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Charles Wesley and the End of the World

Kenneth G. C. Newport*

A. Introduction¹

Of all the books in the Bible it is doubtless the last, the Apocalypse of St. John, that has gained the reputation for being the most conducive to religious extremity. Indeed, some have judged the strange contents of that book to be so hazardous that they have felt it necessary to warn others “beware of the Apocalypse which, when studied, almost always either finds a man mad, or makes him so.”² Such a judgement is, however, a relatively recent one, for it is clear that for much of Christian history the task of interpreting the book of Revelation has occupied a key position on the church’s theological agenda. This seems particularly to have been the case in post-Reformation England, where individuals from across the denominational spectrum devoted themselves to a careful study of the prophecies held in that book, convinced that the words in Revelation 1:1 (“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass”)³ were to be taken literally and with absolute seriousness.

The very considerable interest in the book of Revelation which existed during this period is easy to document. Ever since the publication of John Bale’s book, *The Image of bothe Churches after the moste wonderfull and heavenly Revelacion of Sainct John the Evangelist* (1548), a constant stream of works devoted to the book of Revelation and an interpretation of the prophecies therein poured from the English presses. Joseph Mede’s *Clavis Apocalyptica* (1627) was perhaps the most influential, but there were many others such as Thomas Brightman’s *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos* (ca. 1600)⁴ and John Tillinghast’s

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Abbreviations:

AM = Arminian Magazine

BJRULM = Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester

MARC = Methodist Archives and Research Centre

PW = George Osborn, ed., *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, 13 vols. (1868–1872).

WJW = *The Works of John Wesley*, 14 vols. (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872; repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, n.d.)

¹Some few parts of this paper draw upon work originally published in *The Baptist Quarterly*, *The Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* and *The Wesleyan Theological Journal*. I am grateful to the editors of those journals for granting me permission to make use of that material here.

²*Rainbow: A Magazine of Christian Literature, with Special Reference to the Revealed Future of the Church and the World*, 24 vols. (1864–87), 3.55.

³All scriptural quotations given here are from the KJV.

⁴Thomas Brightman, *A Revelation of the Apocalyp*s (1611). The date of the writing of this work is somewhat unclear. Froom notes that Latin editions appeared in 1609 (Frankfurt) and 1612 (Heidelberg), and gives 1615 as the earliest date for an English edition (see L. E. Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, 4 vols. [Washington DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1946–54], 2.512 n. 18). However, there is in the John Rylands University Library of Manchester an English edition published in Amsterdam dated to 1611 (ref. R127410).

Knowledge of the Times (1654). Shortly before the start of the eighteenth century Samuel Petto, a Suffolk clergyman,⁵ published his own study of Revelation (and other biblical apocalyptic passages).⁶ The work was typical of the age in which it was written: the end is coming and the prophetic “signs of the times” are clearly discernible in the Church and in the world at large. Careful study of the prophecies, especially those contained in the books of Daniel and the Revelation, will give a clear insight into how long this world has yet to last and what must happen before it comes to an end.

Many of the above mentioned works sought to locate the earth’s present position on the map of world time, a sensible enough task given the preconception of the book of Revelation as a panorama of the course of human and divine history. Such an approach to the book of Revelation (and much of what is said in this context is applicable also to the book of Daniel) has become known as “world and/or Church historicism,” for it sees the course of history from the time of John the Seer to the apocalyptic return of Christ (and even a little beyond) as being punctuated by prophetic fulfilment.⁷ According to the historicist interpreter, time

⁵Froom, *Prophetic Faith* 3.131.

⁶S. Petto, *The Revelation Unveiled: Or, an Essay Towards the Discovering I. When Many Scripture Prophecies had Their Accomplishment and Turneth into History II. What Are Now Fulfilling III. What Rest Still to be Fulfilled, with a Guess at the Time of Them. With an Appendix Proving, that Pagan Rome Was not Babylon, Rev 17, and that the Jews Shall be Converted* (1693). See also J. Bachmair, *The Revelation of St. John Historically Explained* (1778); B. Blayney, *A Dissertation by Way of an Inquiry into the True Import and Application of the Vision Related in Dan IX verse 20 to the End, usually Called Daniel's Prophecy of the 70 Weeks* (1775); J. Brown, *Harmony of Scripture Prophecies, and the History of their Fulfillment* (1784); R. Clark, *A Warning to the World; or the Prophetical Numbers of Daniel and John Calculated* (1759); R. Clayton, *A Dissertation on Prophecy, wherein the Coherence and Connexion of the Prophecies in both the Old and New Testament are Fully Considered; together with an Explanation of the Revelation of St. John* (1749). Little can be gained here from a mere listing of sources. However, these few are noted in support of the claim that historicism was a significant force in English exegesis in the eighteenth century. David Brady, *The Contribution of British Writers between 1560 and 1830 to the Interpretation of Revelation 13.16–18 (The Number of the Beast): A Study in the History of Exegesis* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1983) lists many more.

⁷Historicism has a long and complex history in the development of the biblical-interpretative tradition. By the eighteenth century historicism was the standard interpretative paradigm and it hence comes as no surprise to find that it was the approach adopted by Charles. Historicism may be contrasted with two other schools of interpretation which existed in the eighteenth century: preterism and futurism. According to the preterist scheme (which was a forerunner of modern critical contemporary-historical interpretations) most of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation have already been fulfilled in the past (see Arthur W. Wainwright, *Mysterious Apocalypse* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993], pp. 63–66 and J. A. Oddy, “Eschatological Prophecy in the English Theological Tradition, ca. 1700–ca. 1840” [University of London Ph.D. Thesis, 1982], pp. 46–48). A good early example of this view is Henry Hammond (1605–1660), who argued that the bulk of the prophecies contained in Revelation were fulfilled before the conversion of Constantine to Christianity at the beginning of the fourth century (Henry Hammond, *A Paraphrase, and Annotations upon all the Books of the New Testament* [1653]). The millennium, on this scheme, extends from ca. 300 to ca. 1300 and hence the period after that is the period of the last judgment immediately before the end of the world. According to the futurists, on the other hand, most of the prophecies in Daniel and Revelation have yet to occur. So, for example, the Antichrist (taken as prefigured in Daniel 7–8 and Revelation 13) is a literal figure who

moves on to its predetermined goal and the book of Revelation (together with Daniel) previews that course. The images and symbols contained therein are thus milestones which are able to give the traveler some reasonably clear indication of how far he has come and how much further he has yet to go.

As might perhaps be expected, such works most often resulted in the adoption of the view that the writer's own period was the one perched on the brink of the apocalyptic conclusion of the present age. There were of course exceptions (of which John Wesley was one),⁸ but many who did attempt to set a date for the dawn of the eschatological kingdom put the event at no great distance from their respective presents. Such speculation was widespread. Neither was it limited to those on the religious margins or of questionable intellectual ability. Indeed, even such intellectual giants as the unorthodox Presbyterian minister (and "discoverer" of Oxygen) Joseph Priestley⁹ turned their hands to the task of prophetic interpretation, as did the eminent scientist Sir Isaac Newton.¹⁰

This list of biblical-apocalyptic interpreters could easily be extended.¹¹ It might, for example, be driven back to the work of the twelfth-century Abbot Joachim of Fiore who is often credited with founding the "historicist"¹² interpre-

will reign for 3 and a half years/1260 days/42 months etc. and the judgments, vials, seals of the book of Revelation still await their future fulfillment. For a brief discussion of futurism see Wainwright *Mysterious Apocalypse* 61–63. More extensive is Oddy, "Eschatological Prophecy," pp. 94–179. It was largely in Catholic circles that futurism was expounded and was developed as a counter-argument to the almost universal Protestant view that the Pope and/or the Catholic Church in general was the Antichrist depicted in the prophetic books (see Kenneth G. C. Newport, "Revelation 13 and the Papal Antichrist in Eighteenth-Century England: A Study in New Testament *Eisegesis*" *BJRULM* 79[1997] 91–103); *idem*. "Catholics and the Antichrist: Futurist Exegesis in Eighteenth-Century England" (forthcoming). Neither preterism nor futurism appears to have played a part in the formation of Charles's eschatological views.

⁸See below, pp. 36–37; fn. 16.

⁹See for example Joseph Priestley, *The Present State of Europe Compared with Ancient Prophecies* (1794) and his notes on the books of Daniel and Revelation in *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley*, 25 vols. (1817–1831), 12:309–343; 14:442–515.

¹⁰Sir Isaac Newton, *Observations on the Prophecies* (1733). See also the work of Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680) who was head of Magdalene College, Oxford from 1650–1660. Goodwin wrote many works dealing with the general topic of prophetic interpretation including a series of sermons preached in Holland in 1639. These were published posthumously in 1683 under the title *Exposition upon the Book of the Revelation*. See further Brady, *Number of the Beast* pp. 181–182.

¹¹The extent of the literature devoted to the book of Revelation in post-Reformation England is easily underestimated. Some of the eighteenth-century sources have been noted above (see note 6). In addition to Brady, *Number of the Beast*, the bibliographical sections in Richard Bauckham, *Tudor Apocalypse* (Abingdon, Oxford: The Sutton Cortenay Press, 1978) and the second volume of Le Roy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, 4 vols. (1946–1954) give some further illustration of the richness of the materials available.

¹²As noted above (fn. 7) the historicist method of prophetic interpretation has a long history in western exegesis. However, as Wainwright correctly notes (*Mysterious Apocalypse*, pp. 49–53), it was largely as a result of the influence of Joachim of Fiore (ca. 1135–1202) that this approach gained a firm foothold on scholarship. See further Bernard McGinn, *The Calabrian Abbot: Joachim of Fiore in the History of Western Thought* [New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1985], pp. 145–160. A full and detailed study of Joachim and his legacy is to be found in Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969].

tative school to which Newton, Priestley, Brightman, Mede, Bale, and others belonged. Alternatively the tradition could be brought forward to the present where it continues to live on, if not in academic circles, at least in ecclesiastical ones.¹³ However, while the kind of historicist biblical-apocalyptic interpretative scheme briefly outlined above does have a tradition which stretches at least from Joachim to the present day, it was during the period from the Reformation to about the middle of the nineteenth century that the influence of the school was at its height. It was hence the paradigm for eighteenth-century biblical interpreters in general, and therefore the paradigm for Charles Wesley in particular, and, as is noted below,¹⁴ that paradigm informs much of Charles's work in this area.

B. Early Methodists and Millennial Expectation

It is perhaps of little surprise, then, given what would appear to be an almost ubiquitous interest in things future and the decoding of Revelation's encrypted message relating to them, that evidence of an interest in the fulfilment of biblical prophecy among the early Methodists is not difficult to find. I have discussed this issue at length elsewhere¹⁵ and it will hence be enough here simply to note a few of the more salient points. Even such a brief sketch is, however, necessary if Charles Wesley's exegesis of Revelation and other written comments on apocalyptic matters are to be seen in their proper context.

That eschatological speculation was an area in which some eighteenth-century Methodists actively engaged is suggested by a remark made by Luke Tyerman, one of John Wesley's earliest biographers. According to him "there can be no doubt, that Wesley, like his father before him, was a millenarian."¹⁶ In fact it is clear from the context of this remark that Tyerman is suggesting that Wesley was not simply "a millenarian," but a premillennialist, that is he looked for the sudden appearance of Jesus upon the clouds of heaven and the inauguration of Christ's personal reign upon earth *before* the onset of the 1000 years of peace described in Revelation 20.¹⁷ Such a position is in fact affirmed by John Wesley himself, who in a letter to Thomas Hartley (1764), wrote of the latter's presenta-

¹³See further Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall be no More: Prophecy Belief in American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992) and Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism, 1875-1982* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

¹⁴See below, p. 39f.

¹⁵Kenneth G. C. Newport, "Methodists and the Millennium: Eschatological Beliefs and the Interpretation of Biblical Prophecy in Early British Methodism," *BJRULM* 78(1996) 103-122.

¹⁶Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A.*, 3 vols. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1870-1871), 2.523. This is not the place to explore in great detail the claim that John Wesley was a premillennialist. Much of the literature relevant to that discussion is referred to in Kenneth O. Brown, "John Wesley—Post or Premillennialist?," *Methodist History* 28(1989) 33-41.

¹⁷According to the premillennial position (the holders of which were in a minority in the eighteenth century) Christ appears suddenly and unexpectedly to execute judgment on a wicked world. Following this appearance and judgment, the millennium, a period of one thousand years during which Christ reigns upon earth, begins. Premillennialism, which was relatively uncommon in the

tion of his clearly premillennial beliefs “I cannot but thank you for your strong and seasonable confirmation of that comfortable doctrine: of which I cannot entertain the least doubt, as long as I believe the Bible.”¹⁸ Similarly, though John may not have agreed with all he read in the prophetic interpretative works of J. A. Bengel (who thought that a millennium would begin in 1836),¹⁹ he seems nevertheless to have felt the work of that scholar to be sufficiently important to warrant translation and reprint in his own *Notes upon the New Testament* (1754). Indeed, John even prints Bengel’s apocalyptic time chart.²⁰ That John’s interest in Bengel’s work was more than simply a passing one is however confirmed by a report in the *London Chronicle* for 3 June 1788. The headline reads “Wesley in Bradford—World to end in 1836.”²¹ Charles also appears to have had a keen interest in Bengel’s theories, a fact suggested by a lengthy letter discussing them written by Dr. John Robertson and sent to Charles in 1747.²²

Another leading early Methodist whose work reflects intense eschatological concern was John Fletcher who wrote a letter to John Wesley in 1755 on the subject of the prophecies.²³ In the course of the letter Fletcher makes it clear that he

eighteenth century, is often shackled to a basically negative view of humankind, for those who adhere to it hold that humankind and human society are rotten to the core and that this state of things can be overcome only by the direct intervention of God. Those who hold the opposing view, on the other hand, the *postmillennialists*, suggest that Christ will appear only after the 1000 year period. Indeed, it is during this period that the ground is prepared for the Lord’s return by means of a radical and hitherto unprecedented spreading of the gospel. It was to this latter group that the majority of Charles Wesley’s contemporaries belonged. The classic “Augustinian” view (the millennium is the period of the church) had largely run out of steam by Charles’s day.

¹⁸John Wesley to Thomas Hartley, March 27, 1764, *Arminian Magazine* (hereinafter AM) 6(1783) 498–500. Note also the criticism launched against Wesley by Bishop Lavington, according to whom the young John Wesley, like the French Prophets and the Fraticelli before him, spoke frequently and unequivocally of the nearness of Christ’s second coming (Bishop Lavington, *Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compared*, 2 vols. (1749), 1.80, 125 (Methodist Archives and Research Centre [hereinafter MARC] ref. MAW GA 213); R. A. Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950), p. 546.

¹⁹The term “a” rather than “the” millennium seems more appropriate here since Bengel’s scheme is highly complex and involves two millennia. See further Brady, *Number of the Beast*, pp. 218–221.

²⁰John Wesley, *Explanatory notes upon the New Testament* (1754), 932, 1051–1052.

²¹*London Chronicle*, June 3, 1788, p. 3 col. 3. The article goes on to report that Wesley’s text was “The end of all things is at hand: be sober, and watch unto prayer He enforced this awful doctrine with uncommon energy, assuring the audience that the world would be at an end in 1836” (*cf.* *The Works of John Wesley*, 14 vols. [London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872; repr. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, n.d.], 4.416, hereinafter WJW); *cf.* Henry Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth, 1989), p. 475, who notes that in the *Notes* Wesley was himself rather non-committal regarding Bengel’s chronology.

²²J. Robertson to C. Wesley, September 23, 1747. The letter, which is held in the MARC, is not catalogued, but may be found in the volume entitled “Letters chiefly addressed to the Rev. C. Wesley,” leather vol. 6, p. 67. In the letter Robertson discussed various details from Bengel’s work and suggests that in fact the (or possibly “a” [see above n. 19]) millennium will begin on Sunday, June 18, 1836. It is perhaps a fair guess (though no more) that Robertson knew of Charles’s own interest in the prophecies, including his acquaintance with the works of Bengel, and for that reason wrote to him on these matters.

²³Letter of John Fletcher to John Wesley, November 29, 1755. Printed in AM 16(1793) 370–376, 409–416.

expects the end of all things to come in the near future. Indeed, says Fletcher, the year 1750 may already have seen the close of the 2300 day prophecy of Daniel 8:14 (calculated on the widely accepted, at least in Protestant circles, “year-day” principle as equivalent to 2300 years); the sanctuary has begun to be cleansed and the final consummation is near indeed.²⁴ It was in this context that Fletcher once wrote to John Wesley:

Give me leave here, Rev. Sir, to propose to you, a thing that many will look upon as a great paradox, but has yet sufficient ground in Scripture to raise the expectation of every Christian, who sincerely looks for the Coming of our Lord; I mean, the great probability, that in the midst of this grand Revolution, our Lord Jesus will suddenly come down from Heaven, and go himself, conquering and to conquer.²⁵

The list goes on: a somewhat vague but definite reference to the end is found from the hand of Vincent Perronet who wrote to his son William remarking that “the end of all things is at hand”;²⁶ George Bell (and probably Thomas Maxfield) thought that the world was going to end on 28 February, 1763²⁷ and in this seems to have gained a significant following among the early Methodist movement.²⁸ An intense belief in the literal, visible second advent of Jesus is seen also in four sermons on the theme by Joseph Benson.²⁹ According to Benson, the promised second coming “will not be long deferred” and “will be sudden and unexpected.”³⁰

²⁴Fletcher is basically premillennialist, though his work shows some variation on the premillennial theme. In his scheme there are three advents not two (and he criticizes those who “confound our Lord’s second with his third coming” [AM 16(1793):411]). The third coming will be at the end of all things (that is at the end of the millennium). See further Newport, “Methodists and the Millennium,” pp. 105–106.

²⁵AM 16(1793):411 (the reference is most probably to Rev. 6.2).

²⁶Letter of Vincent Perronet to William Perronet. The letter is dated December 9. No year is given, but the contents suggest 1750–1755. The letter is uncatalogued but may be found among a collection of loose materials held together in the MAB section of the MARC in a folder marked simply “VP.” In the course of the letter Perronet remarks that

The season is by no means healthy: your B. Briggs has been ill at Canterbury; poor *Charles*, at the foundry; and poor *Jacky* at Shoreham. It is no wonder that *individuals* are in disorder; when all *nature* seems to be in confusion. Indeed we are only at the beginning of alarming providences; a few years will produce still greater events. Happy would it be for a sinking world if they could see that *the end of all things is at hand*; and would therefore *grow sober to watch unto prayer!*

²⁷Quite where Bell got the date of the end of the world is not clear in the sources. However, there is some slight evidence to suggest that it was not a date plucked at random out of the air, but was rather based upon a historicist reading of the book of Revelation. See further Kenneth G. C. Newport, “George Bell, Prophet and Enthusiast,” *Methodist History* 35(1997) 95–105.

²⁸The size of Bell’s following is difficult to gauge and the number of those who believed his apocalyptic predictions (as opposed or in addition to his perfectionist proclamations) is even more uncertain. Some attempt to calculate the size of the movement is found in Kenneth G. C. Newport and Gareth Lloyd, “George Bell and Early Methodist Enthusiasm: A New Manuscript Source from the Manchester Archives” (*BJRULM*, forthcoming).

²⁹Joseph Benson, *Four Sermons on the Second Coming of Christ and the Future Misery of the Wicked* (1781) MARC, ref. MAB M703.

³⁰Benson, *Four Sermons*, p. 11.

Indeed, Benson is apparently of the belief that he will see the Lord's descent himself³¹ and it is hence not surprising that his first sermon ends on a note of eschatological warning for his hearers to prepare for the dreadful days ahead.³²

It would be easy to extend this list and to give further examples of vivid and apparently premillennial belief in early Methodist circles. Such, however, seems unnecessary for the point has already been made. Early Methodists were not at all immune from some of even the more extreme forms of eschatological expectation. Often these expectations were built upon highly complex interpretations of biblical texts, most particularly Daniel and the Revelation, and in this the early Methodists expressed the common exegetical assumptions of their day.³³

C. Charles Wesley's Eschatology

Apocalyptic expectation was then very much alive and well in the eighteenth century generally and evidence for its existence among the early Methodists is not wanting. With this general context in mind, we may now turn to examine the eschatological views of Charles Wesley in particular and here we shall note that he, like so many of his contemporaries (Methodist, Anglican, and more generally), had very definite views on the matter. Indeed, Charles once wrote that the world was due to end in the year 1794.³⁴

The evidence from Charles's works supportive of the view that eschatological expectation was a significant force in his theological world-view is set out below. In setting out this evidence a particular attempt has been made to avoid placing undue stress upon any single period of Charles's life (for example, it would be easy to amass material from the period immediately following the earthquakes of the early 1750s). Rather a general survey is here presented in an attempt to answer the question "what were Charles's general views regarding the end of the world?" Obviously, since Charles's literary career lasted in excess of 50 years, it would be unwise to expect absolute consistency. However, it is argued here that some general picture does seem discernible in the surviving literary deposits. In the period *ca.* 1750–1760 in particular there is substantial evidence to suggest that Charles's eschatological views were a very distinctive and vibrant force in his overall theological development. Charles's views in the period before 1750 seem

³¹Note for example the following words which Benson wrote after describing John's vision of Christ in Rev. 19.11ff:

But ah! how much more will the representation strike us when it is made by Christ in person, and we shall see him as he is!—Shall see heaven open, and the Son of God in the pomp of Majesty ineffable descending! (Benson, *Four Sermons*, p. 15).

³²"Awake! awake! ye sleepy sinners! shake off your fatal slumbers! Arise from the bed of sloth, and the lap of enchanting pleasures! Haste, haste, and flee for shelter from this day of wrath and unrelenting fury!" (Benson, *Four Sermons*, p. 23).

³³See further Newport, "Methodists and the Millennium," pp. 108–120 where the highly complex interpretative schemes of several prominent early Methodists are examined.

³⁴Below, Appendix, p. 58, par. 4.

to have included a less obvious, but still identifiable, eschatological element. The situation in the period after 1760 is difficult to judge since much of the necessary documentary evidence is lacking.

There has obviously been a need to be highly selective (a process which carries obvious dangers and of which the reader is here warned). However, some attempt has here been made to give at least a broadly representative sample of the materials available. One point, however, needs to be made clearly by way of disclaimer: Charles's hymns and other poetical compositions do not here receive the kind of attention they most certainly deserve. This comparative neglect is partly due to the sheer quantity of poetical material to which Charles gave rise, a corpus which would be extremely difficult to master. In part, however, it is also a deliberate attempt to highlight the indisputable value of Charles's surviving prose materials, which, in comparison with the hymns and poems, have generally been significantly under researched.

1. The Journal Evidence

Almost all of Charles's prose material falls into three basic categories: the journal, the letters, and the sermons³⁵ and material relevant to the present discussion is found in each.

A fair number of Charles's journal entries could be explored here with profit. Some of these I have discussed elsewhere,³⁶ but to these may be added several more. For example, part of the long entry for March 25, 1736 reads:

About noon, in the midst of a violent storm of thunder and lightning, I read the eighteenth Psalm, and found it gloriously suited to my circumstances. I never felt the Scriptures as now. Now I need them, I find them all written for my instruction and comfort. At the same time I felt great joy in the expectation of our Saviour thus coming to judgement, when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed, and God shall make my innocency as clear as the light, and my just dealing as the noon-day.³⁷

The point of the passage seems plain enough: Charles has been falsely accused (in view, of course, are the various charges brought against him by Lawley, Hawkins, and Welch), but looks forward to the time when the Saviour will come and make the truth known. His attention is turned to Psalm 18, a text which needs to be kept in mind as we read Charles's journal entry. In Psalm 18:7–10 we read:

³⁵Charles also wrote a small number of prose pamphlets, but these are of little use in the present context. See further Thomas R. Albin, "Charles Wesley's Other Prose Writings" in S T Kimbrough, Jr., ed. *Charles Wesley: Poet and Theologian* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1992), pp. 91–93.

³⁶Kenneth G. C. Newport, "Premillennialism in the Early Writings of Charles Wesley," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 32(1997) 85–103.

³⁷Thomas Jackson, ed. *The Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A.*, 2 vols. (London: 1849, [hereinafter CWJ]), 1.10.

Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth. There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens also, and came down: and darkness was under his feet. And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind (Psa 18.7–10).

Care must be taken, of course, not to press the journal entry too far. However, when the passage is read in the context of the Psalm to which he refers, his thinking seems plain enough. Christ would one day return to this earth as judge and that coming would be a magisterial and literal event.

Similar in its direct affirmation and expression of hope in the coming Lord are the entries for May 12–13, 1738. Here we find Charles discoursing, praying and singing with others, and on more than one occasion giving voice to the hope of Christ's soon appearing. So powerful, for example, was the effect of the prayer which Charles and Bray prayed on May 12, that Charles "almost thought Christ was coming that moment,"³⁸ a statement which is suggestive of an expectation of a literal, sudden and unexpected appearance of the Lord. Charles goes on to note that the afternoon of the following day was spent with friends "in mutual exhortation to wait patiently for the Lord in prayer and reading"³⁹ and that

At night my brother came, exceeding heavy. I forced him (as he had often forced me) to sing an hymn to Christ, and almost thought He would come while we were singing: assured He would come quickly.⁴⁰

Again the biblical context of Charles's remarks need to be kept clearly in mind. The words "come quickly" are most obviously linked to Revelation 22:20 which reads, in the KJV, "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Charles was later to voice the view that the book of Revelation was to be read in the standard eighteenth-century Protestant way, *i.e.*, from an historicist biblical-interpretative perspective. This being the case, the words recorded here in the journal would seem to take on a definite pre-millennial significance. Christ, Charles is assured, will come "quickly." Not, we must therefore presume, after a lengthy period during which the gospel would be spread throughout the world; not after the millennium, but before it.

Several other examples could be given. The journal entry for February 11, 1744 reports that Charles preached at Adwalton "on our Lord's final coming"⁴¹ and part of the entry for July 24, 1743 reads:

The Society came. Our hearts danced for joy, and in our song did we praise him. We all longed for his last glorious appearing, and with an eye of faith saw the Son of man, as coming in the clouds of heaven, to confess us before his father and the holy angels.⁴²

³⁸CWJ 1.87

³⁹CWJ 1.87

⁴⁰CWJ 1.87

⁴¹CWJ 1.351

⁴²CWJ 1.327

The entry for February 1, 1745 might also be noted. Here, Charles notes, "At our watchnight I described the new Jerusalem; (Rev. xxi.) and great was our rejoicing before the Lord."⁴³

Such material does not stand alone in the early portion of the journal,⁴⁴ though it is unnecessary to present more of the evidence here. The journal for this period seems indicative of Charles's belief and expectation that Christ would one day come again in judgment and to claim his own. This is a not a view to which Charles gave only lip service. It was a doctrine he preached and encouraged others to take extremely seriously.

It is noticeable also in the early part of the journal that the book of Revelation was a source upon which Charles appears constantly to have reflected and often drawn. In this context it is perhaps not surprising to discover that Charles was later to write that while Luther might well say in times of trouble⁴⁵ "Come, let us sing the forty-sixth Psalm," Charles would rather say "Let us read the Revelation of Jesus Christ," for

What is any private or public loss, or calamity; what are all the advantages Satan ever gained or shall gain, over particular men or churches; when all things, good and evil, Christ's power and Antichrist's, conspire to hasten the grand event, to fulfil the mystery of God, and make all the kingdoms of the earth become the kingdoms of Christ?⁴⁶

During the 1750s Charles's interest in things apocalyptic seems to have been increased. This may in part have been due to the earthquakes of that decade, a topic upon which Charles wrote a sermon and several hymns. We shall return to this below. The apparent increase in eschatological expectation on Charles's part is reflected also in the journal from this period. Again there are numerous passages which might be quoted at this point. Mention is made of just two or three.

On December 3, 1753 Charles preached on the coming of Christ to "reign before his ancients gloriously"⁴⁷ and for October 20, 1756 Charles wrote:

The rain quickened our pace to Manchester. I took up my lodgings at Mr. Philips's. My subject at night was, "When there things begin to come to pass, then look up." Many Arian and Socinian Dissenters were present, and gnashed upon me with their teeth, while I preached the coming of Jesus Christ, the one eternal self-existing God, to take vengeance on them, and on all his enemies, who would not have him to reign over them.⁴⁸

⁴³CWJ 1.393

⁴⁴See further October 31, 1747 ("preached for the last time in Marlborough-street, on, "These are they that came out of great tribulation, and washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." It was a time of solemn rejoicing in hope of His coming to wipe away all tears from our eyes" [CWJ 1.464 cf. Rev 21.4]).

⁴⁵The trouble in question, in Charles's case, was of course the severe sickness of his brother, who was "far gone in a galloping consumption" and of whose recovery Charles was far from confident (CWJ 2.96).

⁴⁶CWJ 2.98

⁴⁷CWJ 2.98

⁴⁸CWJ 2.129

In Leeds on September 26, 1756, reports Charles,

The room was excessively crowded, both within and without. I was very faint, as I mentioned my text,—“When these things begin to come to pass, then look up,” &c. My little strength I increased by using it; and the word refreshed both soul and body. The hearers were variously affected. O that all may be found watching!⁴⁹

The biblical imagery here is plain; “When these things begin to come to pass” is taken from the eschatological discourse of Matthew 24 and the reference to being “found watching” is based on verse 46 of that chapter.

On several further occasions Charles reports that he had warned the people of God’s impending judgments.⁵⁰ As we know from another source, these “judgments” were understood by Charles as the terrible punishments that were to come upon the wicked before the end.⁵¹ As is typical in premillennialism, the glorious end is seen by Charles as necessarily preceded by a time of unparalleled wickedness and finally judgment. It will be a time that few will survive. In this context it is perhaps of little surprise to find that Charles’s favourite subject during this period (as he himself states) was “I will bring the third part through the fire” (*cf.* Zechariah 13:9). This “fire” of which Charles spoke so frequently during this period is none other than the fire of tribulation which is to be faced by the faithful in the last days, for where the phrase appears in the journal it is most often in the context of eschatological warning. The entry for October 11, 1756 is not untypical.

They forced me to preach first; which I did from Zech. xiii.: “The third part I will bring through the fire.” My brother George seconded me in the words of our Lord: “I say unto all, Watch.” The prayers and hymns were all attended with a solemn power. Few, if any, I hope, went unawakened away.⁵²

Note also the entry for September 22, 1756 which reads

I warned them of the impending judgements, and left them standing on the watch-tower. We passed a profitable hour at Donington-Park, with Mr. H. Mr. Ianson attended us five or six miles on our way to Nottingham, which we reached by two. I spent the afternoon in taking down the names of the Society, and conversing with them. We rejoiced to meet once more after so long a separation. My subject, both

⁴⁹CWJ 2.117

⁵⁰See for example the entry for September 22, 1756 (quoted below), and part of the entry for February 1, 1747 reads:

I warned the hardened sinners at Sheffield from those awful words, “Except the Lord of hosts had left us a very small remnant,” &c. He filled my mouth with judgements against this people, except they repent, which I trembled to utter. So did most who heard, particularly some of our fiercest persecutors. I found relief and satisfaction in having delivered my own soul, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear.

I repeated my warnings to the Society, and believe they will escape into the ark, before the flood comes (CWJ 1.441).

⁵¹See below, pp. 50–51.

⁵²CWJ 2.124–125

at night and in the morning, was, "I will bring the third part through the fire." It was a time of solemn rejoicing.⁵³

The journal for this period, then, seems positively to support the view that Charles was of the opinion that the apocalyptic end of this world was nigh. Indeed as the surviving MS journal draws to a close the references to the "third part" and the coming judgments become even more common. The last few entries give a picture of an individual increasingly concerned with warning others of the impending doom. Part of the last but one entry in the journal (November 4, 1756) reads "I described the last times to between forty and fifty at our sister Blackmore's; and it was a solemn time of refreshing."⁵⁴

Many of the hallmarks of premillennialism, the sudden appearing of Christ, the judgments, the precursory slide into chaos and destruction, also seem discernible in the journal. The entries are terse and ought not to be pressed too hard for information they do not actually contain. They are, however, clearly suggestive.

2. *The Evidence from the Letters*

A number of the letters from the early part of Charles's ministry are also of importance in this context. The lengthy letter to Charles written by John Robertson has already been referred to briefly above.⁵⁵ In this letter the detailed apocalyptic-exegetical scheme of Bengel is critically discussed in such a way as to suggest that the author knew of Charles's interest in such matters. Here, then, is a letter coming in to Charles suggestive of the recipient's apocalyptic interests. To be noted also is a letter written by Charles from Dublin on December 18 [1747] in which he assures "Sally" (Sarah Whitham) that "Yet a little while, and he that shall come, will come, and take us all into everlasting habitations."⁵⁶ This reference is short but to the point and its implication unmistakable. Charles is expecting the return of the Lord in "yet a little while."

In a later letter Charles set out his thoughts on just how long that "little while" would be, and it is this document that provides the clearest evidence of all regarding Charles's eschatological views. It was written by Charles to an unknown correspondent on April 25, 1754.⁵⁷ I have discussed the content of this letter extensively elsewhere⁵⁸ and need therefore to make only relatively brief further reference to it here.

⁵³CWJ 2.115; similarly on September 25, 1756, Charles wrote:

I encouraged them by that precious promise, "I will bring the third part through the fire;" and parted in great love. At eight I preached on the same subject at Barley-hall; and found there the never-failing blessing (CWJ 2.117).

⁵⁴CWJ 2.139

⁵⁵Above, p. 37; fn. 22.

⁵⁶MARC ref. DDCW 1/16.

⁵⁷MARC ref. DDCW 1/51.

⁵⁸Kenneth G. C. Newport, "Charles Wesley's Interpretation of Some Biblical Prophecies according to a Previously Unpublished Letter Dated 25 April, 1754," *BJRULM* 77(1995) 31-52.

In the letter Charles outlines his vision of the future course of world events and his conclusion is startling: the world will end in 1794. Before the end, however, much will happen. Charles is writing in 1754 and is expecting the beginning of the terrible last judgments of God at almost anytime (“tho they should begin this very year, it would be no way inconsistent with the scripture-prophecies” [§ 8]). Certainly these judgments will have begun by 1761 or 1762, which is the date given by Charles for the conversion of the Jews⁵⁹ since, he argues, in prophecy the conversion of the Jews and the final judgment go hand in hand. The conversion of the Jews leads to their return to their homeland where they set about restoring the temple. However, in 1777 or 1778 they are once again attacked, their newly appointed “prince” is “cut off” and they are expelled. Following their expulsion from their land and the destruction of their city and temple, the Jews (and the rest of the saved) are then “under a cloud” for a time, that is, they must suffer a little of the plagues which have come upon the world. The last judgments fall. Fire, hail, and blood rain down from heaven, the sea is turned to blood, rivers are turned to poison, locusts which sting like scorpions swarm the earth. Upon the followers of Antichrist (Rome) come even more terrible things. As a result of these judgments two thirds of the population dies. Suddenly angels appear to save those destined for salvation. These angels take the saved to a place of safety where they are nurtured by God. The remaining wicked, however, are slain by massive hailstones which fall from heaven. This final plague marks the end of the judgment and the beginning of the millennium. Christ returns and rules in person on Mount Zion.⁶⁰

The contents of this letter are, then, strange and many may be more than a little surprised by it. For this reason it is worth pointing out that the authorship of the letter is not in dispute; the handwriting (including a short-hand note at the very end) clearly indicates its authenticity, and there is no reason to doubt the comment of the one who wrote on the paper cover into which the letter has been stitched that it is a letter of Charles Wesley to an U[nknown] C[orrespondent]. Thus while there are several other letters here which could usefully be mentioned it is this MS from April 1754 which, above all, gives a view of Charles the “expectant pilgrim.” Here we get a reasonably clear view of one eagerly awaiting the return of his Lord and seeking to discern from Scripture when that glorious event was to come about.

The developmental pessimism which runs throughout this letter, so typical of premillennialism generally, is worth noting carefully. Consider for example the following passage.

⁵⁹The view that the Jews would be converted before the end was a commonplace of eighteenth-century English eschatological thought. See further Christopher Hill, “Till the conversion of the Jews” in Richard H. Popkin, ed. *Millenarianism and Messianism in English Literature and Thought 1650–1800* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), pp. 12–36.

⁶⁰A full transcription of the letter is found in the appendix.

But O! dreadful days that are coming on the earth before the last of the above mentioned events, I mean before the long and blessed period takes place. There is a long train of dreadful judgments coming on the earth, more dreadful than ever it yet beheld.⁶¹

To this passage we might add one further example. Speaking of expected persecution at the hands of the Roman Church (which was generally identified as Antichrist in this period)⁶² Charles notes that that idolatrous entity has as yet “gained but a small increase in comparison of what it has yet to gain.”⁶³ The final destruction of the Romish Antichrist is certain, but

before she shall be brought to her final ruin, power shall be given her to distress the Protestant Churches by wars and persecutions, and many of Christ’s faithful ones in those days shall be tried and purified and made white.⁶⁴

In 1754, then, it would appear that Charles looked forward over the course of the next few decades with both hope and distress. God’s kingdom would finally come (in 1794). However, before that event there would be a time of trouble that only few could expect to survive.

A few further letters from the period are worth noting here. Some two years after the 1754 letter, Charles wrote to William Perronet urging the latter to “watch and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape the judgments coming on the world, and to stand before the Son of Man,”⁶⁵ words which seem to voice clearly enough a premillennialist position. The words “watch and pray” are part of a biblical injunction which appears more than once in Charles’s writings. The precise biblical reference is unclear and there are several possibilities (of which Luke 21:36 is perhaps the most likely). However, whichever text is in view the point of the injunction is much the same: the believer must be always vigilant since the return of Christ will come when least expected (*cf.* Mark 13:35, 14:36; Matthew 24:42–43, 25:13; Luke 21:36 [*cf.* Luke 21:34]). We have noted above that “judgments” play a key part in the April 25 letter (*e.g.*, the “long train of dreadful judgments” which are to come upon the earth). Charles’s letter to Perronet probably refers to the same expected cataclysmic events.

Similarly in 1750 Charles wrote to Mrs. Jones at Fonmon castle at a time when she was evidently suffering some “fresh troubles” and afflictions. Charles’s advice, which he gives in the first line of the letter, is simple enough and linked to an expected chronological framework: “bear up under your burthen, till the everlasting comforter comes.”⁶⁶ Also from 1750 (August 10) comes a letter

⁶¹See appendix paragraph 5.

⁶²See further Newport, “Roman Antichrist.”

⁶³See appendix paragraph 1.

⁶⁴See appendix paragraph 6.

⁶⁵MARC, ref. DDCW 1/15a.

⁶⁶MARC, ref. DDCW 1/32.

Charles wrote to John Bennet where again the premillennial views of its author seem plain enough; "We see our calling," writes Charles to Bennet, "which is to suffer all things; disrespect and ingratitude in particular from those we serve in the Gospel. But we expect no reward, 'till the great shepherd comes.'" Only the coming of Christ then, will bring the reward. Does Charles perhaps have in mind Matthew 16:27 "For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works"? On the same MS as this letter to Bennet, Charles adds a note to Grace [Murray] which includes the words

Fear not: in six troubles the Lord hath saved you. A little more suffering, and the end cometh, and the Lord and bridegroom of our souls.⁶⁷

No more evidence need be presented here (though such is not lacking in the materials themselves), for the case seems reasonably clear already: the letters strongly suggest that in the 1740s and 1750s at least Charles's eschatology was imminent and premillennial. This world would not get better. The end to troubles would not come in this present age and rewards cannot presently be expected. Rather when "the great shepherd comes" rewards will be given and at the coming of the Lord and bridegroom troubles would cease. The letter of 1754 is again clearer, but indicative of the more general situation and in this source the situation is outlined without possibility for misunderstanding: trouble, not joy, lies ahead and things will get worse not better. Only the coming of Christ will bring sin and evil to an end.

The main beams of the premillennial theological structure therefore seem to be in place in the letters quoted above. Things will get worse rather than better and the end to trouble will come instantaneously with the literal advent of Christ, not gradually with the spread of Christian social-ethical standards. This letter evidence confirms and complements that gleaned from the contemporary journal entries.

3. The Evidence from the Sermons

Assessing the evidence of Charles's surviving sermon corpus is difficult indeed. This problematic situation is largely the result of the confusion that surrounds Charles's sermon MSS. As is well known, a collection of twelve sermons attributed to Charles was edited and published in 1816,⁶⁸ but it is now clear that at least seven of these were not in fact written by him, but were copies made from his brother's MSS.⁶⁹ On the other hand, two of Charles's sermons are found in John Wesley's works, and of these only one (Ephesians

⁶⁷MARC, ref. DDCW 1/37.

⁶⁸*Sermons by the Late Rev. Charles Wesley, A.M. Student of Christ-Church, Oxford. With a Memoir of the Author, by the Editor* (London 1816).

⁶⁹See Richard P. Heitzenrater, "John Wesley's Earliest Sermons," *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 37(1969-1970) 112-113.

5:14)⁷⁰ is clearly labeled as being by Charles.⁷¹ In addition, several other MS sermons have fairly recently come to light. The six shorthand sermons are now well known;⁷² some few other MSS (including one completely unpublished sermon on John 4:41) have, however, received less attention. This is not the place to discuss in detail these problems of authorship and authenticity. However, the following material at least does seem relevant to the present investigation.

a. Sermon on Philippians 3:13, 14 (1735)⁷³

On October 21, 1735 Charles either preached or wrote (or both)⁷⁴ a sermon on board the *Simmonds*, the ship upon which he sailed to America. Charles's text was Philippians 3:13–14 and the central point of his sermon is the need for Christians to move constantly onward and grow in spiritual maturity and moral rectitude. Several times in the course of this sermon Charles urges his hearers to “watch and pray,” but does not finish the quotation, though its context is significant (“. . . for you know not the hour in which your Lord cometh” cf. Mark 13:35; Matthew 24:42–43; Luke 21:36 etc.). In one passage, however, Charles's thinking does emerge clearly enough. The relevant section reads

Caution and watchfulness is a necessary characteristic of a true Xtian. It is enjoined by our blessed Lord himself frequently to his disciples, and by them the obligation to it extended to all mankind; “what I say unto you I say unto all, watch”. None you see excepted from the duty, no excuse can be urged for not per-

⁷⁰“A Sermon preached on Sunday, April 4th, 1742, before the University of Oxford. By Charles Wesley, M.A., Student of Christ Church” (London: n.d.). The second edition indicates that it was printed by W. Strahan in 1742. It was included as sermon 3 in John Wesley's *Sermons on Several Occasions* from the 1746 edition of volume 1 onwards (*Sermons on Several Occasions. In Three Volumes. By John Wesley M.A., Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford. Vol. 1* [London: 1746]) and is Reprinted in Albert C. Outler, ed. *The Works of John Wesley*, vols. 1–4 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1984–1987), 1.142–158.

⁷¹The other is “The Cause and Cure of Earthquakes” on which see below pp. 50–52.

⁷²Oliver A. Beckerlegge and Thomas R. Albin, *Charles Wesley's Earliest Evangelical Sermons: Six Shorthand Manuscript Sermons Now for the First Time Transcribed from the Original* (Ilford: Wesley Historical Society, 1987).

⁷³The sermon is printed as number 11 in the 1816 edition (pp. 186–206). The MS of this sermon (which has been edited significantly in the 1816 edition) is now held in the MARC, ref. CW Box V. As noted briefly above, it is difficult to assess the probability that this sermon was composed by Charles himself. Thomas Albin, for example, thinks that the case is “exceedingly weak” (Thomas R. Albin, “Charles Wesley's Other Prose Writings” in S T Kimbrough, ed. *Charles Wesley: Poet and Theologian* [Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1992, p. 89]) stating that the only evidence is that the MS is in Charles's own hand. However, this evidence is surely not to be ignored. The fact that Charles took care to indicate (in Byrom's shorthand) that he had copied some of the sermons from his brother or some other unspecified source (as is the case with a sermon on Luke 16.8 [MARC, ref. CW Box V; printed in Outler, *Sermons* 4.361–370) suggests that (counter evidence to the contrary being lacking) those that are not specifically said to be copies are original compositions.

⁷⁴The MS does not indicate whether the sermon was preached on October 21, 1735 or merely written (or copied) on that day. Charles's journal does not begin until March 1736 and so cannot be called upon to shed light. John's journal for October 21, 1735 indicates only that Charles “writ sermons” and does not say if Charles preached on that day (WJW 1.18). If Charles did preach the sermon on October 21 it may well have been the first sermon he had ever preached, since he had been ordained only three weeks before.

forming it. Watch therefore for the coming of your Lord, for you know neither the day nor hour of his coming. "Let your loins be girded, your lamps burning and ye yourselves like unto men that watch for their Lord that they may be ready to enter in with him when he cometh. For blessed are those servants whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing."⁷⁵

Such words seem fairly plain, though one might argue, of course, that what Charles had in mind was a spiritual coming of Christ into the heart of an individual believer at conversion or at the moment of death. Such is not, however, the most obvious way to read the passage, and especially so when its eighteenth-century context is kept in mind. Similarly, as is argued here at some length, it appears from other sources that Charles did have premillennial views. This being so the most obvious reading of this passage from the sermon on Philippians 3 is in the context of Charles's demonstrable premillennialism. The passage is not addressed to unbelievers who are to expect the coming of Christ into their hearts at conversion, or to those who must, in Charles's view, prepare for the hour of their unexpected deaths. Rather Charles seems here to be urging his believing hearers never to slacken from their task of reaching Christian perfection (even if it can never be attained), lest the Lord return unexpectedly and catch them idle in their duties.

b. "Awake, thou that Sleepest" (1742)⁷⁶

The tone of Charles's sermon "Awake, thou that sleepest" is well known. In this sermon Charles calls the slumbering sinner to awake. The theme of judgment runs throughout the sermon. Charles does indeed call the sleeper to awaken, and part of the force of his sermon on the matter is his appeal to the threat of coming judgment. Thus for example, at a fairly early stage of the sermon's development Charles refers to those who disregard "the warning voice of God 'to flee from the wrath to come.'"⁷⁷ Elsewhere in the sermon the threat of the coming judgement hangs heavy. Towards the end of the sermon Charles is speaking of the deplorable condition into which mankind has slipped and the need for Christians to rise above it. It is in this context that he warns:

*And shall not I visit for these things? saith the Lord. Shall not my soul be avenged on a nation such as this? Yea, we know not how soon he may say to the sword, "Sword, go though this land!" He hath given us long space to repent. He lets us alone this year also. But he warns and awakens us by thunder. His judgments are abroad in the earth. And we have all reason to expect that heaviest of all, even "that he should come unto us quickly, and remove our candlestick out of its place, except we repent and do the first works".*⁷⁸

⁷⁵I have used the original here (MARC, ref. CW Box V). The form in the 1816 edition is a little different (pp. 196–197).

⁷⁶See above, p. 48; fn. 70.

⁷⁷Outler, *Sermons* 1.143.

⁷⁸Outler, *Sermons* 1.157–158.

And the whole sermon rounds off with a passage which begins with the words:

My brethren, it is high time for us to awake out of sleep; before “the great trumpet of the Lord be blown”, and our land become a field of blood. O may we speedily see the things that make for our peace, before they are hid from our eyes! “Turn thou us, O good Lord, and let thine anger cease from us.” “O Lord, look down from heaven, behold and visit this vine”; and cause us to know the time of our visitation.⁷⁹

Taken together and within the more general context of the sermon these passages provide an interesting insight into Charles’s expectations. This world, for Charles, was not set to improve with a gradual spreading of the kingdom of God through the preaching and acceptance of the gospel. Rather the future has a definite apocalyptic climax which will itself bring the age to a close. Things are bad and will get worse. Even professed Christians are slipping into perdition unawares. But though the Lord has spared the earth “this year also” the space to repent is getting ever smaller. Indeed, the time will come when “the things that make for our peace” will be hidden and it will be too late. Then the Lord will say “Sword, go though this land.” The “wrath to come” will have come and unpleasant indeed will it be for those who have not fled from it. While the whole eschatological scheme is not spelled out in detail in this sermon, the general picture is distinctly and unmistakably premillennial and in this “Awake, thou that sleepest” agrees with the thrust of the evidence brought to bear above.

c. “On the Cause and Cure of Earthquakes” (1750)⁸⁰

Charles’s sermon on earthquakes also needs mention here. The earthquakes which hit London in 1750⁸¹ did give rise to a general upsurge in warnings of impending apocalyptic doom and Charles was not alone in seeing in them the hand of God.⁸² One might wish to argue, then, that this one sermon may have been relatively uncharacteristic of Charles’s general frame of mind. (Though, of course, he also wrote at least eighteen hymns on the same subject).⁸³ As has been argued here, however, premillennial, pessimistic apocalypticism and the expectation of the coming wrath of God is not by any means uncharacteristic of Charles’s work and this sermon on earthquakes is hence not untypical. Consequently it

⁷⁹Outler, *Sermons* 1.158.

⁸⁰This sermon was printed in WJW 7.386–399.

⁸¹An account of the earthquake is found in John Wesley’s journal for March 8, 1750 (WJW 2.175) with a briefer note on the earlier shake on February 8 (WJW 2.172–173). Charles records on February 8 simply that “there was an earthquake in London” (*Journal* 2.67). Charles’s journal has no entry for March 8, but the entry for March 10 records how Charles preached on Isa. 24, “a chapter I had not taken much notice of, till this awful providence explained it.” See also Tyerman’s account of the events and its effect on the Wesleys (*Life* 2.71–74) and that of Thomas Jackson (Thomas Jackson, *The Life of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A.*, 2 vols. [1841], 1.549–556).

⁸²Brief details of this eighteenth-century interest are found in Outler, *Sermons* 1.357 n. 6.

⁸³Charles Wesley, *Hymns Occasioned by the Earthquake March 8, 1750*, Parts I and II (1750); reprinted in George Osborn, ed. *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, 13 vols. (1868–1872, hereinafter PW), 6.17–52.

may be used as further evidence in support of the general argument here advanced.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Charles's sermon on the cause and cure of earthquakes in the context of the present discussion is that of its theological pessimism. In this the sermon echoes premillennialism in general: society will continue to slide downwards into a moral and spiritual abyss until the great *eschaton*, the coming of Christ, sets all things right. The wicked are finally destroyed and the good rewarded. In this sermon on earthquakes Charles seems to express just this kind of thinking. To be sure it is his task to call those who will respond to escape the coming wrath, but this faithful remnant is not typical of the whole. Neither is man able on his own to come to repentance or even see the danger he is in. Rather, thinks Charles, the gracious God has sent now (and the present earthquake is but one in a sequence) a sign of what is to come in an effort to awaken the sleeping sinner. Earthquakes are a "call to repentance."

In the name of the Lord Jesus, I warn thee once more, as a watchman over the house of Israel, to flee from the wrath to come! I put thee in remembrance (if thou hast so soon forgotten it) of the late awful judgment, whereby God shook thee over the mouth of hell!⁸⁴

Such predictions of woe run throughout the course of the sermon. The present earthquakes are but a timely reminder of more awful things to come.

He hath spared thee for this very thing; that thine eyes might see his salvation. Whatever judgments come in these latter days, yet whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord Jesus shall be delivered.⁸⁵

Perhaps not surprisingly the sermon concentrates on the possibility of escape from these judgments and wrath. Charles is in the business of seeking to save those he can from falling headlong into the apocalyptic abyss. No details of the expected apocalyptic timetable are immediately obvious from the content of this sermon, but, as has been said, its vision of doom is more characteristic of premillennialist pessimism than postmillennialist optimism. Some might be saved, but the outlook for many is grim indeed.⁸⁶

With regard to Charles's preaching, one further scrap of information is worth noting here. The full content of the sermon which Thomas Illingworth heard Charles preach in October 1756 is unknown. However, Illingworth's report is worth noting. He writes

⁸⁴WJW 7.397–398.

⁸⁵WJW 7.399.

⁸⁶Note further the hymn "Tremendous Lord of earth, and skies" (PW 6.21–23), the sixth verse of which begins

If earth its mouth *must* open wide,
To swallow up is prey,
Jesu, Thy faithful people hide
In that vindictive day

He [Charles Wesley] spoke much concerning the end of the World, telling us the Signs foretold were so fully accomplish'd as demonstratively shew'd its Dissolution near.⁸⁷

The sermon evidence, then, in so far as it can be reconstructed from the small amount of homiletic material that has survived, seems to point in the same direction as Charles's journals and letters. Charles looked forward with hope for the future. However, his hopes were pinned not upon a gradual spread of Christian ethics and a consequent improvement in the individual's and society's lot. Individual Christians may grow in spiritual awareness and moral rectitude, but the world at large was doomed. Only at the sudden appearance of Christ would evil be fully dealt with, and only then and in that way would humankind's pristine condition be restored.

D. Conclusion

In this article some of the evidence supportive of the suggestion that Charles's views regarding the end of the world were definite, reasonably consistent, and premillennial has been presented. In conclusion four separate observations are made. The first three of these observations are conclusions in a more traditional sense in that they are apparently accurate deductions made upon the basis of the evidence presented. The fourth point, however, is more by way of identifying some of the resultant questions that need now to be answered as a result of some of the issues here raised.

First, it has been shown that the surviving MS evidence suggests that Charles was interested in eschatological matters and that the form of that eschatology bears the hallmarks of premillennialism (which was in fact the minority opinion in the eighteenth century). This interest was no passing fad. Rather, the evidence from the journal and the letters suggests that Charles's interest in this area is discernible from an early stage and ran throughout the course of his documented career. While there does seem to have been something of an increase in the height of expectation in the 1750s (perhaps explained by the earthquakes), Charles was interested in such matters well before that time. We know for certain that he had been attempting to interpret "the scripture prophecies" since at least 1746 because he says so. In the 1754 letter he writes:

⁸⁷As quoted in Frank Baker, *William Grimshaw 1708–1763* (London: Epworth, 1963), p. 195; cf. Charles's journal entries for October 1756, many of which could be quoted here with profit. On October 7–9, for example, Charles appears to have spoken several times to different audiences on Luke 21 (the apocalyptic discourse) and concluded "I have no doubt but they will be counted worthy to escape, and to stand before the Son of Man" (cf. Luke 21.36). Later on October 9 he warned his audience of the "impending storm." On October 10, writes Charles, "between four and five thousand were left to receive my warning from Luke xxi" and later he judged those to whom he spoke to be "like men prepared to meet the Lord." As noted above, the remainder of the journal continues in this vein right up to the last few entries.

The first time I began to attempt the scripture calculations relating to the conversion of the Jews, the fall of Antichrist and the introduction of the fulness of the Gentiles was in the year 1746. And having made myself master of an antient chronology, I did then make such calculations as happened become pretty near to what I now find to be the truth.

Further, the 1754 letter itself suggests that Charles had spent considerable time in his attempt to interpret the prophecies; he speaks of other prophetic interpreters, whose works he has evidently read, and seems to have been acquainted even with the highly influential, and highly complex, prophetic scheme proposed by Bengel. In 1754, then, his interest is fairly intense. The first conclusion is, then, that Charles Wesley did have a definite premillennial view regarding the end of the world.

Second, throughout this study an attempt has been made to make extensive use of sources which have been generally all but neglected in early Methodist research, namely Charles's prose works. For many the fact that the hymns and poems have been mentioned only infrequently (and in footnotes) will be a cause for great concern, and properly so. No adequate account of Charles's theological views can be given without making reference to the poetical corpus, which must remain central in Charles Wesley research. The point is so obvious it hardly needs mention. It would in fact have been very easy to have peppered this paper with references to hymns: "Lo he comes with clouds descending,"⁸⁸ "Lift your heads, ye friends of Jesus,"⁸⁹ and "He comes! He comes! the judge

⁸⁸PW 6.143-144.

⁸⁹PW 6.144-145. While there has been an attempt here to use the prose materials rather than the hymns, this one example may be quoted here in full as indicative of the kind of material that could be brought to bear from the poetical corpus.

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| <p>1. Lift your heads, ye friends of Jesus,
Partners in his patience here,
Christ to all believers precious,
Lord of lords, shall soon appear:
Mark the tokens
Of his heavenly kingdom near!</p> | <p>4. Sun and moon are both confounded,
Darken'd into endless night,
When with angel-hosts surrounded,
Is his Father's glory bright
Beams the Saviour,
Shines the everlasting Light.</p> |
| <p>2. Hear all nature's groans proclaiming
Nature's swift-approaching doom!
War and pestilence and famine
Signify the wrath to come;
Cleaves the centre,
Nations rush into the tomb.</p> | <p>5. See the stars from heaven falling;
Hark on earth the doleful cry,
Men on rocks and mountains calling,
While the frowning Judge draws nigh,
Hide us, hide us,
Rocks and mountains, from his eye!</p> |
| <p>3. Close behind the tribulation
Of these last tremendous days,
See the flaming revelation,
See the universal blaze!
Earth and heaven
Melt before the Judge's face!</p> | <p>6. With what different exclamation
Shall the saints his banner see!
By the monuments of his passion,
By the marks received for <i>me</i>
All discern him,
All with shouts cry out, 'Tis he!</p> |

severe,"⁹⁰ to name but three that could have been quoted here with profit. However, as noted above, one of the purposes of this paper has been to seek to highlight the wealth of information that is to be found in the prose materials and thereby to encourage scholars working in this area to take them more thoroughly into consideration. Before that can be done, however, they must be made available to the scholarly guild.

Third, it has been suggested that Charles had very definite eschatological views for which he sometimes presented extended argument. Indeed, in the 1754 letter Charles refers to a book which, it seems, he is planning to write on the topic, though the words here are ambiguous and may refer to a work written by someone else.⁹¹ A more extensive study of the 1754 letter would have indicated further the extent to which Charles was able to argue his own case and come to his own conclusions. In fact, as I have noted elsewhere, some of what Charles has to say in the 1754 letter is highly distinctive, for example his interpretation of the mystical number "666" and his view that the "Prince" of Daniel 9:25ff was someone other than Jesus.⁹² As one follows Charles along his exegetical pathways one is aware that here is an individual well conversant with the prophetic-exegetical thinking of his day. In places his exegesis is highly unusual, even novel, and his reasoning is tight and mature. The contents of the letter, and to a lesser extent the sermons, suggest clearly enough, then, that when it came to eschatology Charles was much more confident that he could decipher the imagery of the book of Revelation than was his brother John, who once lamented:

Oh how little do we know of this deep book! At least, how little do I know! I can barely conjecture, not affirm any one point concerning that part of it which is yet unfulfilled.⁹³

Charles was, then, a theologian and a biblical interpreter able to develop a distinctive position independently of his brother.⁹⁴ This distinctive position has

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| <p>7. Lo! 'tis he! our heart's Desire
Come for his espoused below,
Come to join us with his choir,
Come to make our joys o'erflow:
Psalms of victory,
Crowns of glory to bestow.</p> | <p>8. Yes, the prize shall now be given,
We his open face shall see;
Love, the earnest of our heaven,
Love our full reward shall be,
Love shall crown us
Kings through all eternity!</p> |
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⁹⁰PW 6.141.

⁹¹See appendix paragraph 15. "What I have now hinted is only a small part of the scripture-evidences relating to the subject, which you must be content with till the book comes out."

⁹²See Newport, "Biblical Prophecies," pp. 46–49.

⁹³Nehemiah Curnock, ed. *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, 8 vols. (1909–1916), 4.540.

⁹⁴In this same context we might have noted the sermon on Acts 20.7 (MARC, ref. DDCW 9/14 [printed in John C. Bowmer, *The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in Early Methodism* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1951, pp. 225–232)]), which again shows clearly enough that Charles had the ability to argue and reason a case using logic which, while foreign to us, would have appealed to his eighteenth-century contemporaries. In fact Charles notes in the MS that it is his intention to mount a significant, three-part defence of the view that the sacrament must be administered at least every Lord's day. However, of the three areas he plans to cover in the sermon (or "treatise"—the genre is not altogether clear) only the first receives attention.

been developed in prose (though it is also there in the hymns and poems) and on the basis of an appeal to the head rather than to the heart. Charles can appeal to standard eighteenth-century exegetical logic in support of his views and not religious sentiment and the reader of the 1754 letter is asked not so much to hear the whisper in the heart as to discern with the eye of reason the self-evident, logically-derived truth on the basis of the exegesis that Charles has presented. Thus Langford can be challenged. Charles can be shown to be working with the head and to develop a view that is distinctive.⁹⁵ Further studies into this non-poetic expression of Charles's theology are needed. These, however, will be frustrated, first by the fact that much of Charles's prose material appears not to have survived (this can be demonstrated in the case of the sermons where there is a discouraging discrepancy between the register as reconstructible from the journal and the surviving MSS), and secondly by the fact that even that material which has survived is not in a form readily accessible by scholars working in the field.

The fourth and final point that needs to be noted is that this article has been all too brief and has raised many more questions than it has answered. In particular a major study is needed of the relationship between Charles's eschatological views and the rest of his system, especially his social theology. This is so since, as David Hempton⁹⁶ and, much earlier, Harris Franklin Rall⁹⁷ have noted, imminent premillennialism sits not at all well with the view that it is through human institutions that God is planning to transform human society and the world as a whole. "How will the kingdom of God come upon earth?" is the question, to which the premillennialist will answer "by the sudden apocalyptic appearance of Jesus Christ, who will, in a stroke, put all things right." The present evil age, then, according to the premillennialist, will go out with an apocalyptic bang and not an evolutionary whimper. According to Rall this is not the Methodist view and never has been. Rather, he states, John Wesley himself, in bringing the gospel to "the brutish and besotted peasantry of his England," bore witness to his faith that it was through "the power of the Spirit of God" that "God purposed to make a new world."⁹⁸

Though Rall can be challenged factually, on one main point he is right: those who think that there is a new world just around the next chronological corner

⁹⁵Thomas A. Langford, "Charles Wesley as Theologian" in Kimbrough, ed. *Charles Wesley: Poet and Theologian*, pp. 97–105 (who is quoting Rattenbury, who is quoting E. H. Sugden).

⁹⁶D. N. Hempton, "Evangelicalism and Eschatology," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 31 (1980) 189. Hempton makes the same basic point in his *Methodism and politics in British society 1750–1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1984), pp. 77, 95.

⁹⁷Harris Franklin Rall, "Methodism and Premillennialism," *Methodist Review*, fifth series, xxxvi(1920):209–219 (Rall was also the author of *Modern Premillennialism and the Christian Hope* [New York: Abingdon, 1920]).

⁹⁸Rall, "Premillennialism," pp. 211–212.

often⁹⁹ show little interest in cleaning up this one. Premillennialists generally see themselves as trumpet blowers announcing the coming of the king, rather than social activists seeking to put right some of the world's ills. The same point was noted by Hempton. If it can be shown, then, that Charles was basically premillennial and expected the return of Christ sooner rather than later, and I think it can, how did such a view affect his social theology? That question has been left unanswered.

Just how dominant Charles's eschatological views were within the wider context of this theology as a whole, then, remains to be seen. First indications are, however, that somehow he was able to hold in balance with one another his concepts of human freedom, individual responsibility, moral progression, ecclesiological endeavor, divine omnipotence and righteousness, and an acute awareness of the reality and durability of sin. No doubt the system would reveal cracks, if placed under sufficient philosophical strain. However, this is not to underestimate the breadth or integrity of Charles's vision, but simply to acknowledge that he, like theologians generally, was better able to see the constituent parts, than he was definitively to describe the whole.

⁹⁹As a counter example to the general rule, the activities of the Millerites, a group of mid nineteenth-century date-setting premillennialists who expected Christ to return on October 22, 1844, might here be noted. Some Millerites took a very firm stance on slavery and notwithstanding the expected dawn of the perfect millennial kingdom, sought actively to rid the present society of this perceived ill (see Ronald D. Graybill, "The Abolitionist-Millerite Connection" in Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler, eds. *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century* [Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987], pp. 139-152).

Appendix

Letter of Charles Wesley to an Unknown Correspondent

April 25, 1754¹⁰⁰St Mungo, 25 April 1754¹⁰¹

Dear Sir

- 1 The answer of many prayers is at hand; I mean the kingdom of our Lord in its fulness upon earth. What of that kingdom has hitherto taken place since the days of the apostles, is only the first fruits of it, and what the scriptures call *the day of small things*. The fulness of that blessed kingdom, and the day of its great things, is yet to come, and is now at such a small distance of time that you yourself may, by the course of nature, live to see it. The stone that was cut out of the mountain in the apostles' days, without hands, by an heavenly divine power and was separated from the idolatrous Roman Empire (which hitherto has gained but a small increase in comparison of what it has yet to gain) will soon become a great mountain, that is a great kingdom and fill the whole Earth; and the kingdoms of the world will become one great and united kingdom of GOD and his Christ.
- 2 GOD has been pleased to lead me this winter, as it were by the hand, thro the labyrinth of the scripture prophecies relative to the latter times. The scriptures say expressly that a great part of the contents of these prophecies, and more especially what relates to their accomplishment, was to be shut up and sealed unto the time of the end; that is, until the very beginning of those days when they are to be fulfilled. And now these days are begun. He who hath the key of David, who shuts so as no man can open, and opens so as no man can shut, hath taken off the seals, and opened to unworthy me in a very great, tho' not yet in a full, measure, not only the nature of these awful and glorious events which the scriptures say are to be brought to pass in the latter times, but also the very times which the scriptures point out for their accomplishment.
- 3 As for the events themselves it is only proper at this time to mention in general, that they are the conversion of GOD's antient people the Jews, their restoration to their own land; the destruction of the Romish Antichrist and of all the other adversaries of Christ's kingdom; the inbringing of the fulness of

¹⁰⁰MARC, ref. DDCW 1/51. This transcription first appeared in BJRULM 77(1995) 33–37.

¹⁰¹The reference here to "St Mungo" is problematic, for it is not apparent where this place was. Charles's own journal gives no information, since it was either not kept or (more probably) has been lost for the period December 11, 1753–July 8, 1754 (Jackson's published edition ends this section December 6, 1753, but see also John R. Tyson, "Charles Wesley, Pastor: A Glimpse inside his Shorthand Journal," *Quarterly Review* 4[1984]:9–21, which provides additional information for the period December 4–11, 1753). According to John Wesley, Charles was in London in late February 1754, though on the 27th he visited John in Hot Well near Bristol (*Journal* 4:92). In July 1754 he was again with his brother, this time in the neighborhood of Norwich (*Journal* 4:96). Where he was between these times, however, is not clear.

the Gentiles, and the beginning of that long and blessed period when peace, righteousness and felicity, are to flourish over the whole earth. Then Christ the Lord of hosts shall reign in Mount Sion, and in Jerusalem and before his elders gloriously.

- 4 It will appear a Paradox to affirm that all these events will be accomplished in FORTY years time counted from this present year 1754; and the first and second of them, viz the conversion of the Jews and their restoration to their own land, within the short space of *seven* or *eight* years time; but what with men is impossible, is both possible and easy with GOD.
- 5 But O! dreadful days that are coming on the earth before the last of the above mentioned events, I mean before the long and blessed period take place. There is a long train of dreadful judgments coming on the earth, more dreadful than ever it yet beheld; more especially upon these nations, upon whom Christ's name is called, for their neglect and contempt of his glorious gospel. And above all, Babylon shall have her double cup, and be made drunk with the wine of the fierceness of the wrath of GOD as his holy prophets and apostles have foretold long ago.
- 6 Howbeit, before she shall be brought to her final ruin, power shall be given her to distress the Protestant Churches by wars and persecutions, and many of Christ's faithful ones in those days shall be tried and purified and made white.
- 7 O the blessed meaning of that expression *made white!* It means no less than that in these trying times they shall be enabled to stand with firmness and constancy to the cause of Christ and the testimony of his word; and shall be honoured to die the martyr's death and get the martyr's crown and those white robes and palms mentioned in the book of the *Revelation* and be made partakers of that glorious reward which the same inspired book calls the First Resurrection.
- 8 The scriptures point out the time when the judgments shall end and when the blessed days shall begin, but do not, so far as I have yet observed, point out the precise year when the judgments are to commence; only it is clear from scripture that they will begin before the end of SEVEN years hence. And tho' they should commence this very year, it would be no way inconsistent with the scripture-prophecies, but when once they are begun, they will go on in a continued train of one judgment on the back of another, till the end of the FORTY years, counting from this present year. War, famine and pestilence shall be but the beginning of sorrows; for besides and on the back of all these, shall follow all the woes contained under the seven trumpets and seven vials; only that the vials (the last excepted which extends to the wicked in general over the whole earth) seem chiefly, if not only, for the beast and his followers.
- 9 The whole prophecies relating to the latter times, (which make up by far the largest part of the prophetic books of the Old Testament), are full of judgments which are to be executed upon the earth in these days, and of the bless-

ings which are to be poured forth upon the earth and its inhabitants, and more especially upon GOD's antient people, when once these judgments are over: and when that people are to be made blessed themselves, all the nations of the earth are at the same time to be blessed in them, and along with them, in their national capacity. Read over the prophets once more and you will find them full of the judgments and blessings that are to be poured forth in the latter times; and you will be led at the same time to take notice that generally there is some passage or circumstance which points out the judgment to be about the time of the deliverance of GOD's antient people. The year of his redeemed, the day of his great wrath, and the year of his recompense for the Controversy of Sion, and the destruction of Babylon, go together; and the blessings are to be made good at that time when Israel's light is come, and the glory of the Lord arisen upon them. Then, say the scriptures, shall the Gentiles come to Israel's light and kings to the brightness of their rising. And the apostle expressly says, that GOD's receiving again of the Jewish people shall bring the world and its inhabitants, as it were, life from the dead.

- 10 But to return to the judgments: the scriptures expressly say that by these judgments which are coming on, two thirds of the whole number of mankind on the face of the earth will be cut off, and that a third part will be made to escape and will be refined as silver and be tried as gold is tried. Yet the last judgment that is to be executed on the earth in these times shall be of such a dreadful and extraordinary nature, that none can escape being cut off by it, but by the preternatural assistance of angels, whom GOD will send forth to gather his elect from the 4 corners of the earth, unto a place of safety on the earth, where he will provide for them. And where that place is to be is also expressly mentioned in scripture, and then shall be fulfilled that word of the Lord Luk. 18:26 etc, that two men shall be in one bed, the one shall be taken and the other left; and the one shall be taken to a place of safety by the angels of GOD, and the other left to destruction. And two women shall be grinding together at the same mill, and in like manner, the one shall be taken and the other left; and two men shall be working together in the field, at one and the same work, the one shall be taken and the other left.
- 11 But let not them who fear GOD and tremble at his word be afraid beyond measure of these days of judgment which are coming, for many are the promises scattered up and down the word of GOD, for their encouragement. Yea, they will be sealed in their foreheads, with the seal of the living GOD, so that the preternatural judgments will scarcely, if at all, be allowed to touch them; and as to the natural ones of famine, sword and pestilence, they will only be allowed to touch the people of GOD so far as may be for their vastly greater good. The 46 and 91 Psalms are intended in a particular manner for the comfort of GOD's people in these times. Let them also comfort themselves in this, that the days of judgment, distressful as they are, yet are nothing when compared with the long and glorious period of universal peace, righteousness and blessedness which is to follow immediately on the back of

the judgments. And as by the oeconomy of nature, silver cannot be brought out of ore, but by means of the furnace, so by oeconomy of Providence, the day of blessedness cannot be brought about, but by the means of the preceeding days of judgment. 'Tis quite vain and inconsistent with the word of GOD, to expect the blessings to be poured forth upon the earth in any other shape. The numbers and periods mentioned in Daniel and the Revelation, when rightly understood and compared together, do point out the time when these things shall be fully accomplished, so as it may be calculated without hazard, and without erring above a year or so.

- 12 The first time I began to attempt the scripture calculations relating to the conversion of the Jews, the fall of Antichrist and the introduction of the fulness of the Gentiles was in the year 1746. And having made myself master of an antient Chronology, I did then make such calculations as happened to become pretty near to what I now find to be the truth: but I afterward saw that my then calculations could not be depended upon, because I did not then observe any scriptures which seemed to fix the year from whence any of the periods assigned in Daniel, or in the Revelations, were to be computed. However, by means of these calculations, and by the predictions of some good men, I was impressed with a notion that these events were at no great distance of time. But on the 21 of March last, after I had by an accurate examination of the scripture prophecies, both of the Old and New Testament, been enabled to penetrate into the nature of the great and awful events that are to be brought about in the latter days, I was enabled also to penetrate into the passages of scripture, which determine the time of their fulfilment. I can only now just give you a glimpse of the first step of the calculation, without giving you the proofs.
- 13 The first step then toward the finding out the time fixed by scripture for the accomplishment of all these things is the observing that the number 666, assigned Revelation 13:18 for determining the time of the final destruction of the Beast, hath a relation to the *time*, *times* and *half time*, assigned in Dan. 12 for bringing all the events spoken of in that and the preceeding chapters, to an accomplishment, and particularly, for the bringing the end of Antichrist spoken of in the end of the last verse of the 11 chapter; and the final deliverance of the Jews spoken of in the 1 and 7 verse of chapter 12. And so the said period of *time* and *times* and *half a time* is made up of 666—666—666—333 amounting in all to 2331 years, concerning which 2331 years I am able to show that the scriptures do expressly point out the first year thereof to have been the year 538 before the first of the Christian era, being the first year of Darius the Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans.
- 14 I am also able to produce another concurring Prophecy which assigns the same number of years and divides them into different parts, from which Division it appears that the Jews will have returned to their own land, and have an Anointed Prince of their own over them about the year 1771 or 1772; that they will be invaded in their own land and their prince cut off and their

city and sanctuary once more demolished, about the year 1777 or 1778; that they, as well as the whole people of Christ, will remain under a cloud for a time. But all will be brought to rights again by the pouring forth of the last plagues on the adversaries of Christ, and at length by that total final destruction which the prophet calls *The great day of GOD's wrath* about the year 1794. Herewith also concurs the prophecy in Dan. 8:14, which foretells that the Jewish sanctuary is to be cleansed (or justified, as in the Hebrew) that it shall be made fit for divine service at the end of 2300 years, which I am able to shew commences from the same year before Christ 538, being the first year of the Mede-Chaldean or Mede-Persian monarchy prophecied of in that same 8 chapter of Daniel under the vision of the ram which had two horns, viz the Medean and Chaldean empires and whose higher horn, the Chaldean, came up last.

- 15 What I have now hinted is only a small part of the scripture-evidences relating to the subject, which you must be content with till the book comes out. Meantime let me commend to you to read over again Fletcher's fulfilling of the scriptures, and remark the places referred to.* Let me also recommend to you to look into the passages of Sir Isaac Newton on Daniel and the Revelations,† and into Mead's commentary on the Revelations,‡ both of whom come very near the truth. And the only thing that hindered them from penetrating more thoroughly into it, was because GOD's time for taking off the seals was not fully come; but had any of these three men been alive at this day, they might in the divine providence have made it plain.
- 16 Show this to any who have been of the concert for prayer for the coming of the Kingdom of Christ. I am well assured in my own mind that that very Society, tho' not the only persons, yet are among the persons especially pointed at by the Spirit in those remarkable words [in] Malachi 3:16–17: "Then they that feared the Lord, spoke often one to another, and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance (*i.e.*, a register) was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought on his name, and they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels (*i.e.*, my special treasure or my peculiar and proper people) and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." The time when he will more especially spare them is mentioned in the beginning of the 4 chapter: "For behold the day cometh that shall burn as an oven and all the proud and all that do wickedly shall be as stubble, and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave [them neither root nor branch]."

*Edit 1671. pp. 29, 34–38, 122–125, 190, 193, 194, 354, 360, 371, 513, 514.

†The 8th edit. 1733 pp. 12, 15, 247–251 also p. 245, 246.

‡On chap 20 [shorthand note].¹⁰²

¹⁰²The meaning of this brief shorthand note is unclear.

