montanus—who believed that he was chosen as a channel for the Spirit of truth Jesus had promised—was talking about an imminent Second Coming when the heavenly Jerusalem will descend in a place somewhere in Phrigya.⁴

Beyond this heretical movements condemned by the church, there were many Christian authors, well-known in the history as Church Fathers, who tried to find an

¹ James White, *Bible Adventism; or Sermons on the Coming and Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus Christ* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1972), 76.

² Richard Landes, “Millennialism,” in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (www.britannica.com).

³ See also Pr. Petre Chiricuță, *Parusia sau despre a Doua Venire*, second edition (București: Anastasia, 2001), 31.

⁴ Charles Patrick Loughran, Robert McQueen Grant, “Montanism,” in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (www.britannica.com); Chiricuță, *Parusia...*, 32.

answer to the question “when?” by setting dates for the Second Coming.⁵ Most of them interpreted each day of Creation as symbolizing one thousand years. Authors like Barnabas (the epistle of Barnabas, 120-150 AD), Irenaeus (c. 120 – c. 200 AD), Tertullian (c. 155 – c. 240 AD), Cyprian (c. 200 – c. 258 AD), Lactantius (250-325 AD), based on such calculations, are talking about the nearness of Christ’s Second Coming, emphasizing “that the return of Christ will occur after six thousand years... at the beginning of the seventh millennium... However, there was little evidence of date settings among these writers.”⁶

Other Church Fathers pointed to a certain year, especially when about round numbers, as being the last year of the earth. For example, Apollinaris, bishop of Laodicea who died in 382 AD, placed the Second Coming of the Lord in 490 AD.⁷ Talking about Hippolytus of Rome (170-235 AD), Le Roy Froom states that this bishop of Rome was “apparently the first to fall into the error of setting a specific date for the second advent by calculation, fixing upon A.D. 500, on the basis of the generally held six-thousand-year theory of the world's duration”⁸.

After Church Father’s era, the Christians had focused on the significance of year 1000, another round number, so very significant for them.⁹ Joachim de Floris, an

⁵ Concerning Church Fathers’ period, in two of his articles, Laurențiu Moț presents an historical (chronologic) report on both ante- and post-Nicean Fathers’ view about the nearness and delay of the Parousia. (See Laurențiu Moț, “Apropierea și întârzierea parousiei la părinții ante și post-niceeni,” part I, in *Theorhema*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2016, 57-73; part II, in *Theorhema*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2016, 37-53.)

⁶ Thomas D. Lea, “A Survey of the Doctrine of the Return of Christ in the Ante-Nicene Fathers,” in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 29/2, 1986, 166.

⁷ See also Chiricuță, *Parusia...*, 34.

⁸ Le Roy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers. The Historical Development of Prophetic Interpretation*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1950), 278.

⁹ Studying this period, Le Roy Froom concludes that “any expectation of the coming of Antichrist, the loosing of Satan, and the judgment day occurring in connection with or around the year 1000, was not fostered by the hierarchy of the church or by the doctors of divinity, but found its chief expression among larger or smaller groups of the laity, especially in France.” (Froom, *The Prophetic*

Italian theologian who founded the monastic order of so-called Joachimites, is talking about the year 1260 as the year of Parousia, and there were also other theologians or members of the clergy who had advanced other dates around the year 1000¹⁰.

As year 1000 came and passed, people turned their attention to other dates. During the Reformation era, the voice of Martin Luther was the strongest to proclaim the nearness of the Second Coming, based especially on the signs of the time. More than any other reformers of his time, he expressed his conviction that Jesus would not be later than 300 years from his time on (1546), thus placing Parousia in the near future, without advancing a precise date for the event.¹¹ There were also people who tried to set even the day and the hour of Jesus' return, as one of Luther's friends, Michael Stifel, who predicted in one of his sermons that the Parousia will happen at 8 AM, October, 19, 1533.¹²

Based on different calculation methods, many other people—clergy or lay persons—were waiting for Christ's Second Coming in a certain year (even in a certain day).¹³ When the year they were expected had come and passed, their (or their disciples) attempts were replaced by others.

Faith..., 591). Nevertheless, there were heads of the clergy, as Pope Sylvester II, who pointed also to the year 1000.

¹⁰ Chiricuță, *Parusia...*, 37-44.

¹¹ Fromm is citing some of Luther's statements that show how deeply was his hope that the Second Coming of Christ will be an event that will happen in the very near future. See Luther's statements as: "I hope that day is not far off and we shall still see it."; "I hope the last day will not tarry over 100 years, because God's Word will be taken away again and a great darkness will come for the scarcity of ministers of the Word."; "We have reached the time of the white [pale] horse of the Apocalypse. This world will not last any more, if God wills it, than another hundred years."; "The world cannot stand much longer, perhaps a hundred years at the outside." (Apud Fromm, *The Prophetic Faith...* vol. II, 278).

¹² The same year, 1533, is sustained also by Mechior Hoffman. See Laurețiu Moț, "Tema nou-testamentară a apropierei și întârzierii parusiei în gândirea reformei protestante," in *TheoRhema*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2017. See also Chiricuță, *Parusia...*, 49; Fromm, *The Prophetic Faith...*, vol. II, 321.

¹³ See the whole chapter "Opinions, heresies, and eschatological sects in relation to Parousia", especially pages 30-54, in Chiricuță, *Parusia...*, 2001.

The first who calculated the end of the world starting from the prophecy of 2300 evenings and mornings in Daniel 8:14 was Nicolaus Cusanus (Nicholas of Cusa), a German cardinal, theologian and philosopher who lived in the 15th century.¹⁴ According to his calculations, Jesus was to come before 1750. In Cusanus' tradition, other theologians, reformers, even scientists (Isaac Newton) tried to fix a date for the return of Jesus calculating the numbers in Daniel's prophecy. John Hooper and William W. Pym, British clergymen who lived at the beginning of 19th century,¹⁵ etc., the Americans: Samuel M. McCorkle, Johann Petri, William Cummins Davis, Joshua Wilson, Harriet Livermore,¹⁶ calculated the end of Daniel's prophecy either in 1847, or sometime between the year 1843 and 1847.

In the same tradition, at the beginning of the 19th century, William Miller, searching the prophecy in Daniel, calculated the date of the Second Coming in October 1843 (subsequent, Samuel Snow, studying the same prophecy, placed the event in October 1844). Even if Christ did not come, and the believers had to face a great disappointment, Miller's calculations led his followers to discover and understand Jesus' ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, and in the same time they led to the emergence of a new denomination – for whom the Parousia is a central point –, that of Seventh-day Adventist Church.¹⁷

The process of setting dates is not finished. Even in our days, there are people who continue to wait for Christ, making speculation regarding the time of his coming.

¹⁴ Chiricuță, *Parusia...*, 44.

¹⁵ Froom, *The Prophetic Faith...*, vol. 3, 564-577.

¹⁶ See Froom, *The Prophetic Faith...*, vol. 4.

¹⁷ For more information about Miller and his work, see the recent published book George R. Knight, *William Miller and the Rise of Adventism* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2010).

Talking about the apocalypticism¹⁸, Bernard McGinn says that “Apocalyptic expectations went through many changes, both in terms of the manner of presentation and the nature of the content, but apocalypticism did not die out in Christianity.”¹⁹

Eschatological Theology

Around the beginning of the 20th century, the subject of the Parousia and eschatology became an important topic in theologians’ approach.²⁰ They started from the idea that the eschatology cannot be properly understood unless the doctrine of Christ (Christology) is properly understood.

Consistent Eschatology

Albert Schweitzer’s search for historical Jesus²¹ is an attempt to make clear the eschatological understanding. He is starting his research with Reimarus²² before whom “no one had attempted to form a historical conception of the life of Jesus.”²³ Reimarus’ essay “The Aims of Jesus and His Disciples” is considered to be “a magnificent piece of work,” “not only one of the greatest events in the history of

¹⁸ The term is defined as “eschatological (end-time) views and movements that focus on cryptic revelations about a sudden, dramatic, and cataclysmic intervention of God in history; the judgment of all men, and the rule of the elect with God in a renewed heaven and earth.” (See Richard Landes, “Eschatology,” in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (www.britannica.com)).

¹⁹ Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 14.

²⁰ Laurețiu Moț, “Apropierea și întârzierea parusiei la părinții ante- și post-niceeni,” I, in *TheoRhema*, vol. 11, no.1, 2016, 57. See also Chiricuță, *Parusia...*, 22.

²¹ Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus. A Critical Study of its Progress From Reimarus to Wrede*, 2nd english edition (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1911) (electronic source).

²² Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768), a German philosopher and Deist, who denied the supernatural origin of Christianity and consider Jesus only a man, a Jewish prophet, and not the Son of God (Frank Edward Manuel, “Hermann, Samuel Reimarus,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*)

²³ Schweitzer, *The Quest...*, 23.

criticism,” but “also a masterpiece of general literature.”²⁴ In his work – a polemical not an historical one – Reimarus shows that Jesus himself, only a Jew with political Messianic ideals, was disappointed because he believed that his return “was near at hand.” All his actions, all his affirmations during his public ministry are a proof that “Jesus promises the fulfilment of all Messianic hopes before the end of the existing generation.”²⁵ This was the first system in Reimarus’ thinking. After Jesus’ death, his disciples turn their minds to a second appearance of their Lord and they gave to his death “the significance of a spiritual redemption—which had not previously entered their field of vision or that of Jesus Himself,”²⁶ continuing to preach about the Coming Kingdom because this was a good way to live without having to work hard. They stole Jesus’ body and started to proclaim his soon coming which is only an invention, a lie. They have created a new system, a new transcendental and universal Messianism. But everything is only an eschatological deception, because Jesus was only “a mere human afflicted by messianic illusions.”²⁷

Almost one hundred years later, interpreting Reimarus’ thinking system, Schweitzer consider that the philosopher “was the first to grasp the fact that the world of thought in which Jesus moved was essentially eschatological,”²⁸ and for him, Jesus was only “the final product of the eschatological and apocalyptic thought of Late Judaism,”²⁹ an earthly and political eschatology. In Schweitzer words:

²⁴ Ibid., 26.

²⁵ Ibid., 33.

²⁶ Ibid., 34.

²⁷ Manuel, “Hermann Samuel Reimarus”.

²⁸ Schweitzer, *The Quest...*, 36.

²⁹ Ibid., 37.

He [Reimarus] recognized that two systems of Messianic expectation were present side by side in Late Judaism. He endeavored to bring them into mutual relations in order to represent the actual movement of the history. In so doing he made the mistake of placing them in consecutive order, ascribing to Jesus the political Son-of-David conception, and to the Apostles, after His death, the apocalyptic system based on Daniel, instead of superimposing one upon the other in such a way that the Messianic King might coincide with the Son of Man, and the ancient prophetic conception might be inscribed within the circumference of the Daniel-descended apocalyptic, and raised along with it to the supersensuous plane.³⁰

Reimarus laid the foundation for Protestant criticism regarding the study of Jesus' life and he is the precursor of eschatological school of Johannes Weiss.³¹

Johannes Weiss (1863-1914) is considered to be “one of the founders of the eschatological movement in critical theology,”³² criticizing the liberal approach of Jesus' teaching. In one of his articles, David J. Hawkin summarizes Weiss's understanding of the Kingdom of God in following terms: “Weiss claimed that the Kingdom of God was not something which humanity could bring about through the practice of love for each other. In fact, it was not something which lay within the present historical order. It was rather a transcendental reality which would be initiated by God himself in the future.”³³

³⁰ Ibid., 38.

³¹ See also Chiricuță, *Parusia...*, 21. Between Reimarus and Weiss, Albert Schweitzer made in his book a wide exposition of other opinions about Jesus' life, analyzing different ideas of different scholars and theologians (rationalist's works - Johann Jakob Hess, Franz Volkmar Reinhard, Johann Gottfried Herder, Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus, Karl August Hase, Friedrich Ernst Daniel Schleiermacher, David Friedrich Strauss, etc.; fictitious works - Karl Friedrich Bahrtdt, Karl Heinrich Venturini, Charles Christian Hennell, August Friedrich Gfrörer; sceptical works – Bruno Bauer, Ernest Renan; liberal works - David Friedrich Strauss, Heinrich Julius Holtzmann, etc.) (See Schweitzer, *The Quest...*, 1911).

³² Rudolf Bultmann, “Foreword,” in Johannes Weiss, *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God* (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1985).

³³ Hawkin, David J. “Albert Schweitzer and the Interpretation of the New Testament,” in *Churchman*, vol. 125, Issue 4 (Winter 2011), 298.

Contemporary with Albert Schweitzer, he himself a critic of the “19th century immanentism and liberalism,”³⁴ they were the most representative members of the new eschatological school. As Albert Schweitzer puts into words, they tried to understand “what was the significance of eschatology for the mind of Jesus?”³⁵

The thesis of their eschatological school were the following: Jesus really believed that his Kingdom will come very soon; because of earthly disillusion, Jesus decided to conform to Jewish conception about Messiah who had to suffer, in order to bring the Kingdom closer; Jesus was waiting for his resurrection in order to be accepted as Messiah by the people, but because this did not happen, they postpone the Parousia for the end of the time; the Christianity came into being because of the apostles’ eschatological hope which created the vision of the resurrection; because of his imperative eschatological conception, Jesus was preaching only about this event, and not about social, or ethical values (even when he is talking about justice, love, etc.), his ethical system is only an interim ethical system designed to prepare the man for the Kingdom to come. The conclusion of the eschatological school is, in Schweitzer’s term, that Jesus was a great religious-moral personality who, by his eschatological expectation, founded the Messianic Kingdom, and his Parousia has a spiritual-moral character.³⁶

³⁴ A. L. Moore, *The Parousia in the New Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), 35. Hawkin declares that “Up to the time of Schweitzer Biblical studies was dominated by liberal theology. The emphasis in liberal theology was on human freedom. Liberals believed that humans had been ordained by God to use their free will to make the world a better place. This, they asserted, was the essence of Christianity: to proclaim the Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of all humanity, to love one another and in so doing to bring about the Kingdom on earth. Schweitzer’s book effectively brought an end to liberal theology.” (Hawkin, “Albert Schweitzer...”, 297).

³⁵ Schweitzer, *The Quest...*, 19.

³⁶ See Chiricuță, *Parusia...*, 22-30.

For both Weiss, and Schweitzer “apocalyptic was fundamental in Jesus’ teaching.”³⁷ George Eldon Ladd states that:

Schweitzer's interpretation involved three elements which must not be confused: (a) Apocalyptic is an essential element in Jesus' message of the Kingdom. (b) Jesus' message is exclusively eschatological. In no sense of the word could the Kingdom be interpreted as a present spiritual reality. It is the apocalyptic age to come. (c) Jesus thought that the Kingdom would come at once in his lifetime.³⁸

Weiss and Schweitzer’s names are bound to the concept of ‘consistent eschatology,’ or ‘thorough-going’³⁹ eschatology. In their view, Jesus intended to come back soon, in his disciples’ generation. Therefore there is no delay, and the fact that he couldn’t come in that generation was a disappointment not only for the disciples and for other believers, but also for Jesus himself.⁴⁰

Weiss and Schweitzer’s eschatology found the support of other further theologians, and Paul O’Callaghan consider that Weiss and Schweitzer’s studies (and not only theirs) “have had the merit of showing that, at least according to the witness of the New Testament, Christian life, spirituality, ethics, and missionary activities are deeply eschatological in character.”⁴¹

Realized Eschatology

George E. Ladd argues that “Not all scholars have been satisfied to accept Schweitzer's interpretation and to define the Kingdom either exclusively or essentially

³⁷ Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, 4.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁹ Hawkin, “Albert Schweitzer...”, 298.

⁴⁰ Moț, “Tema nou-testamentară...”, 2017. See also F. F. Bruce, “Eschatology,” in Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical dictionary of theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984).

⁴¹ Paul O'Callaghan, *Christ Our Hope: an Introduction to Eschatology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 49.

in apocalyptic term.”⁴² There are many theologians whose interpretation of the Kingdom is non-eschatological.

From such an interpretation of the Kingdom derives another type of eschatology, the so-called ‘realized eschatology’, which is associated with the name of Protestant theologian C. H. Dodd. It represents a reaction to Schweitzer’s ‘consistent eschatology,’ and an attempt to justify the imminent language of Jesus’ teachings.⁴³

This type of eschatology understands the teaching about the Kingdom to come as being already fulfilled in Jesus’ earthly ministry (“in the life, words, miracles, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ”⁴⁴). As Fred Sanders explain in one of his essays, “realized eschatology replaces ‘the end is near’ with ‘the end is here.’”⁴⁵ In Dodd’s view, Jesus’ expectations were not deceived as Schweitzer considers, but he founded during his life the Kingdom he was preaching about. The problem with this eschatological interpretation is that, because everything was done, from eschatological point of view, the future cannot bring anything new. This interpretation was not Dodd’s final view. He “has modified his view of a completely realized eschatology to admit that there is a residue of unrealized or futuristic eschatology.”⁴⁶

⁴² Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, 11.

⁴³ Moț, “Tema nou-testamentară...”, 2017. See also O’Callaghan, *Christ Our Hope*, 50; Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, 17 etc.

⁴⁴ O’Callaghan, *Christ Our Hope*, 50. See also Bruce, “Eschatology,” 364, etc. For Dodd, “Eschatology has to do not with the last things, temporally conceived, but with those things which possess finality and ultimacy of meaning. The Kingdom of God does not mean the eschatological order at the end of history, but the eternally present realm of God, The coming of the Kingdom means the entrance of the eternal into time, the confrontation of the finite by the infinite, the intrusion of the transcendental into the natural. The Kingdom of God is timeless, eternal, transcendental, and is therefore always near and always laying its demands upon men.” (Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, 17-18).

⁴⁵ Fred Sanders, “C. H. Dodd and Realized Eschatology,” in *The Scriptorium Daily*, April 7, 2009.

⁴⁶ Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, 20.

F. F. Bruce affirms that: “As time went on, Dodd made more room for a future consummation: what came to earth with Christ’s incarnation was finally decisive for the meaning and purpose of human existence, so that, at the ultimate winding up of history, humankind will encounter God in Christ.”⁴⁷

Dodd’s view is related to another two concepts, one of them introduced by Joachim Jeremias and called ‘the eschatology in process of realization’⁴⁸ – not yet realized but in process –, and another one introduced by J. A. T. Robinson and called ‘inaugurated eschatology’⁴⁹ (by coming on the earth, dying for the humanity, and resurrecting from death, Jesus only inaugurated the end time He preached about, but its fulfilment is still in the future).

Existentialist Eschatology

The concept of existentialist eschatology can be found in Rudolf Bultmann’s theology. For the German theologian, as for C. H. Dodd, the eschatology is linked with the present time. Bultmann and then his followers concluded that “Jesus’ main emphasis was not that of a future apocalyptic kingdom but of the immediate coming of this kingdom. Immediacy rather than eschatology became central.”⁵⁰ God come into an unmediated relationship with man and Jesus’ Second Coming happened only at a personal level.⁵¹

⁴⁷ F. F. Bruce, “Eschatology,” 364.

⁴⁸ See Bruce, “Eschatology,” 364; Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, 20.

⁴⁹ The concept was suggested for the first time by the Orthodox theologian G. Florovski in one of his articles, and it “implies that eschatology has indeed begun, but is by no means finished” (Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 17-18.). See also Bruce 364-365.

⁵⁰ Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, 8.

⁵¹ Moț, “Tema nou-testamentară...”, 2017.

For Bultmann, “existential significance replaced temporal reference in the definition of eschatology.”⁵² Every decisive decision of man is an eschatological one, because the “Eternal life is the life I receive now; judgment is the crisis in which I stand now, the end-time is the *kairos* in which the issue of life and death is being decided.”⁵³

Existentialist eschatology does not deal with the future or with the past. Everything that counts is the present. “The kingdom does not come from the outside, as it were, in a cosmic context [...] Rather it comes from within in the existential context of a radical decision of faith.”⁵⁴

Already and Not Yet Concept

Trying to solve the problem which involved our time and God’s eternity, Oscar Cullmann, one of the most famous theological minds of the last century, starts from his soteriological research, and argues that “Christian eschatology is characterized principally by an ‘already and not yet’ approach.”⁵⁵

His solution is a solution of compromise between a futuristic eschatology, and Dodd’s realized eschatology. For Cullmann, the Kingdom of God is in the same time here, partially coming, and in the future, partially future, because there are biblical evidences to sustain the two views.

Talking about Cullmann’s contribution and the new eschatological structure in his book *A theology of the New Testament*, George E. Ladd states that:

Jesus’ teaching about the Kingdom of God radically modifies the redemptive time line. The Old Testament and Judaism looked forward to a single day – the Day of

⁵² Carl E. Braaten, *History and hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), 166.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ O’Callaghan, *Christ Our Hope*, 52.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 54.

the Lord – when God will act to establish his reign on the earth [...] Cullmann argues that Christ has modified the time line by giving it a new center. It retained the same basic structure as in Judaism, but the center shifted. Cullmann has been justly criticized for overemphasizing the midpoint of history at the expense of the end.⁵⁶

Therefore, because this understanding of the kingdom in terms of ‘already and not yet,’ the spirit of expectation was kept alive between the Christians in the early church, although Jesus did not come as he had promised.⁵⁷ Citing theologians like G. C. Berkouwer, Joseph Coleson, Ben Witherington, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Richard Rice, Laurențiu Moț declares that Cullmann’s concept was the most convincing in the actual theological world although it is not the perfect solution because of the tensions between New Testament promises of nearness and the apparent delay of the Parousia.

Through all ages, the Kingdom of God was understood in both eschatological and non-eschatological terms. The theological points of view about eschatology presented above prove that in the theological world, the problem of the end of the world has at least two faces: on one hand, the attempts of the early Christians to predict a specific time for the Parousia and for the end of the world, and on the other hand modern attempts to explain the supposed delay of Christ’s Second Coming. In this case, a proper interpretation of the ambiguous verses in the Scriptures, is essential for understanding of such issues.

⁵⁶ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1993), 66.

⁵⁷ Moț, “Tema nou-testamentară...”, 2017.

CHAPTER 3

THE MEMBERS OF THE SANHEDRIN

A small number of religious leaders of Israel appreciated Jesus' teachings, understood them, and decided to follow them. During his public ministry, Jesus had to face many problems and conflicts because of his people's leaders (the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the teachers of the law, the elders of the people, the priests). These leaders played a major role in his condemnation and crucifixion. At the beginning of the first century, during Jesus' earthly life, because they were under Roman occupation, the importance of religious leaders for the people of Israel became much greater in the absence of political independence.¹

The Sanhedrin² is defined as a supreme Jewish Rabbinic council, court or tribunal in Jerusalem whose origins were related to Moses' seventy elders' council.³ This high court of justice dates back to the first century BC (Hellenistic Era) and lasted "during the Greek and Roman period."⁴ It was "dissolved in 66 C.E., four years

¹ In addition to that, because the Jewish state was a theocratic state, the jurisdiction was fulfilled in the name of God. "Because all the laws were given by God, all the offenses that violated them were considered religious offenses," says Ioan Fruma in the book *Procesul Mântuitorului*, citing Samuel Mayer. (Ioan Fruma and Grigorie T. Marcu, *Procesul Mântuitorului*, Studiu juridic și teologic (Suceava, 1997), 36.

² In English, is preferred the term Sanhedrin a Hebrew / Aramaic term. Its equivalent in Greek is Synedrium, coming from two words which mean "together" and "seat." The new form means "assembly". The term was borrowed into Aramaic. Sometime it is met in the form Synedrium, or Sanhedrim. See T. A. Burkill, "Sanhedrin," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible. An Illustrated Encyclopedia* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 214; *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. *Sanhedrin*.

³ Burkill, "Sanhedrin," 214.

⁴ Steven Barabas, "Sanhedrin," in Merrill C. Tenney (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987), 895.

before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 C. E.”⁵ It was also known as the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem, the Court of the Seventy, The council of Elders (gerousia).⁶ In its composition were wise men and a president, but this structure has varied and has changed over time.

There were two such institutions: the Great Sanhedrin⁷, composed of seventy members and a president; and other smaller courts of justice, composed of twenty-three members who were brought together in every town and were named Small Sanhedrin.⁸ The Great Sanhedrin judged more important cases: the idolatry of a whole nation, the false prophets, or the high priest.⁹ Other sources are talking about a Political Sanhedrin and a Religious Sanhedrin¹⁰, or about three courts: one specialized in religious matters and Temple rituals, another one for law enforcement; and the last one specialized in administrative matters.¹¹

The Bible is talking about the high priest as being the president of the Great Sanhedrin during the life of Jesus. The members were coming from “the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law” (Matt 16: 21). The chief priests were “the acting high priest, those who had been high priests, and members of the privileged

⁵ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s. v. *Sanhedrin*, 1013. See also Barabas, “Sanhedrin,” 896.

⁶ See Viviane Prager (coord.), *Dicționar enciclopedic de iudaism* (București: Editura Hasefer, 2000), 695.

⁷ After Hasmonaean victory, “The Great Sanhedrin was then instituted as a specialized body of Halakha to interpret Jewish law. Ritual matters of the Temple were left to the council of priests, and the government administration belonged to the monarchs and city officials in their executive boule (council)” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1013).

⁸ See Viviane Prager (coord.), *Dicționar enciclopedic de iudaism*, 695.

⁹ Fruma, Marcu, *Procesul...*, 37.

¹⁰ Wilhelm Bacher, Jacob Zallel Lauterbach, “Sanhedrin,” in *Jewish Encyclopedia*, electronic source on (<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com>)

¹¹ See Viviane Prager (coord.), *Dicționar enciclopedic de iudaism*, 696.

families from which the high priests were taken.”¹² The teachers of the law or the scribes “formed the Pharisaic element in the Sanhedrin.”¹³ The members of the third class, “the elders were the tribal and family heads of the people and the priesthood. They were for the most part, the secular nobility of Jerusalem.”¹⁴ The historian Josephus Flavius in one of his works says that “in the time of Christ the Sanhedrin was formally led by the Sadducean high priests, but practically ruled by the Pharisees.”¹⁵

In the time of Christ, the Sanhedrin was the religious body who exercised the civil, and also the criminal jurisdiction. It could judge even the kings and “had the right of capital punishment until about forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem. After that it could still pass, but not execute a sentence of death without the confirmation of the Roman procurator.”¹⁶ Haim Cohn affirms that “The Sanhedrin has never been a judicial instrument in the service of the Roman governor, it has not investigated and worked for the Roman tribunal, nor did he judge on behalf of the Roman governor.”¹⁷

There are only a few pieces of important information about the members of the Sanhedrin, the institution whose duty was to watch for the laws (both religious and civil) to be observed by the whole nation. Having this information we can understand easier the role the Sanhedrin played during Jesus’ trial.

¹² Steven Barabas, “Sanhedrin,” in Merrill C. Tenney (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987), 896.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Haim Cohn, *Arestarea, procesul și moartea lui Isus Hristos* (București: Editura Tess-Express, 1995), 48.

But before we move forward, it can be necessary to have a short overview of theological concepts like eschatology, Messiah and judgment as they were understood by the members of the Sanhedrin, in order to understand Jesus' words and his accusers' reaction.

Theological Aspects

The whole Jewish theology is centered on God's sovereignty, a concept "related in the Old Testament to Israel's past, present and future."¹⁸ But the different parties in Judaism, as Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Herodians, had different theological opinions. Because the first two of them are the most prominent, we will focus on their theological views.

Eschatology

The theologians agree that the eschatology is not only a part of the New Testament message, but of the Old Testament message too. From the very beginning, when the promise of a Redeemer was given in the Garden of Eden after the fall, people waited for its fulfilment. According to Hoekema, other eschatological realities the believers of Old Testament were waiting for in the future are: "the Kingdom of God, the new covenant, the restoration of Israel, the outpouring of the Spirit, the day of the Lord, and the new heavens and the new earth."¹⁹

The prophetic hope is a characteristic of Old Testament theology. Concerning this hope, Ladd affirms that "Although the Old Testament hope may be characterized as an eschatological hope, it also remains an earthly hope."²⁰

¹⁸ Moore, *The Parousia...*, 7.

¹⁹ Hoekema, *The Bible...*, 11.

²⁰ Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, 59.

Even if in the Old Testament the expression “Kingdom of God” does not exist, the idea can be found in the prophets’ writings.²¹ They were talking about a Kingdom of God which will come on earth (will take place in history) having a ruler from the Davidic root. Because this hope was not fulfilled they started to look for “an apocalyptic in breaking of God in the person of a heavenly Son of Man with a completely transcendental Kingdom ‘beyond history.’”²²

Having this Old Testament background, we can understand the beliefs of the Pharisees and Sadducees. On one hand, the Pharisees believed that there is a resurrection of the dead in a world to come. They believed “in immortality, angels and demons, spirits, and divine sovereignty. Expansions of such doctrines led to others. For example, belief in immortality resulted in expanded messianic and eschatological views.”²³

On the other hand, the Sadducees had a distinctive theology. J. Julius Scott states that they “were essentially secularists, a result of their exclusion of God (‘Fate’) from human affairs and their conviction that humans can expect nothing beyond this life.”²⁴

Messiah

When Jesus came, the Jewish people believed in two ages: this age, and the one to come. The former is the present sinful age, and the latter, the Messianic age

²¹ For the verses in the Scripture related to this concept see Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 58.

²² Ibid.

²³ J. Julius Scott, Jr., “Pharisees,” in Walter A. Elwell (ed.), *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Books, 1996).

²⁴ J. Julius Scott, Jr., “Sadducees,” in Walter A. Elwell (ed.), *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Books, 1996).

when sin would exist no longer and the conditions of Paradise would return—when the lion would eat straw like the cattle and the lion and the lamb would lie down peacefully together. With the birth of Christ, the whole time scheme shattered, for though the Messiah had arrived, the Messianic age as they conceived it did not come.²⁵

For most the Israelites, including the members of the Sanhedrin, Messiah was seen as “a providential Messenger, a political liberator, and a religious restorer.”²⁶ This was the reason why Jewish people together with their leaders failed to understand Jesus’ earthly mission and the essence of his teachings.

Judgment

There are many written studies about God’s judgement. Gerhard F. Hasel, in one of his articles, presents a comprehensive picture of the theology of God’s judgment in the Bible, stating that “The texts from Joel, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah and Malachi [and also Daniel] all speak of a universal judgment at the end-time in apocalyptic contexts.”²⁷

Because they believed in the life after death, the Pharisees believed also in the concept of divine judgment, when God will punish the sinners, and will reward the faithful people. Such an opinion was not shared by the Sadducees who did not believe in the life after death. For them, the soul disappears at death, therefore we cannot talk about punishment or reward received in the future after God’s judgment.

²⁵ Kubo, *God meets man...*, 83.

²⁶ Danielle Fouilloux, Anne Langlois, Alice Le Moigné, Françoise Spiess, Madeleine Thibault and Renée Trébuchon. *Dicționar cultural al Bibliei*, trad. Ana Vancu (București: Editura Nemira, 2006), 138. See also Viviane Prager (coord.), *Dicționar enciclopedic de iudaism*, 509-512.

²⁷ Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Theology of Divine Judgment in the Bible A Study of God's Past, Present, and Future Judgments and Their Implications for Mankind,” on <https://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/sites/default/files/pdf/judgment%20in%20bible.pdf>

In the same time, in their desire to be separated, detached from others, the Pharisees elevated the tradition above the law of God, the only standard of judgment. “Jesus condemns them, not for what they did, but for neglecting ‘the more important matters of the law justice, mercy and faithfulness.’”²⁸

²⁸ J. Julius Scott, Jr., “Pharisees.”

CHAPTER 4

MATTHEW 26: 64 – AN EXEGESIS

During his process before the Sanhedrin, Jesus remain silent in front of all the accusations. But when the high priest ask him to tell if he is the Messiah, the Son of God, Jesus not only gives an affirmative answer, but he adds some more information that are not too clear for those who try to find an answer at the question related with the time of the Second Coming.

“You have said so,” Jesus replied. “But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” (Matt 26:64)

What could Jesus’ words mean? He is addressing to his accusers, the whole Sanhedrin, who were looking for false evidences against him, telling them that they will see him sitting on his throne, and coming as a king. Does that mean that his return on the clouds of heaven would take place in that generation? Is Jesus speaking here about a very soon coming, an imminent Parousia, in his accusers’ generation so that they could see him coming? What exactly does Jesus state in this verse? Here are only some of the questions that this text rises in the mind of a researcher or in the mind of a reader who wants to understand the Bible and Jesus’ affirmations.

Matthew 26:64 in the Theological Literature

There are many aspects that can be studied in Matthew 26:64 (e.g. the divinity of Jesus, the Second Coming and the time of the end, the Judgment, etc.), therefore

there are commentators who emphasize more the first part of the verse, which talks about the confession of Jesus before the high priest, under the oath, that he is the Christ, the Messiah–Son of God.¹

The majority of the commentators emphasize, beside the aspect related to the divinity of Christ found in the first part of the verse, the events Jesus says will take place in the future, whether it is about an immediate future, the resurrection and the ascension of Christ, or a distant future, the Parousia of Jesus.² Turner is talking explicitly about resurrection in the following words: “The time frame implied in Matt. 26:64 is rather broad. Caiaphas himself will see the exaltation of Jesus when he is confronted with the reality of Jesus’ resurrection, which installs him as the glorious Son of Man.”³ H. F. Bayer argues that the resurrection and the early Parousia sayings are not interchangeable, but “Jesus predicted his immediate vindication / resurrection from rejection / death side by side with his imminent Parousia.”⁴

It is evident that “Of all the gospels Matthew has *the strongest eschatological emphasis.*”⁵ Matthew is so “interested in the second coming, and on occasion he slants sayings of Jesus in such a way that they refer much more definitely to the second coming than do the parallel sayings in the other gospels.”⁶ In order to sustain his

¹ See Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Commentary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Baker Book House, 1989), 756-757; *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990), 671; *Introducere și comentariu la Sfânta Scriptură*, Trad. P. Dumitru Groșan, vol. VIII (Galaxia Gutenberg, 2007), 322.

² Edward E. Hindson, Woodrow Michael Kroll (eds.) *The KJV Parallel Bible Commentary* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1994), 1956.

³ Turner, *Matthew*, 640.

⁴ H. F. Bayer, “Predictions of Jesus’ Passion and Resurrection,” in John B. Green, Scot McKnight (eds.) *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 632-633.

⁵ Barclay, *Introduction...*, 170.

⁶ *Ibid.*

affirmation, Barclay uses two verses from Matthew, one of them being Matthew 26:64, presented in contrast with the parallel verse in Luke, which says nothing about the second coming. For Matthew, the Second Coming is a sure event, one that will take place without doubt, and the verse in Matthew 26:64 seems to sustain the idea of a very soon appearance on the clouds of the heaven, in the generation of Jesus' listeners.

Citing some German theologians of the 19th century, Chiricuță states that "the coming" Matthew refers to in this verse could have a metaphorical sense, being an action or a manifestation of God's power, so it cannot refer to the Parousia at the end of the time.⁷ In others opinion, "the coming" can be a prophecy for the events that will take place in the near future, the destruction of Jerusalem, as an anticipation of the final events of the Parousia.⁸ Chiricuță's conclusion is that in this verse, Jesus, and the gospel writers are not talking about the end-time Parousia, and it will be wrong to believe this.⁹ In his book *Jerusalem and Parousia: Jesus' eschatological discourse in Matthew's Gospel*, Jeffrey A. Gibbs come to almost the same conclusion. He

sees a threefold fulfillment of Jesus' words to the high priest (26:64): the rending of the veil (27:51) and other signs at Jesus' death, the testimony of the guards at Jesus' tomb to the religious leaders (28:11-15), and the fall of Jerusalem. All signify that 'this man is seated at God's right hand and has been invested with power by the Ancient of Days, as Ps 110:1 and Dan 7:13-14 declare.'¹⁰

Another interesting idea belongs to an American theologian, William MacDonald, who argues that "In verse 64, the first address, in the second person

⁷ Chiricuță, *Parousia...*, 339.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 344.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Paul L. Beisel, "Gibbs, Jeffrey A., *Jerusalem and Parousia: Jesus' Eschatological Discourse in Matthew's Gospel*" (review), in *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, 66, No. 1, 2002, p. 88-90.

singular, is addressed to Caiaphas. The second and third are in the second person plural, referring to the Jews as representatives of those Israelites who will be alive during the glorious appearance of Christ when they will clearly see that He is the Son of God.”¹¹ In the light of this view, it seems that Jesus is not talking here about the members of the Sanhedrin he is addressing to, but about their descendants who will live at the end of the time and will see Jesus coming on the clouds.

Some commentators seem to limit this verse at the idea of judgment and they are talking about it in general terms. It will be indeed a day when “Jesus will be the Judge and Caiaphas the culprit,”¹² but this doesn’t solve the problem of the immediateness of Jesus’ return as it appears in Jesus’ words. Every Christian agrees that there will be a time, in the future, when every people should stand in front of the great Judge—Jesus Christ—seeing him and receiving the reward for his own acts.

Matthew 26:64 in Light of the Synoptic Gospels

The Synoptic Gospels describe the life of Jesus almost in the same way. “The word *synoptic* means able to be seen together; and it comes from the fact that it is possible to set these gospels down in parallel columns and to look at them together; and when that is done the similarity becomes even more impressive.”¹³ The first three – Matthew, Mark and Luke – have many similarities, but also many differences. When we study them in connection with one another, the picture becomes clearer.

¹¹ See Romanian edition of William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995) – *Comentar la Noul Testament* (Bielefeld: Christliche Literatur-Verbreitung, 1998), 124 (electronic source).

¹² Archibald Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1985), 218. See also Charles H. Talbert, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 296-297; Carl F. H. Henry (ed.), *The Biblical Expositor. The Living Theme of the Great Book*, vol. III (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company, 1960), 68-69.

¹³ William Barclay, *Introduction to the First Three Gospels* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 82.

Traditionally, the Gospel of Matthew was considered to be the first written document, until the end of the 18th century, when Gottlob Christian Storr, a Protestant theologian, advanced the idea that the Gospel of Mark was written first.¹⁴ Therefore, the Markan priority hypothesis represent a predominant view in the actual Protestant world.

Living in almost the same time with Storr, another scholar, Johann Jakob Griesbach proposed the so-called one document theory. In his opinion, “the gospels were probably composed in the sequence Matthew, Luke, Mark, that Luke used Matthew as a source, and that Mark used both Matthew and Luke as sources.”¹⁵

The two-source or two-documents theory states that there is another document Matthew and Luke used together with Mark to write their Gospels,¹⁶ the so-called source Q, which is “at least in Protestant circles, the standard way of expanding the common teaching material in Matthew and Luke.”¹⁷

Arguing for Matthew’s priority, Chiricuță states that “the verse in Matthew contain the most difficult redaction,” and “the most difficult redaction is usually the most original.”¹⁸

Beyond all of these opinions, talking about the trial of Jesus, Gerard S. Sloyan affirms in one of the notes from his book: “Even if one should opt for the priority of Matthew, rather than of Mark, as a few do, it makes little difference in the

¹⁴ David J. Neville, *Mark's gospel-- prior or posterior? : a reappraisal of the phenomenon of order* (London; New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), x. See also David L. Turner, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 6-7.

¹⁵ Richard P. Thompson and Thomas E. Phillips (eds.), *Literary studies in Luke-Acts : essays in honor of Joseph B. Tyson* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 12.

¹⁶ David E. Garland, *Reading Matthew: a literary and theological commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Pub., 2001), 3.

¹⁷ Barkley, *Introduction to the First Three Gospels*, 96.

¹⁸ Chiricuță, *Parousia...*335.

Passion section, since Mark and Matthew follow basically the same lines of development, compared with the rather different accounts in Luke and John.”¹⁹

In other versions of the Bible there are some differences for the verse in Matthew 26:64. In English Standard Version, New English Translation (NET), and International Standard Version the form of the verse is almost the same. The differences are minor: instead of adverb *so*, NET uses the pronoun *yourself*, and instead of the conjunction *but*, the adverb *nevertheless*. The expression *from now on* is replaced by the adverb *hereafter* in King James Version, New King James Version and 21st Century King James Version, or *henceforth* in American Standard Version. An interesting translation of this adverb is offered by Living Bible which uses the expression *in the future* instead of this adverbs. In other languages, in French for example, the expression *from now on* is translated as *from today* (désormais – Louis Segond), or *starting from now* (à partir de maintenant – La Bible du Semeur; de ahora en adelante – Nueva Biblia al Dia). Searching other versions and also the manuscripts (codex), Petre Chiricuță declares that “there are only few variants, which did not influence the meaning at all, or they make too little difference.”²⁰

The information in Matthew 26:64 is also found in the other two synoptic gospels. In the gospel according to Mark the verse is almost the same, missing only the time related elements, the adverbs: “I am,”²¹ said Jesus. “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” (Mk 14: 62). As in the Matthean version, here are presented the actions the

¹⁹ Gerard S. Sloyan, *Jesus on trial: A study of the Gospels*, second edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 121.

²⁰ Chiricuță, *Parousia...*, 335.

²¹ The translation follow the Greek version of the verse. See Alexander Balmain Bruce, *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 320.

Son takes (he is sitting, he is coming), and the actions the accusers take (they will see Jesus).

In the last gospel, of Luke, the only action is that of the Son of Man. The action of the accusers the other gospels refer to is missing here: “But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.” (Lk 22: 69). In the same time, the last gospel’s writer says nothing about the coming on the clouds of heaven, and in this way even if he is using the elements of time again – the adverb “hereafter” –, we cannot use the verse in the debate about the time of the Second Coming of Jesus.

In his intervention in Matthew 26: 64, Jesus makes an allusion to two messianic passages from the Old Testament. One of them is found in Psalm 110:1 – “The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for your feet’” –, and the other one, in Daniel 7:13 – “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days, and was led into his presence.” The first passage in Psalms is talking about the sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One. The second one, is Daniel vision of the one like a Son of Man who was coming with the clouds of heaven.

Talking about the biblical Old Testament references that are used by Matthew here, Turner affirms that it is “an unambiguous biblical citation that combines Ps 110:1 and Dan 7:13 to the effect that he is indeed the glorious Son of Man who will come from the right hand of Power.”²² He is also citing Blomberg who considers Matthew 26:64 as “Christological climax of the Gospel thus far.”²³

²² Turner, *Matthew*, 640.

²³ C. L. Blomberg, *Matthew*. New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 403, apud Turner, 640.

The Meaning of Jesus' Sayings

Although the focus of this study is not on theological information founded in the first part of the verse, it can be emphasized here the relationship between this part and the rest of the verse. The relationship between the two parts is made by conjunction “but” in New International Version (NIV) translation.

“But”

In the translation we used here (NIV), the two parts are linked by the coordinating conjunction “but” which usually is an expression of opposition. This is the first word Jesus uses to introduce his last words before the Sanhedrin. Talking about the first part of the verse, Frederick Dale Bruner affirms that the answer of Jesus, “those are your words,” (or “you have said so” in NIV translation) “(1) is not a *negation* (‘No I am not; you simply say I am’); (2) it is not an absolute affirmation (‘Yes, you have said it exactly’), but (3) it is a qualified affirmation: ‘There is truth in what the high priest has said, but he must take responsibility for the way he interprets it.’”²⁴ According to this interpretation, using the word “but,” the form preferred not only by NIV, but by many other translations of the Bible, Jesus could emphasize that, while the high priest express something he doesn’t believe even it is true, what follows is a really important matter not only for the present, but for the future also, a matter that concerns all the people. It can also express the changing of accent, from “you” singular, to “you” plural. Jesus’ last words are not only for his interlocutor—the high priest who is addressing the questions—, but they have to reach everybody in the council, every member of the Sanhedrin.

²⁴ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2004), 685

Not every translation uses the conjunction “but” at this point. Some translations are using the conjunction “and” which doesn’t express opposition but continuation, connecting elements of the same kind.²⁵

Some French or German translations, are using the expression “moreover,” or “what is more,”²⁶ which seems to strengthen the opposition between the two parts of the verse because the information added by Jesus is even more astonishing and incredible for these people who were waiting for another kind of Messiah and another kind of Parousia. In *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, Alexander Balmain Bruce explains that “πλὴν not = ‘nevertheless,’ but rather = nay more: I have something more startling to tell you. What follows describes the future of the Son of Man in apocalyptic terms, and is meant to suggest the thought: ‘the time is coming when you and I shall change places; I then the Judge, you the prisoners at the bar.’”²⁷

Beside the interpretation of this conjunction, here are at least two elements in the verse not easy to be understood at first sight: the expression ‘from now on’, and the verb ‘to see’.

“From Now On”

The expression ‘from now on’– Ἄπ’ ἄρτι in Greek, also translated as ‘hereafter,’ or ‘henceforth’–makes the connection between the two parts of the verse

²⁵ See Spanish translation, for example: “Jesús le dijo: Tú lo has dicho; y aun os digo, que desde ahora habéis de ver al Hijo del hombre sentado a la diestra de la potencia, y que viene en las nubes del cielo.” (Jubilee Bible 2000)

²⁶ “Jésus lui répondit: Tu l’as dit toi-même. De plus, je vous le déclare: A partir de maintenant, vous verrez le Fils de l’homme siéger à la droite du Tout-Puissant et venir en gloire sur les nuées du ciel.” (La Bible du Semeur). “Jesus spricht zu ihm: Du hast es gesagt! Überdies sage ich euch: Künftig werdet ihr den Sohn des Menschen sitzen sehen zur Rechten der Macht und kommen auf den Wolken des Himmels!” (Schlachter 2000).

²⁷ See Alexander Balmain Bruce, “The Synoptic Gospels,” in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, vol. 1 (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1897), 320.

in Matthew 26:64. Some suggest that it does not mean ‘at some time in the future,’ but ‘from now onwards,’²⁸ including the present time of the speaker.²⁹ Other translations of the Bible, and also other commentators, are not satisfied with this interpretation because “it is not easy to understand how it can be applied to what they (Jesus addressees those present: [...] ‘you,’ plural) ‘will see’.”³⁰ Therefore, a better solution in other’s opinion is to understand and to translate the phrase as pointing to the future, because “To insist that the expression must be taken to mean ‘from now on’ overlooks the fact the neither the friends of Jesus nor his enemies could see the change of which he speaks beginning ‘now.’ While seeing the roots of the change in what was to happen immediately, it appears that the complete fulfilment of what Jesus is saying belongs to the future.”³¹

In the Seventh-day Adventist literature, the expression is interpreted as pointing out at the future when Jesus will come to judge the earth. But saying that “in the future the members of the Sanhedrin will see him,”³² or that “Jesus points to the future, when, as Judge of the universe, He will appear to ‘give every man according as his work shall be’”³³ it is not enough, and it does not resolve the problem of the time in Jesus’ sayings.

²⁸ R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew. An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.), 256.

²⁹ Petre Chiricuță argues that this adverb specifies a close moments that is almost confusing with the present (Chiricuță, *Parousia...*, 338).

³⁰ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 800.

³¹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans; Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 684.

³² George R. Knight, *The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier. Matthew. The Gospel of the Kingdom* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1994), 265.

³³ Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia, revised edition (Washington, DC, Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1976), 530.

In her book *The Desire of the Ages*, Ellen White, referring to this episode, is talking also about the future, and about Caiaphas who “did not wish to believe that in future he would receive sentence according to his work,”³⁴ without specifying what really means ‘in the future,’ and saying nothing about Jesus’ reference to the act of seeing.

But the meaning of the expression Ἄπ’ ἄρτι is related with the continuity of the time. In this case placing the actions in the future cannot be connected with this expression related with the time. Therefore we need to search for another explanation.

The authors of *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* state that “Word division was generally not customary in writing in the period of the rise of the NT [...] There is no word division in the oldest extant MSS; it remains imperfectly developed even in late MSS (to xv AD),” and therefore “word-unity in Greek as in all languages is not something which is obvious in all instances. Words originally separated gradually amalgamated without the moment of transition being recognized.”³⁵ The conclusion is that in Matthew 26:64 the expression *ap’ arti* is in fact a single word. The same authors add that

Ἄπ’ ἄρτι ‘from now on’ is in at least some places to be taken as ἀπαρτί ... ‘exactly, certainly’. A comparison of the equivocal ἀπαρτί of Mt 26:29, 64 with its Synoptic and Johannine parallels leads to far reaching conclusions about a source common to Mt and Jn 13:19, 1:52: ἀπαρτί = ἀμύην ‘definitely’.³⁶

This explanation seems to bring more light in the interpretation of this expression in order to understand the real meaning of Christ’s saying. Jesus is not talking about time in this verse. He wants to emphasize the certainty of what will

³⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of the Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1940), 708.

³⁵ Friedrich Blass, Albert Debrunner, and Robert Walter Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 8.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

happen in the future. If we are to relate with the first part of the verse, Jesus is opposing here the uncertainty and unbelief of the high priest expression and his words that will be fulfilled assuredly.

“You Will See”

The expression presented above is closely related with the following verb, *to see*³⁷, used with the form of the future tense of indicative, for the second person, plural: “from now on you will/shall see”. The pronoun refers to the people in the audience, in this case the high priest and the chief priests of the Sanhedrin, and it implies that they will be alive to see Jesus coming on the clouds of heaven. If the problem of time is solved with the interpretation of the previous expression as a single word expressing the certainty, the interpretation of Jesus’ affirmation that his audience will see him coming back is still a problem to be solved.

One of the solution proposed by the commentators for the problem raised by the verb *to see* is to understand it not as a “physical or spiritual seeing,” but as an “experimental perception.”³⁸ Lenski affirms that “In the miracles occurring at the time of his death, they shall begin to see, in his resurrection likewise, and thus onward in every manifestation of his power, including especially the destruction of Jerusalem and of the Jewish nation.”³⁹ Bruner adds that the seeing could refer to the signs around the crucifixion that the Sanhedrin could have seen, or to the conversion of some people during that events (Joseph of Arimathea, the soldiers), or it is not about seeing

³⁷ In Greek there are used different verbs according with the translations: *optanomai, horao*. The same verb in Greek is used in Revelation 1:7.

³⁸ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 1065.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

him, but a kind of ‘you shall see,’⁴⁰ etc. In the same direction, Moore points out that for “those who find here no reference to the Parousia” the verb *to see* “refers to a spiritual experience and must not be taken literally,”⁴¹ because, adds Moore citing a French author, the verb doesn’t mean all the time ‘to see with your eyes’.

Another interpretation very convincing is to understand the verse “as referring not to the imminent seeing, but to the imminent *sitting* of the Son of Man at God’s right hand, which will take place in the immediate future in the resurrection of Jesus.”⁴²

Even it seems to add more information, the affirmation in *The Pulpit Commentary* that “the representatives of Israel, shall see the events about to be consummated, the preludes of the great assize, and the coming of Messiah’s kingdom”⁴³ is still ambiguous.

In order to understand what Jesus wanted to say in Matthew 26:64, we have to analyze another verse in the Bible which brings together all the elements presented in Matthew: the time (future), the actions (to come and to see), and the same characters (the people who condemn Jesus and Jesus himself).

Revelation 1:7, the first part, states: “‘Look, he is coming with the clouds,’ and ‘every eye will see him, even those who pierced him.’” The verb *to see*

⁴⁰ Bruner, *Matthew*, 687-689. See also Chiricuță, *Parousia...*, 343.

⁴¹ A. L. Moore, *The Parousia in the New Testament*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum (Leiden: A. J. Brill, 1966), 140.

⁴² Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 800.

⁴³ H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (eds.), *The Pulpit Commentary*, vol. 22 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers), 4.

used here is also at the future tense, the form “frequently used in introducing allusions to Dan 7:13,”⁴⁴ the Old Testament verse Matthew alludes too.

It is well known that the Second Coming of Jesus will be an event visible for all the inhabitants of the earth. But what does the verse want to say talking about the people who pierced Jesus? Many commentators affirm that ‘those who pierced him’ is not necessary an allusion to the members of Sanhedrin, but includes all the people in the world, along the centuries, who reject Jesus and ‘pierce’ him with their indifference and evil actions.⁴⁵

In the Adventist interpretation, the expression in Revelation refers to the people who condemned Jesus, the high priest and the members of Sanhedrin. The Second Coming is the moment of the resurrection of the believers, but with them will be resurrected also Jewish leaders who played a considerable role in the crucifixion of Jesus.⁴⁶ Ellen White affirmations are very specific in this direction:

Those who have acted the most prominent part in the rejection and crucifixion of Christ come forth to see Him as He is, and those who have rejected Christ come up and see the saints glorified, and it is at that time that the saints are changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and are caught up to meet their Lord in the air. The very ones who placed upon Him the purple robe and put the crown of thorns upon His brow, and those who put the nails through His hands and feet, look upon Him and bewail.—Manuscript Releases 9:252 (1886)⁴⁷

The other verb which describe the actions of Jesus is the verb *to sit* and it is related with the event of the Second Coming. Jesus is seen at the right hand of God

⁴⁴ David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 1997), 55.

⁴⁵ See Aune, *Revelation...*, 56; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 72-73; H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (eds.), *The Pulpit Commentary*, vol. 22 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers), 4; Jacques B. Doukhan, *Enigmele Bibliei – Daniel și Apocalipsa* (Pantelimon: Viață și Sănătate, 2013), 218-219.

⁴⁶ See also *Handbook of Seventh-Day Theology* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 349: Between the various resurrections found in the New Testament, we find also “The special resurrection of those who crucified Christ to see him come.”

⁴⁷ In Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events*, 275.

either standing, or sitting. “Sitting at the right hand of God is the usual attitude ascribed to our Lord in token of his victorious rest, and waiting for the day of judgment.”⁴⁸ The sitting of Jesus means that he finished his work and after the finish of his work he will come back. Even this verb is referring to the time of Jesus’ Second Coming when he will come as king to take his kingdom.

⁴⁸ H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (eds.), *The Pulpit Commentary*, vol. 18 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers), 221.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

This study has started from a legitimate question that may arise in the mind of a Bible reader or in the mind of a researcher when approach the chapter 26, verse 64 in Matthew's gospel: "Are Jesus talking here about a very soon coming in glory in order to be seen by his judges during their lifetime?" Although usually Jesus is using the indefinite adverb "soon" to describe his Second Coming, in this verse he seems to be more precisely indicating the exact time: the members of the Sanhedrin's generation. So the study has explored this verse in the light of historical events, theological interpretation and biblical exegesis.

Because the essential aspect here is related to the subject of the time, the first main chapter of the study is a brief review of the problem concerning the time of the Parousia and the date-settings. It demonstrates that throughout history, based on various methods, people have made serious efforts to calculate and predict the time of the end. Not only members of the clergy (Apostolic and Church Fathers, reformers, theologians, etc.) showed interest for this subject, but also the lay people. The interest for eschatology materialized over the years in several theological concepts as: consistent eschatology, realized eschatology, existentialist eschatology, and already and not yet concept. All of them are advancing different opinions in order to explain Jesus' emphasis on "the immediate coming of this kingdom," as Bultmann puts into words.

In order to understand Jesus' sayings it is very important to know their context. The Sanhedrin, the council that judged and condemned Christ, and the place where the words in verse 64 are spoken, express Jewish understanding of theological issues like Messianism, the eschatology and judgment. For them, Messiah was first of all an earthly liberator, a warrior who will establish again the pride of Jewish people defeated by Roman occupation. This new Rabi, who pretended to be the Son of God they were waiting for, had nothing to do with their expectations. More than that, the members of the council had different theological views about the age to come, about the resurrection, etc. Therefore, Jesus' words, even worthy to be believed, couldn't change anything in his audience, but to increase their wrath and to fasten the decision for condemnation.

The verse in Matthew chapter 26 is part of a series of difficult verses. For some of them, the reader (believer or scholar) needs more than hope, wisdom and faith to understand them. If they are taken off their context, or from the general context of the entire Bible, the understanding becomes even more complicated. Therefore, even though many researchers have written many pages about Matt 26:64, their explanations are not always satisfactory, as the review of theological literature concerning it proves. But the correct understanding of such a verse can change our relationship with the Bible, and our image of the end of time or the time of the end.

The exegetical interpretation in this study focused on three expressions considered to be of great importance for understanding: "but," "from now on," and "you will see." The conjunction "but" seems to emphasize the shift from a person to person dialogue, to a dialogue between Jesus and the entire audience. It also places the accent on the certainty of Jesus' sayings compared with the high priest expression. The Greek term for this conjunction can be also translated as "moreover," a translation

which doesn't nullify the opposition between the first part of the verse and the second one, but strengthens it.

A very important place in the argumentation is held by the expression "from now on." Addressing his accusers, Jesus uses in Matthew 26:64 eschatological language. But although he is talking about his Second Coming on the clouds of heaven, he did not intend to say that it will happen in that generation. There is a gap between the generation of his accusers, and 'the coming on the clouds of heaven'. In fact, Jesus says nothing about the time of his return. He is trying to convince the audience that they will certainly see him coming as a king. In an atmosphere of doubt, when his divinity is questioned, Jesus Christ emphasize that there will be a day when his accusers will see him again in another posture, and their places will be changed: they will be the judged, and Jesus will be the Judge.

The central point of Jesus' message in Matt 26: 64, is not related with the time when the event of Parousia will happen. He states that the event is sure, as sure as their Scriptures, and He infers that his accusers will be resurrected at the Second Coming in order to see him coming as king.

The last conclusion of this study is that Jesus doesn't contradict his own words that nobody knows the hour of the Second Coming. No matter when it happens, the Parousia will be a great event seen not only by the faithful ones, but also by the most vehement accusers of Jesus.

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