

Chapter 6

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE AND THE RELATIVIZATION OF THE OLD COVENANT:

Mark 13:31 and Matthew 5:18

Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis

In this essay it is argued that the principal reference of 'heaven and earth' is the temple-centred cosmology of second-temple Judaism which included the belief that the temple is heaven and earth in microcosm. Mark 13 and Matthew 5:18 refer, then, to the destruction of the temple as a passing away of an old cosmology and also, in the latter case, to the establishment during Jesus' ministry and at His death and resurrection of a new temple cosmology – a new heaven and earth.

In the synoptic gospels there are two references to the passing away of heaven and earth. First, at Mark 13:31 (Mt. 24:35 and Lk. 21:33) Jesus predicts that 'heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away'. There is no substantial difference between the first three gospels in this saying. Secondly, Matthew and Luke both relate a similar saying: Matthew 5:18, '... until heaven and earth pass away not one jot or tittle will pass away from the Law; until all has happened'; Luke 16:17, 'It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle to fall from the Law'. The context of the first (Mark 13:31) is that of the Markan eschatological discourse, whilst that of the second is unclear at Luke 16:17 and certainly that of Jesus' attitude towards the Torah at Matthew 5:18. Until recently there was little cause for disagreement over the meaning of the first. However, both Matthew 5:17 and Luke 16:17 have been intensely debated and belong to passages about which there is still a good deal of scholarly disagreement and uncertainty.

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In another context I will deal with Luke 16:17.¹ Instead, it is my aim here to propose a new interpretation of Mark 13:31 (and parallels) and Matthew 5:18. In brief I propose that by 'heaven and earth' is meant the Jerusalem temple and the Torah constitution at the centre of which the former stands. Neither saying envisages the collapse of the space-time universe (as has been understood by modern interpretation). Both refer to the imminent end to the social, religious and economic structure of Israel's covenant relationship with God with the attendant destruction of the temple.

The Two Gospel Sayings

The First Saying (Mark 13:31)

Mark 13:31 (Mt. 24:35) comes at the climax of Jesus' eschatological prophecy; Mark 13:2-37 (Mt. 24:2-44). The occasion for the whole chapter is a prediction of the destruction of the temple in AD 70, which leads to an account in Mark 13:3-23 (Mt. 24:3-26) of the tumultuous social and political upheavals in the years of revolt which preceded that catastrophe. The orthodoxy of twentieth-century scholarship has read the vivid description of cosmic disturbances and the coming of the Son of Man in the latter half of this chapter (Mk. 13:24-37; Mt. 24:29-44) as a prediction of the end of the world, what, it is assumed, Matthew calls the 'parousia'. This 'end-of-the-world' was evidently closely associated with the destruction of Jerusalem which would immediately precede it. Thus, within Mark 13:24-37 (Mt. 24:29-44) the description of the passing away of heaven and earth at Mark 13:31 (Mt. 24:35) is read as an unequivocal statement of the end of history, when the material empirical world will cease to exist.

This reading of the latter half of the chapter as a whole and this verse in particular then creates an infamous problem in the history of early Christianity: this cosmic melt-down has not yet actually happened. The problem is acute because the previous verse promises that 'this generation will not pass away until all these things happen' (Mk. 13:30 and Mt. 24:34). That generation could possibly be that of the evangelists, but is more naturally that of Jesus Himself. Either way, this prophecy was not fulfilled and twentieth-century scholars have been left to explore the social and religious

¹In a forthcoming study I intend to show that Lk. 16:17 has a similar sense to my interpretation of Mt. 5:18 because it, like Matthew's verse, is set in the context where the identity, privileges and cosmic ideology of the Jerusalem temple have been appropriated by the Jesus community.

implications of the so-called 'delay of the parousia' for the history of earliest Christianity.

In the case of Mark, writing before the destruction of Jerusalem, historically this failure can be explained simply as a result of false prophecy. Yet for Matthew, who, it is normally assumed, writes after AD 70, it is difficult to understand his insistence that the end would take place 'immediately' (εὐθέως, verse 29) after the tribulation of the years AD 66-70 (described in verses 15-26), since that end-of-the-world did not actually take place 'immediately' after the destruction of Jerusalem.

In recent decades an attempt to circumvent the delay in the parousia problem has been pursued by George B. Caird and his two pupils Marcus Borg and N. T. Wright.² Their approach, which is represented now in its most thoroughgoing form in the first two volumes of Wright's *Christian Origins and the Question of God*,³ understands Mark 13 in its entirety as a prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem and the world-wide cataclysmic events of the years AD 66-70. This rereading is, in turn, reliant on a reappraisal of apocalyptic eschatological language generally, which, it is argued, should not be viewed as a literal description of the space-time universe, but, rather, a metaphorical account of events *within* history, which thereby invests those events with their appropriate theological meaning. That the language of Mark 13:24 (Mt. 24:29), in particular, should refer to historical political events is consistent with the use of similar imagery in the Old Testament where there is a marked 'tendency to mythologize historical episodes to reveal their transcendent meaning'.⁴

Obviously this approach is to be welcomed if it solves the historical and literary problem of the so-called 'delay of the parousia'. Caird and his followers are right to pay closer attention to the reference to socio-political realities in Jewish and Christian

²G. B. Caird, *Jesus and the Jewish Nation* (The Ethel M. Wood Lecture delivered before the University of London on 9 March 1965; University of London: Athlone Press, 1965), 20-22; M. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* (Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 5; New York & Toronto: Edwin Mellen Press, 1984), 209-227. For nineteenth-century commentators who adopted a similar position see e.g. A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Luke* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1896), 485 on Lk. 21:32 *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992), 280-299 and *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 361-368.

³The words are those of Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 144. For Mk. 13:24 cf. esp. Is. 13:10; 34:4; Ezk. 32:7; Joel 2:10, 30-31; 3:15; Am. 8:9. Cf. generally e.g. Is. 51:9-11; Je. 4:23-28.

apocalyptic language. It remains to be seen whether their approach, in particular the dangerously reductionist understanding of apocalyptic language, does full justice to all the data, both Jewish and Christian.

There are a couple of weaknesses in this new reading. In particular Mark 13:31 presents something of a thorn in the flesh of the Caird school. In his new book on Jesus, Wright's reading of Mark's thirteenth chapter is intelligible, and in the main persuasive, up to 13:30-32. However, his attempt to grapple with 13:31 significantly weakens his case.⁵ His reading is not entirely clear. He seems to take these words, on analogy with Isaiah 40:8 ('the grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God shall stand for ever'), as an affirmation of the security of the prophetic word.⁶ That is just possible, but in the present context, which has been dominated by the imagery of cosmic conflagration, however metaphorical that imagery may be, it is difficult to imagine that the language of 13:31 should not refer specifically to what has preceded. In that case, Wright would have to argue that Mark 13:31 also refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Yet about that literary connection he is significantly silent. Perhaps, given the difficulty of reading 'heaven and earth shall pass away' as a reference to the events of AD 70, he has chosen to avoid the obvious. However, given the clearly climactic nature of the whole discourse, his own claim, that '[t]his is like saying "Truly, truly, I say to you", only magnified to the furthest degree', is unpersuasive.⁷

To the tradition of interpretation in which Borg and Wright stand, it has also been objected that Mark 13:24-27 does not explicitly refer to the destruction of Jerusalem or the temple:⁸ whilst their

approach may well be right to read Mark 13:14-23 as a build-up which expects, but does not itself provide, the actual description of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, it is not entirely clear how Mark 13:24-31 provides that temple-focused climax. Even when the metaphorical language of Old Testament political historiography is granted, it is not clear why Mark 13:24-31 need, at any point, refer specifically to Jerusalem and temple, rather than the Mediterranean-wide turmoil of the years AD 66-73.

It is not our purpose to critique the basic thrust of this AD 70/temple-centred reading. I believe that here Caird, Borg and Wright are on the right lines. Rather, in what follows I hope that a modest remythologizing of the language of the synoptic eschatological discourse will tighten-up weaknesses in their argument, in particular with respect to Mark 13:31 (Mt. 24:35).

Mark 13:31 also has one interpretative difficulty of its own. The second half of the two-part verse refers to the promise that Jesus' words will not pass away. Which words are meant: the words of the discourse, or the totality of Jesus' teaching? If there is here a promise that Jesus' prophecy begun at Mark 13:2 will not fail, then the language is a little odd: we might have expected *οἱ δὲ λόγοι μου* (or even *οἱ δὲ λόγοι ὑμῶν*) *οὐ μὴ ἐκλείψουσιν* ('my words [or 'these words'] will not fail'). There is no verbal allusion to Isaiah 40:8 LXX, which might have been expected, had the force of that text been in mind. There is not, in any case, any cosmic scope in that Old Testament text. If, on the other hand, there is here a promise that Jesus' teaching as a whole will endure the collapse of the space-time universe, then one has to wonder what role it will have beyond the end of history when His teaching quite clearly prescribes the lifestyle of the people of God *within* history.

Given that Mark 13:31 contrasts the passing away of heaven and earth with the endurance of Jesus' words, there is a clear similarity, particularly to the Matthean form of the Q saying at Matthew 5:18 (Lk. 16:17). Not surprisingly, we find that problems of the former recur in the latter, to which we now turn.

The second saying (Matthew 5:18)

Matthew 5:18 is part of the Matthean heading (5:17-20) to Jesus' teaching on the Torah at 5:21-7:27. These four verses are full of exegetical questions and interpretative difficulties: not the least of which is the apparently absolute denial of any change or relativization of the Torah implied by Jesus' words in verse 18. As

⁵Mark 13:31 is conspicuously absent from the discussion in R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament. His Application of Old Testament Passages to Himself and His Mission* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1971), 227-239; Borg's *Conflict*, and his 'An Orthodoxy Reconsidered: The "End-of-the-World Jesus"', in L. D. Hurst and N. T. Wright (eds.), *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament: Studies in Christology in Memory of George Bradford Caird* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 207-217.

⁶Wright, *Jesus and the Victory*, 364-365.

⁷In Wright's favour is the fact that nowhere do the Jewish texts supply a close parallel to Mark 13:31 which could be taken to demand the end of the space-time universe. At 1 *Enoch* 90:16 'the first heaven shall depart and pass away', but there is no reference to the earth: history, albeit a utopian one, is assumed to follow (90:17).

⁸See e.g. D. Wenham, 'This Generation Will Not Pass . . . " A Study of Jesus' Future Expectation in Mark 13', in H. H. Rowden (ed.), *Christ the Lord: Studies in*

this verse is normally understood, the expression 'until heaven and earth pass away' is meant either as a euphemistic 'never' or as a reference to the cosmic melt-down which we have already described. Either way, the (probably Jewish-Christian) author of this verse and the compiler of Matthew assumed that the Torah remained valid in its entirety (ἰσῶρα ἐν ᾧ ἡ μίαια κεραία οὐ μὴ τοπέλαθη, 'one jot or tittle will not pass away') both during Jesus' ministry and throughout the subsequent history of the church.

Not only does this clearly fly in the face of the policy of other early Christian leaders such as Paul, Stephen and the author of Mark (see esp. Mk. 7:1-23), it also creates a problem within the immediate Matthean context, since it is widely assumed that some kind of relativization of the Torah is involved in the third (5:31-32), fourth (5:33-37), fifth (5:38-42) and sixth (5:43-48) of the 'antitheses'.

Matthew 5:18 would appear to deny that any of the details of the Torah can become redundant ('pass away'). The issue, it should be noted, is not the Torah's *annulment*, for which the previous verse has used the verb *καταλύω*, but its *relativization*, for which the verb *τοπέλασθαι* is used. Whilst there is indisputably no antagonistic sense of annulment of the Torah in 5:21-48,⁹ the latter four 'antitheses' do envisage that, at the very least, there is an appropriate passing away in the sense of obsolescence to some of the Torah's provisions. The Torah's provisions for the appropriate implementation of divorce (Dt. 24:1-4),¹⁰ the saying of oaths (Lv. 22:17-25; Nu. 6; 15:1-10; 30; Dt. 23:21-23; cf. 11QTemple 53:9-54:7),¹¹ the laws of retribution (Ex. 21:24; Lv. 24:20; Dt. 19:21) and vengeance against one's enemies (e.g. Dt. 25:17-19) are now to be disregarded. One conclusion cannot be avoided: in this teaching-material there is the *passing away* of many of the Torah's jots and tittles.¹²

⁹W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel of Saint Matthew* (JCC, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 1. 507-509.

¹⁰The issue is highly complicated, but Mt. 19:3-9 at least understands what the Old Testament allowed to no longer be relevant.

¹¹For the Old Testament's commandment that oaths be said, see Ex. 22:10; Nu. 5:19-22.

¹²It is a weakness of much of the discussion to date, and the position represented by recent commentaries, especially that of Davies and Allison, that only two options – conformity to Torah (albeit with radicalization) and (antagonistic) contradiction – are offered as ways of understanding the relationship between Jesus' teaching and Torah. A third way, otherwise explored by, for example, John Meier, *Law and History in Matthew's Gospel* (AnBib 71; Rome, 1976), which emphasizes the controlling salvation-historical paradigm, deserves greater attention.

In the recent history of interpretation there has been much reflection on whether there is any history of religions precedent for a messianic Torah in which some of the details of the law no longer apply. W. D. Davies has collected some rabbinic evidence for this expectation, but it is mostly late and of meagre volume.¹³ Matthew 5:18 has therefore been widely compared with a common Jewish view of the law as eternal and unchanging.¹⁴ However, in the light of recent work on the Temple Scroll from Qumran (11QTS) there is at least one very important pre-Christian parallel to the belief that in the eschaton some laws of the old Torah would become obsolete. In his recent monograph of the temple Scroll Michael Wise has ably demonstrated that the hermeneutical key to the writing of the Temple Scroll is the construction of an eschatological Torah. As such, laws pertaining to Israel outside the Land in a state of exile are deemed no longer relevant to the eschatological conditions of the people of the renewed covenant, and are therefore omitted.¹⁵ This Torah envisages no more sexual immorality (Dt. 23:18-19), divorce or polygamy (Dt. 24:1-4; 25:5-10, cf. 57:17-19 and CD 4:12-5:2), no more borrowing or lending, no more slavery (Dt. 15:8-18; 23:16-17; 24:7); no foreigners (Dt. 14:28-29; 15:1-7; 23:20-21; 24:14-15, 17-23; 26:1-11, 12, 15), and no more wicked men (Dt. 19:1-13; 24:7; 25:1-3, 11-12, cf. 4QPss 37 ii 6-7; Pss. Sol. 17:27). All the laws which pertain to, or even touch on, these pre-eschatological realities are thus deemed redundant. The importance of the Temple Scroll has been noted by W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison in their recent commentary, though they are now *wrong* to insist that this text does not 'call into question . . . the perpetuity of the Mosaic Law'.¹⁶ On the contrary, it does precisely that. In Matthean terms, the Temple Scroll describes an (eschatological) time when many of the jots and tittles have passed away from the Torah.

In the context of second temple eschatological expectations Matthew 5:21-48 now makes perfect sense as not only a radicalization of Torah, but also a relativization of contents which the Jesus!

¹³*Torah in the Messianic Age and/or the Age to Come* (JBLMS 8; Philadelphia, 1952) *Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1964), 109-190.

¹⁴Cf. e.g. *Exod. Rab.* 6:1; *Lev. Rab.* 19:2; *Bar.* 4:1; *Wis.* 18:4; 4 *Ezra* 9:37.

¹⁵See esp. Michael Owen Wise, *A Critical Study of the Temple Scroll from Cave 1* (The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago; Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilisation 49; Chicago, 1990), 161-175. See p. 188 for the similarity to Matthew's gospel. Also his 'The Eschatological Vision of the Temple Scroll', *JNES* 49 (1990), 155-172.

¹⁶*Matthew*, 492, cf. 493, n. 28.

movement, on analogy with the Essenes behind the Temple Scroll, deemed inappropriate for the perfection of Israelite nature and society. In this light, Matthew 5:21-48 might appear to represent one kind of Jewish Christianity – a dispensationalist one – and Matthew 5:18 another kind – a conservative (pharisaic-rabbinic?) one. As such, the latter hardly functions very well as part of a heading for the former.

Furthermore, it is not clear what role Matthew 5:18d 'until all has happened' (ἕως ἂν πάντα γένηται) has, if verse 18b-c does indeed intend an absolute denial of the possibility of the relativization of the Torah. These last four words, which stand in a clear parallelism to verse 18b's 'until heaven and earth pass away' (ἕως ἂν παρέλθῃ ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆς), seem to qualify that absolute denial; envisaging a time when, because all has happened (or been accomplished), it will in fact be possible for a jot or tittle to pass from the Torah. If, however, we insist that the passing away of heaven and earth has to refer to the cessation of the space-time universe then this clause would be almost unique to Matthew's gospel, indeed for the whole of the New Testament, in referring to a period after the cessation of history during which it will be possible, nevertheless, to discuss meaningfully which parts of the Torah are retained and which allowed to fall away. The only possible parallel to this thought is the saying at Matthew 24:35, where Jesus' words are said to remain forever, whilst heaven and earth will pass away. It is this saying, however, which is itself presently open to reinterpretation.

Furthermore, if verse 18d were simply a repetition of 18b, reiterating a reference to the cessation of the space-time universe, then we would have a case of unnecessary redundancy in an otherwise carefully crafted and nuanced passage. Attempts to avoid the redundancy are unconvincing and actually point in another direction for the meaning of verse 18c-d. For example, Davies and Allison defend the text against the charge of redundancy on the grounds that verse 18d 'introduces the idea, absent from the preceding ἕως clause, of God's prophetic promises and redemptive purposes (cf. the mention of 'prophets' in verse 17 and the prophetic use of πληρόω).¹⁷ However, this point itself undermines their insistence that verse 18c-d refers to the collapse of history, since throughout Matthew the prophetic promises are said to be fulfilled here and now *within history in the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus*.¹⁸

¹⁷Matthew, 495.

¹⁸2:15, 17-18, 23; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:14-15, 35; 21:4-5; 27:9-10, cf. 2:5-6; 3:3; 10:35; 11:10; 21:42; 22:44; 24:30; 26:64.

One other widely adopted strategy designed to avoid the problematic verse 18d is what has been called the 'ethical explanation'.¹⁹ According to this view, verse 18d refers to the fulfilment of the law as it has been redefined by Jesus, supremely, that is, by the statement that in the command to love God and one's neighbour all the Torah and the prophets are summed up. However, this view is unwarranted on a number of grounds. It relies on a translation of γένηται as 'accomplished' (rather than 'happen'), for which there is no linguistic support.²⁰ Secondly, the 'jot and tittle' demand that we have here a reference to the Torah legislation in all its details.²¹ In general, this solution fails to appreciate the Torah-specific concerns of early Christianity in general and Matthew's gospel in particular.

I submit that the problem is insurmountable whilst 5:18b is taken to refer to a collapse of the space-time universe. Consequently, in anticipation of our own solution to the problem we should consider favourably the minority interpretation which has explored the possibility that the passing away of heaven and earth refers figuratively to events within history.

Though the possibility is rejected in his recent commentary,²² in 1962 W. D. Davies suggested that the happening of all things is a reference to the 'figurative' passing away of heaven and earth at Jesus' death and resurrection.²³ This approach has been explored in greatest detail by John P. Meier and there are a number of considerations to recommend it.²⁴ First, if the eschatological turning point is taken to be the death and resurrection, after which time the entirety of the Torah is no longer applicable, then this would accord well with the dispensational approach to mission according to which the message is confined to Israel during Jesus' ministry (Mt. 10:5; 15:24) and after His resurrection the command is given to evangelize

¹⁹E.g. W. Trilling, *Das wahre Israel: Studien zur Theologie des Matthäus-Evangeliums* (StANT 10; 3rd edn., Munich, 1964), 169-170; U. Luz, *Matthew 1-7* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 266.

²⁰See Meier, *Law and History*, 53-54 who adds (p. 54, n. 39) that '... to make *parita* mean "all the just demands of the Law," which in turn means "the law of love," is to make too many demands on one simple and vague word'.

²¹Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.495, n. 37.
²²Matthew, 1. 494-495.

²³*Christian Origins and Judaism* (London: Darton, Longmann & Todd, 1962), 31-66.

²⁴J. P. Meier, *Law and History and The Vision of Matthew: Christ, Church and Morality in the First Gospel* (New York: Paulist, 1978), 222-264. See also R. G. Hamerton-Kelly, 'Attitudes to the Law in Matthew's Gospel: A Discussion of Matthew 5:18', BR 17 (1972), 19-32.

all nations (28:18-20).²⁵ Secondly, elsewhere amongst early Christians – Paul in particular – the relativization of the Torah is associated with the death and resurrection of Jesus (Rom. 3:21-28; 7:4; Gal. 2:19). Thirdly, all four gospels regard the death and resurrection of Jesus as an eschatological event.²⁶ Already in Mark the darkening of the whole earth at the sixth hour; the rending of the temple veil as Jesus breathed His last; the application of Old Testament ‘Day of the Lord’ prophecies from deuterio-Zechariah and the parallelism between Mark 13 and the passion, interpret the death and resurrection as eschato-logical events. In Matthew this interpretation is accentuated in a specifically cosmological direction by the addition of the description of an earthquake at the crucifixion and the raising of the dead from their tombs (Mt. 27:51b-53). Finally, that by all these events Matthew understands at least a figurative reference to the passing away of heaven and earth might be suggested by the fact that at 28:11 one of the guards from the tomb went to the chief priests and reported to them *ἐπιγράψατε τὰ γεγονότα* (‘all that had happened’). The language in this peculiarly Matthean verse is remarkably similar to the *πάντα γένηται* of Matthew 5:18d. It now becomes clear that the purpose of this last clause of 5:18 is to specify the passing away of heaven and earth as a specifically Christological focused event within imminent history.

Whilst this approach has much to be recommended, in its present formulation it suffers, broadly speaking, from two deficiencies.²⁷ First, Davies and Allison have objected that ‘Matthew nowhere explicitly relates changes in the Torah to Jesus’ passion and resurrection. . . .’²⁸ This point can be overstated since it is possible that (a) Matthew 28:18-20 envisages a mission to the nations in which the

²⁵See esp. Meier, *Law and History*, 25-29.

²⁶See esp. D. C. Allison, *The End of the Ages has Come: An Early Interpretation of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

²⁷For what follows see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, I. 494-495. Criticisms from Phillip Segal, *The Halakah of Jesus of Nazareth according to the Gospel of Matthew* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986), 22, are really beside the point. From 2 Cor. 5:17 it is clear that some early Christians thought that by virtue of the arrival of the Messiah, heaven and earth had undergone an eschatological transformation. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Waco: Word, 1982), 146, objects to Meier’s interpretation on the grounds that the fulfilment quotations, which it may be argued underlie 5:18d, refer to Jesus’ life and ministry in Matthew, not to the death and resurrection. However, the connection between Jesus’ death and resurrection and 5:18d via the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, which is *in fact* present at 26:54, 56; 27:9-10, need only be a subsidiary point in the argument.

²⁸Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 494, n. 33.

identity markers which constitute the Torah no longer pertain, but have been replaced by Baptism in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and Jesus’ teaching in the gospel, and that (b) the Lord’s supper (Mt. 26:26-30), and that which it symbolically represents, is intended to replace the temple cult as the means of atonement. Yet, Davies and Allison are right that the relativization of the details of the Torah are not explicitly related to Jesus’ death and resurrection in Matthew. Rather the Matthean teaching which seems to relativize the Torah (5:21-48, cf. 12:1-8; 19:1-9) pertains to the situation in the ministry.²⁹ Unless the intention is heavily allegorical and Matthew’s readers had no thought for the life of Jesus, only their own community situation, then the Torah’s relativization is not strictly analogous to the dispensational difference between mission to Israel before death/resurrection and to the nations after that event.³⁰ The relativization of the Torah during the ministry would imply that already, before the death and resurrection, it would be true to say that for Matthew ‘heaven and earth’ have passed, or are in the process of passing away.

The second objection, which takes us to the heart of this study, is the modern inability to conceive of Jesus’ death and resurrection as the passing away of heaven and earth. Even though Dale Allison has made a good case for an eschatological interpretation of the passion, he has gone beyond many and himself falls short of the passion narrative as *the* event which could be described in the language used at Matthew 5:18b. Whilst there are earthly cosmic disturbances at the crucifixion, it is not clear how they could be described as the ‘passing away of heaven and earth’. Even Meier himself assumes that at Matthew 24:35 there is a reference to the ‘catastrophic events in the cosmos at the end of human history’. There is then, for him, a clear conflict of intention between the two, otherwise very similar verses, Matthew 5:18 and 24:35. Although he sees an intimate linguistic and redactional relationship between these two verses, Meier can only attempt an unconvincing cover-up of the obvious inconsistency which his ‘end-of-the-world’ reading of the latter creates.³¹

But Meier’s approach is not to be discarded. It has the unquestionable strength of its salvation-historical and Christo-

²⁹Cf. *ibid.*, 494, n. 33: ‘. . . the “fulfilment” of 5:17-20, a passage which after all introduces the rest of Mt. 5, is more naturally interpreted as referring to the teaching of the earthly Jesus rather than to salvific events at the end of the ministry’.

³⁰Pace Meier, e.g. *Vision*, 234.

³¹Meier, *Law and History*, 62-63.

logically focused conceptual framework. When we have examined the shape of the dominant second temple cosmology we will be in a position to return to refine this approach in a way which, I think, will satisfy its detractors.

The Temple as the Cosmos in Miniature

It used to be thought that second temple Judaism was free from mythology. It was also thought that apocalyptic, whence the language of 'heaven and earth passing away', was a social and religious phenomenon which developed outside and in opposition to the theology of the temple cult.³² Both these positions now seem unlikely; there was a lively, if distinctively Jewish mythology, which was in fact centred on the temple cult.³³ Apocalyptic, which was closely bound up with that mythology, is increasingly seen as priestly and cult-centred.³⁴

The implications of the appreciation of Judaism's temple-centred mythology for the description of its histories and theologies, including that of early Christianity, are far reaching.³⁵ That

³²See esp. P. D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973).

³³See e.g. R. Patai, *Man and Temple: In Ancient Jewish Myth and Ritual* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1947); J. Z. Smith, 'Earth and Gods', in *Map is not Territory* (SJLA 23; Leiden: Brill, 1978), 104-128; Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1985), esp. 102-184; *idem*, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 73-99; John Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon* (University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 35; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) on the *Chaoskampf* and Tabernacles; Margaret Barker, *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (London: SPCK, 1991); Ben F. Meyer, 'The Temple at the Navel of the Earth', *Christus Faber: The Master-builder and the House of God* (Allison Park, Penn.: Pickwick Publications, 1992), 217-279 and most recently C. T. R. Hayward, *The Jewish Temple: A Non-Biblical Sourcebook* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996). For an overview of an approach to apocalyptic as temple centred see the present author's 'The High Priest as Divine Mediator in the Hebrew Bible: Dan 7:13 as a Test Case', *Society of Biblical Literature 1997 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997).

³⁴We should note, for example, Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 14-46; David Bryan, *Cosmos, Chaos and the Kasher Mentality* (JSPS 12; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); Stephen L. Cook, *Prophecy and Apocalypticism: The Postexilic Social Setting* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

³⁵The work of Barker, *Gate of Heaven* and *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God* (London: SPCK, 1992) and Meyer, 'Navel of the Earth', is a start.

mythology thought of the temple as the point at which the creation had taken place and around which it now revolved – the Navel of the Earth (*Jub.* 8:19; *1 Enoch* 26:1, cf. *Ezk.* 38:12); the meeting point of heaven and earth – the Gate of Heaven. As such the temple cult exists in a mythological space and time, closely identified with both Eden and the future 'eschatological' paradise.

Most importantly of all for our purposes was the belief that the temple was regarded as the 'epitome of the world, a concentrated form of its essence, a miniature of the cosmos'.³⁶ The temple was far more than the point at which heaven and earth met.³⁷ Rather, it was thought to correspond to, represent, or, in some sense, to be 'heaven and earth' in its totality. The idea is readily grasped if its three-fold structure, the sanctuary (supremely the Holy of Holies), the inner and outer courts, are allowed to correspond to heaven, earth and sea respectively. In the words of *Num. Rab.* 13:19;

The Court surrounds the temple just as the sea surrounds the world.

For Josephus the original pre-temple tabernacle was similarly divided into three parts, two of which were 'approachable and open to all'. Moses thereby 'signifies the earth and the sea, since these two are accessible to all; but the third portion he reserved for God alone, because heaven is inaccessible to men' (*Ant.* 3:181, cf. 3:123).³⁸

Josephus and the *midrash rabbah* to Numbers are post-second temple authors and where any notice has been taken of their temple cosmology it has sometimes been assumed to be a post-biblical development, and therefore of minor importance.³⁹ Though this symbolism might not be out of place in the wider Greco-Roman world, there is no reason to think that here Josephus or, over half a millennium later, the rabbis are accommodating to a pagan ideology.⁴⁰ In fact, there is now a clamorous chorus of Old

³⁶Levenson, *Zion*, 138, cf. *Creation*, 73-99; Patai, *Temple*, 105-138; Beate Ego, *Im Himmel wie auf Erden* (WUNT 2.34; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1989), 20-23; Meyer, 'Navel of the Earth', 231.

³⁷As Wright, *Jesus and the Victory*, 205.

³⁸The tripartite division of the temple, which was already by the first century expanded to a seven-fold division (cf. Josephus *War* 1:26 with *m. Kelim* 1:8) appears to have been closely related to three and seven storied cosmologies familiar to students of apocalyptic literature (e.g. *1 Enoch* 14:8-18; *Apoc. Abr.* 19:4).
³⁹See e.g. Craig R. Koester, *The Dwelling of God: The Tabernacle in the Old Testament, Intertestamental Jewish Literature, and the New Testament* (CBQMS 22; Washington DC: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1989), 61.

⁴⁰This is rightly perceived by Holladay, *Theios Aner in Hellenistic-Judaism: A Critique of the Use of This Category in New Testament Christology* (SBLDS 40;

Testament/Hebrew Bible scholars who have welcomed the presence of the belief in the temple-as-microcosm throughout Israel's canonical scriptures.

With respect to the post-exilic Priestly material (P), Joseph Blenkinsopp argued in a 1976 article that the writer of P has structured his material in order to establish a set of literary and linguistic correspondences between creation (Gn. 1) and the tabernacle (Ex. 25-40).⁴¹ In a similar vein P. J. Kearney has argued that in Exodus 25-31, where in seven speeches each beginning with the words 'And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying . . . ' (Ex. 25:1-30:10; 30:11-16; 30:16-21; 30:22-33; 30:34-38; 31:1-11; 31:12-17), God gives Moses His blueprint for the tabernacle, there is a deliberate correspondence to the seven days of creation in Genesis 1.⁴² Obviously, this means that creation has its home in the liturgy of the cult and the tabernacle is a mini-cosmos.⁴³

A similar picture emerges from the literature of the exile and early post-exilic literature. Susan Niditch has convincingly demonstrated that the same ideology permeates the vision of the new temple community in Ezekiel 40-48. She creatively draws on comparative religion material and concludes: 'On one level, Ezekiel's vision is the building, is the cosmos, as the mandala in each of its orders is the cosmos.' The importance of temple mythology for first and second Zechariah is well-known, and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar has now suggested that, like Exodus 25-31, the visions of Zechariah 1-8 are structured to conform to the sequence in Genesis 1.⁴⁴

Jon D. Levenson, who further supplies clear proof for the roots of this mythology in the architecture of the solomonic temple, has gathered up much of the wider biblical material in a thoroughgoing demonstration of its importance for biblical

Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977), 86-89; Levenson, *Creation*, 96. In Acts 7:48-50 it is the *hellenist* Stephen who attacks this cosmic mythology and in *b. Sukk. 51b* and *b. Bat. 4a* the cosmopolitan Herod has to be dissuaded from destroying its architectural representation in his temple rebuilding project.

⁴¹The Structure of P', *CBQ* 38 (1976), 275-292 (esp. 275-283).

⁴²Creation and Liturgy: The P Redaction of Exodus 25-40', *ZAW* 89 (1977), 375-387.

⁴³For the reception of Kearney's argument, which can be developed much further, see, e.g., Moshe Weinfield, 'Sabbath, Temple and the Enthronement of the Lord, The Problem of the Sitz-in-Leben of Gen. 1:1-2:3', in A. Caquot and M. Delcor (eds.), *Mélanges bibliques et orientaux en l'honneur de M. Henri Cazelles* (AOAT 212; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1981), 501-511; Levenson, *Creation*, 82-83.

⁴⁴*Prophets of Old and the Day of the End: Zechariah, the Book of Watchers and Apocalyptic* (OS 35; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 18-19, 38, 45.

theology.⁴⁵ From our fragmentary knowledge of Israel's various calendars, it is clear that the two principal New Year festivals, in Tishri and Nisan were associated with the dedication of the sanctuary (1 Ki. 8:2; cf. 2 Ch. 7:9; 1 Ki. 12:32-33; Ezr. 3:1-6) and the erection of the tabernacle (Ex. 40:2, 17) respectively.⁴⁶ In its earliest history this temple mythology has to be understood in the context of ancient Near Eastern mythology related to kingship, the divine conflict with the forces of Chaos and foundation of temple/city. That the cosmic temple mythology should have made an impact on Israelite religion is to be expected, since this was always part of the mythological *lingua franca* of the ancient Near East.⁴⁷ Perhaps its simplest biblical example is Psalm 78:69 where we read:

He built his sanctuary like the high heavens, like the earth, which he has founded for ever.

On the basis of detailed points of correspondence between biblical texts and ancient Near Eastern parallels, Levenson raises the 'fantalising possibility that "heaven and earth" . . . in the Hebrew Bible may, on occasion, be an appellation of Jerusalem or its temple.'⁴⁸ His case is particularly strong for a text such as Isaiah 65:17-18 where the new heavens and earth are related to the restoration of Jerusalem:

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice for ever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy . . .⁴⁹

Needless to say, this possibility is of enormous significance for our two New Testament texts.

In the light of this Old Testament material, the presence of the wider temple mythology throughout post-biblical literature and

⁴⁵*Zion*, 111-176; *Creation*, 78-99. In both volumes Levenson explores the wider ideological and theological issues at stake in the history of the modern suppression of this Old Testament mythology.

⁴⁶For tabernacles/Day of Atonement and New Creation see *Jub.* 5:10-19, esp. 5:18 referring to Lv. 16:34 and 11QTS 29:9 at the end of a description of the sacrifices for tabernacles.

⁴⁷For examples of ancient Near Eastern parallels to the temple as microcosm motif see Victor (Avidgor) Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in the Bible in Light of Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic Writings* (SOTS 115; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 335-337.

⁴⁸*Creation*, 90.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 90-91; Levenson compares the use of the expression 'heaven and earth' at Gn. 14:19.

its temple-as-microcosm component is unsurprising. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that this ideology was as axiomatic for late second-temple theology as is a concept such as covenant which we now recognize to be everywhere assumed even when not explicit.

Despite scholarly neglect we do find that this mythology is everywhere present in the post-biblical literature. C. T. R. Hayward has demonstrated that it is at least implicit in the fiftieth chapter of the Hebrew Sirach and is made explicit by the Greek translator ben Sirach.⁵⁰ He has persuasively argued that, from the same period, the establishment of a temple at Leontopolis in the first half of the second century BC was bound up with the renewal of the cosmos.⁵¹ Ben Zion Wacholder has suggested that the peculiarly cubic architecture of the Temple Scroll found at Qumran, which he correlates closely with the cosmology of the early Enoch literature, reflects a similar conceptual world. The 'future sanctuary prescribed in the scroll seems to have been designed to correspond to the renewal of the heaven and the earth at the end of days'.⁵² Certainly at one point in the Temple Scroll there is an unequivocal identification of the creation of the sanctuary as the day of creation.⁵³

Both Josephus and Philo explore at some length the cosmic symbolism of the tabernacle/temple and its paraphernalia (Philo *Mos* 2:71-145; Josephus *Ant.* 3:123, 179-187).⁵⁴ Both agree that the woven work of the tabernacle and the temple veil are made from four materials symbolizing the four elements – earth, water, air and fire (*War* 5:212-213; *Ant.* 3:138-134; *Quaestiones in Exodum* 2:85, cf. *Mos.* 2:88). Both regard the seven lamps as symbolic of the planets (*Mos*

⁵⁰*Temple*, 38-84, esp. 79-80.

⁵¹The Jewish Temple at Leontopolis: A Reconsideration', *JJS* 33 (1982), 429-443 (esp. 436-437).

⁵²*The Dawn of Qumran* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1983), 40, cf. 33-40. Cf. Margaret Barker, 'The Temple Measurements and the Solar Calendar', in George J. Brooke (ed.), *Temple Scroll Studies. Papers presented at the International Symposium on the Temple Scroll, Manchester, December 1987* (JSPS, 7; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 63-66.

⁵³1QT 29:9: '... יום הבריה אשר אברה אית את מקדשתי'. . . . until the day of creation, when I will create my Temple'. In his *editio princeps* Y. Yadin first adopted the reading 'יום הבריה אשר אברה אית את מקדשתי', though he later conceded the possibility of reading 'יום הבריה אשר אברה אית את מקדשתי' which is now universally accepted. See Yadin, *The Temple Scroll*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1983), 2, 129, 354-355.

⁵⁴At *War* 4:324 Josephus refers to the priests who lead 'the cosmic worship' (ἱεῖς κοσμικῶν θυσιασμάτων). For the later suppression of this cosmic temple mythology, as evinced by the magical text *Sefer Yesira* see Peter Hayman, 'Some Observations on *Sefer Yesira*: (2) The Temple at the Centre of the Universe', *JJS* 37 (1986), 176-182.

2:103; *War* 5:146, 217). Both consider the high priest's garments to be yet another extended cosmic metaphor (*Mos.* 2:117-126, 133-135, 143; *Ant.* 3:180, 183-187). In addition to the points of agreement, each has his own peculiar points of symbolic interpretation. So, for example, for Philo the pomegranates and flowers on the bottom of the high priest's garments symbolize earth and water; the bells the harmonious alliance of the two (*Mos.* 119-121). For Josephus the pomegranates and bells represent lightning and thunder (*War* 5:231; *Ant.* 3:184). It is clear that in the main Philo's cosmological interpretation of the sanctuary is that of mainstream Judaism, since at various points he adds his own more allegorical and rarefied geometric and numerical interpretations (*Mos.* 2:80, 84, 98f., 101-105, 127f.).⁵⁵

Besides the passage in *Numbers Rabbah* this understanding of the temple is recurrent in rabbinic literature even though so much energy after AD 135 had been directed towards creating a world-view – a cosmology – which could give Judaism meaning in the absence of the temple.⁵⁶ Before its fall, the temple, of course, lay at the heart of Jewish practice and belief. Given its tangible presence in the national consciousness, nourished through Scripture, daily prayer and festivals, it is worth recalling the talmudic tradition that the inner walls of the temple had been constructed so as to look like the waves of the sea (*b. Sukk.* 51b, *b. B. Bat.* 4a).⁵⁷

⁵⁵For the place of these texts in the wider context of Philo's thought see Hayward, *Temple*, 108-141.

⁵⁶See J. Z. Smith, 'Earth and Gods', 104-128; Schäfer, 'Tempel und Schöpfung. Zur Interpretation einiger Heiligtumstraditionen in der rabbinischen Literatur', *Studien zur Geschichte und Theologie des rabbinischen Judentums* (AGJU 15; Leiden: Brill, 1978), 122-133. See esp. *Pesiq. R.* 5:3 (on Nu. 7:1); *Pesiq. Rab. Kah.* 1:4-5, 21:5; Rabbi Jacob ben Assi in Midrash Tanhuma *Pesiqidâ* 2 (Levenson, *Creation*, 170, n. 77). Cf. *Pirqe R. El.* 3 (edn.: Friedlander, 17-18) as the climax of the narrative of creation. At *Pesiqta Rabbati* 7:4 (cf. *Gen. Rab.* 3:9; Tanhuma Buber, *maso* 24) the first day of the temple's service (Nu. 7:12) is regarded as the first day of creation. For the tradition assigned to the tanna Rabbi Pinhas ben Ya'ir see Patai, *Temple*, 108 and see texts cited by Ego, *Im Himmel*, 21, n. 15. Note also *b. Ber.* 55a ('Rav said: "Bezalel knew the letters by which heaven and earth were created"'); *b. Shabb.* 87b; Sifra *schemini*, 43 (Schäfer, 'Schöpfung', 131-132); *Midrash Tadshe*, ch. 2 (in Adolph Jellinek [ed.], *Bet ha-Midrash* [Jerusalem: Warhmann, 3rd edn. 1967], 2:164-167).

⁵⁷The ocean symbolism of the temple walls appears to have influenced the famous early mystical tradition concerning four who entered *parades* (*b. Hag.* 14b). Cf. David J. Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision* (TSAJ 16; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1988), 194-210, who supplies parallel Hekhalot texts.

The implications of this mythology for Mark 13:31 (Mt. 24:35) hardly need comment.⁵⁸ Within the broader sweep of the temple focus throughout this eschatological chapter and the specific time reference in the preceding verse (Mk. 13:30; Mt. 24:34), Jesus' promise that 'heaven and earth' will pass away makes best sense, not as a collapse of the space-time universe, as has been so often understood, but as a collapse of a *mythical* space-time universe which is embodied in the Jerusalem temple. Mark 13:31 therefore provides a neat *inclusio* with the reference to the destruction of the temple at the beginning of the chapter (Mk. 13:2). It provides *the* definitive statement that the expected destruction which has been anticipated, in particular from Mark 13:14 onwards, has now arrived. Of course, as a summary statement it picks up the language of 13:24-25 which now makes perfect sense in the context of the detailed correspondences between the temple and structures of the cosmos.

In this history of religions context, the claim by Caird, Borg and Wright that Mark 13 is entirely concerned with the destruction of the Jerusalem temple makes excellent sense. However, their reading is properly located not simply in a particular understanding of Old Testament and apocalyptic metaphor but a broader temple mythology. It is to this mythology which texts such as Jeremiah 4:23-28 and 2 *Baruch* 10:6-19, to which Borg and Wright appeal, properly belong.

The extent and importance of this mythology could be appreciated only with a fuller and more detailed examination of the data. In particular, I suspect, that reference to the social anthropology undertaken by the likes of Peter Berger and Mary Douglas would clarify the relationship between the temple cult and Jewish cosmology. Clearly the mythology assumes a mutual dependence between the structure and stability of heaven and earth and Israel's Torah constitution. The one is contingent upon the other. The connection is clearly made in a number of primary texts which would merit further attention.⁵⁹

⁵⁸For its presence elsewhere in the New Testament see perhaps Heb. 12:25-29 in context.

⁵⁹For the interdependence of (temple-centred) Torah and cosmology see e.g. *Jubilees* (esp. 1:29; 2:17ff., 30; 6:18; 12:25-27; 16:27; 23:18ff.; 33:10-14; Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities* 11:3; 15:6; 23:10; 32:7.

The Passing Away of Heaven and Earth and the Relativization of the Torah (Mt. 5:18)

In the light of the Jewish background and our rereading of Mark 13:31, we are now in a position to consider in more detail a possible solution to the problematic use of the expression at Matthew 5:18d. There are, I suggest, three interlocking referents in the expression 'until heaven and earth pass away' at 5:18d: (1) the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD 70 confirming the obsolescence of the Old Covenant; (2) Jesus' death and resurrection confirming the institution of the New Covenant and its messianic Torah; (3) Jesus' life, ministry and teaching as the embodiment of the new creation and the setting-up of the messianic Torah which His new community follows.

The first of these referents, the destruction of the temple in AD 70, is unproblematic.⁶⁰ With the destruction of the Jewish cult the keeping of the Torah in all its details became impossible. The non-Christian Jews who attempted a rebuilding of the Jewish nation state and temple in AD 132-135 and those who later still composed the Mishnah believed that the Torah was not for ever obsolete; it was worth, against the evidence, maintaining a belief in the temple-centred Torah. However, from a Christian perspective the destruction of the temple would naturally be regarded as a definitive relativization of the Torah. The temple and the covenantal obligations which it administered, and the total vision of the world ('heaven and earth') which it expressed, had ceased to exist. It seems now that when the close parallel to Matthew 5:18 at 24:35 refers to the passing away of heaven and earth and endurance of Jesus' words, the first of the three referents in the former text is to the forefront. With the temple cult gone, Jewish Christians should not feel its loss since they still had Jesus' teaching.

But this first referent itself raises a question. Given that the temple represented not simply a focus of teaching, but much more the means of individual and social atonement and maintenance of cosmic structure, what enabled the early Christians to sit lightly to its loss by comparison to the framers of the Mishnah? Did they have something more than Jesus' teaching (Mt. 24:35b) which rendered the loss of the temple insignificant?

Certainly they did, and the second of the two referents at Matthew 5:18, the death and resurrection of the Messiah Jesus, lies at the heart of the early Christian belief that the temple cosmology has

⁶⁰For this interpretation of 5:18 see A. Feuillet, 'La synthèse eschatologique de Saint Matthieu', *RB* 57 (1950), 62-91, 180-211.

been fulfilled and replaced (with concomitant relativization of the Torah) in the Lord and Saviour.

We have already assessed the evidence discussed by W. D. Davies and John P. Meier for the crucifixion and resurrection as a passing away of heaven and earth at Matthew 5:18. We have seen that the main problem with their interpretation was the lack of any clear indication that the cosmic disturbances surrounding the crucifixion could be regarded as themselves the *passing away of heaven and earth*. However, in the light of our discussion of the cosmic temple mythology, that lacuna is readily filled. First, it is widely believed that the rending of the temple veil (Mt. 27:51a) symbolizes the destruction of the temple itself.⁶¹ That, of course, as we have just seen, would mean the inability to keep the Torah in all, if not most, of its details. If the temple's destruction is symbolized and if the temple embodies heaven and earth, then a Jewish (Christian) reader of the synoptic crucifixion scene would naturally assume that at this point there is insinuated the passing away of heaven and earth.

Secondly, even if the rending of the veil does not intend an allusion to the temple's destruction, only the entry of Jesus' spirit into the Holy of Holies and the establishing of a new relationship between God and man, that is, between heaven and earth, then the veiling presents the reader with another reason to discern the passing away of heaven and earth. Both Philo and Josephus agree (*War* 5:212-213; *Ant.* 3:138-144; *Quaest. Exod.* 2:85, cf. *Mos* 2:88) that the veil, in its fourfold constituent parts 'typified the universe':

For the scarlet seemed emblematic of fire, the fine linen of the earth, the blue of the air, and the purple of the sea; the comparison in two cases being suggested by their colour, and in that of the fine linen and purple by their origin, as the one is produced by the earth and the other by the sea. On this tapestry was portrayed a panorama of the heavens, the signs of the Zodiac excepted (Josephus, *War* 5:212-213).

In that case, the destructive rending of the temple veil itself signifies the passing away of heaven and earth. Since this happens at exactly the same moment as Jesus breathes His last, there is clearly some

⁶¹See already Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* 1:41; *Lives of the Prophets* (C. C. Torrey [ed.], *The Lives of the Prophets: Greek text and translation* [Philadelphia: JBL Monograph Series 1]).

correlation between Jesus' death and the passing away of heaven and earth.⁶²

I submit that, when read in the light of the contemporary temple mythology, one of the only two substantial objections to the Davies-Meier reading of Matthew 5:18 with reference to the cross and resurrection is removed. For all three synoptics this was the decisive moment at which heaven and earth passed away (and were recreated at resurrection).

The other objection to the Davies-Meier reading of Matthew 5:18 was the fact that the strongest indications of a Matthean relativization of the Torah refer not to the period after the death and resurrection, but the period of the ministry: already in the Sermon on the Mount some joys and tittles have passed away. Matthew 5:18 therefore demands that there also be some reference to new creation within the life and ministry of Jesus, rather than solely at the cross and resurrection.

We are thus led to consider the third referent in Matthew 5:18b; the creation of a new heaven and earth during His ministry. This phenomenon has received little attention in Matthean scholarship. It deserves far more attention than the present juncture allows. In the present context a number of preliminary considerations are pertinent.⁶³

First, Davies and Allison have recently adopted the minority position of commentators which reads Matthew's opening words 'Βίβλος γενέσθωσ...' (Mt. 1:1) as a title for the whole gospel recalling the title of the first book of the Hebrew Bible and the words at Genesis 2:4 and 5:1. As such, they argue, it should be translated 'the book of the genesis' or '... of the new creation'.⁶⁴ Though their arguments have not been universally accepted,⁶⁵ they rightly compare other passages in which Matthew associates Jesus' birth and

⁶²The literary connection suggests a set of correspondences between Jesus, the temple and the cosmos, the foundation of which is to be found in the P account of creation and tabernacle, and which I will explore elsewhere.

⁶³Beside a thoroughgoing demonstration of the importance of new creation for Matthew's theology, further study would demonstrate the temple context of four of Matthew's five other 'heaven and earth' references (5:34-35; 11:25; 16:19; 18:18-19), the other being 28:18.

⁶⁴Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1. 150-153.

⁶⁵Their suggestion is dismissed by G. Stanton, 'Matthew: Βίβλος, εὐγγέλιον, or βίος?', in F. V. Segbroeck, C. M. Tuckett, G. Van Belle and J. Verheyden (eds.), *The Four Gospels*, 3 vols. (Festschrift for Frans Neirynck; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), 2.1187-1202 on the grounds that the thought is lacking elsewhere in Matthew.

ministry with the new creation.⁶⁶ Among these, the way in which Jesus is associated with the king of creation who rules over the chaotic waters (8:23-27, cf. Gn. 1:1-2) itself deserves to be placed in the wider context of Israelite temple and divine kingship mythology.⁶⁷ In the context of our discussion, Davies and Allison's comparison with the reference back to the paradisaical conditions in Matthew 19:3-9 is particularly important. There the Matthean relativization of Old Testament divorce law, which is seen as contingent upon Israel's hardness of heart, is explicitly related, to the new creation in accordance with that which was initially intended. Thus Torah is contingent upon both protology and eschatology.

This latter passage could readily fall under the rubric, 'as heaven and earth pass away the details of the Torah will fall away' (Mt. 5:18). Here cosmology is firmly rooted in anthropology and soteriology. But is there any evidence that this was more than a possible connection between two, otherwise widely separated passages? Is there any evidence that the relativization of the Torah at Matthew 5:21-48, which 5:18 introduces, was also understood in relation to the creation of a new heaven and new earth during Jesus' ministry? The parallel to Matthew 19:3-9 at 5:31-32 omits reference to Genesis 1 and 2 and so might be thought to count against any connection between Matthew's Torah hermeneutic and any putative realized eschatology. However, given the thrust of our history of religions and exegetical argument thus far, I suggest that Matthew has created his Sermon on the Mount with an interpretative framework, hitherto ignored, as explicit in its correlation of new creation and Torah relativization as that at Matthew 19:3-9.

When wrestling with Matthew 5:17-20 commentators rarely relate Jesus' words to the immediately preceding material in 5:13-16. They concentrate solely on the so-called 'antitheses' which follow (5:21-48) and the rest of the Sermon (6:1-7:27). Furthermore, when trying to make sense of the structure of the Sermon as a whole, 5:13-16 is relegated to being a 'transitional passage' without any important relationship to any of what follows. Reading 5:18 as I suggest, the place of 5:13-16 in the immediate context becomes clear.

⁶⁶Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.153. See also W. D. Davies, 'The Jewish Sources of Matthew's Messianism', in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 494-511 (esp. 496-498).

⁶⁷Cf. e.g. Ps. 89:25 with 89:10. See rightly T. D. N. Mettinger, *In Search of God: The Meaning and Message of the Everlasting Names* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 112-113.

There is a significant opinion among commentators that 5:14 is meant to evoke Zion/Jerusalem ideology in general and the interest in Jerusalem as a light to the world in particular. The image of a city set on a hill as a light to the world evokes Old Testament descriptions of Israel's capital (Is. 2:2-4; 42:6; 49:6; Mi. 4:1-3) which are themselves taken up in post-biblical literature (*Sib. Or.* 5:420-423; cf. Rev. 21:10-11) and the rabbis (*Gen. Rab.* 59:5; *Pesiq. R.* 20:7).⁶⁸ Some are sceptical as to this symbolism.⁶⁹ But it is entirely consistent with the salt saying in the previous verse which evokes the temple sacrifices (cf. Lv. 2:13; Ezk. 43:24; *Jub.* 21:11; 11QTemple 20). These were also meant to have an atoning and healing purpose for the whole earth (cf. 5:13 τῆς γῆς). The Jerusalem/temple focus is also fitting given the allusion to the covenantal blessings (and curses) at the end of Deuteronomy (28:1-14, cf. 27:15-28, 68; 29) in Matthew 5:3-12.⁷⁰ In Deuteronomy these blessings and curses were to be pronounced on Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. However, Deuteronomy 31:9-13 stipulates that the Deuteronomic Law, of which they are a part, was to be recited septennially at the feast of booths, which was celebrated at Jerusalem in the second temple period (*m. Soṭah* 7:8).

Immediately after 5:17-20 Matthew chooses for the first of Jesus' six *halakic* pronouncements one which contains an overtly temple-focused illustration (5:23-24). If Matthew 5:13-16 as a whole has in mind the creation of the people of God as the New or True Jerusalem, then a reference in 5:18 to the old (temple-centred) Jerusalem passing away is entirely natural. There is then an implicit sense of both newness and fulfilment in 5:13-16, which corresponds to these two themes in 5:17-18.

Furthermore, the imagery of the city set on a hill in 5:14 now chimes in with the last passage in the Sermon on the Mount at 7:24-27. There, there is no explicit mention of a hill; rather a house built on a rock is set over against a house built on sand. However, given the set of mythological images which surround the view of the temple as

⁶⁸These are explored in full by K. M. Campbell, 'The New Jerusalem in Matthew 5:14', *SJT* 31 (1978), 335-336, who cites Is. 14:32; 60:1-3, 19; Mi. 4:6f.; Tob. 13:9-11; *Sib. Or.* 5:249f.; 5:420-423; 3:787; *Gen. Rab.* 59:5 and more generally Is. 2:2-5; 42, 49, 54 and 60. To his passages should be added Josephus' description of Jerusalem and its temple at *War* 5:67, 208, 222-223; *Ant.* 15:393. Cf. Meyer, 'Navel of the Earth', 261. For the restoration of paradisaical light and the temple cult, see e.g. C. T. R. Hayward, 'The Figure of Adam in Pseudo-Philo's Biblical Antiquities', *JSt* 23 (1992), 11-14. For the creation of light in the temple in rabbinic literature see Schäfer, 'Schöpfung', 128-129.

⁶⁹E.g. Luz, *Matthew*, 251, cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.475 for hesitation.

⁷⁰See N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 386-388.

cosmos, there is in this passage a clear evocation of a similar Zion theology. N. T. Wright has now, rightly I believe, pointed out that a parable about a house built on a rock evokes the temple, which is widely described simply as a (or God's) 'house'.⁷¹ The warning that a house built on sand will fall under the tempest of the elements therefore looks forward to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD 70 which is the principal focus of Matthew 24.

Wright's reading is substantially reinforced by the temple mythology from the Old Testament through to the rabbis. As the point at which creation took place, Zion is inviolable against the forces of Chaos, represented archetypally by the flood waters which God had overcome in Genesis 1:1.⁷² Zion is a temple city built on the same foundation stone which God, and then David (*y. Sanh.* 29a; *b. Sukk.* 53b; *b. Mak.* 11a) had used to still the waters of Chaos. As such she is able to withstand the 'thunder and earthquake . . . whirlwind and tempest' (Is. 29:6 in context of 28:14-29:10, *cf. e.g.* Pss. 24; 46). Whilst Israel is set on her 'Rock, the mountain of the Lord', the Lord destroys 'with a cloudburst and tempest and hailstones' the enemies of His people (Is. 30:29-30).⁷³ Whilst commentators regularly compare Matthew 7:24-27 with the flood account of Genesis 6-9, that passage itself is part of this larger mythology. In the biblical account, the ark in which Noah and his family were protected was related to the tabernacle.⁷⁴

Of course, in the context of the gospel Jesus is *reusing* this temple mythology. The house no longer stands for the Jerusalem temple. It is individuated to the wise follower of Jesus who hears and follows His teaching (7:24). In the allusion to the future destruction of the Jerusalem temple – the 'passing away of heaven and earth' – Matthew's Jesus follows the prophetic model of subversive remythologizing set by, for example, Ezekiel 13:9-16:

My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and utter lying divinations. . . . Because in truth they have misled my people, saying, 'Peace,' when there is no peace; and because, when the people build a wall, these prophets smear whitewash on it. . . . There

⁷¹Wright, *Jesus and the Victory*, 292, 334. *Cf. The New Testament and the People of God*, 387, n. 59.

⁷²Of the storm passages regularly cited by commentators to Mt. 7:24-27, Is. 28:16-17; 29:6 are clearly part of the temple mythology tradition.

⁷³*Cf. Sib. Or.* 3:685-692; 1QH 3:14f. with 3:1f.

⁷⁴See e.g. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (London: SPCK, 1984), 421 on Genesis 6:16; Joseph Blenkinsopp, 'Structure of P', 283-286. *Cf. e.g.* Hayward, *Temple*, 52 on *Ben Sira* 50:7.

will be a deluge of rain, great hailstones will fall, and a stormy wind will break out . . . there shall be a deluge of rain, and hailstones of wrath to destroy it (*cf. Je.* 7:3ff.).

Read in this way Matthew 7:24-27 creates a neat *inclusio* with 5:13-16 around the rest of the Sermon on the Mount.⁷⁵ These two scenes evoke two of the most fundamental components of the temple mythos; the creation of the primal light and the construction of the cosmic mountain.⁷⁶ They thus provide the hermeneutical lens through which the whole of the Sermon is to be read: this *halakah* is that of the new creation – its adherents belong to a new temple constitution, a new heaven and a new earth. Follow Jesus' words and the prerogatives of Jerusalem and the temple are yours.⁷⁷ Ignore them and you will go the same way that Ezekiel's opponents went in 587 BC.

This *inclusio* thus provides an essential hermeneutical key to the interpretation of the whole Sermon. The *halakah* which it lays out is that of the new temple community for whom there is already dawning a new heaven and a new earth. The details of the Torah of the old covenant are thus in part relativized. The creation of the new community is understood in clearly cosmological terms and the (new) Torah is regarded as contingent upon that ecclesiological focused cosmology.

I submit that the difficulties presented by the two variants of the same 'heaven and earth passing away' saying have now been substantially resolved. It must be admitted that new questions have been thrown up. What is the relationship between the three layers of meaning we have discerned at Matthew 5:18? Where else in Matthew do we find such a confluence of ecclesiology, Christology, cosmology and Torah ideology and what is the wider Jewish background to such thought? To an exploration of these and other questions I will return elsewhere.

⁷⁵The beatitudes (blessings) of Mt. 5:3-12 are coupled with the curses of Mt. 23:13-36.

⁷⁶Reading e.g. Schäfer, 'Schöpfung', 125-129; Levenson, *Zion*, 132-136 one cannot fail to appreciate the symbolism of this *inclusio*.

⁷⁷The logic is consistent with the return to paradise in Mt. 19:3-9. It is also, I would suggest, the key to understanding Mt. 12:1-8.

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