

THE LAST DAYS  
ACCORDING  
TO JESUS

WHEN DID JESUS SAY  
HE *Would* RETURN?

R. C. SPROUL



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To Garrett Brown



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# INTRODUCTION

You will not have gone through the cities of Israel  
before the Son of Man comes.

Matthew 10:23

Jesus of Nazareth was a false prophet!” This sentiment expresses a view of Christ that goes beyond the borders of slander to flirt with the supreme form of blasphemy from which there is no recovery. It peers into the abyss inhabited by legions of the damned.

Many who shrink from affirming the full deity of Christ hedge their bets by applying the honorific “Prophet” to his name. Few are bold enough in their unbelief to hurl against him the scurrilous epithet “false prophet.” In Israel the term *false prophet* signaled a warrant for death by stoning. The false prophet was a scourge to the community precisely because he was guilty of mixing dross with the gold of God’s truth, substituting the counterfeit for the genuine, the lie

for the truth, and misleading the people of God, sometimes fatally.

The false prophet in Israel was detected by his making future predictions that failed to come to pass. This was the acid test to expose the dreamer who claimed the authority of the divine oracle to sanction erroneous pronouncements. God was enlisted as an ally for disinformation, indeed, claimed as the source or fountain of the poisonous lie. To preface one's declaration with the claim "Thus saith the Lord" was to claim divine inspiration for a mere human opinion, to grasp for infallibility that is not the province of uninspired men.

The charge of false prophecy against Jesus is not made lightly by sober men. The consequences of such calumny are too severe.

It takes a brash or supremely confident critic to risk this type of judgment. Such a man was Bertrand Russell. Russell distinguished himself as a world-class philosopher and mathematician. He attained peerage in the British realm for his many accomplishments. He was frequently in the news for his passive resistance to war, particularly nuclear war. Celebrated as one of the leading intellectuals of his era, Russell was taken very seriously by the intelligentsia.

## Russell's Rejection of Christ

Russell's little book *Why I Am Not a Christian*<sup>1</sup> set forth his polemic against religion in general and Christianity in particular. He was convinced that religion has had an evil influence on human civilization. "The question of the truth of a religion is one thing, but the question of its usefulness is

another,” he wrote. “I am as firmly convinced that religions do harm as I am that they are untrue.”<sup>2</sup>

Though Russell hedges his bets a little by declaring his general respect for the moral character of Jesus, he does raise objections to Jesus’s recorded behavior at certain points. I stress the point of “recorded behavior” because Russell was skeptical regarding the biblical account of the life and teaching of Christ. “Historically it is quite doubtful,” he says, “whether Christ ever existed at all, and if he did we do not know anything about him, so that I am not concerned with the historical question, which is a very difficult one.”<sup>3</sup>

Russell continues: “I am concerned with Christ as he appears in the Gospels, taking the Gospel narrative as it stands, and there one does find some things that do not seem to be very wise. For one thing, he certainly thought that his second coming would occur in clouds of glory before the death of all the people who were living at that time.”<sup>4</sup>

Russell cites various texts of the New Testament to prove his point: “There are a great many texts that prove that. He says, for instance, ‘Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come’ (Matt. 10:23). Then he says, ‘There are some standing here which shall not taste death till the Son of Man comes into his kingdom’ (Matt. 16:28); and there are a lot of places where it is quite clear that he believed that his second coming would happen during the lifetime of many then living. That was the belief of his earlier followers, and it was the basis of a good deal of his moral teaching. . . . In that respect, clearly he was not so wise as some other people have been, and he was certainly not superlatively wise.”<sup>5</sup>

One of Russell’s chief criticisms of the Jesus portrayed in the Gospels is that Jesus was wrong with respect to the

timing of his future return. At issue for Russell is the time-frame reference of these prophecies. Russell charges that Jesus failed to return during the time-frame he had predicted.

There is irony in Russell's negative polemic. One of the most important proofs of Christ's character and the Bible's divine inspiration is Jesus's astonishingly accurate prediction of the destruction of the temple and the fall of Jerusalem, prophecies contained in the Olivet Discourse. There can be little doubt that the biblical record of this prediction antedates the events themselves. It is now almost universally acknowledged that the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke were written before AD 70.

Christ's prophecies in the Olivet Discourse differ sharply from ancient prophecies like those of the Oracle of Delphi, which were exercises in the art of studied ambiguity. They left fulfillment somewhat open ended, and they were capable of disparate interpretation. These oracles are not unlike the predictions found in modern daily horoscopes, which are sufficiently broad or ambiguous to allow for accidental fulfillment.

Nor can Jesus's concrete predictions be attributed to educated guesses or the insight of a futurist. To first-century Jews it was unthinkable that such catastrophic events as the destruction of the Herodian temple, the devastation of the holy city of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the Jewish people to the four corners of the earth could take place in the foreseeable future. Such events were eminently not foreseeable, save to one who had information from the omniscient God himself.

So the very prophecy that should confirm both the credentials of Jesus and the inspiration of Scripture is, ironically, the prophecy used by critics like Russell to debunk both Jesus

and the Bible. Proof for the truth of Scripture and Christ becomes proof for the falsehood of both. As I shall presently endeavor to show, the skepticism expressed by Russell on these matters is by no means limited to him, but is the axe that is ground by a host of higher-critical scholars of the Bible. It would not be an overstatement to suggest that the chief ground for the radical criticism of modern biblical scholarship, which has resulted in a wholesale attack on the trustworthiness of Scripture and a far-reaching skepticism of our ability to know anything about the real historical Jesus, is the thesis that the Gospels' records of Jesus's predictions contain glaring errors and gross inaccuracies.

The main problem with Jesus's predictions in the Olivet Discourse is that they include not only predictions regarding Jerusalem and the temple, which did come to pass with astonishing accuracy, but also predictions of his own coming in glory, or his parousia. It is these predictions regarding Jesus's return on which Russell seized for fodder for his negative apologia. It is tempting to dismiss Russell lightly with the charge that, though he was erudite and astute in at least two major academic disciplines, he was not a trained or skilled exegete of Scripture. When he expressed his criticisms of the biblical text, he was speaking outside the field of his expertise. The problem, however, is that Russell's is not a lone voice in recent history. His criticisms are echoed by a multitude of highly learned specialists in the field of biblical studies.

I must include at this point a personal note. My own academic training took place for the most part at institutions of higher learning that are not identified with conservative or evangelical Christianity. One of my chief professors in college was a doctoral student under Rudolf Bultmann. In

seminary I was exposed daily to critical theories espoused by my professors regarding the Scripture. What stands out in my memory of those days is the heavy emphasis on biblical texts regarding the return of Christ, which were constantly cited as examples of errors in the New Testament and proof that the text had been edited to accommodate the crisis in the early church caused by the so-called parousia-delay of Jesus. In a word, much of the criticism leveled against the trustworthiness of Scripture was linked to questions regarding biblical eschatology.

### Jesus's Time-Frame References

The time-frame references of the Olivet Discourse are prominent in the debate over the integrity of both Christ and the Bible. Mark reports this discourse as follows:

Then as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!" And Jesus answered and said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

Now as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?" And Jesus, answering them, began to say: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled; for such things must happen, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These are the

beginnings of sorrows. But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. And you will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations. But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all men for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

“But when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not” (let the reader understand), “then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. And let him who is on the housetop not go down into the house, nor enter to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his garment. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those with nursing babies in those days! And pray that your flight may not be in winter. For in those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be. And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake, whom he chose, he shortened the days. Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or, ‘Look, he is there!’ do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand.

“But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in heaven will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds

with great power and glory. And then he will send his angels, and gather together his elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven.

“Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the very doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place . . .” (Mark 13:1–30).

The most critical portion of this text is Jesus’s declaration that “this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place” (13:30). When Russell pointed to this pronouncement, he made two important assumptions. The first is that “this generation” refers to a specific time-frame that would be roughly forty years. That is, the terminus for the fulfillment of this prophecy is forty years. If Jesus made this announcement sometime between AD 30 and 33, then the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 would fit perfectly within the time-frame. The second assumption made by Russell (and others) is that the phrase “all these things” includes all of the subject matter of his future prediction, including his coming in clouds of power and glory.

Given these assumptions, the *prima facie* reading of the text leads to the conclusion that, within the time-frame of forty years, not only will the temple and Jerusalem be destroyed, but also the parousia (or coming) of Christ will take place. Since, again according to Russell, the parousia did not take place within this time-frame, both Christ and the Bible are wrong.

Both of Russell’s assumptions have been challenged in manifold ways, as we will see later. For now, however, we are

focusing on the first-glance reading of the text that is held by Russell and others. It is my fear that evangelicals today tend to underplay the significance of the problems inherent in Russell's assumptions. Too often we take a facile approach to the problem that reveals our failure to feel the weight of such objections. This becomes particularly acute when we realize the extent to which these problems have contributed to the entire modern controversy over the inspiration of Scripture and the person and work of Christ. To gain a better feel for the problem, we must take a short reconnaissance of modern views of eschatology.

## The Crisis in Eschatology

Though many of the critical views of Scripture prevalent today originated in the Enlightenment, characterized by a reliance on rationalistic and naturalistic philosophy, they did not reach their acme (or nadir) until the development of so-called liberalism that held sway in the nineteenth century. This era was marked by the dominance of Hegelian philosophy, which provided an evolutionary view of history that worked itself out in terms of a dialectical process. As distinguished from the Marxist view of "dialectical materialism," Hegelianism has been dubbed "dialectical idealism."

If there was a buzzword in nineteenth-century theoretical thought, it was the word *evolution*. The idea of evolution was applied not simply to biology, but also to other fields of inquiry. Political theory saw the application of Herbert Spencer's "social Darwinianism," for example. It is important to realize that evolution encompasses chiefly a theory of history whereby not only biological entities undergo a progressive

development from the simple to the complex, but also other entities undergo a similar sort of progressive change.

Married to evolutionary philosophy, the Religious Historical School of the nineteenth century considered it axiomatic that all religions go through evolutionary stages of development. They move from the simple to the complex. In this scheme all religions begin with primitive forms of animism and move to a more complex level of sophisticated monotheism. Nineteenth-century scholars such as Julius Wellhausen applied this scheme to the Old Testament. They believed Israelite religion evolved through four distinct stages: animism, polytheism, henotheism, and monotheism (*see* fig. 0.1).

Animism, the most primitive form, sees objects of nature as being inhabited by evil spirits. Hints of this were seen in the speaking serpent of Genesis 3 and in Abraham's conversing with angels by the Oaks of Mamre. Critics argued that Abraham was having a dialogue with spirits that inhabited the trees.

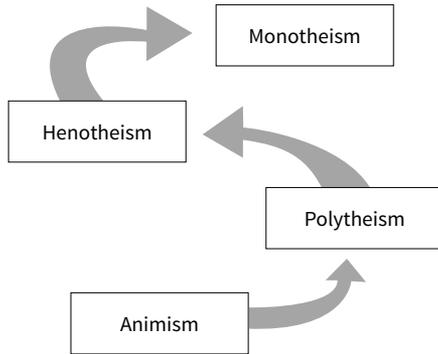
Polytheism affirms the existence of many gods and goddesses who have designated functions such as those in Roman mythology and the Greek pantheon. Here we find deities of war, wisdom, love, agriculture, and so forth. Polytheism was alleged to exist in the Old Testament, particularly with reference to the "E-Source" of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible), in which the chief name for God was *Elohim*, which has a plural ending.

Henotheism, a transition stage between polytheism and monotheism, is the idea that each nation or ethnic group is ruled by a single god. So there are as many gods as there are nations or ethnic groups. This was alleged to be the case in Israelite religion, which pitted the national god, Yahweh, against the gods of other nations, such as Baal (Judg. 2:11–13) or Dagon (Judg. 16:23).

Finally the idea of monotheism emerged (relatively late in Jewish history), which viewed God as the Lord of all creation.

Fig. 0.1

**The Evolution of Israel's Religion  
according to the Religious Historical School**



With the development of nineteenth-century liberalism came a serious effort to modify or revise the essence of biblical religion. Central to this reconstruction of the Christian faith was the attempt to redefine the biblical concept of the kingdom of God. As scholars have noted in recent times, the motif of God's kingdom weaves together the Old and New Testaments and provides the continuity between them. Nineteenth-century liberalism sought a Christian faith that is desupernaturalized and essentially immanentistic in its outlook. Under the influence of Hegelian philosophy, the kingdom of God was evolving naturally without the intrusion of a transcendent God.

Elements of the miraculous were rejected out of hand by thinkers such as David Friedrich Strauss and William Wrede. The miracles of the Bible, especially those attributed to Jesus, were explained in naturalistic terms. For example the feeding

of the five thousand was interpreted in various ways, including these two: (1) Jesus and his disciples had a large store of food concealed in a cave. Jesus stood in front of a small opening through which provisions were secretly passed to him by his hidden disciples, and were then distributed to the multitudes. This crass view reduced Jesus to a clever magician and a charlatan. (2) Jesus used the example of the lad who had offered to Jesus his meager provisions, to exhort those who had brought lunches to share with those who had not.

Thus, this was not a miracle of nature but an “ethical” miracle, persuading those who had much, to share with those who had nothing.

The accent on ethics was primary to the liberal revision of biblical Christianity. Leading thinkers such as Albrecht Ritschl eschewed the influence of Greek metaphysical thought on the formulation of historic creeds such as attributing the equality of divine essence to members of the Trinity. He saw the essence of Jesus’s teaching not as supernatural redemption but as ethical and moral values. Liberal scholars recast Jesus as the supreme teacher of ethics rather than as the incarnate Son of God who was born of a virgin, who died an atoning death of cosmic significance, and who was raised bodily from the dead and ascended into heaven. These supernatural elements of the biblical portrait were rejected, and in their place was substituted the moralist Jew who advocated a kingdom of values and social responsibility.

It was somewhat fashionable in the nineteenth century to compare the world religions in an effort to discern and distill the essence of them all into a basic common denominator. Here Christianity suffered from reductionism with a vengeance. Church historian Adolf Harnack published a little book on the *Wesen*, the “essence” or “being,” of Christianity,

which was published in English as *What Is Christianity?*<sup>6</sup> In this volume Harnack reduced the essence of Christianity to two foundational concepts: the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man.

### Schweitzer's Quest

Against this backdrop of liberalism, Albert Schweitzer wrote his watershed book, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*,<sup>7</sup> which appeared first in 1906 under the German title *Von Reimarus zu Wrede* ("From Reimarus to Wrede"). As the German title suggests, Schweitzer gave a critical analysis of developments in nineteenth-century thought. He embraced much of the thought of Johannes Weiss, who had attacked Ritschl's concept of an ethical-value kingdom that is totally immanent and evolutionary. Weiss argued that this concept is rooted not in the New Testament but in Enlightenment theology and the ethical philosophy of Immanuel Kant.

Herman Ridderbos says of Weiss: ". . . [He] argued that Jesus's preaching of the kingdom of God can only be understood in the light of and against the background of the world of thought of his time, especially of the late Jewish apocalyptic writings. On this view, every conception of the kingdom of God as an immanent community in course of development or as an ethical ideal is consequently to be rejected; for it becomes clear that the kingdom of God is a purely future and eschatological event, presupposing the end of this world; and, therefore, cannot possibly reveal itself already in this world."<sup>8</sup>

When Weiss speaks of the kingdom's eschatological character, he uses the word *eschatological* to mean more than

“the future” or “the last things.” Here the term carries the idea of “an action wrought by God that is transcendent and catastrophic.” It is not a future event that emerges through evolutionary development, but a future event that is brought on suddenly from above, an intrusion of the work of God.

This eschatological concept of the kingdom of God was embraced by Schweitzer. He saw this as the key to understanding the life and teaching of Jesus. Schweitzer called this view “consistent eschatology.” Though he sought to interpret the life of Jesus against the backdrop of a transcendent eschatology, he concluded that Jesus’s own eschatological expectations had been unfulfilled. The historical Jesus believed that the kingdom would be inaugurated by a catastrophic act of God, but this divine act did not materialize.

According to Schweitzer, Jesus underwent a series of crises. He expected the dramatic coming of the kingdom at different points of his ministry, such as when he sent out the seventy. Jesus had to face postponements to his expectation. He finally hoped that his submission to the cross would provoke God to act. When that also failed to happen, Jesus cried out in despair, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46). This was the anguished cry of a disillusioned man.

For Schweitzer, the eschatology of Jesus was unrealized. This led to Schweitzer’s concept of “parousia-delay.” The writings of the apostolic church reflect an adjustment in thinking, a movement from an expectation of Christ’s imminent return (and the consummation of the kingdom) to an expectation of his delayed return in the unknown future.

Though Schweitzer rejected the concept of an ethical kingdom as the motif of Jesus’s teaching and self-consciousness

and replaced it with an eschatological view, it was an eschatology that remained unrealized. Though his view did not prevail among scholars, Schweitzer's work provoked many theories that wrestled with the problems he had raised.

Schweitzer's work was followed by that of C. H. Dodd, who introduced a full-scale system of "realized eschatology." For Dodd the eschatological kingdom of God is ushered in during the ministry of Christ. The presence of the kingdom is a common theme in Jesus's parables, as Dodd notes in *The Parables of the Kingdom*.<sup>9</sup> In another work Dodd says:

The eschatology of the early Church has two sides. On the one hand we have the belief that with the coming of Christ the "fullness of time" has arrived, the prophecies are fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is inaugurated on earth. On the other hand we have the expectation of a consummation still pending in the future. There is some tension between the two in almost all New Testament writings. They differ among themselves with respect to the relation conceived to exist between the fulfillment which is already [a] matter of history, and the fulfillment which belongs to the future. In the Fourth Gospel the language of "futurist eschatology" is little used.<sup>10</sup>

For Dodd the kingdom is essentially a spiritual reality that has been completely realized in the past. The tension between realized and unrealized eschatology has plagued New Testament scholars in our time. Attempts to relieve this stress have been offered by both Oscar Cullmann and Herman Ridderbos. Both scholars have sought to understand the New Testament concept of the kingdom of God in terms of the present and the future.

Ridderbos has popularized the concept of the “already” and the “not yet” of the kingdom (the *als* and the *nog niet*). When John the Baptist appears on the stage of history, a moment of crisis is reached. Unlike the Old Testament prophets, who announced the coming of the kingdom in the unknown or distant future, John announces that its arrival is imminent. He is the herald of the coming kingdom. John declares that “the ax is laid to the root of the trees” and “His winnowing fan is in his hand” (Matt. 3:10, 12). The images of the axe and the fan both call attention to the radical nearness of the kingdom.

The image of the axe does not indicate that the woodsman is merely thinking about cutting down a tree or that he has merely begun the task by striking at the outer bark. The image instead is that the task is nearly complete. The axe has already penetrated to the core of the tree, hinting that one more decisive stroke will make it fall.

The fan refers to the winnowing fork used by a farmer to separate the wheat from the chaff. The farmer is not heading to his barn to get the fan. It is already in his hand and he is about to begin winnowing.

The radical character of John’s baptism is also seen in this light. He called Jewish people to undergo this cleansing rite because their King is about to appear and they are defiled and unready to meet him. Consequently John calls the people to repent and be baptized. “The kingdom of heaven is *at hand*” (Matt. 3:2). With the coming of Jesus, the kingdom is inaugurated, reaching its New Testament acme in his ascension. The ascension is not merely a “going up” to heaven. It is a going up for a specific event, his coronation and investiture as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Insofar as Jesus presently occupies this seat of cosmic authority, the kingdom

of God has come. Yet his reign remains invisible to men. It is yet to be made fully manifest on earth.

At this point Oscar Cullmann introduces his famous D-Day analogy. The resurrection and ascension of Christ represents the D-day of the kingdom, the decisive turning point in redemptive history. In World War II D-Day was not the end of the war, but it was such a decisive turning point that for all intents and purposes the war was over. What was left was a mop-up exercise (the Battle of the Bulge notwithstanding). In like manner the decisive work of the kingdom has been accomplished. We are living in the interim awaiting the consummation that will occur at Christ's parousia.

In addition to these views of the kingdom and eschatology, we encounter modern Dispensationalism, which regards the kingdom as future. For Dispensationalism the kingdom will not come until the parousia. Likewise, various forms of preterism have emerged. Preterists argue not only that the kingdom is a present reality, but also that in a real historical sense the parousia has already occurred.

## Preterism

### **Preterism**

The Kingdom is a present reality.

### **Radical Preterism**

All future prophecies in the NT have already been fulfilled.

### **Moderate Preterism**

Many future prophecies in the NT have already been fulfilled.  
Some crucial prophecies have not yet been fulfilled.

## Moderate Preterism

We may distinguish between two distinct forms of preterism, which I call radical preterism and moderate preterism. Radical preterism sees all future prophecies of the New Testament as having already taken place, while moderate preterism still looks to the future for crucial events to occur. The purpose of this book is to evaluate moderate preterism and its view of eschatology.

Perhaps the most important scholar of the preterist school is J. Stuart Russell. Russell's book *The Parousia*<sup>11</sup> first appeared in 1878, with a second edition following nine years later. The 1887 edition was reprinted in 1983. Russell anticipated many of the theories that would be presented by twentieth-century scholars. His chief concern was the time-frame references of New Testament eschatology, particularly with respect to Jesus's utterances concerning the coming of the kingdom and to Jesus's Olivet Discourse. In his summary at the end of the book, Russell writes:

Without going over the ground already traversed it may suffice here to appeal to three distinct and decisive declarations of our Lord respecting the time of his coming, each of them accompanied with a solemn affirmation:

1. "Verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come" (Matt. 10:23).
2. "Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom" (Matt. 16:28).
3. "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled" (Matt. 24:34).

The plain grammatical meaning of these statements has been fully discussed in these pages. No violence can extort from them any other sense than the obvious and unambiguous one, viz. that our Lord's second coming would take place within the limits of the existing generation.<sup>12</sup>

The central thesis of Russell and indeed of all preterists is that the New Testament's time-frame references with respect to the parousia point to a fulfillment within the lifetime of at least some of Jesus's disciples. Some hold to a primary fulfillment in AD 70, with a secondary and final fulfillment in the yet-unknown future. Whatever else may be said of preterism, it has achieved at least two things: (1) it has focused attention on the time-frame references of New Testament eschatology, and (2) it has highlighted the significance of Jerusalem's destruction in redemptive history.

### **The Life of James Stuart Russell**

- 1816 Born on November 28 in Elgin, Morayshire.
- 1829 Entered King's College, Aberdeen.
- 1835 Received MA degree.
- 1843 Became assistant minister in Congregational church in Great Yarmouth. Later became the minister.
- 1843 Attended the founding of the Evangelical Alliance.
- 1857 Became minister in Congregational church in Tottenham and Edmonton.
- 1862 Became minister in Congregational church in Bayswater.
- 1878 Published *The Parousia* anonymously.
- 1887 Published second edition of *The Parousia* under his name.
- 1888 Retired from the ministry.
- 1895 Died on October 5.

Contemporary eschatological theories, especially those found within evangelicalism, are keenly interested in the significance of events surrounding modern Israel and the city of Jerusalem. Karl Barth once remarked that the modern Christian must read with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. The dramatic return to Palestine of the Jews, the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, and the recapture of Jerusalem in 1967 have provoked a frenzy of interest in eschatology. We see no sign of this ending anytime soon. Books (such as the *Left Behind* series), websites, and other resources insist that we are living in the last generation. The question persists: What is the significance of modern Israel and Jerusalem to biblical prophecy?

Whatever one's view of modern Jerusalem, it is essential that we examine the significance of its destruction by the Romans in the first century. If the reconstruction of Jerusalem is significant, it can only be so in light of its earlier destruction. No matter what view of eschatology we embrace, we must take seriously the redemptive-historical importance of Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70.

In *The Last Days according to Jesus* we will devote considerable attention to New Testament prophecies bearing on the destruction of Jerusalem, as well as the eyewitness account of it provided by Jewish historian Flavius Josephus.

Prophecies of the coming of God's kingdom and the parousia of Christ are linked biblically with prophecies of the day of the Lord. This day is viewed to some degree as a day of divine judgment and the pouring out of God's wrath. These concepts are interconnected and must be viewed in relation to each other.

From the Enlightenment onward, the church has been gripped by a severe crisis regarding the trustworthiness of

Scripture. The spirit of skepticism that reigns in so many quarters is a direct result of the avalanche of criticism leveled against the Bible. Early in this century Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper lamented that biblical criticism had degenerated into biblical vandalism. The task in our time is to answer the critics who have scorned the Scriptures and given us a Christ of their own imaginations. The only Christ is the biblical Christ. All revisionist Christs are but shadows of the antichrist.

Due to the crisis in confidence in the truth and authority of Scripture and the subsequent crisis regarding the real historical Jesus, eschatology must come to grips with the tensions of time-frame references in the New Testament.