

Charles Wesley's Manuscript *Copy* of an Apocalyptic Tract by David Imrie¹ (c. 1756)²

One intriguing manuscript in Charles Wesley's hand that remains among his surviving papers is an apocalyptic prediction of Christ's impending second coming, based on appeal to numerous scriptures. When this item was first brought to scholarly attention, it was assumed that it was an original letter of Charles Wesley.³ This was despite the fact that the letter was headed as written from St. Mungo (a church near Lockerbie Scotland where CW never visited) on April 25, 1754 (when CW was in Bristol). Further investigation revealed this was instead a manuscript *copy* by Charles Wesley of a letter by Rev. David Imrie, the pastor of St. Mungo, published in Edinburgh in 1755.⁴ The manuscript provides further evidence of CW's apocalyptic perspective in the late 1750s, which manifests itself in many of his hymns of the time. But one cannot assume that CW agreed with every exegetical claim in the tract.

The reason for CW making a copy of Imrie's tract, rather than buying it, was likely its scarcity. Imrie had written the letter in manuscript to a friend, and when it was published in Edinburgh in 1755 (without Imrie's permission!) the number printed was apparently small.⁵ It is possible that JW owned a copy of the published version, as John Newton recorded that JW read to a group "some letters from the Rev. Mr. Imrie" in Liverpool in March 1758.⁶

¹This document was produced by the Duke Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition under editorial direction of Randy L. Maddox, with the assistance of Aileen F. Maddox. Last updated: Sept. 30, 2024.

²CW may have come across this rare tract during his last visit to the north of England in Sept. 1756. The apocalyptic emphasis of his most frequent sermon during that visit (on Zech. 13:7–9) resonates with the focus of the tract.

³See Kenneth G. C. Newport, "Charles Wesley's Interpretation of Some Biblical Prophecies According to a Previously Unpublished Letter Dated 25 April, 1754," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 77 (1995): 31–52. The assumption that the letter was by CW reappears in essays by Newport in *Proceedings of the Charles Wesley Society* 3 (1996): 33–61; *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 32.1 (1997): 85–106; and Newport, *Apocalypse and Millennium: Studies in Biblical Exegesis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 119–49.

⁴*A Letter from the Reverend Mr. David Imrie, Minister of the Gospel at St Mungo, in Annandale; To a Gentleman in the City of Edinburgh. Predicting the speedy Accomplishment of the great, awful and glorious Events which the Scriptures say are to be brought to pass in the Latter Times* (Edinburgh: Printed and sold at the printing-house on the New-stairs, 1755). On Imrie, see Hew Scott, *Fasti Ecclesiae Scotiae: The Succession of Ministers in the Church of Scotland from the Reformation* (Edinburgh, 1917, New ed.), 2:221.

⁵See the publisher's preface. Only two copies of this original printing are known to survive. The letter was reprinted in Boston and Philadelphia the following year, but this would have been less accessible in Britain.

⁶John Newton diary, March 23, 1758, New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, Archives, MA 731, pp. 145–46.

The transcription which follows is of CW's manuscript copy, held in the Methodist Archives and Research Centre, DDCW 1/51, showing the page transitions (in red font) in the document. To enable comparison, we also track the page transitions (in blue font) of the original published version of Imrie's letter.⁷ Readers should note that CW omitted the opening preface by the publisher (which tried to justify publication without Imrie's approval). Other omissions by CW are indicated in footnotes. Finally, CW's surviving manuscript ends mid-sentence at the bottom of a page, indicating that at least one leaf (two pages) has been lost.

⁷Based on a surviving copy in the Edinburgh University Library, Centre for Research Collections B.a.c.19/1.

Dear Sir,

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.”² 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 mountain³ 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.⁴

God has been pleased to lead me this winter, as it were by the hand, through the labyrinth of the scripture prophecies relative to the latter times. The Scriptures say expressly that a [p. 8] 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;⁵ that is, until the very [p. 2] 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,⁶ hath taken off the seals, and opened to unworthy me in a very great, though 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.

As for the events themselves, it is only proper at this time to mention in general that they are the conversion of God’s ancient 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 in-bringing of the fulness of 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 Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his elders gloriously”⁷

It will appear a paradox to affirm [p. 9] 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. [p. 3]

¹A church in Annandale, a small village 3 miles south of Lockerbie, Scotland.

²Zech. 4:10.

³Cf. Dan. 2:45.

⁴Cf. Rev. 11:15.

⁵Cf. Dan. 12:9.

⁶Cf. Rev. 3:7.

⁷Isa. 24:23.

But oh 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 judgements 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, Babylon⁸ 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 foretold long ago.⁹

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.¹⁰

O the blessed meaning of that expression "made white"! It means no less than that in these trying times they shall be [p. 10] 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,¹¹ and be made partakers of that glorious reward which the same inspired book calls the "first resurrection."¹²

The Scriptures point out the time when the judgements 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 judgements are to commence; only it is clear from Scripture that they will begin before the end of seven [p. 4] years hence. And though 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 judgement on the back of another, till the end of the forty years, counting from this present year. Wars, famine, and pestilence shall be but the beginning of sorrows;¹³ for besides and on the back of all these shall follow all the woes contained under the seven trumpets and seven vials;¹⁴ only that the vials (the last excepted which extends to the wicked in general over the whole earth) seem chiefly, if not only, for [p. 11] the beast and his followers.¹⁵

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 judgements which are to be executed upon the earth in these days, and of the blessings which are to be poured forth upon the earth and its inhabitants, and more especially upon God's ancient people, when once these judgements 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 judgements and blessings that are to be

⁸I.e., the Roman Catholic church.

⁹Cf. Rev. 16:19, 18:6.

¹⁰Cf. Dan. 12:10.

¹¹See Rev. 7:9.

¹²Rev. 20:5.

¹³Cf. Matt. 24:8.

¹⁴See Rev. 8 and Rev. 15 respectively.

¹⁵Imrie's text ends this paragraph [pp. 10–11]: "to bemoan for [p. 11] the beast and his followers, which will make Babylon's double cup."

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 judgement to be about the time of the deliverance of God's ancient people. The year of his redeemed, the day of his great wrath, and the year of his recompense for the controversy of Sion¹⁶ and the destruction of Babylon go together; and the blessings are to be made good at that time when Israel's light [p. 5] is come, and the glory of the Lord arisen upon them. Then, say the Scriptures, "shall the Gentiles come to Israel's light and [p. 12] kings to the brightness of their rising."¹⁷ 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.¹⁸

But to return to the judgements, the Scriptures expressly say that by these judgements 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.¹⁹ Yet the last judgement 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 four corners of the earth,²⁰ 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 (Luke 17:26ff) to the end that²¹ "two men shall be in one bed, the one shall be taken and the other left"; i.e. 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 [p. 13] and the same work, "the one shall be taken and the other left."

But let not them who fear God and tremble at his word be afraid beyond measure of these days of judgement which are coming, for many are the promises scattered up and down the word of God, for their encouragement. Yea, they [p. 6] will be sealed in their foreheads,²² with the seal of the living God, so that the preternatural judgements 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 46th and 91st 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 judgement, 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 judgements. And as by the economy of nature, silver cannot be brought out of ore but by means of the furnace, so by economy of providence, the day of blessedness cannot be brought about but by the means of the

¹⁶Isa. 34:8.

¹⁷Cf. Isa. 60:1-3.

¹⁸Cf. Rom. 11:15.

¹⁹Cf. Zech. 13:9.

²⁰Cf. Rev. 7:1.

²¹Imrie reads "to the end that."

²²Cf. Rev. 7:3.

preceding days of judgement. It is quite vain and inconsistent [p. 14] 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.

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 ancient chronology, I did then make such calculations as happened to become pretty near to what I now find to be the truth. But I [p. 7] 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 Revelation, were to be computed. However, by means of these calculations, and by the predictions of some good men [...²³], 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 [p. 15] 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. [...²⁴] I can only now just give you a glimpse of the first step of the calculation, without giving you the proofs [...²⁵].

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”²⁶ assigned in Daniel 12 for bringing all the events spoken of in that and the preceding chapters to an accomplishment, and particularly for the bringing the end of Antichrist spoken of in the end of the last verse of the 11th chapter and the final deliverance of the Jews spoken of the 1st and 7th verses of chapter 12. And so the said [p. 16] period of “time, 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 [p. 8] the first of the Christian era, being the first year of Darius the Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans.

[...²⁷] I am also able to produce another concurring prophecy [...²⁸] which assigns the

²³Imrie continues: “of an uncommon spirit, who lived about the time of the Reformation, and in the days of persecution.”

²⁴Imrie continues: “It would require more than the bounds of a letter to explain these, and set before you all that relates to the subject.”

²⁵Imrie continues: “which I do assure you are clear and full, far beyond what it is possible to imagine before they are brought out and laid together.”

²⁶Dan. 12:7.

²⁷Imrie began this paragraph: “I cannot at this time lay before you the evidences of this, but to assure you it is clear and demonstrative.”

²⁸Imrie continues: “which hitherto has never been rightly rendered, nor rightly understood, nor applied to its true subject.”

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 [p. 17] adversaries of Christ, and at length by that total final destruction, which the prophet calls the “great day” of God’s wrath,²⁹ 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 show 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 8th 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.

What I have now hinted is only a small part of the scripture evidence relating to the subject, which you must be content with till the book comes out [...³⁰]. Meantime let me recommend to [p. 18] you to read over again [...³¹] Fleming’s *Fulfilling of the Scriptures*, [...³²] and remark the places [p. 9] referred to.³³ Let me also recommend to you to look into the passages of Sir Isaac Newton on Daniel and the Revelations,³⁴ and into Mead’s commentary on the Revelations,³⁵ both of whom come very near the truth. And the only thing that hindered them

²⁹Cf. Rev. 6:17.

³⁰Imrie continues: “in which I promise to declare and explain the scripture prophesies as I can. The Scripture prophecies respecting the latter times are most of them digested under the proper heads, which *I hope to have in a good forwardness by the end of this year*, only I am afraid I shall not get so much done to it as I could wish this summer, through the necessary avocations of my proper business, and the additional one of rebuilding our parish church, for which I happen to be factor [i.e., supervisor].”

³¹Imrie continues: “(for I doubt not but you have read it formerly).”

³²Imrie continues: “a book which approaches very near to the true sense of the Scripture in these matters.”

³³Imrie continues: “in the note subjoined.” CW then copies the note subjoined in Imrie: “See the edition printed Anno 1671, pp. 29, 34–38, 122–25, 186, 190, 193, 194, 354, 360, 371, 513, 514.” Imrie also gives the equivalent list for the edition printed Anno 1720, pp. 9, 22–24, 78, 118, 120, 223, 225, 229, 233, 236, 325, 326.

³⁴CW again copies Imrie’s subjoined note “The 8vo edition, printed 1733 [i.e., Isaac Newton, *Observations on the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John*, 8th edn. (London: Darby & Browne, 1733)], pp. 12, 15, 247–51; also pp. 245, 246.”

³⁵CW again copies Imrie’s note (mostly in shorthand): “On chap 20 [[concerning the 1000 years of Christ’s reign, and the end of that book containing his relation of Justin Martyr’s dialogue with Trypho the Jew and the tenets of the Jewish doctors concerning the coming of the Messiah]] [i.e., Joseph Mede, *The Key of the Revelation, Searched and Demonstrated*, 2nd ed. (London: Stephens, 1650), 120–30].”

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 [p. 19] men been alive at this day, they might in the divine providence have made it plain. [...³⁶]

Show this to any who have been of the concert for prayer for the coming of the kingdom of Christ. [...³⁷] I am well assured in [p. 20] my own mind that that very society, though 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 4th chapter: "For behold the day [p. 21] 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 [... At least one leaf (or two pages) of CW's copy is missing; below is the remainder of Imrie's text, most of which was likely copied by CW.]

[them neither root nor branch" (and that is the day that is near at hand, and which I have been speaking of in this letter). "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise, with healing in his wings, and ye shall go forth and grow up as calves in the stall, and ye shall tread down the wicked, for they shall be" (as) "ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of Hosts." And in verse 18 of chapter 3 it is said, "Then shall ye return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between the servant of God and him that serveth him not." The meaning of which seems to be that they who fear God, and are spared of him in that great day of his wrath which puts a period to the judgments which are now coming on, shall be, when

³⁶CW omits Imrie's next paragraph: "I leave you to your own discretion to show this letter, or copies of it, to such wise and sober persons as you think proper, *on the condition they do not print it*, which is the only thing I prohibit, as I do not think it proper that anything on this subject should be printed until the *scripture grounds* upon which the whole stands be published. At the same time, I allow you more especially to show"

³⁷Imrie continues: "I have often thought, and am still more and more persuaded of it, that the constant and unwearied application which for these eight years bygone I have been enabled to give unto the study of the holy Scriptures, and the amazing success which God has been pleased to bless my studies of that kind with, has been owing in its own way to the prayers of that devout society, whose prayers and labours I am well assured have come up for a memorial before the Lord. Nay further, I am well assured" CW also omits a subjoined footnote beginning on p. 19 and running to the next page: "One thing that gave rise to the more narrow enquiries I have made this winter into [p. 20] the Scripture prophecies concerning the latter times was some important thought I was struck with last winter, about the time of the elapse of the seven years of the second concert of that society, by that remarkable text Luke 13:35, Matt. 23:38, 'Behold your house is left unto you desolate, and verily I say unto you, ye shall not see me until the time come when ye shall say, "Blessed is he the cometh in the name of the Lord",' compared with Rev. 1:7 and Zech. 12:9–10."

they *return* to their own land again *from the place of safety* where they were preserved from the general destruction, and be then made to discern between him that was a servant of God and him that was not by the difference made by God—in the preservation of the one and the destruction of the other. [p. 22]

What further remains then but that *the same society* should continue and extend their concern, like Daniel when he discovered by “books” (or rather, by calculation, as the original word signifies) that the redemption was drawing nigh, redouble the fervour of their prayers to God for accomplishing the redemption in the way that seems meetest to his own infinite wisdom. And let us all remember, and put in practice, the counsel and command of our Lord upon this very head, namely to “watch and pray always,” that we may be accounted worthy to escape and be carried through all these things that are coming to pass, and to stand before the Son of man in that day when he maketh up his peculiar people.

Finally, I must earnestly beseech and entreat you, and all good people to whose knowledge the contents of this letter may come, to remember in your secret devotions the person who is intending to give a public forewarning from God’s word of the things that are coming on the earth; that God would be pleased to give him the the first place much of the spirit of holiness and devotion, which is far more precious than that of understanding and interpreting the greatest mysteries; and secondly, that God would be pleased to enlighten him [p. 23] more and more in the understanding of his word, and preserve him either from imagining or publishing of anything that is not agreeable thereto.

I conclude with my kind and hearty salutations to you, and your family, and to all your good acquaintances to who you may happen to communicate the contents of this letter, and am with great sincerity, dear sir,

Yours, etc.

David Imrie

Source: CW transcription; Methodist Archive and Research Centre, DDCW 1/51.