

THE *DIDACHE* “APOCALYPSE” AND MATTHEW 24

William C. Varner

THE LITTLE DOCUMENT ENTITLED the *Didache* continues to hold a fascination for the few readers who pay it the attention it deserves.¹ The *Teaching of the Lord through the Twelve Apostles to the Gentiles* (its full English title) was well known in the early church. Chapters 1–5 were incorporated into the early second-century *Epistle of Barnabas* 18–20. Some believe that Clement of Alexandria (second century) and Origen (third century) quoted it, though they did not mention it by name. In the fourth century Eusebius listed it among the noncanonical books read in some churches. Athanasius recommended its reading by young converts, and Didymus the Blind referred to it as a “catechetical book.” It evidently was used for instruction of catechumens, at least in Alexandria. Sections of it were incorporated into some fifth- and sixth-century church manuals. The book itself disappeared from view after a brief mention of it by Nicephorus in the early ninth century.

The only known Greek copy of the *Didache* was found in an Istanbul monastery library by Philotheus Bryennios in 1873.² He published the text in 1883. It presently is housed in the library of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch in Jerusalem. Much scholarly attention was given to the book in the 1880s and 1890s, and the general conclusion was that the original dated from the late first century

William C. Varner is Professor of Biblical Studies, The Master's College, Santa Clarita, California.

¹ The *Didache* is about the same length as the Epistle to the Galatians.

² A leaf of a miniature codex dating from the fourth century, containing *Didache* 1:3–4 and 2:7–3:2, written recto and verso, was recovered at Oxyrhynchus (no. 1782). See the photographs of the codex accompanying the article by William C. Varner, “What the *Teaching* Can Teach Us,” *Christianity Today*, June 2006, 30–32.

and that it utilized the canonical Book of Matthew. Then a view (mainly due to British influence) prevailed in the first half of the twentieth century that it dated from the middle to late second century and reflected opposition to Montanism. Since the work of Pere Audet in the 1950s, the dating of the book has been generally pushed back into the first century again, some placing it as early as before A.D. 70, with the accompanying view that it utilized oral “Jesus tradition” that preceded the Book of Matthew. The archaic simplicity of the book’s theology and ecclesiology and its lack of reference to persecution or heretical teaching point to an earlier rather than a later date.

The author of the *Didache* is anonymous, and no individuals are mentioned by name in the book. It is generally divided into three sections. The first six chapters are based on a two-ways theme (the way of life and the way of death) and are highly parnetic in character, leaning heavily on ethical Torah commands and incorporating some “Jesus” material in chapter 1. The second section (chaps. 7–15) has a series of instructions on how to administer baptism and the Lord’s Supper and how to relate to the itinerant ministries of apostles and prophets. These are presented in successive $\pi\epsilon\rho\iota$ $\delta\epsilon$ sections like Paul’s presentation of his topics in 1 Corinthians 7–16. The Lord’s Prayer is mentioned, and reference is made to some other matters in “the gospel of our Lord.” Leaders of the local assemblies are called overseers ($\epsilon\pi\acute{\iota}\sigma\kappa\omicron\upsilon\pi\omicron\iota$) and deacons. The third section (chap. 16) consists of an eschatological presentation of the last days with an accompanying exhortation on how to live in the light of this “apocalyptic” scenario. The book ends abruptly, and it is commonly agreed that the original ending was longer but was lost before the scribe of the *Didache*, named “Leon,” made his copy in A.D. 1056 and included it in a codex with the writings of other well-known “apostolic fathers” like Clement of Rome, Clement of Alexandria, Barnabas, and the Ignatian letters.³

INTRODUCTION TO THE ESCHATOLOGY OF THE *DIDACHE*

Much has been written about what the *Didache* reveals about early church practice, but relatively little attention has been given to its eschatology and how that affects the book’s overall message. This article seeks to address that issue.

³ For more information about issues related to the *Didache* along with the Greek text and the author’s analytical translation see William C. Varner, *The Way of the Didache* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007).

Though the entire final chapter of the *Didache* is devoted to a practical admonition about living in the last days, eschatological themes are also evident in the earlier eucharistic prayers of chapters 8–10. For example 10:5 reads, "Remember, Lord, your church, to save her from every evil, and to perfect her in your love, and to gather her together from the four winds, the sanctified into your kingdom which you have prepared for her."

This eschatological emphasis is consistent with Jesus' words in Luke 22:16. "And He said to them, 'I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.'" Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11:26 about the Lord's Supper also include an eschatological note. "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes."

In an insightful article on the eschatology of the apostolic fathers Bruce comments on the use of "Maranatha" in *Didache* 10:6 at the end of that same eucharistic prayer. "The invocation *Maranatha* ('Our Lord, come!') goes back to the early Aramaic-speaking phase of the church's life, and (like *Hosanna*, *Amen*, and *Alleluia*) was taken over into the Greek-speaking churches untranslated (cf. 1 Cor. 16:22, where also we may have a primitive versicle and response)."⁴

The final chapter of *Didache* is devoted entirely to eschatological themes. It is surprising that so little has been written about the role of this chapter in understanding the eschatological viewpoint of the Didachist. The two standard collections of scholarly writings on the *Didache* contain a few articles on issues related to chapter 16.⁵ In a published dissertation Balabanski compared the eschatological chapters of Matthew, Mark, and the *Didache*.⁶ In his large commentary on the book, Aaron Milavec devotes one hundred pages to explaining various issues raised in the chapter.⁷ Rordorf

⁴ F. F. Bruce, "Eschatology of the Apostolic Fathers," in *The Heritage of the Early Church*, ed. David Neiman and Margaret Schatkin (Rome: Pontificum Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1973), 83.

⁵ See the chapters by Aaron Milavec and Nancy Pardee in *The Didache in Context: Essays on Its Text, History, and Transmission*, ed. Clayton N. Jefford (Leiden: Brill, 1995), and the chapters by Ernst Bammel and Hans Seeliger in *The Didache in Modern Research*, ed. Jonathan Draper (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

⁶ Vicky Balabanski, *Eschatology in the Making: Mark, Matthew and the Didache* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁷ Aaron Milavec, *The Didache: Faith, Hope and Life of the Earliest Christian Communities* (New York: Newman, 2003), 620–90, 809–38. Unfortunately Milavec's extensive writings on the *Didache* are often marked by idiosyncratic views, such as

and Tuilier also discuss the chapter in their monograph on the *Didache*.⁸ However, most of these treatments deal largely with source critical issues, usually centering around the Didachist's use of Matthew or of some other common source. Nothing has been written that approaches the thoroughness of the unpublished 1949 dissertation of Ladd, entitled "The Eschatology of the *Didache*."⁹

It is common for writers to refer to chapter 16 as an apocalypse. Seeliger, however, has warned against the careless use of this noun in light of a generally accepted definition of the apocalyptic genre in the second temple period. He asserts that *Didache* 16 simply does not qualify as an apocalyptic text.¹⁰ He cites Collins, who defines an "apocalypse" as "a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world."¹¹

In light of this definition one should note that in this chapter there is no narrative framework, no revealer or receiver of an apocalyptic message, no information about the manner of the revelation, and nothing that is recorded in the sense of an "unveiling." What seems to be already known is repeated and is given for its practical application to the lives of the readers. In other words the Didachist may have been influenced by apocalyptic sources, but he did not claim to be a channel of new revelation. Seeliger's thesis about the chapter is worthy of serious consideration. "The apocalyptic conclusion of the *Didache* . . . preserves an important part of the preaching of the prophets attested in the *Didache*."¹² This makes good sense in light of the fact that the previous material in the book, particularly the two-ways section, must have been taught

his hope that someday the *Didache* would be added to the New Testament canon! (www.didache.info).

⁸ Willy Rordorf and Andre Tuilier, *Le Doctrine des Douze Apôtres* (Paris: Les Editions de Cerf, 1998), 81–92.

⁹ George Eldon Ladd, "The Eschatology of the *Didache*" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1949).

¹⁰ Hans Reinhard Seeliger, "Considerations on the Background and Purpose of the Apocalyptic Conclusion of the *Didache*," in *The Didache in Modern Research* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 374–76. It is ironic that Seeliger still refers to *Didache* 16 as "apocalyptic" in the title of his chapter.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 374. John J. Collins's definition stems from the Genres Project of the Society of Biblical Literature.

¹² *Ibid.*, 381.

often until it was written down in this form. Perhaps the material in this chapter was taught by prophets and then was written for the instruction of catechumens and others.

If the chapter represents the preaching of the prophets mentioned in earlier chapters, this may help explain the differences between the chapter and the Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24–25. This is not the place to discuss the intricate details of the *Didache*'s possible and often-debated use of Matthew. Generally speaking, New Testament scholars today tend to think that the Didachist used Matthew, while *Didache* specialists generally think that the book utilizes oral Jesus material that antedated the Synoptic redactions.¹³ A variant view is that the *Didache* employed an early Greek translation of Matthew's *logia*, a view explained in more detail later in this article. Whatever view one adopts, however, it needs to explain both the evident verbal similarities between the two documents and also the clear differences between the two. Balabanski's conclusion is that the chapter gives clear evidence of a developed view of what was mentioned in Matthew 24.¹⁴ Most recently Verheyden has also argued for the Didachist's having adapted Matthew in the chapter.¹⁵ Appendix A of this article lists verbal parallels between *Didache* 16 and Matthew 24, and Appendix B lists a few phrases that appear in *Didache* 16 but in no other canonical writing. To return to a point mentioned above, another explanation is simply that the prophets who originally preached the material written in the chapter were not actually quoting Matthew but were adapting the passed-down tradition of Jesus' words and applying them with their own further nuances and additions.

¹³ New Testament scholars who advocate the Didachist's use of Matthew include Edouard Massaux, Martin Hengel, Udo Schnelle, and Christopher Tuckett. *Didache* specialists who advocate the Didachist's use of oral tradition include Aaron Milavec, Clayton Jefford, Jonathan Draper, and Jean-Paul Audet. However, these are not hard-and-fast divisions. Helmut Koester, for example, argues strongly for use of oral traditions, but he admits that the Didachist may have sometimes utilized a Gospel document (*Synoptische Überlieferung bei den Apostolischen Vätern* [Berlin: Texte und Untersuchungen, 1957]).

¹⁴ Balabanski illustrates this by the reference in *Didache* 16:4 to the κοσμοπλάνης, which she sees as the Didachist's adaptation of the "abomination of desolation" in Matthew 24:15 (*Eschatology in the Making*, 195).

¹⁵ Joseph Verheyden, "Eschatology in the *Didache* and the Gospel of Matthew," in *Matthew and the Didache: Two Documents from the Same Jewish-Christian Milieu?* ed. Huub van de Sandt (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 193–215.

THE TEACHING OF *DIDACHE* 16¹⁶

16:1, Be watchful over your life; do not let your lamps be quenched, and do not let your waists be ungirded. But be prepared, for you do not know the hour in which our Lord is coming.

16:2, And frequently be gathered together, seeking what is appropriate for your souls; for the whole time of your faith will not benefit you unless you are perfected in the end time.

16:3, For in the last days the false prophets and corrupters will be multiplied, and the sheep will be turned into wolves, and the love will be turned into hatred.

16:4, For when lawlessness increases, they will hate each other, and they will persecute and they will betray each other. And then will appear the world deceiver as a son of God, and he will do signs and wonders; and the earth will be delivered into his hands, and he will do unlawful things that never have happened from eternity.

16:5, Then the human creation will come into the fiery test, and many will be led into sin and will perish, but the ones remaining firm in their faith will be saved by the cursed one himself.

16:6, And then the signs of the truth will appear: first, a sign of an opening in the sky, then a sign of a trumpet sound, and the third [sign will be] a resurrection of dead ones—

16:7, but not of all, but as it was said, “The Lord will come and all the holy ones with him.”

16:8, Then the world will see the Lord coming above the clouds of heaven (the sky). . . .

The chapter opens with a threefold exhortation: “be watchful,” “be prepared,” and “be gathered together” (16:1–2). Between the two imperatives of 16:1 and the imperatival future of 16:2 is an indicative statement that forms the basis of the three admonitions: “for you do not know the hour in which our Lord is coming.” The brief exhortations end with the strong warning that all will be in vain unless the readers are “perfected [τελειωθητε] in the last

¹⁶ This translation is by the present author.

time." The reference to being "perfected" recalls references to "you shall be perfect" in 1:4 and in 6:2. The author skillfully placed these references at the beginning and the end of the first two sections of his book to serve as an *inclusio* that frames these sections of his discourse. The rest of chapter 16 then gives details of the Lord's coming with a series of "predictions" (16:3–8), with no further imperatives.

These urgent exhortations in 16:1–2 were given in light of the Lord's expected imminent return, and they are consistent with similar exhortations in the New Testament in light of the *parousia* (Matt. 24:42–44; Luke 12:35; 1 Thess. 4:15–18; 2 Pet. 3:10–14). As mentioned previously, many writers have affirmed, especially in the first period of *Didache* research, that Matthew's Olivet Discourse and especially 24:42 must have influenced the writer in these verses.¹⁷ However, the French scholar Andre Tuilier's suggestion is preferable. He suggests that the Didachist here and in earlier sections was influenced by what he called "the gospel of our Lord" (*Didache* 15:4, ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν; cf. 8:2; 11:3). This "gospel," however, was not the canonical Gospel of Matthew, but was probably an early Greek translation of Matthew's Aramaic sayings, sayings originally composed in Aramaic and alluded to by the second-century writer Papias.¹⁸ Whether the source was Matthew or an earlier Greek version of Matthew's *logia*, the Didachist still adapted them for his own purposes.

The Didachist had an intensely practical purpose in all his teaching, namely, the preparation of his readers for the difficulties of the end time. Following the opening exhortation in 16:1–2 that his readers should be "perfected in the end time" (ἐν τῷ ἐσχάτῳ καιρῷ τελειωθῆτε), the Didachist continued in verse 3 with a general description of what will take place "in the last days" (ἐν γὰρ ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις). This will include the rise of false prophets who will cause many to abandon their profession. Verbal similarities to Matthew 24:11–12 are clear, although the exact wording is more a summary of the Matthew sayings than a quotation.

Didache 16:4 opens by mentioning the increasing lawlessness, hatred, and betrayal of others that will prevail at that future time,

¹⁷ Varner, *The Way of the Didache*, 41–54.

¹⁸ Eusebius preserved Papias's statement as follows. "Matthew arranged the sayings [λογία] of the Lord in the Hebrew/Aramaic [ἐβραϊδί] language and each interpreted/translated [ἐρμηνεύσεν] them as he could" (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.14). See Andre Tuilier, "Les charismatiques itinérants dans la *Didache* et dans l'Évangile de Matthieu," in *Matthew and the Didache: Two Documents from the Same Jewish-Christian Milieu?* 157–72.

again echoing themes in Matthew 24:10, 12. The Didachist then mentioned four unique events that will follow in those last days. Each of the four is introduced by the discourse marker τότε (“then”) in verses 4, 5, 6, and 8. Even his use of this adverb as a transitional marker may indicate a Matthean influence.¹⁹ First, he mentioned the one he called the “world deceiver” (κοσμοπλανήτης).²⁰ This term, probably coined by the Didachist, describes one who will appear as a false son of God and deceive the entire earth by claiming divine powers and committing unlawful deeds so evil that they have never before been witnessed. The Didachist urged his readers to be faithful so that they will not be turned away by the deceptive actions of this deceiver whom the New Testament calls the Antichrist. The way to withstand these pressures is to be found faithful in attending Christian gatherings (16:2).

Following the description of the world deceiver’s actions, 16:5 states that “then” (τότε) the human creation will come into the “fiery test” (εἰς τὴν πύρωσιν τῆς δοκιμασίας). This Greek expression probably is a head noun with an “attributed genitive.”²¹ This is the one element in the chapter that has no clear parallel in Matthew. An eschatological “fire” for the wicked, however, is a theme mentioned elsewhere in Matthew (3:12; 13:40; 18:8; 25:41), and *Didache* 16:5 is possibly a development of that Matthean theme. Milavec suggests that this is “a fire that saves”; he says the fire has a purifying rather than a penal function.²² This points to a purgatorial role for the “fire,” but that idea is not supported by the Didachist’s Matthean source. Since he clearly states that this fire will be reserved for “the human creation” (ἡ κτίσις τῶν ἀνθρώπων), the focus in the description is on unbelievers. False professors among the flock will fall away at the time, but the faithful will endure and be saved (οἱ δὲ ὑπομείναντες ἐν τῇ πίστει αὐτῶν σωθήσονται). Nothing is mentioned in the passage about how this fire functions to “purify” them. Instead it punishes the ones who do not endure

¹⁹ The Book of Matthew has τότε ninety times, compared to six in Mark, fourteen in Luke, and ten in John. In the Olivet Discourse alone τότε occurs sixteen times (Matt. 24:9–10, 14, 16, 21, 23, 30, 40; 25:1, 7, 31, 34, 37, 41, 44–45).

²⁰ Although this is a *hapax legomenon*, this is similar to 2 John 7, “This one is the deceiver and the antichrist” (οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ πλάνος καὶ ὁ ἀντίχριστος). Additional verbal parallels can be seen in John’s description of the “second beast” in Revelation 13:13–14.

²¹ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 89–91.

²² Aaron Milavec, “The Saving Efficacy of the Burning Process in *Didache* 16:5,” in *The Didache in Context*, 131–55.

rather than purging the ones who do endure.

Much scholarly discussion has focused on the identity of the "curse" in 16:5b, "but the ones remaining firm in their faith will be saved by the cursed one himself" (ὕπ' αὐτοῦ τοῦ καταθέματος). The word καταθέμα can be translated "curse."²³ This word does not occur in the Septuagint and appears in the New Testament only as a preferred variant reading in Revelation 22:3. This expression seems to recall Galatians 3:13, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.' " The word for "curse" there, however, is κατάρα. In light of the lack of any exact parallels Schaff comments, "This is the most difficult passage in the *Didache* next to 'the cosmic mystery' in XI. 11."²⁴ Even in 1887 Schaff mentioned that there were already at least seven interpretations of the word.²⁵ In light of Deuteronomy 21:23 it is still best, despite the different Greek word used in the Septuagint (the participle κεκατηραμένω), to understand *Didache* 16:5 as a paradoxical statement that the "cursed one" (i.e., Jesus) will save the faithful from the eschatological curse, because He already experienced it in being cursed by men and/or by God. Probably the Didachist had Deuteronomy 21:23 in mind and simply used another word.

"Then" (τότε) will appear the three "signs of the truth" that the Didachist described in *Didache* 16:6–7. While these signs have some similarities to Matthew's terminology, there are also differences. The first sign is an "opening in the sky," which could simply be a preparation of the sky for the later appearing of the Lord (v. 8). Some scholars, however, have translated ἐκπετάσεως as a "spreading out," that is, a display of a celestial "sign of the cross."²⁶ The "trumpet" is referred to also in Matthew 24:31; 1 Corinthians 15:52; and 1 Thessalonians 4:16. Both the Didachist and Paul were referencing an original statement by "the Lord."

The final sign, "a resurrection of dead ones," although not mentioned in Matthew, recalls Old Testament expressions such as

²³ Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 517; and G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (New York: Clarendon, 1961), 708.

²⁴ Philip Schaff, *The Oldest Church Manual Called the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1887), 215.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 216.

²⁶ Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 307. See also Rordorf and Tuilier, *Le Doctrine des Douze Apôtres*, 198.

Daniel 12:2, “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.” The Didachist did not refer to a general resurrection because the resurrection he mentioned is limited to believers. He wrote in 16:7a, “but not of all [the dead]” (οὐ πάντων δέ). He then quoted Zechariah 14:5 (“Then the LORD, my God, will come, and all the holy ones with Him!”), applying the “holy ones” in that passage to “saints,” not angels. From the earliest commentators on the *Didache* down to current times, this expression of limited resurrection has been taken by many as indicating the chiliasm, or millennialism, of the author.²⁷ Second-century church fathers such as Barnabas, Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian were chiliasts. Therefore it is not surprising that the Didachist also used language that is consistent with the view that a resurrection of believers will occur first and that a resurrection of unbelievers will occur later. However, dogmatism in this matter should be avoided. Possibly the Didachist meant that there will be a resurrection for believers only. This position, however, cannot be sustained by any analysis of the relevant biblical texts. The main reason for being nondogmatic about the Didachist’s chiliasm is that the book ends abruptly at 16:8 with no further mention of any sort of future kingdom, earthly or heavenly. Despite these cautionary qualifications, the limiting of the resurrection to believers leaves open the possibility that the Didachist held a view that was consistent with the chiliasm that prevailed in the second century.

The fourth and final “then” (τότε) occurs at the beginning of the last verse in the book, which concludes in 16:8 rather abruptly with the statement that the world will see “the Lord [replacing “Son of Man” in Dan. 7:13 and Matt. 24:30] coming above the clouds of heaven.” The verse seems to conclude in mid-sentence with nothing about the fate of the “world deceiver” nor any mention of whether the righteous find some reward for their faithfulness. All writers on the book affirm that the words of 16:8 were not the original ending.

The scribe of the Jerusalem codex identified himself in a colophon as “Leon, scribe and sinner.” He indicated that though his *vorlage* did not contain anything beyond the words in 16:8, he believed that this was not the original ending of the work. This is certainly evident when one examines the manuscript. The end of

²⁷ For example Schaff, *The Oldest Church Manual Called the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, 218; and Ladd, “The Eschatology of the *Didache*,” 33. Both believed that the Didachist’s eschatological views were at least consistent with premillennialism.

every other book in the Jerusalem codex is marked by an asterisk and the next literary work starts on the following line. The ending of the *Didache*, however, has a period, and the beginning of the next work jumps to the next page. Leon left a very obvious and distinct blank space after the *Didache* of seven and a half scored lines with no words hanging from them.²⁸

The *Apostolical Constitutions* and some other ecclesiastical manuals of the fifth century incorporated the entire contents of the *Didache* and include some additional words after 16:8. Because of this, some scholars have speculated that these works may contain the original ending. Many scholars today view the solution proposed by Aldridge as the most probable. He suggests that a combination of the *Apostolical Constitutions*' ending and that of the Georgian version "may be accepted as the proximate true ending."²⁹ His suggestion, however, is not completely satisfying. Part of the ending of the *Apostolical Constitutions* is clearly a borrowing of Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 2:9. The *Apostolical Constitutions* reads, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him." Since the *Didache* nowhere indicates a knowledge of Paul's writings, the following is Aldridge's ending without that Pauline insertion: "with the angels of His power, in the throne of His kingdom, to condemn the devil, the deceiver of the world, and to render to everyone according to his deeds. Then shall the wicked go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous shall enter eternal life. And they shall rejoice in the kingdom of God, which is in Christ Jesus."³⁰

However, another explanation for the abrupt ending of chapter 16 should be considered. Ladd presents an argument that the abbreviated ending of the chapter may have been deliberate, not accidental. He suggests that the original ending of the *Didache* may have included a clear reference to an earthly kingdom that will precede a resurrection of the wicked dead. He suggests that in the

²⁸ Varner, *The Way of the Didache*, 10–11, 100. Black-and-white photographs of the *Didache* portion of the codex were published in the appendix to Rendell Harris, *The Teaching of the Apostles: Newly Edited with Facsimile Text and Commentary* (London: C. J. Clay, 1887). Daniel B. Wallace hopes to gain permission to make color photographs of the entire Jerusalem manuscript as part of a project sponsored by the Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts.

²⁹ Robert E. Aldridge, "The Lost Ending of the *Didache*," *Vigiliae Christianae* 53 (1999): 1–15.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 15. It should also be noted that the Didachist nowhere else used the title "Christ Jesus."

fourth century, when chiliasm had fallen out of favor with many segments of the church, its chiliastic ending could have been stricken for dogmatic reasons.³¹ The eleventh-century manuscript of Leon, based on what some scholars think was a fourth-century exemplar,³² may reflect that intentional mutilation. Thus what appeared in the later church manuals probably was another doctored ending that omitted the chiliastic reference in favor of a view more amenable to the church at that time, even adding 1 Corinthians 2:9 for good effect.³³

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Didachist clearly had an eye on Matthew 24 as a source for his own version of the last days. The similarities between the chapters are real and the divergences can be accounted for as later clarifications or enlargements of Matthew's expressions. Rather than positing oral "Jesus tradition" as his source, the Didachist, it seems, either utilized the canonical Book of Matthew or an early Greek version of Matthew's *logia*, which he called "the gospel of our Lord." Although not discussed in this article, it is difficult to discern any "realized eschatology" in the Didachist's description of the future character of those last days. One gets the distinct impression, however, that he thought these future events were very imminent.

Chapter 16 clearly affirms a resurrection for believers only at the parousia. And an antichiliasist theological motive may have accounted for the abrupt ending of the book. One can therefore conclude that *Didache* 16 indicates a propensity toward the view that would in later years be called premillennialism.

Whatever theological implications are drawn from this study of the *Didache* "Apocalypse," it should be clearly understood that the Didachist did not write his final chapter to promote a personal theological agenda. To him all of this "teaching" meant something very practical, namely, that believers need to be prepared for the imminently perilous events of the last days. The danger of lapsing in the face of such an evil eschatological onslaught demanded his readers' careful attention to the teaching in his little book. This

³¹ Ladd, "The Eschatology of the *Didache*," 177.

³² David Flusser and Huub van de Sandt, *The Didache: Its Jewish Sources and Its Place in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 22.

³³ Not all evangelical scholars are convinced of the Didachist's chiliasm. See, for example, Charles E. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 77.

teaching included many exhortations, including the call to be faithful in attending the gathering of believers (16:2). Elsewhere he wrote that in such an assembly believers could seek out the presence of the saints for support (4:2). In that assembly believers should confess their wrongdoings (4:14) and partake of the "thanksgiving meal" (14:1-2). Also in that assembly his readers should "tremble at the words" of the one who taught God's Word to them (3:8-4:1). This advice is as relevant today as it was over nineteen hundred years ago.

Appendix A

PARALLEL EXPRESSIONS IN *DIDACHE* 16 AND MATTHEW 24

	<i>Didache</i>	Matthew
16:1	"Be watchful over your life; do not let your lamps be quenched, and do not let your waists be ungirded. But be prepared, for you do not know the hour in which our Lord is coming."	24:42; 25:13
16:3	"For, in the last days the false prophets and corrupters will be multiplied, and the sheep will be turned into wolves, and the love will be turned into hatred."	24:11 24:12
16:4	"For, when lawlessness increases, they will hate each other and they will persecute and they will betray each other."	24:12
16:5	"Then the human creation will come into the fiery test, and many will be led into sin and will perish, but the ones remaining firm in their faith will be saved by the cursed one himself."	24:10
16:6	"And then the signs of the truth will appear: first, a sign of an opening in the sky, then a sign of a trumpet sound, and the third [sign will be] a resurrection of dead ones."	24:30-31
16:8	"Then the world will see the Lord coming above the clouds of heaven (the sky)."	24:30

Appendix B

IDEAS UNIQUE TO *DIDACHE* 16 (ITALICIZED)

16:2, *And frequently be gathered together, seeking what is appropriate for your souls; for the whole time of your faith will not benefit you unless you are perfected in the end time.*

16:4, *And then will appear the world-deceiver as a son of God, and he will do signs and wonders, and the earth will be delivered into his hands, and he will do unlawful things that never have happened from eternity.*

16:5, *Then the human creation will come into the fiery test, and many will be led into sin and will perish, but the ones remaining firm in their faith will be saved by the cursed one himself.*

16:6, *And then the signs of the truth will appear: first, a sign of an opening in the sky, then a sign of a trumpet sound, and the third [sign will be] a resurrection of dead ones—*

16:7, *but not of all, but as it was said: “The Lord will come and all the holy ones with him.”*