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#209 Israel and the Second Coming (Replay)

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Ask NT Wright Anything - Premier

How should Christians think about the place of Israel today? Do the Jewish people still have a distinct role in God's purposes? The Bible says Jesus will return 'soon', so why hasn't he? These and more listener questions get addressed by Tom Wright in this episode. This episode originally aired on: 27 August 2019 Subscribe and Rate the Ask NT Wright Anything podcast on your podcast provider, and look out for exclusive Tom Wright questions coming to YouTube soon! • Subscribe to the Ask NT Wright Anything podcast: <https://pod.link/1441656192> • More shows, free eBook, newsletter, and sign up to ask Tom your questions: <https://premierunbelievable.com> • For live events: <http://www.unbelievable.live> • For online learning: <https://www.premierunbelievable.com/courses> • Support us in the USA: <http://www.premierinsight.org/unbelievableshow> • Support us in the rest of the world: <https://www.premierunbelievable.com/donate>

Transcript

As a believer, reading God's Word is a critical part of your daily spiritual journey. And because it's so important, we've created a unique new resource to help you immerse yourself in biblical truth and open your eyes to all God's Word has for you. It's a free PDF download called The Word 1-1 that takes you on a guided journey through John chapter 1. With biblical text and short commentary, each page provides insights that will strengthen your faith in an easy-to-read guided format.

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Unlock access through the newsletter to updates, free bonus videos, and e-books. That's premierunbelievable.com. And now for today's replay of Ask NT Wright Anything. The Ask NT Wright Anything podcast.

Today, Tom's going to be tackling questions about the place of Israel and the return of

Jesus. Just another completely uncontroversial issue to get our teeth into today. But if you'd like more episodes, updates, want to ask a question yourself for a future program as ever.

The place to do that is register at ask NT Wright dot com. Now we've got some exciting news. Tom is moving.

Yes, this was announced just the other week. News came through that. Tom has been appointed senior research fellow at Wycliffe Hall at the University of Oxford as he retires from his position as research professor of New Testament and early Christianity at St Mary's College in St. Andrew, Scotland.

So that's going to be very exciting. It'll mean Tom's a little bit closer to home when it comes to where we record. He's podcast here in London at Premier Christian Radio.

But these were the words of Reverend Dr. Michael Lloyd, principal of Wycliffe Hall on the announcement of his taking up that position at Wycliffe Hall. He said, we're delighted that Tom will be joining us. Wycliffe aspires to be a centre for the intellectual renewal of the Church and through the Church of Society.

I can think of no one who's better able to help us make that aspiration a reality. Tom has reshaped the field of New Testament studies. He's defended the historicity of Jesus' resurrection with a thoroughness and sophistication never before attempted.

And his impact reaches far beyond the boundaries of the Church by his engagement with the traditional and new forms of media. That's right. Well, those new forms of media include podcasts, of course.

So I'm glad that you're with us for this week's edition of the Ask Anti-Write Anything podcast. And just before we get into today's episode, well done to the winners of Paul Abulography, signed editions of Tom's book on Paul coming your way, as well as a signed edition of my own book Unbelievable. Why, after 10 years of talking with atheists, I'm still a Christian.

Yes, it is quite a mouthful. But it was, let me see, Todd in Ohio, Mark in Michigan and Graham in Peterborough, who were the winners of that prize draw. That was simply because they are signed up newsletter subscribers.

So if you want to be in with a chance of winning a book in the next draw we do, then do make sure to get yourself signed up over at Ask Anti-Write.com. There are lovely messages from Todd, who was one of those winners, saying, I love the Ask Anti-Write Anything podcast. I appreciate your interaction and care with which you come to each episode in your listeners. I remember hearing Tom Wright for the first time in Asbury Theological Seminary in 99 or 2000.

The chapel was packed and I was standing on the stairs going up to the balcony. He spoke of Jesus, heaven, the resurrection, and the Kingdom of God. I had my own strangely warmed heart moment, where's the humour? As I stood there, hanging on every word.

Quick storage to share, I am a united Methodist pastor in Columbus, Ohio. My lead pastor and myself recommended, surprised by hope to a friend in our congregation. Jim is a retired college professor, and he came to me a few weeks later and said, I've grown up in the church for over 67 years, and this is the first time I'm hearing about heaven, resurrection, and the Kingdom of God.

In three weeks, he will be leading a book discussion on Dr. Wright's book and is so excited to share it. I've also shared the Ask Anti-Write Anything podcast with him too. So may I ask a request? I've been deep into my own copy of Dr. Wright's poor biography, and while I'd absolutely love to have an autograph copy, and I can't believe I'm asking this, would it be possible for Tom to sign it to Jim? I'm so thankful for Jim and how the Holy Spirit has been working in his life for the last few years.

If there's any way to do that, I'd be very grateful, looking forward to digging into your book too, Justin. Thank you so much. Thank you very much, Todd, and yes, we'll make sure that poor biography gets signed by Tom to Jim specifically, and that's very kind of you to pass it on to him.

I'm sure he'll deeply appreciate it. Again, if you want to make sure your name is in the hat for any future prize draws, do get subscribed as Todd and Paul and Graham all are to the Ask Anti-Write Anything newsletter, and you also get those great updates that we send every few weeks. Ask Anti-Write.com is the place to go for now.

Let's get into today's edition of the show. Great to have you back with us. Thank you.

Good to be here. Today's edition of the programme, Tom, and you've been to Israel, I'm sure, at least a few times I imagine in your life. A dozen or so, yes.

What for you is special about going to that particular place? I have vivid memories of my first time in Israel. I spent three months there in spring 1989. I had a sabbatical from Oxford, and I was asked to go and teach at the Hebrew University, and I stayed at George's Cathedral in Jerusalem, just north of the Damascus Gate, and where the then dean was an old friend of mine from way back, and so he'd said, if you have the chance, come and stay.

My rent was to take services for him on a Wednesday morning so that he could have a lie in, which was fine. I was very happy to do that. It was a very good deal.

It was a very good deal, and you don't have spent too long coming from where I do before you realise that this place is different. This is quite unlike anywhere else, and

particularly having grown up in the West with the sort of traditions of democracy, which kind of nudge you into thinking that if there is a God and if he was going to act in the world, he ought to do the same everywhere. It ought to be sort of democratic and well-organised.

When you're in Jerusalem, it makes sense. You just feel that it makes sense to think, actually, this is the middle of everything. This is where geographically all the continents come together, so it's not surprising there have been wars and rumours of wars there forever.

It's almost as though it's right on all the fault lines, culturally, historically, geographically, so that then it makes sense to say maybe if God were to do what he needs to do to help the world turn its great corner or to make the world turn its great corner, maybe it does make sense that it happened here. And having grown up rather sneering at those medieval maps which had Jerusalem as the centre of the world, they were probably right, and we who have drawn our maps so that they highlight Western Europe as though that's a lie. And it's been a damaging lie.

Obviously, the state of Israel is always a controversial issue, politically, geographically, religiously. And I think probably more so than ever in recent decades, because particularly in America, there's so much rides on what people say and think about Israel. And I imagine this is not an easy one, none of these are easy, but this one in particular, there's all kinds of competing concerns here.

I mean, it's bizarre in a way, but even British politics is affected by the question of Israel. When there are claims of anti-Semitism in parties, it's all bound in in some way with it all. So this is something that touches all areas of life in many ways, but many people asking, wanting to know what your thoughts are on the place of Israel today, and in, if you like, eschatology.

And so let's start with Seth in Roanoke, Virginia, who says, can you speak to the roles that modern Israel and or the Holy Land people and or place has in eschatology? I agree with your thinking about the eschaton, and I'm asking specifically about the people and the place as in the location. So I think, yeah, essentially goes along with you in terms of the way you see the new creation and so on, but wants to know what about this particular place and people? What role do they have in there? It's a great question, and a high-earth, I've visited Roanoke once in a lovely place and maybe go back there one day. A lot of this emerges from a Western Christian world which had forgotten about the significance of geography and the significance of ethnicity and was thinking of Christianity as sort of an abstract spiritual thing, which actually it never was, so that there was a kind of a vacuum into which then the events of 1947, 1948 and the creation of the modern state of Israel has suddenly come rushing, which has happened at the same time as the early Pentecostal movements from the early years of the 20th century,

and the earlier Plymouth Brethren movements from the 19th century were saying on the basis of particular interpretations of Daniel and Revelation and one or two other bits and pieces that one day the Jews will go back to the Holy Land and that this will somehow precipitate the ultimate end, whether it's Armageddon or whatever, and there's been a growth industry, it's not just the Left Behind series, but it's stuff that's been going on for the last 200 years with earlier medieval antecedents and so on, that from time to time this thing has come up that what about the Holy Land and is it special, and the Crusades were partly about that, although partly there were a displacement activity for problems in Northern Europe.

Where I start is this, in the New Testament it's quite clear that with Jesus and the Spirit and the Resurrection and Pentecost and the Mission of the Church, the whole world is now God's Holy Land. That's very clear. Romans 8, which on anyone's account is not a marginal passage, this is one of the most central chapters in the Bible, talks about the inheritance of God's people and about our present journey towards that inheritance, and the inheritance is the renewed creation.

It's not heaven and it's not one particular piece of turf in the Middle East. And this idea goes back to the Psalms because God promised to Abraham, Genesis 12 and 15 and 17 and 22, it's covenant promises and says with the coming King, with the Messiah, the whole world will be His dominion, so that it uses the same language, ask of me and I will give you the nations for your inheritance and the uttermost parts of the world for your possession. And we find exactly that in Isaiah, it's too light a thing for the servant to restore the tribes of Israel, I will give you as a light to the nations that my glory may be known throughout the world.

So those are the promises which the early Christians saw fulfilled in Jesus, and they do not speak of, oh by the way, there's still a little bit of Holy Land left there as it were. That was contentious, no doubt in the first century, but Paul's missionary strategy was beginning from Jerusalem, but then as in the book of Acts, going out to Rome, which once you've got to Rome, you've got to the world because all the roads lead there and from there, etc. So the idea of there still being one strip of territory, which is the Holy Land and that's where it's all going to happen, is quite a major theological category mistake.

Now, having said all that, after the Second World War, there is no doubt in my mind that the Jewish peoples of Europe, who such as were left after the terrible, amazingly wicked and horrible things that were done, that they needed to have a new sort of security. I gather that somebody, I think some British politician, suggested giving them Uganda, and you think, how crass can you be? What self-respecting Jew would say, okay, we'll have that instead, as it were. I mean, they would have made it blossom like the Rose, because that's what they did in the Middle East when more and more Jews went back there.

But the fact that then the movement to take more and more Jews to the Middle East, whatever we're going to call it, by the way, I get emails about this. Somebody told me off for referring to that bit of land as Palestine and said, surely you should call it Israel, as it always was. Actually, in the first century, there was no country called Israel.

There was Judea, which was the bit around Jerusalem. There was Galilee, and there was Samaria in between. And there were several other quite different and hostile cultures, because this is a world before you have international borders as we now know them, where countries were more organized around cities and their environs.

So there's all sorts of misunderstandings there. So when I say that Jesus was a first-century Palestinian Jew, that ought to be uncontroversial. But people who get worried about the naming of things.

The name of things. The name of precedent. Exactly.

Exactly. So what I want to say is that the Jewish people in the 1940s desperately urgently needed the international community to say, oh my goodness, we've got to make this work for you. And I totally get that.

And I respect that and honor that. And when I've lived there and I've known Jewish friends and worked with them at the time, et cetera, I totally honor that. What I don't agree with theologically is what you have in the iconography of the Hebrew University.

We've got this great long corridor with photographs of the returning exiles throughout the 20th century, with then texts from Ezekiel and Isaiah and so on. And the Israel Museum, where the Dead Sea Scrolls are displayed, where Isaiah 40:5, one of the great return from exile passages is displayed, as though to say, and we now have the fulfillment of that. So it's that claim which is dangerous.

And by that, it sounds like you're very much saying no to what is a very large and widespread movement, especially in North America Zionism, which is that this needs to happen. The Balfour Declaration, the state of Israel, that's all fulfilling prophecy. People coming back to the lands is all part of ultimately God's plan to bring about the return of Jesus.

I met this when I got married, because my late father-in-law, bless him, was an old-fashioned Dabi-eyed pre-millennialist. And I'd never met it before. But I got it full on for some years, and we had wonderful conversations about it.

And I've since then realized it is, as you say, widespread in certain circles. And people get very uptight about it. And sometimes this gets muddled up with the problem that much Western Christianity has Ddu-de-ized itself, has not read the Bible as a Jewish document.

And I've spent my whole career trying to read the Bible as a first-century Jewish document. So I put my hand up and say, I think I'm on board with this. You may have these already answered in that case, Jeff in Kentucky's question, but I'll read it just so that you can expand on it.

How would you respond to the dispensation and idea that there is a stark separation between the church and ethnic Israel, a distinction which holds that the covenantal promises like a new rebuilt temple and the liberation of the promised land are still waiting to be fulfilled and were not fulfilled in and through Jesus Christ's death, resurrection, and the creation of a new people of God, i.e. the church? Okay, that case you have to scrub out several bits of Paul for a start, and John, by the way, and Matthew, and because they all say all of that reached its climax with Jesus, and Jesus himself is the real temple. This is what the Gospels are trying to tell us in very first-century Jewish language, and the idea that he came to save us for heaven, but then there is this earth. That's the problem.

This is the reflex of a going-to-heaven theology which has a kind of geographical deficit, if you like, and which then sees the mission to the Gentiles, not in terms of the just and gentle rule of Jesus being extended within the world, but in terms of going and snatching a few more souls away from the world. That you're left with is vacuum, as I say, and this thing rushes into fillet. That's very unhealthy.

It's bad as a method of doing theology, and the results are, if anything, worse. So that having lived right there within a few hundred yards of the green line in 1989 and having gone back several times, and my wife and I have led pilgrimages and so on, I know what life was like in the Interfada for the Palestinian people, but I also know from my many Jewish friends there, how the assumptions and the rhetoric and the whole movement works, and then from talking to Christians, some living in Jerusalem and some on both sides as it were, I know it's hugely confusing, and every time I've written or said anything about this, I always want to add with every sentence, but actually it's a lot more complicated than that. So I'm not saying this is simple or easy, but I'm saying that what your friend from Kentucky said, you have to erase for a start, Paul saying all the promises of God find a yes in him.

That's very clear in 2 Corinthians, and once you've said that, you then start to look around and see, of course, when John is talking about, out of that person's heart will flow rivers of living water, and he said this about the Spirit, which those who believed in Jesus were to receive, this is the promise of the New Temple from the Book of Ezekiel, and he's saying that the New Temple promise is fulfilled in the Spirit, and it's partly because we Western Christians haven't spotted the temple resonances of so much of the New Testament. We haven't wanted to go there. Liberal Protestantism doesn't like temples and all that sort of thing, so we've gone in a different direction, and so those are all waiting to be explored, but once you explore them, there is no room for saying let's build

a new temple, you're going to have to strike out the letter to the Hebrews for the start, which says that sacrifices were finished with Jesus.

Before we rejoin the rest of today's podcast, I have a very special offer for you to help you have an even more meaningful spiritual experience this Easter. As you know, NT Wright is without doubt one of the greatest Christian thinkers and apologists of our time, and some of Tom Wright's answers to questions about Jesus' death, resurrection and return are some of the most poignant and thought-provoking. That's why we've created a brand new downloadable devotional resource that's perfect for the Easter season featuring these questions and Tom's answers.

This five-day devotional journey titled Jesus' Death, Resurrection and Return is only available to friends like you, as are thanks for your gift today. And remember, your support is truly critical to help keep resources and podcasts like Ask NT Wright anything and unbelievable going strong, because this ministry is completely funded by friends like you. So please give the very best gift you can and make sure to download your copy of Jesus' death, resurrection and return devotional at premierinsight.org forward slash NT Wright.

That's premierinsight.org forward slash NT Wright. Thank you. There's a couple of questions about the way this plays out, especially in the USA.

I'll read both of these and you can sort of take both of them at the same time. Shireen Denver asks, I'd love to hear Dr Wright talk about the role of evangelicals in the Zionist movement. I know there are sincere Palestinian Christians that western evangelicals don't seem to apply the Sermon on the Mount to, so I'm just referring there to the issues over the land and so on, and the way that some evangelicals in the Zionist movement are very insistent on the certain ways of treating Palestinian and so on.

Joshua in Portland also asks, as Christians, how are we to handle Israel? Being raised in the United States, the treatment of the modern nation of Israel has been burned into my evangelical upbringing. We're taught that we should bless Israel, which after unpacking it seems to mean monetary support, governmental alliances and weapons sales. We warned not to curse them by withholding these things.

Several Christians I've talked to try to point to natural disasters being linked to times the United States has interfered with Israel. It's become deeply ingrained in American politics with Christians supporting unsavory characters to say the least, as long as they make a strong stand for Israel. It's gotten to the point where it feels like an addendum to the gospel itself.

We can sort of tell where Joshua obviously stands on that issue. How much do you have sympathy for the way he sees that? I very much understand the problem. I haven't seen it too much full on because I suspect that people who take the views he's describing tend

not to turn up at my lectures or not to express all this so vividly.

Though I have had emails and comments and of course in Britain as well, there are many people who are on the lookout for anyone who says anything at all critical of the present government policies in Israel. And I won't say again and again, I am very critical of things that my own government in Britain does. That doesn't make me anti-British.

It makes me very pro-British and wanting to see it done well. So the idea that I criticise Benjamin Netanyahu for some particular policy doesn't mean I'm anti-Israel. I want to say very firmly, I do believe, as I said, that from the 1940s onwards, the Jewish people globally needed to have a place where they would be secure and where the international community would say, now, let's be stable and have this well-organised et cetera.

It was not well done at the beginning because the original boundaries were very insecure and very vulnerable. I get that. I've walked up and down in Samaria and seen how narrow the original settlement was.

At the same time, I know Palestinian families who were simply driven out of their ancestral homes and off their ancestral vineyards or whatever, olive trees, and given either no compensation or just a grubby refugee camp where they still are. As I say, it's more complicated than that, but I understand both of those very clearly from personal experience. I'm thinking of people whose faces I can see sitting and talking to me.

So the idea of evangelicals feeling that they have to be pro-Israel in whatever that means, one of the things needs to be said is that's very different in Britain from America. There are some evangelicals self-identifying in Britain who would take a line rather like that, probably not so strident. But the great majority wouldn't at all.

I grew up as a fairly typical British evangelical in my teens and early twenties. I think I never, ever, ever heard any of this from the great leaders like John Startle, Jim Packer or Michael Green or Dick Lucas. This was not on the radar.

And so there's a big gulf between what thinks of itself as evangelical in Britain, what thinks of itself as evangelical in America. And in America, that has been bound up for all sorts of interesting historical and cultural reasons, with a sense of America's own identity. And it's partly going back to the founding fathers of America as the new Promised Land, so then identifying with other people who have Promised Lands or whatever, as though they sort of belong together, and then it's been mixed up with all sorts of other things, but particularly with the dispensationalist theology and politics which your correspondences refer to.

And so when a scripture is taken from the Old Testament, which says, I'll bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. That was for a time and place, not for, as it were, the New Covenant. You then, this then forces you to do the complicated thing of

reading the New Testament and seeing what it says about the fulfillment of the Promises.

And the New Testament is very specific. Some people say, oh, you're just swapping Israel for the Church and it absolutely not. Jesus himself, as Israel's Messiah, and so many Christians have just treated the word Christ as a proper name and they've forgotten that it means Messiah, the Messiah is the one in whom Israel's destiny is fulfilled.

So if we say, this is all fulfilled in Jesus, that isn't over against Israel, that's this is how Israel's own story, promises destiny, came to its fulfillment. And with all that that means, and then by the Spirit, those who are Jesus people become renewed Israel people, not by replacement, but by enlargement. And Paul is quite clear about this.

Of course, this all comes to a head in Romans 9 to 11, which would be the subject for about a year's lectures, and I've done those again and again and written about it. But there is so much misinformation in one of the previous American presidential elections. There was an article, I think, in Time magazine about one of the candidates, which said that, it was one of the women, who said that she believes in the return of the Jews to their land as being prophesied in the New Testament as it is in Romans 11.

And I thought, Time magazine, you used to have fact checkers who used to look at these things. But the myth has got out there that Romans 11 prophesies the return of Jews that doesn't say anything about that at all. But Paul in those chapters does grieve at the way many of his fellow Jews have not received the message of Jesus and Messiah.

It's very clear. And in a sense, I think many people believe that Paul believed there would be an incoming of the Jews to Christianity or to fulfill Judaism and say, well, that's still to come. There is still some kind of thing God's going to do with Israel or with the Jews.

Having studied that passage intensively over the last 40 years, what I find myself now saying, this is Romans 11 through till the end really, is that Paul is very careful not as it were to tie God's hands. Paul is addressing Gentile Christians in Rome because we have to remember the situation. He's writing the mid-50s.

Nero has become emperor. Claudius is edict banishing the Jews from Rome, has been rescinded. The Jews have come back, but there's been a period, five or six or seven years, when the Roman church was basically Gentile and where Paul seems to know that a lot of the Gentile Christians are saying, well, of course, this thing may have started with the Jews, but thank goodness we've got rid of them because we never liked them anyway.

And there's a sort of a proto-Marcinism, a proto-sense of, well, the God of Israel isn't really the God of Jesus. And Paul is saying, absolutely not. This is the one God.

And if you start talking like that, then watch out because you're in trouble. So he doesn't have a particular timetable. He is basically saying to potentially anti-Jewish Christians in Rome, watch out because actually God made promises to the people of Israel.

And that means that just like I, Paul, a Jew and also a Messiah person, so God can save many more like that. This remnant can grow and you should welcome them. And then he wants, in Romans 14 and 15 to say, and here's how you navigate the difficult issues of how to have a community with some Torah-observant Jews and some non-Torah-observant Gentiles and everyone getting it together.

And by the way, just to do a plug for a book, the recent commentary on Romans by Brian Walsh and Sylvia Kismat, *Romans disarmed*, has some very remarkable, fictitious but very vivid little scenarios of Roman Christians trying to figure out what on earth's going on at that point. I don't agree with them all the time, but my goodness, it makes you think. So you cannot simply scoop up Romans 11 and say, there it is, Paul is predicting some future.

Paul wants to say, God can do whatever God wants to do, and I bet that includes a lot more Jews, thank you very much, so you Gentiles don't despise them. That's the long and the short of it. Just with the final moments we've got on today's podcast, I wonder, you talked about Paul's not putting a timetable in place, but many Christians do and have done that such events need to happen before the return of Christ and so on.

And Peter, who comes from, I assume it's a place called Brown, though I wasn't sure if it was his surname in terms of the location. Well, my people were expecting Jesus to return within their lifetime, possibly, in the New Testament. In Revelation 23, Peter says that Jesus declares three times that he is returning to the earth soon or quickly.

Well, it's been almost 2000 years and still no Jesus. Granted, God does exist outside of time and a day to him is 1000 years, but Jesus is talking to people who exist inside of time. Why use such potentially misleading terms like soon or quickly? And others have asked similar questions about, you know, it seems as though in certain parts of the Gospels, Jesus is talking about his return within the lifetime of his followers.

Paul seems to have an expectation of the imminent parousia as it's called. What's your take on? Okay, huge question. It is.

By the way, there's a model I don't know whether it's a mistyping or something, but there isn't Revelation 23 unless it's a new text which this colleague has just discovered. It wouldn't be Peter saying it if it did. Well, it was Peter asking the question.

Oh, sorry. Revelation 22 does say a few times I'm coming soon. I think it must have been 22.

I'm sure. I just, um, the mind boggles now. There was another chapter of Revelation, but

I'm aware of it.

Yes, yes. Of course, this is, again, one more time, CS Lewis, who has Aslan saying to the children, I will see you again soon. And I think as Lucy says, what does that mean, Aslan? Aslan says, I call all times soon.

I don't think that's a cop out. I think it was Lewis's way of saying that God doesn't work on the same timescales as we do. I don't think it's helpful to think of God as outside time.

I'm not quite sure really what that means when God made a good world which is a forward-moving world as it were. However, the quote from 2 Peter about one day with the Lord as a thousand years and vice versa. That is pretty important.

And I often think in this connection of the Jewish people between when they were in Babylon and when some of them at least came back to Judea and Galilee. And for those 400 years, they were praying, they were seeing the Psalms, they were waiting, they were struggling, they were trying to be obedient, they're trying to keep Torah. And praying for a Messiah for a turnaround, for a real return from exile, it said, 400 years a long time, half a millennium.

And finally, those prayers were extraordinarily answered in ways that they weren't expecting. But when they, like the two on the road to Emmaus, when they suddenly realized, oh my goodness, this was what the Scriptures are about all along. So it seems to me that's a model for how we should hold our eschatological expectations.

That yes, God will bring the whole thing together. There will be a moment when we will say, of course this was how it had to happen, even though we hadn't seen it coming. Now, the question of in their own lifetime, yes, the early Christians, because Acts 1 says this same Jesus will come in the same way that you saw him go, they expected that this would be at any time, which meant they thought in their own lifetime.

Paul, in 1 Corinthians, is quite clear that he will be among those who don't sleep, who don't die ahead of time, but he will be changed when Jesus returns, transformed, because God is going to transform the whole creation and our bodies along with. Not come and take us away to heaven, that's the spurious reading of 1 Thessalonians 4. By the time he writes 2 Corinthians, he's been through a huge crisis, and I described that in my biography. And partly as a result of that, but also what he says in Philipians where he clearly is facing the possibility of a death sentence, he knows that he might well die ahead of time.

That doesn't bother him. And as we see if we go on from Paul into the writings we call the Apostolic Fathers, into Clement, Ignatius, and then 2nd century people like Justin Marta, Arneas, Tertullian, you'd have thought that if the early message had been, this must happen within 40 years, they would be really panicking. There is no sign of that.

The people who have done the detailed study of those writers say that they all believe this could happen at any time. It doesn't bother them that it hasn't happened within a generation. This is another displacement thing.

It's because what is going to happen within a generation is the fall of Jerusalem, and that did happen. And you've obviously covered that in other podcasts where people... Absolutely. And your view that obviously people have thought of Jesus talking about his return is actually talking about this.

Because if Jerusalem and its temple are the place where heaven and earth are held together, then if that's going to be destroyed, what other language is appropriate other than the sun and the moon being darkened and so on. And the vindication of the son of man is his exaltation to world sovereignty, not his coming down in return. Those are key exegetical moves, and within that we can take the pressure off the idea that Odier didn't happen within a generation, therefore something has gone horribly wrong.

Do you think as we finish today's podcast, we should still rather like those early Christians be living in the expectation if it could be tomorrow? It could be. It could be today. Absolutely.

I remember my Theological College principle saying something about this and somebody saying principle, it could be tomorrow. And he said, why tomorrow? Well, it could be at any time. So why not today? Okay, fine.

Well, I suppose, yes, Jesus had things to say about being ready at any time of the day or night. Absolutely. And those are, I think, deliberately vague because Jesus doesn't want us to be thinking about timetables.

He wants us to think about faithfulness and following, and that's what it's all about. Well, thank you for being with us again. My pleasure.

God willing. This will be broadcast before Jesus returns to claim his kingdom, but in any case, it's been great to spend some time with you again. Thank you very much.

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