

# WHY NOT Full-Preterism?

A Partial-Preterist Response  
to a Novel Theological Innovation



Steve Gregg



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Novel Theological Innovation***

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***Books by Steve Gregg:***

***Revelation: Four Views: A Parallel Commentary***

*1997 (revised 2013), Thomas Nelson Publishers*

***All You Want to Know About Hell: Three Christian Views of God's Final Solution to the Problem of Sin***

*2013, Thomas Nelson Publishers*

***Empire of the Risen Son: A Treatise on the Kingdom of God***

***Book One: There is Another King***

*2020, Xulon Press*

***Empire of the Risen Son: A Treatise on the Kingdom of God***

***Book Two: All the King's Men***

*2020, Xulon Press*

***Empire of the Risen Son: A Treatise on the Kingdom of God***

***Books One and Two in One Volume***

*2021, Xulon Press*

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## **Definitions**

*Preterism is the approach to biblical prophecy that assigns a past fulfillment, rather than a future one, to what is found predicted there. Thus, for example, Christians take a preterist approach to the prediction of the Messiah's birth in Bethlehem, in Micah 5:2.*

*Futurism is the approach to biblical prophecy that assigns a future fulfillment, rather than one in the past, to the thing predicted. For example, virtually all Christians take a futurist approach to Paul's prediction of the Resurrection and the Rapture of the Church, in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17.*

*Partial-Preterism is the belief that part of the body of prophecy in scripture has been fulfilled in history, and does not require a future fulfillment, while another part of the scriptural prophecies will be fulfilled in the future. Thus, one may believe that Jesus' prediction about the fall of Jerusalem (e.g., Matthew 24:2) was fulfilled in A.D.70, but that predictions of His second coming to judge the world (e.g., Matthew 25:31ff) remain to be fulfilled at some future date.*

*Full-Preterism is the belief that all biblical prophecies have been fulfilled in the past, and that no part remains to be fulfilled in the future. This means that the Second Coming, the Resurrection, the Rapture, the Final Judgment, and the New Creation, have all occurred in the past—namely, at the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D.70.*





**Foreword**  
**by Samuel M. Frost, Th.M.**

I first heard of Steve Gregg probably like many of you did, from his book: *Revelation: Four Views*<sup>1</sup> and later had the opportunity of meeting him, a couple of years back, in Indianapolis. He was speaking informally on the topics of his book, *Empire of the Risen Son*,<sup>2</sup> which is a treatise on the Kingdom of God. It was a presentation that was fresh, challenging, and he was certainly “at home” with his subject matter. In reading Mr. Gregg, one gets the sense of technical material without being technical—somewhat like reading the late R. C. Sproul, Sr., and N.T. Wright in his “*For Everyone*” series. I suppose this is why I always hear a pleasant response when I mention Steve Gregg in the company of those who also are familiar with his work. Gregg writes with pastoral concern. It is clear that he really cares.

Gregg masterfully explores what he sees as a “serious and unnecessary error” in the Full Preterist (FP) view; a “radical cult,” and points out, correctly, that it is the FP view that bears the burden of proof.

Gregg’s work here is in dialogue with several thoughtful perspectives, and the clear thesis he demonstrates is: *all prophecy is not fulfilled*.

While not agreeing with everything Gregg has written in this book, I entirely agree with the fact that Full Preterism’s attempt to force *every* verse having to do with this topic into their paradigm is obsessive, and way off-balance. Gregg has *carefully* shown that there are other legitimate ways to interpreting the passages used by Full Preterists. For me, Gregg’s work is one that I will be referring to (with the others listed below<sup>3</sup>) when people ask, “is there anything out there that refutes Full Preterism?” The answer is, “yes.” *Full Preterism has been refuted*.

Since my departure from the FP movement, in 2010, I can name several who have left as well, and have received hundreds of emails, messages and the like from those who have either left, or were “spared” entering into it. There have been church fallouts, removals, and even a few excommunications of disruptive FPs within existing congregations. Many Full Preterists attend existing congregations and remain somewhat “quiet”. Many do not.

After you read this book, I strongly urge you to read the other book mentioned, above, *Empire of the Risen Son*. From this, one is not left with the notion that “it’s all over.” Nor is one left with the dogging questions Full Preterism leaves us wondering—resulting in a parade of confused and conflicting answers currently imploding within this movement. Mr. Gregg is a disciple of Christ, and a disciple of the Scriptures. He does not lean merely on his own understanding, but has clearly immersed himself in others’ thoughts and ideas, and is willing to go where the evidence may lead. It

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<sup>1</sup> *Revelation: Four Views/A Parallel Commentary*, Ed., Steve Gregg, Thomas Nelson Publishers: Nashville, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> *Empire of the Risen Son: A Treatise on the Kingdom of God – What It Is and Why It Matters*, Book 1: There is Another King, Xulon Press: Maitland, FL, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel M. Frost, *Why I Left Full Preterism*, Victorious Hope Publishing: Chesness, SC, (2012) 2019; Roderick Edwards, *About Preterism: The End is Past*, Self Published, rodericke.com/preterism, 2019; Brock David Hollett, *Debunking Preterism*, Morris Publishing: Kearny, NE, 2018; Lance Conley, *Hope Resurrected: A Refutation of Full Preterism*, Eastern Light Publishing: Sheridan, WY, 2019; Dee Dee Warren, *It’s Not the End of the World*, Xulon Press. 2015 – these are from former Full Preterists. I would like to add one more who, although not a former adherent, has nonetheless provided thoughtful material on the subject, Stephen Whitsett, *The Cold Case Against Full Preterism*, Independently Published, 2019. See also, Kenneth L. Gentry, *Have We Missed the Second Coming?: A Critique of the Hyper Preterist Error*, Victorious Hope Publishing: Chesness SC, 2016; *When Shall These Things Be?*, Ed., Keith Mathison, Presbyterian & Reformed, Philipsburg NJ, 2004; Jay E. Adams, *Preterism: Orthodox or Unorthodox*, INS, Timeless Texts: Stanley NC, 2003. These three works are from a Reformed evaluation.

is plain to me, as a former leader within the Full Preterist movement, that even though he was never a Full Preterist himself, *he has critically, carefully considered it*, and has amicably addressed it from a place of understanding the issues and arguments. The reader will see the need to think twice before embracing Full Preterism.

*Samuel M. Frost, Th.M.*

Author of *Why I Left Full Preterism*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Why I Left Full Preterism*, by Samuel M. Frost (Chesnee, SC: Victorious Hope Publishing, 2012)

## *Preface*

It is in the nature of a polemical book to seem like an attack on the view to which it is a rejoinder. In writing this book, I have not seen myself as being on the offensive against a settled, alternative Christian viewpoint, but as one merely endeavoring to “hold the fort” against an aggressive and virulent new doctrine which deliberately challenges the historic Christian faith. I hope that nothing I have written may give the impression of an attack on other Christians. Those whom I am writing to correct initiated the attack against historic Christian truths, and seek to unseat the views of all Christians who have lived in the first nineteen centuries. Such innovators cannot be surprised to receive resistance from defenders of historic evangelical faith.

Throughout the last 2,000 years, the Church has divided over many issues. It seems that at any given time there were sincere Christians, somewhere, denying some doctrine that other believers held to be sacrosanct. One thing that no theological camp ever denied, however, was that the Bible teaches a Second Coming of Christ at the end of this present age. The future second advent of Christ has been held by Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Coptic, and Protestant churches of every denomination. Until very recently, this hope of the saints has not been a disputed doctrine in any Christian communion.

In the 1970s, Max King, a minister in the Churches of Christ, began to promote a radical theological system which he called *Transmillennialism*—also called *Covenant Eschatology*. Today it is better known by the labels *Full-Preterism* or *Hyper-Preterism*. Building on the ideas of nineteenth-century thinkers like James Stuart Russell and Milton Terry, who had interpreted most of the eschatological passages in scripture as referring to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D.70, King went so far as to say that every prophecy in the Bible was fulfilled no later than that event. Thus, every scriptural mention of the Second Coming of Christ, of the Resurrection, the Rapture, the Final Judgment, the New Heavens and the New Earth (he claimed) were fulfilled at that time and nothing remains to be fulfilled in the future. The destruction of Jerusalem was the very Second Coming of Christ, ushering in the final, eternal age, which now prevails and will have no end. The only future hope of the believer is to die and go to heaven while the earth and countless future generations continue on forever.

King’s views were as radically at odds with all historic Christianity as were those of Joseph Smith and John Nelson Darby—who founded Mormonism and Dispensationalism, respectively. Like Smith and Darby, it was necessary for King to claim that no church father or subsequent Christian theologian had ever correctly grasped the biblical witness concerning doctrines of the first order of importance. Never had there been a major teacher or movement that did not anticipate a future Resurrection and Judgment at the return of Christ. While being almost as novel as King’s views, both Mormonism and Dispensationalism were closer to historic Christianity in terms of eschatology.

The creation of novel religious ideas is a popular enterprise for people of a certain iconoclastic stripe. The Church has historically made so many embarrassing mistakes that it is tempting to speculate as to how many major doctrines it may have botched. While church history has witnessed the rise of many heresies it would be hard to identify a doctrine upon which all Christians were making the same major mistake together—unless Max King and his followers are correct.

Some of us may be very open to allowing the scriptures to challenge certain widely-held Christian viewpoints. However, whenever someone wants to say that *literally all* Christians have been wrong for 2,000 years concerning one of their major doctrines, the burden of proof would seem to lie heavily upon the challenger.

We must remember that “the Resurrection of the Dead and Eternal Judgment” are listed in scripture as being among the foundational doctrines of Christ (Heb.6:1-3). They were identified as “the blessed hope” of all believers (Tit.2:13) and the rationale for enduring every hardship, even unto death (1 Cor.15:30-32). The Second Coming of Christ is said to be the *terminus ante quem* of both the presence of Christ with us in fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt.28:19-20) and of the Church’s proclamation of the Lord’s death in the communion meal (1 Cor.11:26). The futurity of this event was not only affirmed by *certain* Christian teachers and movements, but by every one of them, until very recently.

If Smith, Darby and King wish to persuade us that all Christians before them—even those closest to the apostles who spoke and read biblical Greek as their native language—consistently read the scriptures incorrectly, then let us hear their case. However, when we say that the burden of proof is theirs to bear, we mean that they had better bring forward flawless exegesis which cannot be reasonably assailed on every determinative text of scripture. It is not enough to show that *certain passages* that have improperly been applied to the future are actually referencing events long past. Such a claim needn’t be regarded as too controversial. What they must demonstrate is that there is *not one* verse of scripture predicting any event that has not yet been fulfilled. If this cannot be done, then their claims to superior insight are revealed to be exactly what we suspected when we first encountered them—extremely immodest and unsubstantiated. What can one be called, other than arrogant, who claims to know what no previous saint or scholar of scripture has ever known or seen?

I have frequently been asked why I, who have been a partial-preterist for some forty years, have never gone “all the way” into *Full-Preterism*. The inquirers, being of the latter persuasion, often refer to their own view as “*Consistent Preterism*.” The alleged *consistency* they claim for themselves is found in their accepting the hermeneutical principles which partial-preterists apply to some passages and applying the same approach to *all* eschatological passages. They ask, if one takes portions of the Book of Revelation, the Olivet Discourse, and many Old Testament books as having been fulfilled ages ago, why would one not take the “consistent” approach of assigning a past fulfillment to all biblical prophecies?

It seemingly would be equally fitting to ask why anyone who takes the Resurrection of Christ as a literal and physical phenomenon would not exhibit the consistency of seeing the “resurrection” of those who were declared to be “*dead in trespasses and sins*”<sup>5</sup> to likewise refer to a physical resurrection. If “resurrection” is physical when applied to Christ, why is it not physical when applied to the Christian’s regeneration? The answer surely is that we all recognize in scripture certain themes, terms and motifs that bear more than one meaning when appearing in different contexts and usages. When Jesus passed from death unto life it was in physical resurrection (as shall also be the case for us on the Last Day). However, when believers are said to have already “*passed from death into life*,” this is speaking of something else. Even full-preterists recognize this. There is a “consistency” that is unwarranted when such disparate subjects are under consideration.

Even the Dispensationalists, who boast of “consistently taking prophecy literally,” seem to be wise enough to depart from their stated “consistently literal” policy when speaking (for example) of the “*Lamb...having seven horns and seven eyes*” or of “*a beast, having seven heads and ten horns*.” They know that these descriptions are symbolic—though they may not acknowledge to themselves that they are not, in such cases, adhering to their professed literal hermeneutic. Nobody is foolish enough to follow such a literalistic hermeneutic “consistently.”

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<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 2:2

All Christians show such discretion with reference to Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament. Some we take literally (e.g., that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem,<sup>6</sup> of a virgin,<sup>7</sup> and would ride a donkey into Jerusalem<sup>8</sup>), while others we recognize as figurative (e.g., that the Messiah would be a “branch,”<sup>9</sup> a “rod,”<sup>10</sup> a “stone,”<sup>11</sup> a “sunrise,”<sup>12</sup> or a “shepherd”<sup>13</sup> tending sheep).

If Dispensationalists (whom full-preterists often deride as naïve) are nonetheless able to recognize that the same hermeneutic cannot be *consistently* applied to every case, I would hope that our often self-congratulatory full-preterists could exercise at least as much discretion. My reason for not going the way of *Full-Preterism* is my inclination to approach the scriptures with such discretion.

### *The proverbial “slippery slope”*

Criticism of *Partial-Preterism*—whether coming from the *futurist* or the *full-preterist* camp—often argues that the acknowledging of certain disputed prophecies as having been fulfilled in the past must inevitably place one on a slippery slope leading straight into the clutches of *Full-Preterism*. My first reaction to those who say this is, “Why in the world should this be the case?” It seems to me that a rational interpreter will seek to assign the proper interpretation to each passage on a case-by-case basis and not to use such an irresponsibly broad exegetical brush.

All historic Christian expositors have recognized that some of the Messianic prophecies have been fulfilled in the past, while recognizing that some prophecies await a future fulfillment. Virtually every Christian in history until the 1970s (as we shall see) could technically be called both a *partial-preterist* and a *partial futurist*. That *some* prophecies had a past fulfillment has been uncontroversial. Differences of opinion had only to do with *how many prophecies* and *which ones*. However, the actual label *partial-preterist* has come to be reserved for those who find, especially in the Olivet Discourse and the Book of Revelation, a high degree of fulfillment in the past—particularly in the fall of Jerusalem. This is the perspective from which this writer is coming.

My interest in writing on this subject is not to promote my particular eschatological outlook. To me, eschatology is less interesting than matters of Christian discipleship—matters upon which one’s eschatology may have minimal impact. My own view for the past forty years has been that of a *partial-preterist*. As a teacher I have often been asked the difference between *Partial* and *Full-Preterism*, and why one who has accepted the former would not embrace the latter.

A partial-preterist has come to recognize that certain expressions in scripture that sound like descriptions of the end of the universe are actually apocalyptic representations of earthly disasters—like the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in A.D.70. This awareness is capable of being irresponsibly extended to include every passage using similar terminology, as if all refer to this one event. They ask why such a *consistent* approach should not be followed.

These students of scripture do not find it hard to recognize that various prophecies concerning the doom of Egypt, Babylon or Edom, etc., *while using similar or identical language*, were fulfilled at different times in history. Yet they seem to have difficulty with the concept that Jesus’ predictions concerning the end of the second temple could be fulfilled at one time, while His predictions

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew 2:5-6

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 1:22-23

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 21:4-5

<sup>9</sup> Jeremiah 23:5

<sup>10</sup> Isaiah 11:1

<sup>11</sup> Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 28:16

<sup>12</sup> Malachi 4:2

<sup>13</sup> Isaiah 40:11

concerning the Resurrection and Judgment of all people and all nations would be fulfilled at another time.

### *A question of motives*

I am often asked why a partial-preterist, like myself, would not slide all the way down the slope to *Full-Preterism*? One speculation suggested by those in the full-preterist camp is that partial-preterists, like myself, simply do not have the courage to support such a minority position. This is a strange charge, since *Partial-Preterism* is itself a minority position, and is greatly reviled in some (especially *Dispensationalist*) circles.

There are a number of full-preterists who have spread a rumor about me personally, saying that I have as much as admitted to having such a low motive for rejecting *Full-Preterism*. I have never made any statement to that effect and it is certainly not the case, as will be seen in the following chapters. The accusers refer to a comment of mine made in a debate between myself and the full-preterist “debatesman” (as he is sometimes called), Don K. Preston, in Denver in 2013. At one point, I was acknowledging my sympathies for how difficult it must be to be a full-preterist, in view of its radical divergence from the views of all historical Christianity. My actual comment was:

“I was seriously contemplating the other day: ‘If I were ever to become a full-preterist, how would that impact my ministry?’ *It would end it!* Which—I’ll be frank with you—makes me very careful about being persuaded too easily.”<sup>14</sup>

A few critics have seized upon this mere statement of fact and implied that it reveals something about my secret motives for rejecting the full-preterist position. They represent me as having said that I would embrace that view if only it would not adversely affect my career. Obviously, my statement neither stated nor implied anything about my reasons for believing or disbelieving anything. It would, indeed, compromise my ministry if I were to take the full-preterist position—for the simple reason that doing so would seriously undermine my credibility as a responsible Bible teacher—in my own eyes as well as others’. The same would be true if I were to become a believer in the “flat earth” position. Such a shift would ruin my credibility—and it should! But this is not my reason for rejecting either position.

*Flat-Earthism* and belief in *Full-Preterism* are both views that I (and almost all careful students of scripture) reject upon exegetical and other evidential grounds. If I were inclined to restrict all of my theological convictions to the realm of safe, popular theology, I would never have allowed my studies to lead me to embrace *Amillennialism* or *Partial-Preterism* while ministering in a staunchly *Dispensationalist* environment—possibly the least welcoming of all environments for the acceptance of such views.

I have no difficulty declaring my motives for rejecting *Full-Preterism* (or *Flat-Earthism*, for that matter). It is because as a student of scripture I find the exegesis supporting such teachings to be very weak at crucial points. I hold no malice toward the full-preterists that I have known, but confess that

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<sup>14</sup> Debate on Full-Preterism: Don K Preston (Full-Preterist) Vs. Steve Gregg (Partial-Preterist), September 6-8, 2013 in Denver, CO. DVDs and Mp3s are available from Don Preston for a price. He has graciously allowed us to post the audio files for free listening at our website. My comment was made in the first 30 seconds of this segment: [https://thenarrowpath.com/audio/topical-lectures/various-debates/17\\_Full\\_Preterism\\_Part\\_4\\_Steve\\_Gregg\\_Negative.mp3](https://thenarrowpath.com/audio/topical-lectures/various-debates/17_Full_Preterism_Part_4_Steve_Gregg_Negative.mp3)

I find the exegetical support they provide for their principal claims deficient and excessively agenda-driven.

The task undertaken in this work is not to prove that every point of *Full-Preterism* is weak or incorrect (since some of its arguments are quite strong and, I believe, correct), but to show that it is incorrect in its unique claims and essential arguments. I am not the first to write such a correction to this movement and do not desire to reinvent the wheel. However, I am regularly asked my thoughts about it and wish to answer in my own words.

I am not writing so much to attack as to defend the long-settled Christian understanding of the coming of Christ. The full-preterists who have engaged me have imagined that no adequate response can be made to meet their challenges. They are mistaken. It is not in my power to dissuade anyone from believing what they insist upon believing. If I were to set such a goal for myself I should be greatly disappointed. I am writing simply to demonstrate that the scriptures more than adequately justify the historical position of the Church, and do not comport with the full-preterist claims. If I should in the process persuade any full-preterist, or one considering Full-Preterism as an option, that my position is not only defensible but also correct, that would please me well.

I am not a controversialist by temperament, but when it comes to engaging with error I am more than willing to join the discussion. I have found most of my dialogues with full-preterists to be somewhat frustrating—though they have been mostly cordial. How can a cordial dialogue be found frustrating? It is simply that the awareness eventually dawns upon one in the midst of such conversations that there are too many points of disagreement to adequately vet them all in any one discussion. For that reason, and mainly to limit the need for such fruitless discussions, I have for some time promised my students and correspondents that I would lay out my case fully in a book. This is the fulfillment of that promise.





## *Chapter One*

### *Why not Full-Preterism?*

The word *praeter* (often spelled “preter”), in Latin, signifies the idea of “beyond” or “before.” “*preterist*” refers to an interpretative approach to prophecy which identifies a fulfillment as having happened *before, or in the past*. This is an alternative to the approach that views a given prediction as unfulfilled and awaiting future realization. The latter approach is called the “*futurist*” approach to a prophecy. Christians and Jews agree that many biblical predictions have already been fulfilled—thus giving those prophecies a preterist interpretation. These would include, among others, the many prophecies that foretold the fall of ancient Assyria, Edom, Moab, Philistia—and even the destruction of First-Temple Jerusalem by the Babylonians, in 586 B.C.

Both Orthodox Jews and Christians agree that the *Tanakh* (what we Christians call the Old Testament), contains multiple (some Christians say as many as three hundred) prophetic passages concerning the Messiah. Since Orthodox Jews do not recognize a fulfillment of these predictions in Jesus of Nazareth, they remain *futurists* with reference to all such messianic prophecy.

All Christians, on the other hand, consistently take these passages in a *preterist* manner, recognizing them to have been fulfilled in Jesus at His first coming. According to Paul, the Gospel itself affirms that “*Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures*” (1 Cor.15:3-4). All Christians believe these Gospel statements, meaning that all Christians believe certain Old Testament prophecies about Christ’s death and resurrection have been fulfilled in the past.

In other words, all Christians take a *preterist* view of many biblical prophecies. Those who believe that a given prophecy is divinely inspired will either take a *preterist* (past fulfillment) or a *futurist* (future fulfillment) view of that passage. There is nothing controversial, then, about a Christian being a *partial-preterist*—which simply means that he or she takes some, but not all, biblical prophecies as having had a past fulfillment.

Prophecies popularly applied to the Second Coming (Gr. *Parousia*) of Jesus must be taken case-by-case, due to the fact that some of them are ambiguous enough to raise questions as to whether they are addressing the actual end of history or some prior historical event. With reference to such passages, some Christians are *futurists*, some are *partial-preterists*, and some are *full-preterists*. The first two of these groups still anticipate the fulfillment of some second-advent prophecies. The latter two groups see some or all of these as referring to something already past—usually the destruction of the second Jewish temple, in A.D.70. The reason for such disagreements will be made clear in the following pages.

When considering the entire corpus of prophetic scriptures, there are therefore three possible interpretive commitments: 1) *full-preterists* [all biblical prophecy is fulfilled], 2) *partial-preterists* [some, but not all, biblical prophecies have been fulfilled], and 3) *full-futurists* [no biblical prophecies have been fulfilled]. Since no believer actually exists in the third category, every Christian is either a partial- or full- *preterist*.

While all Christians recognize that *some* prophecies in the Bible have already been fulfilled (the *partial-preterist* view of scripture), still the vast majority would deny that *all* biblical prophecies have been fulfilled in the past (*full-preterist*). There are different labels given to the full-preterist position, depending on who is discussing it. Critics often (justly) call it *Hyper-Preterism*. By contrast, its advocates often call it *Consistent Preterism*, or *Covenant Eschatology*. I have chosen not to use either the pejorative “hyper,” nor the seemingly self-congratulatory term “consistent” in describing the

system. My preferred term, *Full-Preterism*, is merely descriptive of its commitments. It is offensive to none, and acceptable to all.

Those identified as *full-preterists*, do not believe that any biblical predictions remain to be fulfilled in the future—including any predictions of the final Resurrection, the Rapture of the Church, the Second Coming of Christ, the Final Judgment, the destruction of Satan, and the renewed creation. Their view is that expressions like “resurrection,” “the coming (*Parousia*)” and the “Day of the Lord” all refer to things that occurred (if not literally, then at least spiritually) at the time of Jerusalem’s destruction in A.D.70. This historical event is seen as perhaps the most important prophesied occurrence in scripture and history—apart from the incarnation itself—and their belief is that all the purposes of God were wrapped-up when the Herodian temple was destroyed in that year.

To those who have never encountered such claims, they will probably sound absurd. However, many who teach this view (just like many in every cult) are intelligent and articulate, and they study their Bibles. In the following pages, I will seek to explain their reasons for thinking the way they do, and also to respond to their arguments.

These days the word *preterist* is frequently used by its theological rivals with reference only to *full-preterists*, so that some Christians have only heard that word identified with “heresy.” However, the majority of self-professed *preterists* disagree with the full-preterist viewpoint. The self-designation adopted by the majority of preterists is *partial-preterist*. As the name implies, they hold that many prophecies have been fulfilled in the past—including many that are popularly assumed by most modern evangelicals to require a future fulfillment. It is in the latter instances that the (often heated) controversy, even over *Partial-Preterism*, exists.

Partial-preterists share a belief with all other evangelicals that there remain many unfulfilled prophecies concerning several future events—including a literal and visible descent of Christ from heaven, a physical resurrection of all dead bodies, a catching-up of living believers to meet Christ in the air, a final judgment, and a future renewed heaven and earth—thus, such people (including this author) are not only *partial-preterists*, but also *partial futurists*. At the same time, those typically identified as *partial-preterists* tend to see most, or all, of the apocalyptic prophecies in the Olivet Discourse and of the Book of Revelation as having been fulfilled in A.D.70. *Partial-Preterism* also identifies the fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies with this same historical fulfillment.

### *A brief background of Full-Preterism*

Though there are “*preteristic-sounding*” passages in some of the early church fathers’ writings, every one of them affirmed a future, end-of-the-world return of Christ in blessing and judgment. This means they were what we would have to call *partial-preterists* (The Book of Revelation was not necessarily among the portions of scripture that they understood in a preteristic manner).

The writings of a few authors in the nineteenth century introduced a more thoroughgoing preterist position. Some of them may have understood every prophecy to have been fulfilled no later than A.D.70, but the most influential of them, J. Stuart Russell, actually balked at interpreting Revelation 20:10-15 (the judgment after the millennium) as having already been fulfilled. The otherwise-absolute *Preterism* of Russell and a few others did not spawn anything like a “movement”—until the late twentieth century.

As former full-preterist, Roderick Edwards, points out:

In brief, almost all theological expressions of Preterism were merely what is now labeled “Partial-Preterism” BEFORE Max King (a [Church of Christ] preacher) started advocating his views in the

1970s...Full-Preterism, as we presently know it has its roots within the anticreedal, anticonfessional, & antihistorical denomination [the Churches of Christ].<sup>1</sup>

Full-Preterism is not the official position of the Churches of Christ, but it is significant that its founder, along with its principal current defenders (Edward E. Steven and Don K. Preston) are all Church of Christ preachers. This movement has always had the distinctive of downplaying the authority of creeds and post-apostolic Christianity. It is, perhaps, this predisposition that allowed preachers from this movement to be the first to reject the beliefs of every Christian theologian prior to their time—namely the doctrine of the future return of Christ.

One who is committed to the principle of *sola scriptura* (placing the authority of scripture above that of all men and creeds), will acknowledge that scripture must be allowed to correct traditional errors in past religious thought. However, the scriptures we read and study today are the same scriptures which Christians have been studying for thousands of years, for many of whom the language of the New Testament was their native tongue. It is *theoretically* possible that all Christian scholarship prior to 1970 may have missed something that some very clever exegete today might bring to light. However, it would be absolutely necessary for one's exegesis to be demonstrated to be superior to that of all others previously, if any universally held doctrine—especially a major one—is to be successfully challenged.

The bar is very high for the required proof of a doctrine as heterodox as is *Full-Preterism*. I have been reading their books and writings for many years, and I find nothing like superior exegesis being presented. In fact, most of the exegesis seems suspiciously agenda-driven.

Rather than our being asked to explain why we have declined to join a theological movement which, in terms of historic Christianity, is a radical cult, we should be asking, "Do you really have new exegetical insights adequate to justify a departure from Christianity's historical blessed hope as it was universally understood until the 1970s?" We would do well to examine this question critically.

### ***What didn't happen in AD 70***

Why not seriously consider that all Bible prophecy was fulfilled by AD70? The first reason would be that the following things cannot credibly be said to have happened in A.D.70:

- There was no "*appearing of the glory*" of Christ in the Church (Tit.2:13; Rom.8:18).
- The Church did not see Jesus "*face-to-face*" or come to "*know even as we are known*" (1 Cor.13:12).
- The Church did not become "*like Him*" (1 John 3:2).
- The Christians, viewed either individually or corporately, did not have their bodies glorified (Phil.3:21).
- The Church did not become "*a mature man*" (Eph.4:13).

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<sup>1</sup> Roderick Edwards, *Origins of Full-Preterism*  
<http://unpreterist.blogspot.com/2008/01/history-of-heresy-origin-of-fullhyper.html> (accessed 12/8/21)

- The Church did not, in any perceptible sense, begin to “*reign on earth*” (Rev.5:10).
- God’s will is not yet being done “*on earth as it is in heaven*” (Matt.6:10).
- The devil and demons were not permanently removed from the earth (Matt.25:41; Rev.20:10).
- The creation was not delivered from the bondage of decay (Rom.8:21).
- There did not come a new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Pet.3:13).
- There came no era in which death, or sorrow, or crying, or pain ceased to exist (Rev.21:4).
- There came no end of the institution of marriage (Luke 20:35).
- There was no event in which two people were sleeping side-by-side and one was taken and the other left (Luke 17:34-37).
- The groaning of the Christians in their bodies did not end (Rom.8:23).
- There was no final conquest of all Christ’s enemies (1 Cor.15:24-25).
- There was no final conquest of death (1 Cor.15:26).
- The living saints were not caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess.4:17).
- The “times of the Gentiles” which seem to have begun at Jerusalem’s destruction in AD 70 (Luke 21:24), can hardly have been fulfilled at the time identified as their starting point.

Full-preterists insist that I am mistaken on these points and that all of these things were indeed fulfilled in A.D.70, in some manner—which they are usually happy to explain. I am prepared to let them attempt to do so, and to respond to them in the remainder of this book. Since books and blogs by full-preterists seem to be innumerable, I will not attempt to examine every minor claim in detail that appears in their works. I have no intention of writing a major work myself on this topic.

The only thing that would be necessary in order to prove that *Full-Preterism* is incorrect would be to discover so much as one prophecy in scripture, as Russell did, that has not yet been fulfilled. So long as any predicted event can be shown to remain unfulfilled and to await a future fulfillment, *Full-Preterism* is thereby discredited. There are many passages which most objective biblical students have always found to fall in this category.

This does not mean that most modern Christians are sufficiently “objective” and “biblically-literate” to avoid being deceived by the arguments of articulate defenders of *Full-Preterism*—who are often masters of their craft. Former full-preterist, Roderick Edwards, has accurately stated the case, when he wrote:

...most clergy have not prepared the average Christian for interaction with a preterist<sup>2</sup> who has often spent large amounts of time honing their [*sic*] arguments. This doesn't make the preterist correct, merely prepared and practiced.<sup>3</sup>

There are already a number of books by competent authors, some of them former full-preterists, that have done a fine job of helping the average Christian prepare for such encounters. This is my modest contribution to the genre.

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<sup>2</sup> Edwards consistently uses the word “preterist” to mean “full-preterist”—usually contrasting this designation with “Christian.”

<sup>3</sup> Roderick Edwards, *About Preterism: The End is Past*, (2019), p.50



## *Chapter Two*

### ***General introduction to Full-Preterism***

#### *Partial-Preterism Vs. Full-Preterism*

As mentioned earlier, every Christian is some kind of preterist. The ones who are not full-preterists are partial-preterists. This is because the latter term means “someone who believes that part (or *some*) of the prophecy in the Bible has been fulfilled in the past.” Though this is so, most Christians do not use this term to describe themselves. The term *partial-preterist* is usually reserved for Christians who place more prophecy in this category than does the average Christian. At the very least, those called *partial-preterists* will take part (or all) of the Olivet Discourse (Matt.24-25; Mark 13; Luke 21), and part (or all) of the Book of Revelation, as having been fulfilled in the past. Typically, fulfillment is identified with the fall of Jerusalem to Rome, in A.D.70.

It is not clear why such a position would stir up much controversy among evangelicals. There are so many interpretations abroad already concerning Revelation and the “last days,” that it should not be unsettling to find yet another—especially one which is so completely in line with historic Christianity. One’s view of Revelation or the end times obviously has nothing to do with how devoted a Christian may be to Christ. Yet, those who see the Olivet Discourse and the Book of Revelation entirely through the *futurist* lens are often very loyal to the end-times scenarios that they have derived from this approach, and some apparently feel personally offended, or even threatened, when one challenges their pet eschatological views.

Even if one should take the entirety of Revelation and the Olivet Discourse as having been fulfilled in A.D.70, this need not destroy the clear eschatological reality of a future coming of Christ in glory, accompanied by the Resurrection, Rapture, Judgment and New Creation. Most of these features of the future are derived more from other portions of scripture (e.g., Christ’s parables, and several of the apostolic epistles). The validity of the major features of Christian eschatology does not stand or fall with any particular interpretation of the apocalyptic sections of the New Testament.

#### *The Olivet Discourse*

The basis for taking the Olivet Discourse as a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D.70 is the fact that this is the event that Jesus predicted, which caused the disciples to ask “*When shall these things be?*” He had just predicted the utter destruction of the Jewish temple—that not one stone would be left standing upon another (Matt.24:1-3; Mark 13:1-4; Luke 21:5-7)—so that “*these things,*” in their question, would have been the things He had just predicted. Add to this the fact that Jesus said the fulfillment would occur in “*this [that is, His own] generation*” (Matt.24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32), and there would seem no more natural way to understand the fulfillment than in the destruction of the Jewish temple in that very generation—that is, forty years later, as Jesus predicted. This is also the way that the early church understood this passage. Eusebius, the earliest church historian (other than Luke), and a respected church father, wrote, in A.D. 325, in his discussion of the Jewish War of A.D. 66-70:

It is fitting to add to these accounts the true prediction of our Savior in which he foretold these very events. His words are as follows: ‘Woe to them that are with child, and to them that give suck

in those days! For there shall be great tribulation, such was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.<sup>1</sup>

The reader will note that Eusebius equated the trials of the Jews in that time with the “great tribulation” predicted by Jesus (mentioned also in Revelation 7:14). While no one believes Eusebius to be an inspired interpreter of scripture, it is hard to read the accounts of Josephus, who was a witness and participant in that war, and fail to recognize the warrant of these words. The events predicted in the early portion of that discourse (which Jesus referred to as “*these things*”) did occur in that generation.

### *The Book of Revelation*

There is reason also to see the *Apocalypse* as a prophecy of the Jewish crisis at the close of the apostolic generation. Besides seeing in it the same subject matter (“*the great tribulation*”—7:14) as is found in the Olivet Discourse, it should be noted how frequently John, or the later reader, is told that the prophecy will come to pass “*shortly*” and that it is “*at hand*” (that is, “near”). In particular, John was given instructions opposite to those given to Daniel, who was told to “seal up” his book because it would not be fulfilled until long after Daniel’s time (Dan.12:4, 9). By contrast, John is told: “*Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand.*” (Rev.22:10)

Thus, while Daniel was informed that his prophecies would not be immediately fulfilled, John is explicitly told that his prophecies were for immediate fulfillment. If Revelation was written in the reign of Nero,<sup>2</sup> who died in A.D. 68, then an A.D.70 fulfillment would be precisely in the timeframe announced.

The preterist approach to Revelation is sometimes misrepresented by its critics as having arisen as a response to the Reformers’ claims that the papacy was the beast in Revelation. It is said that the Jesuit, Luis de Alcázar, in defense of the pope’s reputation, introduced a variety of *Preterism* in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. While it is true that Alcázar wrote a partial-preterist commentary on Revelation, he was by no means the first to do so. Possibly as much as a thousand years earlier, Andreas, bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, and Arethas, a later bishop of the same church, both wrote commentaries on Revelation, mentioning a preterist approach that was held by some in their time.<sup>3</sup>

### *Apocalyptic imagery*

These observations may not make any kind of preterist out of a futurist reader, unless there is a corresponding appreciation for the genre of literature in which Revelation is written, and the conventions of expression so common to such works. All informed students of Jewish and ancient Christian literature recognize the close similarities between the style in which Revelation was

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<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*. Book III, chap.7

<sup>2</sup> Most modern commentators, and the editors of study Bibles, assume a date of writing for Revelation during the reign of Emperor Domitian, around A.D. 96—rendering the book too late to be “predicting” events that occurred a quarter of a century earlier. While this date agrees with most popular scholars in our day, there have been times when more commentators identified the time of writing with Nero’s times—and the case for this date is strong. I will not take the time here to survey the evidence for the early and the late dates, respectively. I have done so elsewhere (see Steve Gregg, *Revelation: Four Views: A Parallel Commentary, Revised and Updated* Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2013), 26-34

<sup>3</sup> For citations from Andreas and Arethas, see *Revelation: Four Views: A Parallel Commentary, Revised and Updated*, p.63.



written and that of many other Jewish and Christian books current in or around the first century. The style has come to be called *Apocalyptic*, owing to the similarity of the other books of this genre to the Book of Revelation which, in Greek, is called *The Apocalypse*.

Many of the original readers to whom it was written are sure to have read other books of this ilk, and would know immediately the manner in which it should be understood. With many apocalyptic books (including Revelation), the exact meaning is often obscure due to the highly symbolic nature of the narrative. We have an instructive example of this style of writing, whose meaning cannot fail to be understood, dated from the second century B.C.

The Book of Esther, as anyone can tell by reading it, contains no sensational, miraculous, or mythical-sounding features. It is a straightforward historical narrative about a Jewish queen of Persia, who, through the counsel of her uncle Mordecai and many conspicuous providences of God, delivered her people from the genocide plotted by a wicked villain named Haman.

Some anonymous writer, centuries after the book was written, wrote his own prologue and epilogue to the existing canonical Book of Esther. These additions can still be found in Roman Catholic versions of the Bible, and are regarded as parts of the *Apocrypha*. They were written two or three centuries before Christ—centuries after Esther's time—in the apocalyptic style that was so popular in that period. The author of these sections (falsely) claims to be Mordecai himself, and professes to be relating a dream that he had. In reading his prologue, we might get the feeling that we are reading a lost passage from the Book of Revelation:

*The dream: Behold, noise and confusion, thunders and earthquake, tumult upon the earth! And behold, two great dragons came forward, both ready to fight, and they roared terribly. And at their roaring every nation prepared for war, to fight against the nation of the righteous. And behold, a day of darkness and gloom, tribulation and distress, affliction and great tumult upon the earth! And the whole righteous nation was troubled, they feared the evils that threatened them, and were ready to perish. Then they cried to God and from their cry, as though from a tiny spring, there came a great river, with abundant water, light came, and the sun rose, and the lowly were exalted and consumed those held in honor (A:3-10).*

At this point, the canonical Book of Esther begins. At the end of the story, the same apocalyptic writer adds the following explanatory epilogue:

*I remember the dream that I had concerning these matters, and none of them has failed to be fulfilled. The tiny stream which became a river, and there was light and the sun and abundant water—the river is Esther, whom the king married and made queen. The two dragons are Haman and myself. The nations are those gathered to destroy the name of the Jews. And my nation, this is Israel, who cried out to God and were saved (F:2-6).*

The great value of these particular apocryphal passages is that they give us an example of how apocalyptic imagery was commonly used in the period when Revelation was written. Since we are familiar with the contents of the Book of Esther, we can see how much less spectacular the events were in real life, in contrast to its representation as a warfare between two fierce dragons in the milieu of cosmic disturbances. All of this was very familiar fare for Jewish and Christian readers of the period in which Revelation was written.

With such a guide as this, we may safely assume that similar sensational imagery, when we find it in other apocalyptic books like Revelation, probably describes dramatic, but natural, historical

events as well. Anyone who suggests that the things occurring in Israel from A.D. 66 to 70 would not warrant the sensational language and symbolism of Revelation's visions is simply displaying an ignorance of these events, which can easily be cured by perusing Josephus' history of that holocaust. The more a student reads from Josephus, the more likely he or she is to take some form of preterist approach to the Book of Revelation.

### *The "coming" (Parousia) of the Lord*

Once a reader becomes aware of the figurative language characteristic of prophetic and apocalyptic writings, it becomes clear with what variety the language of God or Christ "coming" is used in scripture.

The imagery of the Lord "coming," in both Testaments, is usually found in passages predicting earthly judgments upon wicked societies, taking place not at the end of the world, but within ordinary history. Sometimes God is said to be exploiting the natural aggression of the invading nation (as with Assyria coming against Samaria, in Isaiah 10:5-15), or dragging them by hooks in their jaws (as in the case of Gog in Ezekiel 38:4). Other times, the picture is simply of God arriving through, or at the head of, the invasion forces. The thought behind such language is that God is the Sovereign over all the nations, and is sending or bringing the invaders against the condemned nation as a direct punishment from Himself.

Thus, when predicting the invasion of doomed Egypt by the advancing Assyrian armies (which occurred in the seventh century B.C.), Isaiah speaks as if Yahweh is literally riding on a cloud like a chariot (cf., Ps.104:3), leading the Assyrian forces against Egypt. In fact, the language of the passage sounds very similar to the Olivet Discourse's description of Jesus coming on the clouds (Matt.24:30). Isaiah writes, "*Behold, the LORD rides on a swift cloud, and will come into Egypt...*" (Isa.19:1).

Micah predicts the destruction of Samaria by the Assyrians in similar imagery:

*For behold, the Lord is coming out of His place; He will come down  
And tread on the high places of the earth. (Micah 1:3)*

And Zechariah speaks of the Lord coming in battle in connection with Jerusalem's fall, in A.D.70:

*Then the Lord will go forth  
And fight against those nations,  
As He fights in the day of battle. (Zech.14:3)*

It is important to note that many statements in both Testaments, which speak of the "coming" of the Lord, are not referring to the coming of Christ at the end of the world, but to some nearer, earthly judgment—almost always brought about through an invasion by armies of earthly aggressors. These invasions are seen as direct judgments from God, which is why He is depicted as riding at their head, and coming with them. In Chapter Three, we will provide additional examples of the same phenomenon occurring in the New Testament, as well. The "coming" of God, or of Christ, is a very generic idiom to speak of temporal judgments of nations which, though accomplished through war and conquest, are in this manner declared to be God's doing.

In contrast to these many cases, the end-time “Second Coming”<sup>4</sup> of Christ, historically anticipated by all Christians, occurring at the end of the world, is the actual descent of Jesus physically from heaven to earth, on which occasion He will raise the dead and rapture the Church. This coming precipitates the final judgment and the renewal of the physical cosmos.

The partial-preterist and the full-preterist agree that there are many cases in scripture where the “coming” of Christ does not refer to the literal, personal coming of Christ at the end of the world, but rather is idiomatic, referring to the severe judgment upon Jerusalem in the first century. It should not be thought that there was a literal, physical descent from heaven of Christ in that event. To speak of A.D.70 in such terms is no more literal than was Yahweh riding on a cloud and “coming” to Egypt (Isa.19:1). So also the “coming” of Jesus on a cloud (to Jerusalem) can, and does, sometimes refer to the coming of the Roman armies to conquer the Jewish State.

### *Full-Preterism*

It is, I think, this last observation that has gotten the full-preterist into trouble. They seem to reason, “Since the ‘coming’ of God or of Christ is a common metaphor for the divine judgment in history of various nations or entities, why should it ever mean anything else?” This is a criticism often raised by futurists against *Partial-Preterism*—it looks like a slippery slope. Once you have given up a few passages that have popularly been applied to the end of the world *Parousia*, why stop there? Aren’t you in danger of selling the whole farm?

Reality is full of slippery slopes—many of them are found in theology. If a Christian were to embrace premillennialism, what prevents him from sliding all the way into the Millennial Dawn (Jehovah’s Witness) Movement? If one were to believe that the Church is the New Israel, what prevents a slide all the way into antisemitism? If one acknowledges that the gifts of the Spirit remain available to Christians in the present time, why not go “all the way” and insist that speaking in tongues is necessary for salvation? The answer to such questions, of course, is that doing biblical studies requires a measure of sanity. To recognize that “coming” is often a metaphor in certain scriptural contexts does not predict that every occurrence of the term must have a merely symbolic meaning. If Jesus is referred to symbolically as a “Lamb” dozens of times in scripture, this does not justify an assumption that the word “lamb” is never used literally in scripture, as well.

This is what I noticed, in 1983, when I read James Stuart Russell’s book, *Parousia*. I was not yet even a convinced partial-preterist (I held to an Idealist view of Revelation at that time). I had first encountered *Partial-Preterism* in Jay Adam’s little book *The Time is at Hand*. He presented the view that the first half of Revelation predicted A.D.70, and the second half foresaw the fall of Rome (Babylon). I had never previously heard any suggestion that Revelation was about events that have long since occurred, but I found Adams’ arguments to be intriguing and almost persuasive. However, it did not answer all questions for me. The idea of a past fulfillment of Revelation was too radically novel for me to allow for an instant conversion. I needed to give it more thought. In Adams’ book, and in J. Marcellus Kik’s *Eschatology of Victory*, I found irrefutable arguments that the Olivet Discourse was about the fall of Jerusalem in the first century. However, I had never noticed how pervasive the A.D.70 theme was throughout scripture until reading J. Stuart Russell’s masterful work.

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<sup>4</sup> The actual term “Second Coming” isn’t found in scripture, though the concept is believed to be referred to in a number of passages.

I had never heard of *Full-Preterism*, and only years later realized that Russell's tome was considered by many to be the seminal work from which that modern movement grew.<sup>5</sup> All I knew was that Russell demonstrated that the word *parousia* (usually translated "coming"), when applied to Christ, sometimes referred to the divine judgment that came upon Jerusalem through the instrumentality of the Romans. At that time, however, I noticed the broad brush with which Russell was painting. He surveyed the theme of the *Parousia* throughout the New Testament, passage-by-passage. Half the time, he successfully demonstrated that A.D.70 was in view, whereas, in the passages that most needed proof of this thesis, it seemed his exegesis was weak or faulty. My assessment was, "Obviously there are references to the first-century destruction of the Second Temple, but let's use a little exegetical discretion here! Admittedly, the word *parousia* is used in many connections.<sup>6</sup> What rule compels me, every time I find this word referring to Christ's "coming," to always forcibly apply it to the same event?" Full-preterists need to answer this question persuasively, and, to my mind, this cannot be done.

The burden upon the full-preterist is great. A partial-preterist can concede that many or most of the passages they use have already been fulfilled in the past, but if there is so much as one verse in the Bible that speaks of a consummation that remains to be fulfilled in the future, then the primary claim that justifies *Full-Preterism* over *Partial-Preterism* simply disappears. This means that every passage about the return of Christ, the Resurrection of the dead, the Rapture of living saints, the Final Judgment, and the New Heavens and Earth must be shown to have their fulfillment in A.D.70 (or at some other time in the past). They must also persuade us that Satan and demons no longer exist, and that the present age (post A.D.70) is one about which the scriptures have nothing to say. The full-preterists, therefore, struggle to find meaning in life for the believer post A.D.70—since they believe no scripture looks beyond that date. To what do we look forward today? Only death and heaven? Are we to believe Jesus no longer is with us, since He only promised to remain until the "*end of the age*" (Matt.28:20)? Are we to abandon the Lord's Supper, since Paul said we are to do this only "*until He comes*" (1 Cor.11:26)? Are we to consider the Great Commission to be completed?

As former full-preterist, Roderick Edwards, writes in his 2019 book, *About Preterism*:

If the Great Commission has been fulfilled, and the General Resurrection of Christians has been fulfilled, and the Judgment of the wicked and the righteous has been fulfilled; then what is left to propagate? Is Preterism really about telling everyone it's all over and everyone missed it?

This question of what is ongoing or the 'What now?' question has dogged many preterist teachers...[T]here is not much of an outline in the Bible for what Christians should be doing if they are not supposed to be replicating the practices of the pre-AD70 Christians.

Further, it has been difficult for preterists to maintain traditional church structures since it seems pointless...The cohesiveness of churches with all the clergy structure typically falls apart after a while or gives way to more of a social gathering than a proper place of worship and learning. There are some existing preterist churches, but they are typically small and stagnant.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> As it turns out, Russell was not a "fully-full-preterist" since he believed that the events following the thousand years of Revelation 20 remain to be fulfilled.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Paul speaks of "the coming (*parousia*) of Stephanus, Fortunatus, and Achaicus" (1 Cor.16:17), "the coming (*parousia*) of Titus" (2 Cor.7:6,7); and the "presence" or "coming" (*parousia*) of Paul himself (2 Cor.10:10; Phil.1:26; 2:12).

<sup>7</sup> *About Preterism*, 36f

The issues that must be answered are no straw-man questions. Full-preterists often face them squarely, and give their responses, though they do not all give the same answers. Their conflicting positions concern fundamental matters in the movement. Did such a physical resurrection and rapture of the Church, as most Christians still anticipate, occur (though apparently unnoticed and unrecorded) in A.D.70, as one camp (e.g., J. Stuart Russell, Milton Terry, Edward E. Stevens) claims? Or were the Resurrection and Rapture invisible, spiritual phenomena by which the Church became glorious and inherited all of her spiritual privileges (equally unnoticed and unrecorded), as others (e.g., Max King, Don K. Preston) insist? Or is the Resurrection the personal experience of every Christian, receiving a new, body in heaven at the moment of death, while the old one remains buried on earth (apparently held by most full-preterists)?

The full-preterist movement is not only divided, but also divisive in spirit. This may be said, to a certain extent, of the Christian religion as a whole, but there is a difference in degree. We know that there are many denominations that have arisen in Christianity over the past 2,000 years. However, it took hundreds of years for the major differences to develop, since most of the central doctrines of the faith are clear in scripture, and are held by all in every branch of Christianity. *Full-Preterism*, however, only emerged as a modern movement in the 1970s, and already there are a large number of competing branches, many of them calling the others “heresy.”

Former insider, Roderick Edwards (who calls *Full-Preterism*, simply “preterism” and consistently contrasts it with what he calls “Christianity”) observes the following characteristics of the movement:

Preterism by nature is a private interpreter’s paradise where you can question everything; after all, one of the main premises of preterism is that 2000 years of Christian eschatology is wrong. The door is wide open for replacement of any doctrine.”<sup>8</sup>

...its anti-establishment frame is often destructive on any cohesive unions, be it as an organization or perhaps even marriages...Preterism is a radical paradigm shift into radical individualism without responsibility...once the ‘us vs them’ martyr comradeship of Preterism wears off, it really is every man for himself.<sup>9</sup>

I have attended some of these gatherings...they all seem to emanate the same almost smug martyr mentality. Almost as if they feel they are being persecuted by mainline Christianity because they as preterists are just too smart for everyone else.

This underlying arrogance often reveals itself as a hostile need to debate or ridicule or dismiss people as inferior or ‘creedalists’...

What makes a preterist church even more precarious is that within Preterism leadership of the Church as a single Body and as connected entities of congregations was supposed to end by the time the Chief Shepherd (Jesus) returned.<sup>10</sup>

While these observations may be insightful, one cannot legitimately refute a theology by merely *abusive ad hominem* criticisms of its adherents. The movement is definitely growing quickly, because, despite their weaknesses, they do have some persuasive biblical arguments. In particular, they rest much of their case on two principal arguments: 1) *Time Statements* in the text, and 2) the principle of *Audience Relevance*.

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 52

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 87

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 88 (alluding, in the final line, to 1 Peter 5:4)

## *Time Statements*

The most important argument in the full-preterist's arsenal is the presence of numerous "time indicators" attached to certain prophecies. It is commonly claimed that there are over a hundred "time statements" in the New Testament pointing to the chronological nearness of the prophesied events—including the Second Coming and its associated phenomena. This number is taken from a list posted by David A. Green, called *Preterism 101*,<sup>11</sup> which includes 101 verses of scripture that are said to prove that the eschatological events were expected by the biblical writers to come to fruition within the lifetimes of many of their readers in the first century.

The argument reasonably suggests that the things that are declared to be "at hand" and "soon" in the time of the original readers could not possibly have remained unfulfilled to this day, two thousand years after they were predicted. This is reasonable.

However, not every predicted event in the New Testament is found to be qualified with such indicators. In fact, David A. Green's list includes very many verses which contain no time referent at all, and a great many more whose alleged time elements are far too vague to serve as evidence for the point the full-preterist hopes to establish.

There are, of course, some very specific time indicators in the New Testament. I am referring to Jesus' statement, "*This generation will not pass before all these things take place*" (found paralleled in all three Synoptic Gospels,<sup>12</sup> and so accounting for three of the time statements on Green's list of 101 cases). Also, Jesus said to His disciples, "*Some of you standing here will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.*"<sup>13</sup> These statements definitely do place a severe and specific time limit upon the events they are predicting. They can very reasonably, as the full-preterists argue, be applied to the holocaust of A.D.70. There are no other statements in Green's list that are anywhere near this specific. Therefore, the total number of statements in the Bible predicting an event that must specifically occur in the lifetime of some of the listeners is precisely two (with their repetition in parallel accounts of the Gospels bringing the occurrences to six). Nonetheless, this number would be sufficient to make the case, for the particular event to which these verses refer. The problem is in attempting to ascertain that the events referred to in these passages are the same as those referring to the final *Parousia*, accompanied by the Resurrection, the Rapture, and the Judgment of the world. Given the variety of ways in which the "coming" of the Lord is used in scripture, it would be presumptuous to assume that a given "coming" mentioned in one passage must be identified with all other "comings" mentioned in various other contexts.

The time-texts are the most persuasive data that preterists have available to them, but the passages that speak of the eschatological Resurrection, and such associated events, do not contain unambiguous time references. David A. Green's list of 101 time statements can be reduced to six categories:

- 1) Those that speak of the soon coming of the Kingdom (6x);
- 2) Those that predict the destruction of Jerusalem (36x);
- 3) Those that employ the common Greek word "*mello*"—which commonly means "about to" (as in, "*there is about to be a resurrection of the dead*"—Acts 24:15) (26x);
- 4) Those in which the writer addresses his audience as "we" or "you" who will see or experience the event (10x);

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.prophecyhistory.com/node/117>

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32

<sup>13</sup> Matthew 16:28; cf., Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27

- 5) Those in which the subject matter is far from clear (10x); and
- 6) Those which actually contain no time indicators of any kind (13x)

We will have occasion to look carefully at these passages category-by-category, in Chapters 5 and 6.

### *Audience Relevance*

The other major argument that full-preterists use has to do with the fact that the New Testament epistles were written to specific churches and individuals in the first century—not to us. Paul says, “we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord...”<sup>14</sup> and “we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,”<sup>15</sup> and that God will “give you who are troubled rest”<sup>16</sup> when Jesus returns. These statements (they say) speak only of Paul and his contemporaries. “We” and “you,” in such cases, encourage the original readers to expect that they themselves will be alive to experience the events associated with the coming of Christ. These passages include those predicting the Resurrection, the Rapture, and the Judgment of the world. Thus, J. Stuart Russell writes: “To whom does the apostle refer when he says, ‘We shall not all sleep,’ etc.? Is it to some hypothetical persons living in some distant age of time, or is it of the Corinthians and himself that he is thinking?”<sup>17</sup>

The strength of this argument rests upon the assumption that the first- and second-person plural pronouns used by the writers would naturally include only the original readers as members of first-century local congregations. If Jesus did not finally return in their lifetimes, we are told, then these expectations were wrong and the biblical writers (who could not err in their writing) seem to have misled their original readers.

It is difficult to fully disprove this argument, other than by the fact that these things (as we shall demonstrate) never occurred in their time, nor at any subsequent time in history. It might seem that this would leave us, with only two possibilities:

- 1) The writer was correct, and writing symbolically about events that really did occur in their lifetimes—namely, the destruction of Jerusalem, in A.D.70;
- 2) The writer was looking for a literal end-of-the-world, physical return of Christ, but was mistaken about its timing;

However, there is a third possibility, which we will explore presently. Hint: the “we” and the “you” mentioned by the writers encompass a larger solidarity to which the original readers belonged—which was not bound by limits of either geography or their lifetimes. This is the way all Christian scholars understood these passages until at least the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and we, in due time, will examine the evidence to demonstrate that this historic understanding is correct—and that the original audience would almost certainly have been aware of it.

### *Varieties within the full-preterist fold*

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<sup>14</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:15

<sup>15</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:51-52

<sup>16</sup> 2 Thessalonians 1:7

<sup>17</sup> Russell (2003), 208

The time statements and the audience relevance arguments are thought to point unmistakably to a first-century culmination of history, at which time the promises of Christ's Second Coming occurred. All full-preterists have some beliefs in common, including:

- 1) The Second Coming occurred in A.D.70
- 2) The Resurrection and Rapture occurred in A.D.70
- 3) The Final Judgment was in A.D.70 and the devil was removed to the lake of fire
- 4) The New Heavens and New Earth came in A.D.70

These are points upon which all full-preterists agree. When it comes to the specific interpretations of these things, however—especially of the Resurrection—the devil is in the details, not the lake of fire. All full-preterists seem to deny two aspects of the Resurrection: 1) that there remains a resurrection of the dead to occur at the end of the world, and 2) that physical bodies are predicted to rise from the tombs and graves.

Among full-preterists there are numerous camps, with some being quite hostile toward others. I will make no effort to catalogue all the varieties within the movement, since, at the time of writing, the movement is still growing and diversifying. I need only give a general summary of the different directions in which its major branches have extended themselves.

The biggest challenge for full-preterists would appear to be finding consensus about the doctrine of the Resurrection which the Bible predicts to occur at the *Parousia*. Since the major claim of this camp is that everything associated with the *Parousia* of Christ occurred no later than A.D.70, it is necessary to identify some phenomenon in that year that can reasonably fit the scriptural statements about the Resurrection and the Rapture. This is a daunting errand, as can be seen by the confused array of opinions given by leading voices of the movement.

We should note that the full-preterists can't seem to make up their minds as to whether the Resurrection should be viewed as a one-time event, in A.D.70, or as a process continuing forever as each individual experiences his or her own death.

It appears that most opt for both. By one definition or another, they believe there was a once-for-all-time event to which the biblical writers referred, which occurred in A.D.70. They do not agree as to the nature of this event, but all seem to agree that it was not a resurrection of actual physical bodies—thus it was not an event that conformed to any definition of the word “resurrection” in either Judaic or Greek thinking or language. Nor does the concept of a “non-physical resurrection” fit the biblical parallel of Christ's own resurrection, who is the “*firstborn from the dead*”<sup>18</sup> and “*firstfruits*”<sup>19</sup> of the eschatological resurrection. In other words, there is nothing about a non-physical “resurrection” that fits any of the relevant cultural, linguistic, or scriptural definitions or data.

Most full-preterists seem to believe that the A.D.70 “resurrection” was a transportation to heaven of the souls (not bodies) of Old Testament saints and Christians who had died before A.D.70. Some believe there was also an actual physical Rapture (of all, or only some) living saints to heaven simultaneously.

Some believe in the “Collective Body View” (abbreviated CBV) of Max King and Don Preston. This is the view that the Resurrection was not about individual bodies being raised, nor related to the afterlife, but was a spiritual resurrection of “the dead carcass of Judaism” to become the New Covenant Church. The Old System and temple were (they say) the “heavens and the earth,” in rabbinic

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<sup>18</sup> Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5

<sup>19</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:23



thought, while the New Covenant Order in which Christians now live (since A.D.70) is the New Heavens and Earth (abbreviated NHE).

In addition to whatever form of one-time resurrection is thought to have occurred in A.D.70—whether of the individual or the collective body—most full-preterists also seem to believe in the “Individual Body at Death” (IBD) view. This addresses the pressing question: *What then happens to believers since the “resurrection” of A.D.70?* Their answer is that every individual receives, at death, an immortal new body suited for eternal life in heaven. The body that dies never rises. Rather, it decays forever while the believer inhabits a new body created *de novo* for the post-mortem existence in eternity. Thus, there never is a resurrection of actual dead bodies from graves, such as Jesus predicted,<sup>20</sup> nor do our mortal bodies “put on immortality,” as Paul promised.<sup>21</sup>

These various views of the Resurrection advanced by full-preterists will be examined and critiqued in greater detail in Chapters 7 and 8. I have not read every preterist writer (nor will I). However, one does not have to refute every writer, or every individual point, in order to show that the biblical resurrection has not occurred, and that the defining issues in the full-preterist system are in error.

Despite their many differences, the full-preterists have one thing in common: *They all deny that there will be a future, world-changing Parousia of Christ to culminate the purposes of God that have been developing over the last (at least) six-thousand years.*

From my reading of full-preterist authors (and debating some of them), I have gained the impression that the most necessary tool in their hermeneutical kit is a shoehorn. Whereas the partial-preterist is free to interpret every passage individually on its own terms, in its own context, and to decide whether it refers to *this* or *that* “coming” of the Lord, the full-preterist has decided, prior to investigation, that every passage must fit into his one prescribed pigeonhole. I do not mean to imply that the thought-leaders of this camp do not give meticulous consideration to every text *individually*. I do mean that they cannot give consideration to every relevant text *independently* of their gratuitously pre-set parameters. To maintain the credibility of their system, they are already obligated, prior to approaching any given eschatological text, to find a clever way of making it fit the A.D.70 mold they have created for it. The scriptures address many various issues. Individual texts are like blocks of many different shapes that need to be matched with the holes of their respective shapes. The full-preterist has a template where all the holes are the same shape, and the blocks that don’t naturally fit must be forcibly made to do so against nature. There seems no end to the ingenuity employed, but in at least a few cases it just leads to ridiculous exegesis.

Jay Adams, in discussing the quality of the full-preterists’ exegesis, writes:

So long as they deal with passages about which all Preterists [Partial and Full] agree, they rarely go astray. But as soon as they begin to advance their unorthodox views, they make a hash of the Scriptures. In order to maintain their views of the Resurrection, the return of Christ and the judgment, they are forced to arrive at unnatural and uncharacteristic interpretations. They are like someone who has mixed pieces of two different puzzles trying to make all of the pieces fit. But in order to do so, they find it necessary to cut, shape and bend some of those pieces...

[J. Stuart] Russell, the most adroit and satisfying writer among them, does much fine and enlightening work...Yet when Russell comes to the great commission, because of his desire to fit all of the pieces, he must interpret the word ‘nations’ as ‘tribes’ in Palestine! There is no warrant

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<sup>20</sup> John 5:28-29

<sup>21</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:53

for doing this other than to save his view from being shattered by a passage that really doesn't fit into it...the incongruity of finding excellent exegesis alongside of highly unacceptable exegesis from the same writer in the same book is clear evidence that passages of Scripture must be bent and twisted in order to reject major...biblical doctrines.<sup>22</sup>

This assessment perfectly articulates the impression I received the first time I read Russell's *Parousia*, in 1983. He seemed brilliant in what I judged to be about 50% of his exegesis (possibly slightly more), and seemed to fall apart entirely in the remainder. In my subsequent reading of numerous full-preterists, I have found the same phenomenon to be present in their writings.

Todd Dennis, creator and former curator of the online "preterist archive," was a solid full-preterist for over ten years. I recently came across an online statement of warning from Dennis concerning the theology he formerly promoted. He now refers to it as a "toxic theology," whose "core components [are] extra-biblical history and logic—there being not one single verse which looks back to fulfillment in ad70... [T]he system is based entirely upon deductive reasoning..." He goes on to challenge:

If you have already adopted this viewpoint, please consider—has your attention been drawn toward or away from Jesus Christ and him crucified? (i.e. what is the focal point of your Christian life...AD70 or AD30?) Please note that the earliest known adherents of full preterism later abandoned it, as have many contemporary former full preterists...<sup>23</sup>

I have not set out here to write the definitive work refuting every full-preterist advocate, point-by-point, on every argument. My aim is a more modest one—to prove that their rejection of the hope of the historic Church is a serious and unnecessary error.

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<sup>22</sup> Jay Adams, *Preterism: Orthodox or Unorthodox?* (Stanley, NC: Timeless Texts, 2003), 5-6

<sup>23</sup> <http://preteristheresy.blogspot.com/2007/11/todd-dennis.html> (accessed 1/11/22)

### Chapter Three

## *The Parousia of Christ*

There is an uncanny similarity between *Full-Preterism* and *Dispensationalism*. Both have arisen in recent history (*Dispensationalism* in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and *Full-Preterism* in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century) and both present eschatological schemes contrary to all previous Christian teaching. Founders of both systems believed that all the biblical scholarship and the testimony of the Church fathers, apologists and martyrs since the time of the apostles was fundamentally misguided.

*Dispensationalism* teaches that the error of the historic church was in its failure to recognize certain prophesied events (especially related to ethnic Israel) which are to be fulfilled in the “end times.” They believe that they have restored to the Church an awareness of many things that were formerly thought to be fulfilled in Christ, but which actually belong to the nation of Israel in the future.

*Full-Preterism* also argues that the error of the historic church lay in their eschatology, but it was the opposite error. Historic Christianity attributed to the future certain prophecies that actually were fulfilled in the past. All Christians have historically anticipated a return of Christ at the end of time. According to *Full-Preterism*, all previous Christians failed to recognize that this *Parousia* actually occurred in the lifetime of some of the apostles.

Both views must assert that the apostolic message was, apparently, lost immediately after the death of the apostles themselves—due to poor exegesis on the part of church fathers—and that no subsequent Christian scholarship in the following two millennia ever managed to spot their basic error—not, that is, until *they* arrived. Both systems assert that they have rediscovered the true Christian faith, which was known and taught by the apostles, but was suddenly forgotten in the following generation and cannot be shown to have ever been taught by anyone since the apostles’ deaths. This is the claim that most cults (e.g., the Mormons) likewise have made for themselves. In fact, it is almost a defining distinctive of a cult.

Both views create for themselves a very narrow and artificial paradigm which becomes the key to interpreting all scripture. In both cases, the system controls the exegesis, often resulting in bizarre outcomes. For the Dispensationalist, every passage of scripture must be hammered on the anvil of a man-made hermeneutic called “literal interpretation.” This results in the massive disfigurement of many biblical passages. Similarly, the full-preterist must funnel all biblical prophecy into a narrow window of time, claiming that the fulfillment of events that were said to inspire hope in all the first Christians have actually occurred, though totally unnoticed, unrecorded and unremembered by those (like Polycarp and Clement of Rome) who were almost certainly alive at that time.

Understandably, these two systems despise each other, competing, as they do, for the one distinction of being the true, restored faith of the apostles. They stand at opposite ends of the eschatological spectrum, but they both exist upon the same assumption—namely, that some individual in ultra-modern times has finally succeeded in exegesis where all others failed for nearly two thousand years—and it was *their* guy, not the other group’s guy.

Putting aside, for the moment, the *prima facie* arrogance of such an assumption, we should be willing to admit that such a claim is not impossible—however improbable it may be. Of the two, there are far more scholars who have been persuaded of *Dispensationalism* than of *Full-Preterism*, but, theological vogues do shift over time, and *Full-Preterism* has made many converts in the past few years (though they have lost some of their champions<sup>1</sup> in the same period).

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. Samuel M. Frost, Todd Dennis, Roderick Edwards

Regardless how brazen the claims of these systems may be, *vis-à-vis* historical Christianity, the exegesis is what must determine credibility of a system. However, when one is claiming to be an exegete more correct than all others who have previously lived, one must forgive the rest of us for suggesting that the “bar” is incredibly high and the new exegesis must be flawless and thorough, without importing unwarranted assumptions or hermeneutical sleight-of-hand. To my mind (and to the minds of many of the most capable biblical exegetes), neither of these modern systems can meet the challenge of such a high bar.

It is the full-preterist system’s attempt to do so that I am here examining (I have done the same for *Dispensationalism* elsewhere, and often).

### 1) The meaning of *parousia* and *erchomai*.

It is my opinion that the biggest exegetical error made by full-preterists is their failure to give adequate consideration to the range of meanings that certain words have in biblical usage. In the New Testament, there are two common Greek words that usually are translated as “coming”—one is the noun *parousia*, which can speak of one’s “coming” as an event, or one’s consequent *presence* as a reality. The other is the verb *erchomai*, which describes the *action* of coming.

The New Testament writers use both of these words in connection with Christ’s *coming*. But what is meant by Christ’s “coming”? For many, this term must always refer to the same event. On the one hand, *futurists* tend to make all such references apply to the future, end-of-the-world return of Christ from heaven. *Full-preterists*, on the other hand, in virtually every occurrence, apply it to A.D.70. *Partial-preterists* recognize the need for a more nuanced approach to the terms, and their application, since it is contrary to the evidence to assume they always speak of the same event.

The word *parousia*, for example is generic. It can refer to someone’s “coming” or to their “presence.” It is translated both ways and is said to have the same range of meaning as our English word “visit.” To say, “I look forward to your visit,” is to speak both of the arrival and the subsequent stay of the person who is being welcomed. The words *parousia* and *erchomai* are both used very broadly—not only of the coming of the Lord, but for the coming of anyone else. Thus, we read of the coming (*parousia*) used of multiple individuals in different contexts—whether of Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus,<sup>2</sup> of Titus,<sup>3</sup> of Paul himself,<sup>4</sup> or of an event.<sup>5</sup> The two cases of Paul’s *parousia* (footnote #4, below) are instructive, since Paul twice speaks of “my coming” without the slightest reason for us to believe that the same “coming” is referred to in both cases. The same is true in the various instances that speak of the “coming” of the Lord. There is no reason to assume that all references to His *Parousia* are speaking of the same *coming* unless it is required in the context of each case.

The verses that speak of the “*parousia* of the Lord” are Matthew 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 1 Corinthians 15:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 8, 9; 2 Peter 1:16; 3:4; James 5:7-8; 1 John 2:28). These are the passages most commonly attributed to the Second Coming at the end of time, though full-preterists would apply them all to A.D.70.

There is certainly good reason to identify *some* references to His “coming” with the judgment events of A.D.70—in keeping with the Old Testament’s precedent for speaking thus of various historical disasters. But this does not apply to all, nor necessarily *most*, cases. There is at least one

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 16:17

<sup>3</sup> 2 Corinthians 7:6

<sup>4</sup> 2 Corinthians 10:10; Philippians 1:26

<sup>5</sup> 2 Peter 3:12

instance in which the coming of the Lord is said to be “at hand” (e.g., James 5:7, 8) and a good case can be made for this being a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem. On the other hand, there is also one case which seems to refer to the transfiguration as Christ’s *parousia* (2 Pet.1:16), which muddies the waters a bit. In many other instances, Christ’s coming is associated with events that simply cannot be shown to have occurred, to date.

Since *parousia* is a word that has a range of meanings, it cannot always be said to refer to the same event—though, of course, the same event may be in mind in several of its occurrences.

With reference to the verb *erchomai*, the following should be observed:

1. The first biblical reference to the “coming” of the Son of Man is found in Daniel 7:13-14.

*I was watching in the night visions,  
And behold, One like the Son of Man,  
Coming [erchomai] with the clouds of heaven!  
He came to the Ancient of Days,  
And they brought Him near before Him.  
Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,  
That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.*

Since full-preterists insist that every reference to the “coming of the Son of Man” must refer to the same event, they should not object to allowing this earliest appearance of the terminology to be the “controlling” passage in their hermeneutic whenever such language is used in the New Testament. But do they?

It is obvious from the statement in Daniel that the “coming” of the “*one like the Son of Man*,” in the passage, speaks of His coming “*to the Ancient of Days*”—that is, to God. It is the imagery of vertical ascent from earth, through and beyond the clouds, to the Father. This is the ascension of Christ, which we read of in Acts 1:9 and Mark 16:19. This occurred ten days before Pentecost.

But this can hardly be the only “coming” of Christ, since, no sooner had Jesus made this ascent, than two angels immediately announced that there would be yet another “coming” (Acts 1:10-11)—this time, earthward. There are at least two “comings” of the Son of Man, easily discovered in the New Testament. How many others might be found, if we were to look with our eyes open?

The consistent application of the full-preterists’ arbitrary hermeneutical rule of conflating all references to Christ’s “coming” into one event, would require that actually *none* of Jesus’ references to His coming could possibly refer to A.D.70. Daniel already originated the expression to speak of an earlier event (the ascension of Christ). The majority of predictions of Christ’s “coming” are written *after* the ascension—which means that the first reference to a term (i.e., in Daniel 7:13) cannot control all other references to the same term.

What, then, is a full-preterist to do with his arbitrary rule? He must, in all honesty, dispense with it as a failed hermeneutic. It is the mere clinging to this hermeneutic, and nothing else, that justifies *Full-Preterism’s* existence as a system separate from *Partial-Preterism*. One would think that this information would warrant a crisis of faith for any honest full-preterist.

What other events might be referred to, scripturally, as Christ’s “coming”?

2. In John’s writings, Christ is occasionally said to “come” in a spiritual sense.

*“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, **I will come** in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.” (Rev. 3:20)*

Compare this idea with the same usage in John’s Gospel:

*“And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper... the Spirit of Truth ... I will not leave you orphans. **I will come** to you” (John 14:16-18) ; and*

*“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and **We will come** to him and make Our home with him.” (John 14:23)*

This promise, no doubt, is to be understood as the coming of Christ’s Spirit to dwell in the believer at Pentecost, or at an individual’s conversion. This obviously does not refer either to the end of the Herodian temple, nor the end of the cosmos. It is yet another sense in which Jesus “comes” to His people.

3. *Temporal judgments upon nations or other entities are “visitations” from God.*

*For [the Lord] **is coming** to judge the earth [or land]. (Ps. 96:13; 98:9)*

*Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud, and **will come** into Egypt. (19:1).*

*For behold, the Lord **is coming** out of his place; He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth [or land]. (Mic. 1:3)*

To the Church in Ephesus: “Repent and do the first works, or else **I will come** to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.” (Rev. 2:5)

To the Church in Pergamos: “Repent, or else **I will come** to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.” (Rev. 2:16)

To the Church in Sardis: “Therefore if you will not watch, **I will come** upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.” (Rev. 3:3)

To the Church in Philadelphia: “Behold, **I am coming** quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.” (Rev. 3:11)

In all the above cases, a specific case of judgment upon some identified nation, city or church is threatened. None of these particular cases is speaking of the end of the world, nor of the end of Jerusalem in A.D.70. Each instance belongs to a separate historical event. Each uses identical language, but each had its own individual fulfillment in history.

Clearly, in both Testaments, the idea of the Lord “coming” is generic, and capable of being applied to various events. It is a common biblical expression for God’s judgment upon some entity in various historical settings. We should observe, of course, that it is not referring, in such cases, to a literal descent of God or of Christ from heaven, but simply a metaphor of God judging—generally through humiliating and crushing defeat in war, as in the case of Isaiah 19:1 speaking of Assyrian armies

defeating ancient Egypt. This is the most common meaning of the divine “coming” in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, such language is sometimes used in referring to the destruction of Jerusalem by Roman forces (e.g., Matthew 21:40f).

The *full-preterist* does not recognize this nuanced use of these terms any more than the *futurist* does. These camps paint only with a broad brush, seeing only one event in every occurrence of the terminology.

Full-preterists gratuitously conclude that, since the destruction of Jerusalem seems to be referred to as a “coming of the Lord” in some places, the language must be applied to the same event in every instance. It can never refer to any judgment event later than A.D.70. This is exegetically vacuous, in light of the biblical evidence, and simply represents a prejudicial, *a priori* assumption of simplistic biblical interpreters. This rule is already been shown to be fallacious by the references to Christ’s coming to the Churches in Ephesus, Pergamos and Sardis in the exact same language used when speaking of His coming to judge Jerusalem. These cities and their churches came to their ends centuries ago, but also centuries after A.D.70.

### *The Final Parousia*

Since the phraseology of the “coming” of the Lord might refer to any number of events, depending upon context, it is absurd to suggest that it cannot, in certain contexts, refer to a final event of judgment upon the whole world at the end of time. This is especially true in cases where the “coming” is said to be accompanied by events that have never occurred, like all the graves being emptied and corpses coming to life (John 5:28-29)—or the living Christians being caught up into the sky to meet Christ (1 Thess.4:14-17).

Two instances where the “coming” of Christ is seen as the end of the world much more reasonably than the destruction of Jerusalem, or any other historical event, are the references in Acts 1:11 and 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18.

The first of these records the announcement of two men (generally regarded to be angels) to the disciples on the occasion of Christ’s ascension. They said:

*“Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”* (Acts 1:11)

Interestingly, the angels did not use the metaphorical imagery used in judgment passages. They say that it would be “*this same Jesus*” coming back “*in like manner*” as He left. There is no time-text attached to this prediction. Jesus can be said to have “come,” in A.D.70, only in the same metaphorical sense as God is said to have “come” to Egypt (that is, God *sent* the foreign armies to conquer them). The destruction of Jerusalem was not a case of Jesus returning “*in like manner*” as the disciples had seen Him go up. Even if the disciples understood the generic judgment language of the Old Testament and the Olivet Discourse, they would not have understood these words in that sense. If they had, they would not have been listening very well.

The second case is Paul’s lengthier treatment in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18, which reads:

*For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming [Parousia] of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with*

*them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.*

The readers would have noticed the emphatic phrase “the Lord *Himself* shall descend...” This is a departure from the normal verbiage of God’s metaphorical “comings” elsewhere in scripture. To avoid confusion with other events that might be described in similar language, Paul emphasizes that he is not speaking of a *figurative* or *metaphorical* coming, but of the Lord *Himself* descending. The inclusion of the emphatic pronoun has the effect of saying—“This time we are not speaking metaphorically, but of the real thing.” He Himself will personally descend. We see the intention of the emphatic pronoun in Jesus’ post-resurrection appearance to the disciples, where He says: “*Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I Myself*” (Luke 24:39). Since they had mistaken Him for an apparition, Jesus was at pains to show that they were seeing the real person. In saying, “*it is I Myself*” He clearly meant, “*It’s the same Me! I am back with you —here in the flesh!*”

We have seen that “the coming of the Lord” could, in some cases, figuratively refer to something other than His personal return to earth. Assuming that Paul wished to make a difference between such metaphorical “comings” and an actual, literal return of the Lord to earth, what language would the full-preterist allow to make such a distinction?

At the time of Christ “Himself” coming, there is to be the raising of the dead and the taking up of the living saints to meet Christ in the air. There is nothing in this passage, or any other, that would encourage us (nor the original readers) to see this any differently than the way Christians always have seen it, namely, as physically-ascending saints greeting the physically-descending Christ.

Also, verse 18 clearly says that this hoped-for event was to have a significantly comforting effect upon the Thessalonian readers who had lost loved ones. There is no biblical reason to believe that the events surrounding Jerusalem’s demise would have any direct or momentous impact upon people living across the sea, in Greece, nor upon their departed loved ones. In fact, so far as history shows, it did not bring any particular improvement to the circumstances of any church *anywhere*.

There is absolutely no exegetical basis for applying either of these verses to the A.D.70 events—other than a presupposition that all references to any “coming” of the Lord must be the same as all other references. I have shown that such a hermeneutical straight-jacket only dooms the exegete to selective blindness.

### ***Things accompanying the Parousia***

Traditionally, the Second Coming of Christ has been understood to be a complex event, involving numerous unprecedented features. Those features are expected to include:

- 1) ...the physical and visible return of Christ from heaven to earth, accompanied by angels and departed saints (Matt.13:41, 49; 16:27; 25:31; Acts 1:11; Phil.3:21; 1 Thess.1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:14-18; 5:23; 2 Thess.1:7-8; 2:1, 8; 2 Tim.4:1);
- 2) ...the physical resurrection of all the dead from their graves, and the Rapture of the living Church to meet Him in the air, so as to accompany Him for the final leg of His descent (John 5:28-29; 6:39, 40, 44, 54; Acts 24:15; 1 Cor.15:51-52; 1 Thess.4:16-17; Rev.20:12-13);
- 3) ...the instantaneous transformation of the believers into their immortal, glorified state—like that of the resurrected Jesus (Rom.8:23; 1 Cor.15:42-44; Phil.3:21; 1 John 3:2-3);



- 4) ...the burning of the earth and heaven with fire, followed by its restoration to its pristine, unfallen condition (2 Pet. 3:10-13; Rev.20:11; 21:1ff; cf., Rom.8:19-21);
- 5) ...the final judgment of all people, resulting in their being sent either to eternal life or their final doom (Matt.13:41-43, 49-50; 27; 25:31-46; Acts 17:31; Rom.2:5-10; 1 Cor.4:5; 2 Cor.5:10; 2 Tim.4:1)

Obviously, the full-preterist must interpret all of these events in a manner consistent with seeing their occurrence at the time of Jerusalem's destruction. Further along, we will take more time to examine these interpretations. However, in this chapter I would like simply to describe and expound what the traditional eschatology has found the Bible to say about each of these.

*1) the physical and visible return of Christ from heaven to earth;*

The fact that the King's return will occur "*in like manner*" as His departure (Acts 1:11) indicates that this coming is not a metaphorical expression of His providential movement of armies to accomplish His temporal, local judgments (since His ascension certainly involved no such features). The Roman invasion of Jerusalem was not like Christ's ascension *in any manner*. While such manipulations of the world's military forces to effect temporal judgments upon nations are sometimes spoken of as the Lord's "coming" against those nations, it is a very different matter to speak of "*the Lord Himself*" descending (1 Thess.4:16). The scriptures seem to describe the Second Advent as somewhat more consequential than was anything seen previously in history. To say that such a thing happened in the past is to say that these words speak of something that no one seemed to notice, and that was never recorded in history.

That the Second Coming (*Parousia*) of Christ will be visible is confirmed by the fact that it is also called His "appearing" or "brightness" (Gr. *epiphaneia*<sup>6</sup>) and also His "revelation" or "unveiling" (Gr. *apocalypsis*<sup>7</sup>).

Many scriptures are popularly applied to the Second Coming, which do not actually appear in their context to be addressing that event. Numerous things that one frequently hears about Christ's return to earth are actually not found in any scripture discussing that event. For example, the idea that He will set His foot on the Mount of Olives and split the mountain in two arises from a tenuous interpretation of Zechariah 14:4, which, in its context, speaks of Yahweh Himself standing outside Jerusalem (as in Ezekiel 11:23), an image which portended God's giving Jerusalem up to invaders. The context gives no indication that the Second Coming of Christ is in view (Jesus is not even mentioned in the passage). The prophetic symbolism employed in Zechariah's visions would be more easily understood by readers in his own day than by most modern readers.<sup>8</sup>

Regardless of geographical considerations, however, the purpose of Christ's physical return to earth is often missed. His return is to fulfill the original plan of God, which was to have this planet ruled and stewarded by a perfect humanity (Gen.1:26-27). The first Adam failed the loyalty test and caused that plan temporarily to derail. The Second Adam (Jesus) passed every loyalty test and has already assumed His rule remotely from heaven. It is prophesied that, when the creation is renewed

<sup>6</sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:8; 1 Timothy 6:14; 2 Timothy 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13

<sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:7; 2 Thessalonians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:7, 13; 4:13

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed, verse-by-verse exposition on this chapter see my lectures on Zechariah 12-14 at [www.thenarrowpath.com](http://www.thenarrowpath.com)

and purged from the effects of the fall, Christ, along with His people, will take up His terrestrial rule (Rom.4:13). The nations, at that time, will have been given to Him as His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession (Ps.2:8). His followers, “*the meek*,” will likewise inherit the earth and share with Him in His eternal rule (Matt.5:5; Rev.5:10).

There is nothing in scripture to support the popular opinion that Jesus is coming simply to extract His people to take them away to heaven. Such an idea not only is never expressed in scripture, but the concept is totally at odds with the revealed plan of God for His people—who are never depicted as having their eternal home in heaven, but in the New Earth.

*2) the physical resurrection of all the dead from their graves, and the Rapture of the living Church to meet Him in the air, so as to accompany Him for the final leg of His descent;*

The Bible describes a resurrection of “*all who are in the graves*”—both the good and the bad (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15). In His resurrection, Jesus became “*the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep [i.e., who have died]*” (1 Cor.15:20) and “*the firstborn from the dead*” (Col.1:18; Rev.1:5). Jesus explicitly said that this resurrection will come “*on the last day*” (John 6:39, 40, 44, 54), which is also said to be the same day that the disobedient are to be judged (John 12:48). This, in turn, is said to occur “*at His appearing*” (2 Tim.4:1). In the New Testament, this *last day* is variously referred to as “*the Day of the Lord*,”<sup>9</sup> “*the Day of Christ*,”<sup>10</sup> “*the Day of the Lord Jesus*,”<sup>11</sup> “*the Day of Jesus Christ*,”<sup>12</sup> “*the Day of the Lord Jesus Christ*,”<sup>13</sup> and “*the Day of God*.”<sup>14</sup>

Since God made the first human from dust, we needn’t worry that those bodies that have been burned to ashes, or deteriorated into dust, will present any difficulty to God in effecting a resurrection. It also presents no difficulty to God, when the atoms of one body have subsequently been consumed by other organisms (e.g., fish, scavengers, worms, bacteria, etc.) and have thus been scattered, over time, across the face of the earth. In fact, the very atoms in our bodies today are not the same ones that were in them a decade ago. It is not the specific atoms in your cells that make them distinctly yours. It is the DNA code in your cells. Assuming God has kept your DNA “on file,” He can simply create for you a new body with atoms every bit as much your own as those in your body right now. If He chooses, He could even easily clone a new body for you from just one cell.

In addition to the dead who rise, the change from mortal to immortal, from inglorious to glorious, will occur also to believers who have not yet died at the time of His coming. The living will be “*changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye*” (1 Cor.15:51-52) at the same time as they are “*caught up together with [the resurrected ones] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air*” (1 Thess.4:17).

The verb “to meet” (Gr. *apantesis*) is used only here, and two other places, in scripture. It is used of the “ten virgins” who “*went out to meet the bridegroom*” (Matt.25:1), and of the Roman Christians who came out to “*meet*” Paul as he approached their city (Acts 28:15). In other words, the word speaks of what we would call a “welcoming committee” going out to greet an arriving dignitary to accompany him or her on the final leg of a journey. Thus, Paul says that Jesus, at His return will be greeted in the air by His faithful servants, who will then return with Him to the earth to which He is coming to lay claim.

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<sup>9</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10

<sup>10</sup> Philippians 1:10, 2:16; 2 Thessalonians 2:2

<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Corinthians 1:14

<sup>12</sup> Philippians 1:6

<sup>13</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:8

<sup>14</sup> 2 Peter 3:12

Of course, the purpose of the righteous receiving bodies again, even after some have been so long a time disembodied, is to fit them/us for the same mode of life with Christ in the new earth, over which we will share in His reign (Rom.4:13; Psalm 2:8; 2 Tim.2:12; Matt.5:5; Rev.5:10).

3) *the instantaneous transformation of the believers into their immortal, glorified condition—like that of the resurrected Jesus;*

Paul said that Christ, coming from heaven “*shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself*” (Phil.3:21). As John put it: “*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is*” (1 John 3:2).

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul is unambiguous in his saying that the resurrected and glorified bodies will be like the glorified body of Jesus in His resurrection. They will be incorruptible, glorious, powerful, and supernatural. They will be the same bodies (though transformed) that had been previously buried (“sown” or “planted”) in their corruptible, dishonorable, weak, and natural state (vv.42-44). There will be a continuity between our present bodies and the resurrected ones—just as Christ’s glorified body was the same, though changed, body that was buried. This is why Christ’s dead body was not found in the tomb after He was resurrected, and why His glorified body displayed the same scars that it had received in its mortal state. Just as the body of a mature man is the same body that he had in his prepubescent years, our same, formerly-perishable bodies will “*put on imperishability*” and our same mortal bodies that will “*put on immortality*” (vv.53-54).

These bodies, though described as “spiritual” are nonetheless material. Paul does not use the word “spiritual” in contrast to “physical.” Jesus’ resurrected body was both spiritual and physical. Instead, Paul’s contrast is between the future “spiritual” and the present “natural” bodies (v.44). The word translated “natural” is literally, *soulish*—sometimes translated as “sensual,” (in the negative sense)<sup>15</sup> It would appear that the resurrected body will be governed by spirit, rather than soul—though who can say what that may mean?

The same transformation that the dead bodies will undergo in resurrection will be experienced by those living at the time of Christ’s return—only without requiring death to intervene (1 Cor.15:51-52). The dead will rise first, followed by the living believers, all to meet the Lord in the air and to accompany Him on His return to earth (1 Thess.4:16-17). Paul specifically said that those who are Raptured will not “*sleep*” (i.e., “*die*”)<sup>16</sup> and will be alive (apparently as Enoch was) at the time of their being caught up to meet Christ.<sup>17</sup>

The fact that being alive at the coming of Christ will mean that one totally escapes the experience of physical death is confirmed in the final verses of John’s Gospel. When Jesus’ spoke (hypothetically) of John’s remaining “*until I come,*” some believers, who mistook this as a promise, spread the false rumor that Jesus had promised John “*would not die*” (John 21:22-23).<sup>18</sup> Obviously, Christians understood that to remain until the Coming of Christ would exempt one from physical death.

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<sup>15</sup> James 3:15; Jude 19

<sup>16</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:51

<sup>17</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:17

<sup>18</sup> Strangely, though the Fourth Gospel takes pains to dispel this rumor, full-preterists still make the same mistake, claiming that Jesus predicted His coming in John’s lifetime. This is clearly denied in the passage. The ability to take from a passage the opposite of its explicit meaning is an indicator of the quality of full-preterist exegesis.

How will these glorified bodies differ from those we now have? We are not given detailed information. We can observe some ways in which the raised body of Jesus had changed in the process of resurrection. He apparently did not look quite the same, since many who had known Him in His ministry years had difficulty immediately recognizing Him after His resurrection.<sup>19</sup> He had flesh and bones, meaning His body was physical—and He pointed to this fact as proof that He was not merely a spirit (Luke 24:36-40). Yet, while physical, His body had supernatural qualities, including the ability to materialize and to dematerialize (or at least to appear suddenly, and, just as suddenly, to disappear).<sup>20</sup> We are given no explanation of this phenomenon, so we must await the event to know its details.

One thing that Jesus affirmed about the Resurrection bodies is that they will no longer marry (Luke 20:35). This does not merely mean that there will be no new marriages contracted, but that even the marriages entered into in this age will be no more *“in that age.”* This is the only reasonable meaning that can be taken from Jesus’ words to the Sadducees on this subject. Their question related to marriages contracted in this lifetime, and what their status would be in the Resurrection. For Jesus to have said merely, “People won’t be getting married anymore,” would have missed their point entirely. They were asking about the post-resurrection validity of marriages existing at the present time.

This part of the teaching of Christ disturbs many readers. To those in blissful unions, it may be impossible to imagine happiness in eternity without their being with their present partners. We are not told that we won’t be with our former loved ones, or know them in some form of relationship.

On the other hand, those in difficult or miserable marriages might view Jesus’ words with relief.

As John says about our glorified state, *“it has not yet been revealed what we shall be...”* (1 John 3:2). We do not know what we, in our changed condition, will desire or enjoy—just as, when we were children, we could not anticipate what we would enjoy as adults. Marriage, in this world, was designed to fulfill the will of God and a human need. In the goodness of God, He made it potentially blissful. In the glorified state, God will not consign us to a frustrated existence. We may be certain, that our lives in that mode will be more pleasurable and fulfilling than anything in this life—not less so. God knows what we will most need and desire for our happiness, and that is what He has in store for us in a life that we are currently in no condition adequately to imagine.

*4) the burning of the earth and heaven with fire, followed by its restoration to its pristine, unfallen condition;*

The Bible nowhere, in a single passage, lays out a chronology for all the events occurring on *“the Last Day,”* so we must either speculate concerning the order of events, or else content ourselves with the fact that God knows how all the pieces will fall together.

At some point, possibly while the resurrected and raptured saints are in the air, there will be a purging of the earth and the proximate heavens, followed by their replacement with a *“New Heavens and a New Earth”* (2 Peter 3:10-13). There exists a difference of opinion as to whether the old cosmos will dissolve entirely and vanish, only to be replaced by the new—or whether the “burning” will simply be the cleansing of the surface of the old planet by a purging of fire. The latter seems to best fit Peter’s teaching, since he compares and contrasts this renewal with the manner in which the world was destroyed by water in the flood—which, of course, only cleansed the surface of the earth, and did not involve the dissolution of the planet: *“the world that then existed perished, being flooded with*

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<sup>19</sup> E.g., Luke 24:16, 37; John 20:14; 21:4, 12

<sup>20</sup> Luke 24:31, 34, 36

*water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (2 Peter 3:6-7).*

Full-preterists believe that the old cosmos represents the Old Covenant and the Temple Order. The New Heavens and Earth (NHE) is seen as the fruition of the New Covenant order to replace the old. While there may be more arguments in favor of this than the average Christian would immediately acknowledge, we will analyze and critique them in Chapters Eleven and Twelve. Spoiler alert: Their case does not turn out to be very strong upon careful examination.

The restoration of the cosmos to its pre-fall condition is the object of this renewal. The creation undergoes this renovation at the same time (and for the same reason) as the glorification of our bodies in the Resurrection. The New Jerusalem (the community of Christ’s followers) is depicted as descending from heaven to the New Earth. There are resemblances in the description (whether literal or symbolic) between the new cosmos and the pre-fall cosmos. For example, the Tree of Life (probably representing Christ and the eternal life available to those who “eat” Him) is in the New Jerusalem, as in the Garden of Eden (Gen.2:9; Rev.22:2). Equally significant is the mention that, in that New Order, *“there shall be no more curse”* (Rev.22:3). That is, the curse that came upon the earth when man sinned, in Genesis 3, will no longer apply. The particulars of this fact are enumerated thus: *“there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away”* (Rev.21:4).

Of course, acknowledgement should be made of the currently popular view that the New Heavens and Earth will not actually occur at the Second Coming of Christ, but, rather, that there will be a thousand-year temporary order intervening between the *Parousia* and the New Cosmos. Not wishing to debate that question here, I would simply say that Peter placed the renewal of creation in *“the day of the Lord [that] will come as a thief in the night”* (2 Peter 3:10), and Paul placed that renewal at the same time as *“the redemption of our body”* (Rom.8:23)—that is, at the Resurrection. Thus, both Peter and Paul state that this occurs at the Second Coming of Christ—and no biblical writer contradicts this scenario.<sup>21</sup>

##### *5) the final judgment of all people, resulting in their being sent either to eternal life or their final doom*

The “Last Judgment” is possibly the most familiar feature of the eschatological *Parousia* of Christ. The idea of all men and women someday standing before the throne of God to have their lives evaluated by Him has captured the imagination of many Christians and non-Christians alike—even those who could not list the other biblical features of *the Last Day*.

Here, Christians have not been in full agreement since the rise of *Dispensationalism*, almost two centuries ago. The latter system sees two resurrections and two judgments bracketing a period comprised of a seven-year tribulation and a thousand-year interval. That is, they see a resurrection and judgment of the righteous at the Rapture. Then they see “the Tribulation,” followed by the actual Second Coming of Christ. The coming of Christ is said to launch the millennium, after which there is a second resurrection and judgment—this time of the unsaved. The merits of this view can be

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<sup>21</sup> The premillennial view, which sees such a thousand-year interval, bases its case entirely upon Revelation, chapter 20—and, in particular, their own interpretation of that chapter. The merits of their interpretation may be debated, but any interpretation that places the chapter in contradiction to the other clear statements of scripture should obviously be passed over in favor of a better and more harmonious interpretation. If John actually did intend to predict such a millennial interpolation into the eschatological paradigm, he was the only biblical writer to do so, and he mentions it only in the most symbolic of all the books in the Bible. Through three-quarters of the Church’s history, the millennial view was rejected in favor of an interpretation more in harmony with the whole of scripture.

debated at some other time, since it is *Full-Preterism*, not *Dispensationalism*, which is our focus in this study.

The more common view of the Church through most of its history, and which seems to have the most straightforward exegesis on its side, is that there is a single occasion of resurrection and judgment. Jesus placed the Resurrection of the righteous, and the Judgment of the wicked on the same day (John 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 12:48)—and the Resurrection of some to eternal life, and others to condemnation, in the same “hour” (John 5:28-29). Also, in the parable of the sheep and the goats, He clearly placed the judgment of both groups at the same time, which He predicted as occurring “[w]hen the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him...” (Matt.25:31ff). Paul said that Christ will judge the living and the dead “at His appearing and His kingdom” (2 Tim.4:1). This agrees with everything else affirmed by biblical writers.

Paul said that “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Cor.5:10). The Greek word for the judgment seat, used in this verse, is *bema*. Some would gratuitously distinguish this *bema* judgment from some other, later judgment day which they refer to as the Great White Throne Judgment (so named from Revelation 20:11). On what basis is this distinction derived? It is dictated by their other eschatological commitments. The *bema*, to which Paul refers, is clearly that of believers (since Paul uses the word “we” to describe those appearing there). Their understanding is that Christians are judged at the Rapture—which they place before the “*thousand years*.” On the other hand, the “*great white throne*,” in Revelation 20, is placed at the end of the “*thousand years*.”<sup>22</sup>

The theological impetus behind this gratuitous distinction may be that the great white throne judgment is clearly declared to be a judgment of “works.” Evangelicals are strongly committed to the doctrine of justification by grace through faith—not works (e.g., Rom.3:22, 24; 5:1; Eph.2:8-9; Titus 3:5). Some think it inappropriate for those saved by faith to be judged by their works. However, judgment on the basis of works cannot be escaped by making the *bema* something different from the final judgment in Revelation, because Paul says that, at the *bema* of Christ, “each one [will] receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor.5:10). It is a judgment of works, as well as the judgment of Christians, of which Peter writes: “if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear” (1 Peter 1:17).

Just about every biblical writer who speaks of the eschatological judgment mentions that one’s works are what will be examined there.<sup>23</sup> To be judged by one’s works is not contrary to being saved by faith, since true saving faith is always exhibited in one’s behavior—or “works” (e.g. Rom.2:5-10; Eph.2:10; Tit. 2:14; James 2:14-20). In fact, one’s works are the only measure by which anyone’s faith can be observed. Court cases are settled by evidence, not the mere pleas of the defendants. On the day of judgment, everyone will be inclined to claim that they had faith. The examination of the evidence will be the reviewing of works. Many who falsely profess Christ may be alarmed to hear that their works will be examined. Their discomfort illustrates the reason why one’s works are the best criterion of judgment. Many *claim* that they are Christians. Those who are not true followers of Christ will clearly be sorted out by the examination of their behaviors.

True Christians follow Christ, though we are not perfect, and we all “*stumble in many things*” (James 3:2). When we remember that our actions will be judged, we must remember that repentance is also an action. While a disciple of Christ is determined not to sin, we nonetheless sometimes do so. Paul tells us: “*For if we would judge ourselves*”—which is what we are doing when we repent—“*we*

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<sup>22</sup> The view of the Church through most of its history is that the thousand years is symbolic for the age of the Church, and that the judgment of Christians and non-Christians alike occurs at the end of this age.

<sup>23</sup> E.g., Matt.16:28; 25:31-46; Rom.2:5-10; 2 Cor.5:10; 1 Pet.1:17; Rev.20:12-13

would not be judged [by God]" (1 Cor.11:31). The cross is where the judgment for our sins is settled. Our repentance for specific failures is the bringing of them to the judgment of the cross. When we have done this, "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). On the day of judgment, there will be no reckoning for sins that were previously expunged by repentance. There is no double jeopardy with God. No sincere Christian need be nervous about facing a judgment of works, since every true disciple happily does such works in his or her life as will vindicate, on that day, one's claims to having faith.

### **Summary**

The complex of events that are associated in scripture with the final *Parousia* of Christ are far more life-and-world-changing than were any of the events in A.D.70—as important and significant as those were. Yes, the people of Israel worldwide—and especially in Palestine—were greatly impacted, but this was an event that had a felt effect upon, probably, less than 1% of the world's inhabitants. The other 99% didn't feel a thing. One must wonder why so much of the excitement of the apostolic Church worldwide was directed and focused upon such a relatively uneventful development.

Absolutely no tangible or visible evidence can be presented indicating that, in A.D.70, Jesus Himself descended from heaven, that the dead were raised and the living raptured, that mortal Christians became immortal, that New Heavens and a New Earth were brought into being, or that there was a final judgment resulting in every person receiving exactly what their works warranted.

The full-preterist has to take each of these features and reinterpret them as invisible realities that did not really bring about much observed or sensed change in the lives of the Christians, nor in the broader circumstances of the world. Many readers may remember that the Jehovah's Witnesses claimed Jesus "invisibly" came in 1914 (to cover for having previously predicted that His *visible* coming would occur in that year), and that the Seventh-Day Adventists similarly claimed that Jesus "invisibly" came into the "Investigative Judgment", in 1844 (though they had actually predicted His *visible* return at that date). The claims of *Full-Preterism* about an *invisible* Second Coming sound eerily familiar!

It is puzzling why anyone would choose to embrace a system that is fraught with so many difficulties, when a more exegetically-responsible *Partial-Preterism* exists as an alternative. If one wishes to recognize in the holocaust of A.D.70 the fulfillment of such *parousia* passages as actually fit the event, that is an option open (and recommended) to all. It is the policy followed by partial-preterists. On the other hand, to shoehorn every hostile passage into the same template, in order to maintain an artificial and unnecessary consistency, simply seems lazy. Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote that "a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines." Though he did not live to see the explanations offered by these modern "divines," it is hard to imagine that he would fail to see in their system the vindication of his famous adage.





## *Chapter Four:* *Those All-Important Time-texts*

As previously stated, full-preterists bear the overwhelming burden of proof to show that there are no prophecies in scripture that remain to be fulfilled in the future. The steepest hurdle would seem to be demonstrating that “*this same Jesus*” came “*in like manner*” as He was previously seen to go away, that He raised all the dead and raptured the living saints at His Coming, and established the New Heavens and Earth where there is no longer any “*death, nor sorrow, nor crying, and...no more pain*” (Rev.21:4)—nor marriage (Luke 20:35).

Since there is absolutely no historical or biblical record, nor any tradition in the early church, of any of these things occurring, we must conclude that, if they did happen, they seem to have had very little impact on the people of God. Apparently, no one noticed. Why are we asked to believe that any of this occurred in A.D.70?

It appears to be for one reason only—namely, what full-preterists refer to as “time-texts.” While there is no evidence, after the fact, that any of these things actually occurred, there is allegedly evidence in scripture that they were promised to occur at that time which is now long past. We are told that a high view of scripture compels us to believe that the promises of Jesus and the apostles about a very near fulfillment actually came true, though it cannot be shown to have been observed by anyone at the time, nor to have left any noticeable traces for later generations to investigate. Without these “time-texts,” there is simply no basis for belief that the final Coming of Christ, the Resurrection of the dead, or the Judgment of the world actually occurred in A.D.70. Everything rests upon the identification and interpretation of their time-texts.

It should be noted that finding legitimate time indicators related to certain (even many) prophecies does not adequately answer the question of whether additional prophecies, which lack such time indicators, remain to be separately considered. An event whose time of fulfillment is limited by a time-text could be a different event than one that is governed by no such time indicator—even if similar language or imagery is used in referring to both. Although full-preterists know that terms like “the day of the Lord” and the “coming of the Lord” are rather generic, and are known to describe many different historical events in the Old Testament, they proceed as if this is not the case in the New Testament usage.<sup>1</sup> In other words, a “judgment-coming” mentioned in one passage might be said to be close at hand, because it was, while a different “judgment-coming” may be mentioned elsewhere without any indication of its timing, because its timing is not known, even approximately.

David A. Green has amassed 101 “time-texts” that are intended to prove that all eschatological events were expected to (and, therefore, *must have*) come in the generation of the apostles and their readers. He lists them without categorization, simply in order of their occurrence in the New Testament. I have found it helpful to categorize all 101 into a few types. Below, I have identified six categories which can accommodate all the texts on his list, and which must each be examined separately. Here are the categories (the number in parentheses gives the number of examples provided in each category):

### **1) The nearness of the Kingdom (6)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Old Testament* references to “the Day of the Lord” are used very broadly of a variety of historical events. This is less true of the New Testament usage of the term, where it usually speaks of the “Last Day”—i.e., the *Parousia*.

1. *"The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."* (Matt.3:2)
2. *"The Kingdom of heaven is at hand."* (Matt.4:17)
3. *"The Kingdom of heaven is at hand."* (Matt.10:7)
4. *"The Kingdom of God is at hand."* (Mk.1:15)
5. *"The Kingdom of God has come near to you."* (Lk.10:9)
6. *"The Kingdom of God has come near."* (Lk.10:11)

## **2) The impending judgment upon Jerusalem (36)**

1. *"Who warned you to flee from the wrath [about] to come?"* (Matt.3:7)
2. *"And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees."* (Matt.3:10)
3. *"His winnowing fork is in His hand."* (Matt.3:12)
4. *"Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?" They said to Him, "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons..."Therefore I say to you, the Kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it..." Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them.* (Matt.21:40-41, 43,45)
5. *"...this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place."* (Matt. 24:34)
6. *"Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vinedressers, and give the vineyard to others"...they knew He had spoken the parable against them.* (Mk.12:9,12)
7. *"...this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place."* (Mk.13:30)
8. *"Who warned you to flee from the wrath [about] to come?"* (Lk.3:7)
9. *"The axe is already laid at the root of the trees. "* (Lk.3:9)
10. *"His winnowing fork is in His hand...."* (Lk.3:17)
11. *"Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do to them? <sup>16</sup>He will come and destroy those vinedressers and give the vineyard to others"...they knew He had spoken this parable against them.* (Lk.20:15-16,19)

12. *"For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled."* (Lk.21:22)
13. *"...this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place."* (Lk.21:32)
14. *"Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!' Then they will begin 'to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!'"* (Lk.23:28-30; Compare Rev. 6:14-17)
15. *"But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'And it shall come to pass in the last days...'"* (Acts 2:16-17)
16. *"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son..."* (Heb.1:1-2)
17. *"In that He says, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away."* (Heb.8:13)
18. *"...now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself."* (Heb.9:26)
19. *"...and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."* (Heb.10:25)
20. *"For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry."* (Heb.10:37)
21. *"Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you...Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days."* (Jas.5:1,3)
22. *"For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God..."* (1 Pet.4:17)
23. *"...scoffers will come in the last days... For this they willfully forget..."* (2 Pet.3:3, 5)
24. *"It is the last hour."* (1 John 2:18)
25. *"...even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour."* (1 John 2:18; Compare Matt. 24:23-34)
26. *"this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world."* (1 John 4:3; Compare 2 Thess.2:7)
27. *"For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation...Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, 'Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, <sup>15</sup> to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds..."* (Jude 4,14-15)

28. *"But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, who cause divisions..."* (Jude 17-19)
29. *"...to show His servants—things which must shortly take place."* (Rev.1:1)
30. *"The time is near."* (Rev.1:3)
31. *"I am coming quickly."* (Rev.3:11)
32. *"...to show His servants the things which must shortly take place."* (Rev.22:6)
33. *"Behold, I am coming quickly."* (Rev.22:7)
34. *"Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand."* (Rev.22:10; Compare Dan. 8:26)
35. *"Behold, I am coming quickly."* (Rev.22:12)
36. *"Surely I am coming quickly."* (Rev.22:20)

### **3) Unclear subject matter (10)**

1. *"you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes."* (Matt.10:23)
2. *"...there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."* (Matt.16:28; cf. Mk.9:1; Lk.9:27)
3. *"Hereafter, you [Caiaphas, the chief priests, the scribes, the elders, the whole Sanhedrin] will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."* (Matt.26:64; Mk.14:62; Lk.22:69)
4. *"it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand."* (Rom.13:11-12)
5. *"And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly."* (Rom.16:20)
6. *"The time is short."* (1 Cor.7:29)
7. *"these things...were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."* (1 Cor.10:11)
8. *"...salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."* (1 Pet.1:5)

9. *"He ...was manifest in these last times for you."* (1 Pet.1:20)
10. *"But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers."* (1 Pet.4:7)

#### **4) No clear time indicator (13)**

1. *"If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?"* (John 21:22)
2. *"The form of this world is passing away."* (1 Cor.7:31)
3. *"Maranatha!"* [The Lord comes!] (1 Cor.16:22)
4. *"The Lord is at hand."* (Phil.4:5)
5. *"The Gospel ...was preached to every creature under heaven."* (Col.1:23; Compare Matt.24:14; Rom.10:18; 16:26; Col.1:5-6; 2 Tim.4:17; Rev.14:6-7; cf. 1 Clement 5,7)
6. *"For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned."* (Heb.6:7-8)
7. *"...the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the [heavenly] Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience— concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation."* (Heb.9:8-10; Compare Gal.4:19; Eph.2:21-22; 3:17; 4:13)
8. *"They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead."* (1 Pet.4:5)
9. *"for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber."* (2 Pet.2:3)
10. *"the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining."* (1 John 2:8)
11. *"And the world is passing away, and the lust of it."* (1 John. 2:17)
12. *"But hold fast what you have till I come."* (Rev.2:25)
13. *"And in her [the Great City Babylon] was found the blood of prophets and saints and of all who were slain on the earth."* (Rev.18:24; Compare Matt.23:35-36; Lk.11:50-51)

## 5) The use of *mello* ("is about to...") with reference to eschatological events (26)

1. "...the age [about] to come." (Matt.12:32)
2. "The Son of Man will [is about to] come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He will reward each according to his works." (Matt.16:27)
3. "But we were hoping that it was He who was going to [about to] redeem Israel." (Lk.24:21)
4. "I will come to you...At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you'...'Lord, how is it that You will [are about to] manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?" (John 14:18,20,22)
5. "He has appointed a day on which He will [is about to] judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained..." (Acts 17:31)
6. "there will [is about to] be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust." (Acts 24:15)
7. "Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment [about] to come..." (Acts 24:25)
8. "Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be [is about to be] imputed to us who believe..." (Rom.4:23-24)
9. "For if you live according to the flesh you will [are about to] die." (Rom.8:13)
10. "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Rom.8:18)
11. "...not only in this age but also in that which is to come." (Eph.1:21)
12. "...which are a shadow of things [about] to come..." (Col.2:16-17)
13. "godliness...[has] promise of the life that now is and of that which is [about] to come." (1 Tim.4:8)
14. "...storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time [about] to come..." (1 Tim.6:19)
15. "...the Lord Jesus Christ, who will [is about to] judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom..." (2 Tim.4:1)
16. "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will [are about to] inherit salvation?" (Heb.1:14)

17. *"For He has not put the world [about] to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels."* (Heb.2:5)
18. *"...and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age [about] to come..."* (Heb.6:5)
19. *"But Christ came as High Priest of the good things [about] to come..."* (Heb.9:11)
20. *"For the law, having a shadow of the good things [about] to come..."* (Heb.10:1)
21. *"...and fiery indignation which will [is about to] devour the adversaries."* (Heb.10:27)
22. *"For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one [about] to come."* (Heb.13:14)
23. *"So speak and so do as those who will [are about to] be judged by the law of liberty."* (Jas.2:12)
24. *"...I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will [is about to] be revealed."* (1 Pet.5:1)
25. *"I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall [is about to] come upon the whole world."* (Rev.3:10)
26. *"...a male Child who was [about] to rule all nations with a rod of iron."* (Rev.12:5)

## **6) Audience Relevancy: "we" and "you" passages related to eschatological events (10)**

1. *"Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— <sup>52</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. (1 Cor.15:51-52)*
2. *"...we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep...we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds...But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief." (1 Thess.4:15,17; 5:4)*
3. *"...and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thess.5:23)*
4. *... "since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels..." (2 Thess.1:6-7)*
5. *"...that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing." (1 Tim.6:14)*

6. *“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves...from such people turn away! For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women...these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was...”* (2 Tim.3:1-2,5-6,8-9)
7. *“Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord.”* (Jas.5:7)
8. *“Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.”* (Jas.5:8)
9. *“And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”* (2 Pet.1:19)
10. *“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?”* (2 Pet.3:10-12)

These are the 101 alleged time-texts. It is clear that some of them are very restrictive time indicators, while others mention no timing at all. There are some that sound as if they speak of an indefinite imminence, and some that sound as if some of the original readers might be around to see the things predicted. In the following two chapters, we will analyze these texts more thoroughly to determine what they do, or do not, prove about the specific claims of the full-preterist.



## **Chapter Five: Time-Indicators Examined**

It should be understood that full-preterists rest almost their entire exegetical case upon real and imagined “time-texts” regarding the various eschatological events associated with Christ’s Second Coming. Without these time-texts, there would be no reason to associate any of these prophecies—other than those specifically predicting the destruction of Jerusalem—as having been fulfilled in the past. Without exegetical warrant, they insist that every mention of Christ’s Coming, the Resurrection, the Judgment, or the New Heavens and New Earth, are identified with that national disaster in A.D.70.

Further, they consider these time-texts to be inescapable proofs of their system. As Ed Stevens writes: “These time statements about the imminency of Christ’s return cannot be taken any other way without casting doubt upon the integrity of the [New Testament].”<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, I will demonstrate that many so-called “time-texts” actually make no time reference at all, and that the ones that do are predicting the destruction of Jerusalem—not the Second Coming, the Resurrection, Judgment or any of the final events comprising the blessed hope of the believer. It is notable that none of the time statements are attached to any passage unambiguously speaking of these eschatological events. Some of these texts may challenge the futurism of those who see no fulfillments in A.D.70, but nothing in this list gives the full-preterist any advantage over *Partial-Preterism*, which readily acknowledges that many prophetic passages were fulfilled in that first-century holocaust of the Jews.

Before considering in detail the 101 purported “time-texts” which we are supposed to see as predicting the imminent Second Advent of Christ in the apostles’ day, a careful student of the Bible will want to be familiar with the phenomena of prophetic time indicators in scripture generally. If a prophet says that something is “at hand” or “near,” or makes other statements indicating imminence, we do not really know exactly how far off the thing predicted may actually have been.

For example, in Isaiah 13, the historical fall of Babylon to the Medes and the Persians is prophesied at least 200 years before the event. Yet, Isaiah says of this conquest, “*Wail, for the day of the Lord is at hand...Her time is near to come, and her days will not be prolonged*” (Isaiah 13:6, 22). That someone would be told that something two-hundred years off into the future was nonetheless “at hand” and that such a delay is not a case of days being *prolonged*, seems counter-intuitive to us, but we have to deal honestly with the scriptures as we find them. This raises questions as to how these time statements relate to the original audience. None of those who heard Isaiah’s prediction lived to see its fulfillment. Neither did their children, grandchildren or (probably) great-grandchildren. Yet, the event was said to be “at hand.” Is it possible that, “*days will not be prolonged*,” simply means, “the delay is not as great as one would imagine from naturally assessing the situation”? Or does it mean “From the rise of Babylon to prominence, it will be a short time (only 70 years) before its fall”? I cannot answer, but whatever the case may be, it should make us wary of taking such language too literally in terms of original audience relevancy.

Haggai 2:6-7 reads (according to the Hebrew text<sup>2</sup>):

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<sup>1</sup> Edward E. Stevens, *What Happened in A.D.70?* (Bradford, PA: Kingdom Publications, 1997), p.2

<sup>2</sup> The phrase “*it is a little while*” is not found in the Septuagint (LXX). Since the writer of Hebrews quotes almost exclusively from the LXX, he leaves it out when citing this passage (Heb.12:26). Interestingly, however, he attaches this phrase to his citation of Habakkuk 2:3-4 (Heb.10:37-38), where it is not found in either the Hebrew or the LXX. He may have felt justified in doing so owing to that passage’s mention of fulfillment not

*For thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land...*

The writer of Hebrews, apparently, applies this passage to the impending disaster of A.D.70. Yet, there was nearly a five-hundred year gap between the prediction and its fulfillment—which is nonetheless spoken of by the prophet as “*a little while*.”

Jesus was talking about A.D.70 when He said, “*These are the days of vengeance that all things which are written may be fulfilled*” (Luke 21:22). Full-preterists often cite this verse to support their idea that every prediction in the Bible was fulfilled by A.D.70. However, not every prediction in the Bible had been spoken or written when Jesus referred to “*all things which are written*.” Given the fact that not one line of the New Testament had been “written” when Jesus made this statement, it is clear that His words can only encompass the prophecies of the Old Testament. This gives us no information at all about many of the predictions that were later given by Jesus Himself or the apostles. We cannot honestly apply His time reference to any prophecies other than the ones of which He had in mind.

Ezekiel, six hundred years earlier had made a similar statement: “*But say to them, 'The days are at hand, and the fulfillment of every vision'*” (Ezek.12:23). This is predicting the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. The reference to “*every vision*” obviously does not speak of all the visions in the whole Bible (e.g., not those of Zechariah, nor the Book of Revelation—which had not yet been revealed). It is clear that Ezekiel is referring only to his own visions, and perhaps those of previous prophets who had also spoken of this specific disaster.

Since everything hangs, for the full-preterist, upon the interpretation of time-texts in scripture, we must look carefully at what is, and what is not, being said in each case. The 101 suggested “time-texts” identified—and depended upon, for the full-preterist’s exegesis—are not all of the same kind. In the previous chapter, I arranged all 101 texts into six identifiable categories, which will be profitable to examine as groups.

## **1) The nearness of the Kingdom**

The six verses in this group all make the exact same claim—that, during the ministry of Jesus on earth, the Kingdom of God (also called the Kingdom of heaven) was “at hand” or had “drawn near.”

1. “*The Kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matt.3:2).
2. “*The Kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matt.4:17).
3. “*The Kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matt.10:7).
4. “*The Kingdom of God is at hand*” (Mark 1:15).
5. “*The Kingdom of God has come near to you*” (Luke 10:9).
6. “*The Kingdom of God has come near*” (Luke 10:11).

It is clear that such verses can only serve the interest of full-preterists if we are to assume that “*the Kingdom of God*” refers to a new order inaugurated at the fall of Jerusalem, in A.D.70. But does it?

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being delayed. The writer of Hebrews cites both passages as references to his own times, so his use of “*a little while*” still assumes that it was included in the Old Testament predictions of A.D.70.

It may seem supportive of this case to cross-reference the easily misunderstood promise that Jesus made to His disciples just after Peter's bold confession in Caesarea Philippi: "*Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom*" (Matthew 16:28).

The exact interpretation is admittedly made more challenging by the fact that the same remark, in Mark and Luke's parallels, substitutes the phrase "*the Son of Man coming in His kingdom*" with "*the Kingdom of God present with power*" (Mark 9:1), and simply, "*the Kingdom of God*" (Luke 9:27).

It seems clear, to anyone familiar with prophetic terminology, that the predicted thing which would be seen within the lifetime of some who were standing there might refer to the destruction of Jerusalem. This would be the opinion of the full-preterists and, probably, most partial-preterists, as well (including this author).

However, other plausible views have been suggested:

- 1) A common interpretation among non-preterists is that Jesus is referring to the vision that three of those in His audience would see upon the Mount of Transfiguration only a week later. All three Synoptics relate that story immediately following the prediction, skipping over everything in the intervening week. Additionally, Peter later repeated some of the elements found in the prediction ("coming" and "power") in his recollection of the experience on the mount:

*For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ...we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.<sup>3</sup>*

Probably the strongest objection to this identification of the fulfillment of the prediction is that Jesus said, "*some of you standing here will not taste death before...*" Since the transfiguration was only a week after the prediction, and none of the disciples had died during that time, the words chosen by Jesus seem to be radically understated. It probably would have been more suited to the case had He said, "*some of you will not bathe until you see [the Transfiguration].*"

Also, the fact that later, after the Transfiguration, Jesus made almost the exact same prediction (Matt.24:30-33) would strongly suggest that an event later than the Transfiguration was in view in both statements.

- 2) It could also be argued credibly that the coming of the Kingdom in power occurred at Pentecost. It was in reference to that event that Jesus had, a few days prior, said, "*You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you*" (Acts 1:8). A few weeks earlier still, Jesus had spoken of the coming of the Holy Spirit in this manner: "*I will come to you,*" (John 14:16) and "*[the Father and I] will come and make our abode with you*" (John 14:23). That Pentecost was a "coming" of Jesus in His Kingdom's "power" is beyond dispute. It is even the case that one of the disciples (Judas) had died by that time. No one could reasonably rule out the possibility, in light of these facts, that Jesus may have been predicting Pentecost in His cryptic statement.

This view faces the same challenge as does the Transfiguration view, however. The similar prediction, made in the Olivet Discourse, is associated with the prophecy that not one stone of the temple would remain upon another in A.D.70. This makes it less likely that this similar prediction refers to either the Transfiguration or to Pentecost.

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<sup>3</sup> 2 Peter 1:16-18

- 3) If the prediction at Caesarea Philippi and the one on the Mount of Olives refer to the same “coming,” which would be in that generation, then both are most reasonably applied to the holocaust of A.D.70.

Thus, the partial-preterist has no difficulty with the suggestion that the Kingdom, in one of its phases, could be said to have “come” in A.D.70 (thus, these examples do nothing to support the specific claims of the full-preterists, and must not be regarded as evidence for that view).

Notwithstanding, this is very unlikely to be the meaning of the six announcements cited above as proof. The arrival of the Kingdom, according to Jesus, was to be a gradual thing, like the growth of a mustard seed, or the spreading of yeast in a lump of dough. He predicted that development to pass through stages, like the growth of a wheat plant—first the seed, then the blade, then the heads of grain, then the mature grain inside the heads, then the harvest. To argue that the coming of the Kingdom in the lifetime of those present with Jesus must be identified with the last phase, is unwarranted and arbitrary.

Only months after the initial announcements, Jesus began to say that the Kingdom (the new society under His rule) had already arrived (Matt.12:28) and that it was already in the midst of His audience (Luke 17:21). He said that there were people already entering His Kingdom, to the chagrin of His opponents (Matt.23:13), and that the poor in spirit already were already part of it (Matt.5:3). Speaking to Nicodemus, Jesus equated the Kingdom with eternal life, and said that one enters it through being born of the Spirit (John 3:3-15).

The seed of the Kingdom had already been planted in the ministry of Jesus. After the Resurrection of Christ, the seed sprang up as a blade, and in the ensuing history, developed into scattered fellowships—like heads of grain on a single stock. The Day of Pentecost and the destruction of Jerusalem were both, in their respective senses, thresholds that had to be crossed in the ultimate victory of the Kingdom, but they cannot reasonably be said to have brought about all that is predicted for the Church—e.g., that it should become “*a mature man*” in the “*measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*” (Eph.4:13). If the measure of an immature Church is its internal divisions (1 Cor.3:1-3), then the mature Church, of which Paul writes, must yet be in our future! It seems clear that the maturity of the individual grains within the heads did not occur in the first century—nor has that goal been realized yet.

The maturity of the grain is a prerequisite for the sickle at the harvest. Paul assured his readers that they were already—years prior to A.D.70—in the Kingdom (Col.1:13). Yet, both Jesus and Paul spoke of the believers’ future “inheriting”—that is, being enthroned in—the Kingdom at the final judgment (Matt.25:31-34; 1 Cor.6:9-10; Gal.5:19-21).

The nearness of the Kingdom announced by both John the Baptist and Jesus (in the verses cited at the head of this section) is not likely to look even so far ahead as to A.D.70. Since the Kingdom’s arrival was gradual, developing in increments, there were several thresholds that were much more “*at hand*,” when John and Jesus were preaching than the events of A.D.70. There is nothing in the announcements that would point specifically to the developments of A.D.70, as opposed to earlier phases of the Kingdom’s presence. In other words, these six verses do nothing to establish the conclusions the full-preterists are trying to reach from them. None of them seem to refer to the Second Coming of Christ.

## **2) The impending judgment upon Jerusalem**

The second category of time statements appealed to by full-preterists are also accepted as evidence by partial-preterists—and thus, provide no support specifically for *Full-Preterism*. The largest number of time indicators fall under this heading.

It is clear that there was an impending crisis coming upon the mostly-oblivious Jews when John, and later Jesus, began publicly declaring that the long-awaited Kingdom of God had arrived. As the Old Testament had predicted, the Messiah would bring in a new order, and eliminate the corrupted older order represented by the compromised temple priests, the Pharisaic rabbis, and the corrupt Sanhedrin. A major catastrophe was only a generation removed in the future for the whole of world Jewry—especially those in Judea and Jerusalem.

The nation at that time, as at virtually all times throughout their history, consisted of two types of Jews: the faithful remnant, and the apostate majority. John likened the righteous to fruitful trees and grain that would be preserved through the crisis (because they would follow the Messiah). He compared the apostate majority with fruitless trees and chaff, which would be destroyed in the fires of the impending holocaust:

*But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance...And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire...His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."<sup>4</sup>*

Jesus, likewise, at various points in His ministry—and increasingly near the end—spoke of the things that were coming within that generation upon those who would reject His Kingdom. He said that His generation had become implacable and unresponsive to any of the various approaches God had employed to win their cooperation.<sup>5</sup> He compared His generation with a man who had initially been granted relief from demon possession, but having rejected Christ, would now be infested with far worse demons (anyone reading Josephus will have no difficulty seeing the fulfillment of this prediction).<sup>6</sup> He said that retribution for the bloodguilt for the killing of a multitude of martyrs slain from the time of Abel onwards would come upon that generation,<sup>7</sup> that the temple would be destroyed, and that the Jews would be scattered among the Gentiles before that generation had passed.<sup>8</sup>

Likewise, the apostles, seeing that the prophets had distinguished between an age prior to the Messiah and the age of the Messiah's reign, recognized themselves as living at "the ends of the ages"<sup>9</sup>—i.e., the tail end of the first and the front end of the second, which overlapped each other by a single generation—just as the age of Egyptian bondage had overlapped the age of the new Kingdom of Israel by the transitional generation that wandered in the wilderness. Therefore, while they were living in the beginning days of the Messiah's Kingdom, they were simultaneously in "*the last days*" of the old order, which was already "*obsolete*" and was "*ready to vanish away*" (Heb.8:13).

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 3:7-8, 10, 12

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 11:16-19

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 12:43-45

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 23:35-36

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 24:1-2, 34; Luke 21:20-24, 32

<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:11

Therefore, we see most of the New Testament writers—Peter, Paul, James, John, the writer of Hebrews—speaking of their own times as “*the last days*,”<sup>10</sup> “*the last times*,”<sup>11</sup> “*the end(s) of the ages*,”<sup>12</sup> and “*the last hour*”<sup>13</sup>—referring to the nearness of the crackdown on the Old Order that had prevailed for the previous 1,400 years.

It was no exaggeration on their part to see their times as the beginning of a transition of enormous significance. Jesus had said that the coming of the Roman armies to surround Jerusalem would herald the “*days of vengeance, that all things that are written may be fulfilled*” (Luke 21:20, 22). Whether “*all things*” should be understood as hyperbole or not, it is clear that Jesus saw, in the fall of Jerusalem, the realization of the major prophetic threats contained in the Old Testament. To make this statement apply to every prophecy uttered by Christ and the apostles, as the full-preterists do, would go beyond the scope of the statement, since Jesus only mentioned the written predictions (i.e., of the Old Testament Law and Prophets).

Both partial and full-preterists believe that Revelation was written prior to A.D.70, and that its subject matter focuses on the passing of the old order’s temple system. Thus, the many times that the first-century reader was told that the things predicted were “near” and would happen “soon” create no difficulty for either group of preterists, and, therefore, do nothing to favor unorthodox *Full-Preterism* over its orthodox cousin, *Partial-Preterism*.

### 3) Unclear subject matter

The list of reported time-texts includes several cases which may very well speak of the nearness of some event, but in which the identity of that event is ambiguous. In many of these cases, the events of A.D.70 may very well be that to which the passages allude, but it is not obvious, and would be impossible to prove. Since the full-preterist position is the challenger of all theological consensus throughout history, and bears such a burden of proof to overturn two thousand years of scholarly exegesis, the passages in this group would have to be more specific to make their point conclusively. Even if many or most of them were to be accepted as speaking of A.D.70, of course, they would only be saying what partial-preterists also say—namely, that *many* passages in the Bible predict the fall of Jerusalem, and the Jewish War that preceded it. In other words, they would not bolster the special claims of the full-preterists that the Second Coming of Christ, the Resurrection, *et al*, occurred at that time. Let’s look at the verses in this category individually.

#### 1. “*You will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.*” (Matt.10:23)

This prediction was made by Jesus on the occasion of sending the disciples out, two-by-two, on a short-term outreach mission, from which they would regather at some point that is not recorded, but which would necessarily have been preplanned and communicated to them. He was telling them that they should hasten on their mission, given its brevity. They should not linger in one location after discovering that their message was unwelcome. They should move along to cover as much territory as possible in the limited time they had. He said that, in any case, they would not have reached every village in Israel before “*the Son of Man comes.*” What did He mean by that expression?

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<sup>10</sup> Acts 2:17; Heb.1:2; James 5:3;

<sup>11</sup> 1 Peter 1:20

<sup>12</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:11; Hebrew 9:26

<sup>13</sup> 1 John 2:18

Since the Church has had more than enough time, in the past two thousand years, to reach every village in a small country like Israel, He does not seem to be referring to His *Parousia* at the end of the world. He probably is referring to the crisis of A.D.70, because that would specifically result in the destruction and dispersing of many of the villages before they could be reached. If so, then all preterists (partial and full) can agree and be comfortable with this suggestion.

However, this is not the only plausible suggestion. As we have observed, there were, prior to A.D.70, other “comings” of Jesus to which He might refer. The examples of the Transfiguration, the Ascension (referred to as “the Son of Man coming”, in Daniel 7:13-14), and Pentecost do not seem to fit the statement very admirably. However, one suggestion, which is not in any measure absurd and would fit the concerns expressed in the statement, would be that He is referring to their rendezvous at the end of that particular outreach. There had to be a place and point in time at which they would regroup and continue with their travels together. That Jesus is referring to His arrival at that rendezvous location is not in the least implausible. However, on balance, I personally favor the likelihood is that He is referring to A.D.70 here.

2. “...there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” (Matt.16:28; cf. Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27)

We have already discussed this prediction (above), where it was shown that numerous contenders have been supported as the possible event that Jesus predicted. I believe it probably refers to A.D.70, though anyone who thinks this to be provable is overconfident. As for the relation of this verse to the preceding one, see our excursus on this at the end of this chapter.

3. “Hereafter, you [Caiaphas, the chief priests, the scribes, the elders, the whole Sanhedrin] will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.” (Matt.26:64; Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69)

Again, we have a reference to a “coming” of Christ that would occur, seemingly, within the lifetime of Caiaphas and his contemporaries. Unfortunately for the full-preterist, Joseph Caiaphas, the high priest to whom Jesus spoke these words, died in A.D. 46, and so was not around to “see” the fall of Jerusalem, or even the beginning of the Jewish War, which began twenty years after his death. So, given the full-preterist’s principle of “audience relevance,” whatever event Jesus had in mind, He could not be referring to the destruction of Jerusalem. Besides, Jesus did not predict a time that this would be seen in the future, but as something Caiaphas and the rest would begin and continue to see “from now on.”<sup>14</sup> What they were to see was not so much a particular event as a new reality that would be true from that point onward.

Interestingly, “from now on you will see,” in this verse, is the same Greek phrase that is found in John 1:51, where Jesus told Nathanael (and the other disciples), “from now on you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”<sup>15</sup>

No commentator I know of believes that the disciples literally “saw” with their eyes (nor even in a vision) angels of God ascending and descending from heaven upon Jesus, as upon Jacob’s ladder, to which Jesus was alluding (cf., Gen.28:12). It is most reasonably suggested that this comment speaks of their perceiving a reality about Christ’s status—as the access portal between heaven and earth for

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<sup>14</sup> This is the meaning of “Hereafter” in the verse (Greek: *ap arti*)

<sup>15</sup> The use of *ap arti* in John 1:51 is in the Textus Receptus, and not in the Alexandian Text.

angels and men—which would become increasingly evident and be realized by the disciples as they accompanied Him, and later.

This is how we should see the present comment of Jesus to Caiaphas, which is worded similarly. From that point forward, the Jewish leadership would increasingly see the evidence of something about Jesus. What would that “something” be?

In Chapter Three, we observed the fact that, in Daniel 7:13-14, the ascension and enthronement of Christ was referred to as “*the Son of Man coming*,”. This passage is the first appearance of this terminology in the Bible—and the *only* case of the use of that phrase that would have been familiar to the Jewish leaders, to whom Jesus was speaking.

In fact, almost every element of the picture in Daniel is included in Jesus’ statement here—namely, the Son of Man coming in the clouds and being seated with God on the throne of His kingdom. This became a reality, as the New Testament writers frequently attest (especially by their repeated application of Psalm 110:1), when Jesus returned to heaven and assumed His place of supremacy.<sup>16</sup> They were about to “lift up” the Son of Man on the cross (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:34), which was the first stage of His ascension and glorification. Jesus was saying that, *from then on*, the evidence of His ascension to power, predicted by Daniel, would be manifested through the Church before the Sanhedrin’s eyes! The early chapters of Acts record the frustrated reaction of these men to this demonstration in the Church.

Thus, there is no exegetical reason to apply this supposed time-text specifically to A.D.70.

4. *"it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand."* (Rom.13:11-12)

5. *"...salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."* (I Pet.1:5)

These passages speak of “salvation” being near, or being ready to be revealed. While it seems strange to refer to the destruction of the temple system as the coming or revealing of our “salvation,” it is not untenable. In one sense, of course, the readers of both statements were already “saved” before A.D.70 (Rom.8:24; Eph.2:8-9; Heb.5:9; 6:9), but there are different aspects of salvation mentioned in scripture. For the Church to be delivered from the pull or demands of temple Judaism, which were often imposed upon her members by Judaizers would be a welcome deliverance indeed. If “salvation,” in these passages were to convey the idea of *vindication*, this would be understandable. Also, in Luke’s version of the Olivet Discourse, Jesus says, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, that the disciples’ “redemption” would then be drawing near (Luke 21:28). Though it is not clear in what sense the fall of the old system was the “redemption” of the disciples of Jesus, it is obvious that Jesus used this language—which is not very different from the word “salvation” in meaning. I am inclined to see these passages as relevant to A.D.70, though not in any sense equating that with the Church’s blessed hope and the return of Christ. There may be better suggestions out there, though none immediately comes to mind.

6. *"The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet"*. (Rom.16:20)

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<sup>16</sup> E.g., Mark 16:19; Acts 2:33; Eph.1:20-22; Phil.2:9-11; Heb.1:3; 1 Peter 3:22



If Satan were here identified with the corrupt Jewish system, as full-preterists affirm, this prediction could *almost* apply to A.D.70. The rather significant problem with this suggestion is that the Jewish system was not crushed under Christians' feet, but by pagan military invasion. It seems more likely that this is a promise that the Church, having followed Paul's instructions to discipline the divisive trouble-makers in the Church (see context in vv.17-19), will soon find Satan's efforts to divide them crushingly defeated by such actions.

7. *"The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer."* (1 Pet.4:7)

If we feel compelled to deny that Peter's statement was capable of containing a mistaken notion of nearness, we have the option of interpreting *"the end of all things"* within the limited context of *"all things Judaic"* (a subject, however, not previously identified in Peter's epistle). In this case, as in so many others, we will find yet another reference to A.D.70. However, it is not impossible that the brevity of the time of which he speaks could refer to the span of each one's life. Because all will die before very long, the *"end of all things"* is near for each of us.

#### **4) Where there is no clear time indicator**

Strangely, in order to inflate the perceived number of available time-texts, full-preterists sometimes include a number of passages that contain no prediction containing any time text at all. For example:

1. *"If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?"* (John 21:22)

I have encountered numerous full-preterists who suggest, on the basis of this statement about John, that Jesus predicted John's survival until Jesus would "come." This means, they say, that Jesus' "coming" would necessarily have occurred in John's lifetime, and should therefore be identified with A.D.70.

It is hard to imagine a more embarrassing miscarriage of exegesis than that exhibited in this particular argument. First, because there clearly is no prediction of any kind in this verse. There is a hypothetical "if," but the hypothesis is not affirmed to be so!

What is worse for the full-preterist using this "time-text," the very purpose of John's recording this statement was to debunk the very claim they are making! After recording Jesus' words about John, the author goes on the report that a false rumor had begun to circulate, based on a misrepresentation of this statement—with the result that some were mistakenly imagining that Jesus had predicted John's survival until His coming. Then the narrator clarifies (what should have been obvious from Jesus' statement): *"Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, 'If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?'"*

There is nothing resembling a time indicator here.

The next four examples have something important in common with each other:

2. *"The form of this world is passing away."* (1 Cor.7:31)

3. "The world is passing away, and the lust of it." (1 John 2:17)
4. "Maranatha!" [The Lord comes!] (1 Cor.16:22)
5. "the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining." (1 John 2:8)

Did you notice? The thing they all have in common is that none of them contains any specific time indicator. They all refer to ongoing realities that are true at any given point in Christian history. It is always true that the world and its desires are temporal, and are passing away—although full-preterists, contra these statements, believe the earth will exist forever. They believe the world, here, refers to the Jewish system. Those seeking scriptural justification for this identification will be disappointed.

6. "The Lord is at hand." (Phil.4:5)

Yes, He is. He is never far from any of us (Acts 17:27). There is no time indicator, no chronological information, nor any reference to any anticipated event in this verse.

7. "The Gospel ...was preached to every creature under heaven." (Col.1:23; Compare Matt.24:14; Rom.10:18; 16:26; Col. 1:5-6; 2 Tim.4:17; Rev.14:6-7; cf. 1 Clement 5,7)

Only one of these verses, i.e., Matt.24:14, makes any kind of prediction—and it contains no time indicator. It states that the evangelization of the world is a necessary precondition for "the end." The other verses listed are affirming that such a condition existed in the time of the apostles. Two problems render this verse useless to the full-preterist argument:

- a) World evangelization is presented only as a *necessary* precondition, not a *sufficient* one. That is, other places in the Bible list additional preconditions for the Second Coming. This verse certainly says that "the end" cannot be expected to come before the Gospel has reached all nations, but it does not say that the end *must come immediately* upon the fulfillment of this condition. If Paul said the conditions had already been met at the time of his writing, and yet the end had not yet come, there clearly is such a gap acknowledged. The length of this interval is not revealed. Other necessary conditions may additionally await fulfillment. Elsewhere, it is predicted that the full maturity of the Kingdom's fruit must precede the harvest,<sup>17</sup> and that Christ must defeat all His enemies prior to the end of His present reign from heaven.<sup>18</sup> Paul said that the Church must "*all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*"<sup>19</sup> It would take a vivid imagination, and a near-total ignorance of the history of the Church, to claim that these conditions were fulfilled by A.D.70 (or even now!).

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<sup>17</sup> Mark 4:26-29

<sup>18</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:25

<sup>19</sup> Ephesians 4:13

b) It is not clear what is meant by “*the end*” that is to come. The context of the disciples’ question (vv.2-3) suggests that the end of Second-Temple Judaism may be in view. This is how the full-preterists view the matter, and they may be right. However, they gain nothing from this, since even partial-preterists recognize A.D.70 in this part of the discourse. The full-preterist needs his time-texts to apply to those passages which everyone else associates with the end-of-the-world *Parousia*. This isn’t one of them.

8. *“For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.”* (Heb. 6:7-8)

This is a timeless agricultural (and spiritual) truth. It contains no prediction or time text. I suppose the full-preterist sees the ground that has produced no fruit and is ready to be cursed as the Jewish religious system. In that case, the end of the Jewish temple cultus was near. But this is not controversial, and Hebrews has a lot to say about that subject. Nothing about it helps the cause of *Full-Preterism*. The context of the statement, however, does not encourage this meaning in this passage. The context seems to be describing individual responsibility for one’s own fruitfulness. The context implies this, because of which it can be seen as paralleling the thought in John 15:1-6.

9. *“...the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the [heavenly] Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience—concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.”* (Heb. 9:8-10; Compare Gal. 4:19; Eph. 2:21-22; 3:17; 4:13)

Here we find no time text, nor any prediction of events associated with the *Parousia*. I have seen full-preterists use this verse to suggest that there was no access for Christians into God’s presence in the heavenly Holy of Holies prior to the destruction of the temple. Never mind that there is no mention of the temple (only the tabernacle of Moses) in the passage, and that the tearing of the veil at the death of Christ (Matt.27:51) is reasonably viewed as having already provided such access. Elsewhere, the same writer says that such access was already available at the time of writing, even though the temple still stood (Hebrews 4:14-16; 10:19-22). Nonetheless, the inclusion of this text in a list of alleged time statements is perplexing, since it contains no reference to “soon,” or “this generation,” or anything relevant to timing.

10. *“They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.”* (1 Pet.4:5)

Prior to this, both Peter and Paul both have affirmed that Jesus will judge the living and the dead (Acts 10:42; 1 Timothy 4:1). Paul places this judgment “*at His appearing.*” This is most naturally associated with the final resurrection/judgment event at the Second Coming of Christ (see Matt.25:31-46; John 5:28-29; Acts 17:31; 24:15; Rom.2:5-10; 2 Cor.5:10; 1 Pet.1:17; Rev.20: 13-15).

Peter says that Christ is “*ready*” to conduct this judgment. There is no time reference here. The Greek word translated as “*ready*” appears only two other times in the New Testament (Paul’s

“readiness” to die for Christ and his “readiness” to make a third visit to Corinth) and once in the LXX<sup>20</sup> (Nebuchadnezzar asking the three Hebrews about their being “ready” to bow down to his image). The word speaks of being both prepared and willing to do something. It does not speak of imminence or timing.

11. *“for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.”* (2 Pet.2:3)

The personification of “judgment” being “idle” or “sleeping” would seem to suggest it being harmless. It is not. In any case, there is nothing resembling an obvious indication of timing in this verse. The judgment alluded to is not of Jerusalem, but of the false teachers in the Churches to whom Peter is writing (presumably those in Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia—1 Peter 1:1; 2 Peter 3:1). Their judgment should probably be viewed as having occurred in history—but not in A.D.70. That date saw no significant judgment upon false teachers in the distant Gentile regions.

12. *“But hold fast what you have till I come.”* (Rev. 2:25)

It is unclear why this exhortation to the Church of Thyatira would be in a list of supposed time-texts for A.D.70, since it gives no hint of timing, and no allusion to the judgment upon Jerusalem. Mention of Christ’s “coming” to them makes the verse relevant to our exploration of various meanings of that term, but nothing indicating any timeframe of fulfillment is found or suggested in the verse. The compiler’s inclusion of this verse in our list seems to have been done by mistake, but its presence provides an opportunity to address some full-preterist assumptions about such passages.

Several of the seven churches received exhortations or warnings about Jesus “coming” to them. Generally, Christ’s “coming” to them is mentioned as a clear threat of judgment to them (2:5, 16; 3:3)—seemingly, referring to their extinction, or coming under discipline, if they should fail to repent. These churches no longer exist, so these were no idle threats. However, so far as history records, none of them experienced destruction, nor suffered any known ill effects, in relation to the events of A.D.70.

It is unclear what the “coming” of Christ to Thyatira may mean. It probably refers to the tribulation and death that He threatened to bring on Jezebel and her followers. There is no reference to timing, other than, perhaps, the lifetime of the woman called Jezebel. Like the similar threats made to several others of the Churches in Asia, the threat likely has no connection to A.D.70. The individual judgments upon the unrepentant churches occurred centuries later.

13. *“And in her [the Great City Babylon] was found the blood of prophets and saints and of all who were slain on the earth.”* (Rev.18:24; Compare Matt.23:35-36; Luke 11:50-51)

This would be a solid proof text for preterists (whether partial or full) who wish to identify Babylon with first-century Jerusalem. Given what Jesus said about Jerusalem and that generation, the mention here of the blood of the prophets certainly is indicative. If this identification is correct, then its connection to Matthew 23:35-36 would suggest its fulfillment in the apostles’ generation. This would consign it to our second category (above). However, this verse contains nothing internally that resembles a time indicator.

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<sup>20</sup> LXX is the abbreviation for the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, made in Alexandria, beginning in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> Century B.C.

## *A strangely neglected time-text*

In Revelation 20, a very long time period (symbolized as a thousand years) is prophesied to occur between the binding of Satan, on the one hand, and the Resurrection and creation of the New Heavens and New Earth, on the other. Most full-preterists tend to equate this millennium with the period from A.D.30 to A.D.70.

Yet, the number “a thousand” whenever used as a round number elsewhere in scripture, invariably refers to an extremely large, but indefinite, number (e.g., Gen.24:60; Ex.20:6; Deut.1:11; 7:9; 32:30; Ps.50:10; 84:10), because of which, “*a thousand years*” means “a very long period of time” (e.g., Ps.90:4; 2 Pet.3:8). It is, therefore, hard to believe that Christ, in Revelation 20, uses this symbol to speak of an interval which is confined to the short period of a single generation, ending with an event which John repeatedly says is “*at hand.*”

Why would those who make so much of eschatological time-texts fail to take this obvious one seriously? It is clearly because the Resurrection and Final Judgment of the world are predicted to occur at the end of this extremely long period of time. My full-preterist friends say that the symbol of a thousand years represents, really, only the forty years, between Pentecost and A.D.70. “After all,” they argue, “if some can take it as symbolic of the whole Church Age, why can’t it be symbolic of a shorter period?”

When an interpreter decides that an image in scripture is not literal, one cannot simply assign to it any meaning he or she would prefer. Any given symbol is chosen by the writer *for a reason*. The number one thousand, which has a commonplace non-literal meaning throughout scripture, speaks always of a very large, though indefinite, number. Where can one find a reason that this number would be chosen to designate a period of time that was so brief as to occupy less than one human lifetime? It certainly seems that Revelation is trying to indicate *something* about the interval preceding Christ’s final Coming and Judgment. Why not allow it to say what every Christian and Jew in history instinctively understood such a number to mean—*an incredibly long time*? The answer: It would destroy the full-preterist system, and its prior-to-investigation conclusions about biblical eschatology.

As mentioned previously, J. Stuart Russell is regarded by many as one of the “fathers” of modern *Full-Preterism*, because he believed that virtually every eschatological prediction in the Bible applied to A.D.70. However, he was not dishonest. He knew Revelation 20 was the nemesis of his view, and he did not try to sweep it under the rug, or contort it beyond any sensible meaning, as modern full-preterists do. To his great credit, Russell wrote:

Some interpreters indeed attempt to get over the difficulty by supposing that the thousand years, being a symbolic number, may represent a period of very short duration, and so bring the whole within the prescribed apocalyptic limits; but this method of interpretation appears to us so violent and unnatural that we cannot hesitate to reject it...The seer, having begun to relate the judgment of the dragon, passes in ver. 7 out of the apocalyptic limits to conclude what he had to say respecting the final punishment of ‘the old serpent,’ and the fate that awaited him at the close of a lengthened period called ‘a thousand years.’ This we believe to be the sole instance in the whole book of an excursion into distant futurity; and we are disposed to regard the whole parenthesis as relating to matters still future and unfulfilled.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia*, pp. 514, 523)

Earnest Hampden-Cook, editor of the *Weymouth New Testament*, wrote a book espousing and defending *Full-Preterism* in 1891, entitled *The Christ Has Come: The Second Advent an Event of the Past*. Yet, according to Roderick Edwards (former full-preterist), Hampden-Cook, in 1905, also conceded:

In the New Testament, there are also clear and definite announcements of a world-wide resurrection and a world-wide judgment still future. “The times of the Gentiles” are to run their appointed course and have an end (Luke xxi. 24; Ephes. i.10). Christ’s Millennial Kingdom in which we are now living is not to last forever: To Him every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall own that He is Lord (Phil. ii.10, 11), and then, having put all His enemies under His feet, He will surrender the Kingdom to the Father—that God may be all in all (1 Cor. xv. 28).<sup>22</sup>

So even the staunch grandfathers of *Full-Preterism* found it ultimately impossible to deal with this strong time-text in such a manner as to see the final judgment in A.D.70. We must ask, if the boast of the full-preterist is his unique commitment to allowing time-texts to direct his exegesis, why do so many refuse to acknowledge this obvious time-text?

Yet, the things that are predicted to occur after so long an interval are the Resurrection, the Judgment, the destruction of Satan, and the New Creation—the very features of the orthodox Christian view of the end-of-the-world *Parousia*.

### *Wrapping up this chapter*

The remaining two categories of “time-texts” are of a different nature from those considered in this chapter. They both have to do with a favorite full-preterist argument called “audience relevance.” They allegedly set up the original readers to expect the Second Coming of Christ in their own generation. We will have much to say about these passages in the next chapter.

Suffice it to say that not every text we have considered in the first four categories actually contains anything like a time indicator, and the ones that do would seem to be about the holocaust of A.D.70, or, possibly, some other near-term event that would fall within the time limitations set by the language of the texts.

There are, no doubt, many predictions in the New Testament about the crisis of A.D.70, and some of them contain specific time indicators for their fulfillment. These passages may present challenges to non-preterists, but they provide no ammunition specifically for the full-preterist against the claims of partial-preterists. All preterists are comfortable with such passages, yet most preterists do not see any reason to embrace *Full-Preterism*. Let them provide a hundred times more of this kind of text and they will not have gotten one step closer to proving their specific position—and their specific position is just what they are required to defend. Perhaps the next two groups of “time-texts” will assist them. We shall see.

What we do not see in any of the texts in the first four categories (examined above) is any clear time specific text associated with the historical *Parousia* doctrine—no visible return of Christ from heaven, no Resurrection or Rapture of the saints, no universal Judgment or renewing of the cosmos. These things are indeed mentioned in the two groups of texts that we will consider in the next chapter. The task is to determine whether any of these contain actual time indicators. If they do not,

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<sup>22</sup> <http://unpreterist.blogspot.com/2008/01/history-of-heresy-origin-of-fullhyper.html>, (accessed July 20, 2021)

then *Full-Preterism* will have failed to justify its existence as a system. All of its ancillary arguments and explanations of related doctrines will be seen to be *ad hoc*, and a somewhat desperate effort to salvage a view based primarily upon the misidentification of alleged time indicators. We will look at these various explanations in subsequent chapters, but it is the time-identifiers upon which the system stands or falls.

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#### *Excursus on Matthew 16:27-28*

*27"For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.*

*28"Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."*

The second of these verses was discussed earlier (Category 3; #2). There, I favored the conclusion that the "coming" which would be seen in the lifetimes of some of the disciples most likely refers to the A.D.70 crisis. At first blush, Jesus appears to place this judgment at the same time as the final Judgment at the *Parousia*. If this is what Jesus meant, I confess, it would greatly strengthen the case of the full-preterist.

In these two successive verses, there appear to be exactly what *Full-Preterism* needs—*viz.*, a reference to the final *Parousia* of Christ in judgment, coupled with a clear and specific time-text. To my mind, these verses together come closest of any biblical passage to appearing to support a full-preterist contention—namely, that the "coming" of Christ in final judgment is one and the same as the "coming" of Christ to judge Jerusalem, in A.D.70. Therefore, an examination of the juxtaposition of these two statements deserves careful examination.

We know that the "coming of the Lord," and the equivalent expression, "The Day of the Lord," are generic expressions, found throughout scripture, with reference to various judgments throughout history—and not always the same event. On occasion, such expressions may refer nonspecifically to God's general activity of judging sinners, without any particular case being indicated (Psalm 96:13; 98:9).

The divine "coming" may refer, in one context, to the conquest of Egypt by Assyria (Isa.19:1) or, later, by Babylon (Jer.46:10), and in another, to the conquest of Assyria itself by Babylon (Isa.30:27). In another case, it refers to the fall of Babylon to the Medes and the Persians (Isa.13:6, 9).

It can refer to the time of judgment coming on Israel, by the Assyrians, in 722 BC (Amos 5:18, 20), or judgment upon Jerusalem—whether by locust plague (Joel 1:15), by the Nebuchadnezzar, in 586 B.C. (Zeph.1:7, 14), or by the Romans, in A.D.70 (Zech.14:1-2; and elsewhere).

The phraseology may even refer to Christ's act of removing the Church of Ephesus (Rev.2:5), or of the Church of Sardis (Rev.3:3), both of which occurred, of course, several centuries into the Christian Era.

In all these cases the expression speaks of some temporal judgment or other, and is to be recognized as a mere, common figure of speech. The Lord did not leave heaven and come down to earth in any of these cases. His "coming" refers only to His sending invasion forces to conquer some group or another. Such is seen as a direct judgment from God—no less than was the destruction of Sodom, though by other means.

God's temporal judgments, however, are only tokens of the larger commitment that God has to finally judge the whole world (Matt.25:31ff; Luke 17:26-30; Acts 17:31; Rev.20:12-15). Thus, the historical judgment of the world by water in Noah's day is seen as a precursor and a guarantee of a future judgment of the world by fire (2 Pet.3:5-7).

Similarly, the destruction of Jerusalem, in A.D.70, is the type or token of the final judgment coming on the rest of the world. Paul spoke of two phases of God's ultimate judgment—upon "*the Jew first, but also the Greek* [Gentiles]" (Rom.2:9). The "coming" in judgment on the Jews (in A.D.70) is simply the fulfillment of Paul's prediction that judgment will be "*of the Jew first*". This will eventually be followed by a judgment on the Gentile nations.

In the parable of the king's wedding feast (Matthew 22), a king wishing to arrange for the marriage of his son first invites his friends and those close to him to attend. Shockingly, these "friends" insult their king by declining his invitation. In fury, he sends out his armies to destroy those false "friends" and to burn down their city (vv.1-7). This obviously speaks of the Jews, who had previous connections with Yahweh, being the first to be invited to participate in Christ's Kingdom. Their refusal brought about the destruction of their city in A.D.70. This meaning of the parable can hardly be contested.

But the story continues (vv.8-10). After the city of the rebels has been burned down, the king launches a campaign to invite strangers from far and wide to attend the wedding. This occurs, resulting in the wedding hall eventually being filled with attendees. This clearly refers to the current Gentile mission of the Church, which is described here as primarily taking place after the destruction of Jerusalem.

In the final movement of the parable (vv.11-13), the king himself visits the wedding hall and examines the guests. Finding one (some?) who has not come into the wedding feast on proper terms, he casts him (them?) out into outer darkness. This bespeaks a *second* judgment—this time of the Gentiles who, having been given opportunity after the fall of Jerusalem to participate in Christ's Kingdom, have refused to come in on the King's terms.

Thus, Jesus spoke of the A.D.70 judgment being followed by a later judgment that will take place at the end of the ingathering of the nations. The interval between these two represents the present era, which is characterized by God's servants going out to the world and gathering all the guests (Gentiles) into the wedding feast. This interval is to be identified as the present age.

Interestingly, when speaking in this parable of the judgment on Jerusalem, Jesus speaks of the king as "sending His armies," while the final judgment occurs when He *personally visits* the now-full wedding hall. In whatever manner one may wish to interpret this latter judgment, the parable makes it clear that there are significant events predicted to occur beyond A.D.70. The reasonable assumption, in agreement with historic Christian beliefs, would be that this secondary judgment is the final one at the end of the present world.

The "coming of the Lord" when speaking of national, temporal judgments, does not refer to the *personal return* of Christ, but only of His representatives (armies) coming as His agents. However, the final judgment occurs when "*the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout,*" to raise the dead and catch up His surviving saints alive (1 Thess.4:16-17). There is a difference between Jesus sending His representative armies, on the one hand, and His coming here *Himself*, on the other.

The two angels, at the time of the ascension, spoke of this final, personal coming of the Lord at the end of the world when they said, "*This same Jesus* who was taken up from you into heaven, will *so come in like manner as you saw Him go* into heaven." (Acts 1:11). There is no record of anyone having ever seen such a thing yet.

We come now to Matthew 16:27-28.



In the first of these verses, Jesus speaks of His final coming in judgment.

*“For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.”*

In this verse, He makes no predictions of timing. It is the Final Judgment, concerning which no one knows the day or the hour, and it is not for us to know even the times or the seasons (Acts 1:7). It is clear from the words of the verse that no such event has happened yet. Every person has not yet been rewarded according to his works.

In the following verse, He tells them that a confirmatory token of this ultimate judgment will be seen in a proximate event within the lifetimes of some of His hearers:

*“Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.”*

This does not speak of the same event. It speaks of something that some of the disciples would live to see—*“the Son of Man coming in His kingdom”* (or, as the parallels in Mark and Luke put it, *“the Kingdom present with power,”* or simply, *“the Kingdom of God”*). The coming of the Kingdom, as we have discussed previously, is hardly equivalent to the Final Judgment mentioned in the previous verse. This presents no actual problem.

It may be a reference to A.D.70, but the wording of Matthew’s version would appear to connect it with the ascension prediction of Daniel 7:13-14. There, the Son of Man is seen “coming” [to heaven], being installed upon a throne, and given a kingdom. We would be very justified in seeing this second verse as a reference to the ascension of Christ (which was not the same thing as the Judgment described in the previous verse).

Quoting Joel 2, in his first sermon, Peter treats the ascension of Christ (vv.33-36), the outpouring of the Spirit (vv.16-18, 33), and the destruction of Jerusalem (vv.19-21)—a sequence spread out over forty years—as a single, complex transition. The Son of Man coming in His Kingdom (Dan.7:13), and the Kingdom present in power (Acts 1:8), are precursors and predictors of the judgment on the old order, which happened in A.D.70.

The coming of the Son of Man with His angels in glory to reward every man is an event for whose historical fulfillment no scriptural, historical, nor traditional, testimony exists. It is described in the same language as is His coming in Matthew 25:31, which describes a judgment of all nations, where those judged are ushered into either *“eternal life”* or *“eternal punishment”* (v.46). Nothing like it has ever occurred. This language is best seen as the future coming of Christ at the end of the world. When Jesus mentions it in Matthew 16:27, He affixes no time prediction to that event.<sup>23</sup>

However, in the next verse, He speaks of a near-term “coming,” which He places within the lifetime of some of His disciples. This included the A.D.70 judgment on the Jews, which (like the flood of Noah—2 Peter 3) betokens the later, universal judgment that He had just mentioned. The final judgment (of the nations, or Gentiles) would not be soon, but they would receive assurance of its eventual reality by seeing it first installment (the judgment *of the Jew first*) in their own generation. This was the earnest, or guarantee, of the second installment, yet to come.

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<sup>23</sup> This verse is one that appears in our next category (covered in the next chapter) where the word *mello* appears, which full-preterists take to be a time-text. We will discuss that point when we come to that category.



## *Chapter Six:* **Audience Relevancy**

It cannot reasonably be denied that passages predicting the destruction of Jerusalem often contain time indicators specifically revealing that it would occur in the first generation of the Church. On the other hand, when it comes to actual events associated with the Second Advent of Christ, no unambiguous time indicators can be found. Nonetheless, even many of the latter prophecies are claimed to contain features that indicate an imminent fulfillment, so that the Resurrection, Rapture, Judgment, etc., we are told, must be included among those things promised to occur in that first generation of believers. If this is so, there remains no scriptural basis for a future blessed hope of the Church.

There are two specific features in several passages, explicitly referencing the final events, which are claimed to point toward total fulfillment of all predictions in the first century. The first of these is the frequent use of the Greek word *“mello”* (usually meaning “about to”) in statements concerning, especially, the Resurrection and Judgment. The second is the use of the personal pronouns “we” and “you” which the writers employed when speaking of those who will be living to experience the final events. Both of these factors are said to render the predictions relevant uniquely to the original readers or hearers. Is this really the case? Let us examine the relevant texts.

### **1) The uses of *mello* (“is about to...”) with reference to eschatological events (26)**

The Greek word *mello*, which has a primary meaning of “about to,” occurs frequently in the New Testament when speaking of future things. Since the Greek word commonly means “about to,” it often indicates that a thing is impending and will happen quite directly.

Paul told Felix, “*I have hope in God...that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust*” (Acts 24:15). The word *mello* is used in the expression “*will be,*” so that the full-preterist reads the statement, “*...there is about to be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.*” Later, we are told that Paul reasoned with Felix “*about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come*” (Acts 24:25)—which, because of the use of *mello*, full-preterists would render, “*righteousness, self-control, and the judgment about to come.*” These are only two of about twenty-six such verses put forward as “time-texts” by the full-preterists. Approximately half of the verses included in this category pose a challenge to those of us who believe the events of the Second Advent are yet future. I say they pose a challenge, only because they require explanation.

In examining these texts, we find that:

- There is reference to “*the age to [or, about to] come*” (Matt.12:32; Eph.1:21; Heb.6:5).
- There is a “*world*” and a “*city*” that are “*to [or, about to] come*” (Heb.2:5; 13:14).
- “*The Son of Man will [or, is about to] come*” (Matt.16:27).
- “*There will [or, is about to] be a resurrection of the dead*” (Acts 24:15)
- There is “*the judgment to [“about to”] come*” (Acts 24:25)—so that Christ “*will [“is about to”] judge the world,*” including “*the living and the dead*” (Acts 17:31; 2 Tim.4:1; James 2:12).
- There is a “*glory that will [or, is about to] be revealed*” (Rom. 8:18; 1 Pet.5:1).

Most of the features we associate with the Second Coming of Christ were, therefore, said to be “about to” occur when Jesus and the apostles preached. Does this not prove that all these things

accompanied the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D.70? In what other event near the times of the apostles could these things have occurred? Yet, there is not the slightest evidence anywhere to support the notion that any such things (or anything remotely comparable to them) ever happened!

A closer look at the lexicons will reveal, significantly, that there is a range of meanings of the word *mello* in the Greek language. It is true that the first meaning of *mello* listed in most lexicons is exactly what full-preterists claim—namely, that it commonly contains an element of immediacy or nearness of an action or event. However, the use of *mello* in Greek is somewhat more complicated, because it sometimes does not carry this thought at all, but merely indicates that something is *certain*, or *destined*, to happen. In such cases, near proximity of time is not suggested. Here are some of the definitions of this word from easily accessible and respectable lexical sources:

1) *Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich Lexicon:*

“be on the point of, about to...be destined, inevitable...intend, propose, have in mind...denoting an action that necessarily follows a divine decree—is destined, must, will certainly”<sup>1</sup>

2) *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament:*

“...to be on the point of doing or suffering something...intend, have in mind... As in Greek writings from Homer down, of those things which will come to pass (or which one will do or suffer) by fixed necessity or divine appointment...in general, of what is sure to happen...”<sup>2</sup>

3) Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary:*

“To be about to do or suffer something...(II) Also as implying purpose, meaning, to have in mind, to intend...(III) Meaning ought, should, must, implying necessity in accordance with the divine appointment and therefore certain, destined to take place...”<sup>3</sup>

4) *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words:*

(a) “of intention, to be about to do something...” (b) “of certainty, compulsion or necessity, to be certain to act.”<sup>4</sup>

From this sampling of authorities we can see that, rather than conveying the thought of immediacy, *mello* sometimes is used to speak of the mere *intention*, *certainty* or *divinely appointed necessity* of a thing coming to pass, without reference to immediacy. Whether or not this is the *primary* meaning of the word in Greek, it is a common alternative usage. The question becomes, “In any given case, does *mello* mean immediacy, or does it mean divinely appointed?” In other words, is it more accurate to translate the thought of such verses as Acts 24:15:

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilber Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 501

<sup>2</sup> Joseph H. Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 396f

<sup>3</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1992), 956

<sup>4</sup> W.E. Vine, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984, 1996), 4

*“there is about to be a resurrection of the dead”*

or

*“there is certainly determined to be a resurrection of the dead”?*

Should the words of Jesus (Matt.16:27) be rendered:

*“the Son of Man is about to come in the glory of His Father...”*

or

*“the Son of Man will certainly come in the glory of His Father...”?*

Some full-preterists, while admitting that *mello* may have other meanings, have insisted that *mello*, when used with an infinitive, always means “to be about to be; to be on the point of occurring.” Don K. Preston makes this claim. He cites numerous authorities to support this point, writing:

Paul used the word “mello” in the infinitive. The Blass-Debrunner Greek Grammar says: “mellein with the infinitive expresses imminence” (Blass-DeBrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1961)181). See the *Analytical Greek Lexicon, Revised*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1978)262: “to be about to be, be on the point of.” In a newer work, among many that could be cited, Robinson and House say: “with the infinitive I am about to, I intend.” (*Analytical Lexicon of New Testament Greek*, Edited by Maurice Robinson and Mark House, (Peabody, Mass., 2012)231). Among many Greek commentators that could be cited, *The Expositors Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1970)379), Knowling says the meaning of *mello* in the form used in Acts 17 (with the infinitive, DKP) “may equal its use in Acts 12:6” and therefore mean – to be “on the point of judging.”<sup>5</sup>

This is worth double-checking. We have acknowledged the indisputable fact that this is one common meaning of *mello*—but not the *only* meaning. Note that one of the authorities cited by Preston (*Analytical Lexicon of New Testament Greek*) actually provides the alternative meaning that we have suggested, allowing that the term can mean “intend” without implications of imminence. Thus, Preston’s own authorities turn against him.

The question is not what a word with multiple possible meanings *can* or *might* mean, but what it actually does mean in a given sentence. There are numerous authorities who disagree with Preston’s assertion that *mello* with the infinitive always speaks of immediacy, and which confirm the alternative meanings, like the following:

1) *Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich:*

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<sup>5</sup> <https://donkpreston.com/responding-to-the-critics-a-response-to-howard-denhams-syllogism/> (accessed 7/27/21). Italics added

“*mello*—With the future infinitive [*mello*] denotes certainty that an event will occur in the future...(*...Acts 24:15...*)”<sup>6</sup>

2) *Syntax of the Mood and Tenses in New Testament Greek*:

“*Mello* with the Infinitive is also used with a force akin to that of the Future Indicative. It is usually employed of an action which one intends to do, or of that which is certain, destined to take place.”<sup>7</sup>

3) *A Beginning-Intermediate Grammar of Hellenistic Greek* :

“*Mello* with the infinitive ... is occasionally used as periphrasis for the simple future.”<sup>8</sup>

4) *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*:

“...*mello* means must, to have to, be certain to, in the context of events which happen according to the will and decree of God and which were thus necessary, certain, and inevitable.”<sup>9</sup>

5) A.T. Robertson’s “*Word Pictures in the New Testament*”:

- On Acts 17:31 (“*He has appointed a day on which He will [mello] judge the world in righteousness*”):

“*Will judge (mellei krinein)*. Rather, is going to judge, *mello* and the present active infinitive of *krino*. (Paul is quoting Psalm 9:8)”<sup>10</sup>

- On Acts 24:15 (“*there will [mello] be a resurrection of the dead*”):

“*That there shall be a resurrection (anastasin mullein esesthai)* ...The future infinitive *esesthai* after *mullein* is also according to rule, *mello* being followed by either present, aorist, or future infinitive (Robertson, *Grammar*, pp. 870, 877, 878).”<sup>11</sup>

- On Acts 24:25 (“*righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to [mello] come*”):

“‘the judgment to come’ (*tou krimatos tou mellontos*) which was certain to overtake them.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilber Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 500

<sup>7</sup> Ernest DeWitt Burton, *Syntax of the Mood and Tenses in New Testament Greek*, (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1893) 36.

<sup>8</sup> Robert W. Funk, *A Beginning-Intermediate Grammar of Hellenistic Greek* Vol. II (Missoula, MT: Society of Biblical Literature, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1973), 432

<sup>9</sup> Walter Schneider, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, edited by Colin Brown, vol.I, p. 325

<sup>10</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament—Volume III* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), 291

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 417

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 422

Notice that, in all three of the above examples, Robertson deals with the specific grammatical constructions of *mello* and opts for the simple future tense in his translation—emphasizing the element of certainty in the last case.

### ***When “mello” does not mean “about to”***

When *mello* is used in predicting eschatological events, it is precarious exegesis to assume that it is speaking of immediacy or even nearness of occurrence. Since the word can simply emphasize that these events *must certainly* occur, by *divine determination*, they cease to serve in any sense as “time indicators” supporting a first century fulfillment. This may be the reason that the church fathers who spoke Koine Greek from their childhood onward never seemed to see the full-preterists’ meaning in any of the passages upon which they lean so heavily.

The Greek of the New Testament was the same Koine Greek previously used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint (the LXX). There are examples in the Septuagint of *mello* referring to events that were in no sense near to the original audience.

Isaiah, writing in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. spoke of the destruction of Babylon (which took place two hundred years later) as “*what is about to [mello] come upon you*” (Isa.47:13 LXX). Similarly, predicting the return of the Jews from exile (which is stated to be 70 years distant), Jeremiah said that God was *about to [mello] visit and bring them home again to the land* (Jer.29:10). Since virtually all adults reading Jeremiah’s letter would be dead before seventy years had passed, it would seem cruelly misleading to speak of that deliverance as “*about to*” take place—if that was how they were expected to understand the word *mello*. No doubt, the word, in such cases was not understood to speak of imminence but of certainty.

In many New Testament occurrences, *mello* is used to speak of events that were by no means immediate or soon after the reference point of the sentence. For example:

1) Matthew 11:14 (YLT)

*...and if ye are willing to receive it, he [John] is Elijah who was to come [mello—about to come?]*

Elijah “*was about to come*” from what chronological standpoint? Not from Jesus’ point in time, since John had already come and his career was essentially over when the statement was made, and Jesus did not say “*is about to come*” (*contra* some English translations). From the standpoint of some past reference point, Elijah *was about to come*. The only starting point for the expectation of Elijah’s coming would have been the time of Malachi’s prediction (Mal.4:5-6), which was four centuries before John came. Jesus is saying that, from the standpoint of those who received Malachi’s promise (remember, audience relevancy!) Elijah “*was about to come*”—or should we say, “*was destined to certainly come*”—almost half a millennium later!

2) Acts 13:34

*As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: ‘I will [mello—am about to?] give you the holy and sure blessings of David.’ (NASB)*

While not quoting either the Hebrew or the LXX version of the prophecy, Paul is paraphrasing Isaiah 55:3, written about 700 years before Christ (therefore, about 700 years before the fulfillment of his prediction). Paul says that this promise was fulfilled in the Resurrection of Christ, which, apparently, was regarded as “*about to*” happen in Isaiah’s day—unless we understand *mello* to mean

“is certainly determined” to happen. This was not by any stretch of the imagination an “immediate” fulfillment.

3) Acts 26:22-23

*So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to [mello—about to?] take place; that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would [was about to] be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles. (NASB)*

Did Paul mean to say that the events of Christ’s life (especially what He would suffer) were “about to take place” when predicted by Moses and the Prophets? The last of the Old Testament prophets spoke four hundred years prior to Christ. Isaiah (who most clearly spoke of the Messiah’s sufferings) was seven centuries before Christ and since Moses was that much earlier still—this use of *mello* would not seem to carry the meaning of *immediacy*, but of *certainty*.

4) Romans 5:14

*Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to [mello—about to?] come. (NASB)*

Jesus was the one “about to” come. Again, from whose perspective? It seems as though Paul is referring either to the promise made to Adam and Eve (Gen.3:15), or to the many Old Testament predictions (the former being the most likely). In any case, if Jesus was “about to” come when God first predicted His coming, then this use of *mello* allows for a delay of as much as four-thousand years.

5) Galatians 3:23

*But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to [mello—about to?] be revealed. (NASB)*

All the while the Jews were kept under the Torah (a period of 1,400 years), it would appear, the Christian faith was “about to” be revealed. That is a long time. Maybe Paul is not using *mello* to mean that something is soon to occur.

6) Hebrews 11:8

*By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would [mello—was about to?] receive as an inheritance...*

Though Abraham personally never inherited any of the land of Canaan, the promise was fulfilled over four centuries afterward, through his descendants dispossessing the Canaanites in Joshua’s day (Josh.21:43-44). There could hardly have been *immediacy* intended in the writer’s use of *mello*.

7) Romans 4:23-24



*Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall [mello—is about to] be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.*

8) 1 Timothy 1:16

*However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to [mello—about to?] believe on Him for everlasting life.*

9) 2 Peter 2:6

*and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would [were about to] live ungodly...*

The three verses above all refer to people who (like Abraham) would be credited with righteousness by faith, or who (like Paul) would believe in Christ for eternal life, or who (like the people of Sodom and Gomorrah) would live ungodly lives. Although the word *mello* occurs in all three of these cases, the subject matter does not seem to justify a particular near-term fulfillment, but rather an on-going process occurring throughout ensuing ages. Thus, the words “about to” do not seem as well fitted in any of the above verses as “are destined to” or “are certain to”—which is the alternate meaning of *mello* provided in all the lexical sources.

A number of Greek authorities cited above indicated that the expression *mello* (with the infinitive) is periphrastic of the simple idea of a future occurrence. Paul says, in Romans 8:13, “if you live according to the flesh, you will [*mello, mellete—are about to*] die.” It does not seem that he is telling the Roman Christians that their deaths were immediately impending. In the *New Beacon Bible Commentary, Romans 1—8*, Greathouse and Lyons explain this as follows:

“Paul uses the verb *mellete* (lit. “you are about to”) with the infinitive *apothneskein* (“to die”) as a paraphrase of the simple future. This variation brings home the certainty of the consequences: **you are destined to die** (see Bauer 1979, 501; s.v. *mello* 1.b).”<sup>13</sup>

I freely admit that the finer points of Greek grammar lie beyond my range of expertise—which is why I have depended entirely upon lexical authorities and biblical examples for this point. It seems clear that more than one possible meaning of *mello* can be identified in its usage throughout the New Testament and the rest of Greek literature. All sources agree that its primary meaning (that is, in its most frequent usage) is “about to.” However, they also list a variety of other meanings as reflecting diverse usage in the Greek literature, including the LXX and the New Testament. Several of the above authorities agree that *mello* with the infinitive is used periphrastically for a simple future affirmation—with no specific indication of imminence. All agree that the word can speak of certainty and divine determination, rather than nearness in time.

What we can conclude from these facts is that when Paul spoke of the Resurrection and the Judgment, using the word *mello*, he *might* have been saying that he expected these events to occur in his near future, as the full-preterists insist. It is equally possible, however, that he was merely speaking of them as *certain* and *necessary* events destined to occur by the divine will.

This leaves us at a draw with the full-preterists over the value of verses using *mello* in understanding the passages under dispute. They neither support nor debunk the full-preterist

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<sup>13</sup> William M. Greathouse with George Lyons, *Romans 1 – 8: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2008), 247 (bold type in the original)

position. Decisions as to which meaning is intended by the author must be made case-by-case, on the basis of whether the thing predicted actually happened shortly afterward, or not. Full-preterists cannot demonstrate from history or tradition that there was a general Resurrection of the dead, nor a Judgment of the world in past history, and are therefore *forced to assume* that this all took place, based upon their unfounded assumptions that the apostles said it would occur soon after their time.

Yet, making such assumptions is simply begging the question. If these things *really happened* in A.D.70, then it is reasonable to assume that the apostles were claiming they would happen soon after their own times. On the other hand, if they did not happen then, and have not yet happened, then an alternative meaning of *mello* in these passages, as in many others, would be preferred in the translation. The question of these events actually having happened will have to be decided by further biblical and historical study, and will be investigated in chapters ahead.

## 2) The “we” and “you” passages related to eschatological events

The verses in this category are those that use the term “we” and “you” in the following manner:

*Behold, I tell you a mystery: **We** shall not all sleep, but **we** shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and **we** shall be changed.* (1 Cor.15:51-52)

*...**we** who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep... the dead in Christ will rise first. Then **we** who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.* (1 Thess.4:15-17)

*...since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble **you**, and to give **you** who are troubled rest with **us** when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God...* (2 Thess.1:6-8)

If there are any verses that speak unambiguously of the eschatological Resurrection and the Rapture, it would be these. Yet Paul speaks as if he and his readers will be among those who will be alive at the time to experience this. Is this what he thought and what he was affirming to his contemporary readers? Did he falsely set up an expectation in his readers that was not realized? If he was wrong, does this negatively impact his credibility as an apostle? These are the challenges that the full-preterist presents from such verses.

The relevant question is, to what group was he referring when speaking of “we” or “you”? Paul says to the Corinthians in the first century, “*we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed*” (1 Cor.15: 51). He speaks of “*we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord*” (1 Thess.4:15, 17), and promises that Christ will “*give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven*” (2 Thess.1:6-7). If Paul is talking about the end of the world, why would Paul imply to his readers that “we” and “you” will be alive to be experience it? J. Stuart Russell expresses the problem in this way:

But the question for us is, To whom does the apostle refer when he says, 'We shall not all sleep,' etc.? Is it to some hypothetical persons living in some distant age of time, or is it of the Corinthians and himself that he is thinking?<sup>14</sup>

When I debated Don Preston, he led off with the following argument from 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9 (cited just above). Preston has laid out the same argument in writing that he used in that debate. On his website, he writes:

▀ The Thessalonians—2000 years ago—were being persecuted (2 Thessalonians 1:4f). Paul was not writing to, or about, a far distant, as yet not occurring persecution, by unknown persecutors.

▀ They—the Thessalonians—were being persecuted by the Jews (Acts 17; 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16).

▀ Paul said it was a righteous thing with God to give persecution to “those who are troubling you.” God would turn the tables on their Jewish persecutors—they would become the persecuted! Note that Paul did not say, God will give tribulation to those—unknown persecutors—who will, one day, persecute the Church, in some far distant, unknown generation!

▀ Paul promised that the Thessalonians would be given “rest” —from anesis—which means relief, not reward.

▀ Paul said that relief and persecution of their persecutors, would be given, “when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven.”

Proper logic demands that the Thessalonians would have to be alive, under persecution: “When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven” for Jesus to give them relief from persecution. Jesus could not give them relief from persecution at his coming, if they were not being persecuted when he came! That is logically impossible!<sup>15</sup>

Preston says the Thessalonians were being persecuted by Jews, whose persecuting activities would end at the coming of Christ—which he identifies with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, in A.D.70. By implication, the destruction of the Jewish State in Palestine was the “eternal destruction” of these Jewish persecutors in Thessalonica bringing an end to (relief from) the Christians’ suffering of persecution. There are at least four points upon which his case can reasonably be challenged:

1. Paul does not mention the Jews as those who were persecuting the Christians in Thessalonica, and there is no clear evidence that this was the case. Preston gives two references to support this proposition. The first is Acts 17, and the other is 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16.

The first of these contains the story of the founding of the Church in Thessalonica—probably only a few months prior to Paul’s writing his epistles to them. In the account of Acts, there is no reference to the Church being persecuted—only Paul and his missionary team. One may possibly infer that those who brought charges against Paul, in that city, continued after his departure to persecute the

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<sup>14</sup> Russell, op cit., 208

<sup>15</sup> <https://donkpreston.com/responding-to-the-critics-a-response-to-howard-denhams-syllogism/> (accessed 7:27/21)

believers he left behind there. We have no record of it, though it is not a far-fetched theory and it is worthy of consideration.

Even if we assume that those who were persecuting the Church were the same people who had persecuted Paul, we must recognize that the Jews were not the only (and possibly not the primary) perpetrators of the persecution. It is true that it was certain Jews in Thessalonica who initially stirred up the local Gentiles against Paul (v.5), but it was those who were loyal to Caesar (almost certainly the local Gentiles) who raised the complaint against him before the magistrates (vv.6-7) and got Paul expelled from the city. The Jews lit the fuse, but after it was lit, we have no reason to believe that they were involved in the actions of the court. To see Paul's expulsion, or any ongoing persecution of the local church in Thessalonica, as being primarily carried out by the Jews, is merely speculation.

Judging from the charges brought against Paul and his team, that "*these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus*" (Acts 17:7), it would seem that the persecution was waged upon political, not religious, grounds. This strongly suggests that the main opponents, after the Jews lit the fuse, were probably the Gentiles. We are told that, "*they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things*" (v.8). These city rulers and citizens were predominantly Gentiles. If they were the same people later persecuting the Church when Paul wrote his epistles, then the persecutors were not Jewish, and would hardly notice when Jerusalem was destroyed so far away from them.

The Jews did not possess political power in Thessalonica, a Roman colony, as they were in Jerusalem. In pagan cities, they would only have had the authority and the incentive to expel Christians from their synagogues, but since the Church was mostly Gentiles, there is no reason to imagine that, after their initial rejection by the Jews, they even desired to attach themselves to the synagogue. The converts were "*a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women*" (v.4). The latter would have been Gentile women—probably the wives of important officials. Thus, the Church was comprised of few, if any Jews, and was primarily populated by Gentile converts, including some well-connected ones. After Paul's departure, the hostile Jews would have no particular concern what their Gentile neighbors were believing about Jesus or anything else. The Gentiles had always been pagans as far as the Jews were concerned. That the Jews would seek to attack Gentile believers (including the wives of powerful men!) on the Gentiles' own turf seems highly unlikely. The pagan Gentiles would be far more likely to persecute their countrymen who seemed to be embracing loyalty to a King other than Caesar.

The other verse cited by Preston similarly fails to make his case that the Thessalonians were being persecuted by local Jewish antagonists. First Thessalonians 2:14-16 does not identify their persecutors with Jews, but seems to *distinguish them from* the Jews. Paul says that the persecution of the Thessalonian Christians mirrored that of the Christians living in Judea. He points out that the persecution of the Judean Christians was "*from the Jews,*" but that the Thessalonians were being persecuted by their "*own countrymen.*" Don Preston has pointed out that the expression "*from the Jews*" is literally "*from the Judeans,*" which identifies them by geography rather than by race or religion. This means that he may not be contrasting the *race* but the *locality* of the persecutors in Judea and Thessalonica, respectively. Thus, the contrast Paul is making does not necessarily rule out the possibility that the Thessalonians were also being persecuted by Jews, as were the Christians in Judea.

We cannot rule out the possibility that some Jews may have been among the persecutors of the Christians to whom Paul wrote, but Preston's case depends upon the assumption that most or all of the persecutors were Jewish, and that they would be disastrously impacted (eternally destroyed) by the fall of Jerusalem. We have shown, however, that the likelihood is much greater that the

persecutors of the Church were pagan loyalists to Caesar, and not Jews. The vast majority of Thessalonians, both inside and outside the Church, were Gentiles. If Paul wished to identify the ones troubling the Church specifically as the Jews, he missed an opportunity to say so. Instead, he contrasts the Jews of Judea with the Thessalonians' "countrymen" that were bothering the Church in Thessalonica. Any insistence that these countrymen were Jewish would impose a crushing burden of proof upon the one making such a claim.

2. Even if the persecutors in Thessalonica were Jewish, there is no reason to believe that they personally experienced any particular local consequences (much less suffering "*eternal destruction*") when Jerusalem was destroyed hundreds of miles away. The desolation of the Jerusalem temple and Jewish state did not spark a general Jewish holocaust throughout the Roman Empire. I have seen no evidence that A.D.70 would have any significant impact on the persecutors of Paul's readers—whether Jew or Gentile—much less the dramatic changes (flaming fire, everlasting destruction upon the persecutors) suggested by Paul's language.

3. If Christians in Thessalonica did indeed receive "rest" or "relief" from persecution in A.D.70, it would have been only a brief reprieve, hardly worth mentioning. Though the Jews were the first to persecute the Church, in many locations, they were not the only ones to do so. Apart from Nero's paranoid persecution of Christians, from A.D.64 to 68, the Romans took little note of the Christians until Jerusalem's fall. Prior to that, the pagans tended to lump the Christians together with the Jews, as diverse sects of one annoying monotheism. There were laws against starting new religions in Roman territories, but Judaism, because it existed before the Roman conquests, had been "grandfathered" in, and was a legal religion in the empire. The fact that Christianity was technically a new "religion" was effectively masked by the fact that pagan authorities found them hard to distinguish from Judaism in their beliefs. In fact, when The Roman general Titus destroyed Jerusalem, he apparently hoped that he was putting an end to Judaism and Christianity in one blow.

When Jerusalem fell, it ended historic Judaism, but Christianity continued to flourish—underscoring the fact that it was not a part of Judaism, and was itself an illegal, novel faith system. This led to further, more severe persecutions of the Christians throughout the empire, including the Thessalonians. If Paul intended to give them a hope that the fall of Jerusalem would bring the Christians long-term relief from persecution, he certainly misled them on that point!

The persecution imposed by many Roman emperors was far more widespread and severe than any conducted against the Church outside Jerusalem by the Jews. Did the pagans who had been stirred up by the Jews in Thessalonica suddenly become more tolerant of these perceived "enemies of Caesar" once the Jewish capital across the sea had ceased to exist. Why would that have any impact on the plight of Paul's readers in Greece—and can anyone present any evidence that it did?

4. Paul did not only predict that the persecutors of the Thessalonian saints would be punished at the coming of the Lord. He also had earlier predicted<sup>16</sup> that the dead would rise and the living saints would be Raptured at that same time. Full-preterists may claim that something fitting this description happened to the worldwide Church in A.D.70, but words are cheap. All evidence for any such occurrence is conspicuous by its absence.

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<sup>16</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

All this leaves completely unaddressed the basic challenge presented by Preston and other full-preterists—namely, that Paul speaks as if the generation of his readers will live to see these eschatological events. To prove Preston’s argument incorrect about 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9 does nothing to answer this fundamental challenge concerning the meaning of “we” and “you.”

The answer, of course, must identify what entity or solidarity is intended by Paul by his use of personal pronouns. The word “we” may literally mean “you and I.” It also may mean, “representatives of the larger the group to which we all belong.” This is also true of the word “you” (plural). Does it mean, “the very persons to whom I am speaking, and none others,” or does it mean, “members of the group of which you are a member”?

It is undeniable that Paul uses these terms to mean “*those of our group*,” rather than in the sense of “*literally, you and I*.” How do we know this? For one, Paul himself died at the hands of Nero—obviously before Nero’s death in A.D.68. Paul did not live to see the events he was describing, whether they occurred in A.D.70 or remain to be fulfilled at the end of the world. Thus, unless he was mistaken (a possibility which to consider would destroy the entire full-preterist edifice), Paul could not be saying, “*you and I will be alive and will remain until the coming of the Lord...*”

In fact, if Paul used “we” or “you” to mean *the constituents of my immediate audience*,” he would be speaking without knowledge. Without knowing how long any of his readers would actually live, he could not really affirm with confidence that any of those to whom he wrote would still be alive in A.D.70 any more than that he would be. The letters to the Thessalonians were written between A.D.49 and A.D.51—twenty years before the fall of Jerusalem. When Paul wrote, some of the Thessalonian Christians had already died, either from the persecution, old age, or other natural causes.<sup>17</sup> In the following two decades, it is very likely that many others would also die. No one could predict whether any individual Christian living at that time would be living in A.D.70. Paul had no idea which, if any, of his readers might still be living twenty years later, and he would be foolish to have made promises implying that he had such knowledge.

We will see that, when Paul used these plural pronouns, his frame of reference was the membership of the global, trans-generational Body of Christ, not simply those living in his time. When one uses the plural “we,” “us” or “you,” it is evident that he identifies himself and his hearers as being jointly part of some corporate group. Such a solidarity, depending upon context, may simply refer to those in the same room, those of a family, a club, a movement, a race, or a nation. One might, therefore, hear an American citizen say, “We who have obtained our freedoms at the cost of war and bloodshed must be diligent not to let them slip away.” In such a case, “We who...” does not refer to the speaker or his hearers. It was not 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans who fought for and won America’s freedoms. “We” means “members of our group—of the solidarity with which we identify.” In the case of the last example, Americans of a different generation from ours.

It does not require long contemplation to think of many cases in which people speak this way. Some of the best examples come from the Bible itself. Goliath challenged Israel to send a champion against him with the following proposal: “*If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants*” (1 Sam.17:9). The “we” to whom he refers does not even include himself, since he would be dead in such a scenario and consequently would not be among the “we” who would serve Israel. “We” refers to “our people”—in his case, the Philistines—a multigenerational ethnic identity.

This is the very way in which church fathers used “you” and “we” in their writing about trans-generational congregations like those to whom Paul wrote. Polycarp, writing to the third generation of Christians in Philippi, said to those in that church:

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<sup>17</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:13

...among [you] the blessed Paul labored, who are praised in the beginning of his epistle. For concerning **you** he boasts in all the Churches who then alone had known the Lord, for **we** had not yet known him.<sup>18</sup> (Letter to the Philippians, 11:3).

This was written about a century after Paul had labored in Philippi. None of those among whom Paul had labored were still living. When Polycarp said that Paul had labored among “you,” he clearly meant the Philippian church, as an ongoing historical entity—and clearly was not referring specifically to the generation of his readers. Likewise, Polycarp’s “we” meant the Church of Smyrna collectively, though neither he nor his contemporaries had been part of it at the time referenced.<sup>19</sup> The “you” and the “we” addressed to such churches speaks of them as trans-generational entities—like the global Church as a whole.

Even if (as seems unlikely) Paul’s “you” did not intend to encompass the global Church, but only the Thessalonian church, he still would not be speaking necessarily of its membership in that generation alone. There is still a church in Thessalonica today, having its roots back in the congregation Paul addressed two thousand years ago. That church is the same “you” to whom he wrote in his day—just as the church in Philippi in Polycarp’s day was the same one that had existed in Paul’s.

This manner of addressing members of an abiding corporate entity as if they belonged to members of the same group centuries later is normative also in the Old Testament. There, Israel is a nation that spans the centuries. Moses, the Psalms and the Prophets all spoke to their own generations of the circumstances of earlier or later generations of Israel, using the pronoun “you”—even though none of the hearers would have been alive at the time indicated. Many examples can be brought forward to demonstrate the particular collective mentality that permeates the Bible and informs its use of pronouns.

When Daniel was repenting on behalf of his nation, he cried, “*We have sinned!*” Since he had not personally been guilty of the sins of his nation, it is clear that he was referring not simply to himself or the living Hebrews of his time. He was talking about the Israelites as a nation—primarily referring to earlier generations than his own (Dan.9:5-6).

God often addressed Israel as “you” when speaking of privileges and consequences that would come upon those of their nation living centuries later. The Old Testament prophets, speaking of the Messianic hope of the remnant, often referred to those in that later age as “you”;

Isaiah 12:3-4

*Therefore with joy **you** will draw water  
From the wells of salvation.  
And in that day **you** will say:  
“Praise the Lord, call upon His name...”*

Notice that Isaiah’s generation is addressed as “you” even when those to whom it refers are of a much later generation. This is because “you” refers to the collective Israel, just as Paul’s “you,” in many cases refers to the corporate entity, “the Church,” which is every bit as multigenerational as was Israel.

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<sup>18</sup> Polycarp, *Letter to the Philippians*, 11:3

<sup>19</sup> The time referenced is the time of Paul’s laboring in Philippi—around A.D.50, about 100 years before Polycarp’s time of writing.

Isaiah 14:3-4

*It shall come to pass in the day the Lord gives **you** rest from your sorrow, and from your fear and the hard bondage in which **you** were made to serve, that **you** will take up this proverb against the king of Babylon...*

Interestingly, Paul told the Thessalonians that they would obtain “rest” or “relief” from their troubles (2 Thess.2:8), just as Isaiah used “you” addressing his own generation—saying that they would have rest from their sorrow. Neither Paul’s nor Isaiah’s generation actually experienced the promised relief in their time. Yet, those of a later generation, to whom the prophecies applied, are referred to as “you,” in both cases. The “you” in Isaiah’s statement refers to the generation of Jews who would see Babylon’s fall, nearly two-hundred years after the time of Isaiah’s original audience. The same principle applies to many other prophecies, including the following:

Isaiah 45:17

*But Israel shall be saved by the Lord  
With an everlasting salvation;  
**You** shall not be ashamed or disgraced  
Forever and ever.*

Isaiah 55:3, 12

*And I will make an everlasting covenant with **you**—  
The sure mercies of David...  
For **you** shall go out with joy,  
And be led out with peace;  
The mountains and the hills  
Shall break forth into singing before **you**,  
And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.*

In the above two examples, Isaiah’s generation is addressed as “you” in a prophecy that was not fulfilled until more than seven centuries after the original audience’s time.

Speaking 1,400 years before Christ, Moses spoke to his own generation concerning the fate of their distant descendants, referring to those living at that future time as “you”:

Deut.28:64-68;

*Then the Lord will scatter **you** among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there **you** shall serve other gods, which neither you nor your fathers have known—wood and stone. And among those nations **you** shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of **your** foot have a resting place; but there the Lord will give **you** a trembling heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul. **Your** life shall hang in doubt before you; **you** shall fear day and night, and have no assurance of life. In the morning **you** shall say, ‘Oh, that it were evening!’ And at evening **you** shall say, ‘Oh, that it were morning!’ because of the fear which terrifies **your** heart, and because of the sight which **your** eyes see. And the Lord will take **you** back to Egypt in ships, by the way of which I said to **you**, ‘You shall never see it again.’ And there **you** shall be offered for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no one will buy **you**.*



Deut. 30:1-3

*Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon **you**, the blessing and the curse which I have set before **you**, and **you** call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God drives **you**, and **you** return to the Lord your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command **you** today, you and **your** children, with all **your** heart and with all **your** soul, that the Lord your God will bring **you** back from captivity, and have compassion on **you**, and gather **you** again from all the nations where the Lord your God has scattered **you**.*

Suppose we were to apply Preston's argument of "audience relevancy," which he used in discussing 2 Thessalonians 1:6-8, to the above two passages. It would be necessary to say that Moses' contemporaries would experience banishment from the land of Israel into an international diaspora—but would also be regathered to the land after repentance. Obviously, these things did not all happen in one generation—but hundreds of years later.

The language of "*audience relevancy*" becomes even more explicit when Isaiah tells his 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. audience "**you shall see**" events that would actually take place centuries after their own time (Isa.60:5). Similarly, Zephaniah, speaking of the Messianic Age (and writing six centuries before Christ) told his audience that these things will occur "**before your eyes**" (Zeph.3:20). By full-preterist standards, these certainly would qualify as "time-texts"—though misleading ones—if indeed "*you*" must refer only the contemporary readers at the time of the prediction, rather than their people viewed collectively through the centuries.

The examples I have provided are merely samples of the common use of "you" throughout the prophetic writings. They disprove the arguments and assumptions of the full-preterists concerning the significance of personal pronouns in prophetic statements. It is reasonable to assume that this applies to Paul's usage of the same pronouns in his prophetic statements as well—especially since nothing like what he describes in these statements occurred in the generation of his original readers—nor in the two thousand years since.

Clearly, the solidarity with which Paul identified was the Body of Christ, or the family of God—part of which (in his day as in ours) was already in heaven, part on the earth, and part yet to be born. Paul speaks of "the whole family in heaven and earth" (Eph.3:15). "*We who are alive and remain (at such and such a time)*" would clearly mean "*the members of our family who will at that time alive.*" Paul is thus using "we" inclusively of the whole Body of Christ. This is how the Church has always understood these words, and this is the only way these statements truly make sense.

### ***Audience Relevance reimagined***

Some full-preterists have suggested that a prophecy about events centuries in the future would not be seen as relevant to readers in Paul's day. What concern would it be of theirs what things may occur long after they are dead?

This idea that a prophecy must be expected to have its fulfillment in their own time, in order to be seen as relevant to the original recipients, is absurd. Isaiah told Hezekiah that Babylon would plunder Jerusalem, but with the specific caveat that it would not happen in his own time.<sup>20</sup> Daniel was given prophecies about events more than 490 years into the future.<sup>21</sup> He was also told that he should not concern himself with the timing of any of the events he had predicted, since he would die

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<sup>20</sup> Isaiah 39:5-8

<sup>21</sup> Daniel 9:24-27

and much time would pass before they came true.<sup>22</sup> Original audiences would find predictions of such distant events relevant precisely to the extent that they were concerned about the long-range purposes of God being eventually fulfilled.

Mankind began to receive prophecies about the Messiah as early as the time of Adam, Abraham, Jacob, and Moses—thousands of years before the Messiah came. However, no devout Old Testament Jew would dream of suggesting that the Messianic hope embodied in these predictions was less than vitally relevant to him in his faith, or the way he lived his life!

To first century Christians in Rome, Corinth, Philippi, Galatia, and Thessalonica, the hope of Christ's coming to set all things right would have been much more relevant (whether perceived as near or far-off) than would an event like the destruction of Jerusalem far away across the sea. The latter, when it occurred, probably changed very little in their lives or circumstances.

I am not denying that the destruction of Jerusalem was a great matter in terms of the redefinition of the identity of God's people, or a great disaster to the Jewish people, but it would have very little impact upon the day-by-day life of the average Gentile Christian in most of the Roman Empire.

Throughout the last two thousand years, faithful saints have found the blessed hope of the eventual return of Christ to be relevant to their historical outlook and their motivations in life. Not all of them have necessarily assumed that they would live to see this event. Expectations of a culmination generations into the future give us perspective and direct our activities in the present. For example, for one who prays daily for God's Kingdom to come and for God's will to be done on earth, or who contemplates Jesus' return only to a fully evangelized world and to a unified and mature Church, this expectation sets priorities that are very relevant to our present life choices.

Those who insist, counterintuitively, that Paul's pronouns must include only first-century Christians must show that he did not think of the Church as the New Covenant counterpart of Israel. They must insist that Paul did not speak to the Christians using the same terminology that Moses and the prophets used in speaking to the Jews. They must also show that something like what Paul predicted actually did occur in A.D.70.

We have seen that, according to biblical (and extrabiblical) usage, neither the use of the word *mello*, nor of the personal pronouns, "we" and "you," can reasonably be seen as true "time indicators." Events that would transpire generations or centuries later than Paul's time would reasonably be discussed using the same conventions of language. Biblical and Greek scholars for two millennia have never seen these terms as problematic—simply because they are not.

Once we have recognized that the use of *mello*, and of first and second-person pronouns, do not constitute genuine time indicators, we find that the data of scripture support what *partial-preterists* affirm, but not the special claims of the full-preterists. That is, there are indeed time-texts controlling certain prophetic statements, and these statements are most likely (and in many cases, certainly) predicting the cataclysmic events associated with the end of the Jewish temple system.

However, we also find a class of predictions for which no time indicators are supplied. These events include the following:

- When the Lord Himself descends from heaven, in like manner as He was seen to go
- When the dead are raised
- When the living saints are raptured
- When the judgment of the world and the rewarding of every person takes place
- When the present cosmos is destroyed and replaced with a New Heaven and New Earth

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<sup>22</sup> Daniel 12:13

There are no time-texts associated with these events—nor any compelling reason to believe that any of them have ever occurred in the past.

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***Excursus: Contemplating the unthinkable—Viz.,  
Could Peter or Paul have been mistaken about timing?***

The above considerations have fully undermined the validity of the full-preterist case, and shown that there is no need to suggest that Paul was anticipating the final *Parousia* in his or his audiences' lifetimes. However, those who may be unwilling to accept the arguments provided thus far may still think that Paul believed in the soon arrival of Christ, the Resurrection and Judgment, in his own day. While we have shown that no such expectation is necessarily expressed in his words, is it still possible that Paul and his readers nonetheless expected Christ to come in or near his own time?

Quite apart from any considerations regarding A.D.70, there is nothing objectionable in thinking that Paul may have personally held a belief that Jesus would literally return much sooner than has proved to be the case. Since Jesus did not reveal (and said that it was not theirs to know—Acts 1:7) the times and the seasons that the Father alone dictates, the apostles were entirely capable of mistaking the timing of the Second Advent—possibly even speculating that it would occur simultaneously with, or shortly after, the destruction of Jerusalem. If they held such views, they may not have expressed them out loud. Even if they did privately hold such sentiments, they did not affirm them as doctrine.

There is a certain type of fundamentalist who would find unthinkable any suggestion of an apostle's being mistaken. Without the slightest scriptural warrant, they have decided either that the apostles were infallible men, or that they, at least, became infallible at the moment they put their pens to the parchment. It should be noted that none of the New Testament writers actually gave the slightest hint that they thought this to be true of themselves. Likewise, Jesus never predicted that it would be so for any of them. Such would merely be a gratuitous assumption made about any writings which eventually came to be included between the leather covers of our Bibles. The writings themselves contain no such claims.

We know that Paul said "*All scripture is God-breathed and profitable...*"(2 Tim.3:16). While nothing is stated here about what we evangelicals call *infallibility*, the verse, in any case, makes no allusion to the production of New Testament documents. Paul was referring to the Old Testament writings (as is clear from his reference to the "scriptures" in the previous verse). Paul was saying nothing here about books of the New Testament, which, in his time, were not yet a recognized collection of writings.

The apostles and the early church rightly viewed the apostolic writings as reliable and authoritative—and so should any serious Christian. But reliable witnesses are not necessarily omniscient.

It is true that Peter seems to include Paul's letters, along with the Old Testament, in his definition of sacred scriptures—but he wrote thus, probably, after Paul's death. Peter's post-mortem assessment of Paul's writings would not warrant the assumption that Paul was referring to his own, or other apostolic writings in his comment to Timothy about the prophetic scriptures of the Old Testament. The reason we regard the Old Testament scriptures as the Word of God is we believe their writers to have been a unique class of inspired men, called *prophets*. No New Testament book (other

than Revelation) claimed or implied that its author was an inspired *prophet*. This is significant, as it would be strange for someone speaking under prophetic inspiration to neglect to mention that he was doing so. Prophets speak God's own oracles, spoken in the first person, usually prefaced by, "*Thus says the Lord,*" while New Testament writers speak authoritatively *about* the Lord *in the third person*.<sup>23</sup>

The reason the documents of the New Testament are accepted as scripture is because of their *apostolic* (not *prophetic*) credentials. Apostles were not infallible men, nor were they always inspired. They sometimes made mistakes which they themselves acknowledge in their writings. However, Christ had specially instructed them and authorized them to speak as His agents. Jesus made it very clear that whoever receives one of these "sent ones" (*apostoloi*) is, in doing so, also receiving Him (John 13:20). Decisions enacted through an ambassador carry the authority of the government that sent him—without necessarily any implications of the infallibility of the agent. Similarly, a theological or ethical pronouncement from an apostle carries the weight of a pronouncement of the Lord who sent him. This does not mean that such people never express any of their personal desires or opinions. Paul often did this very thing, identifying his own hopes and opinions as such.

What if the apostles, like many Christians after them through the ages, had expressed hopes that the *Parousia* would come in their time, but were mistaken on that detail? If they did so, their readers would view any time element in their expectations as having the status of personal wishing. They obviously could not be thought to have ever spoken authoritatively about the timing of the eschaton, since Jesus had clearly told them, "*It is not for you to know the times and the seasons that the Father has put in His own authority*" (Acts 1:7). This statement makes it clear that nobody, including the apostles to whom Jesus was speaking, if found expressing expectations about the timing of future events, could be counted as speaking with certainty. An apostle can *hope*, just as you and I can.

Neither Paul nor Peter claimed that they were infallible men, and they clearly weren't. On one occasion, according to Paul, Peter was "*to be blamed*" and had to be rebuked (Gal.2:11ff). More than once, Peter even tried to correct Jesus Himself (Matt.16:22; Acts 10:14).

Paul, on one occasion, mistakenly thought God wanted him to go to Bithynia—when he was actually being called to go to Europe instead (Acts 16:7). The Holy Spirit had to correct him. He certainly expected that he would visit Rome shortly after delivering a gift to the Jerusalem Church (Rom.15:24-28). He was not aware, at the time of writing Romans, that there would be a four-year delay in his coming to Rome. He was not omniscient. In saying these things, I am making no criticism of the New Testament writings. I am merely saying we should not think them to be anything other than what they claim to be.

There is a Roman Catholic tradition that Mary was sinless, and there is an evangelical tradition that the New Testament writings are in all ways infallible. Neither of these traditions is supported by actual scriptural statements. Following a strict *sola scriptura* policy would not lead one to embrace either of these traditions. It is no doubt the legitimate respect that Catholics have for Mary that has led them to create extrabiblical traditions about her. Likewise, it is the justifiably high opinion of New Testament writings that has apparently led us evangelicals to make extrabiblical claims about them. However, for those who would consistently follow a *sola scriptura* commitment, neither Catholic nor Protestant traditions can be made to overthrow the clear statements of scripture.

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<sup>23</sup> We find the expression "*says the Lord*" in Paul's writings in one very unusual passage—2 Corinthians 6:17-18. In this place it sounds as if Paul is speaking prophetically himself, just like an Old Testament prophet. This is not impossible, since, as an apostle, he certainly was capable of prophesying. However, it would constitute a unique deviation from the character of the remainder of his writings, where he always speaks *of God* in the third person, rather than *as God* in the first person.

In speaking about himself, Paul claimed to “*know in part and prophesy in part*” (1 Cor.13:12). When speaking on matters upon which Christ had been silent, and for which the Holy Spirit had given no specific revelation, Paul sometimes was required, admittedly, to proffer his own enlightened opinion (1 Cor.7:12, 25). On one occasion, he admitted his error in writing incorrectly as to the number of those he had baptized in Corinth, and he had to correct his own misstatement (1 Cor.1:14, 16).

Some might conclude that Paul misjudged the time element of the end, in 1 Corinthians 7:29, where he wrote: “*The time has been shortened.*” This is an interesting case. What it says, and what it implies, can be differentiated. Paul says that “*the time*” (what time?) has been shortened. Is he thinking of Jesus’ statement that “*unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved*” (Matt.24:22)? If so, he might be thinking of A.D.70, which is the time to which Jesus was there referring.

In itself, the statement is sufficiently ambiguous to allow us to see it as a reference either to A.D.70 or to the final *Parousia*. However, it is the context of his statement that might raise questions about an A.D.70 identification. The advice Paul gives in connection with this “shortened” time is that married people should behave as if they were not married. In view of Jesus’ saying there would be no marriage in the Resurrection, might Paul be thinking that the Resurrection was nearer than it actually was? He doesn’t necessarily say so. Perhaps some other time period was shortened? He is not specific.

Of course, if Paul is here thinking of the end of the world, and the Coming of Christ, which was at least two thousand years away in his time, it would still be true, with every passing moment, that the interval was “shortened”—but that would hardly be worth mentioning. Was Paul thinking of A.D.70, or the end of the world, or possibly conflating both in his mind by mistake, as the disciples might be thought to have done in Matthew 24:3?<sup>24</sup>

This verse occurs in a section of 1 Corinthians 7 which Paul specifically opens with a disclaimer, “*I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give my judgment...*” and, “*I suppose...*” (vv.25-26). The section closes in a tentative manner: “*...in my judgment—and I think I also have the Spirit of God*” (v.40). There is every reason to take Paul at his word and to say that he is here giving his opinion, and not asserting anything with certainty. Could he be telling us that, in his opinion, having been given no sure word from the Lord on the matter, the end was relatively close—whether referring to the destruction of the temple, the final coming of Christ—or both?

The same arguments may be applied in the case of Peter’s comment: “*The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer*” (1 Peter 4:7). I have said earlier, in Chapter Five, that Peter could have been referring to the end of the Jewish Order, since he was obviously thinking of that in Acts 2:16-21.

But what if he was not? What if he literally thought the end of the world itself was not far off? What is lost to us in entertaining this possibility? As near as I can tell, nothing is forfeited in accepting this suggestion—other than a traditional view of Peter’s infallibility which he never claimed for himself, and which no biblical writer ever claimed for him.

The bottom line is that we don’t know whether the apostles actually expected the return of Christ, the Resurrection, *et al*, to be in their near future. Their statements do not unambiguously require that they did. On the other hand, what if they did, and were mistaken about the timing? Does it matter? Many millions of Christians have made such an error, and the Church survives. No theological point,

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<sup>24</sup> When Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple, the disciples asked Him about the timing of that event and of the end of the age. The differing ways in which their question can be understood will be taken up in our discussion of the Olivet Discourse (Chapters Thirteen and Fourteen). It is possible that, in their minds, they were thinking that the end of the temple would coincide with the end of the world.

and no moral imperative, is compromised by someone thinking Christ's coming is closer than it actually is. Obviously, some in making this mistake, have unnecessarily made some unwise short-term decisions. However, the apostles did not do this. Since no one is permitted to know about the timing of such things, no one's opinion can be trusted about the timing. The apostles, claiming no divine authority or revelation for their opinion on this, could have cherished, and even expressed, a hope that Christ would come in their time. Nothing in scripture would preclude their being mistaken on an issue about which no one can know the truth.

**Chapter Seven:**  
***The Resurrection According to Scripture and History***

**The importance of the Resurrection doctrine**

The fact of Christ's resurrection is central to the Gospel preached by the apostles. The first public prediction of Christ, when challenged about His authority in the temple, was a cryptic reference to His own resurrection.<sup>1</sup> It is not enough that Christ died as a sacrifice for sin, but it is equally important that He arose to life again<sup>2</sup> and ascended to the throne at the right hand of God as King and Intercessor.<sup>3</sup> It is in this way that He came to His enthroned position as King and Lord—a status which every tongue shall acknowledge and in acknowledgement of which every knee shall bow.

The Resurrection of Christ, however, is not treated in scripture as only significant in terms of His own exaltation, but of ours as well. Having risen from the dead, He became the "*firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep* [that is, who have died]." This means His resurrection was just the first of an eventual harvest of those who would experience the same phenomenon of resurrection: "*... in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming*" (1 Corinthians 15:20, 22-23).

The same concept is implied in the expression "*firstborn*":

*And He is the head of the body, the Church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. (Col.1:18)*

*...from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead... (Rev.1:5)*

*For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. (Rom.8:29)*

It was clearly God's desire to have not only one risen and glorified Son, but a large family of such risen and glorified sons and daughters. In order for this to happen, it will be necessary for all of His children to eventually have glorified, resurrected bodies like the one Christ has. Why this is important and how physical bodies are essential to God's purposes were points discussed in Chapter Three, and will be further addressed presently. For now, we need only to know that our bodies are destined to take on the same nature as His resurrected body. The scriptures identify this as an essential element of our hope as Christians:

*...we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. (Phil.3:20-21)*

*Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. (Romans 8:23)*

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<sup>1</sup> John 2:19

<sup>2</sup> Romans 4:25

<sup>3</sup> Romans 8:34

*Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him... (1 John 3:2)*

This was not a peripheral or negotiable doctrine in apostolic Christianity. Paul told Timothy that the denial of a future resurrection by some had led to the overthrow of the faith of those deceived by such a denial (2 Tim.2:16-18). There can be no reasonable doubt that the physical resurrection of our bodies is absolutely essential to a correct understanding of the Gospel and of the believer's hope. This belief did not begin with Christ or the Christians, but has its roots in much earlier divine revelation.

### **The Old Testament on the Resurrection**

The Sadducees were a party of Jewish leaders who differed from the majority position among the Jews on a number of subjects. We are told that they didn't believe in angels, spirits, nor the Resurrection from the dead.<sup>4</sup> They apparently didn't accept any scriptures other than the *Torah* (the five books of Moses), and they didn't see any clear indication in those books affirming an-end-of-days resurrection of bodies. In this they differed from the Pharisees and the majority of the rabbis.

Generally, we do not wish to take our Christian positions from the opinions of the Pharisees, but we cannot ignore their views, since Paul specifically claimed to hold a position on the Resurrection agreeable with theirs (Acts 23:6; 24:15). One of the things that full-preterists challenge is the meaning of his statements on the subject.

Though the Old Testament is relatively quiet on the subject of the Resurrection, there are several passages from which the Jews seem to have derived their ideas. All of them are subject to more than one possible interpretation, which renders them controversial to this day among Bible students. This is because the imagery or language of resurrection is sometimes used in the Old and New Testaments, in both a metaphorical and a literal sense.

Yet Jesus seemed to affirm that there were references in the Old Testament to the Resurrection from the dead. He rebuked the Sadducees, charging them with error on this matter due to their ignorance of the Old Testament scriptures (Mark 12:24). This strongly suggests that, according to Jesus, a correct understanding of the Old Testament would lead to a recognition of the Resurrection doctrine—to one example of which, He Himself drew their attention (Mark 12:26f).

The most vivid Old Testament image of bodies rising from the dead is that which is portrayed in Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones (Ezekiel 37:1-14). In that vision, disassembled, dry human bones are seen scattered in the desert. At the word of Ezekiel, these bones begin to shake and move. As the prophet watches, the bones assemble into human skeletons, upon which flesh, skin and hair then appear. Eventually, the breath of life enters them and they become a great host of living people.

The passage itself explains the vision and we find that it is not describing a literal resurrection at the end of the age at all. The scattered, dry bones are symbolic of the condition of the Jews in their Babylonian exile. *"Our bones are dry; our hope is gone,"* they say. In the land of their ancestors, their nation was literally nonexistent. The nation of Israel was dead. The imagery of restoration and revivification represents God's working the miracle of restoring the "dead" nation into the living entity that it once was—first, by assembling the Jews from captivity back into their land, and second, by pouring out His Spirit upon them.

Even though this is not a prophecy of the Resurrection of the Last Day, it does use the concept of resurrection as a metaphor for national restoration, and that imagery is of physical, dead body parts

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<sup>4</sup> Acts 23:8



being regathered and re-animated into resurrected bodies. The bodies in the vision were not *spiritual* or *non-physical* bodies, so the concept of resurrection, of which this national restoration is an analogy, is not seen as a spiritual one.

There are three instances of actual resurrection in Old Testament history—the dead bodies of two children and of a soldier were brought back to life through Elijah and Elisha, respectively.<sup>5</sup> These were physical resurrections. In the first of these cases, the prophet specifically speaks of the child's soul returning to his body. These are not directly related to the eschatological resurrection, but they represent the only *kind* of resurrection known to the Jews—as opposed to, for example, the transmutation of the soul to another body, or simply taking on a purely spiritual mode of existence.

Much earlier, Job had expressed what sounds like an expectation of literal physical resurrection of his body. While in his agony, he proclaimed:

*For I know that my Redeemer lives,  
And He shall stand at last on the earth;  
And after my skin is destroyed, this I know,  
That in my flesh I shall see God.  
Whom I shall see for myself,  
And my eyes shall behold, and not another.*  
(Job 19:25-26)

Though this is poetry, and could be interpreted as the expression of Job's hope of being healed from his present sickness, the most straightforward interpretation of his words would suggest that he believed in a future resurrection of his body after death. The eyes with which he expects to see God will be his own eyes—not those of a different body, but the same ones presently in his flesh. Yet, he expected this to occur sometime after his flesh had been destroyed, when his Redeemer would at last stand on the earth. Despite what one might regard as poetic imagery, this sounds remarkably like the teaching of the Resurrection that Christians have always found taught in the New Testament.

David wrote:

*For You will not leave my soul in Sheol,  
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.* (Psalm 16:10).

Peter identified this as a Messianic statement, applying it to Jesus and His resurrection. However, we cannot forget that such Messianic Psalms apply *secondarily* to Christ as the antitype of David and other psalmists. It seems that the psalmists' statements were primarily autobiographical. David's words meant something to him about himself. They expressed his own hopes and fears, in addition to having additional application, in many cases, to his most illustrious Descendant. We only learn about the messianic application of these Psalms in hindsight. Even the psalmists may not have been aware of this secondary significance at the time of writing. In other words, David was no doubt expressing his own personal hope of not being left in *Sheol* or seeing permanent corruption. As a type of Christ, he inadvertently spoke for Jesus as well, but he himself seems to have expected to be eventually delivered from *sheol* (reasonably understood as *the grave*<sup>6</sup>) into an incorruptible state.

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Kings 17:17-22; 2 Kings 4:18-37; 13:20-21

<sup>6</sup> The Hebrew word *Sheol*, like the Greek word *Hades*, refers to the place of the dead. It is used both of the grave (as the place of dead bodies) and of the probably non-physical place of persons (the shades? souls?) who have died.

Peter's commentary on this verse (Acts 2:25-29) makes it clear that it predicts a bodily resurrection because he says it was fulfilled in Jesus' bodily resurrection. The fact that it had application to someone beyond David himself is underscored by Peter's referring to David's tomb and body being still present in Jerusalem. Thus, David's personal hope of resurrection has not yet been realized, though Christ's has. Peter seems to be using the "bones-are-still-in-the-graves" argument for the not-yet-resurrected David (an argument scorned by full-preterists when used against them in debate by those pointing out that no resurrection occurred in A.D.70<sup>7</sup>).

Isaiah and Hosea also used language which Paul picks up as predicting the Resurrection:

*And He will destroy on this mountain  
The surface of the covering cast over all people,  
And the veil that is spread over all nations.  
He will swallow up death forever. (Isa.25:7-8; 1 Cor.15:54)*

*I will ransom them from the power of the grave;  
I will redeem them from death.  
O Death, I will be your plagues!  
O Grave, I will be your destruction! (Hos.13:14; 1 Cor.15:55)*

*Your dead shall live;  
Together with my dead body they shall arise.  
Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust;  
For your dew is like the dew of herbs,  
And the earth shall cast out the dead. (Isa.26:19)*

*He has stricken, but He will bind us up.  
After two days He will revive us;  
On the third day He will raise us up,  
That we may live in His sight. (Hos.6:1-2).*

It may reasonably be suggested that the third and the fourth of the above four examples can conceivably be taken non-literally, as metaphors, similar to Ezekiel's dry bones. The problem this creates is that they appear in close proximity to the first two examples—both of which Paul applies to the final resurrection<sup>8</sup>—and they sound as if they are on the same subject. Even if we are not sure that all four passages speak of the same thing, we cannot reasonably deny that Paul saw references to his own (and the rabbis') doctrine of the Resurrection in Isaiah and in Hosea.

The last Old Testament text to consider is near the end of Daniel's fourth vision:

*And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake,  
Some to everlasting life,  
Some to shame and everlasting contempt. (Daniel 12:2)*

This is generally recognized as a prophecy of the eschatological Resurrection. In Chapter Nine, I will suggest an alternative possibility concerning the meaning of this particular verse.

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<sup>7</sup> E.g., John Noe, *Your Resurrection Body and Life*, 70f

<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor.15:54-55

We should also add that Jesus found an obscure proof of the Resurrection in the *Torah* (for the sake of the Sadducees who recognized nothing else as scripture), which none of us would probably have seen in the passage:

*But even Moses showed in the burning bush passage that the dead are raised, when he called the Lord 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him. (Luke 20:37-38)*

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had long since died when God spoke these words to Moses. Yahweh regarded Himself as still *the God of* these deceased men. Yet, He is not the God of dead men, but living men—implying that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were not actually, or permanently, *dead*. It is not obvious, at first glance, how such a statement would actually prove the concept of resurrection from the dead. Rather, it seems to speak of the continuing survival of souls after death—which seems to be the meaning of Jesus' tag line "*for all live to Him.*" But the post-mortem survival of the soul is not the same idea as the Resurrection of the dead.

The idea of eternal destinies in a disembodied state was a pagan notion, not a scriptural or Jewish one. Jesus seems to assume that, since these men lived on disembodied after death, for the present, such could not be regarded their permanent or final condition. Their continuing existence as shades in *sheol* implies the necessity of a future reuniting with their bodies. Since the Sadducees denied not only the Resurrection, but also the existence of spirits, this put them in more of a pickle than it might seem to us. If there are no spirits, then Abraham, Isaac and Jacob could not be living as spirits in *sheol* at all. This means that God's statement to Moses at the burning bush must anticipate a future time when these men will be alive again and worshipping their God in their bodies—which is the very meaning of the Resurrection. The argument might seem a bit esoteric to us, but it is Jesus who makes it, and it cannot, therefore, be flawed. We are told that it also silenced the Sadducees, so His point must have been viewed as unanswerable.

So, we see that Jesus had grounds for chiding the Sadducees for their ignorance of scripture (even the *Torah*, which they accepted) in their denial of the Resurrection.

### **What the Jews believed about the Resurrection**

Full-preterist Max King wrote that the doctrine of resurrection preached by Paul was "radically different from the traditional Jewish understanding of the Resurrection."<sup>9</sup> However, Paul himself said that the doctrine of resurrection for which he was being persecuted was essentially *the same as* the doctrine approved by the Jews—particularly the Pharisees, with whom he specifically identified himself on this point.<sup>10</sup>

*But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged! (Acts 23:6)*

*I have hope in God, which they [the Jews] themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. (Acts 24:15)*

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<sup>9</sup> Max King, *The Cross and the Parousia of Christ* (Warren, OH: Parkman Road Church of Christ, 1987), p.428

<sup>10</sup> Acts 23:6

In deciding whether Paul's view of the Resurrection was "radically different" from that of the Jews or not, we might reasonably regard the man's own statements about his beliefs, rather than the affirmations of a 20<sup>th</sup>-century preacher seeking to create a radically novel theology out of whole cloth. I, for one, would rather trust Paul to be the world's greatest expert on his own opinion.

Not all full-preterists hold exactly the same opinion about the Resurrection. Some<sup>11</sup> insist that the Resurrection, which they date in A.D.70, did not affect individuals or their bodies, but was the "covenantal" resurrection of Judaism from its "dead" condition into a New Creation in the Body of Christ, the Church. Therefore, even though the Resurrection happened, no one actually experienced an individual, bodily resurrection. What occurred was only a collective change in *covenant status* for those who had previously been "dead" under the Law. This is called the Collective Body View (CBV), advocated by Max King and Don Preston. Upon what grounds such a change would be assigned to A.D.70, instead of forty years earlier, at Pentecost (where the biblical writers tend to locate the spiritual resurrection, or regeneration) seems a mystery.

Some full-preterists<sup>12</sup> see the Resurrection as the emptying of *hades* of all the righteous souls who had died prior to that time, and their relocation to heaven in *spiritual* bodies. Thus, the Resurrection affected people individually (not collectively) and consciously (not merely objectively)—but only those who had died before A.D.70—and it only involved their receiving spiritual bodies in heaven. Their earthly bodies, now decayed, did not rise.

Some<sup>13</sup> see the Resurrection as an ongoing process, beginning in A.D.70, and involving each saved individual, subsequent to A.D.70. This view sees each one receiving a spiritual body suited for life in heaven, at the time of one's individual death. Some full-preterists mix and match more than one of these concepts (as we will examine further in our next chapter), but all agree that the event took place, and/or commenced, in A.D.70, and that it did not involve the actual restoration of life to any dead physical bodies.

In other words, those devoted to any version of *Full-Preterism* have reason to want Paul's teachings to differ radically from those of the Jews, regardless of his strong statements affirming that he held a view compatible with theirs.

The traditional Jewish belief was essentially the same as the historic Christian position—namely, that each body in the grave will *stand up again* (the literal meaning of the Greek *anastasis*—"resurrection"), in order to resume physical life in a renewed physical earth. The purpose is to resume the original plan, from which Adam and Eve broke away by their disobedience. For any readers not familiar with the Jewish view of the Resurrection, at the time of Christ, we can quickly establish this by a reference to a few authoritative Jewish sources:

We read in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (online):

Both the Pharisees and the Essenes believed in the Resurrection of the body, Josephus' philosophical construction of their belief to suit the taste of his Roman readers notwithstanding (see "B. J." ii. 8, § 11; "Ant." xviii. 1, § 5; compare these with the genuine source of Josephus).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> E.g., Max King and Don Preston

<sup>12</sup> E.g., Daniel Harden

<sup>13</sup> E.g., Edward E. Stevens, John Noe, John L. Bray, Randall E. Otto

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12697-resurrection>

Another online source, the *Jewish Virtual Library*, confirms the standard Jewish view:

**RESURRECTION**...the belief that ultimately the dead will be revived in their bodies and live again on earth. Resurrection is to be distinguished from the belief in some sort of personal existence in another realm after death (see Afterlife) or in the immortality of the soul. A major tenet of Jewish eschatology alongside the Messiah, belief in the Resurrection is firmly attested from Maccabean times, enjoined as an article of faith in the Mishnah (Sanh.10:1)...<sup>15</sup>

Since the view is attested from Maccabean times (second century B.C.), it clearly prevailed in the times of Christ and the apostles, as it still does among Orthodox Jews. Yet another online Jewish source confirms:

Resurrection of the dead — *t'chiyat hameitim* in Hebrew — is a core doctrine of traditional Jewish theology. Traditional Jews believe that during the Messianic Age, the temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem, the Jewish people ingathered from the far corners of the earth and the bodies of the dead will be brought back to life and reunited with their soul...The medieval philosopher Maimonides includes it as one of his 13 principles of the Jewish faith, and the Mishnah states that those who don't believe in resurrection "have no share in the world to come." (Mishna Sanhedrin 10:1)...Among Orthodox Jews, belief in the Resurrection is still generally understood as a literal prophecy that will come to fruition when the messiah comes.<sup>16</sup>

All of these sources confirm that the Jewish concept of the Resurrection in New Testament times—the view upon which both Jesus and Paul agreed with the Pharisees—involved the restoration of the original physical bodies of the dead by the return of their souls or spirits into them. This is the very definition of the word "resurrection" and it is in contrast with any other theories of soul migration, soul survival in heaven, or any other concept of the ultimate end of human beings. The reason for the Resurrection of bodies is so that they might have a part in the completely restored physical order. As Christian scholar, Brad H. Young explains:

The Jewish people believed that God created the world. Our physical world is God's creation, and it is good. The Pharisees, in contrast to the Greco-Roman religious beliefs, vigorously affirmed the doctrine of the Resurrection of the dead. The Pharisees stressed a literal resurrection of the physical body, which would be reunited with the spirit of an individual. Their worldview embraced a future restoration of God's original design for his world. The Pharisees envisioned a time of redemption in which God would realign the physical creation with the ethereal realm.<sup>17</sup>

Murray J. Harris correctly states:

Moreover, in Jewish thought the idea of a Resurrection...after death necessarily involved (at least) the revival of the physical body, the emptying of the grave. No one could be said to be resurrected while his corpse lay in a tomb.

Since the word "resurrect" literally means to "stand again," it is clear that it is referring to the physical body—and the same physical body that was laid to rest at death. Only that body could be

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/resurrection>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/jewish-resurrection-of-the-dead>

<sup>17</sup> Brad H. Young, *Paul, the Jewish Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, reprint edition, 1995), 123.

said to be standing *again* (as it had previously *stood*) in resurrection. As Raymond E. Brown explains, “The concept of resurrection from the grave...is certainly what resurrection meant to the Jews of Jesus’ time...It is not really accurate to claim that the NT references to the Resurrection of Jesus are ambiguous as to whether they mean bodily resurrection—there was no other kind of resurrection.”<sup>18</sup>

Thus, to suggest that Paul believed in any kind of final resurrection that did not involve the revivification of the bodies of the dead, is to suggest that he taught a view “radically different” from the Jewish understanding. We find him to be fully in agreement with the Jewish idea of the Resurrection—not only in view of his own declarations of affinity with the Jews on this point, but also in his actual didactic comments regarding the subject, in his letters. We find that his words describe the same concepts as existed in the Jewish view.

While a minority of Jews, the Sadducees, denied the future resurrection, they actually denied all other views of afterlife as well. They were in constant conflict with the Pharisees on the subject. Their challenge to Jesus assumed that He believed in the Pharisaic doctrine of physical resurrection, and He gave no indication of their being mistaken about His view on this. When He had answered the Sadducees, the Pharisaic scribes, though hostile to Him personally, were delighted with His answer and commended Him, saying, “*Teacher, you have spoken well*” (Luke 20:39). They certainly found nothing in His comments about the Resurrection to be contrary to the Jewish orthodoxy.

### **What the early church believed about the Resurrection**

In Chapter Nine we will examine the relevant statements of Christ and Paul about the Resurrection, and will provide responsible exegesis of the passages. Before doing so, however, it is important to see how the earliest Christians—including 1) those whose lifetimes overlapped those of the apostles, and 2) those whose lifetimes overlapped the lifetimes of those who had known the apostles—understood the apostolic teaching on this topic.

While we do not regard the church fathers as “inspired” or infallible, we do well to recognize that they lived at a time too early for major deviations from fundamental apostolic doctrines to have come to be universally accepted in the Churches throughout the world. Some of the fathers had occasion to learn from the apostles’ own mouths, and others learned from first-hand hearers who had thus learned. Even if they had learned only from the apostolic writings (the New Testament), rather than from face-to-face instruction, they spoke, as their mother tongue, the same language in which those documents were written (which cannot be said of anyone alive in modern times). Through years of immersive study, we may become proficient in *Koine* Greek, but these ancient teachers of the Church didn’t need to do that.

It is ironic how many people, based upon their own particular understanding of certain Greek expressions, are willing to say that all the church fathers understood these passages incorrectly! These early leaders would know the nuances of every word in the New Testament (including *mello*) intuitively without engaging in specialized studies or appeal to lexicons.

Every church father believed that the Second Advent, and the accompanying Resurrection remained to be seen at a time future to themselves. None had any awareness of such events having occurred in A.D.70, though some were born near that time. Though these fathers were generally at odds with the Jews, and had been educated in the Greco-Roman world, they all affirmed a future resurrection of physical bodies—a doctrine essentially identical to that of the Jewish beliefs. In their pagan world, a physical resurrection was regarded as a concept to be mocked (Acts 17:32), yet, as

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<sup>18</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* (New York: Paulist Press, 1973), 70, italics in original

Christians trained by the apostles and others close to the apostles, none of them expressed any doubt about the coming of the future, physical Resurrection.

I will let these early Christians speak for themselves, and leave it to the full-preterists to explain how every Christian of the ancient church understood the matter differently from J. Stuart Russell, Max King, Don Preston, Ed Stevens, *et al.*:

*Didache* (c. 80-140, E), 7.382:

*But be ready, for you do not know the hour in which our Lord comes.*

Clement of Rome (c. 96, W), 1.11:

*There will be a future resurrection.*

Athenagoras (c. 115, E), 2.150.

*That same power can reunite what is dissolved. It can raise up what is prostrate, and restore the dead to life again. It can put the corruptible into a state of incorruption. And the same Being, and the same power and skill, can separate that which has been broken up and distributed among a multitude of animals...He can separate this, I say, and unite it again with the proper members and parts of members. And this is whether it has passed into one animal, or into many, or even if it has passed again from one animal into others.*

*Ibid.*, p.162:

*It is impossible for the same men to be reconstituted unless the same bodies are restored to the same souls.*

Polycarp (c. 135, E), 1.34. (born in A.D.70, or before, and acquainted with the Apostle John):

*If we please Him in this present world, we will also inherit the future world. For He promised to us that He will raise us again from the dead. "*

*Ibid.*, p.42:

*I give you thanks...that I can have a part in the Resurrection of eternal life, both of soul and body.*

Second Clement (c. 150), 7.519:

*Let none of you say that this very flesh will not be judged, nor rise again...For just as you were called in the flesh, you will also come to be judged in the flesh.*

Justin Martyr (c. 160), 1.169:

*We expect to receive again our own bodies.*

*Ibid.*, 233

*Even if anyone is laboring under a defect of body, yet if he is an observer of the doctrines delivered by Christ, He will raise him up at His second advent perfectly sound. He will make him immortal, incorruptible, and free from grief.*

*Ibid.*, 251

*He will raise all men from the dead. He will appoint some to be incorruptible, immortal, and free from sorrow in the everlasting and imperishable kingdom. However, He will send others away to the everlasting punishment.*

*Ibid.*, 294:

*Those who maintain the wrong opinion say that there is no resurrection of the flesh.*

Tatian (c.160, E), 2.61.

*We believe that there will be a resurrection of bodies after the consummation of all things...So even though fire may destroy all traces of my flesh, the earth still receives the vaporized matter, and though [my body] may be dispersed through rivers and seas, or torn in pieces by wild beasts, I am laid up in the storehouses of a wealthy Lord.*

Theophilus (c. 180, E), 2.91:

*God will raise your flesh immortal with your soul; and then, having become immortal, you will see the Immortal, if you now believe on Him.*

Irenaeus (c.180), 1.411.

*When the number is completed that He had predetermined in His own counsel, all those who have been enrolled for life will rise again. They will have their own bodies, their own souls, and their own spirits, in which they had pleased God. On the other hand, those who deserve punishment will go away into it, they too having their own souls and their own bodies. Both classes will then cease from any longer begetting and being begotten, from marrying and being given in marriage.*

*Ibid.*, 528

*But vain in every respect are they [i.e., the Gnostics] who despise the entire dispensation of God, and disallow the salvation of the flesh, and treat with contempt the regeneration of the flesh, maintaining that it is not capable of incorruption.*

*Ibid.* 510

*Although the body is dissolved at the appointed time because of that original disobedience, it is placed, as it were, in the crucible of the earth, to be re-cast again. When it is re-cast, it will not be as this corruptible body. Rather, it will be pure, and no longer subject to decay. To each body, its own soul will be restored.*

Polycrates (c.190, E), 8.113:

*In Asia, great luminaries have gone to their rest, who will rise again in the day of the coming of the Lord. This is when He comes with glory from heaven and when He will raise again all the saints.*

Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.511:

*In the Resurrection, the soul returns to the body.*

I have included only statements from fathers prior to the year 200, to show the beliefs of the earliest Christians after the apostles. Citations of later fathers could be multiplied, but to what purpose? The views of those cited are simply those agreed upon by every orthodox Christian teacher in the Church throughout history. It is clear that those who claim to know and understand the minds



of the apostles on this doctrine better than did all the Christians who came before them had better have superior exegesis to make their case anything other than a heretical novelty.

### **The purpose of the Resurrection**

The full-preterists are not the only people confused about the purpose of the Resurrection. Many rank-and-file Christians who hold no heterodox theological views are also somewhat confused. One common question I often hear from Christians is, “If we go straight to heaven as soon as we die, why do we have to be resurrected at the end when Jesus returns?” This question arises from the widespread misapprehension (shared by full-preterists, as well) that the eternal home and destiny of believers is to be in heaven. Once we are there, what is the point of raising our physical bodies—a factor unnecessary for our existence in a non-physical, spiritual realm?

It may shock some readers to learn this, but not one passage in scripture speaks of heaven as the eternal destiny of Christians (nor of any other humans). We have a Father in heaven, a Lord in heaven, a reward in heaven, treasure in heaven, a hope laid up in heaven, and deceased brethren in heaven. These are being kept securely in heaven (*where neither moth nor rust corrupt, and thieves do not break in and steal*), and Christ will bring these with Him when He comes (1 Thess.4:14). The Bible is clear that heaven was never intended to be a permanent home for humans. We have an eternal house presently in the heavens (a metaphor for our future bodies in contrast to the *tabernacle* in which we now live—2 Cor.5:1), but it is to be ours here on earth, so that Paul speaks of it as “*our habitation which is from heaven*” (*Ibid.*, v.2). The New Jerusalem is currently described as “*above*” (Gal.4:26) and “*heavenly*” (Heb.12:22), but ultimately, it descends from heaven to earth (Rev.21:10).

Full-preterist Charles Meek, like all full-preterists (and probably most Christians) assumes that “eternal life” after the Resurrection and Judgment (events which he places at A.D.70) will be identified with “heaven”:

We see in the passage [Matt.25:31-46] that at Jesus’ Second Coming in judgment, the sheep and the goats, the just and the unjust, were judged and sent to their final destination—either heaven or hell.<sup>19</sup>

Those who make such claims do not seem to be disturbed by the fact that neither this passage, nor any other about eternal destinies, mentions or alludes to “heaven.” They can find no biblical mention of our eternal destinies having any connection with heaven. The fact that this does not stop them from making such claims tells us everything we need to know about the reliability of their exegesis.

The destiny of the resurrected Christ as a glorified, physical human being<sup>20</sup> (as we also shall be<sup>21</sup>), is to rule the earth. Paul said that Abraham and Christ, his Seed, were promised to “*inherit the world.*”<sup>22</sup> God has promised to Christ that He will receive the nations for His inheritance and the uttermost parts of *the earth* for His possession.<sup>23</sup> Those who will reign with Him will inherit the earth, as joint heirs.<sup>24</sup> God has never changed His mind about the original purpose of man’s existence—

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<sup>19</sup> Charles S. Meek, *Christian Hope Through Fulfilled Prophecy: An Exposition of Evangelical Preterism* (Spicewood, TX: Faith Facts Publishing, 2013), 193f

<sup>20</sup> Luke 24:39; 1 Timothy 2:5

<sup>21</sup> Philippians 3:21

<sup>22</sup> Romans 4:13

<sup>23</sup> Psalm 2:8

<sup>24</sup> Matthew 5:5; Romans 8:17

namely, to rule the earth with Him.<sup>25</sup> The saints currently in heaven celebrate their destiny to someday “reign upon the earth.”<sup>26</sup> This is the reason we shall have immortal, physical bodies, as Jesus now has—because our eternal future environment is a physical planet.

Full-preterists deny all of this, but their disadvantage is in their not having a single text of scripture to refute these things. Their whole argument is twofold: 1) that all of the purposes of God were fulfilled in A.D.70, and 2) that mankind coming into immortal bodies to rule a curse-free world simply didn’t happen at that time.

The reason God created earth and man upon it is stated unambiguously in scripture. Earth was to be man’s home. Had there been no sin, and consequently no death, it would have been man’s home forever. When God created mankind, He prepared the earth as man’s perfect habitation. God’s stated purpose for making humans was that they might fill the earth and have dominion over it (not over heaven):

*Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth’...Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it...’ (Genesis 1:26, 28).*

Adam and Eve were not immortal by nature, but were given, conditionally, the opportunity to live forever. God placed the Tree of Life in the midst of the Garden with the power to impart eternal physical life to those continually eating of it.<sup>27</sup> It is clear from Genesis that this life was to be enjoyed in an eternal, physical environment—the perfect, unfallen earth. It was not His will that man should sin, and it is only because of man’s sin that his tenure on this planet was temporarily interrupted until the “*the times of the restoration of all things*” (Acts 3:21). Jews in the Old Testament were given no hint that they would ever go to heaven, nor that this was even a destiny to be desired. The Psalmist wrote:

*The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord’s;  
But the earth He has given to the children of men. (Psalm 115:16)*

The main reason, I suppose, that so many Christians have mistakenly thought of heaven as their eternal home is because Jesus often spoke of entering and inheriting “*the Kingdom of heaven.*” Any responsible study of this topic will quickly reveal that “the Kingdom of heaven” is not heaven itself, but a kingdom originating from, and belonging to, “*the God of heaven*” (Dan.2:44). That Kingdom is not *in heaven* (it is never spoken of in such terms). Just as we are “*of God*” but “*in the world,*” so is the Kingdom in which we live as disciples of Jesus.<sup>28</sup> The Kingdom of God is never said to be in heaven, but it is always depicted as being on earth—both the present earth now, and the New Earth, at Christ’s coming.<sup>29</sup> The promise is that the meek and the righteous “*will inherit the earth*” (Ps.37:9, 11, 22, 29, 34) . Solomon expressed the biblical hope of the Jews:

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<sup>25</sup> Genesis 1:26-17

<sup>26</sup> Revelation 5:10

<sup>27</sup> Genesis 3:22

<sup>28</sup> Colossians 1:13; Luke 17:21; Matthew 12:28; etc

<sup>29</sup> See Daniel 2:44, comp., v.35

*For the upright will dwell in the land,  
And the blameless will remain in it;  
But the wicked will be cut off from the earth,  
And the unfaithful will be uprooted from it. (Prov.2:21-22)*

While preterists may prefer to translate the word “earth” (Heb. *eretz*) to mean the “land” (i.e., the Promised Land)—and then spiritualize this *Promised Land* to mean heaven in the afterlife—there simply is not one passage in either the Old or the New Testament to warrant this transmogrification of the stated purposes of God.

*Covenant Eschatology*—the camp of Max King and Don Preston—has everything reversed from what scripture states. They insist that the penalty of the fall was not physical death at all, but only spiritual death. They believe that man would have physically died and gone to heaven even if there had been no sin. Heaven, not earth, is said to be God’s intended eternal home for the righteous, and physical death on earth (as the transition to heaven) was in the plan from the beginning, with or without sin entering the picture. This is why this camp does not believe there is any reason for there to be a physical resurrection at the end. In their view, eternal physical existence was never in the cards for humans.

Anyone aware of the second and third century heresies that plagued the early church will recognize that these full-preterist assertions seem to align with the devaluation of the physical which was characteristic of the Gnostics and Manichaeans. These heretical groups followed the Greeks in their notion that physical existence is evil, or at least substandard. They believed that being in physical bodies was a temporary trial—a prison—to be endured until death. Upon dying, the true “person” escapes this physical “prison” and continues only in a purely spiritual form. Some of the apostles, and many church fathers wrote against this concept, regarding it as one of the most pernicious perversions of biblical truth that they encountered in the early centuries.

Keith Mathison correctly observes:

While belief in the eternal survival of the soul was fairly common in the [pagan] Greco-Roman world into which the first Christians came preaching the Gospel, belief in bodily resurrection was looked upon as utter foolishness and rejected out of hand. Peter Bolt summarizes his study of the term *resurrection* in the [pagan] literature of this period succinctly and helpfully: “When ‘resurrection’ proper is mentioned in nonbiblical Greek literature, it is most commonly in a statement of its impossibility: the dead are not raised.”<sup>30</sup>

We demonstrated (above) that the Jewish belief, supported by Old Testament intimations, was that God would restore the creation to its optimal, unfallen condition, and would resurrect the bodies of the righteous to live on the renewed planet forever. It is striking that nothing in the New Testament seems calculated to contradict this historic Jewish understanding—which incidentally coincides perfectly with everything communicated by Jesus or the apostles on the subject.

The renewal of the cosmos was predicted by Paul (Rom.8:19-23) and Peter (2 Peter 3:10-13) before it was described in Revelation 21. The Resurrection of physical bodies from graves fits the language of Jesus (John 5:28-29), of Paul (1 Thess.4:16-17; 1 Cor.15:12-13, 20, 42-44, 52-53), and John (Rev.20:13). The full-preterists are not stupid. They have their own alternative, though

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<sup>30</sup> Keith A. Mathison, ed., *When Shall These Things Be? A Reformed Response to Hyper-Preterism* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2004), 298f

heterodox, explanations of these texts. It is their explanations to which we will turn in the next chapter.

## *Chapter Eight*

### *The Resurrection & Rapture According to Full-Preterism*

Among the most strained teachings of *Full-Preterism* is their insistence that the Resurrection of the dead, in one sense or another, occurred in conjunction with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D.70. As we have previously seen, the time-texts upon which they base so much of their confidence are not unambiguously referring to this momentous event, and no evidence can be presented to suggest that any such thing ever occurred.

This belief is what distinguishes full-preterists from all other Christians, including those of us who regard ourselves as partial-preterists. We acknowledge that A.D.70 was very significant, and that it was mentioned numerous times in prophecy. However, we are not bound in an exegetical straight-jacket that requires us to torture every passage into submission to an A.D.70 time of fulfillment. The latter is the unenviable task of the full-preterist. J. Stuart Russell stated the case:

...we conclude that the Parousia, the Resurrection, the judgment, and the last day, all belong to the period of the destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup>

The same commitment is affirmed by a modern leader in the movement, Edward E. Stevens:

Our [New Testament] teaches that the ‘Parousia,’ the Resurrection and the judgment were all interconnected events that would occur in the lifetime of those listening to Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

Partial-preterist, R.C. Sproul, wrote: “The great weakness of Full-Preterism—and what I regard to be its fatal flaw—is its treatment of the final resurrection.”<sup>3</sup> I believe this would be the consensus of all or most partial-preterists, as well as all futurists.

Nor is it only critics of *Full-Preterism* who see this weakness. One of the principal leaders of the movement, Edward E. Stevens, wrote: “There’s a tremendous amount of confusion and chaos in the Preterist Movement over this issue of Resurrection.”<sup>4</sup> Likewise, full-preterist, Charles S. Meek acknowledged, “There is more room for doubt about what exactly happened at the ‘general resurrection’ than the *timing* of that event, which we think is definitive...We are persuaded that the Bible teaches that at or near the end of the age in A.D.70, the Resurrection of the Old Testament saints, along with the deceased Christians, occurred.”<sup>5</sup>

Meek is correct in saying that most full-preterists believe that the dead saints of the Old Testament, and Christians who had died before A.D.70, experienced a spiritual resurrection in that year. This does not mean that anyone rose physically from the dead, but that those whose departed

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<sup>1</sup> Cited by Jay Adams, *Preterism: Orthodox or Unorthodox?* (Stanley, NC: Timeless Texts, 2003), 3

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> R.C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), 217

<sup>4</sup> Edward E. Stevens, *Key Differences Between CBV and IBV*, Vancouver Conference 2018

<sup>5</sup> Charles S. Meek, *Christian Hope Through Fulfilled Prophecy: An Exposition of Evangelical Preterism* (Spicewood, TX: Faith Facts Publishing, 2013), 191

souls had been confined to *Hades* were at this time granted immortal, *spiritual* bodies and permitted to live in heaven.

Those in Ed Stevens' camp believe that the living saints were also Raptured to heaven and given spiritual bodies at that time, as well.

Some affirm that, in addition to this one-time event, "the Resurrection" refers to a continuing process which allows Christians living since A.D.70, to receive at the point of death, their spiritual bodies fitted for eternal existence in heaven. No physical resurrection is expected.

### ***Individual Bodies or Corporate Body?***

The above are varieties, or elements, of a general position called the "Individual Body View," or the "Individual Body at Death" view (commonly abbreviated as IBV and IBD, respectively). This view of things is contrasted with another major branch of *Full-Preterism* called CBV— the "Corporate (or Collective) Body View." The latter position was formulated by Max King, the original full-preterist. Don Preston is probably, at the time of this writing, the most well-known proponent of CBV, which is also called *Covenant Eschatology*.

CBV, in contrast to IBD, does not believe the Resurrection refers to individuals receiving their spiritual bodies, but to the corporate entity of dead Judaism being replaced by the corporate Body of Christ, the Church. The dead "body" that was raised is the Old Covenant Jewish Temple Order, which was destroyed in A.D.70, and was resurrected as the Church—a new *body*.

We allow Max King to explain his position (CBV) in his own words:

The primary application of the Resurrection is applied to the death of Judaism, and to the rise of Christianity...Resurrection has reference many times to the change from the Jewish system to the Christian system, where the material body of Judaism is put off in death and the spiritual body of Christianity is resurrected in life.<sup>6</sup>

Does [the biblical resurrection of the dead] relate to the recovery of decomposed physical bodies at the end of time, planet earth, or human existence, or was it tied to the climax of redemptive history in terms of man's redemption and restoration to God? Is it connected to a change in man's bodily form and substance, or does it pertain to a change in man's mode of existence in this life that gives man life and immortality now through putting on Christ? It is clear that the latter view has the overwhelming support of scripture.<sup>7</sup>

The majority of biblically literate Christians and scholars, including many full-preterist ones, would say that the alleged "overwhelming support of scripture" in favor of this view is far from "clear."

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<sup>6</sup> Max King, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, (Warren, OH, 1971 ed), 204, 191

<sup>7</sup> Max King, *The Cross and the Parousia of Christ* (Warren, OH: Writing and Research Ministry, 1987) 382

There is a real rivalry between these two camps within full-preterist circles. Ed Stevens, who spent his first 18 years as a full-preterist in the Collective Body View, is now probably the best-known proponent of the IBV view. He writes of this conflict between the two positions:

The *Individual Body View* believes that when the Parousia occurred, the dead saints who were in Hades were raised out of Hades and put on their new individual, immortal bodies. Nothing hard to understand about that. Really simple and straightforward.

The *Collective Body View* says that the Resurrection was merely a spiritual change of status for a collective body so that it had salvation in a provisional sense up until A.D.70, but was not finished and fully established until the Parousia, at which time Christ completely abolished the Old Covenant, took the Temple out of the way, and fully established his new covenant with his people. So they see the Resurrection as being a resurrection of a collective body (the Church) out of its dead state in Judaism into the covenantal life of the Kingdom (a spiritual change of status).<sup>8</sup>

This is where the debate is focused: What does scripture actually teach about the Resurrection of the dead? Was it a resurrection of “*Souls out of Hades*” (SOH) to get their new individual immortal bodies and go to Heaven, or was it merely a status change for a collective body from out of the old covenant death into the new covenant life?<sup>9</sup>

Unfortunately, that’s what the Collective Body guys teach. They teach that the Resurrection of the dead, the eschatological resurrection, was nothing more than a *spiritual status change for a collective body*. And if you ask them about whether the dead were raised out of Hades, they will say, “Yes, maybe, probably, but I don’t know any passages that talk about it.” They say this because they believe that ALL of the Resurrection texts, as far as they are concerned, are dealing with a collective body being raised out of old covenant Judaism into the covenant life of the Church (a status change for the collective body, the Church).<sup>10</sup>

It should be noted that no full-preterist believes in a physical resurrection of Christians from their graves, either in A.D.70 or in the future. They believe we are mistaken to take the word “resurrection” in the only manner in which it was ever understood among the Jews and the Greeks (even though the Bible affirms the Jewish meaning, and uses the established Greek terminology in referring to it).

### ***The “Silver Bullet” text for the Corporate (Collective) Body View***

When Edward Stevens asked Max King what he regarded as the “silver bullet” proving the Collective Body View of the Resurrection, King identified Philippians 3:21:

*...who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.*

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<sup>8</sup> Edward E. Stevens, *Key Differences Between CBV and IBV*, Vancouver Conference 2018

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

The value of this text to the position is that it speaks of “our” (plural) “body” (singular)—suggesting not the transformation of individual *bodies*, but of the one Body to which we all belong. Since this is clearly speaking of the Resurrection at the coming of Christ, it would seem to view the Resurrection as being of the corporate body of Christ, rather than of our individual bodies. A similar passage, exhibiting the same grammatical feature is Romans 8:23, which also refers to the Resurrection as “the redemption of *our body*”—again matching the plural pronoun with the singular noun. At first blush, both of these verses seem very supportive of a “corporate body” resurrection.

Of course, even if Paul were saying that the Resurrection would be corporate, neither of these verses suggests 1) that this would be the only aspect of the Resurrection and would not be accompanied by the physical resurrection of our individual bodies as well (a feature affirmed in many other passages), or 2) that the event Paul described occurred in A.D.70, or any other time in the past. After all, no one can name any feature in which the corporate Body of Christ became observably improved—in either its external or internal circumstances—in or after A.D.70. In fact, most of the greatest persecutions, heretical intrusions and flagrant forms of apostasy in the Church belong to the period later than A.D.70. To all appearances, the Church was purer and more Christlike in the days of the apostles than it was afterward.

What can we say about Philippians 3:21 and Romans 8:23, that would diminish their evidential value for the Corporate Body View of the Resurrection? Simply this, that the use of a plural possessive pronoun with a singular noun, while grammatically strange to our ears, is a common idiomatic construction in the scriptures. The actual construction in the Greek in these cases is: *The X (singular noun) of us (plural possessive)*—hence, in these two verses, “*the body of us.*”

In the Old Testament, as well as the New, it is not uncommon to find this very construction unambiguously meaning “the X (*plural noun*) of us.” That is, “our body” in such a construction means “our bodies.” Though I cannot explain how this idiom came into use, the witness of its common occurrence is undeniable. For those who wish to be given proof of such claims, my own rapid survey of the Bible has produced the following examples (I may have missed some):

#### *Old Testament examples—*

- Gen. 37:27. 43:21—“our hand” (meaning: *our hands*)
- Josh.2:19—“Our head” (meaning: *our heads*)
- 1 Sam.14:10—“our hand” (equivalent to “*our hands*” 17:47)
- Ps. 12:4—“Our tongue” (meaning: *our tongues*)
- Ps. 33:20-21—“Our soul...Our heart” (meaning: *our souls, our hearts*)
- Ps. 44:25—“Our soul...Our body” (meaning: *our souls. Our bodies*)
- Ps. 66:9 —“Our soul” (meaning: *our souls*)
- Ps. 103:14—“Our frame” (meaning: *our frames*)
- Ps. 123:4—“Our soul” (meaning: *our souls*)
- Ps. 124:4. 5—“Our soul” (meaning: *our souls*)
- Ps. 126:2—“Our mouth...Our tongue” (meaning: *our mouths. Our tongues*)
- Isa. 26:8—“Our soul” (equivalent to “*our souls*” in 58:3)
- Isa. 38:20—“All the days of our life” (meaning: *all the days of our lives*)
- Jer.44:17—“Our own mouth” (meaning: *our own mouths*)
- Lam 5:15, 17—“our heart” (meaning: *our hearts*)

#### *New Testament examples—*



- Luke 24:32—"Did not our heart burn...?" (meaning: Did not *our hearts* burn...?)
- Acts 2:8—"Our own language" (meaning: our own *languages*)
- Rom.8:16—"Our spirit" (meaning: *our spirits*)
- Rom. 8:23—"Our body" (meaning: *our bodies*)
- Phil.3:21. —"Our vile body" (meaning: *our vile bodies*)
- 2 Cor.1:12—"Our conscience" (meaning: *our consciences*)
- 2 Cor.4:10—"Our body" (used as equivalent to *ourselves*, in 1:9; *our mortal flesh*, in 4:11; and *our bodies* in 7:5)
- 2 Cor.5:1-2—"Our earthly house...our habitation" (in context, seems to mean *houses; habitations*)
- 2 Cor.6:11—"Our heart" (equivalent to "*our hearts*" in 7:3)
- 1 Pet. 4:3—"Our past lifetime" (meaning: *our past lifetimes*)
- 1 John 3:19-20—"Our heart" (3x) (meaning: *our hearts*)

While there is the bare possibility that Paul's two references to "our body," in Romans and Philippians, could be exceptions to this common idiomatic usage, we would have to conclude, in light of the biblical evidence above, that the "silver bullet" status of such verses for CBV cannot be maintained.

Besides, Paul did not say Christ will transform our lowly body to *be* His glorious body, as one would expect if he were speaking of the Church corporately, but the our lowly bod[ies] will be "*conformed to His glorious body.*" This does not suggest *identity as*, but *conformity with*, the glorified body of Jesus.

### ***The CBV concept of "Sin-Death"***

The concept of the Resurrection, by any definition, refers to the reversal or undoing of "death." The traditional understanding takes "death" in its natural meaning of physical death. Not so with those who reinterpret the Resurrection as a spiritual transition. To them, the death that is defeated in resurrection is "spiritual" death. Ed Stevens describes a major difference between his view (IBV) and that of Don Preston (CBV) in this respect:

The two major views on resurrection within the Preterist movement (CBV versus IBV) part ways at the very beginning of the Bible in regard to how each defines the "death" that God threatened and carried out against Adam "on the very day" he sinned. The CBV defines it as a *spiritual-only* death, while the IBV sees it as a *comprehensive* death, including physical, spiritual, and eternal death.<sup>11</sup>

The idea that Adam died "spiritually" is a probably a familiar view even among non-preterist evangelicals. The CBV, or *Covenant Eschatology*, of Don Preston, however, renders this death (which some refer to as "*sin-death*," "*alienation death*," or "*covenant death*") the *only* death that came as a judgment for sin. Physical death would have occurred, Preston says, even if Adam and Eve had never sinned, and this death is not the penalty for their disobedience. It is simply the consequence of being created mortal. God, we are told, never planned for Adam and Eve to live forever (despite His

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<sup>11</sup> Ed Stevens, *Death of Adam: Spiritual-Only or Physical Also?*, March 12, 2019

originally giving them access to the Tree of Life, which was to confer immortality). Even if they had not sinned, it is asserted, they would have died and gone to heaven. What occurred at the fall was a covenantal “death” of separation from God.

The significance of this claim is that the reversal of this Sin-Death does not require a resurrection from physical death, since the latter was not part of the curse and was always a part of God’s plan. Resurrection only applies to the defeat of the Covenant Death that came upon the race through Adam’s covenant unfaithfulness. Preston writes:

[The] death of Adam, which is the focus of Christ’s end time resurrection work, has nothing to do with biological death, but with the loss of spiritual fellowship with God...if you mis-identify the death of the Garden, you will of necessity wrongly identify the nature of the Resurrection in [the whole] New Testament. If your *protology* (doctrine of the beginning) is wrong, your *eschatology* (doctrine of the end) is destined to be misguided.<sup>12</sup>

Even though there is no reference in the story of Adam and Eve to any kind of death other than physical (“*From dust you are, and to dust you shall return*”—Gen.3:19), Preston’s argument is based upon the wording of the threat that God made to Adam: “*In the day you eat of it, you shall surely die*” (Gen.2:17). The argument goes: We know that Adam did not physically die *on the day he sinned*, so the threat must have referred to a spiritual, non-physical death.

This is far from the only explanation of this passage available, and assumes as a primary meaning a doctrine that is not mentioned in the Genesis account at all. From this point, the argument assumes that the death which resulted from the curse, and from which Christ redeems us in resurrection, is not physical (hence, no physical resurrection), but spiritual and covenantal.

While the non-physicality of the Resurrection may sound like a logical conclusion from such an original premise (*viz.*, that the penalty of Adam was not physical death), the premise itself is flawed. After Adam sinned, God specifically announced that his penalty was physical death and decomposition (Gen.3:19), and made no mention at all of any other kind of death. So how do we deal with “*in the day you eat of it you shall surely die?*” There are several possibilities that actually (unlike the non-physical death theory) arise directly from the text:

- 1) The phrase “*In the day you eat...you will surely die*” can easily be understood as an idiom parallel to that used by Solomon to Shimei: “*For it shall be, on the day you go out and cross the Brook Kidron, know for certain you shall surely die*” (1 Kings 2:37). This did not mean that the execution of Shimei would be carried out the same day of his crossing the brook—and it was not. It means that the day the crime was committed, his doom was sealed and his death was certain.
- 2) The phrase, “*you shall surely die*” is literally, in the Hebrew, “*dying you shall die.*” Adam was not innately immortal (nobody is, other than God—1 Tim.6:16), though he could potentially have enjoyed the divine gift of immortality had he retained access to the Tree of Life, which God provided for that purpose. His *immortality* was contingent on the eating of that tree—and was thus *potential*, not *inherent*. He could live forever if he would eat of the Tree of Life (Gen.3:22), but not otherwise. Mortal creatures are always in the process of dying. This process need not result in immediate death, however—nor even eventual death, so long as one has access to the

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<sup>12</sup> Don K. Preston, *We Shall Meet Him in the Air*, 3

Tree of Life. This tree would apparently sustain life indefinitely. It is due to the committing of sin that the access to the Tree of Life was thereafter denied. So that Adam's present process of dying would, in due time, end up in actual death. This became a reality the day he sinned. Dying he would die.

- 3) Genesis makes the point of God's providing animal skins to cover Adam and Eve's nakedness. This appears to have happened on the very day they sinned. The providing of these skins required the death of an animal, slain on their behalf—the first atoning animal sacrifice. It is not difficult to interpret these animals' deaths as the shedding of blood to atone for (i.e., to cover, which is the meaning of "atone") the sin and shame of our first parents. This is in fact a very common understanding among Christians, and is legitimate. If sacrifices are made on behalf of sinners, those animals stand in as substitutes for punishment. What is done by a substitute on a person's behalf is counted as if it was done by that person. Clearly, that is what Paul means when he says, "*we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died*" (2 Cor.5:14). That is, Christ died as our substitute, thus, *in His death*, we have all died. The day the Substitute died, we died. So also, in the substitutionary sacrifice killed on their behalf, Adam and Eve died the very day they sinned.

Every one of these possible explanations is more in keeping with the wording of the scriptures than is any theory about *covenant-death* or *sin-death* which is entirely absent from this story, and, arguably, from the whole Old Testament.

In my 2013 debate with Preston, he asked me if physical death is an enemy to the Christian. He hoped to have me on the horns of a dilemma. Speaking of physical death, Paul wrote that he longed to depart and to be with Christ, which is "*far better*" (Phil.1:23). However, elsewhere, Paul said that death was the "*last enemy*" to be destroyed at the Resurrection (1 Cor.15:26). Here is the supposed dilemma: If *physical* death is welcome, because it is a departure to be with Christ, then it can hardly be regarded as an enemy. The last enemy which resurrection defeats must then be *sin-death*. To say that physical death is not an enemy to the Christians would be conceding to Preston's position. On the other hand, if I were to say that physical death is indeed an enemy, Preston could say, "Then why did Paul say that to depart and be with Christ is 'far better' than to live on in this life?"

Of course, the question must have a finer point put upon it: Is death an enemy *to whom*? Death is a welcome reprieve for the dying saint, but is certainly an enemy to those who loved and lost the deceased. It is not the enemies of man that Paul has in mind, in 1 Corinthians 15, but the enemies of Christ. Paul's comment about the last enemy is in the context of Christ bringing all His enemies under his feet.

The death of a servant of Christ is a costly loss for the Kingdom of God. We all have heard (usually at funerals) the words of Psalm 116:15— "*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.*" We may not, however, have comprehended that the word "precious" means "costly." There is a serious loss to the Kingdom when a saint passes on from this life. This is the very point Paul makes in the passage where he says that to depart is far better—that is, *for Paul personally* it would be an improvement in his circumstances. However, he said that the choice to remain alive was a better one from the standpoint of benefits to the Church (Philippians 1:24). His death would be an irreplaceable loss to the Church. Jesus wept at the tomb of His friend, seeing the grief and pain of loss experienced by the believers who were bereaved of that good man. It was certainly not the "spiritual" death of Lazarus that caused either the family, nor Jesus, to weep. According to Jesus' own previous words,

Lazarus already would have, in that sense, passed from death to life before his physical death (John 5:24).

Don Preston argues that the Bible sometimes differentiates between physical death and the sin-death from which Christ came to save us. He says the former may be simply called *thanatos* ("death") while the latter is referred to as *ho thanatos* ("the death"). One will search in vain for a demonstration of this distinction in scripture. It is true that *thanatos*, in scripture, is found both with and without the definite article, but the distinction between the two (if there is any) is not that which Preston claims. Scriptural examples in which ordinary physical death is referred to as *ho thanatos* include 2 Corinthians 1:9; Colossians 1:22; and Revelation 9:6. Preston's distinction appears to be artificial.

Ed Stevens criticizes Preston's position claiming that it compromises the biblical view of Christ's atoning death:

...the CBV cannot be right about the Death of Adam being *spiritual-only*, since it would necessarily imply that Christ did not need to die *physically* in order to overcome the *spiritual-only* death of Adam, and that the physical death of Jesus was not His substitutionary death for our atonement. But that fatally contradicts Hebrews 9:22 which states, "*without the shedding of [Christ's] blood there is no forgiveness.*" That clearly demands that our substitutionary atonement could not have occurred without the physical death of Jesus. The CBV attempts to avoid this dilemma by redefining "blood" in Heb. 9:22 as being "spiritual blood." Steve Baisden, Holger Neubauer, and Don Preston defended that "spiritual blood" idea on FaceBook recently.

Stevens also reports:

In his recent debate with Hester, Don Preston stated unequivocally that the physical death of Jesus was NOT his substitutionary death, but instead it was his spiritual death that was the substitutionary death.<sup>13</sup>

When one is willing to reinvent the very doctrine of the atonement by appeal to something like Christ's "spiritual death," or His shedding of "spiritual blood," one might be expected to provide an impressive scriptural case. However, we search in vain for any reference in scripture even to Christ ever having died a "spiritual death." The term, and, as far as I can tell, the concept, is entirely absent from the Bible. It should tell us a lot about a teacher when he contorts a major tenet of the Christian faith by appeal to a supposedly comprehensive, controlling idea that is nowhere found in scripture.

If we simply look for information from the Bible as to what penalty came upon Adam, what Christ endured to remedy the problem, and what the ultimate realization of that victory will be, we will find nothing supporting the contentions of the *sin-death* camp. The wages of sin is always said to be "death," but this is never modified by the words "sin-", "covenant," or even "spiritual."

The Genesis narrative makes it plain that, though Adam was naturally mortal when created, he was not intended to physically die. The Tree of Life, of which humans were expected to eat and live forever, was placed at their disposal in the Garden. The penalty for their sin was their being debarred from that tree, resulting in their inevitable physical death. The death that came upon them was described by God Himself as physical: "*For dust you are, and to dust you will return*" (Gen.3:19).

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<sup>13</sup> Edward E. Stevens, *Key Differences Between CBV and IBV*, Vancouver Conference 2018

The means by which Christ conquered this enemy, was by His own physical death. We know He died that kind of death and we never read of His suffering any other kind. To say that Jesus died any other kind of death is to make doctrines out of thin air, raising questions as to why one feels justified in doing so. If Jesus died a death additional to His physical death—and if this is significant—why did no scriptural writer think to mention it?

The ultimate immortality which Christ has acquired for His people is that of our physical bodies. Such physical deathlessness would have been ours had Adam never gotten us all banned from the garden and its Tree of Life. Paul says that it is “*this mortal [body]*” that will “*put on immortality*” (1 Corinthians 15:53-54), and points out that the physical resurrection of Christ was simply the firstfruits of the Resurrection His people will experience at His coming (1 Corinthians 15:22-23).

*Covenant Eschatology* can sound convincing in the context of a debate where an audience is hearing unfamiliar concepts for the first time. Yet, it is one thing to spin a fancy, novel theological narrative that hangs generally together when spoken very rapidly. It is another thing to slow down so as to answer challenges from people who recognize that not one verse of scripture affirms what is being said.

While it is true that, in certain contexts, the words “dead” and “death” are used metaphorically of the sinner’s lost condition,<sup>14</sup> it is clear that the remedy to that condition was realized by the sinner’s coming to Christ—not by Christ’s coming in judgment on Jerusalem. The only references in scripture to Christians being raised from such a metaphorical “death” are those that speak of the experience of Christians long before A.D.70 being raised to life in regeneration.<sup>15</sup> No hint is given that anything was lacking in this realm to be improved in A.D.70. Paul told the Colossians, prior to A.D.70, that, concerning their salvation, they were “*complete in Him*” (Col.2:10).

### ***An A.D.70 Rapture of the Church?***

Some full-preterists believe there was an actual physical Rapture of all the saints living in A.D.70. This was believed by the earliest preterists of this movement (though not quite “full” preterists themselves). James Stuart Russell and Milton Terry believed there was an actual removal of the living saints at or around A.D.70, and Ed Stevens has defended this view as well. He provides a reason why none of the Church fathers seem to have been aware of this event:

It is very appropriate to ask: If the “*souls out of Hades*” (SOH) was the original Biblical view, how was that concept lost after A.D.70? This is a very challenging question for most preterists to answer. The only satisfying explanation for that abrupt departure of the Church from its original concept of resurrection seems to be the Rapture.

The Rapture easily shows why none of the apostles or even any of their disciples were still around after A.D.70 to claim that the Resurrection occurred and explain what it was all about. All of the true Christians who knew what the Apostles taught were no longer on earth. They were taken to heaven.

What does this mean? It means that when new Christians came into being after A.D.70, they were without any knowledgeable or mature Christians to teach them. The Christians we find after A.D.70 were totally unaware not only of what the Resurrection of the dead meant, but even

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<sup>14</sup> E.g., Luke 15:24; Ephesians 2:1,5; Colossians 2:13

<sup>15</sup> E.g., John 5:24; Ephesians 2:4; Colossians 2:13

unaware that the Parousia had occurred. Dr. Charles Hill, in his critique of the Preterist view, notes that we do not find a single Christian after A.D.70 who was aware of a past Parousia, resurrection, and judgment, nor even aware of anyone who believed it had occurred (Mathison, *WSTTB*, p. 107)...

That is how the confusion occurred. And that is how the original Biblical understanding of the Resurrection was lost, because there were no apostles, nor anyone who had been taught by the Apostles, left alive on earth afterwards who could explain what the Resurrection was all about. Thus, the original understanding of resurrection (SOH) was lost after the true Christians were Raptured out of there at the Parousia.<sup>16</sup>

This is not the view of all full-preterists (e.g., the CBV adherents,) but many follow Ed Stevens, Russell and Terry in such a theory. They say the whole church, dead and living, were taken to heaven at that time, and that Christianity had to start again from scratch after that. We are not told how the Christian faith started up again after the disappearance of all the apostles and those whom they had instructed.

Perhaps the first *post-Parousia* convert found a copy of one of the New Testament Gospels or epistles? Not being able to properly understand what these documents taught, he or she naturally mistook all the references to the Resurrection as describing an event that corresponds to the actual meaning of the Greek words, and did not know the esoteric meanings known even today only to an elite coterie of full-preterists. But wait! If these native Greek-speaking readers read the New Testament documents, and were unable to extract from them the full-preterist paradigm, how is it that the full-preterists of our day have discovered it from the same documents? Do they really imagine themselves to be the most astute students of the Bible to have lived over the past twenty centuries?

Would not the early, post-A.D.70 converts be as capable as are modern readers of seeing what the Greek text said? Wouldn't they be as familiar as anybody with the nuances of the word *mello*, or with the audience relevancy inherent in the use of personal pronouns? Wouldn't they know whether *anastasis* refers to physical standing-up or to spiritual revivification? And, most of all, wouldn't they be aware of the inexplicable absence of all believers who had lived prior to their own conversion? It seems that they, more than we, would be interested in explaining the inexplicable, recent disappearance of all the Christians who lived before their time. Since they had the New Testament documents, they knew that Jesus and the Church had existed before their time. How strange for them never to speculate in their writings about what had become of all those Christians living throughout the Roman Empire prior to A.D.70!

If they could not correctly understand the text without the apostles and their protégés to guide them, how is it that modern teachers—also lacking the living apostles and their disciples to expound upon them—are suddenly able to see the true meanings? Some explanation and evidence would seem to be required, other than the mere observation that patristic writings from the second half of the first century are not abundant. Certainly, that fact has more than one possible explanation.

The ideas that there are very few writings from church fathers in the generation following that date can hardly prove that all the Christians had suddenly vanished at that time. This argument misapprehends the nature of the evidence.

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<sup>16</sup> I regrettably have misplaced the source of this quote (if anyone has it, I would be obliged to have it again), but I including it, knowing it is genuine, and that Edward Stevens would stand by these remarks.

We have to realize that a relatively small percentage of the works written in ancient times have been preserved through the centuries for modern readers to find. In order for documents to be preserved even for so much as a couple of centuries—to say nothing of two millennia—there must be those in numerous successive generations highly motivated to preserve them. They must be laboriously copied and recopied every few decades lest the text pass entirely out of existence. That is why so many classic works are known to us only by their reputations. Others knew of them, and mentioned them, but no one cared enough to continually copy them through the generations.

We know there were books called *The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah*,<sup>17</sup> *The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel*,<sup>18</sup> *The Book of Jasher*,<sup>19</sup> *The Book of the Wars of the Lord*,<sup>20</sup> *The Book of Samuel the Seer*,<sup>21</sup> *The Book of Nathan the Prophet*,<sup>22</sup> *The Book of Gad the Seer*,<sup>23</sup> and others that were important enough to be mentioned by biblical writers, but not sufficiently cherished for anyone to preserve through the ages.

Elsewhere, Stevens mentioned that this shortage of writings was also a feature of the Pre-A.D.70 church: “The fact that [the apostles’] writings came to an abrupt end before 70, and we hear no more from them after that, tells us that they must have died.”<sup>24</sup>

If there was an abrupt halt to Christian writings prior to A.D.70, then it would seem unreasonable to argue that the events of that year can explain the dearth of writings also existing after that year. Perhaps those who would otherwise have written were also killed as were the apostles. This is certainly more likely than the theory that they were taken up in a Rapture which no one witnessed or remembered.

In every age the number of Christian leaders who wrote anything at all worth keeping has been a tiny percentage. Even if we had writings from 100 church fathers, this would still represent less than one in a thousand of the Christians living in their times. We cannot estimate the size of the Church in any age by the number of those who left surviving writings. In the age prior to A.D.70, who, other than the apostles, wrote anything that has been preserved? If the forty years prior to A.D.70 can yield almost nothing in writing from those primitive bishops, why would it be remarkable for the following forty years to similarly produce little of substance?

Of the apostles themselves few writings remain. Only three of the original twelve wrote anything that survived to the time that the New Testament canon was formed. Shall we suppose the rest had all died too early to write anything, or is it more likely that whatever they may have written simply has not been preserved? Even the letters of Paul, who wrote more than any of the others, have not all been preserved. He mentions at least one of his letters which has not survived (see 1 Cor.5:9).

The Roman historian Livy wrote 142 books of Roman history, but only thirty-five have been preserved. Tacitus, around the time of the “missing” Christian documents, wrote fourteen books of *Histories* of which only four and a half remain to this day. Of his sixteen books of *Annals* only ten survive. These were great and famous works in their times and no doubt some sought to preserve them, but apparently the zeal to do so was not sufficient to inspire enough generations to continue the labor required to do so. The loss of ancient works due to apathy or insufficient manpower must have caused the disappearance of hundreds, if not thousands, of lesser works of antiquity.

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<sup>17</sup> 1 Kings 14:29, etc.

<sup>18</sup> 1 Kings 14:19, etc.

<sup>19</sup> Joshua 10:13; 2 Samuel 1:18

<sup>20</sup> Numbers 21:14

<sup>21</sup> 1 Chronicles 29:29

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Stevens, *The Final Decade Before the End*, 149

So, what can we deduce from the scarcity of late-first century Christian works? Probably nothing of significance. During that time, the Church would have had a great incentive to preserve the apostolic writings. Perhaps there was no corresponding zeal to copy and recopy other works produced in that period. This may have been due to the inferiority, or the limited distribution, of those works. We cannot say, but their absence is not a mystery that can only be solved by invoking the even greater “mystery” of an A.D.70 Rapture. Though Christian writings either were not abundant or have not survived from the post-A.D.70 generation, we know that there were plenty of Christians present through the whole time. It is apparent that their mentor John, likewise, knew nothing of it.

At the time of his martyrdom in the year 155, Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, claimed that he had served Jesus for 86 years—that is, since A.D. 69. This means he was either born or converted in that year. If Polycarp was born to Christian parents, and marked his service to Jesus from his birth, then he was born during the Jewish War, a year before the alleged Rapture is said to have occurred. If his parents had suddenly been taken to heaven one year after his birth, then whoever raised him would likely have known of this, and he would have heard of it. On the other hand, Polycarp may have been born even earlier, and converted in A.D.69, either as a child or a young adult. In either case, he regarded himself to have been serving Christ prior to A.D.70. If this was so, then he himself would have lived to see, and missed out on, the Rapture that allegedly occurred in his youth. It would necessarily have been after this that Polycarp was taught by the Apostle John—so that they both missed the supposed Rapture of A.D.70.

Just about forty years after A.D.70, Ignatius was the elderly bishop of Antioch. Given that he was almost certainly over forty years old at that time, he would necessarily have lived through the A.D.70 Rapture (had it occurred)—and probably would have remembered it. Ignatius, like Polycarp, was a disciple of the Apostle John—both of whom probably would have remembered having missed the Rapture together if it had happened in their lifetimes. Yet, these men believed in a future Second Coming of Christ—and knew nothing of one that had occurred prior to their time.

Likewise, Papias is said to have lived from 60 to 130 AD. He would then have been ten years old in A.D.70. He obviously lived well beyond the alleged A.D.70 Rapture and claimed that he had interviewed (certainly in his adult life) many men who had known the apostles. These men who knew the apostles would have known them prior to A.D.70, since most of the apostles (John is the only known exception) died before then. It certainly would have been after that date when they spoke with Papias. Their lifetimes, like that of Papias himself, began before and ended after the date of the alleged Rapture! If we would speculate that, after their conversations with the apostles, they missed the Rapture, they might at least be expected to have noticed that it had occurred.

By the way, all of these men who lived through the A.D.70 events wrote of a future coming of Christ and judgment of the world. Though their lives overlapped the lives of some of the apostles (e.g., John), they had never noticed, nor been informed of the A.D.70 eschaton. Apparently, John didn't know about it either—though he himself had previously written the Book of Revelation.

Eusebius gives unbroken lists of the bishops of several churches from the times of the apostles until his own day (fourth century). Also, many early fathers preserved memories of the apostles' lives that are not recorded in Acts, and give accounts of their manner of death. Unless they were blatantly fabricating these stories, they had to have a reliable set of traditions about the apostles that would be inexplicable if everyone who had known the apostles had disappeared from earth before these writers learned these stories.

It would be a strange providence of God to take from the world all the living Christians leaving behind only such esoteric New Testament documents as were unintelligible to every generation that followed until the 1970s. One may then be forgiven for asking why God made His word so obscure



without leaving behind someone or some document that could have guided the next generations away from what seems the obvious, but wrong, interpretation of every eschatological passage. Was it not necessary for the Church of two millennia to grasp the mysterious, deeply hidden meanings of the text? On the other hand, perhaps He actually has provided a Bible that actually means what every careful and sincere Bible scholar has always understood it to mean.

Suffice it to say that there is significant evidence that the Church did not disappear from the earth in A.D.70—and no evidence whatsoever that it did. This would seem to be a determinative consideration. The theory that the Resurrection and Rapture *must have* happened in A.D.70 rests only upon the unsupported assumption that they were predicted to occur then. That assumption, in turn, rests only upon a highly speculative exegesis of alleged time-texts, which we considered earlier. To question or revise history based upon a novel, unsupportable theological theory seems unwarranted, to say the very least.

### ***Conclusion:***

The *Parousia* and the Resurrection comprised the essence of what the apostolic Church longed for, and identified as their great hope. This hope strengthening them to suffer torture and death with fortitude. It seems incredible to think that this event, when it happened, went entirely unnoticed by history and evidently changed nothing for the Church on earth—nor for the Church in heaven, so far as we can know from scripture. For those saints who had placed so much stock in this great event, it certainly must have seemed to be a disappointment. It was so unnoticeable that, in order to believe it, they simply had to “take it by faith” (as we are being asked to do) that it had actually happened.

It produced (*contra* Paul’s predictions) no significant diminution of persecution for the Church, and no spiritual improvement in its character. Further, if *Full-Preterism* is correct, the Second Coming, Resurrection and Rapture were events that, for two thousand years after they occurred, were never known by any Christian to have taken place. More amazing still is the fact that even those who finally were bright enough to recognize that these events *must have* occurred in the first century still cannot agree on what exactly it was that supposedly happened!

Regardless which full-preterist view one takes of the Resurrection, the idea of any resurrection event in A.D.70 (whether individual or corporate) suffers from serious reasonable objections:

- 1) The final Resurrection is supposed to be the final vindication and glorification of the Church—the end of our afflictions and persecutions. However, after A.D.70, the Church entered centuries of far-worse persecution than what the apostles suffered under the Jews. Also, the Church did not become more glorious, but descended into corrupt and dead institutionalism. It is hard to name one factor that improved in the spiritual life or earthly circumstances of the Church in or around A.D.70.
- 2) The scriptures distinguish spiritual resurrection from physical resurrection (John 5:24-29; Rev.20:5-6), placing the first prior to A.D.70 (Eph.2:4; Col.3:13), and the second many centuries later (Rev.20:7-13). Full-preterists seem to conflate the two into one event that supposedly happened in A.D.70. When Paul refers to spiritual resurrection, he speaks of it as an already existing reality among his readers. He wrote and died before A.D.70. If all the benefits of the spiritual resurrection were enjoyed in Paul’s own time, what, along such lines, remained to be experienced after A.D.70?

- 3) In the Resurrection, it is “*Those who sleep in Jesus*” (1 Thess.4:14-16) that are said to be raised. Although all full-preterists deny any resurrection of physically dead bodies, they miss the obvious fact that “*those who sleep*” must refer to those physically dead (not “spiritually dead”). Sleep is a metaphor for physical death established by Christ Himself, and “waking” speaks of raising a dead body. Jesus set this precedent when speaking of the dead bodies of Jairus’ daughter and of Lazarus (Matt.9:24; John 11:11). That Paul, like Jesus, uses “sleep” as the metaphor for physical death is irrefutable. Those who *sleep in Jesus*, who are to be raised at His coming, cannot refer to those who are spiritually or *covenantally* “dead.” Those who “sleep” (the dead who are to be raised) are already said to be “*in Jesus.*” This expression would not apply to those described as spiritually “dead.”
- 4) There simply exists no evidence that any of this occurred in A.D.70.

As we said at the beginning of this chapter, the doctrine of the Resurrection is clearly a nemesis to *Full-Preterism*, whether they recognize this or not—and some do. Their explanations are *ad hoc* attempts to force the predictions into a theoretical timeframe to which they are hostile. This would not be necessary (nor possible) if one simply had the commitment to let each passage of scripture speak for itself, and fit into the proper place in God’s overall program. In any theological paradigm passages of one type go into one category, while passages of another types go into other categories. The round pegs go into the round holes; the square pegs belong in square holes. All pegs cannot legitimately be made to fit a system with only round holes.

## **Chapter Nine**

### **Key Disputed Passages on the Resurrection**

It is only natural that the portions of scripture that speak most directly and clearly about the Resurrection and the Judgment at the coming of Christ should become significant battlegrounds in the controversy between *Full-Preterism* and any historic approach to the subject of the Second Coming. Here we will look at the points of controversy in three important witnesses: Jesus's words about the Resurrection, Paul's Thessalonian correspondence, and 1 Corinthians 15.

#### **I. Jesus' and the Resurrection.**

It was apparently a common expectation among the Jews of Jesus' day that there would be a "Resurrection at the Last Day." Martha spoke of it as if everybody knew about it (John 11:24). We have seen in Chapter Seven that, to the Jewish mind, this would be a resurrection of physical bodies, being re-animated by the return of their spirits, which had departed at death. The Jews believed that the Resurrection of the Last Day would also be accompanied by a restoration of the creation to its ideal state. In other words, they believed the same things that Paul did, when he wrote in Romans 8:21-23—

*...because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.*

That Paul believed the same way the Jews did about these matters should be no surprise, since he announced his agreement with them on this very point: "I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust" (Acts 24:15). But did Jesus believe and teach the same doctrine?

Jesus used the standard Jewish language of the Resurrection that Martha had used, saying four times that He would raise His people up "at the last day." From Paul's statements in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15, we know that, at the Resurrection of the dead, the Rapture of the living saints will also occur. Both of these things—the Resurrection and the Rapture—must be included in Christ's reference to "raising them up" on the Last Day:

*This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day...No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day...Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:39, 40, 44, 54)*

Given the common expression among the Jews, "the Resurrection at the last day," it would be absurd to deny that Jesus was affirming that very doctrine in His words above. The verb "to raise up" (Gr. *anistemi*) means "to stand-up again" or "to cause [another] to stand-up again." Jesus uses the same verb of His own resurrection on the third day (Matt.17:9; 20:19). The same term refers to

people in general rising from the dead (Mark 12:23, 25; Luke 16:31; John 11:23, 24; 1 Thess.4:16). It is, therefore, the common word for the Resurrection of dead bodies.

Jesus said He would raise His own people at the Last Day. “The Last Day” means the final day of a given series of days. The most natural reference would be to the last day of the world as we know it, after which no other days occur (Rev.21:25). This would apparently be in keeping with the normal Jewish belief. According to Jesus, “the Last Day” is also the day when the wicked will be judged for their rejection of Christ: *“He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day”* (John 12:48).

Thus, the righteous and the unrighteous are both brought to life and judged on the same day. This is what we see in the parable of the sheep and the goats where “*all nations*” are called to account before Christ at His *Parousia*, and some (likened to goats) are consigned to “eternal fire,” while the others (likened to sheep) go into eternal life (Matt.25:31-46).

The full-preterist believes all of this occurred in A.D.70. That the wicked in Jerusalem could be said to have been judged in that event is reasonable enough, though the destruction of that city hardly fits Christ’s reference to the judgment of “*all nations*,” in Matthew 25:31-32. The reference to “*eternal fire*” (v.41) could conceivably be seen as an apocalyptic idealization for that tremendous holocaust—but we can find no warrant in the context for seeing it this way.

The advocates of *Covenant Eschatology* see the raising-up of the saints as a corporate, spiritual elevation of *status*—not a physical evacuating of the graves by rising bodies. They think they can support this idea by appeal to another statement of Christ’s on the Resurrection (John 5:28-29), and comparing that with the prediction of Daniel 12:2. I mentioned, in Chapter Seven, that we would return to this verse in Daniel, which is widely regarded as the clearest prediction of the Resurrection to be found in the Old Testament. Daniel wrote:

*And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake,  
Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt.*

The reference to both the righteous and the unrighteous rising at the same time is thought to correspond admirably to Jesus’ statement:

*Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the Resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the Resurrection of condemnation. (John 5:28-29)*

Full-preterists, and many other Christians, typically assume that these two passages can be seen in juxtaposition as both referring to the same event. I suggest that this identification of the two can be reasonably challenged, and may not be correct. There are only two features that the two passages have in common with each other: 1) Both use language (but not the same language) evoking the idea of dead people rising, and 2) Both include reference to the righteous and the unrighteous in the same passage. However, we have seen that language evoking the idea of the dead rising is occasionally used in scripture with reference to various phenomena besides the eschatological Resurrection.

For example, there is graphic imagery of resurrection in Ezekiel’s vision of the dry bones (Ezek.37). The prophecy is not actually about bodies rising, but about the restoration to life of the dead nation of Judah, scattered throughout the Babylonian Empire. Jesus and Paul both, on occasion, refer to salvation as a passing from death to life, which we generally understand as describing

spiritual regeneration.<sup>1</sup> Advocates of *Covenant Eschatology* believe that both Daniel 12:2 and John 5:28-29 are talking about a spiritual, corporate “resurrection” which is no more literal than Paul’s reference to our having been “*dead in trespasses and sins*” and been brought to life at salvation. More often, both passages are taken to refer to the physical Resurrection of the Last Day.

I am going to argue that, in these two passages, Daniel and Jesus are not both describing the same event. Their respective statements have common imagery, but only such as is used differently in different contexts. It is the things they do not share in common that I find more significant. Let me enumerate some of them:

- 1) Daniel speaks of those who “sleep in the dust,” while Jesus speaks of those who are “in the graves.” Both phrases can certainly refer to the same thing. Yet, given the common use of death imagery to depict different phenomena in different contexts, they might not. What is noteworthy is that, if Jesus was consciously alluding to Daniel 12, it is strange that He neither quoted it nor used expressions more verbally similar to it.
- 2) Daniel speaks of the sleeping ones “awakening,” while Jesus speaks of those in the graves “coming forth.” Again, these can easily be seen as synonymous ideas where context warrants, but it is still strange that Jesus avoids using the same terminology as Daniel, if He is, in fact, alluding to Daniel’s statement (especially given the fact that Jesus, on other occasions, speaks of dead people’s rising as their being “awakened”<sup>2</sup>).
- 3) Daniel only speaks of “*many of those who sleep*” awakening, while Jesus speaks of “*all who are in the graves*” coming forth. There is a clear contrast between the “many” and “all.” In some cases “all” could be referred to as “many” (e.g., compare Mark 10:45 with 1 Tim.2:6). If Daniel had said “Many sleeping shall awake,” it would be possible for us to say, “He means that all of them will awake—and their number is many, not few.” But when one says “many of those who sleep” it specifically indicates that only a portion of the whole group is intended. So Daniel speaks of something affecting many of those he describes as sleeping in the dust, while Jesus speaks of everybody that is in a grave—i.e., all the dead bodies.
- 4) The outcomes are not verbally the same. Though the idea could easily be the same, expressed in different words, it is the different words that raise questions of whether or not Jesus was alluding to that specific passage in Daniel. In Daniel 12, the two groups rise—on the one hand, to “*everlasting life*” (which could be the spiritual resurrection of which Paul speaks, in Eph.2:5 and Col.2:12), and, on the other hand, to “*everlasting shame and contempt.*”

This last phrase is popularly quoted in support of the doctrine of eternal torment in hell. However, Daniel does not speak of the conscious experience of those in this group, but of the attitudes of others toward them. Without holding any particular theories of the afterlife, one might justly say that Adolph Hitler is currently the object of everlasting shame and contempt—that is, in the memory and assessment of him by the world. Jesus, on the other hand, speaks of a “*resurrection of life*” for the one group, and a “*resurrection of condemnation,*” for the other. Again, I am not saying that these two expressions cannot be merged with Daniel’s language in meaning, but by avoiding any linguistic overlap between His own and

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<sup>1</sup> John 5:24; Ephesians 2:5; Colossians 2:13

<sup>2</sup> E.g., John 11:11

Daniel's statements, Jesus provides no evidence that the passage in Daniel informs His own, or is even necessarily on the same subject.

There appears to be a closer parallel with Daniel 12:2 (though, again, not a direct quotation) in the prophecy of Simeon, speaking with reference to the infant Jesus in the temple: "*Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel...*" (Luke 2:34). The word "rising," by the way, is *anastasis*, in Greek—the normal word for "resurrection." However, Simeon is not speaking here of the global Resurrection of the Last Day, but (like Daniel) of something that would occur to "*many in Israel*," as a result of Jesus' having come.

Like Daniel (and Ezekiel before him), Simeon uses the *language* of resurrection, but is almost certainly not referring the actual Resurrection at the Last Day. We can conclude this from his speaking of these events affecting people specifically "in Israel," whereas the Resurrection will affect "*all nations*" and "*all who are in the graves*."

I believe that Simeon and Daniel both speak of the spiritual resurrection through rebirth of Israel's faithful remnant who embraced Christ—and also of the "fall" of the corrupt power structure in Israel, in A.D.70—resulting in everlasting shame and contempt upon them (e.g., consider the connotations that have come to be attached to the word "Pharisee" over the past two thousand years). The righteous would "awaken" to God in rebirth and eternal life—as Paul wrote in what many consider to have been a baptismal formula, "*Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light*" (Eph.5:14). By contrast, the apostate Jews who had been given "*a spirit of stupor*" (Rom.11:8) would "awaken" from their apathy to discover the Romans crashing through their walls and destroying their nation.

There are reasons for believing that Daniel and Simeon were both describing such a dual-awakening in Israel. First, because Daniel 12:1, as is widely conceded, speaks of the "*great tribulation*" which Jesus associated with the judgment coming upon Jerusalem in His disciples' own generation (Matt.24:21, 34). Second, because of what Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1:10-12.

Peter described prophets of the Old Testament who spoke "*of the grace that would come to you*," and how they inquired of God desiring greater information about the meaning of their own prophecies—but were told it was not for them to know. We know of only one Old Testament prophet that this could be describing—Daniel, in Daniel 12:8-9. Yet, Peter said that these prophecies were speaking of the salvation that had now come to his readers in the first century (1 Pet.1:10). Peter thus seems to see Daniel 12 as describing New Testament salvation and grace in the time of his readers. They would identify with those who were awakening to eternal life, of whom Daniel wrote.

Full-preterists, of course, would agree with this identification, for the most part. However, I believe they err in assuming that this prophecy in Daniel is addressing the same subject as the words of Jesus in John 5:28-29. As a result, they make Jesus' words, as well as Daniel's, apply to A.D.70. I have challenged the identification of these two passages with the same subject. Looking more closely at John 5, and the context of Jesus' statement, will tend to confirm my suspicions. Let us examine the whole passage:

*24 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. 25 Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live... 28 Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice 29 and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.*

The words of Jesus that we have been considering begin with the words, *“Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth...”* (vv.28f). We find the phrase, *“the hour is coming...”* (referring to something still in the future of His listeners) and He speaks of the graves being emptied of bodies (there is nothing else in graves but physical remains of the dead), so this is the future physical Resurrection.

But this phrase, *“the hour is coming”* has occurred earlier, in verse 25, where Jesus said, *“the hour is coming, and now is...”* What does this strange expression mean? It seems to speak of something yet future, which, in some sense, was also already true. The phenomenon that Jesus described as both future and present is described in these words: *“the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live.”*

This sounds a lot like verse 28—but not exactly. In verse 25, it is *“the dead”* who hear the voice of Christ and *“live,”* while, in verse 28, it is specifically said to be *“all who are in the graves”* who hear His voice and *“come forth.”* Aren’t these statements identical? They could be, but the context suggests not. Those who are in the graves are, specifically, the bodies of those who have physically died. By contrast, *“the dead”* is not quite so specific. It can include dead bodies, but also can mean “dead” in a spiritual sense. The “dead” can refer to both categories—dead bodies and dead souls. To introduce the latter concept is not gratuitous, since the previous verse (24) specifically mentions the regeneration of believers who had been spiritually dead and who were at that very moment hearing the voice of the Son of God and living:

*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.*

The passage thus speaks, in a sense, of two “resurrections”—a spiritual one that was already happening in the present and a physical one that would occur in the future. This explains why, when speaking generically of “dead” people (first the spiritually dead, then the physical dead bodies) hearing His voice and coming to life, Jesus says, *“the hour is coming, and now is...”* Dead people (i.e., *spiritually dead*) were already coming to life by heeding His voice (as per v.24), but there was also a future hour predicted in which the *dead bodies* will also hear His voice and come back from their graves (vv.28-29). Verse 25 speaks of both phenomena, the present and the future. Verse 24 describes the present, and verses 28-29 speak of the future. The present one (v.24) is clearly a spiritual resurrection, while the future one (v.28) is clearly physical.

This is why verse, 25 (speaking of both) says, *“the hour is coming, and now is, when...”* while verse 28, speaking only of the physical resurrection, only says *“the hour is coming....”* (omitted the second phrase).

Full-preterists believe that there is only one resurrection in view through the whole passage. They think the expression *“the hour is coming, and now is...”* to be essentially synonymous with *“the hour is coming...”* This seems a rather glaring failure to recognize that the statements of timing are not the same, and that the spiritual resurrection of verse 24 is contrasted with the Resurrection from the graves, in verses 28-29.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Dispensationalists also have something they should observe in Jesus’ teaching on this subject. They believe that the righteous (the Church) will rise prior to the tribulation and the millennium, and that the wicked will rise and be judged at the end of those two periods. Thus, the wicked are raised and judged (they believe) 1,007 years after the righteous are. Yet, Jesus said that both groups will rise in the same “hour”—and that the

To put it another way: There is the basic proposition, broken into two parts: Hearing the voice of Christ causes dead people to come to life (vv.24-29)

1. In the future (*"the hour is coming"*), this will be realized in the resurrection of the bodies in the graves (vv.28-29).
2. In the present (*"and now is"*), spiritually dead people are already coming to spiritual life (v.24)
3. Thus, *"the hour is coming and now is"* in which the dead hear the voice of Christ and come to life (v.25).

These three points are all affirmed by Jesus, in John 5:24-29, but in a different order than that which I have just presented. It is possible that many will not find the following diagram helpful, but some may. The middle column has the generic statement (v.25) speaking of the truth that is both (in one sense) present and (in another sense) future—*"is coming and now is."* The column on the left gives the specific information about the present reality of the statement (v.24), whereas the column on the right (vv.28-29) give the future fulfillment of that which "is coming" (not the "now is").

John 5:24	John 5:25	John 5:28-29
<i>Most assuredly, I say to you,</i>	<i>Most assuredly, I say to you,</i>	<i>Do not marvel at this—</i>
	<i>the hour is coming,</i>	<i>for the hour is coming</i>
		<i>in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice</i>
<i>he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me</i>	<i>and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God</i>	
<i>has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.</i>	<i>And those who hear will live...</i>	<i><sup>29</sup> and come forth those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.</i>

Thus, Jesus affirms the Jewish expectation of the future resurrection of the dead bodies (which was never fulfilled in A.D.70 or any other time in the past), while affirming the present, spiritual counterpart—which was not future (that is, it did not await A.D.70 to happen).

## II. The Thessalonian Correspondence

The Thessalonian epistles are reasonably referred to as the "eschatological epistles," owing to the extraordinary degree to which they focus on matters of Christ's Second Coming, the Resurrection and

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Resurrection of Christ's disciples will be *"at the last day"*—the same "last day" in which the wicked are judged. Paul, likewise, believed in a single, last-day resurrection, *"both of the just and the unjust"* (Acts 24:15). Jesus also placed the judgment of both the sheep and the goats at the same hearing, occurring *"when the Son of Man comes in His glory"* (Matt.25:31ff).



the Rapture of the Church. Of the 88 verses in 1 Thessalonians, at least 21 (about a quarter) deal with the coming of Christ and its related events. Likewise, of the 47 verses in 2 Thessalonians, fully 17 (over a third) are concerned with eschatological matters. There are longer treatments of these matters in scripture (e.g., 1 Corinthians 15), but there are no other canonical books that are so focused in their entirety on such matters.

Paul had spent only a few weeks in Thessalonica, and succeeded in planting a congregation there before being run out of town by those who were offended that he preached “*another King—Jesus.*” Though the opposition was initially stirred up by the Jews of the synagogue, it was the loyal citizens of Caesar who carried out the persecution and brought about the expulsion of Paul from the city (Acts 17:1-9). We do not know who (the Jews or the Gentiles) continued the persecution of the Church there after Paul left. Most scholars would agree that Paul wrote his two epistles to the Church in Thessalonica shortly, perhaps weeks or months at the most, after his leaving them. This makes these two letters the earliest written documents in the New Testament to mention these eschatological events.<sup>4</sup>

#### 1) 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18

The essential passage about the Resurrection and the Rapture, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18, contains no specific time indicators, though full-preterists think Paul’s pronouns—especially “*we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord*” suggest He expected fulfillment in his own lifetime. If he did, then he was mistaken, since neither the end of the world, nor A.D.70, occurred in Paul’s lifetime. We spent half of Chapter Six discussing these pronouns, and showing that they cannot actually be seen as time indicators.

Another imagined time limitation is thought to exist in Paul’s introductory phrase, “*For this we say to you by the word of the Lord...*” (4:15). These words sound as if Paul may be repeating something Jesus had previously taught on the subject, rather than introducing Paul’s original, personal insights. Full-preterists point out that there are parallels between the wording of this passage and that found in the Olivet Discourse. The latter does in fact contain a clear time indicator—“*this generation shall by no means pass*” (Matt.24:34). To them, this proves that Paul, in 1 Thessalonians, like Jesus, in that earlier discourse to which Paul is referring, must also be talking about A.D.70.

The expression, “*we say...by the word of the Lord*” may indeed be alluding to something Jesus had previously said, which Paul is now reaffirming or expanding upon. This might find its analogue in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, where Paul refers back to Christ’s teaching on divorce and disclaims any originality, with the words, “*I command, yet not I but the Lord*”—which is not the same wording as here, but similar.

Yet we know that Paul also received private, special revelations from Christ following his conversion,<sup>5</sup> and he may here be referring to something the Lord revealed through one of those experiences, rather than anything Jesus had said while on earth.

We know that Paul, on occasion, would say that he was speaking, “*on Christ’s behalf*” and “*as though God were pleading through us*”<sup>6</sup>—that is, he was speaking as Christ’s authorized agent. For this reason he could say that the instructions he gave the Churches (e.g., about church gathering

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<sup>4</sup> The Gospels and Acts were not yet written, and only Galatians, of Paul’s epistles, was earlier—but it did not discuss eschatology. No one knows when James was written, but it was probably not as early as the Thessalonian epistles.

<sup>5</sup> Acts 22:17-21; Galatians 1:11-12; 2 Corinthians 12:1, 7

<sup>6</sup> 2 Corinthians 2:10; 5:20

protocols) were to be regarded as “*the commandments of the Lord*,”<sup>7</sup> though they were not derived from any known teachings of Christ. Therefore, we cannot be certain that Paul’s introductory phrase in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 implies any dependency he had on earlier recorded teachings of Jesus.

In any case, the similarities between Paul’s teaching in 1 Thessalonians and the Olivet Discourse are really very few and unspecific. Let’s compare the two passages.

The Olivet Discourse speaks of:

- the sun, moon and stars and the powers of the heavens being shaken (Matt., Mark and Luke);
- distress of nations, waves roaring, men’s hearts failing for fear (Luke);
- the appearance of the “sign” of the Son of Man in heaven and the mourning of the tribes of the land (Matt.);
- the Son of Man coming in clouds (Matt., Mark, and Luke);
- the angels (messengers) being sent out to gather the elect (Matt. and Mark);
- the sound of a trumpet (Matt.).

In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul mentions the following:

- the Lord’s personal descent from heaven;
- a shout, the voice of an archangel, and the trumpet of God;
- the dead raised;
- the living saints Raptured to meet them in the clouds
- Christians, from that point onward, being forever with the Lord

A complete comparison of the two prophecies will show that they parallel only at two points:

- 1) Christ “coming” (a very generic imagery, applicable to various events in history); and
- 2) The sound of a trumpet, which is also found in Paul’s other Resurrection/Rapture discussion (1 Cor.15:52). “Trumpets” and “shouts” are extremely common judgment accompaniments in scripture, and are mentioned together in many battle and judgment contexts (e.g., Job 29:35; Ps.47:5; Isa.58:1; Hos.5:8; Amos 2:2; Zech.9:14; Rev.1:10).

While the Olivet Discourse appears to be using the kind of generic language that might, in various contexts, refer to any number of judgment scenes, only 1 Thessalonians mentions the Resurrection and the Rapture, as well as the descent of “*the Lord Himself*.”<sup>8</sup> I made these observations in my debate with Don Preston, two which he responded with a two-fold answer.

First, he said that not much should be made of the word “*Himself*,” even though it is emphatic and not found in generic passages about God’s other “comings” to judge wicked nations.

Second, Preston took pains to demonstrate, what I would in no way challenge, that two passages may legitimately describe the same event without including all the same details in both.

No one would dispute this second point, but this misses the purpose of my showing these contrasts between the passages. We have not argued that the two passages must not be describing

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<sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:37

<sup>8</sup> The mention of His coming “with clouds,” so common in the apocalyptic judgment scenes, is not actually found in this passage (other than the saints being caught up into the clouds—a different image), nor in any passage which unambiguously describes the final *Parousia*.

the same event *on account of their including different details*—though the differences are considerable, and might reasonably be thought to be indicative of different subject matter. Our argument is that Paul, in writing his account, does not demonstrate any dependency upon the Olivet Discourse, as Preston claimed to exist. The argument of the full-preterist is that Paul’s phrase “this we say...*by the word of the Lord*” is a statement of his dependency upon that earlier discourse—which is the only way that one could import the time-text of the latter into 1 Thessalonians 4. If Paul is not referring to the Olivet Discourse, then there is no a priori reason to assume he is speaking of the same event discussed there (*viz.*, the destruction of Jerusalem). Preston wants to apply the Olivet time-text to 1 Thessalonians, which requires that he prove the subject matter in both passages to be the same. This can most readily be accomplished by Preston’s asserting that Paul is alluding to that discourse in his discussion of the Resurrection and Rapture.

At this point I am not interested in proving that the two passages are describing different subject matter (i.e., the A.D.70 events in Olivet, and the end of the world in Thessalonians), I am demonstrating that there is no evidence of Paul’s dependency on that discourse in his teaching in 1 Thessalonians. Paul’s focus is on the Resurrection and the Rapture at the coming of Christ. The Olivet Discourse does not make any unambiguous mention of these two things. If Paul is dependent upon Christ’s teaching for these points, he would not have taken them from that famous discourse—but perhaps from another.

We have already seen that, in John 6, Jesus mentions four times<sup>9</sup> that He will raise up His people “*at the last day*.” This raising up of Christ’s people is not a feature of the Olivet Discourse, but is the primary feature in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, and is best understood as a reference to the Resurrection and the Rapture. If Paul depended upon Jesus for his teaching on the Resurrection, it would have to be from statements like those in John 6, rather than from the Olivet Discourse, which did not discuss those subjects.

In John 6, we find no allusion to the *timing* of this raising-up, other than the repeated phrase, “*at the last day*.” “*The last day*” seems to have been a well-known expression among the Jews, since Martha spoke in a matter-of-fact manner of “*the Resurrection at the last day*.”<sup>10</sup> This would seem to connect Jesus’ statements with the ordinary Jewish belief in the Resurrection, which (as we have seen in Chapter Seven) was very much like the traditional Christian concept of a physical resurrection to dwell on a renewed earth.

Since Paul emphatically declares that his own view of the Resurrection mirrors that of the Jews (Acts 24:14-15), we can be assured that “*the last day*” of Jesus’ statements, and the Resurrection of 1 Thessalonians 4:16, do not refer to A.D.70—since no resurrection fulfilling anything remotely like the Jewish expectations can be claimed or demonstrated to have occurred at that time.

The view of *Covenant Eschatology* that the “Resurrection” refers to a new degree of privilege for the people of God, who *corporately* shed their Old Covenant status in favor of the New, hardly fits Paul’s wording. Paul does not describe one event affecting all the saints collectively, but two that affect different categories. One event affects the “sleeping” (i.e., dead) saints and another affects those still living. Paul distinguishes between those who have died, and those who remain alive. It is not clear why he would distinguish between these categories if he is not discussing individuals. Was part of the Old Jewish Order sleeping and the other part alive? He can’t be referring to the Jewish temple system anyway, since those who are dead are said to be “in Christ,” not “in Moses.” Paul certainly seems to be discussing the distinct experiences of different people, some living and some dead, in this passage. The experiences he describes cannot reasonably be seen to have occurred in A.D.70.

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<sup>9</sup> Vv.39, 40, 44, 54

<sup>10</sup> John 11:24

## 2) 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3

When we come to 1 Thessalonians 5:1ff, we find Paul continuing to discuss the “*day of the Lord*” (5:2), which he seems to equate with the “*coming of the Lord*” (4:15). Paul says that this day will come “*as a thief in the night*,”<sup>11</sup> at a time when people are experiencing a false sense of “*peace and safety*.”<sup>12</sup> There is no specific reference to resurrection in these verses, but they follow, without a break, Paul’s discussion of that subject, and seem to continue on the same topic.

Full-preterists point out that the “*thief in the night*” comparison arises from Jesus’ use of it in the Olivet Discourse which contains the time indicator of fulfillment in “*this generation*.”<sup>13</sup> The fact that the thief comparison occurs first in the Olivet Discourse does not predict for its having the same meaning in every later occurrence of the phrase. For example, in Revelation 3:3 Jesus warns the Church at Sardis that if they fail to watch He will come to them “*as a thief*.” That particular church no longer exists, so this threat cannot occur in the future. Neither was it fulfilled when Jerusalem was destroyed, but centuries later. In other words, there is at least this one “coming” of Christ “*like a thief*” which was not referring to A.D.70, and there might be other judgment events (including the last one on the last day) which could likewise be described in those terms.

## 3) 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9

Like the verses just considered, this passage does not mention the Resurrection *per se*, but it does describe the Second Coming and the Judgment, which correlate chronologically with the Resurrection in the New Testament’s other eschatological discussions.

We discussed one aspect of this passage in Chapter Six, where we examined the claims made by full-preterists concerning Paul’s choice of pronouns. Here we need to look at a different argument, arising from verse 9, in particular, which reads:

*These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.*

In our 2013 debate, Don Preston made the following points about 2 Thessalonians 1:9 (where the wicked are said to suffer “*eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord*”):

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<sup>11</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:2

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, v.3

<sup>13</sup> It is not necessary to believe that the phrase, *thief in the night*, refers to A.D.70 in Matthew 24:43 (or anywhere else). We will analyze the Olivet Discourse in great detail, in Chapters Thirteen and Fourteen, but I will say here that the simile of the *thief in the night* is found in the second part of that discourse, *after* the section which Jesus said would occur in His generation. My argument will be that there is one event, the destruction of Jerusalem, discussed in Matthew 24:1-34, and another, the Second Coming of Christ on the Last Day, that occupies the later portion of Matthew 24 and 25.

As I also point out, in those chapters, that what came upon the Jews in A.D.70 did not come suddenly, at a time when the Jews were feeling secure and at peace. The destruction of Jerusalem came at the end of a protracted and horrendous war, in which no sane person felt secure or at peace during a period extending over more than three years. The “*sudden destruction*” of 1 Thessalonians 5:1ff hardly can be thought to describe that event or time.

- A) In talking about the Second Coming of Christ, Paul says that the wicked will be destroyed “*from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power*” (2 Thess.1:9). This precise phrase is found in Isaiah 2:9-10, 19-21, in the Septuagint, which Paul is apparently quoting;
- B) In Isaiah 2, this refers to the destruction of Jerusalem, as is clear from the fact that it follows upon the establishment of the spiritual Zion (in the first four verses of the chapter), and also from the fact that Jesus, when talking about A.D.70, cites Isaiah 2, in Luke 23:30;
- C) Paul is using specifically *covenantal* language, applicable only to Israel, as he speaks of people being expelled “*from the presence of the Lord.*” Only Israel was ever given the privilege of being “in the presence of the Lord” (it was a covenantal privilege), so only they could be expelled from the presence of the Lord, as they were in A.D.70.

His conclusion: This means that Paul is using Old Testament language to speak of the end of the Old Covenant. He is describing Christ’s “coming” in A.D.70, not at the end of the world, and the ones being judged are the Jewish persecutors of the Thessalonian Christians.

When Preston made this argument, I confessed that it contained information I had never heard before, and would have to look into more fully. I also acknowledged that given the premises outlined above, it seemed like a formidable argument—and it was, *until* I looked into the validity of its premises. What I found was:

- A. Paul was, indeed, using the same phrase that occurred twice in Isaiah 2—just as Preston claimed. Beyond this, the other premises became questionable. While it is true that Paul uses a phrase from Isaiah 2, he does not use it in the same manner as does Isaiah. In Isaiah 2:10 and 21 the Greek phrase reads “*from in front of the fear of the Lord and from the glory of his strength.*” In 2 Thessalonians 1:9 Paul borrows the last seven words of this clause, but changes the earlier part, reading: “*from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his strength.*”

Thus, “*from the fear of the Lord,*” in Isaiah, is changed to “*from the face (or presence) of the Lord,*” by Paul (clearly not an exact quote). Paul obviously lifted the phrase “*from the glory of his strength,*” but he did not bother to quote Isaiah’s longer clause verbatim. Insofar as he could be said to be “quoting” the last few words, it cannot be insisted that he was thinking of the context in which it occurred in Isaiah—less still, that he was identifying the judgment in Isaiah 2 with that which he was describing.

Beyond this, Paul’s use of the phrase is entirely different. Isaiah describes the idols of the people being cast into the caves *from in front of the fear of the Lord and from the glory of his strength*. This seems to refer to the people being ashamed of their idols, and trying to conceal them from God in the time of judgment. By contrast, Paul is talking about people themselves experiencing destruction *from the face [or presence] of the Lord and from the glory of his strength.* The two ideas are quite distinct. Only the phraseology, not the idea or the event, are shared in common.

- B. The reasons given for identifying Isaiah 2 with A.D.70 are invalid.
  - While it is true that the first four verses of Isaiah 2 describe the Messianic Kingdom of the New Covenant, this is chronologically irrelevant since Isaiah intersperses longer and shorter stand-alone kingdom passages like this throughout his book, and they often do not

connect nor correlate chronologically with the material before or after them. In Chapters 11-12, Isaiah provides another example. This passage is preceded by the prophesy of the doom of Israel in 722 B.C. and is followed by several chapters predicting the fall of pagan nations, including Babylon, Philistia, Moab, Syria, and other nations, most of which fell in the sixth century before Christ. Babylon itself fell in 538 B.C. to the Medes and Persians. The mention of the New Covenant Era in Chapters 11 and 12 (the same era as described in 2:1-4) is not followed by descriptions of A.D.70. This is true of many Messianic passages. Meaning there is no *prima facie* basis for thinking Isaiah 2:5ff is related chronologically to the vision in the opening four verses.

- In Luke 23:30, Jesus actually did not cite anything from Isaiah 2, as Preston claimed. He quoted from Hosea 10:8, which also is not about A.D.70 but about the destruction of Samaria in 722 B.C. (see v.7), when plunder was carried off to Assyria (v.6). This means that nothing in Isaiah 2 remains to tie it directly to A.D.70. In fact, the principal offense for which Judah is being judged in Isaiah 2:5ff is their making and worshiping of idols. After the Babylonian exile, Israel never returned to such practices, and were, therefore, not guilty of that particular sin when they were judged in A.D.70.
  - Jesus quoted Hosea's words and applied them to a judgment event (the Roman invasion of Jerusalem) which was entirely different from that addressed in Hosea (722 B.C.). The reference to people calling on rocks and mountains to cover them from wrath seems sufficiently commonplace as to allow it to be used in describing various historical circumstances. Isaiah 2 uses similar imagery (but not the same words) in verses 10, 20, 21, in describing the crisis of Assyria's invasion of Judah—yet a third judgment event.
- C. Preston errs in his interpretation by following a flawed English translation of 2 Thessalonians 1:9. Paul wrote that the disobedient will suffer "*destruction from the presence of the Lord*" at Christ's coming. That is, the destruction comes from the *face*, or from the *presence*, of the Lord. The expression Paul uses, "*from the presence of the Lord*" has no actual parallel in Isaiah 2. Such a phrase is found in one other place in the New Testament where Peter says that, if his hearers will repent, they will experience times of refreshing "*from the presence of the Lord*" (Acts 3:19). The statements are related in meaning: The repentant receive blessing "*from the presence of the Lord*" while the unrepentant receive destruction "*from the presence of the Lord.*" Nobody is said to be "*excluded from the presence of the Lord.*"
- No one is said to have been, previously "in the presence of the Lord," nor is anyone in this place said to be *excluded* from the presence of the Lord. "The presence of the Lord" is not referring to a place of privilege from which someone is being excluded. The phrase identifies the *source* of the destruction. The destruction *comes from* the presence of the Lord. This is the same idea as that found in the following chapter, where Paul speaks of the fate of the "*lawless one...whom the Lord will consume by the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming*" (2 Thess.2:8). Thus, the destruction of the lawless one, like that of the rebels, in 1:9, *is occasioned by* the presence of the Lord and the brightness of His coming. There is no specific reference to anyone's "banishment" in the passage.

Preston's confusion arises from the fact that many modern translations hold to the view that Paul, in 2 Thessalonians 1:9, is talking about eternal punishment of sinners in hell—and that hell is, by

definition, banishment from the presence of God. In order to make Paul seem to say this, many translators gratuitously add some additional word into the English versions. Before the expression “*from the presence of the Lord*,” some translators add misleading words like “away” (NASB, ESV, NET), “shut out” (NIV), “separated” (NRSV, NLT). This gives the false impression that the nature of the destruction is to be “away from,” “shut out from,” or “separated from” the presence of God. Of major translations, I found only KJV, NKJV, CSB, and Young’s Literal Translation to be honest enough to avoid adding words that Paul did not include. The CSB accurately reads, “*eternal destruction from the Lord’s presence*.” The ESV is one of those that wrongfully adds the word “away,” but redeems itself with a footnote that reads: “Or *destruction that comes from*.”

Preston’s entire case for “covenantal language” in 2 Thessalonians 1:9 is based on the assumption that Paul describes people being excluded from God’s presence. He indicates that the Jews had a covenantal privilege of dwelling in God’s presence, so Paul must be speaking about them. However, when we realize that Paul does not speak of anyone being “shut out from” God’s presence, this argument evaporates.

Full-preterists should be glad that this is so, since they apply both this passage and Revelation 14:10 to the same judgment in A.D.70. In Revelation, apparently speaking of the judgment of Jerusalem, the punishment is said to take place “*in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb*.” This would suggest that 2 Thessalonians 1:9, by Preston’s preferred reading, would not speak of the judgment upon Jerusalem. It would seem strange for John to describe a judgment as people suffering *in the presence of Christ*, and for Paul to speak of the same judgment as people being *shut out from the presence of Christ*.

### III. 1 Corinthians 15

The most extensive discussion of the doctrine of the Resurrection is found in 1 Corinthians 15. This is sometimes called “The Resurrection Chapter” of the Bible, just as 1 Corinthians 13 is called “The Love Chapter” and Hebrews 11 as “The Faith Chapter.”

Full-preterists may follow King’s and Preston’s *Covenant Eschatology*, which denies that physical bodies will individually experience resurrection, but argues that the entire people of God, corporately and collectively, experienced a covenantal recalibration. As we have repeatedly mentioned, this apparently did not result in a change in anyone’s subjective experience, but only in their possessing of a new, objective status with God. If so, then it is hard to see how Paul believing such a thing would have asserted anything that he wrote in this chapter.

Alternatively, full-preterists may follow Edward Stevens and the “Individual Body at Death” view, which indicates that the physical bodies, which were dead and buried, were exchanged in heaven for different bodies suited not for earth but for heaven. This would mean that the dead bodies were not actually “resurrected” at all—only replaced. The biblical word resurrection (*anastasis*) means *to stand again*, and the only dead body that can stand “again” is one that was standing at a time prior to death.

In any case, though they find a few specific verses in the chapter to encourage them (we will look at those), full-preterists do not hold to a view that can otherwise make much sense of 1 Corinthians 15.

Because it is fairly obvious, there is widespread scholarly agreement that Paul is writing here to correct some in the Church of Corinth who were rejecting the Christian doctrine of the Resurrection of the dead. They were not denying that Christ had risen, but they were rejecting the hope of believers being resurrected at the Last Day. The nature of this error seems to be related to Greek philosophy.

The Corinthians were Greeks, who seemed to tend toward an inflated opinion of their own philosophical sophistication.<sup>14</sup>

Jews and Christians believed in the innate goodness of the physical creation (Gen.1:31), though it had been marred by human sin. They looked forward to its renewal and to their participation in it with perfect bodies. The Greeks had the exact opposite idea. They believed that the physical world had by nature an inherent evil taint and that only what was purely *spiritual* was truly good. Therefore, the physical human body was considered inferior as part of the evil physical realm. A man's body was considered a prison to his pure spirit. Death was viewed as a release of the spirit from this prison of the body. This is what Greek philosophy desired in death—to be freed from the physical realm. The idea of having been released from that realm and then afterward to be placed back into the physical body forever was considered an atrocious and absurd prospect.

Paul, and all right-thinking Christians, clearly held to the Jewish view, but some of the Corinthians, being Greeks, inclined the other way. Paul needed to overcome their cultural prejudice against physical resurrection. He did this by reminding them that they had already embraced the Gospel that included the confident affirmation of Christ's physical resurrection (vv.1-11). He then said that it is inconsistent to believe that Christ Himself arose physically, and, at the same time, to deny the validity of the whole concept of physical resurrection (vv.12-19).

Paul then explains that Christ's resurrection was the prototype of our own resurrection just as Adam's death was the prototype of our own deaths. Like the *firstfruits* of a general harvest, the resurrected Christ is the harbinger of a greater resurrection of the same kind for His people (vv.20-28). Since Christ's resurrection was a personal and physical one, Paul gives the distinct impression that the same must be true of our own resurrection—the general harvest of which Christ's resurrection was the *firstfruits*. It is in the definition of firstfruits that they be of the same substance and nature as that of the crop itself that shall afterward be harvested.

If any in Corinth were denying that Paul himself believed in the Resurrection of the dead, Paul says, they must not be paying attention to the way he and other Christians lived their present lives—facing mortal danger without recoiling from it (vv.29-34). No Jew or Christian wished to be permanently disembodied—as Paul elsewhere mentions (2 Cor.5:4). If Paul had no fear of physical death, it is because he shared the Christian hope of physical immortality in the Resurrection.

In the next section (vv.35ff), Paul teaches that it is foolish to deny the concept of, or to speculate about the nature of, the resurrected body. We have its parallel in the planting and growing of seeds. As Jesus had said, using the same analogy of His own death and resurrection (John 12:24), the seed must die before it springs back to life. Paul affirms the same fact (vv.35-38). The seed analogy points out that the resurrected body is different in many respects from, but has continuity with, the mortal body that died and was buried.

Paul implies that one should not assume there to be only one kind of body, since men and animals have different kinds of bodies and that even the celestial "bodies" differ in brightness from one another (vv.39-41). Similarly, our natural bodies are not of the same nature as the resurrected bodies. Though they are the same ones that are buried, they come up transformed—from perishable to imperishable; from dishonorable to glorious; from weak to powerful; from natural to spiritual (vv.42-46). It is the same body that is buried in one state that emerges from the grave in another state—just as was true of Christ in His resurrection. He was not given a different body instead of His previous body, which would then have been abandoned to remain in the tomb. Christ's tomb was empty

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<sup>14</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:18-23; 2:4-7; 3:18-20; 4:10; 8:1-3; 2 Corinthians 11:19



because it was the same body (now transformed) that was raised. This is also why the resurrected body of Christ bore the same wounds as did the body previously laid to rest. It was the same body.

Paul explicitly affirms what might have been deduced from the “*firstfruits*” metaphor, namely, that our resurrected bodies will bear the likeness of Christ’s resurrected body (vv.45-49). It is said, both of Christ’s and of our resurrected bodies, that they are no longer made of *dust* (vv.47-49), nor are they “*natural*” (v.44, 46), nor are they “*flesh and blood*” (v.50). They are “*spiritual*.” In this case, “*spiritual*” or “*spirit*” are not, as we might imagine, contrasted with physical. They are contrasted with “*natural*.” That word in Greek is *psuchikos*, meaning “*of soul*.” Adam was made a living “*soul*” (Gr. *psuche*)—but Christ was made a life-giving “*spirit*” (v.45). Our bodies are planted as bodies “*of soul*” but are raised bodies “*of spirit*” (v.44). This distinction is never explained. However, the first term is always associated with natural life, as is also the expression “*flesh and blood*.” That a body is “*soulish*” must mean that it is animated by the life of the soul, or blood—or natural life—even as animals are (see Hebrew “*nephesh*”—Gen.2:7, 19).

The second term (*spiritual*), by contrast, must mean animated by “*supernatural life*” or “*spiritual life*.” Jesus’ body after resurrection had “*flesh and bones*,”<sup>15</sup> but was not, apparently, “*flesh and blood*.” It was physical and tangible, but it was also supernatural and spiritual.

In the Resurrection, we do not get completely different bodies, but the corruptible ones we have “*put on incorruption*,” and the mortal ones we have “*put on immortality*” (v. 52-54). The next verses emphasize this aspect of the immortality and incorruptibility of the resurrected bodies (vv.50-55), and the chapter closes with encouragement to persevere in their work for Christ.

There are two features at the end of Paul’s discussion that may give one pause in the rejection of the “*Corporate Body View*” of teachers like Don Preston. We confess that these points have a measure of cogency, though they are not sufficient to overthrow Paul’s arguments throughout the chapter, or elsewhere in scripture.

First, Don Preston has pointed out that 1 Corinthians 15:54 alludes to Isaiah 25:8—

*So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”*

How does this verse serve Preston’s purpose? Well, it can be persuasively argued that earlier verses in Isaiah 25 describe the end of the Old Covenant with the coming of the New Order in the Messiah. Verse 2 mentions the destruction of a city that is most likely Jerusalem, followed by a number of images suggesting the Messianic (i.e., present) Age. There are repeated references to things that will take place “*in that day*” (24:21, 25:9; 27:1) and in, or on, “*this mountain*” (24:23; 25:6,7,10). The passage appears to be best understood as a description of the establishment of the Kingdom on the spiritual Mount Zion after the destruction of the old temple and city. In the midst of the prophecy (v.8), we find the prediction alluded to by Paul:

*He will swallow up death forever,  
And the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces;  
The rebuke of His people  
He will take away from all the earth;  
For the Lord has spoken.*

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<sup>15</sup> Luke 24:39

Preston points out that the context of this verse, which Paul quotes as something to be fulfilled in the Resurrection, is the passing of the Old Order, in A.D.70. To which, I would answer, “So it is.” However, the strong city, and Mount Zion upon which it sits, simply refers to the Church itself, and the prophecy seems to depict that order of things that began with Christ and continues to this day. The present phase of that order will pass when Christ “*delivers the Kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power*” (1 Cor.15:24). This corresponds to the Resurrection that Paul and Christ predicted will occur at the Last Day. Isaiah 25:8 predicts this, but does not indicate when God will do this. The statement can easily be seen as a stand-alone prediction and taken as parenthetical, telling what God will someday do, without mentioning at what point during that age He will do it. What Paul tells us, and Isaiah does not, is *when* that statement will be fulfilled. Paul says it will occur after Christ has defeated every enemy of His (v.15). As we speak, there are still a few enemies out there who have not submitted to Him—so this prediction remains to be fulfilled in the future.

The second point that may support Preston’s paradigm is that Paul closes up the whole discussion by mentioning that death is defeated in the Resurrection, and that death’s sting is sin, and sin’s strength is the Law (v.56). Why is the Law (*Torah*) brought up here? If Preston is right, the Second Coming is the destruction of the system of *Torah*, and our resurrection is our liberation from the *Torah* because of the New Covenant. If this is Paul’s doctrine, then his mention here of the Law would be apt.

However, the mention of the Law would be valid whether Paul was thinking as Preston does or not. Paul has mentioned the Law enough times in 1 Corinthians to let us know that it is never far from his thinking, even when Judaizers are not the primary focus of an epistle. In Christ, we have been redeemed from the curse of the Law. This did not happen in A.D.70, but when Jesus was made a curse for us by hanging on a tree (see Gal.3:13). Though not featured prominently in Paul’s first epistle to them, there were, nonetheless, among the Corinthians, teachers of the Judaizing sort (see 2 Cor.11:20-22).<sup>16</sup> Paul was not awaiting A.D.70 to free him from the demands of the *Torah*. He was already “not under Torah” (1 Cor.9:20-21).

I believe the reason Paul speaks of the chain of law, sin and death is to explain how it is that Christ has been able to assure our future Resurrection. It is because death can only claim sinners, and it is the Law that identifies and condemns sinners. Since we are not under the Law, we find that sin—and therefore death—has no strength or claim against us:

*Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. (Romans 8:33-34)*

Because we are redeemed from the condemnation, or curse, of the Law through Christ’s hanging on a tree, there remains no claim that death can lay to us. Like Jesus Himself, whom death held only temporarily, so also it can be said of every Christian: “*It was impossible for death to hold him*” (Acts 2:24).

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<sup>16</sup> The mention of Corinthian believers who were saying, “I am of Cephas (Peter)” may refer to some who claimed loyalty to the Jerusalem Church and apostles—whom they may falsely have claimed were in agreement with the Judaizers (1 Corinthians 1:12)

## **Chapter Ten**

### **No Marriage in the Resurrection**

*Then some of the Sadducees, who deny that there is a resurrection, came to Him and asked Him, saying: "Teacher, Moses wrote to us that if a man's brother dies, having a wife, and he dies without children, his brother should take his wife and raise up offspring for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. And the first took a wife, and died without children. And the second took her as wife, and he died childless. Then the third took her, and in like manner the seven also; and they left no children, and died. Last of all the woman died also. Therefore, in the Resurrection, whose wife does she become? For all seven had her as wife."*

*Jesus answered and said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the Resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the Resurrection. But even Moses showed in the burning bush passage that the dead are raised, when he called the Lord 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him."*

*Then some of the scribes answered and said, "Teacher, You have spoken well."*

(Luke 20:27-39)

It would be hard to find a passage that is *prima facie* more hostile to the full-preterists' claim that the Resurrection occurred in A.D.70 than the response Jesus gave to the Sadducees concerning marriage in the Resurrection. Jesus said that those having part in the Resurrection, or "*who are counted worthy to attain that age,*" will not marry and that they, being now like the angels, "*cannot even die any more.*" Yet marriage and death both continue as realities, since A.D.70 and to this day. We might, therefore, reasonably conclude that neither believers nor unbelievers seem to have yet "*attained to that age,*" despite the claim of full-preterists that the Resurrection occurred centuries ago, and that we are living in "*that age*" of which Jesus spoke. Are we to believe that Jesus was mistaken, or that He misled His hearers on this subject?

Remember that in order to disprove the special claims of *Full-Preterism* it only takes one verse that will not fit the A.D.70 paradigm. If every other verse in scripture can be made to fit A.D.70, but just one statement of scripture cannot reasonably be forced into that pre-fabricated mold, then that one verse argues that not everything was fulfilled in that singular cataclysm.<sup>1</sup> An examination of the present text, and of the vain efforts of the full-preterists attempting to explain it, leaves the objective reader with the profound impression that we have come across just such a passage. Along with Revelation 20, it clearly is the nemesis of honest *Full-Preterism*.

#### ***Background of the statement***

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<sup>1</sup> As we have previously noted, this was the conclusion J.S.Russell was forced to accept, based on a single passage of scripture in Revelation 20.

Let's consider the context of the passage. There was a longstanding theological rivalry in Jewish theology between the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The Pharisees believed in a literal resurrection on the Last Day, but the Sadducees did not. The two camps had debated these positions for years. Perceiving that Jesus was on the Pharisees' side of the issue, the Sadducees decided to challenge Him on this point. Since they had been debating the Pharisees for years on this very subject they obviously would have had certain favorite hypothetical scenarios that presented enigmas they considered to be unanswerable. The one they brought to Jesus must have been just such a conundrum which (we can assume) had previously been used successfully to stump the Pharisees in debate.

Since they had themselves failed to solve the puzzle, the Pharisees in the crowd must have listened intently upon hearing this troublesome question now posed to One whom they had heretofore failed to befuddle in debate. Given their animosity toward both Jesus and the Sadducees, and their hearing this previously unanswerable challenge now posed to Him, it is hard to know which side of the debate the Pharisees would be favoring to win. Would Jesus be confounded as they had been, or would He finally provide the definitive answer requiring the Sadducees to permanently retire this particular challenge from their *repertoire*?

The challenge was based upon the ancient custom called levirate marriage—from the Latin word "*levir*" meaning *a husband's brother* (we would say, a *brother-in-law*). This custom was practiced in ancient Middle Eastern culture even in the days of the patriarchs,<sup>2</sup> but later became formally encoded in the *Torah*.<sup>3</sup> Under this law, if a married man died leaving no heir to his estate, his nearest relative (usually, his brother) was obliged to marry the dead man's widow in order to produce an heir for the deceased and perpetuate his name. The child would then be regarded as that of the deceased brother—the mother's first husband. This law seemed to imply that if the second brother failed to have a son by his brother's widow prior to his own death then the next brother (or next of kin) would have to marry her—and so on until she had a son.

The narration provided by the Sadducees set up a situation where, due to such duties, seven brothers had all serially been required by the law to marry the same (apparently infertile) woman. All seven marriages were not only legitimate, but mandatory, under the *Torah*. But would this not create a problem in any hypothetical future resurrection when she and all of her former husbands would come back to life at the same time and they all would seemingly have a legitimate claim upon her? Whose wife would she then be? This potential situation, which had been created by following the requirements of *Torah* itself, would seemingly make the whole idea of a resurrection untenable—would it not?

Jesus "silenced" them (Matt.22:34) by informing them that there would be no marriage (nor death) in "*that age*" which would be inaugurated by the Resurrection. In that age all would be both unmarried and immortal—like the angels. The complication of seven men laying claim to the same woman which was anticipated in the Sadducees' riddle would, therefore, not arise at all.

### ***The full-preterist explanation of Luke 20:35***

Full-preterists want us to reconsider the definitions of such terms as "*the Resurrection*," "*that age*" and the phrase "*neither marry nor are given in marriage*." They suggest that these terms do not refer to what the Church has always understood them to mean—i.e., to a literal resurrection of the dead at the end of this present world, rendering the institution of marriage obsolete.

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<sup>2</sup> Genesis 38:1-11

<sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy 25:5-6

I first encountered the full-preterist explanation of this passage when I debated Don Preston, in 2013. Prior to the debate, I had asked Preston in private correspondence what he made of Christ's statement about no marriage in the Resurrection. He replied succinctly, "**The textual emphasis** and the focus is on the **Old Covenant Levirate Marriage** mandate, not marriage as a universal concept. Under Torah, inheritance, kingdom and identity as a child of God was through marrying and giving in marriage. This is not the case under Christ."<sup>4</sup>

Since this answer actually did not noticeably connect, at any point, with anything found in the text or its context, I wondered if I was simply dull and missing some more profound component of the argument. Was Preston saying that Jesus couched two alternative meanings in His one answer—while saying nothing about either of them? Was Jesus saying on one hand that the Resurrection in A.D.70 would bring an end to the Jewish law, including its requirements of levirate marriage—and on the other, that people are no longer brought into the Kingdom through natural procreation? It was not clear what these two points had in common with each other, or how two totally unrelated points could be intended in the same statement—especially without that statement making any reference to either subject! It was too much for my weak exegetical abilities to process.

Hoping for a better grasp of his position, I took the opportunity during the debate to raise the question again. I received, essentially, the same response. Preston answered:

Jesus has a two-fold answer: nature of the Kingdom and reality of it...Jesus says, 'You don't understand. There is no levirate marriage. There is no Mosaic law in the age to come.'

That Old Covenant kingdom was maintained and spread through marrying and giving in marriage. That Old Covenant kingdom was dependent upon marrying and giving in marriage. Eunuchs could never participate in that. But in the age to come, eunuchs could produce sons of God—not through marrying and giving in marriage. That's why Paul could say 'in Christ there is neither male nor female...'

In the age in which Jesus lived, the levirate marriage law is the law that was under controversy. It characterized that age. It characterized that kingdom. The Pharisees assumed that Torah would endure into the age to come, and therefore that's why and that's how the Sadducees constructed their argument...Jesus is correcting a total misconception.

These explanations seemed entirely to dodge the concerns of the whole exchange between Jesus and the Sadducees, ignoring both their question and the actual words spoken by Jesus in His response. I was again far from sure that I had properly followed Preston's argument. While I am no genius, I can usually see how a reasonable interpretation of a statement, when pointed out to me, connects in some way with the words of a text being analyzed—and with the concerns of the persons speaking in it. I could not do so in this case. I went home wondering if this was a problem in my perception, or if Preston was simply employing some kind of exegetical sleight-of-hand.

Five years later, Preston published a small book called, "*Marrying and Giving in Marriage...in the New Creation??*"<sup>5</sup> Since the title of this book made a clear allusion to the passage about which I had asked him (to which I had received so unsatisfying an answer), I eagerly bought and read the book, in order to get a less-abbreviated explanation of his position. Less abbreviated it was. Though it is one of Preston's shorter books, he devotes about 120 pages to discussing this one issue.

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<sup>4</sup> Boldface in original

<sup>5</sup> This is not a typo. The book's title ends with two question marks.

I was disappointed with the book on several counts, but mostly in that it confirmed the impression I had received from his shorter answer five years earlier. The discussion in the book meanders quite a bit, making and returning frequently to various points of dubious relevance to the announced subject. I found it very difficult to extract from the book an actual explanation of Luke 20:35—the passage cited at the book’s beginning and from which its title was taken. The book seemed to have been written mostly with the intention of making a previous debate opponent of Preston’s (Joel McDurmon) look silly. The book failed—both in the effort to make McDurmon look foolish and in the ostensible goal of proving Preston’s own case. Again, two separate (and, seemingly, unrelated) explanations of Luke 20:35 seemed to emerge. I believe I am faithfully representing *Covenant Eschatology’s* two proposed explanations in the following summary:

- 1) The first explanation, which I understood Preston to be providing in his correspondence and in debate with me, is not featured prominently in his book (though it seems to lie behind his criticism of McDurmon on page 58). Preston does not bother to develop in any significant degree the idea that Jesus was predicting the passing away of *Torah*. Perhaps Preston no longer places much stock in this argument? Or maybe I mistook his meaning when he first answered me?

In any case, it is not a particularly strong point. Levirate marriage was not a distinctive element of *Torah* (it was in common practice in the Ancient Near East long before *Torah* was given—Genesis 38:1-10). Therefore, the passing of *Torah* would not necessarily predict the end of levirate marriage, which had an independent validity unrelated to *Torah*.

This part of Don’s argument, as best I can understand it, is this: In His comments about “marriage and giving in marriage,” Jesus is not speaking to the Sadducees about the end of marriage, *per se*, but specifically the end of levirate marriage. By implication, this refers to the end of the *Torah* system of which levirate marriage was a part. In other words, Jesus is saying that situations like that described by the Sadducees will not come up after the A.D.70 “resurrection,” because the law which brought about the situation described in the riddle will no longer be practiced.

It is hard to imagine why Jesus would take the opportunity to address a matter so totally irrelevant to the challenge they had presented to Him—as if He had not heard or understood the Sadducees’ question. It is equally futile to seek any affirmation in Jesus’ actual statement that could be construed as making this alleged point.

While this first explanation figures into Preston’s earlier communication with me, both in writing and in our debate, his book seems to lean almost entirely on a different explanation.

2. In the Resurrection (A.D.70), marriage itself will cease to have the importance it had to the Jews under the Old Covenant. Under that system, the Kingdom of God was associated with ethnic Israel. It was through marriage and physical reproduction that ethnic Israel continued to exist—allowing the Kingdom to continue and expand in the old Jewish Order. In the New Covenant (supposedly inaugurated in A.D.70, rather than in A.D.30), the Kingdom is spiritual, and is not expanded by physical procreation, but by bearing *spiritual children*.

Preston cites a statement from an older book by Sam Frost—who was defending the full-preterist view at that time (but who has subsequently renounced the full-preterist system completely):

The woman and the seven brothers were under the laws of Moses in order to raise up seed to secure the nation of Israel as a people. In the Resurrection, this will no longer be the case.

They will not have to marry or be given in marriage in order to produce sons ('raise up seed'). In the Resurrection, sons will be 'raised up' in a different manner.<sup>6</sup>

Another advocate of Preston's *Covenant Eschatology*, Charles Meek, explains:

This passage does not mean that after AD 70 marriage is abolished for subsequent generations of earth-dwellers. Jesus was merely teaching certain Jews that their concept of a physical nature of the Kingdom was wrong. The Jews were of the mindset that their kingdom was expanded by marrying and having children. The Kingdom of God, however, is a **spiritual** kingdom (John 18:36) and is spread by faith not by blood (Romans 9).<sup>7</sup>

Though Jesus never said anything regarding such an issue, this being Preston's main argument, he has to expand upon it by discussing several other scriptural passages—totally unrelated to the dialogue between the Sadducees and Jesus. This strikes me as a device similar to the magician's trick called misdirection.

Preston seems to deflect to Isaiah's prediction that in the New Order eunuchs will no longer be called "dry trees" (Isa.56:3), because (Preston alleges) they will be able to reproduce *spiritual* children like anyone else. However, Isaiah does not make any statements about eunuch's producing children, whether spiritual or otherwise. The prophecy in Isaiah 56:1-8 exhibits no interest in the subject of anyone bearing children for the Kingdom. Eunuchs are mentioned, not in connection with their obvious infertility, but alongside foreigners (Gentiles), whose fecundity, or lack thereof, likewise does not figure into the concerns of the passage. Eunuchs and Gentiles are mentioned as examples of people who, under Torah, did not have full privileges of access to the tabernacle. The promise to both groups—eunuchs and Gentiles—is that they will have a place in God's temple equal to that of the Jews generally (vv.5, 7). If Isaiah had any concerns about Gentiles or eunuchs producing sons for the Kingdom, he failed to make any mention of it, and took his discussion an entirely different direction. In any case, there is no mention either of marriage in general, nor of levirate marriage in particular, in Isaiah 56—and no mention of eunuchs in Jesus' conversation with the Sadducees.

Jesus' searching question, "Who is my mother or my brothers?" (Matt.12:48f) and Paul's statement about there being no "male or female" in Christ (Gal.3:28) are also brought into Preston's argument—though these statements have nothing to say about A.D.70 at all. They are both declarations of facts that are declared by Jesus and Paul to be true in their own times, much earlier than A.D.70. They say nothing about that date or its events, and (as a separate issue) are irrelevant both to Christ's dialogue with the Sadducees, and to the point Preston wants to prove.

In his book on this subject, Preston informs us that the point Jesus was trying to get across was that, "Literal marriage and child bearing no longer identify, advance or define the Kingdom."<sup>8</sup> But this was already true when Jesus walked the earth, and when Paul wrote to the Galatians twenty-something years before A.D.70. In fact, it was technically true ever since Mount Sinai, since the Kingdom was even then an ethnically "mixed multitude" (Ex.12:38), which could as easily be

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<sup>6</sup> Sam Frost, *Essays on the Resurrection*, p.91; cited by Preston on p.24

<sup>7</sup> Charles S. Meek, *Christian Hope Through Fulfilled Prophecy: An Exposition of Evangelical Preterism* (Spicewood, TX: Faith Facts Publishing, 2013), 192 (boldface in original)

<sup>8</sup> Preston, *Marrying...* p.114

expanded by Gentile conversions as by Jewish reproduction (Ex.12:48). It is hard to see how such facts would enter a discussion about conditions which would allegedly commence at the destruction of Jerusalem.

While none of Preston's propositions about marriage, reproduction, or advancing the Kingdom contain anything objectionable, it is hard to see how any of them can be made to connect to the passage under consideration—which, presumably, is the proper task of exegesis—or would in any sense address the Sadducees' challenge. Preston explains:

What we are saying is that Jesus' teaching on the family, 'marrying and giving in marriage' and Paul's teaching on marriage...must be viewed not as discussions of those generic praxis [*sic*]. *They must be viewed within their covenantal context.*<sup>9</sup>

One is left to wonder why these teachings "must be viewed" in such a counter-intuitive manner. No evidence is provided to show that the passage under consideration means anything more esoteric than the plain and simple thoughts expressed in the words used by the respective speakers. For example, which statement—either of the Sadducees or of Jesus—introduced questions concerning the impermanence of levirate marriage as a custom, the passing of *Torah*, or the method by which children are generated and the Kingdom is advanced? The Sadducees' question was not about levirate marriage, *in particular*, but about the status of marriage, in general, after the Resurrection. They were not asking whether such marriages would be contracted after the Resurrection, but about the post-Resurrection status of marriages contracted in their prior to that age. If Preston's assertion is correct, we must assume that Jesus dodged their question entirely, as if they had not asked it. Yet the reaction of both the Sadducees<sup>10</sup> and the Pharisees<sup>11</sup> would indicate that He had addressed their concerns directly, cogently and with finality.

Preston's thoughts (if Jesus had expressed anything remotely like them) would have left everyone scratching their heads and wondering if Jesus had actually heard the question. In that case, the fact that the Sadducees were "silenced" would suggest that they saw Him as a lost cause, not worthy of their time in further engagement, since He apparently could not follow a simple train of thought or answer relevantly.

The Sadducees asked nothing that would be answered by appeal to upcoming changes in the covenant or marriage practices. No such concerns enter the recorded conversation at any point. No mention of, or allusion to, the *covenant* can be found in the passage. The Sadducees were not inquiring about the *permanence* of levirate marriage under *Torah*, nor about how the Kingdom was to be advanced (whether by natural or spiritual procreation) in the age to come. They were asking about an ostensibly historical case and wondering how the complexities of that case would be worked out if there were to be a literal resurrection of all the dead after all the parties had died.

Even if A.D.70 were to bring an end to such practices as levirate marriage, how would that impact the case they had presented? In their scenario eight Jewish people had lived in accordance with the *Torah's* mandatory practice, resulting in seven unavoidable serial marriages. The question was not whether new cases of this type would continue to come into being after the Resurrection. The riddle was, rather, what would happen in this particular case, with these people, if there were to be any such future resurrection.

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.117

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 22:34 — Jesus had silenced the Sadducees

<sup>11</sup> Luke 20:39 — The Pharisaic scribes commended His answer



Charles Meek, as we saw, promotes this same argument we have been critiquing. However, perhaps because he senses the failure of the argument, he suggests yet another possible explanation of Jesus' reply to the Sadducees (alternative to the view that he earlier had represented as what "Jesus was merely teaching"):

Jesus may also have been suggesting that those who are in heaven after the Resurrection of the dead in AD 70 (the Old Testament saints) will not marry because they are 'like angels,' i.e., spirits, in heaven. Spirits do not marry. Thus, there is no marriage *in heaven*.<sup>12</sup>

Yet, no one had made any mention of heaven in the conversation. Neither the Sadducees, the Pharisees, nor Jesus (nor any biblical writer, incidentally) ever associated any part of the doctrine of the Resurrection with "heaven" (nor should we).

We now have on the table three dissimilar explanations from full-preterists, each allegedly explaining what Jesus was saying. No two of them are alike, and not one of them connects with either what the Sadducees were asking, nor with the things Jesus said in response to them. Since Jesus' words cannot be thought to teach three entirely different things (especially, in the absence of His actually *saying* anything about any of them), one gets the impression that full-preterists don't really know what to do with this passage. Those who are not full-preterists have no such difficulties since nothing in it is really ambiguous. If we have not gratuitously adopted a shoehorn hermeneutic we are at liberty to do what Jesus' hearers did—namely, to hear what Jesus said and give His words their plain meaning.

These three full-preterist explanations all seem to be examples of verbal sleight-of-hand. They make relatively uncontroversial affirmations about "marriage," and then proceed as if they had explained a passage that happens to contain the word "marriage," but which otherwise has nothing to do with what they are saying. This may succeed in convincing unperceptive readers, or full-preterist ideologues, but no one who honors and studies scripture attentively is likely to mistake any of these for objective attempts to explain of the meaning of Christ's words.

The first duty of the Christian biblical exegete is to fear God and hold the text in *reverence*—and to be fearful of the temptation to exploit the text to teach what it in no way seeks to communicate. Peter refers to those who twist the scripture to their own advantage as "*untaught and unstable*" (2 Peter 3:16). God will look favorably only on those who fear Him and who tremble at His word (Isa.66:2). At a minimum, reverent and scripture-honoring exegesis requires that one:

- a) observe the actual words used in the passage;
- b) read the actual sentences in the passage;
- c) consider the context of the passage;
- d) follow the train of thought in the passage;
- e) believe what the passage says, regardless what we might prefer for it to say.

The arguments given by the Covenant Eschatologists on this interaction between Jesus and the Sadducees flagrantly neglect all of these principles. Their exegesis is just wrong in every way that exegesis can go wrong. Consider:

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<sup>12</sup> Charles S. Meek, *Christian Hope Through Fulfilled Prophecy: An Exposition of Evangelical Preterism* (Spicewood, TX: Faith Facts Publishing, 2013), 192f

- The Sadducees asked no questions relevant specifically to the legitimacy or permanence of levirate marriage or *Torah*.
- Jesus did not give an answer having anything relating to levirate marriage or *Torah*.
- Jesus, we assume, knew how to say the words “levirate marriage,” if He wished to address that subject. Instead, He spoke only of “marriage,” making His answer (unlike that which the full-preterists would like for Him to have answered) relevant to the actual question that He was asked.
- No one asked any questions about eunuchs, about child-bearing, or how the Kingdom would be expanded after the Resurrection. Whatever truths may be affirmed about those things simply were not of interest to the inquirers, nor included in this conversation by anyone involved;
- Their question was intended as a challenge to the idea and doctrine of the Resurrection—which was held by both Jesus and the Pharisees. Jesus addressed the core issue in their challenge, not peripheral questions in which no one had expressed the slightest curiosity or interest, and which would have failed to address the challenge posed.

Apparently, when trying to promote an interpretation of a passage, and when one’s partisan exegesis makes no sense, one can fool some people simply by saying, “This is all *covenantal* stuff.” A discerning skeptic will naturally respond, “In the total absence of any evidence within the text itself, why am I expected to accept this bizarre and unsupported interpretation—because *you* say so?” The answer is, although full-preterists disparage creeds in general, they nonetheless have their own creed containing one non-negotiable tenet: “Everything has to be made to fit, *no matter how unnaturall, or disingenuously*, into an A.D.70 fulfillment.”

Many of the advocates of *Full-Preterism* are clearly smart people who show, in other instances, the capability of connecting logical points and stringing together a valid scriptural argument. If they were merely dull, we might grant them more grace when they advance a critically flawed exegetical case. Given their intelligence, however, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that in discussing this particular passage the full-preterist, is secretly thinking, “In the interest of promoting what I believe, on other grounds, to be true it is excusable for me to construct a totally invalid exegesis for this one troublesome text. If I speak fast and string together a lot of passages and concepts of no actual relevance to the text under consideration, I just may get safely past this embarrassing spot in the road without getting caught. Then we can move forward to another text for which we have more reasonable-sounding arguments.”

Those who actually revere the Word of God will naturally respond, “Not so fast. Whatever other strong-sounding arguments may await our consideration on other texts, we cannot simply pretend that your views have legitimately addressed this key verse—one of the most determinative passages in the whole debate.”

I do not like suspecting any of my Christian friends of being deliberately disingenuous. Therefore, I hope I am wrong about their thought processes. If their thoughts are other than I have imagined, they have been at pains to conceal that fact.

We have a duty to hold Christ in greater reverence than would allow us to take sacred words He has spoken and twist them beyond recognition into something ostensibly more harmonious with our pet theological theories. The latter is the practice of cults and their leaders. While there is much in

the exegesis of full-preterists on other passages that can command a measure of respect, it is a case like this one that shakes our faith in their objectivity and the reverence which a Christian ought to have for Christ's teaching.

Advocates of *Covenant Eschatology*, rather than looking at the wording of the passage itself, and seeking to exegete its actual statements, misdirect their audience with issues and terminology completely unrelated to anything found in this key teaching of Jesus upon which so much hangs.

It is true that levirate marriage was a law concerned with producing an heir for a deceased man. However, in their challenge to Jesus, the Sadducees expressed no interest in this aspect of the law. The *purpose* and the *permanence* of levirate marriage do not figure into their discussion. Their concern had to do with the unavoidable *consequences* of the marital history of a particular family upon the feasibility of any future resurrection.

In their challenge, the Sadducees were saying, "We have lived under a law that could conceivably result in a woman having multiple husbands by divine mandate in her one lifetime." This sets up their conundrum. At this point all concern for the levirate institution leaves the field and the real question comes forth: In the Resurrection, what will be the marital status of people who have been married more than once? Levirate marriage was not the only scenario that could set up the situation. A woman in one lifetime could easily have more than one husband, serially, due to widowhood or divorce. In the Sadducees' challenge, levirate marriage simply served to set up such a scenario that would seemingly create an unacceptable circumstance in any hypothetical future resurrection.

The essence of their problem was, "If someone has been legitimately married more than once [whether because of levirate marriage, or for any other reason], to which of their former spouses will she be bound in your alleged Resurrection?" The Sadducees were not really seeking information. The riddle was intended as a trap and was assumed to be unanswerable. They did not believe in the Resurrection of the dead, so they set up a hypothetical case in which any such resurrection would lead to admittedly absurd results. How could a woman, in such a resurrection, find herself married to seven men simultaneously? The very idea is repugnant! That was their issue—their *only* issue.

The purpose of levirate marriage in the Old Testament was not primarily to advance the Kingdom of God by increasing the Jewish population. The statute was intended to provide for a man who was deceased without an heir, to have one to perpetuate his name and inheritance in Israel. This hardly reflects a concern for expanding the Kingdom through population growth. The effect levirate marriage would have upon the population would be minimal to none. Once a woman in a levirate scenario would finally have had her son by one of her brothers-in-law, the levirate obligations would be fulfilled. The woman would have the one child—enough for the purpose of preserving her former husband's heritage, but having little connection with overall population growth.

This woman's one child would not have a significant impact on population, nor on the survival of the Jewish race. She could have made as much of a contribution to that end simply by remarrying another husband and starting a whole new family, unrelated to her deceased former husband. Also, the brother-in-law could as easily have had a child (or many children) with a different wife, having exactly the same impact on the population, without any levirate marriage. In the case of one woman who serially married seven brothers—all dying childless—the common denominator would be the woman, who was apparently infertile. If population growth had been the primary interest of the law, six of these brothers could have made a greater contribution to that end had they married six other potentially fertile women, and had not been forced to make yet another attempt with their apparently barren sister-in-law.

The birth of the son produced by this custom, while having little impact on population growth, would have a great impact on the *inheritance rights* of his legal father, the mother's deceased

husband. Thus, the purpose of levirate marriage had little or nothing to do with perpetuating the Jewish Kingdom, but with the maintaining the name and inheritance rights of a given man within a particular clan. This is why other cultures had already practiced it long before there was a Jewish kingdom with which to be concerned.

If Jesus had wished to say something as pedestrian as, “*In the New Covenant order, those Old Covenant levirate marriage customs will be obsolete,*” He was quite capable of finding words that would convey such a meaning. However, He would in that case have said nothing relevant to the point about which He had been asked. What He *actually* said had nothing to do with such ideas as lie at the core of the full-preterist’s interpretations. If He had answered according to such explanations, His opponents would have quite reasonably seen Jesus’ response as a mere deflection, suggesting that He was just as incapable as were the Pharisees of defeating their actual challenge.

It seems clear that it is the full-preterists, not Jesus, doing the deflecting with reference to this passage. Their pre-existing assumption that the Resurrection belongs to the events occurring in A.D.70 is their controlling paradigm. Remember Charles Meek’s comment, cited in the last chapter:

There is more room for doubt about what exactly happened at the ‘general resurrection’ than the *timing* of that event, which we think is definitive...We are persuaded that the Bible teaches that at or near the end of the age in A.D.70, the Resurrection of the Old Testament saints, along with the deceased Christians, occurred.<sup>13</sup>

The priority of the paradigm is all-important for the full-preterist. The scheme must be assumed, even prior to examining any individual text. They already know every answer without having to first have heard the question. To them, “the timing...is definitive”—even though there is no time-text connected with this or any of the passages discussing the subject of the Resurrection. What does the text say? Who cares? Whatever details may be found in the text will either be ignored or forced, in any way necessary, to maintain the non-negotiable *timing* so essential to the theory. Luke 20:35 is simply an inconvenient and hostile testimony against this scheme—a square peg which must be violently pounded into the only hole they have—which happens to be a round one.

This cannot be done *honestly*. Those who would teach theology with integrity must find the right shaped hole that accommodates each biblical peg without having to do violence to any text. This is why there is *Partial-Preterism*, which is capable of recognizing A.D.70 where the exegesis so requires, but also to take non-A.D.70 prophetic passages on their own terms. *Partial-Preterism* recognizes that there are round pegs and square pegs, corresponding to round holes and square holes, respectively. This leads to much less embarrassment and is the only way to maintain the clear conscience that comes with treating scripture with integrity.

### ***Toward a non-evasive exegesis of the Luke 20:35***

Good exegesis does not serve to affirm what we *wish* Jesus *might have* said, ignoring His failure to use any of the words or sentences that would have conveyed our preferred meaning. Responsible biblical studies must look at the actual words He spoke, and explain the meaning they intended to communicate to the original hearers. Christians doing exegesis must let Jesus decide what we are to think on a subject, rather than our dictating to Him what He must think or say about it.

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<sup>13</sup> Charles S. Meek, *Christian Hope Through Fulfilled Prophecy: An Exposition of Evangelical Preterism* (Spicewood, TX: Faith Facts Publishing, 2013), 191

Since the words spoken by Jesus to the Sadducees are so central to His teaching on the Resurrection, we ought to look at that statement carefully in the three versions provided in the synoptic Gospels (cited from the NASB 1995):

<b>Matthew 22:29-32</b>	<b>Mark 12:24-27</b>	<b>Luke 20:34-38</b>
<p><i>"You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God."</i></p>	<p><i>"Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God?"</i></p>	<p><b><i>"The sons of this age</i> marry and are given in marriage..."</b></p>
<p><sup>30</sup> <b><i>For in the Resurrection</i></b> they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven."</p>	<p><sup>25</sup> <b><i>For when they rise from the dead,</i></b> they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven."</p>	<p><sup>35</sup> "...<b><i>but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the Resurrection</i></b> from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; <sup>36</sup> <b><i>for they cannot even die anymore,</i></b> because they are like angels, and <b><i>are sons of God, being sons of the Resurrection.</i></b>"</p>
<p><sup>31</sup> <b><i>But regarding the Resurrection of the dead,</i></b> have you not read what was spoken to you by God: <sup>32</sup> <i>'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.'</i></p>	<p><sup>26</sup> <b><i>But regarding the fact that the dead rise again,</i></b> have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the burning bush, how God spoke to him, saying, <i>'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?'</i><sup>27</sup> He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; you are greatly mistaken."</p>	<p><sup>37</sup> <b><i>But that the dead are raised,</i></b> even Moses showed, in the passage about the burning bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. <sup>38</sup> <b><i>Now He is not the God of the dead but of the living; for all live to Him.</i></b>"</p>

In seeking to understand the meaning of these statements, there are key terms that we must necessarily define:

- A) *The Resurrection [of or from] the dead* (Matt.22:30, 31; Luke 20:35, 36)  
*The dead are raised* (Luke 20:37)  
*They rise from the dead* (Mark 12:25)/ *the dead rise again* (Mark 12:26)
- B) *Marry/ given in marriage* (Matt.22:30; Mark 12:25; Luke 20:34, 35)
- C) *This age/ that age* (Luke 20:34, 35)
- D) *Cannot even die anymore* (Luke 20:36)

E) *All live to Him* (Luke 20:38)

All of these terms are crucial to the understanding of what Jesus was saying since they are the words He chose to use. Let us first consider what the average intelligent listener in the original audience would have understood these terms to mean, in contrast to what *Covenant Eschatology* suggests that they should mean.

It would seem clear that, without any special coaching from full-preterists, the original audience would understand Jesus to be saying that there will be a time when those who have died will rise from the dead. At that time they will be both immortal and unconcerned about new or previous marital ties. There is a contrast made between “*this age*” and “*that age*”—the latter apparently referring to the age inaugurated by the Resurrection. While the teaching might raise such questions as “*Why no more marriage?*” and “*What will replace marriage in the lives of the resurrected ones?*” the plain meaning of words in the text strongly and plainly convey the above impression.

Perhaps it is more complicated than this and there are hidden meanings imperceptible to the original audience—and to virtually all Christians over the past two thousand years. This would be a case for the full-preterist to make. It is his task to prove that the word “resurrection” was to be understood to mean a *spiritual* transformation that allegedly occurred in A.D.70 and that it is not *marriage* in general, but *levirate marriage* in particular, that came to an end in that year. Further, for the full-preterist, the phrase “*cannot even die anymore*” must bear some meaning other than the obvious.

Let’s examine the words and concepts listed above:

A) *The Resurrection [of or from] the dead* (Matt.22:30, 31; Luke 20:35, 36)

*The dead are raised* (Luke 20:37)

*They rise from the dead* (Mark 12:25)/ *the dead rise again* (Mark 12:26)

This concept means the physical rising of the dead from their graves, not only in common speech today, but also in the context of the Sadducean controversy with the Pharisees. The word does not simply mean “a coming alive,” but “a rising, or standing again.” That which stands *again* must at one time previously have been standing. Such esoteric ideas as those of *Covenant Eschatology*, which cannot easily be grasped even by Christians well-schooled in the New Testament, would have been far from any of the thoughts of those familiar only with Old Testament and common Judaic ideas. To the Pharisees, the Resurrection was a clear and unambiguous expectation. We established in Chapter Seven that the Jews expected a resurrection of dead bodies, rejoined with their formerly departed spirits, to live in a renewed world.

There can be no doubt that this is the idea of resurrection that was affirmed by the Pharisees of Jesus’ day and was the concept that the Sadducees were determined to debunk. They recognized Jesus also as an advocate of this Pharisaic view and would not have approached Him with their question had they not. Nothing He said to them (or elsewhere) was calculated to correct this assumption.

If Jesus had held a different idea of the Resurrection from that of the Pharisees, this was His golden opportunity to clear that up. If Jesus had simply told the inquisitors that He did not support the belief in a physical resurrection this would have pleased the Sadducees well rather than “silencing” them as we are told He did. The answer He gave indicated that their rejection of the standard view revealed their ignorance and error.

Since Paul also told Felix that he held a view of the Resurrection very harmonious with that of the Pharisees (Acts 24:15). This claim would have been disingenuous if, in fact, he held a view like that of Don Preston, which in no respect resembled the Pharisaic understanding—nor any known definition of the word *anastasis*. If Jesus or Paul held any novel view of the Resurrection, they kept this a strict secret—deliberately deceiving their hearers about His true beliefs in the process.

*B) Marry/ given in marriage (Matthew 22:30; Mark 12:25; Luke 20:34, 35)*

In scripture, these terms are found together in only one other context, where they also come from the mouth of Jesus. There, He uses the expression to refer to *ordinary* marriage—not *levirate* marriage. He lists “*marrying and giving in marriage*” alongside other very normal activities in which people were engaged in the days of Noah—including buying and selling, eating and drinking, building and planting (Matt.24:38; Luke 17:27). These activities were not specific to life under the Mosaic Covenant, and clearly do not represent the Torah system. It would be absurd to hear someone argue that since “*eating and drinking*” and “*buying and selling*” were activities essential to the survival of the Jewish race, Jesus must somehow be referring to the continuance of the Old Covenant Order. It would be equally ridiculous to say the same about the phrase “*marrying and giving in marriage*”—with the further explanation that this term refers specifically to levirate marriages.

According to Preston, the rare expression, “*marry and are given in marriage*,” occurring in Luke 20, refers specifically to *Jewish levirate marriage practices*. There is no indication, *in situ*, that this is what Jesus meant. When we find the same expression in Luke 17:27 and Matthew 24:38, it certainly does not have this meaning, since Noah’s contemporaries, who were engaged in these practices, did not live under the *Torah* at all and were, therefore, not necessarily engaged in Jewish levirate practices.

Even if the antediluvians did practice levirate marriage, they did not do so under the authority of Sinaitic Judaism—so the practice was in no sense a shorthand expression for *Torah observance*, as Preston’s argument presupposes. *Marrying and giving in marriage* simply refers to the universal practice of marriage, not specifically *Jewish* practices. Likewise, the phrase does not specifically refer to having children to promote the Kingdom. Though procreation is commonly a result of wedlock, such an outcome does not inevitably follow marriage and it is not alluded to in either context. There is no focus on perpetuating the Kingdom through childbirth (either in these passages nor, frankly, anywhere in the Old Testament), which renders the full-preterist explanation of this phrase a complete red herring.

*C) This age/ that age (Luke 20:34, 35)*

Preston and many mainstream Bible scholars insist that the Jews knew of only two “ages.” The first was that of the Mosaic order, and the second, was to be the Messianic order. These were, respectively, called “*this age*” and “*the age to come*.” After citing many authorities to establish this as the Jewish way of thinking, Preston writes: “I could add volumes of additional quotes from scholars all of whom acknowledge that Biblically there were only two ages...” (p.92).

Whatever the Jews may have commonly thought, a belief that there are only two “ages” is not endorsed anywhere in scripture. In asserting that there were “*Biblically*” only two ages, one might be thought to be obliged to identify *at least one* “biblical” passage that affirms this. One might find numerous scholars to affirm that this is how the Jews thought, but this will not show that it was

actually a *biblical* concept (meaning, “a concept found or taught in the Bible”)—nor that Jesus affirmed it.

In agreement with many, even of the partial-preterist camp, full-preterists believe that “*this age*” ended and “*the age to come*” arrived with the destruction of the Second Temple and the Old Covenant cultus in the first century. If this is correct, and if Jesus equated the Resurrection with “*the age to come*,” as Preston continually avers, then the Resurrection must have occurred in the first century at the changing of the guard in A.D.70. In that case, whatever was predicted as accompanying the Resurrection (e.g., the Second Coming, the Rapture, the Final Judgment, the New Heavens and Earth) would also necessarily have been realized in A.D.70, inaugurating an order of things that would thereafter remain unchanged for eternity.

The claim that there are no more than two “ages,” then, becomes an indispensable assumption in the case for *Full-Preterism*. We cannot assail the *logic* involved—and the *conclusions* are inescapable—if only the *premises* were correct. It is the premises that must be challenged—and with them, the whole logical scheme, and its conclusion.

While it might have been commonplace for the Jews to speak of two ages, as is claimed by many scholars, we must ask whether Jesus and the apostles similarly restricted themselves to belief in only two ages. One must then ask whether Paul, living and dying before A.D.70, saw himself as living in “*this age*” (the Old Covenant, pre-Messianic Age) or in “*the age to come*” (the New Covenant, Messianic Age). If he was in the age of the Mosaic Order (“*this age*”), then we wonder why he took so much liberty in ignoring the Mosaic way of life—especially when among Gentiles.<sup>14</sup> A Jew under *Torah* must obey the *Torah* even when living among Gentiles (e.g., Daniel and his friends in Babylon). Paul tells us that his own policy was to live without the restrictions of the Jewish Law when among Gentiles (which was most of the time)—the only exception being when he was around sensitive, observant Jews (1 Cor.9:21-22). If the Old Order was still valid, then he was in habitual violation of God’s will.

Paul did not see himself as belonging to the Old Covenant Order. He called himself a “*minister of the New Covenant*” (2 Cor.3:6) which exists only if the Old Covenant is obsolete. During Paul’s lifetime, the temple had yet to come down, but its practices had already become *obsolete* and were soon to disappear entirely (Heb.8:13). Thus, we must see Paul as writing during the New Covenant, or Messianic, “*age to come*”—beginning at Pentecost.

Whichever “age” he regarded himself to be living in, Paul anticipated multiple *future ages* (Eph.2:7; cf., Dan.7:18 LXX) and knew of multiple *past ages* (Rom.16:25; 1 Cor.2:7; Eph.3:9; Col.1:26; Tit.1:2; cf., Heb.9:26). Paul’s belief in a multiplicity of ages was either residual from his former beliefs as a Jew (meaning the Jews did not, in fact, believe in only two ages), or else it was a distinctly Christian revelation vouchsafed to him by God (thereby trumping any former Jewish belief in only two). It seems clear that neither Paul nor, presumably, Jesus held to the “two-ages-only” paradigm. If the Jews believed such, they did not do so upon divine authority. Nothing in the Old Testament affirmed this two-ages-only dichotomy.

Since neither the Old nor the New Testament limits the “ages” to the two mentioned by Preston, we would have to ask what Jesus meant by “*that age*” in speaking of the Resurrection. In his book on this passage, Preston continually claims that Jesus identified the Resurrection with “*the age to come*” (which Preston believes began in A.D.70). Yet, Jesus never used that term when speaking of the Resurrection. He simply said “*that age*.” Since Preston only recognizes two ages, he jumps to the conclusion that “*that age*” must be his own favored “*age to come*”—commencing in A.D.70.

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<sup>14</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:20-21



Jesus knew of a popular Jewish distinction between “*this age*” and the “*age to come*” and was known to use those expressions Himself without suggesting that these two actually exhaust the total number of “ages” (Matt.12:32; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30). However, He was under no mandate to restrict His thinking or speaking to these narrow Jewish categories. The Greek word *aion* (age) refers generically to any given period of time, or era, not particularly distinguished by its length, but by whatever defining features may be mentioned in connection with it. Thus, some today speak of the “age of the dinosaurs” or the “age of the Caesars.” Depending on what characteristics of the period are in view there is no limit to the number of “ages” or “eras” to which one might refer. These may even overlap or run concurrent with each other—as America’s “Civil War Era” did with Britain’s “Victorian Era.”

Further, it is clear from a comparison of parallel Gospel accounts that the term “*this age*”—far from being a technical term with an established definition, can also merely mean “at this time.” For example, Mark 10:30 has Jesus making a distinction between “*the present age*” and “*the age to come.*” This sounds like Jesus is affirming the Jewish paradigm seemingly using these terms as technical terms for the pre-Messianic and the Messianic eras respectively—and well He might have been. Interestingly, however, Luke feels free to disconnect with such technical terms in his parallel passage where he replaces “*the present age*” with the more generic “*at this time*” (Luke 18:30). Thus, while using, at times, the popular terminology distinguishing between two discreet “ages,” punctuated by the Messiah’s appearing, it seems as if the reference can simply be contrasting the present time with some other time(s).

This brings us to our present interest in Jesus’ comment about the Resurrection. Unlike the parallels in Matthew and Mark, which make no reference to “ages” at all, Luke records Jesus as contrasting two “ages.” His actual words contrast “*sons of this age*” with those who attain to “*that age.*” For whatever reason, in the latter case He avoids the use of the more common term, “*the age to come,*” which would seem the more predictable contrast, but also might be mistaken for the Jews’ technical term. Thus, although “the age to come” in the popular Jewish usage might refer to the Messianic (present) Age, Jesus does not refer specifically to it. Instead, He refers to the age of the Resurrection. He does not identify the Age of the Resurrection with the Messianic Age—and might reasonably be seen as contrasting them.

The full-preterists assume without textual warrant that Jesus is speaking of the so-called “*age to come*” (i.e., the Messianic Age in which we now live) by His phrase “*that age.*” If so, it is remarkable that he does not adopt that familiar parlance. This raises the question whether He was speaking of an age even beyond that of the present Messianic period. One thing we cannot say, as Preston does, is that Jesus explicitly placed the Resurrection at the beginning of what is elsewhere called “*the age to come.*”

I would argue that the so-called “*age to come*” desired by the Jews began at Pentecost, and is sometimes, for that reason, also referred to by theologians as the “Age of the Spirit.” That age began in A.D.30. For Jesus prior to Pentecost that could be referred to as “*the age to come.*” But what age does Jesus have in mind by His vague reference to “*that age*”?

We needn’t conjecture since the answer is given in the text, in which “*that age*” is identified as the age of the Resurrection (the one that the Pharisees, Jesus and Paul anticipated, but which the Sadducees denied). It is, as Jesus said, an age where people no longer marry and in which they “*cannot even die anymore*” (implying that they had died previously)—sharing in these characteristics with the angels. Since such conditions do not yet prevail, one is forced to conclude (as all competent theologians have historically done) that this describes an “age” not yet inaugurated.

D) *Cannot even die anymore (Luke 20:36)*

As suggested above, Jesus describes an end to death at the time of the Resurrection. To claim that this is a reference to *spiritual death* would be “special pleading” in the extreme. Since, in scripture and in Judaism, the Resurrection is that of *physical* bodies from their *graves*, the idea that these bodies are immortal and cannot *physically* die any more agrees admirably with Paul’s statements elsewhere affirming that our resurrected bodies will be immortal, being like the risen body of Jesus (Phil.3:21; 1 Cor.15:49).

That Christ’s resurrected body was truly *physical* was established by “*many infallible proofs*” (Acts 1:3) to those who encountered Him thereafter. That it was an *immortal body* is made clear by Paul, in various places (Rom.6:9; 1 Tim.6:1:5-16). It is equally affirmed that in the Resurrection our formerly-mortal bodies will become immortal (1 Cor.15:53; 2 Cor.5:4).

Preston’s view is that the Resurrection is not of individuals nor of physical bodies, but it is the corporate “covenant-body” of Israel which was “resurrected” into the glorious Church in A.D.70. If Jesus had this in mind, He would more accurately have said, “*it [meaning the new corporate entity] cannot die anymore,*” rather than “*they [meaning actual people] cannot die anymore.*” The living and dying of which He speaks are not the life and death of a corporate entity, but of individuals (the same ones who will no longer marry).

To summarize the above points, the words Jesus spoke would have been clearly understood a certain way by His original audience based upon their established understanding of the matter about which they had inquired. The full-preterists’ sensitivity to audience relevancy should take this factor into their consideration. Jesus answered the Sadducees’ question directly and definitively enough to have “silenced” them (Matt.22:34)—which would certainly not have been the case had he answered along Don Preston’s lines (which would have been even more unintelligible to them than it is to us). Any suggested interpretation of Jesus’ answer that has no relevance to the Sadducees’ question is clearly to be rejected.

E) *All live to Him (Luke 20:38)*

This enigmatic statement (found only in Luke) seems to be a summary of the previous argument (found in all three Gospels), which was: “Since God is only the God of living people, and since in the time of Moses He claimed still to be the God of the patriarchs who had long-since passed away, it must be assumed that they, though having died in this world, still live to God in some realm.” The dead saints would be the “*all*” whom Jesus says still “*live to Him.*”

Jesus had introduced this particular argument with the words, “*But regarding the fact that the dead rise again...*” (Mark 12:26). This means that the point He made somehow contributes to the argument for the future Resurrection. How so? The most that seems to be proven by the example He provides is that these patriarchs did live on after death, *in some realm*. It does not speak of them being physically risen from the dead. However, the idea of living on after death eternally in a disembodied state was an idea unthinkable to the Jews. The only hope for eternity that they cherished was physical resurrection to live again in *eretz Yisrael* (the land of Israel).

Remember that the Sadducees denied not only the Resurrection, but also the existence of angels and spirits (Acts 23:8). Jesus appears to be saying that they have overlooked a scripture that speaks of the survival of men’s spirits post-mortem and thus they are equally ignorant of other related subjects, like the Resurrection. To the Jewish mind, any *soul survival* beyond death could only be viewed as a temporary condition to be resolved eventually by their return to the physical realm

through resurrection. The Sadducees, in denying both concepts (post-mortem spirit survival and resurrection) showed themselves to be “*mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God*” (Matt.22:29).

If the future Resurrection were to be the corporate *repurposing* of Old Covenant Israel that *Covenant Eschatology* professes it to be, in what sense would the spiritual survival of the patriarchs figure into Christ’s teaching on the subject to the Sadducees? Jesus was, after all, speaking of the *personal* survival of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as individuals, with no hint of any *corporate body*.

### ***In Summary***

When read without an agenda, Jesus’ interchange with the Sadducees does not give any support to the *Covenant Eschatology* concept of a corporate resurrection occurring in A.D.70, nor at any other time. The question of audience relevancy, seemingly so important to full-preterists, would render any such esoteric interpretation totally inappropriate, because it would be unintelligible to them, and irrelevant to their inquiry. Militating against the interpretation put forward by *Covenant Eschatology* are the following considerations:

- 1) The established meaning of the concept of “resurrection” in the context of the debate;
- 2) The actual statement of Jesus, considering content, vocabulary and grammar;
- 3) The non-fulfillment in A.D.70 of anything predicted by Jesus in the passage.

Seeking to “explain” the passage, while ignoring these key features, guarantees that the resultant explanation will land far afield of the teaching of Jesus in the passage—a result any God-fearing expositor should contemplate with horror.



**Chapter Eleven:**  
***New Heavens and New Earth***  
**Part One: Initial Considerations**

If I was a little hard on *Covenant Eschatology* in my previous chapter, it is not because of any animus I feel toward any sincere full-preterist, but because of the occasional disingenuous exegesis that is sometimes employed in eliminating passages that are clearly contrary to the view. Everyone may be tempted to resort to such an expedient in weaker moments when seeking to force a recalcitrant verse of scripture into a paradigm that clearly resists such insertion. When we are convinced on other grounds that our position is correct, the occasional contradictory passage may not necessarily be welcomed as a corrective to our view. Rather, it may be treated as a hostile datum that must necessarily be made to yield to our framework. This is clearly what has happened in the case of the full-preterist treatment of “*marrying and giving in marriage*” in the Resurrection— notwithstanding the ability to cite even one as notable as N.T. Wright<sup>1</sup> in support of one’s view. The convenient citation of great authorities does not overturn the requirement of bringing responsible exegesis to a passage.

On the present subject of the New Heavens and the New Earth (which preterists sometimes abbreviate: NHE), I must express a greater degree of sympathy with the full-preterists, while still disagreeing with much of their exegesis and their conclusions. I believe, as they do, that the expression “New Heavens and New Earth” could sometimes refer figuratively to the New Covenant Order—though, if it does, it would seem most scriptural to see this as having come in A.D.30 (at Pentecost) rather than in A.D.70. Even where such an interpretation is possible, I do not see those passages to be the most relevant to the subject of the NHE. The most relevant passages to the eschatological NHE would be Romans 8:19-23; 2 Peter 3:10-13, and Revelation 21:1ff—which full-preterists see as describing events fulfilled in our past. I cannot find any reason to agree with the arguments leading to such a conclusion, even after reading a 300-page book by Don Preston defending his thesis.<sup>2</sup>

The full-preterist does not believe that there will be a redemption of the cosmos—only each individual’s permanent escape from it by death. This may well agree with the default and naïve assumptions of the average, minimally literate churchgoer as well. Many have assumed that the purpose of Christ’s coming to this planet was to permanently extract from it as many of us as possible. Popular hymnody and careless sermons have applied the imagery of the New Jerusalem (e.g., “pearly gates” and “streets of gold”), found in Revelation 21, to heaven itself. The obvious fact that the city thus described is seen as “*coming down out of heaven*” (Rev.21:2), seems often to be overlooked. Since the opening verse of the chapter contrasts heaven from earth, the descent of the city from heaven suggests its destination to be the earth (to where else would it descend?).

The silly imagery of departed saints with halos and wings, sitting on clouds and playing harps has so colored the imaginations of nominal believers as to raise frequent questions about whether the believers’ afterlife will be only slightly less boring than hell itself. This imagery is wrongly drawn, primarily, from John’s visions of heaven in Revelation, chapters 4, 5 and 15, which (even if we were

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<sup>1</sup> N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), p.402, note 109, cited by Preston in *Marrying...* p.113

<sup>2</sup> Donald K. Preston, *The Elements Shall Melt With A Fervent Heat* (Unknown, 2012). Kindle edition

to think them to be literal) are not depicting conditions of the eternal state, but realities in the heavens in John's own time. Nothing *post-Parousia* is depicted in those chapters.

The best understanding of the eternal state of the believer is not necessarily to be drawn from passages in Revelation. Though we may find there a few passages relevant to that theme, the highly-symbolic nature of Revelation always leaves a measure of uncertainty as to its time and means of fulfillment. There are considerably less-symbolic portions of scripture (virtually the entire New Testament is less symbolic than Revelation!) from which we can more confidently form our understanding of the eternal state of believers.

Suffice it to say, the New Testament speaks of the ultimate fulfillment of God's earthly purposes and the final state of believers in terms of a renewed creation, referred to in certain passages as the *New Heavens and New Earth*. The main controversy between full-preterists and more conventional interpreters of scripture lies in the question of whether this renewed creation speaks of the state of the cosmos after the future *Parousia* of Christ or whether the Second Coming has already occurred along with a spiritual "new creation." The settling of this question will be our concern in this chapter.

We have already suggested that scripture defines the very purpose of the physical resurrection of the body as being to fit us for life in an actual physical creation at the end of the present world. The Bible teaches that God created mankind for the earth, and the earth for mankind.<sup>3</sup> Had man never sinned, access to the Tree of Life would have remained uninterrupted with the result that all people could live eternally on a perfect earth,<sup>4</sup> in perfect bodies.<sup>5</sup>

Scripture specifically designates earth, as opposed to heaven, as man's rightful domain,<sup>6</sup> and tells us that it is Christ's destiny, along with His saints, to inherit and rule over the earth forever.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the whole earth is to be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.<sup>8</sup> This destiny has not yet been realized in history and there is no reason to interpret it as taking place anywhere other than on earth.

The Old Testament never promised heaven as the inheritance of Israel or her Messiah. Israel's hope was that of the Messiah reigning over the world<sup>9</sup> (and them with Him in the land of Israel). This reign would continue forever.<sup>10</sup> While Jesus and the apostles did introduce subjects that had not been understood by the Jews from the Old Testament, the idea of the earthly reign of saints with the Messiah was not among those beliefs that they ever challenged or corrected. Jesus very rarely spoke of life after death and never promised anyone an eternal dwelling in heaven. Although Paul tells us that Christ and the Gospel have "*brought life and immortality to light*,"<sup>11</sup> he nowhere suggests that this immortality is to be experienced anywhere other than on this planet.

### **But aren't there passages that speak of us going to heaven?**

By contrast, many Christians, including the full-preterists, have assumed what no passage in scripture ever affirmed—namely, that man's true home is not earth, but heaven, and that there is some eternal work or worship to be done in heaven with which the redeemed are to be eternally

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<sup>3</sup> Genesis 2:8; Isaiah 45:18

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 2:17; 3:22-24

<sup>5</sup> Romans 5:12; 1 Corinthians 15:21a

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 115:16; Genesis 1:26; Psalm 45:16; Proverbs 2:21-22

<sup>7</sup> Psalm 2:8; Psalm 72; Matthew 5:5; Luke 19:15-19; Romans 8:17; Revelation 5:10; 11:15

<sup>8</sup> e.g., Numbers 14:21; Psalm 72:19; 102:15; Isaiah 11:9; Habakkuk 2:14 [2 Corinthians 6:4]

<sup>9</sup> e.g., Psalm 110:2; Isaiah 42:1-4

<sup>10</sup> Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 1:32-33

<sup>11</sup> 2 Timothy 1:10

occupied. My statements made above will conflict with the interpretation popularly given to certain New Testament passages. Since the Old Testament never mentions a destiny for people in heaven, any expectation of such as the destiny of the righteous must come from the New Testament. Does it? Let us look at some of the passages which might give such an impression.

#### A) "Kingdom of heaven"

In Matthew's Gospel we often find reference in Christ's teaching to the need to enter or inherit the "Kingdom of Heaven." Many Christians seem to assume that the *Kingdom of Heaven* simply is another way of saying "heaven," so they are under the impression that Jesus *often* spoke of heaven and of the afterlife.

However, Jesus' statements about the Kingdom of Heaven are generally not concerned with the next life at all. How would the parables of Jesus apply to life in heaven? In what sense is that like a field in which seeds are sown, falling on good or bad soil?<sup>12</sup> Is heaven a place where wheat (children of the Kingdom) and tares (children of the evil one) grow together side-by-side?<sup>13</sup> Is the next life comparable to a growing mustard plant providing lodging for birds in its branches,<sup>14</sup> or like leaven put into three measures of dough?<sup>15</sup> Of course not.

These parables are simply about Christ's Kingdom, which He announced as having arrived on earth with Him,<sup>16</sup> and which is alternatively referred to as "the Kingdom of God," or "the Kingdom of Heaven." The latter is simply a Hebraism<sup>17</sup> for the former, and the two terms are used entirely interchangeably (e.g., see Matt.19:23-24).

Jesus did speak of a more universal and complete realization of this Kingdom as coming in the future,<sup>18</sup> but this realized universal Kingdom is never said to be *in heaven*. In fact, our prayer is that the Kingdom "*come*" with a result that His will is done *on earth* (Matt.6:10). Our prayer is for a changed earth, not an escape into outer space, or the heavenly realm (see also John 17:15).

#### B) John 14:2-3

*In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.*

Perhaps no other passage is cited more frequently than this one in referring to the believer's hope as an escape to a home in heaven. Yet, our default assumptions and older translations have sometimes led us astray. The language of the King James Version, especially, has inspired hymns and sermon illustrations in which "mansions" in heaven are pictured as our eternal homes in the sky.

Most Christians have understood the words, "*my Father's house*" to be a reference to heaven, and the "mansions" as our future homes there. But scripture never speaks of heaven as God's "house."

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<sup>12</sup> Matthew 13:3-8

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, vv. 24-30, 36-43

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, vv. 31-32

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 33

<sup>16</sup> Mark 1:15; 12:28; 23:13; Luke 16:16; 17:21 (cf. Col.1:13)

<sup>17</sup> *Hebraism*; that is, an idiom commonly used among the Jews. The word "heaven" was often substituted for the word "God."

<sup>18</sup> Matt.13:43; 25:34

While the Bible affirms that God dwells in heaven, it also teaches that God dwells with us on earth. In scripture, the “house of the Lord” always refers to the building on earth where God dwells among His people. In the Old Testament, God’s house is always identified with the tabernacle of Moses,<sup>19</sup> or with the temples of Solomon or Zerubbabel<sup>20</sup> that eventually replaced it. Jesus Himself spoke of the temple in Jerusalem as “the house of God.”<sup>21</sup> Earlier in John, Jesus used the exact phrase found in our present passage, “*my Father’s house*,” with reference to that existing temple: “*Do not make my Father’s house a house of merchandise*” (John 2:16). There is simply no biblical precedent or authority for identifying God’s “house” with heaven.

At the end of Jesus’ ministry, He no longer spoke of the Jerusalem temple as His Father’s house. They had rejected Him and He now announced the departure of God from the premises. At that point, in referring to the temple, Jesus no longer used the expression, “*my Father’s house*,” but “*your house*”—that is, *Israel’s*, not *God’s*: “*See! Your house is left to you desolate*” (Matt.23:38).

In the New Testament we are told that God no longer inhabits temples made with human hands.<sup>22</sup> Instead, every believer is recognized as a “living stone” being built, along with others, into a spiritual temple inhabited by God’s Holy Spirit.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the community of Christ, His Body, is regarded as the “house of God.”<sup>24</sup> No other identification of God’s “house” can be found after Pentecost.

Since there is no reason to identify the “Father’s house” with heaven, there is likewise no reason to think in terms of “mansions in heaven.” In fact, the word “mansion” in older English, simply meant a dwelling—unlike the lavish ideas we associate with that word in modern English. The Greek word translated as “mansion” is the word *moné*. It is the noun form of the verb *meno*—which means to abide or dwell. The noun means “a place of dwelling.” In the context of a “house” having many “places to dwell” we should think of these as “rooms.” Thus, modern translations say nothing of mansions, but render *moné* in this passage more correctly as “dwellings” (NKJV fn); “dwelling places” (NRSV; NET; GNV; Mounce) or “rooms” (NASB; NIV; ESV; CSB; RSV; GNT; Phillips).

Significantly, the word *moné* is found only one other place in the New Testament, and that occurrence is later in the same chapter (strongly suggesting identity of meaning). It is found in verse 23 where Jesus says: “*If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home [moné] with him.*”

In this verse Jesus says that every one of His obedient disciples would be<sup>25</sup> an individual *moné*, or dwelling place, of God and Christ. There are thus many such “dwelling places” in God’s “house” (which is comprised of all the individual Christians).

In John 14 Jesus is telling the disciples that after He departs the Holy Spirit will come (v.16). As a result, they themselves will become—both individually and collectively—God’s dwelling place on earth (v.23). He identifies the coming of the Spirit with His own coming to them: “*I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you*” (v.18), and also as the Father and Himself making their home in the believer: “*We will come to him and make Our home with him*” (v.23). The “rooms” in God’s house are individual believers indwelt by God and all the rooms, collectively, comprise the “house of God.”

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<sup>19</sup> E.g., Exodus 23:19; 34:26; Deuteronomy 23:18; Joshua 6:24; Judges 18:31; 19:18; 20:18, 26; 21:2; 1 Samuel 1:7, 24; 3:15; 1 Chronicles 6:48; Psalm 23:6; 26:8; 27:4; 55:14, etc.

<sup>20</sup> E.g., 1 Chronicles 22:2; 2 Chronicles 3:3; 5:14; 15:18; Ezra 2:68; 4:24; 5:2, 15, 16, 17; 6:3; Psalm 42:4; Ecclesiastes 5:1; Daniel 5:3

<sup>21</sup> Matthew 12:4; Mark 2:26; Luke 6:4

<sup>22</sup> Acts 7:48

<sup>23</sup> 1 Peter 2:5; Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 6:16

<sup>24</sup> E.g., 1 Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 3:6

<sup>25</sup> I.e., after the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost



When Jesus speaks of the rooms in His Father's house, He is not speaking of *where we will live*, but *where God will live* (Jesus is discussing *God's* house, after all, not *ours*).

Jesus is saying that His Father's house, from this point onward, will no longer be the Jewish temple, but the Church, collectively comprised of many disciples ("dwelling places"), in which God now dwells. Paul and Peter both referred to the Church as the "*house of God*" (1 Tim.3:15; 1 Peter 4:17; cf., Heb.3:6), and Paul referred to the Church as the "*temple of God*" (1 Cor.3:16; 2 Cor.6:16).

What then are we to make of Jesus' words that He was going away (surely to heaven) to prepare a place for us? Precisely that we cannot have a place in His Body or Temple other than by being inhabited by the Holy Spirit who would not be given while Jesus remained among us on earth (John 16:7). The purpose of His going away was that He might send the Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who prepares each of us a place and an individual role to play in the Body of Christ (1 Cor.12:4-6, 11, 18). As every member has to be properly related to the rest of the body, and every stone to the rest of the stones in the building, so the Holy Spirit has prepared a specific functional and positional role in Christ's community for each believer. It is by Christ's going away and sending the Spirit that we can be included and incorporated into this domicile of God among earth-dwellers.

Reference to Christ's coming, so that we may be with Him, is sufficiently ambiguous as to possibly refer to the coming of the Spirit—which He elsewhere speaks of as His own coming (John 14:18; cf., Rev.3:20). Alternatively, He may be referring to His eventual Second Coming, which will result in our being "*always with the Lord*" (1 Thess.4:17). If the latter is the case, there is no indication that this will be in heaven. His promise is to come to be with us *here*, not to take anyone away to heaven.

#### C) 2 Corinthians 5:1-4

*For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.*

In this passage, Paul speaks of our bodies as "tents" and as "clothing" for our souls or spirits. The dissolving of this earthly tent refers to physical death and Paul reveals what he expects to find after death. From his comments in the verses immediately following, it seems clear that Paul does anticipate going to heaven when he dies. We are currently "*present in the body*" and "*absent from the Lord*" (v.6). At death, we will be "*absent from the body*" but "*present with the Lord*" (v.8; cf., Phil.1:23)—that is, in heaven—but only until Jesus returns.

Paul's reference to the mortal body as a tent, no doubt, is intended to emphasize its being temporary, fragile and perishable—in contrast to our "house" which he says is "*eternal in the heavens*." The latter phrase could certainly give the impression that he is saying our replacement bodies will forever exist in heaven.

However, he next refers to the same body (house) as coming to us "*from heaven*." The former phrase seems to affirm that our future house (body) is both *eternal* and currently reserved *in heaven*. This is similar to Jesus saying that we are to lay up treasures "*in heaven*" (Matt.6:20). It does not mean that we must go to heaven to enjoy them since Jesus said that when He comes back here, He will bring each one's rewards with Him (Matt.16:27). Our hope, and our incorruptible inheritance are "*laid up*" or "*reserved in heaven*" for us (1 Col.1:5; Pet.1:4). According to Jesus, that is the most secure place to

store things of value. We may store certain valuables in a bank vault, but this does not suggest that we plan to go to live in the vault in order to enjoy them.

Christ Himself is “in heaven” (Eph.6:9; Col.4:1; 2 Pet.3:22), but we anticipate His return “*from heaven*” (Phil.3:20; 1 Thess.1:10; 4:16). Also, the New Jerusalem is currently said to be “above”—i.e., in heaven (Gal.4:26), but in Revelation 21:2 & 10, it is seen descending *from heaven* to earth. Our future immortal bodies (perhaps we would more accurately view this as the *promise* or the *title deeds* to these bodies) are safely reserved with God *in heaven*, but, at the Resurrection, will be given “*from heaven*” to the saints on earth. Paul expresses an expectation of being temporarily disembodied (“unclothed”) in the intermediate state between death and the Resurrection, but this is not his ultimate hope. Rather, he anticipates eventually being “*further clothed*” (that is, embodied) in the Resurrection.

#### D) “*With the Lord*”

In at least two passages, Paul distinctly expresses the view that he will go to be with the Lord when he departs from this body at death (2 Cor.5:6-7; Phil.1:23-24). Since Jesus is in heaven at the right hand of the Father, we could call this an expression of a “hope of heaven.” It may surprise many to learn that the Bible never speaks in terms of the Christian’s “hope of heaven.” The Christian’s *hope and calling* is frequently said to be the obtaining of “*the glory of God,*” For example, Paul writes:

*...through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in **hope of the glory of God.*** (Rom.5:2)

*...this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, **the hope of glory.*** (Col.1:27)

*...so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who **calls you into His own kingdom and glory.*** (1 Thess.2:12)

*It was for this **He called you through our Gospel, that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** (2 Thess. 2:14)

*...looking for **the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus...*** (Tit.2:13 NASB)

This glory that is the hope and calling of the Christian is never identified with heaven. Rather, it is the glory with which, unperceived by most, “*the whole earth is filled*” (Isa.6:3), and the *knowledge* of which shall also someday fill the earth “*as the waters cover the sea*” (Hab.2:14; Num.14:21; cf., Isa.11:9).

This glory is identified with that likeness of Christ toward which we currently are being transformed “*from glory to glory*” (2 Cor.3:18)—which our “*light affliction is working for us*” (2 Cor.4:17), and with which the sufferings of the present time are “*not worthy to be compared*” (Rom.8:18).

Paul referred to this as “*the glory which shall be revealed in us*” (Rom.8:18). We are to be glorified at Christ’s coming (1 Cor.15:43). This is when we become “*like Him, for we shall see Him as He is,*” which John refers to the Christian’s “*hope*” (1 John 3:2-3). The reality of this

glory has already been revealed “to us in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor.4:6), but remains to be revealed “in us” (Rom.8:18).

This is what Paul continually declares whenever he is contemplating our hope. There is nothing in it of an eternal existence in heaven. This is when God’s will shall be done “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt.6:10). It is “the restoration of all things” of which Peter preached<sup>26</sup> when God’s ultimate goal to “reconcile all things to Himself...whether things on earth or things in heaven”<sup>27</sup> is realized. This is the purpose of Christ’s coming (according to His own statement): “to seek and to save that which was lost”(Luke 19:10). The rescue and restoration of all that was forfeited by Adam’s sin involves the restoration of the earth and humanity to their pristine state of righteousness.

What, then, are we to make of Paul’s longing to depart and be “with Christ” (i.e., in heaven)? Paul understood that he might very well die before the *Parousia*. The ultimate glory will not appear before that final day, but from the time of his death until then, his spirit goes to be with the Lord. This is referred to as the “intermediate state.” We know that Paul understood man to be a spirit (or soul, or both) dwelling in a mortal body, like a house. He spoke of our mortal lifetime as being a time when we are “at home in the body” (2 Cor.5:6).

Even prior to death, Paul believed that a person could, conceivably, be briefly “out of the body” (2 Cor.12:2, 3). He believed that at death one becomes “absent from the body,” just as we might today be temporarily absent from the house in which we live. Our bodies, in this life, are merely our domiciles—they are not “us.” We can be in them or absent from them.

Paul spoke of dying as a departing to “be with Christ, which is far better” (Phil.1:23). He clearly identified being “absent from the body” with being “present with the Lord” (2 Cor.5:8). Nonetheless, since we will never again, after death, be absent from the Lord, we will also accompany Him in His return to earth at the *Parousia*. Paul states this in 1 Thessalonians 4:14, just prior to describing the Resurrection, in which we rejoin our bodies.

Paul tells us that when Christians die, our spirits and/or souls depart from our bodies to dwell temporarily in heaven with Jesus. The body at that time remains in the ground to decay and await the Resurrection on the Last Day. The departed soul, like Jesus Himself, remains in heaven until Jesus returns to earth. At that time He will “bring with Him” the Christians who have died, to rejoin their bodies (now glorified) and to live and reign on the New Earth forever.

### **The Full-Preterist conception of New Heavens and New Earth**

The argument of *Full-Preterism* begins with the claim that in biblical times the expression “heaven and earth” was commonly understood by the Jews to be a reference to the Old Covenant, or perhaps the Temple System (which is essentially the same thing). We are informed that the temple was seen as the portal between heaven and earth where the two touched one another. The passing away of heaven and earth, they say, really refers to the passing of the Old Covenant and temple in A.D.70. The New Heavens and New Earth then refers to the New Covenant Order that replaced the Old. As Max King, the founder of Full-Preterism, put it:

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<sup>26</sup> Acts 3:21

<sup>27</sup> Colossians 1:20

The expression 'heaven and earth' is used in scripture to designate a dispensation, or an orderly system under which men lived...Now, the critical question in the immediate text of Rev.21:1 is: What new heaven and earth did John see? Is the new heaven and earth of his vision one that follows the Christian dispensation, or is it the Christian age itself, following the Jewish age?...The new heaven and earth, therefore, stands in contrast to the Jewish world, not this present material world.<sup>28</sup>

It is one thing to affirm a theological conclusion, but it is another to demonstrate that the logical steps taken to reach that conclusion are sound. Did the Jews think of the temple, or of a “dispensation,” when speaking of “heaven and earth”? Perhaps some may have, but determining whether the Bible uses such terminology in that way or not is a different matter requiring demonstration, not assumption. Let’s examine this claim.

### **The meaning of “heaven and earth” in scripture**

The terms “heaven” and “earth” are mentioned together in juxtaposition at least 160 times in scripture (that is the number at which I stopped counting). In virtually every case the context renders it unambiguous that the expression refers to the literal earth and sky—not “a dispensation.” There are a very few exceptions where some could justify taking the words symbolically as the full-preterists do, employing them as a metaphor for the Old or New Covenants Systems. These cases are extremely rare in scripture, and none actually requires this interpretation. Even if it could be determined that this was their meaning, these few outliers cannot be made to control the meaning of the scores of cases where no such meaning is in view.

Charles S. Meek, in his book *Christian Hope Through Fulfilled Prophecy*, makes a promise which, I think, he fails to keep: “We...will show that the *new heaven and new earth* is a covenantal/theological term.”<sup>29</sup> He later affirms, “It can be argued that most references to the heavens and earth are uses of Hebraic phraseology that refer to the religio-political government of a people group.”<sup>30</sup>

I suppose almost anything “can be argued,” so long as one is determined to reach a pre-selected conclusion, and the actual facts of the case are not consulted. Again, I encourage any reader to look up the 160+ biblical references to the *heaven and earth* and decide whether “most” of them could conceivably be viewed as Meeks suggests. This claim can be taken seriously only if “most” can mean perhaps 3% of the relevant cases.

Appeal is made to Flavius Josephus<sup>31</sup> in support of the claim that, “in the Jewish mind, heaven and earth came together in the temple.”<sup>32</sup> This is to prepare us for the specific claim that, when the Bible says “*heaven and earth*,” it really means the Jewish temple—a claim that would not be established even if the original assertion could be proved correct. The particular references provided from the Jewish historian are from the third book of his *Antiquities*—the first found in 3.6.4 (123) , and the other in 3.7.7 (180-187). In reading these sections of Josephus, I find him explaining Solomon’s intentions in designing the temple, speaking of the Holy of Holies as representing heaven and the other courts of the temple representing sea and land. Various details of the design are said to be fashioned after the Zodiac and the movement of various planets. All of this is very unsurprising since

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<sup>28</sup> Max R. King, *Spirit of Prophecy* (1971, Warren OH), p. 357, 358.

<sup>29</sup> Charles S. Meek, *Christian Hope Through Fulfilled Prophecy*, third edition, 2016, p.126

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.127

<sup>31</sup> Flavius Josephus was the first-century Jewish historian from whose writings we obtain much of our knowledge of the Jewish history, beliefs and customs in New Testament times.

<sup>32</sup> Meek, *op.cit.*, p.136

ancient temples often symbolically portrayed astral, mundane or spiritual things (what else exists for them to represent?).

But this is a very far cry from establishing a claim that the phrase *“heavens and earth”* had acquired the technical status of a metaphor among the Jews, so that in speaking of “heaven and earth” one would be naturally understood to be referring to the temple, or the religious orders associated with it. Notably, in the scores of references in the pages of scripture, barely a handful could reasonably be suggested to have this meaning—and even in their cases, this meaning is disputable.

Meek’s scriptural case<sup>33</sup> rests upon the obvious New Testament references that either speak of the passing away of heaven and earth or of a “new heaven and a new earth.” The total number of verses that fit this description is five (a very small sample from which much is expected to be proved). Meek provides eight references in Isaiah, of which only two use the phrase “new heaven and new earth.” The others do not use this language at all. They are all instances of apocalyptic language wherein the destruction of some nation or other (including Edom and Babylon) are spoken of in language of cosmic cataclysm. Obviously, most of these provide no help in proving that “heaven and earth” serves as a synonym for the Jewish religio-political establishment. It would seem that the reader is not supposed to actually look up and read the examples, or doing so, is not supposed to notice what they actually say.

Max King is partially correct when he points out:

The writer of the Book of Hebrews referred to...the shaking of heaven and earth, which signified the removing of the temporal Old Covenant world that was created at Mount Sinai (Hebrews 12:26-27)... The destruction of Jerusalem and the earthly temple in A.D.70 provides the context for the passing of the old heaven and earth...<sup>34</sup>

Here, King is referring to Hebrews’ citation of Haggai 2:6. In Hebrews 12:26, the writer refers first to the fact that the earth shook at the initial giving of the Law at Mount Sinai when the Old Covenant was first inaugurated. The prophet Haggai (like the writer of Hebrews citing him) seems to be saying that the covenant that was established with the shaking of the earth was soon to be brought down by an even greater shaking, in A.D.70. This time, not only the earth, but the heavens as well would be (figuratively) “shaken.” Jesus had earlier referred to A.D.70, saying of that time, *“the powers of the heavens shall be shaken”* (Luke 21:26). Though this may be a legitimate instance of the disappearance of the Old Covenant being described as a shaking of “heaven and earth,” the passage in Haggai does not merely mention “heaven and earth” as if using an established technical term, or a recognized metaphor, for the covenant system. The statement in Haggai continues, also including the shaking up of many things besides “heaven and earth”:

*I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come... (Haggai 2:6-7)*

A few verses later, God’s shaking of the heavens and earth are said to result in the overthrow of *“the throne of kingdoms”* and the destruction of the strength of *“the Gentile kingdoms”* (Hag.2:21-22).

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p.126

<sup>34</sup> Max R. King, *Israel’s New Heaven and Earth*, Mar.26, 2005

It appears that the divine shaking mentioned in Haggai occurs throughout history and is seen in the rise and fall of empires.

In any case, the *shaking* of heaven and earth is not synonymous with the *destruction* of heaven and earth. The writer of Hebrews assumes that the shaking will remove the impermanent order, leaving other things “*that cannot be shaken*” undisturbed.<sup>35</sup>

While full-preterists tell us that the phrase “heaven and earth” was a recognized and standard metaphor for the temple order, the examples in Haggai and Hebrews would not support this contention—even if that was the event being described. The present case would equally justify the assertion that the whole clause, “*heaven and earth, the sea and the dry land, and all nations*” was also a recognized term for the Old Covenant System. Such an identification could never be maintained. We can see the passage in Haggai as describing the destruction of Jerusalem using terminology of a cosmic cataclysm, but this would be a stand-alone instance (as would, e.g., Isa. 24:3-4,18-20), not a case controlling all future hermeneutics. Far from being an established metaphor for the destruction of the Jewish temple system, the destruction of “heaven and earth” elsewhere refers to the destruction of ancient Babylon (Isa.13:13).

In order to gain a proper understanding of “heaven and earth” in any particular case, we must exegete every relevant passage individually by appeal to its context and internal features. To say that a term like “heavens and earth” in Isaiah 65:17 controls the meaning of the same expression wherever it occurs is to practice hermeneutical absurdity. As mentioned previously, “heaven and earth” occur together in scripture (from the first verse of Genesis through the last chapters of Revelation) over 160 times. Twenty-two of these occurrences are in Isaiah. Of these, perhaps, three<sup>36</sup> could conceivably be seen as metaphors for Old-Covenant Judaism—but even in these cases, such a meaning would not be demanded, nor would it be their most obvious interpretation.

In one case mentioned above, the destruction of heaven and earth is indisputably associated with the fall of ancient Babylon (not Jerusalem).<sup>37</sup> The remaining eighteen cases in Isaiah are unambiguous references to the literal earth and sky.<sup>38</sup> This does not provide much warrant for us to allow the metaphor of Isaiah 65:17 to control the meaning of the phrase anywhere else—even in Isaiah. Only very special contextual features would justify the few instances in which we would take the phrase metaphorically. Those considerations do not appear to exist in the New Testament cases in the Gospels, Romans, 2 Peter, or Revelation 21.

### ***Jesus’ use of “heaven and earth”***

In the recorded statements of Christ in the four Gospels, we find twenty occurrences of the words “heaven” and “earth” together. All of them can reasonably be seen as nothing more than statements referring to the literal earth and sky—and at least sixteen of them can be seen no other way.

We have no record of Jesus ever using the phrase “*new heavens and new earth*,” as Peter and John (in Revelation) do. However, there were three times (five passages, including parallels) when Jesus did refer to the “passing away” of the heavens and the earth (as did Peter and John). This makes them relevant to our present inquiry. Here are the three statements:

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<sup>35</sup> Hebrews 12:27

<sup>36</sup> Isaiah 51:16; 65:17; 66:22

<sup>37</sup> Isaiah 13:13

<sup>38</sup> Isaiah 1:2; 37:16; 40:12, 22; 42:5; 44:23-24; 44:24; 45:8, 12, 18; 48:13; 49:13; 51:6, 13; 55:9-10; 66:1

- 1) *For assuredly, I say to you, till **heaven and earth** pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.* (Matt.5:18)
- 2) *And it is easier for **heaven and earth** to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail.* (Luke 16:17)
- 3) ***Heaven and earth** will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.* (Matt.24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33)

In two of the three instances (#1 and #3), one might conceivably find in Jesus' phrase "heaven and earth" a metaphorical reference to the Old Covenant and the temple. By that I mean the suggestion would not seem completely absurd in either of those cases, though there is no compelling reason to read this meaning into the words. They make sufficiently good sense in their literal meaning.

The close similarity of the first example to the second would suggest that the phrase "*heaven and earth*" is being used the same way in both statements. In the second, it would make no sense at all to see "*heaven and earth*" as a metaphor for the Old Testament System of Torah, since the statement would then become a nonsensical tautology. How could it be "*easier*" for the whole Torah System to pass away than for any detail of that system to do so? If such a passing away is anticipated, both the system and its minutiae would disappear simultaneously—the one being no easier, or more difficult, to dispense with than the other. Certainly, the passing of the heavens and earth, though spoken of only hypothetically, would refer, in Luke 16:17, to the end of the present cosmos, not of the Old Covenant.

This being so, it would be most reasonable to interpret "heaven and earth" similarly in the corresponding statement of Matthew 5:18. In fact, since Luke is sometimes known to paraphrase for greater clarity the more Hebraic terminology in Matthew,<sup>39</sup> the Lucan pronouncement might merely be taken as a clearer statement of all or part of the Matthean statement. If so, we might paraphrase Matthew 5:18 thus (allowing for the idiomatic use of "until" to mean "unless"<sup>40</sup>: "*Until* [that is, "*unless*"] *heaven and earth pass away, not one jot or tittle of the law will fail before all is fulfilled.*" The first "until" would accordingly be seen as hypothetical; the second as predictive.

In any case, Christ's few references to the passing of heaven and earth provide no basis for saying that He, or the Jewish listeners of His time, would have understood "heaven and earth" to mean "the Mosaic Covenant." If we cannot show that His usage bore this meaning, we would seemingly have to see Matthew 24:35 as an outright prediction of the end of the cosmos, such as is predicted in 2 Peter and Revelation.

### **The *stoicheia***

An additional argument in favor of *Full-Preterism* comes from Peter's statement, when describing the destruction of the heavens and the earth, that "*the elements will melt with fervent heat*" (2 Pet.3:10, 12). This argument focuses on the meaning of the word "elements," which, in Greek, is the *stoicheia*

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<sup>39</sup> E.g., Luke paraphrases "the abomination of desolation," in Matthew 24:15, as "Jerusalem surrounded by armies," in Luke 21:20. Similarly, Luke consistently paraphrases Matthew's "kingdom of heaven" with the less-confusing phrase "kingdom of God" (e.g., comp. Matt.13:33 with Luke 13:18; Matt.8:11 with Luke 13:28-29; Matt.10:7 with Luke 9:2; Matt.18:3 with Luke 18:17; Matt.19:14 with Luke 18:16; Matt.19:23 with Luke 18:24).

<sup>40</sup> i.e., as is the case, for example, in Matthew 23:39

(plural of *stoicheion*). The word is sometimes translated “rudiments,” sometimes “elements,” or “first principles.” Thayer defines this word (in harmony with all lexical authorities) to mean, “*any first thing, from which the others belonging to some series or composite whole take their rise; an element, first principle.*”<sup>41</sup>

In Greek, this word refers to the first or fundamental units of the cosmos, or of a series, like the letters of the alphabet. Among the Greeks, the basic elements [*stoicheia*] from which the natural world was made were regarded as earth, air, fire and water. It is in this sense that biblical commentators have generally understood its use in Peter’s comments about the cosmic destruction.

Apart from its appearing twice in this passage in 2 Peter, the word is found twice in Galatians, twice in Colossians and once in Hebrews. Based upon their interpretation of the Pauline and Hebrews passages, full-preterists suggest that the New Testament uses these terms to mean the old covenantal system of Judaism. If this definition is to be accepted, there will have to be strong justification from context, as the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (TDNT) says: “Outside the NT the term [*stoicheia*] would denote the four elements or the basic materials of the world of which the whole cosmos, and humanity within it, is composed. Only the context can yield any other sense.”<sup>42</sup>

In 2 Peter it is said that the heavens “*will pass away with a great noise*” and “*the earth...will be burned up*” (3:10). That is where we are also told that the *stoicheia* will “*melt with fervent heat.*” Such language gives the impression of the end of the cosmos and the dissolution of the physical elements. TDNT continues: “In 2 Peter 3:10, 12 the reference has to be to the elements (or just possibly the stars). The use of terms and the idea of a final conflagration strongly support ‘elements’ as the true rendering. As V.12 points out, both the higher and lower elements will be destroyed, including the earth and all its works.”<sup>43</sup>

The imagery of the passing away of heaven and earth has already been identified in Full-Preterism with the passing of the Old Covenant System. It is argued that the melting away of the *stoicheia* can best be seen in the same way. In speaking of the *stoicheia*, Don Preston writes: “...the elements in view are not the elements of physical creation. The elements were the fundamental aspects of the Old Covenant world.”<sup>44</sup>

Later, he writes, “We have already shown that the word *stoicheia*, is used by Paul to speak exclusively of the passing of the Old world of Israel.”<sup>45</sup>

It is common in Preston’s books to find him saying “We have already shown such-and-such a thing,” when he should more correctly have said, “We have already *asserted* such-and-such.” In his book he demonstrates no such meaning of *stoicheia*—he only affirms it. As the TDNT argued, above, any claim of *stoicheia* meaning anything other than the physical elements would have to be defended from context. Does context justify the full-preterist contention here?

They argue that Paul and the writer of Hebrews use the word exclusively to refer to the “first principles” of religion found in Judaism. It’s rituals and ceremonies associated with the temple were an inferior, or infantile, form of religious worship and experience which disappeared with the destruction of the temple in A.D.70. The use of *stoicheia* to refer to temple Judaism is thought to be supported in the other New Testament occurrences of the word, outside 2 Peter. There are five of these. Let’s look at them.

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<sup>41</sup> *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Joseph H. Thayer (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), p.588

<sup>42</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, Kittel and Friedrich, edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985). p.1088

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Preston, *Elements*, p.192

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 299



## Galatians 4

*Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements [stoicheia] of the world.*  
(v.3)

*...how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements [stoicheia], to which you desire again to be in bondage? (v.9)*

## Colossians 2

*Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles [stoicheia] of the world, and not according to Christ.(v.8)*

*Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles [stoicheia] of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations...? (v.20)*

## Hebrews 5:12

*For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles [stoicheia] of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.*  
(v.12)

These five verses comprise the whole case for the identification of the *stoicheia* with the Jewish religion in the New Testament. Do they make the case?

Let's take the occurrences in Galatians 4 first. We know that the Galatians were being lured into Jewish religious practices by heretical Judaizers. Such practices included circumcision and the observance of holy seasons (Gal.4:10; 5:2). With reference to this trend, Paul speaks of their turning again to the worthless *stoicheia* from whose bondage they had escaped. Yet, the religious background from which they had been converted was not Judaism. They were Gentile converts from paganism. If they had been Jews, they would already have been circumcised and the matter would not have come up for discussion.

In verse 3, Paul says, "*when we were children, [we] were in bondage under the elements [stoicheia] of the world...*" To whom does he refer in his use of the pronoun "we"? Certainly himself (a former Jew) and his readers (former pagans). He and his readers had both, prior to their conversion, been in bondage to the *stoicheia*, which includes both Judaism and Paganism. Both were infantile, sub-Christian ways of seeking to worship and relate to God. It is true that his readers were not returning to *the same stoicheia* that they had formerly abandoned, but a turning to Judaism was no more desirable than a return to Paganism, since both represent the abandonment of Christ (see 5:1-4). Both are referred to as the "*stoicheia* of the world" (v.3). Thus, Paul's use of this term in Galatians does not support its one-to-one correspondence to Judaism, *per se*. The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* confirms our verdict—using Paul's usage in Galatians as the example when asserting that the phrase *stoicheia of the kosmos* "draws attention to something common to Jewish and pagan religion."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Freidrich, Ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), Vol.7, p.684

When we turn to Paul's usage in Colossians 2, full-preterists fare no better. Here, too, Paul speaks of the "*stoicheia* of the world." We know that Paul in Galatians included both Judaism and Paganism under that rubric. In verse 8, Paul warns us not to be led astray through philosophy and the traditions of men, according to "the *stoicheia* of the world." It is thought by many that there was a "Colossian Heresy" comprised of elements of Greek philosophy, Jewish practices, and borrowings from the pagan mystery religions. Whether there was one composite heresy incorporating these elements, or simply three different heresies about which Paul sought to warn the Colossians, it cannot be shown that "the *stoicheia* of the world," which he mentions twice, refer specifically to Judaism. He does seem to list some (possibly Jewish) regulations as being part of what he is warning against (vv.20ff). Nonetheless, we would be well-justified in saying that Paul's usage of this term differs nothing from his meaning in Galatians—and that this does not specifically refer to Judaism but all inferior religion.

The final non-Petrine instance is one occurrence of *stoicheia* in Hebrews 5:12. We know from many internal evidences that the readers of this epistle were Jewish Christians who were being drawn back to their Jewish roots at the expense of their commitment to Christ. If we are not very perceptive of the contents of our passage, we might leap to the conclusion that the writer's disparaging of the *stoicheia* is a warning against Judaism. Reading the passage in context will easily disabuse us of this error.

We might notice that the writer does not here refer to "the *stoicheia* of the world" (as we find in both Galatians and Colossians), but as "the *stoicheia* of the oracles of God" (a much less condemnatory term). It can easily be shown that the *stoicheia* in this passage have a different referent than is the case in Galatians and Colossians. Here, the writer is referring to the most basic principles of *Christian teaching* (not Judaism), which were appropriately taught to fledgling believers.

The writer, in Pauline fashion, equates "the *stoicheia* of the oracles of God" with what he calls "*milk*" (contrasted with "*solid food*").<sup>47</sup> Paul makes this same distinction in 1 Corinthians 3:1ff, when he is chiding his Christian readers (as does the writer here) for having failed to properly mature since coming to Christ. Paul says he had fed the Corinthians with "milk" because they were not ready for the "solid food" that he taught to "*the mature*" (1 Cor.2:6). It is clear that "milk" is not a reference to Judaism, since Paul would never have fed such to his converts. He is referring to the most basic of Christian teachings, which he earlier had identified as nothing "*except Christ and Him crucified*" (2:2).

This basic Gospel information which Paul calls "*milk*"—is what the writer of Hebrews equates with "the *stoicheia* of the oracles of God." Though the readers were indeed being warned generally against a return to Judaism, that is not the specific concern expressed in Hebrews 5:12-6:3 (an unbroken section).

In case we were uncertain as to what the writer is referring to in his reference to the *stoicheia*, he unpacks it for us by listing six doctrines to which he refers as "*the foundation*" (6:1-3). These are:

- Repentance from dead works
- Faith toward God
- The doctrine of baptisms
- The doctrine of laying on of hands
- The doctrine of resurrection from the dead
- The doctrine of eternal judgment

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<sup>47</sup> Hebrews 5:12-14

Many commentators identify this list with doctrines of Judaism, since all of these things can be found (minimally, in some cases) in the Old Testament. The argument for this identification is two-fold:

- 1) the fact that the book, in general, is an appeal for the readers to escape the grip of Judaism, and
- 2) the use of the word “*baptisms*.” This is not the Greek word usually used for Christian baptism.<sup>48</sup> The word *baptismon* used here usually refers to the Jewish practice of washing oneself and certain objects (Mark 7:4) to maintain or regain ritual cleanness. The same word is used with this very meaning in Hebrews 9:10, where it is translated “washings.” Also, the use of the plural *baptisms* seems strange, in view of the Paul’s affirmation that there is only “*one baptism*” (Eph.4:5).

The first of these arguments we have encountered and dispensed with above, and the second presents no insurmountable difficulty. When writing to Gentiles, Paul likened Christian baptism to burial and resurrection (Rom.6:2-3; Col.2:12) and to the exodus of Israel from Egypt through the sea (1 Cor.10:1-6). Peter likened it to passing through the waters of Noah’s flood in the safety of the ark (1 Peter 3:20-21). By contrast, the Jews tended to see Christian baptism in terms of “washing,” or “purification” (John 3:25-26; Acts 22:16; cf., Titus 3:5). To the Jewish Christian, *baptism* (immersion in water) was the counterpart to the Old Testament idea of washings. To speak to such readers of their baptisms being “washings” (using the word for Jewish purification) is not stranger than for Paul to speak of “Christ, our Passover” or of the keeping of “the Feast” [i.e., of unleavened bread] when speaking of living an uncompromised life (1 Cor.5:7-8). In fact, the writer of Hebrews himself had already spoken of “*a keeping of sabbath*” with reference to the spiritual rest of the Christian (Heb.4:9, Gr.). In light of such cases there is nothing strange in his speaking of Christian baptism as a “washing” as he seems to do in Hebrews 10:22.

But what shall we say of the use of the plural “*baptisms*”? Are we to recognize multiple baptisms in the Christian experience? Paul indeed refers to “*one baptism*” when listing shared experiences and benefits which define the unity of all Christians (Eph.4:4-6). We have all had one and the same baptism. That is, all were baptized in the name of Christ, rather than the names of Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or any other Christian leader or sect (see 1 Cor.1:12-15). In that sense, there is only one, unique baptism shared by all believers—namely, into Christ.

This does not nullify the fact that scripture speaks of various other baptisms (immersions) that the same believer is expected to experience. There are at least three baptisms mentioned by Christ. Our “one baptism” in the name of Christ refers to water baptism. Nevertheless, in addition to water baptism, Jesus also spoke of being baptized (immersed) in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5). On one occasion, Jesus told His disciples that they, like Himself, would experience a baptism (immersion) in suffering (Matt.20:22-23). Paul, additionally, refers to us being baptized (immersed) into the body of Christ as an act of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor.12:13). These four experiences are all referred to as “baptisms,” and are normatively to be experienced by every Christian. Thus, biblically, there are multiple “baptisms” in the Christian life.

The writer’s use of *baptismon* does not suggest that he is listing the foundations of Judaism, as opposed to basic Christian teachings. These six things are indeed fundamental beliefs and practices

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<sup>48</sup> It is *baptismon*—plural of *baptisimos*, as opposed to the more common word for baptism: *baptisma*.

of Christianity—but not of Judaism! The author refers to these things as “*the first [principles] of Christ,*” not of Judaism (6:1).

If one were to list the most basic teachings and practices of Judaism, this is not the list anyone would make. The fundamentals of Judaism would certainly include their festivals, sabbaths, circumcision, temple sacrifices, and many other things that would come to mind before any of the things in the writer’s list of foundational things. Also, while our writer might wish to tell his readers to leave behind Jewish practices, the six things he listed are not the aspects of Judaism that Christianity would discard. Repentance, faith, washings (or baptisms), laying on of hands, the doctrine of resurrection and final judgment, all may be found among some Jews (though not the Sadducees, who comprised most of the priesthood and temple leadership). Significantly, they are the very things in Judaism that Christianity retains. Leaving behind Judaism would not involve discarding these things.

If the writer was, in this passage, seeking to make the point that Judaism must be abandoned he would have listed practices and beliefs that were distinctively Jewish, and not those retained in Christianity. There were plenty of such from which to choose—e.g., circumcision, temple sacrifices, festivals, kosher rules, etc.

In this particular context, the author is scolding Christians for not having progressed beyond the most basic of Christian teachings (the “*milk*” or *stoicheia* of 5:12, which he also calls the “*first principles of Christ*” in 6:1). The idea is not that these six things are to be fully abandoned, as Judaism is to be. No one would argue that Christians must not continue to have faith toward God. The exhortation is not that these six things are to be renounced (like Judaism), but that they should be built upon as a structure rises from a permanent foundation. The idea here, as in 1 Corinthians 3, is not that milk is bad, but that infantile Christians should “*go on to maturity*” (6:1) so as to consume and digest “*solid food*” (5:12-14). When building a structure, one lays the foundation first. This foundation is never discarded, and it remains the principal basis of the building’s stability. However, one does not endlessly continue “*laying again the foundation*” (6:1). More needs to be learned than the mere fundamentals and this progress requires maturing learners (contrast 1 Cor.2:2 with 2:6).

We can see that the writer of Hebrews does not refer to Judaism in his reference to *stoicheia*.

The claim that 2 Peter 3:10-13 refers to the removal of the Old Covenant—because this is the alleged meaning of *stoicheia*—is a failed argument. Whatever other strengths the full-preterists may bring to the passage, this one is of no value.

**Chapter Twelve:**  
**The New Heavens and New Earth**  
**Part Two: Principal Texts**

Peter told his readers, “we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet.3:13). Obviously, Peter is not innovating a new idea here. He refers to a previous promise of God which anticipates the coming of *new heavens and a new earth*, in which righteousness prevails. To what promise does he refer? There are several possibilities.

We can find reference to such in a number of other biblical passages. The earliest of which is Isaiah 65:15—

*For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth;  
And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.*

This is followed, a chapter later, by Isaiah 66:22—

*“For as the new heavens and the new earth  
Which I will make shall remain before Me,” says the Lord,  
“So shall your descendants and your name remain.”*

These are the only Old Testament verses that use the exact wording found in 2 Peter 3:13. Revelation 21:1 also mentions a “new heaven (singular) and new earth” which differs from Peter’s phrase only in its making “heaven” singular in contrast to Peter’s “heavens.” This difference is of no significance, and the likelihood that Peter and John have the same concept in mind seems beyond reasonable doubt.

Additionally, there is the Pauline description of the present groaning “*creation*” that anticipates its being liberated from the bondage of corruption at the time of the “*redemption of our body*” (Rom.8:18-23). This deliverance from corruption seems to fit with the description of conditions in the New Jerusalem (in the New Earth) where there is “*no more curse*” (Rev.22:3).

We see that reference to a new creation (“heaven and earth”) can be found outside 2 Peter in the writings of Isaiah, Paul and John. To which earlier “*promise*” does Peter refer as the source of his information? We might think that the passage in Revelation can be immediately ruled out due to the assumption that Revelation was written too late to have been available to Peter—but this might not actually be the case. The date of writing of the Book of Revelation is greatly in dispute, and there are those who believe it was written during the reign of Nero, who died at his own hand in A.D.68. Peter certainly died in the time of Nero. Therefore, it is possible that both Revelation and 2 Peter were from the Neronian period. Which of the two came first cannot be certainly known. That Peter would refer to a promise found in John’s Book of Revelation is no less likely than that James, in his epistle, would refer back to a promise from the same book. Most would think both suggestions very unlikely, but consider the statement in James 1:12—

*Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.*

In all the recorded words of Jesus, only once do we find the promise to which James refers—namely, Revelation 2:10—

*...you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

Either James is referring to the promise made in Revelation 2:10 (meaning Revelation was written before the Book of James), or else James refers to another, otherwise unknown, promise made by Christ—which was possibly known to the early Christians only through oral transmission.

Of course, the exact same thing is true of Peter. If James could quote promises from the Apocalypse, so could Peter. On the other hand, if James and his readers knew certain promises made by Christ which have not been preserved in the written scriptures, then so would Peter. This raises the additional possibility that Peter was not referring to Isaiah, Paul or the Revelation as the source of his promise, but to something Jesus said *off the record*.

The latter suggestion being unverifiable, we might find the simpler solution to be that Peter is referring to the promise in the Apocalypse. There is one important factor that favors this option. Of the several alternative references to the new heavens and earth in scripture, only Peter and Revelation refer to this new created order following the catastrophic destruction of the first heaven and earth.<sup>1</sup> Jesus had mentioned the passing away of “heaven and earth” (e.g., Matt.5:18; 24:35; Luke 16:17), but we do not have record of His speaking about “*new heavens and new earth*.” Only Isaiah, Paul, Peter and Revelation mention the new creation distinctly. Neither Isaiah nor Paul describe the destruction of the old heaven and earth, but both Peter and the Revelator emphasize this point (2 Pet.3:10-12; Rev.20:11; 21:1, 4).

I do not intend to argue that Peter is specifically dependent upon the Apocalypse for the “promise” to which he refers (many would simply find the suggestion preposterous). I am only pointing out that in considering alternative candidates for Peter’s source Revelation cannot be ruled out presumptively.

Peter might have been thinking of Isaiah’s or Paul’s words concerning the renovation of creation (in which case, he merely inferred a violent destruction of the old cosmos). That Peter was familiar with Paul’s epistles is clear (2 Peter 3:15-16). His first epistle exhibits the influence of Romans and Ephesians specifically.

Full-preterists generally assume that Peter is referring to the “promise” of *new heavens and earth first* found in Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22. This is certainly possible, though as we have said, not a necessary assumption. A respectable case can be made that Isaiah’s use of such terminology is not referring to changes in the literal cosmos, but metaphorically to changes in the covenant. How so? While elements in Isaiah 60 through 66 are popularly viewed as eschatological in subject matter, Jesus and the apostolic Church did not seem to view these chapters that way.

We are happy to admit, along with the full-preterists, that much of this portion of Isaiah speaks of the New Order initiated by Christ—though we would recognize it as beginning in A.D.30 (not A.D.70). Jesus Himself applied this section of Isaiah in this manner, when He quoted Isaiah 61:1f and then announced that those verses were being fulfilled even as He was speaking (Luke 4:18-21). He also described the present, incremental growth of His Kingdom in terms taken directly from Isaiah 61:11, and in the beatitudes and woes found in Luke 6:20-25 we seem to hear the echo of Isaiah 65:13-14.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah and Paul do mention, in either apocalyptic or literal terms, the “passing away” of the cosmos, but not in the immediate context of their discussions of the new heavens and earth. Obviously, they might have connected these two phenomena, but their writings do not specifically connect them, as do 2 Peter 3 and Revelation 20-21.

Beyond this, Stephen quotes Isaiah 66:1-2,<sup>2</sup> and Paul cites Isaiah 65:1-2,<sup>3</sup> as being relevant to their own times. Paul also alludes to Isaiah 66:20 as descriptive of his own ministry to the Gentiles.<sup>4</sup> These New Testament citations and allusions clearly show that Jesus and the apostles recognized a fulfillment of this section of Isaiah as commencing in their own times—prior to A.D.70. Therefore, one might reasonably see the coming of “*new heavens and a new earth*” (found nowhere in the Old Testament other than in this section of Isaiah), as a reference to that transition that took place in the first century, when the New Covenant Order replaced the Old Covenant Order.

Full-preterists find additional support for this idea in Paul’s reference to the New Testament believer as “*a new creation*,” including the statement that “*old things have passed away*” (2 Cor.5:17). Paul also consistently refers to the “*new man*” as something “*created*” (Eph.2:15; 4:24; Col.3:10). The “*new man*” (the corporate body of Christ) is contrasted with the “*old man*” (the corporate body of Adam),<sup>5</sup> even as the new creation is contrasted with the old.

Of course, if this is what Isaiah is talking about, it’s fulfillment would have to be identified with Pentecost, rather than with the destruction of the temple—since Isaiah only speaks of the establishment of the new, and mentions nothing about the demolition of the old.

Our admission that Isaiah 60 through 66 applies significantly to the New Testament Era is not the same as denying a future new heavens and new earth, to be recreated at the end of the present cosmos.

### ***The primary New Testament texts on “New Heavens and New Earth”***

The question remaining on the table then is: What were Isaiah, Paul, Peter and John anticipating when they spoke of a renovated creation including a new heaven and new earth? The answer may or may not be the same for all four of these writers, but the question is before us to be explored.

I have said that the section of Isaiah in which reference to this new creation occurs (65:17; 66:22) is repeatedly cited in the New Testament as being relevant to the present age. Is this all we need to know in seeking to understand their predictions? Does this fact alone require that Isaiah’s references to the new heavens and new earth must only be spiritualized, denying any validity to the concept of a literal new cosmos to be introduced at the *Parousia*? There are two questions that must be raised concerning New Testament writers’ usage of the Isaianic verbiage:

- 1) Is there an “already-not yet” aspect to these passages? And
- 2) Does Isaiah possibly employ a metaphor based upon a literal eschatological reality?

I do not suggest that the answers to these questions are obvious but they are relevant to our inquiry. Do Isaiah and the New Testament writers mean for us to take this language metaphorically (i.e., *covenantally*) rather than literally? Could both approaches be warranted—the first being a mere foreshadowing of the second? And how would we choose between these alternative interpretations? Let us pause to make sure that we understand what these two questions mean.

- 1) *Is there an “already-not yet” aspect to these passages?*

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<sup>2</sup> Acts 7:49-50

<sup>3</sup> Romans 10:20-21

<sup>4</sup> Romans 15:16

<sup>5</sup> Romans 6:6; Ephesians 2:15; 4:22, 24; Colossians 3:9-10

This refers to the fact that most Biblical scholars recognize numerous concepts in scripture that are said to be present in a spiritual sense today, but remain to be seen in another sense in the end of the age. This is sometimes referred to as "inaugurated eschatology." It suggests that the final chapter of God's redemptive drama has been inaugurated by Christ at His first advent, and that we already have a part in it. However, like a growing mustard seed it is a progressive fulfillment, of which the final stage is yet to come. Here are some examples of this phenomenon in scripture:

- Jesus said the Kingdom of God has already come (Matt.12:28; Luke 17:20-21), and Paul says we are already in it (Col.1:13); but we also anticipate inheriting the Kingdom, in another sense, at the return of Christ (Matt.25:34; 2 Pet.1:11).
- In some passages, we are already said to have been "saved" (e.g., Eph.2:8), while in others, we are looking forward to a future salvation (1 Pet.1:5). This recognizes different phases of salvation having different time referents: justified (already in the past), sanctified (in the present), and glorified (in the future).
- Some passages say we have already passed (spiritually) from death unto life (e.g., John 5:24), whereas other passages speak of a physical resurrection of bodies from graves in the future (John 5:28-29).
- According to John the Baptist, the Bridegroom already has the bride (John 3:29), and Jesus said that He and the disciples were already at the wedding supper (Matt.9:15), which is being furnished with guests (Matt.22:10), but the actual marriage feast, in another sense, is spoken of as future, when the bride "*has made herself ready*" (Rev.19:7; cf., Matt.25:1ff).
- The crushing underfoot of Satan (Gen.3:15) has occurred in one sense at the cross (Heb.2:14), but continues progressively to be brought about under the feet of the people of God (Rom.16:20; Ps.47:3).
- Similarly, the New Covenant Order is a "new creation" (or "*new heavens and new earth*") populated by those who are in Christ (1 Cor.10:17), but we also look for a future, literal *new heavens and new earth* (2 Pet.3:13). According to Hebrews 6:5, we have already "*tasted of the powers of the age to come.*" However, the *fullness* of that age is yet to come.

I was pleased to find that Don Preston himself acknowledges that "in the New Testament there is the 'already-but-not-yet' of the new creation..."<sup>6</sup> Providing examples of this general principle in scripture, Preston writes that Christians in New Testament times "were redeemed, but were looking for redemption (Ephesians 1: 7f/4: 32). They had been adopted, but were eagerly awaiting the adoption (Romans 8: 14/ v. 23)."<sup>7</sup>

He specifically applies the same principle to the new creation:

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<sup>6</sup> Preston, *The Elements Shall Melt With a Fervent Heat*, p.148

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*



Notice the already-but-not-yet aspect of the building of the Temple of God...They were anticipating the arrival of 'that which is perfect' and the 'measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ' (1 Corinthians 13: 8/ Ephesians 4: 8f). In other words, the new creation had begun, but they were longing for its full arrival.<sup>8</sup>

I agree with these particular statements. Our significant disagreement being that he thinks the "not-yet" portions of these dichotomies have now joined the ranks of the "already" portions, whereas I do not. There is no reason to believe that A.D.70 brought about the conditions that Paul would describe as "*the perfect*" or the Church's attaining to the "*measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*" If the Church became perfect and mature in A.D.70, this achievement went unnoticed and it has deteriorated considerably since then!

It is not unreasonable to suggest that Isaiah, Paul, Peter and John all anticipated a literal, eschatological renewing of creation, but that they also saw aspects of its present *spiritual* realization in the passing of the Old Order and the introduction of the New Order—at Pentecost and A.D.70.

2) Our second question is whether a literal new cosmos was expected already even before Isaiah's time, the imagery of which gave rise to the metaphor of a new covenantal order in Isaiah 65 and 66. The New Testament writers may be talking about the literal eschatological reality, while Isaiah, when referring to the New Covenant replacing the Old, employed a metaphor based upon the literal phenomenon.

Think about it. What is a metaphor? It is an idiom in which the words for something literal are symbolically applied to something else. "*I am the true Vine,*"<sup>9</sup> is a classic metaphor. While Jesus is not a literal vine, the metaphor can be understood only because there are such things as literal vines. Jesus used such metaphors frequently, as, "*I am the Door of the sheep,*"<sup>10</sup> "*I am the Light of the world,*"<sup>11</sup> and "*I am the Bread of Life.*"<sup>12</sup> These metaphors can only be employed because everyone knows that doors, light, and bread are real things to which He is comparing Himself.

The prophets do the same. They write almost entirely in poetry that is replete with metaphors. In Isaiah alone, we constantly encounter such figures of speech. Judah, under judgment, is a "sick" man, full of sores from head to foot.<sup>13</sup> Jerusalem is "Sodom and Gomorrah,"<sup>14</sup> and a fruitless vine.<sup>15</sup> The city is, in one place, a harlot,<sup>16</sup> and elsewhere, a virgin.<sup>17</sup> Christ is a "Branch" growing from Jesse, and a banner to the Gentiles.<sup>18</sup> Cyrus the Persian is a "bird of prey from the East."<sup>19</sup> A river of water irrigating and fructifying the desert<sup>20</sup> is a metaphor for the Spirit being poured out and producing the fruit of justice and righteousness.<sup>21</sup> Citing examples in Isaiah alone (to say nothing of the other

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> John 15:1

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:7

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 8:12

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:48

<sup>13</sup> Isaiah 1:5-6

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:10

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:7

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:21

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 37:22

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 11:1, 10, 12

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 46:11

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 43:19-20

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 32:15-16

prophets) would more than adequately illustrate this phenomenon. It is also Isaiah who uses the metaphor of *a new heaven and new earth*.

These metaphors exist because they correspond to literal and familiar realities to which they are likened. There are literal sick men. A literal Sodom and Gomorrah existed. Harlots and virgins, branches and banners, birds of prey, rivers, and deserts are physical realities to which spiritual things can be likened. Isaiah and his readers knew of all of this, of course. Might Isaiah have known of a future renewed cosmos also, which provided the imagery for his metaphorical use of that concept? Proving that Isaiah used the term metaphorically does not rule out the possibility (or likelihood) that there will be an actual new heavens and earth coming—such as that which the Jews anticipated, and to which the New Testament writers refer. Isaiah may well have held such an eschatological expectation, and borrowed its imagery in his figurative poetry as a metaphor for the coming of the New Covenant.

If the New Testament writers knew of a literal renewed cosmos to come at the end of this world, just as Isaiah did, they might have spoken of it without any dependence upon Isaiah's metaphorical prophecies. We will not insist upon this, at this juncture, but it is an explanation that might well be justified in our examination of the New Testament texts, to which we now turn.

### ***Paul's "liberated" creation***

*For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. (Rom.8:19-23)*

Paul spoke of the present "groaning" of the creation under the burden of futility and corruption to which it has been subjected and is in bondage. He likens the groaning of the creation to the groaning of the Christian living in this present world system, and he depicts the creation and us as both longing for "liberty" at the anticipated "adoption," which he identifies as the "*redemption of the body*." At face value, Paul seems to be describing the fallen condition of the world and the expectation that it will be redeemed from this state when the Resurrection frees us from these fallen bodies into "*glorious liberty*." Seen this way, Paul's expectation fits perfectly with the *prima facie* meaning of the rest of New Testament eschatology, and that of the Church through the post-apostolic millennia.

We have observed that the full-preterist wants to say the term "*heaven and earth*" was a common Hebraic expression referring to the Jewish Temple Order. While this may conceivably have been true among some rabbis, we have seen Jewish sources saying that the Jews have believed, at least from Maccabean times, in a physical resurrection to populate a renewed creation. This Jewish expectation agrees admirably with the Christian hope expressed in scripture.

Having asserted that "*heaven and earth*," is a technical term for the temple, the full-preterists ask us also to see Paul's term, "*the creation*," as yet another synonymous technical term. This again, even if some rabbinic precedent may be demonstrated,<sup>22</sup> has no basis in the *scriptural* use of the expression "*the creation*." The Old Testament does not contain the word "creation" at all, but the New

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<sup>22</sup> I have seen none, but this does not mean such cannot exist.

Testament uses it thirteen times. Most of the time, the word simply means what we typically mean by the term—the things created by God.

The expression “*the beginning of the creation*” is used three times. In one of which Jesus explicitly applies the term to the original creation of man and woman and the first marriage in the Garden of Eden: “*But from the beginning of the creation, God made them male and female*” (Mark 10:6).

In another instance, the phrase is elongated: “*the beginning of the creation which God created*” (Mark 13:19), which would most naturally refer to the whole of natural creation. It is virtually impossible to demonstrate scripturally that anyone in Paul’s community would have thought of “*the creation*” as a reference to the Old Covenant System.

Full-preterists assume without warrant that Paul’s expectations, expressed in Romans 8, are dependent on Isaiah 65 and 66. This is gratuitous, since Paul makes no allusion to Isaiah’s prophecy and uses none of Isaiah’s terminology. In this passage, he makes no reference to any of the ideas in Isaiah 65-66 and the concepts that he *does* mention are not found in Isaiah. In other words, Paul, in the earliest New Testament mention of the redeemed creation, does not connect his prediction with anything mentioned in Isaiah 65 or 66. Like Isaiah, he makes no mention of the destruction of the old heavens and earth, but the fact that two passages omit the same things hardly connects them theologically to each other.

Don Preston thinks he sees in Paul’s Romans 8 passage about the liberation of the creation, an undeniable dependence upon Isaiah 26, which reads:

*19 Your dead shall live;  
Together with my dead body they shall arise.  
Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust;  
For your dew is like the dew of herbs,  
And the earth shall cast out the dead...  
21 For behold, the Lord comes out of His place  
To punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity;  
The earth will also disclose her blood,  
And will no more cover her slain.*

Of this passage, Preston writes: “Paul, in Romans 8 draws upon Isaiah 26 for his doctrine of the Resurrection. But Isaiah 26 foretold the time when the blood of the martyrs would be vindicated in the Day of the Lord.”<sup>23</sup>

Preston may see such “drawing upon,” but I cannot. It is true that the language of resurrection from the dead appears in Isaiah 26:19 and 21, but Paul does not allude to these verses, even when speaking of “*the redemption of the body.*” Nothing in Paul’s passage connects verbally, nor necessarily conceptually, with Isaiah 26. Apart from (very different) language of resurrection, I find no other points of similarity between Isaiah 26 and Romans 8:19-23. The mention of the dead awakening and singing in Isaiah 26:19 could certainly be seen figuratively (as Preston sees it), but this does not reveal any connection between this passage and anything Paul says in Romans 8. Paul does not mention anyone awakening or singing. Paul’s liberation of the whole creation from the bondage of corruption (decay) finds no parallel in Isaiah 26.

Since there is no case in scripture in which “the creation” clearly refers to the Old Covenant, there is absolutely no basis for understanding Paul’s redemption of the creation and of our bodies as having

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<sup>23</sup> Don Preston, *Elements*, p.151

any fulfillment in A.D.70. The only reason to see this passage in that manner would be the *a priori* commitment to a paradigm requiring everything predicted in scripture to reach its fulfillment by that date. This paradigm requires demonstration, not mere assumption.

To assume that the expression “*heaven and earth*” refers to the Old Covenant Order and that the alternate expression, “*the creation*,” is simply Paul’s shorthand for the longer phrase, is not based upon exegesis. It is pure eisegesis. No one who reveres the scriptures should feel any obligation to accept such unwarranted, man-made assertions about the text.

In one enigmatic statement, Paul describes Christ as “*the firstborn of all creation*” (Col.1:15). Anti-trinitarians make opportunistic use of this text to prove that Christ is a *part of* creation, not its Creator. To counter this argument, some newer translations have mistranslated this phrase to read “*the firstborn over all creation*,” thus changing Paul’s words and obscuring his meaning. We may be sure that Paul, had he wished to convey the thought of firstborn *over* all creation, knew the words for such a phrase, and would have used them. It is better, no doubt, to let Paul choose his own terms to express his own inspired beliefs.

If Paul was not teaching that Jesus was the *first created being*, what could he possibly have meant by referring to Christ as the “*firstborn of all creation*”? We can answer that by reference to the explanatory phrase he provides three verses later (v.18) where he uses “firstborn” in the same manner as Christ Himself later does in Revelation 1:5. Both expand the term to read “*the firstborn from the dead*.”

In what sense does “*firstborn from the dead*” (Col.1:18) clarify the meaning of “*firstborn of all creation*”(Col.1:15)? The simplest explanation with the fewest difficulties would be the following: Jesus, in His rising into a state of immortality, became not only the first of the human family to undergo this transformation but also the first of the whole creation, which shall also undergo similar transformation. To Paul, we have already entered the “*new creation*” *in a spiritual sense*: “*If any man is in Christ he is a new creation*” (2 Cor.5:17), but our bodies at the *Parousia*, along with the rest of creation, will experience a similar renewal. In rising glorified from death Jesus became the pioneer of a new reality into which we all, and the whole creation, will follow Him.

Did Paul actually believe that the world will be renewed as the perfect home of perfected men and women? Apparently, he saw this as the only way in which the Abrahamic promise could be fulfilled. God did not promise Abraham (nor anyone else) eternal life in heaven. According to Paul, the promise made to Abraham and his Seed was to be “*heir of the world (kosmos)*.”<sup>24</sup> So, in Paul’s view, the inheritance of the “world” (not in its current corrupted form) is the promise made to the Seed of Abraham—Christ and to His disciples (Gal.3:16, 29). Paul saw this as a promise that would be fulfilled in a renewed creation. In what sense could it be said that Abraham has received this inheritance in A.D.70 or any other time in the past?

Though the author of Hebrews may not have been Paul, he shared Paul’s perspective (and some of Paul’s special vocabulary). This author spoke of “*The world (oikoumené) to come*” as being put in the hands of men, not angels (Heb.2:5). If the full-preterist wishes to make the “*oikoumené to come*” a reference to the New Covenant coming in A.D.70, there are some challenges he must face.

First, *Oikoumené* means “the inhabited world” and, in the New Testament, it is used, most often, hyperbolically of the Roman Empire. Its literal meaning would be essentially the same as “planet earth.” It is used as the equivalent of “*the earth*” (in contrast to heaven) in Rom.10:18.<sup>25</sup> It is not used anywhere in scripture with reference to the Old Covenant dispensation.

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<sup>24</sup> Romans 4:13

<sup>25</sup> “*Their sound has gone out to all the earth,  
And their words to the ends of the world.*”

Second, *Oikoumene* is not the same term as “*heaven and earth*” nor as “*the creation*.” All of these may refer to the same thing (as I believe they do), but to make all of these expressions refer to a covenantal, rather than cosmic, referent is to gratuitously multiply alleged “established” metaphors endlessly. What terminology would the full-preterists permit biblical writers to use if they actually wished to affirm the orthodox Jewish and Christian view?

If “heaven and earth” were indeed a common Hebraism for Judaism—a claim still awaiting biblical demonstration—this would not automatically confer the same metaphorical meaning to a variety of other terms which might be used interchangeably only in literal contexts.

Terms that are *literally* synonymous are not necessarily *figuratively* synonymous in established literary usage. For example, in scripture, the Church is sometimes called “the body.” The Bible also will sometimes use the terms “flesh” and “body” interchangeably. This does not mean that the biblical references to Christ’s “flesh” could reasonably be claimed to refer to the Church just because the word “body” sometimes does. Though several words may be interchangeable when speaking literally, the adoption of one of them as a figure of speech in a certain culture’s parlance does not draw the whole lot of them into that same usage. Thus, “heaven and earth,” “the creation,” “the world (*kosmos*),” and “the world (*oikoumenē*)” often will all refer to the same thing in literal speech, but the colloquial use of one of these phrases does not say anything about the usage of the others.

An important question we must ask the full-preterist concerning Romans 8 would be: “If Paul was using such Hebraic idioms as remain opaque even to most biblical and Hebrew scholars to this day was he not, in doing so, taking a tremendous risk of confusing his first-century non-Jewish readers?” We know there were Jews in the Church of Rome whom Paul addresses separately (e.g., Rom.2:17ff), but he does regard the Roman church to be primarily a Gentile congregation (Rom.1:13-15). Could Paul be confident that a Gentile church, who had never met him nor been exposed to his teaching, would not mistake his use of obscure Hebraic imagery for a more literal meaning of his words?

It would have posed no difficulty for him to have said, “the Jewish Temple Order” (or some equivalent) in place of “*the creation*”—if that was indeed what he meant to communicate. Even if the Roman Church had some knowledge of Old Testament terminology (as we do), how would they be expected to know that Paul was not here using literal expressions rather than largely unfamiliar, foreign idioms? There would be no reason in this case (in contrast to 2 Thess.2) for him to be coy about his actual meanings. If Paul spoke to neophyte Gentile believers in rather opaque metaphors that even trained Hebrew scholars today do not readily penetrate we must question his ability to communicate effectively—and the Holy Spirit’s choice of him to do so.

We conclude, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, that Paul speaks of an actual renewed creation, which will be realized at the Resurrection of the dead on the Last Day. There being no biblical precedent for doing otherwise, it would seem best to understand Paul’s liberated “*creation*,” his inherited “*world (kosmos)*,” and Hebrews’ “*world (oikoumenē) to come*” all as literal, and identical in meaning to each other. This strongly suggests that Peter, in claiming to speak agreeably with Paul’s writings on the subject (2 Peter 3:15-16), has the same in view when speaking of “*new heavens and new earth*.” We will next consider Peter’s statements in their context.

### **Peter’s new heavens and new earth**

*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (2 Peter 3:10-13)*

According to Don Preston, “Most commentators are agreed that Isaiah is the source for Peter’s anticipation of the new creation: ‘According to His promise, we look for a new heavens and earth’ (2 Peter 3: 13).”<sup>26</sup>

I have dealt with this matter in the beginning of this chapter, pointing out that there are other possible precedents for Peter’s teaching on this subject apart from Isaiah 65. I also argued that Isaiah may have written metaphorically using imagery borrowed from an anticipated literal event known to the apostles (and possibly to the Old Testament saints and prophets, as well). As we saw in Chapter Seven, the eventual renewal of the earth to its pristine condition was the traditional belief of Judaism..

Don Preston believes it to be helpful to take Peter’s specific discussion in chapter 3 in the context of the previous two chapters of the same epistle in order to determine his meaning. Preston even wants to include the context of Peter’s first epistle, as well. He points out that Peter, in his first epistle had said, “*the end of all things is at hand*” (4:7). Yet, unless he was talking about the actual end of literally everything, we must understand this to mean “*all things*” of a certain category—probably Judaism. Other things, not in that category, would remain to have their end at another time. Seeing this statement as a reference to A.D.70, Preston assumes that everything else Peter will say, whether in this or the next epistle, must also be about A.D.70. Preston does not appear to be aware that full-preterists like himself are the only people who seem to have nothing to discuss apart from A.D.70. Most Christian writers are not one-trick ponies and can discuss a wide range of issues including A.D.70. Peter’s correspondence, like Paul’s epistles, covers a wide range of topics—most of them not eschatological. Like every other preacher, Peter is quite capable of making reference to A.D.70 in one place, and to the end of the world in another, if he so chooses. *Partial-preterists* do this all the time. It is no great feat—just a matter of discussing different subjects on different occasions. This requires, of course, an awareness that the Bible discusses more than one thing.

Preston indicates that the focus of 2 Peter is upon Judaizing false teachers (chapter 2), and the judgment that will soon come upon them (chapter 3). While 2 Peter 2 is one protracted description and denunciation of false teachers, Peter provides no indication that they were Jewish, or Judaizers. They seem much more to fit the description of libertine antinomians who carouse (v.13), commit adultery (v.14), and teach for pay (v.15). We have no indication in scripture that the Judaizers whom Paul continually denounced were motivated by money. They seemed only to be (as James described them) “zealous for the law.” Judaizers brought Christians into bondage under the law, but those described by Peter “*promise them liberty*” (2:19). These teachers sound more gnostic than Jewish. Thus, the question of the punishment of Jewish false teachers does not appear to be on Peter’s mind at all.

There are “scoffers” mentioned in chapter 3, but we do not know them to be the same as the “teachers” earlier mentioned (Some theological writers might need to be reminded that “scoffing” is not the same activity as “teaching”). Nothing in their description would suggest they were Jews. Like

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<sup>26</sup> Don Preston, *Elements*, p.98

the false teachers in the previous chapter, they seemed to be characterized by lustful behavior (v.3). They mock the promise of Christ's coming, saying that this promise has remained unfulfilled even though "*the fathers*" will have (in their time) fallen asleep (v.4). If these are to be people scoffing at the expectation of the fall of Jerusalem rather than the end of the world, then not all of the "fathers" (a reference to the earlier generations of believers?) would by then have "fallen asleep." Even if we were to equate "fathers" with the very first generation of Christians who had personally heard Jesus speak, some of them would still be living in A.D.70, as Jesus Himself assured them (Matt.16:28; 24:34). It seems that these scoffers are not as early as the first or second generation of believers. A longer time-lapse than that seems to be indicated. Peter finds it necessary to insist that a delay even of *a thousand years* does not nullify the promise (vs.8-9)—hardly a necessary statement if he was referring to something that he knew to be looming in the immediate future.

Despite the scoffers' ridicule, however, Peter assures us that "*the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up*"(v.10).

In light of the assertion that Peter is depending on Isaiah 65 and 66 for this chapter's information, it is interesting that his emphasis in verse 10 through 12 is on the conflagration destroying the old heavens and earth—something not specifically depicted in Isaiah 65 or 66.

By the time Peter says, "*we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells*" (v.13), it is possible that he has Isaiah 65:17 in mind, though we have previously discussed alternative possibilities.

How likely is it that Peter would use the phrase "*new heavens and a new earth*" to mean a New Covenant? Is it possible that Peter was not aware that the New Covenant had already been established at the Last Supper (with Peter present!) when Jesus said, "*This cup is the new covenant in my blood*" (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor.11:25)? Long before Peter wrote, Paul had identified himself and his co-workers as "*ministers of the new covenant*" (2 Cor.3:6). Did Peter not know that the reason the Old Covenant was "*becoming obsolete*" and "*ready to vanish away*" was because the New Covenant had already come (Heb.8:6, 13)? Why, then, would Peter speak in his time of the New Covenant as something Christians were still looking forward to?

There is no New Testament basis for equating the "*new heavens and new earth*" or the words "*heaven and earth*" earlier in the chapter (vv.5, 7) with respective covenantal systems. In 2 Peter 3, Peter contrasts three sequential "heavens" and "earths:"

- 1) The first "*heavens and earth*" were those established by the word of God, which stood in and out of the waters (v.5). This verse sets the precedent for the way Peter is going to use the phrase "*heaven and earth*" in the rest of the chapter. There is no point at which Peter signals a shift in his use of this terminology. This first *heaven and earth* are those mentioned in Genesis 1:1. Peter calls them "*the world that then existed,*" which "*perished, being flooded with water*" (v.6).
- 2) There is a second "*heavens and the earth*" which, Peter says, "*now exist*" (v.7). The natural progression of thought would suggest that he is referring to the world since the flood, though full-preterists want us to believe that Peter is now using the term differently from his usage in verses 5-6. If he has, in fact, radically changed the meaning of the terms at this point, he has risked throwing his audience into hopeless confusion since he gives no warning of such a change and has secretly moved from the literal to the metaphorical use of the same terms.

What makes this the more confusing is that his new statement, in context, makes perfectly good sense when it is assumed that he has made no such change.

He has mentioned a world existing before the flood, and would naturally appear to be referring here to the world since the flood. How did Peter expect his Gentile readers to guess that he had inconspicuously switched from a perfectly understandable mode of speaking to an esoteric, *distinctly Jewish*, mode of expression. His adoption of an unfamiliar Hebraic metaphor (if such it is), without providing any notice of change, was sure to lose his audience.

Peter says that the second "*heaven and earth*" will be destroyed by fire, just as the first was destroyed by water.

- 3) After the fiery destruction of the second "*heavens and earth*," we are told there will be yet a third "*heaven and earth*" (v.13). Thus Peter presents a series of three separate "heavens and earths." We know that the first use of the term in the context refers to the literal earth and sky. We are being asked to believe that this initial meaning has no control or impact upon the use of the same phrase in the following few verses—even though Peter gives no hint of any change in usage.

The full-preterist wants to convince us that Peter, in the second and third cases, is not referring to "worlds" as he is in the original case, but has secretly switched modes of expression to now refer to the Old and the New Covenants respectively. A moderately curious fellow might be forgiven for asking, "If the change from the first *heavens and earth* to the second, at the flood, is not referring to a change of covenants, on what basis can we argue that the change from the second to the third *heavens and earth* refers to a change of covenants?"

There is no evidence that in seeking to communicate with Gentile readers<sup>27</sup> Peter would employ confusing foreign idioms. There was nothing to prevent him from speaking unambiguously. If he had wished to talk about the end of Second Temple Judaism and the beginning of the New Covenant, he might as well have said so. If he had been writing to rabbinic Jews, he might have endeared himself to them with unique figures of speech that some writers think such Jews used. But when addressing a Gentile audience, there is no reason for him to confuse them with Hebraisms that might mistakenly be taken to be literal statements by the unsuspecting reader. Where else in his letters does Peter exhibit a propensity for obscuring his meaning by the use of rare Jewish idiomata?

On the other hand, to say that the *physical* land and atmosphere were destroyed in the flood, and replaced by new earthly and atmospheric conditions, would be a natural and sensible way to understand Peter's words—confirmed by the biblical history in Genesis. Peter calls the antediluvian heavens and earth "*the world (kosmos) that then existed*"(v.6). *Kosmos* is not generally used in scripture with reference to a religious system. In any case, by use of this term Peter sets up his readers to understand the "*new heavens and earth*" as a new physical world.

He then speaks of the present heavens and earth as being reserved for a future destruction. Since the heavens and earth that perished in the flood were a "world," and not a covenantal order, the

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<sup>27</sup> Some dispute whether Peter's intended audience were Gentiles. However, it seems clear that he is writing this letter to the same churches whom he addressed in his first (2 Peter 3:1). In that epistle, he identified his audience as the believers scattered in Gentile regions of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1 Peter 1:1)—many of which were in churches established by Paul, where divisions between Jews and Gentiles would be strictly forbidden (see Gal.2:11-13). Peter's readers had been converted out of "abominable idolatries" (1 Peter 4:3), which was not true of Jewish converts. Also, Peter reminds his readers that before they were Christians they had been "not a people" (1 Peter 2:10)—something that could not be said of Israel.



destruction of the second heavens and earth would not predictably be recognized as referring to the destruction of the temple system.

In verses 10 and 12, the full-preterist wants to see in the melting “*elements*” (*stoicheia*) a reference to Jewish religion. We dispensed with this argument in our previous chapter, showing that there is not one instance in scripture where *stoicheia* can be shown to be equivalent to specifically Jewish practices.

### **John’s New Heaven, New Earth and New Jerusalem (Rev.20, 21)**

*Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. (Rev.20:11)*

*Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” (Rev.21:1-4)*

*And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. <sup>2</sup>In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. <sup>3</sup>And there shall be no more curse.... (Rev.22:1-3)*

The New Heavens and New Earth in Revelation 21 cannot be interpreted independently of the New Jerusalem. No sooner does John see the New Heaven and New Earth, in v.1, than he sees the New Jerusalem descending from the former to the latter (v.2). The New Jerusalem is the focus of most of the chapter’s details, representing the society of those dwelling in the New Earth.

In Hebrews 12:22-23 and Galatians 4:26, the heavenly Jerusalem is identified with the Church. Likewise, the description of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21 possesses many features which identify it with the Church.

The New Jerusalem is described as sitting upon twelve foundation stones, which are the “*twelve apostles of the Lamb*” (v.14). Likewise, Paul says that the Church is “*built upon the foundation of the apostles...*” (Eph.2:20). Jesus spoke of His disciples collectively, as “*a city that is set on a hill*” (Matt.5:14) and the writer of Hebrews refers to the “*general assembly and church*” as “*the city of the living God*” and “*the heavenly Jerusalem*” (Heb.12:22-23). John sees the city as a woman—the wife of the Lamb (Rev.19:7; 21:2, 9-10) and Paul says that “*the Jerusalem above*” is “*the mother of us all*” (Gal.4:26). Elsewhere, scripture also speaks of Christ’s Church as His bride (John 3:29; Eph.5:31-32).

John describes the city as being in the shape of a cube, equal in length, depth, and height (v.16). It also has no natural light, but is illuminated only by the glory of God and Christ (v.23). These features call to mind the holy of holies in both the tabernacle and the temple. It was that one place where the high priest alone could commune with God in immediate contact. The city is thus described in terms suggesting a giant Holy of Holies, that is, as the dwelling of God among mankind on earth. The descriptions in scripture of the Church as God’s temple/house on earth are myriad (e.g., John 14:2, 23; 1 Cor.3:16; 2 Cor.6:16; Eph.2:20-22; 1 Peter 2:5; 1 Tim.3:15; Heb.3:6).

The relevant question concerning John's description would be "Is this the Church of the present—or of the future?"

The full-preterist view obviously makes John's vision of the New Jerusalem a revelation of the New Covenant Order, since A.D.70. In my judgment, the vision of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21 is that of the future, glorified Church, after the Resurrection. This is because John describes it as "*having the glory of God*" (v.11)—which, I think, describes a future destiny of the Church. According to Paul, in the Resurrection the believers will be "*raised in glory*" (1 Cor.15:43). This is what occurs when Jesus comes to "*transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body*" (Phil.3:21). This is "*the glory that shall be revealed in us*" when the "*sufferings of this present time*" are over (Rom.8:18). We discussed earlier that the New Testament consistently identifies our ultimate hope as "*the obtaining of the glory*" of Christ (2 Thess.2:14). There is no historical evidence that the Church has already been glorified, either in A.D.70 or any other time.

It seems obvious that we are to recognize the city as a representation of the community of Christ on earth after we have been glorified in the Resurrection. Only by the most counterintuitive and gratuitous exaggeration could the conditions described by John be said to pertain to the present Church. In fact, there is no biblical or historical basis for suggesting that the Church fit these descriptions more admirably *after* A.D.70 than it did *before* that time. It was after A.D.70 that the greatest, most prolonged persecutions of the people of Christ came upon them. It was also after A.D.70 that the Church adopted non-apostolic traditions which (some would reasonably argue) corrupted the life of the more-pristine apostolic assemblies. To describe the Church after A.D.70 as having attained to a "*perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*" (Eph.4:13) would be to display either an ignorance or a denial of the facts of the Church's history.

In the New Earth, John tells us that, "*God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away*" (Rev.21:4). This can hardly be explained away by suggesting merely that the Christians, after A.D.70, had God so intimately close to them as to comfort them in life's trials. This would ignore the fact that Paul spoke of just such comfort as his strength in his own trials prior to A.D.70 (2 Cor.1:3-7). There is nothing in Christian experience since that date that can be said to be an improvement over Paul's experiences in this regard.

Nor does it make sense to say that John is simply noting a contrast in the Christian experience compared to the "*sorrow*," "*crying*," and "*pain*" that defined the perennial plight of the Jews before Jesus came. It might be claimed that the joy in the Holy Spirit lifts Christians above this misery. However, whatever joy Christians have in the Holy Spirit since A.D.70 cannot be shown to be superior to that same joy testified to by the apostles prior to that time<sup>28</sup>—or, for that matter, by the Old Testament saints themselves.<sup>29</sup> Nor has the degree of sorrow and pain from persecution been less among Christians than among Old Testament Jews. In reading full-preterist explanations, I have found nothing sensible to adequately explain John's description.

I believe that the renovation of the cosmos will be the final installment of the "*restoration of all things*" (Acts 3:21; Rev.21:5).

In speaking of the New Earth, John also says, "*there shall be no more curse*" (22:3). Full-preterists can find curses associated with the Law (e.g., Deut.28:15ff) and can point out that Jesus took the curse of the Law upon Himself so that it no longer threatens God's redeemed ones. Consequently, in the

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<sup>28</sup> Acts 8:8; 13:52; Romans 14:17; 15:13; 2 Corinthians 7:4; 8:2; Galatians 5:22; Philippians 4:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; James 1:2; etc.

<sup>29</sup> E.g., Nehemiah 8:10; Esther 9:22; Job 33:26; Psalm 5:11; 16:11; 30:5; 32:1-2, 11; 51:12; 89:15; 126:5

New Covenant, the curse of the Old Covenant is neutralized or eliminated. But Paul said this happened at the cross, not at the destruction of the temple (Gal.3:13).

John cannot be referring to the curse of the Law. He speaks in the future tense: "*There shall be no more curse.*" Whatever "curse" he had in mind, he does not speak of it having yet been revoked at the time of writing, or he would have used the present tense. He is describing something future to himself and his readers. It is true that A.D.70 was arguably in the future at the time of writing (as I think), but what curse was removed in that year that had not previously been removed at the cross? Paul associates our redemption from the curse of the Law with Christ's hanging on a tree. Ever since the atoning work of Christ there has been no curse of the Law applicable to believers. So, what curse remained at the time of John's writing, and was it removed in A.D.70?

The most defensible theory is that John's "curse" was referring to that which came upon creation when Adam sinned. This agrees with Paul's statement that the creation will be liberated from the effects of that very disaster at the same time as we are resurrected (Rom.8:19-23). This curse of the fall then is what is absent in the New Earth. This included those griefs we discussed above, listed in Revelation 21:4—sorrow, crying, pain, death. John clearly anticipated the end of these miseries with the removal of the Edenic curse. That it is this curse and not the curse of the Law to which John refers is supported by the fact that John's statement is accompanied by imagery from the Garden of Eden—e.g., a river, the Tree of Life (vv.1-2). Access to the Tree of Life is the very thing that was lost in the Edenic curse. Its being made available again to earth's inhabitants clearly bespeaks the removal of the curse by which we were deprived of it. This curse did not go away in A.D.70. Nor did any other curse mentioned in scripture. John's literal words are: "*Every curse will be no more.*" This would not be true if the curse of the Law had passed, but the Edenic curse remained.

We see then that John's vision is of a reality that we await to this day. That it is not describing any present condition might easily have been determined by the chronology presented in Revelation 20-22. In this continuous narrative, Satan is bound for a thousand years (20:1-6), then briefly released (20:7ff). He is soon afterward judged in the lake of fire (20:10) and a general resurrection and judgment takes place (20:12-13). At the same time of this judgment, "*the earth and the heaven fled away*" (20:11). We then see the New Heavens and the New Earth. The old heaven and earth had previously disappeared at the Resurrection/judgment (20:11, 21:1). The new cosmos in Revelation 21 is seen as the natural sequel to the events in chapter 20.

What do we know about Chapter 20? We know, of course, that it is very controversial. The premillennialist, the postmillennialist and the amillennialist all have different opinions about the thousand years (millennium) that spans the gap between the binding and the loosing of Satan just prior to the Judgment. It is not important at this time to resolve which of these views best understands the millennium. That which all must acknowledge is that the thousand years speaks of a very long time, that it follows the binding of Satan, and that it precedes the New Heavens and New Earth in chapter 21.

The binding of Satan in Chapter 20 is variously interpreted as taking place at the first coming of Christ, at the Second Coming of Christ, or sometime in between. It is taken by some to be a literal thousand years, and by others, as merely an extremely long period of time. What all of these views agree upon is that the binding of Satan did not occur prior to the first coming of Christ. The thousand years in the passage end with the brief release of Satan, followed by Resurrection, the Final Judgment, and the creation of New Heavens and a New Earth.

For *Full-Preterism* to be correct, the Resurrection, the Judgment, and the New Creation must all have come in A.D.70. This means we would have to measure backward a thousand years (or some similarly long period) from that date to locate the binding of Satan at its beginning. If the thousand

years were taken literally, this would place the binding of Satan sometime around the time of Solomon or Rehoboam. Obviously, no one (even full-preterists) can allow for this interpretation. The full-preterist, like the amillennialist, places the binding of Satan in the time of Christ's first coming, but the former view sees the end of the millennium in A.D.70—resulting in a “millennium” of only forty years' duration.

Let us consider the reasonableness of this suggestion. It would mean that a period less in length than a man's lifetime is symbolically represented as a thousand years. While there is no biblical precedent for such an anomaly, there is much biblical precedent for the symbolic use of the number “one thousand” to represent an indefinite, very large number. The biblical references to the cattle on a thousand hills,<sup>30</sup> a day in God's courts as being better than a thousand,<sup>31</sup> God's keeping His covenant to a thousand generations,<sup>32</sup> His multiplying Israel a thousand times more,<sup>33</sup> a thousand years being like a watch in the night,<sup>34</sup> or like a day,<sup>35</sup> are all familiar to us. This is the common biblical way of using “one thousand” in a non-literal manner. A writer is under no obligation to use this number, but when he chooses to do so, he necessarily conveys to the reader a huge quantity.

There can be only two sensible reasons for John to speak of the binding of Satan lasting a thousand years: 1) It is a literal time period; or 2) It represents an incredibly long period. A third option, that it represents less than one human lifetime, is not plausible. It was this point alone that caused J. Stuart Russell, who was otherwise a full-preterist, to find in this instance a single exception to his preterist paradigm. He was too wise to pretend that a case can be made for a single generation being represented in biblical imagery as a thousand years.

That the millennium did not end in A.D.70 is clear from other considerations. At the end of the thousand years, but before the Resurrection and Judgment, there lies a “little while” in which two specific things happen:

- 1) Satan is loosed and gathers the nations of earth against the “beloved city.”
- 2) The siege comes to nothing and the city saved by fire from heaven destroying the invaders.

The full-preterists must locate these events prior to the establishment of the new creation (prior to A.D.70). The temptation might be to find the invasion and siege of “*the beloved city*” in the Roman invasion of Jerusalem. However, it would be strange for John to describe as a “beloved city” the apostate Jerusalem, which he had earlier identified as “*Sodom and Egypt*” (Rev.11:8). This is especially so in the immediate context of the truly beloved city which becomes the wife of the Lamb. In Revelation, the beloved city is the bride, the Church—not corrupt Jerusalem.

The second objection to this identification is that the passage sees the attack upon the city as the plot of Satan, and therefore a sinister thing. By contrast, Jesus sees the destruction of Jerusalem as a well-deserved judgment from God Himself, sending His armies against His enemies (e.g. Matt.21:40-41; 22:7).

The third problem with identifying this as the invasion of Jerusalem is simply that historically Jerusalem was not spared, but was destroyed by the Romans. The “beloved city” in Revelation 20 is spared and vindicated by divine intervention. There is nothing in this “little while” at the end of the millennium that can reasonably be identified with events of A.D.70.

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<sup>30</sup> Psalm 50:10

<sup>31</sup> Psalm 84:10

<sup>32</sup> Deuteronomy 7:9

<sup>33</sup> Deuteronomy 1:11

<sup>34</sup> Psalm 90:4

<sup>35</sup> 2 Peter 3:8

Thus, as Russell well knew, the full-preterists cannot responsibly exegete the passage to render the millennium as a symbol of forty years during which nothing predicted in the passage occurred. This being so, the "*new heavens and new earth*" that appear in chapter 21 (coming, as they do, after the "thousand years") cannot be identified with any first-century fulfillment.

## **Summary**

We have sought to responsibly exegete all the most relevant passages that speak of the New Heavens and the New Earth. It has become obvious that the arguments of full-preterists seeking to eliminate the future hope of a renewed cosmos have been clever, but inadequate. Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22 may well be using the language metaphorically, but the context and wording of the New Testament passages do not work for the full-preterist framework. We do not deny that some of the passages contain elaborate symbolism that challenges the skills of all interpreters. Nor must we object to the suggestion that the passing of the Old Covenant Order might reasonably be compared to the passing of an old world to be replaced with a new one. However, it is merely a fair comparison, which does not eliminate the rather clear statements of the New Testament which reveal the future eternal home of the saints to be a glorious community in a perfect and unfallen world.



## *Chapter Thirteen*

### *Introduction to the Olivet Discourse*

All three Synoptic Gospels give detailed accounts of the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25; Mark 13; and Luke 21).<sup>1</sup> The discourse is so named due to the venue where it was delivered—on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. It was uttered only a few days before Christ’s crucifixion and predicted the destruction of the Herodian Temple in Jerusalem, which was razed to the ground (as Jesus predicted) by the Romans in A.D.70. This fulfillment of the prophecy was recognized by the early church at least as early as the Christian historian Eusebius (A.D.325).

It is hard to miss this identification of its fulfillment, since Jesus unambiguously predicted that not one stone of the temple structure would be left standing upon another. All would be thrown down by invaders. He also predicted that this would occur in “*this generation*.” The fulfillment occurred just forty years after He spoke these words. The predictions in this discourse, therefore, comprise the most specific and accurate time-sensitive prophecies in the New Testament.

Not all Christians have paid sufficient attention to the wording of the prophecy, or know enough about the historical facts of the case, to recognize that what Jesus predicted actually occurred in the past—during the Jewish War and its bloody conclusion (A.D.66-70). Christ’s use of Jewish idioms and apocalyptic language in parts of the discourse befuddles many people who have never studied such literature.

For example, *Dispensationalists* believe that the “*abomination of desolation*” mentioned in Matthew 24:25 and Mark 13:14 refers to some event remaining to be fulfilled in the end times. They usually associate it with a future antichrist expected to erect a statue of himself inside a future, third Jewish Temple (an event to which no verse of scripture bears testimony).<sup>2</sup>

The easiest way to disprove a future *abomination of desolation* is to simply set Luke’s version of the Olivet Discourse alongside the versions of the same prophecy in the other Gospels. Matthew and Mark both retain the strange Hebraism “*abomination of desolation*.” However, in the very place where this phrase should occur in Luke, we find it paraphrased as “*Jerusalem surrounded by armies*” (Luke 21:20)—which preceded by no great interval the destruction of the temple.

There is also the passage in Matthew 24:29-31 predicting the darkening of sun and moon, the falling of the stars, the sign of the Son of Man appearing in the heavens, the mourning of the tribes, the “coming of the Son of Man,” the additional “*sign of the Son of Man in heaven*,” and the angels gathering the elect. This passage presents as many problems for the modern reader as does the “*abomination of desolation*.” Many of the details in this section, if taken literally, would speak of the end of the universe and the wrapping up of the purposes of God in history.

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the material from Matthew 24 has parallels in Luke 17, which will be discussed presently.

<sup>2</sup> The idea that there will be an image of antichrist set up in a future Jerusalem temple is derived by making several gratuitous assumptions and conflating two unrelated passages of scripture. In 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, Paul says the “*man of lawlessness*” will “*sit in the temple of God*.” The expression “*temple of God*” is never used by Paul in reference to the Jewish temple, but he uses it elsewhere as a reference to the Church (1 Cor.3:16; 2 Cor.6:16). In a different place, another entity, called “*the second beast*,” is said to create a statue of “*the first beast*” to be worshipped by all (Rev.13:14-15). Nothing in scripture identifies Paul’s “*man of lawlessness*” with Revelation’s “*beast*.” There is no reference to *an image in a temple*. The *man of lawlessness* himself (not a statue of him) is said to “*sit in the temple of God*” (that is, in Paul’s terminology, “*in the Church*”), whereas the *image of the beast* is worshiped by the world, but is nowhere associated with any temple or geographic region. Thus, the popular interpretation of “*the abomination of desolation*” is a composite picture put together from pieces of separate puzzles. Daniel and Jesus both provide sufficient details to identify what this term is referring to. (see discussion in the next chapter, at Luke 21:20).

Yes—*If taken literally*. There is a growing awareness among studious Christians that all of these details can be cross-referenced with the same kind of apocalyptic language in symbolic Old Testament passages about the historical doom of nations like Edom, Egypt, and Babylon in the ancient past. Some seemingly supernatural events and visions among the Jews are recorded in Josephus' history and in parts of scripture, as occurring before Jerusalem fell. More will be said on this before we are finished. Suffice it to say that the insistence on taking this passage literally can only come from one's being insufficiently familiar with the prophetic language of the Old Testament, and possibly also with the historical, eye-witness record of Josephus.

To make a long story short (it will be given longer treatment below), it is possible to demonstrate that Jesus was completely correct in saying that some of His own contemporaries would live to see the events in this discourse.

All partial- and full-preterists recognize the relevance of Christ's monologue to the Jewish War and the fall of Jerusalem. However, there exists one great difference of opinion between full-preterists and some partial-preterists—the latter suggesting that A.D.70 is not the only subject addressed in the discourse—particularly in Matthew's longer version, in his chapters 24 and 25.<sup>3</sup>

The theory held by this latter group (myself included) purports that everything prior to Matthew 24:34 (with the possible exception of parenthetical insertions) occurred in the events of A.D.66-70. Summarizing the events predicted in this early section, Jesus said, "*this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place*" (v.34). We need look no later than A.D.70 for His referent.

Yet, in the following verse (v.35) Jesus may be introducing a separate topic. He predicts the passing away of *heaven and earth*...followed by the statement, "*but of that day and hour no one knows...*" The things that follow this transitional statement are things which actually did not occur in or prior to A.D.70 and which (as this theory argues) are most reasonably applied to the future *Parousia* at the end of the world. This analysis is stridently denied by the full-preterists who dutifully stick to their governing prejudice concerning all prophecy and defend an A.D.70 fulfillment for the entire discourse.

Matthew 24:1-35 follows quite closely, thought for thought, alongside Mark 13 and Luke 21. After verse 35, Matthew 24 contains material found in neither of Mark's or Luke's parallel accounts—but some of which is found in a different discourse recorded in Luke 17:22-37. Matthew's additional material, from verse 36 through Chapter 25, seems to speak of Christ's future Second Coming. Matthew extends the discourse with five additional parables not found in Mark or Luke.

The discourse in Luke 17 (from which Matthew 24 draws some of its later material) was spoken on a different occasion from that of the Olivet Discourse, in Luke 21, and may well be about a different subject (this latter point is what is disputed among preterists). Matthew seems to have combined portions of two separate discourses. As it is his general custom to conflate similar sayings of Christ into composite discourses elsewhere (e.g., Matthew Chs.5-7; Ch.10; Ch.13; Ch.18), there seems little doubt that this is what he has done in Matthew 24-25.

The relevant questions would be:

- 1) Are the two discourses in Luke 17 and Luke 21 both addressing the same theme? And
- 2) If not, why did Matthew combine them?

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<sup>3</sup> Some partial-preterists agree with the full-preterists that the Olivet Discourse is entirely about the fall of Jerusalem, while disagreeing with the grand thesis that all prophecy in the whole Bible was fulfilled at that time. In other words, they are full-preterists with respect to the discourse, but not with respect to the Bible as a whole.



On the first question, the full-preterist argues that both discourses are on the same theme, meaning the whole of Matthew's conflation of the two should be interpreted as having to do with A.D.70. By contrast, some partial-preterists are inclined to see Luke 17 as the outlier, which is not about A.D.70, but rather about the *Parousia* at the end of the world. If so, then part of Matthew 24 should be applied to A.D.70 (roughly, that portion paralleling Mark 13 and Luke 21), and the other part should be interpreted as relating to the still-future Second Coming of Christ.

On this assumption, why did Matthew combine these two discourses of Christ? If the full-preterist's answer to the first question is correct—namely, that both of Luke's passages are about A.D.70—it becomes unproblematic. Matthew simply combined the material from two sermons about the impending destruction of Jerusalem. However, the easiest solution is not necessarily the correct one.

If the alternative view is correct and Luke 17 is about the future end of the present age, then several possible reasons for combining discourses on two different subjects may be considered:

- 1) Matthew, writing as he did before the fall of Jerusalem, may have assumed that the two discourses were about the same subject—a mistake that could not have been discovered until after A.D.70, when the events of Luke 17 did not materialize.
- 2) Matthew knew they were about two different events, but considered that they might occur in close proximity to each other. No one (not even Jesus) knew the date of the second event, but in the absence of information to the contrary, Matthew (and all New Testament writers) may well have expected the Second Coming to occur at roughly the same time as the destruction of Jerusalem, or soon thereafter. No one could fault Matthew for having such an opinion, and if he did, it would make sense for him to combine these two discourses as he did.
- 3) Matthew knew they were two different subjects, but placed them together topically, since both are protracted judgment narratives in the teachings of Christ. Judgment would then be the common theme of both, though they were not about *the same* judgment. This would be analogous to what Matthew did in conflating multiple discourses about the disciples' short-term mission in Galilee and their long-range mission to the world, respectively. The first fifteen verses of Matthew 10 contain instructions Jesus gave to His disciples on the occasion of sending them out two by two to Galilean villages on a short-term outreach (comp. Matt.10:1-15 with Luke 9:1-6). In the following verses, Matthew adds to the chapter things Jesus said on later occasions concerning other, much later, outreaches (comp. Matt.10:16-22 with Luke 21:12-19 and Matt.10:26-33 with Luke 12:2-9). Matthew follows the same policy with his expanded versions of the Sermon on the Mount (comp., Matt.5-7 with Luke 6:20ff) and the parables discourse, in Matthew 13.

This, then, is where the disagreement lies between the full and partial-preterists on the Olivet Discourse.

The best way to analyze the question would seem to be to examine the three synoptic accounts side-by-side, verse-by-verse. It is only by doing so that the meaning of certain obscure statements becomes elucidated. That is what we will do in our next chapter. In comparing Matthew 24 with Mark 13 and Luke 21, we find the parallel portion of these chapters can be divided into 19 pericopes, or subject units. Matthew includes a couple of major data points, in parallel with Luke 17, which were

actually not part of Jesus' discourse on the Mount of Olives. After including these two additional pericopes, Matthew reconnects with Mark and Luke in concluding with warnings to "watch."

Here are the first 19 segments paralleled in the Olivet Discourse:

- |                                          |                                                |
|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| 1. The Prediction of destruction         | (Matt.24:1-2; Mark 13:1-2; Luke 21:5-6)        |
| 2. The Disciples' Question               | (Matt.24:3; Mark 13:3-4; Luke 21:7)            |
| 3. False Messiahs                        | (Matt.24:4-5; Mark 13:5-6; Luke 21:8)          |
| 4. Initial Wars                          | (Matt.24:6; Mark 13:7; Luke 21:9)              |
| 5. Disasters: The Beginning of Sorrows   | (Matt.24:7-8; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:10)           |
| 6. Persecution and False Prophets        | (Matt.24:9-12; Mark 13:9-13; Luke 21:12-18)    |
| 7. Endurance Necessary                   | (Matt.24:13; Mark 13:13; Luke 21:19)           |
| 8. Gospel Preached to All Nations        | (Matt.24:14; Mark 13:10)                       |
| 9. Abomination of Desolation             | (Matt.24:15; Mark 13:14; Luke 21:20)           |
| 10. Flight to the Mountains              | (Matt.24:17-18; Mark 13:14-16; Luke 21:21-22)  |
| 11. Woe to those with Incumbrances       | (Matt.24:19-20; Mark 13:17-18; Luke 21:23)     |
| 12. Tribulation                          | (Matt.24:21-22; Mark 13:19-20; Luke 21:23-26)  |
| 13. Premature Claims of Messiah's Return | (Matt.24:23-28; Mark 13:21-23) [Luke 17:22-25] |
| 14. After Tribulation                    | (Matt.24:29; Mark 13:24-25; Luke 21:26)        |
| 15. Son of Man Coming                    | (Matt.24:30-31; Mark 13:26-27; Luke 21:27-28)  |
| 16. Fig Tree Analogy                     | (Matt.24:32-33; Mark 13:28-29; Luke 21:29-31)  |
| 17. "This Generation"                    | (Matt.24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32)           |
| 18. Heaven and Earth Will Pass Away      | (Matt.24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33)           |
| 19. The Unknown Day and Hour             | (Matt.24:36; Mark 13:32)                       |

We will look at each of these points more closely in the next chapter, but the general observation I would make initially is that we find parallels in all three accounts of the Olivet Discourse through the first 19 subject sections (Luke omits the last point, but Mark includes it). Matthew 24 continues beyond this point by including two major additional sections (paralleled in a different context in Luke), before merging again with the other accounts in the closing warning to watch:

- 20. Days of Noah (Matthew 24:37-39; Luke 17:26-30)
- 21. One taken, one left (Matthew 24:40-41; Luke 17:34-37)
- 22. The need to Watch (Matthew 24:42-44; Mark 13:33-37; Luke 21:34-36)

Mark 13 and Luke 21 rejoin Matthew (or he rejoins them), and they conclude the discourse. All accounts end with an emphasis on the need for diligence and watching for the return of the Lord at an unpredictable and unexpected time. The need to watch refers to staying awake, which is appropriate whatever the time may be—whether in anticipation of A.D.70, or of the Final Judgment at the *Parousia*. Therefore, the final exhortation does not connect exclusively with either of the two events, but applies to both.

Among the three accounts of the discourse, Matthew is alone in inserting points #20 and #21. However, as we have mentioned, we find the parallels to these in Luke 17, which we think to be looking forward to the final *Parousia*, rather than the downfall of the Jewish temple and society. If this is so, then we would be entitled to postulate the following understanding of the discourse:

- 1) Mark 13 and Luke 21 are answering the question of the disciples about the time of the fall of Jerusalem and are therefore looking toward A.D.70. This discussion climaxes with the summary statement that this event would be fulfilled in their own generation (Matt.24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32). Matthew 24:1-34 parallels them thus far.
- 2) After this summary statement, Matthew and Mark record Jesus predicting that “*heaven and earth will pass away*” followed by His remark that no one knows the day or the hour of that event (Matt.24:35; Mark 13:31). This means that Jesus gave a time reference for the fall of Jerusalem, but was unable to give any information about the time of the passing away of heaven and earth which Peter and Revelation place at the time of the *Parousia*.
- 3) Matthew seems to use this last statement as a springboard from which to launch into material on this new topic which Jesus here introduces without further comment, but about which He had taught elsewhere (i.e., in Luke 17, and on other occasions not paralleled in other Gospels—i.e., the parables of Matthew 25).

This all may sound very neat and tidy, but it is not without its difficulties. Full-preterist, Ed Stevens, is among those who have challenged this framework for understanding Matthew 24.<sup>4</sup> He points out that there are parallels with Luke 17, not only in Matthew’s later section, but also in his earlier section—suggesting that Luke 17, like Matthew 24’s earlier portion, is also about A.D.70. Luke 17 should not then be thought of as addressing a different topic.

Stevens calls attention to five details in the Luke 17 passage—three of which are found in Matthew’s earlier portion (the part I have identified with an A.D.70 fulfillment), and two of them included in Matthew’s later section (that which I have identified with the eschatological *Parousia*). Since the A.D.70 portion of Matthew 24 contains elements of Luke 17, it is argued, the latter passage must also be seen as having a fulfillment in the destruction of Jerusalem. This strikes me as a formidable argument—if not for the existence of even greater arguments against his thesis.

The two points of similarity between Luke 17 and the later section of Matthew 24—the “days of Noah” and the “one taken, one left” passages—would support my thesis, if not for the challenge presented by the other three bits. What are they? In Luke 17 and in the early portion of Matthew 24 we find the following three parallels:

- 1) “*Let him who is on the housetop not come down...*” (Matt.24:17f with Luke 17:31)
- 2) “*For as the lightning comes from the east...*” (Matt.24:26f with Luke 17:23f)
- 3) “*For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered*” (Matt.24:28 with Luke 17:37)

Since all of these features appear in the section of Matthew 24 that discusses A.D.70, by what tortured logic (we are asked) can they be said to be about something else when they appear in Luke 17? How shall we address this challenge? As for the first of these three, I will confess that it has always provided difficulties for me. We will temporarily table that point to be discussed presently. The other two points do not present a problem at all. On the assumption that Luke 17 is talking about the yet-future *Parousia* of Christ, sayings #2 and #3 must both address that event. Matthew places them together as adjacent statements—but in what context? Here are the verses in their context:

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<sup>4</sup> Edward E. Steven, *What Happened in A.D.70?* (Bradford, PA: Kingdom Publications, 1997), pp.17-21.

*“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There!’ do not believe it. 24 For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 25 See, I have told you beforehand. 26 “Therefore if they say to you, ‘Look, He is in the desert!’ do not go out; or ‘Look, He is in the inner rooms!’ do not believe it. 27 For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. 28 For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.*

We see that Matthew presents these two statements as a corrective to anticipated false rumors that might circulate prior to A.D.70 asserting that Messiah has secretly or invisibly returned (vv.23-26). With reference to such reports, He says, *“Don’t believe it!”* The same warning is found in the parallel, in Mark 13:21-23. However, Matthew alone inserts these two additional statements into his record in which, borrowing from Luke 17, he parenthetically tells the reader that Jesus’ actual return will be universally observed and not secretive, as the rumors would be falsely claiming.

In both Matthew and Mark’s versions of the discourse Jesus issued a warning not to be deceived by false reports of Christ’s having secretly returned. At this point Matthew inserts the specific corrective, telling us that the actual return of Christ will be accompanied by unmistakable evidences—like the illumination of the sky or like telltale eagles (or, possibly, vultures). The details borrowed from Luke 17 address the future Second Coming, but are inserted parenthetically by Matthew as a corrective in a relevant spot in his narration about A.D.70.

Matthew wants his readers to know what the Second Coming will really be like so he tells them by importing information not spoken by Jesus on that particular occasion, but on another. This is not even slightly problematic and is keeping with Matthew’s general policy of expanding Christ’s recorded discourses with authentic sayings of Christ given on other occasions about the similar topics.

But what about the first problem—Christ’s exhortation not to return to one’s house? In Matthew 24, it functions as placing additional stress on the urgent need to leave the city of Jerusalem as the Romans approached (see, especially, Luke’s parallel in Luke 21:20f)—but how could the same words relate to the end of the world, if so they do in Luke 17? Much less obviously, I will confess.

To my mind, this is the only a minor speedbump in our identification of Luke 17 with the final *Parousia*, but is it fatal to the thesis? Each reader must judge—especially as we will soon examine the fatal flaws in the only alternative, which is the identification of Luke 17 with A.D.70.

Here is how it reads in Luke 17—

*In that day, he who is on the housetop, and his goods are in the house, let him not come down to take them away. And likewise the one who is in the field, let him not turn back. Remember Lot’s wife. Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.” (vv.31-33)*

If *“in that day”* refers to the sudden appearance of Christ, accompanied by the burning up of the cosmos, how does it make sense to tell people not to attempt to rescue their goods from within their house? If that cataclysm occurs *in the twinkling of an eye*,<sup>5</sup> how would anyone have time even to consider doing this? And to where could they be planning to flee, anyway?

A reasonable answer might be that these three verses do not actually command any action to be taken at all (only what *not* to do), but merely make a point of principle about attitudes toward worldly

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:52

things. Notice, in Matthew 24, these words about going back to the house are connected with the command to flee. In Luke 17, there is no such instruction about flight. In fact, there is no specific instruction at all—only the idea of abandoning all attachment to worldly possessions. Along with the following two verses, verse 31 may be seen as merely an idiomatic way of warning against maintaining any bondage to the things of this world, including your clothing, your household possessions, or your life.

The statement about Lot's wife suggests that we should not have a longing for the society nor the possessions of the condemned world that we are leaving behind. Seeking to save our lives in this world would simply disqualify us for the life to which we are going. Seen this way, the exhortation in Luke 17 is not actually the same as that similar statement in Matthew 24:16-18, Mark 13:14-16, and Luke 21:21—the latter referring specifically to the urgency of fleeing from the doomed city. No actual flight is here mentioned in Luke 17—only the need for detachment from the world—so there is no reason to attach the words in Luke to the necessary flight in Matthew 24.

The final warning forbidding the seeking to save one's own life underscores that this is not referring, in Luke 17, to escaping from Jerusalem. Would not such a flight be the quintessential example, in such a situation, of trying to save one's own life? The command to flee in Matthew 24 is clearly with a mind of the disciples seeking to save their lives.

I will advise the reader to withhold judgment on the strength and validity of this explanation until we have examined the problems associated with the only alternative to this theory. We will conduct that investigation in the course of our verse-by-verse commentary on the discourse, in the next chapter.



## **Chapter Fourteen**

### **Commentary on the Olivet Discourse**

In assessing the full-preterist claims concerning the Olivet Discourse, I think it helpful to go quickly through a verse-by-verse survey and point-by-point analysis of the three parallel accounts in the Synoptic Gospels. I have attempted to keep the chapters of this book short enough to avoid fatiguing the reader. This chapter, however, will be the longest, owing to its inclusion of the full text of several whole chapters of scripture, along with my comments.

The scene is the final week of Jesus' earthly sojourn with His disciples. He had spent the early portion of week focused upon the impending judgment of Jerusalem, using various parables, symbolic actions, and straightforward prophecies.

On Palm Sunday, during His Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, Jesus publicly wept over the city:

*Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation." (Luke 19:41-44)*

Jesus clearly predicted that the city, and its children within it, would be invaded, besieged, conquered, and demolished—leaving no stone remaining upon another. He said that this calamity would befall them because of their refusal to recognize that He, their Messiah, had come (Luke 19:41-44).

Monday, He began illustrating this message with His symbolic act of cursing the fig tree (Matt.21:18-19). This served as the conclusion for His previously unfinished parable of the fruitless fig tree that had been given one last chance to produce fruit before being cut down and uprooted.<sup>1</sup> He followed this action by entering the temple and driving out the merchants and moneychangers, referring to the temple as a "den of thieves" (Mark 11:17)—a quotation of what Jeremiah had said when announcing the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Babylonians, in 586 B.C.<sup>2</sup>

The next day, Tuesday, was just two days before His arrest, which, according to the strongest tradition, occurred Thursday Night. This was a day of controversy. Jesus confronted the Jewish leaders, predicting the doom of their city with His two parables of the wicked tenants of the vineyard (Matt.21:33-43), and the wicked subjects of the king who refused his invitation to come to his son's wedding (Matt.22:1-13). In both cases, the wicked, representing the Jews rejecting Christ, are depicted as coming to a ruinous end (Matt.21:41; 22:7).

The same day, He ranted in the temple denouncing the wicked scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy. He announced that they would not escape the fires of Gehenna, and that the punishment for the accumulated blood-guilt of all their ancestors would fall upon them in their present generation (Matt.23:33, 35-36). At the end of that tirade, Jesus pronounced the temple "desolate" (God-forsaken), and walked out, apparently, for the last time (Matt.23:38-39).

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 13:6-9

<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 7:11

As Jesus exited the temple with His disciples, they observed how beautiful and impressive the stones of the temple were. Why they did so is unknown, since this was far from the first time they had seen them. Perhaps, in view of Jesus' pronouncement of the desolation of the temple, they were suggesting what a waste it would be for such a marvelous structure to be abandoned.

Their comment provided the occasion for Jesus to again predict that not one stone would be left upon another. When the disciples, now with Him on the Mount of Olives, inquired further about this prediction—expressing curiosity concerning the time of its fulfillment, Jesus delivered the discourse that has become the focus of so much prophetic interest.

We will here take Matthew 24 (and its parallels) point-by-point:

### 1. The Prediction

<b>Matthew 24</b>	<b>Mark 13</b>	<b>Luke 21</b>
<i>Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple.</i>	<i>Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, "Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!"</i>	<sup>5</sup> <i>Then, as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations, He said,</i>
<sup>2</sup> <i>And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down."</i>	<sup>2</sup> <i>And Jesus answered and said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down."</i>	<sup>6</sup> <i>"These things which you see—the days will come in which not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down."</i>

It is important to note that Jesus made no reference to the end of the world, or to His eschatological Coming in His remarks. For several days, He had been predicting and alluding to the impending doom of Jerusalem. In fact, He had previously made this very same prediction about the city as He makes here about the temple itself—that not one stone would be left upon another.<sup>3</sup> As predicted, this total dismantling of the Jewish state and religion occurred forty years later at the end of a war that lasted over three years. He had not been discussing any distant events looking centuries into the future. Likewise here, His remarks are concerned only with the fate of the temple and its stones to which his disciples had just brought His attention.

### 2. The Disciples' Question

<b>Matthew 24</b>	<b>Mark 13</b>	<b>Luke 21</b>
<sup>3</sup> <i>Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying,</i>	<sup>3</sup> <i>Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately,</i>	<sup>7</sup> <i>So they asked Him, saying,</i>
<i>"Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of</i>	<sup>4</sup> <i>"Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign</i>	<i>"Teacher, but when will these things be? And what sign will</i>

<sup>3</sup> Luke 19:44



<i>Your coming, and of the end of the age?"</i>	<i>when all these things will be fulfilled?"</i>	<i>there be when these things are about to take place."</i>
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Only Mark tells us that this question was brought to Jesus privately by four of the apostles, including Peter, who was Mark's source, according to reliable tradition.

We find that Matthew's version of their question differs in wording from that of Mark and Luke. This is significant to determining the subject of the discourse since it was clearly given in answer to their inquiries and might be expected to address the points about which they asked. Mark and Luke record only two questions of the disciples—both concerning the same subject:

- 1) When will the destruction of Jerusalem occur? and
- 2) What sign might the disciples look for as a signal that it is about to happen?

All the accounts mention "*these things*"—which can only have as their antecedent the *things* that Jesus had just mentioned—the destruction of the temple and the things naturally entailed in that crisis. As we shall find in the ensuing discourse, Jesus specifically answers both of these questions. To the question of when this will be, Jesus will reveal: "*This generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.*" To the question of what sign will there be that it is imminent, Jesus will answer: "*When you see the abomination of desolation*" (which, in Luke's version, is paraphrased, "*When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies*").

In other words, Mark and Luke represent the discourse as having no subject matter beyond the timing of Jerusalem's destruction, and the signal to the disciples that they should immediately escape from the coming carnage of the city. Neither their questions, nor Jesus' answers, broach the question of the end of the world.

But what of Matthew's variation in the question—and in his record of the discourse itself? Matthew provides a protracted version of the disciples' inquiry and a longer discourse in response to it, including so much extra material that his version grows to three times the length of Mark's or Luke's version. How shall we explain this? It is no doubt, as we explained in our previous chapter, that Matthew has a policy of combining sayings of Jesus uttered on various occasions into combined mega-discourses. In this case, including material from Luke 17 and some parables not recorded elsewhere.

Essentially, Matthew's Gospel records two questions of the disciples, as do the synoptic parallels, but the wording of the second question is different. Like the other accounts, Matthew records the question, "*When shall these things be?*" Also, the next words, "*and what will be the sign...*" agree with the form of the question as recoded in other Gospels. However, where Mark and Luke render the second question, "*What will be the sign that these things are about to happen?*" Matthew's version says, "*What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?*" Does this make two questions, or three?

Full-preterists, and many partial-preterists, believe that "*your coming and the end of the age*" represent a single event, which is synonymous with "*these things*" in the parallels. Therefore, the disciples are referring to Jerusalem's fall as Christ's "*coming*" (*Parousia*), coinciding with "*the end of the [Jewish] age.*" This is very reasonable, in view of facts we have explored in earlier chapters demonstrating that the divine "*coming*" is frequently idiomatic for some temporal, earthly judgment through war—and specifically of the judgment on Jerusalem.

It also seems very unlikely that the disciples, when speaking of Christ's "coming" would be thinking of what we have come to call Christ's "Second Coming" yet to occur at the end of the present world. The concept of Christ's returning was unknown to them. They did not yet even know that He would leave them, causing an occasion for His return. Without knowledge of a *departure*, there would be no category in their thinking of a *return*. They later learned of these things, but did not seem to be aware of them at the time they asked this question (see Acts 1:6-11).

Thus, we might simply see that Matthew, writing with a Jewish audience in mind, characteristically renders Jesus' and His disciples' statements as originally worded, leaving all Hebraisms intact. Mark and Luke, by contrast, accommodated their Gentile audiences, clarifying the meaning of the cultural idioms by means of paraphrase (as Luke later would do, in paraphrasing "*the abomination of desolation*"). If so, there is no difference in meaning between the questions as represented by Matthew, Mark and Luke, and their concern was limited to detail of the predicted destruction of the temple—not the end of the world.

Another theory, not necessarily superior to the first, is that Matthew actually *did expand* the disciples' question beyond their words spoken on this occasion, in order to introduce the additional topic of the *Parousia* at the end of time. He may have felt the need to expand their question in anticipation of the additional material he was going to include from Luke 17 and other sources, which apply not to A.D.70 but to the end of the world.

The idea, then, would be that the disciples never really asked about the end of the world or Christ's final *Parousia* (knowing nothing of such things). However, Matthew writing long after their question was asked, and having subsequently become aware of these things, could expand on the discourse, bringing in material about an additional event. Matthew thus prepares his reader to find (as he intends to provide) a discussion of both subjects by adding to the disciples' question. I do not particularly favor this explanation over the other, but it is not an unreasonable alternative.

Prior to the time when the New Testament books were collected into a single volume, a reader of Mark or Luke who was not also in possession of Matthew's Gospel, would recognize in the disciples' question, and in the discourse that follows, no subject of concern beyond the destruction of the temple. By contrast, readers of Matthew's account would find more being discussed than Jesus really included on a single occasion. Jesus spoke, at different times, of two separate judgment events. We find them both in Matthew 24 and 25, giving the impression that Jesus discussed both of them on the same occasion there on the Mount of Olives—which, as Luke 17 informs us, He did not.

### 3. False Messiahs

Matthew 24	Mark 13	Luke 21
<p><i><sup>4</sup> And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. <sup>5</sup> For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many.</i></p>	<p><i><sup>5</sup> And Jesus, answering them, began to say: "Take heed that no one deceives you. <sup>6</sup> For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and will deceive many.</i></p>	<p><i>And He said to them "Take heed that you not be deceived. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and, 'The time has drawn near.' Therefore do not go after them.</i></p>

Jesus begins His answer by warning against deception. He indicates that impostors will arise to distract the disciples from the truth. Here He mentions only the false Christs (i.e., Messiahs), though, in Matthew 24:11, He will also mention false prophets. It is interesting that Jesus does not begin by warning about dangers from famines, earthquakes and pestilences, but from those dangers

associated with being deceived. Outward circumstances alone can do no eternal harm to the soul. Succumbing to deception can.

We know from the testimony of scripture and secular sources that many deceivers arose in the years prior to the destruction of Jerusalem. It is not always easy to know whether such a deceiver should be regarded as a “false prophet” or a “false Christ” since many false prophets claimed outright, or implied, that they were the Messiah—or even that they were God. The Bible mentions several by name, the most notorious of which being Simon Magus,<sup>4</sup> who was confronted by Peter in Samaria (Acts 8), and later went to make a name for himself in Rome. While in Samaria, he passed himself off as “*the Great Power of God*” (Acts 8:9-10). According to Eusebius, this Simon was worshiped as a God in both Samaria and Rome. Eusebius and Tertullian both mention the existence in their time of a statue of this same Simon standing at the River Tiber displaying the inscription: “To Simon the Holy God.” According to Henry Hammond, among the titles Simon claimed for himself were “the Father,” “he that appeared as the Son among the Jews,” and “the Holy Spirit.”

In addition to Simon, the New Testament mentioned other false messianic figures (some of them also mentioned by Josephus, Eusebius and other writers), including Theudas,<sup>5</sup> Judas of Galilee,<sup>6</sup> and an unnamed Egyptian who led 30,000 people in an abortive attempt to liberate Jerusalem (Acts 21:38, mentioned also by Eusebius).

John, possibly writing in this very time period, reports that “*many false prophets have gone out into the world*” (1 John 4:1). He also reports that many false Christs, or “*antichrists*” had arisen, proving that he and his readers were seeing “*the final hour*” (1 John 2:18)—probably meaning the end of the Jewish order, as predicted by Jesus.

#### 4. Initial Wars

<b>Matthew 24</b>	<b>Mark 13</b>	<b>Luke 21</b>
<sup>6</sup> <i>And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.</i>	<sup>7</sup> <i>But when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled; for such things must happen, but the end is not yet.</i>	<sup>9</sup> <i>But when you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified; for these things must come to pass first, but the end will not come immediately.</i>
<sup>7</sup> <i>For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.</i>	<sup>8</sup> <i>For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.</i>	<sup>10</sup> <i>Then He said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.</i>

The years prior to the fall of the Jewish capital were characterized by armed conflicts in various places. The war between the Jewish Zealots and the Romans began in A.D. 66 and civil wars among the Jews also erupted in various towns. J. Stuart Russell writes:

The Jewish war, under Vespasian, commenced at the furthest distance from Jerusalem in Galilee, and gradually drew nearer and nearer to the doomed city. The Romans were not the only agents in the work of slaughter that depopulated the land; hostile factions among the Jews themselves

<sup>4</sup> Acts 8:9-10

<sup>5</sup> Acts 5:36

<sup>6</sup> Acts 5:37

turned their arms against one another, so that it might be said that “every man’s hand was against his brother.”<sup>7</sup>

According to Josephus: “Every city was divided into two armies encamped one against another...so the daytime was spent in shedding of blood, and the night in fear.” (Wars 2:18:2)

Additionally, in other lands, local Gentiles rose in armed opposition to the Jews in their territories, resulting in bloodshed at home and abroad.<sup>8</sup>

During the Jewish War there was another theater of continual warfare in Rome itself, rumors of which would be heard among the disciples in Judea and throughout the empire. In Rome, one leader after another sought to occupy the throne left vacant by Nero’s suicide in A.D.68. A succession of assassinations and *coups* kept Rome in embroiled in civil war for the better part of two years. Yes, the disciples living at that time were certainly hearing of wars in diverse places.

### 5. Natural Disasters: The Beginning of Sorrows

Matthew 24	Mark 13	Luke 21
<i>And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places.</i>	<i>And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles.</i>	<sup>11</sup> <i>And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.</i>
<sup>8</sup> <i>All these are the beginning of sorrows.</i>	<i>These are the beginnings of sorrows.</i>	

The New Testament itself records the occurrence, prior to A.D.70, of earthquakes<sup>9</sup> and famines.<sup>10</sup> Other historical sources mention more of the same during this period. Contemporary historians recorded famines in Judea, Rome and parts of Italy at this time. Also, there were earthquakes in Crete, Smyrna, Miletus, Chios, Asmos, Rome, Laodicea, Hierapolis, Colosse, and Campania during the same period. Many suffered from pestilences in Babylon in A.D.40, and in Rome in A.D.60.

The words of Jesus certainly came true. Those who wish to apply the Olivet Discourse to the future sometimes appeal to alleged statistics like, “There have been more earthquakes in the past century than in all history previously.” This information is presented as a supposed confirmation that we are living in the last days. Aside from the fact that no one knows how many earthquakes human civilizations have endured throughout history, there is nothing in Jesus’ words predicting an *increase* in earthquakes, nor of these other disasters. There have always been plenty of them in the world. Jesus was concerned that the disciples, in seeing and hearing of such things, might make the common mistake (currently made by modern prophecy teachers) of thinking that such phenomena amount to evidence that the end is near. He told them not to make this mistake, since it was only “*the beginning [not the end] of sorrows [birthpangs].*” He was essentially saying, “These are not signs that the end is near. Such disasters happen all the time, and no prophetic significance should necessarily be assigned to them.”

<sup>7</sup> James Stuart Russell, *The Parusia: A Critical Inquiry into the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord’s Second Coming* (Harvard University, 1878), Pp.389f

<sup>8</sup> According to Josephus, during this period, 50,000 Jews were slaughtered in Mesopotamia, 20,000 in Caesarea, 50,000 in Alexandria, and 10,000 in a single hour in Damascus.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 27:54; 28:2; Acts 16:26

<sup>10</sup> e.g. Acts 11:28—mentioned also by Josephus and Eusebius

## 6. Persecution and False Prophets Take Their Toll

<b>Matthew 24</b>	<b>Mark 13</b>	<b>Luke 21</b>
<i><sup>9</sup> "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake.</i>	<i><sup>9</sup> "But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them.</i>	<i><sup>12</sup> But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake. <sup>13</sup> But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony.</i>
<i>Paralleled in v.14 (below)</i>	<i><sup>10</sup> And the Gospel must first be preached to all the nations.</i>	
<i><sup>10</sup> And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another.</i>		
<i>Similar instructions found in Matthew 10:19-20</i>	<i><sup>11</sup> But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.</i>	<i><sup>14</sup> Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; <sup>15</sup> for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist.</i>
<i><sup>11</sup> Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.</i>		
	<i><sup>12</sup> Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death.</i>	<i><sup>16</sup> You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death.</i>
<i><sup>12</sup> And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.</i>		
	<i><sup>13</sup> And you will be hated by all for My name's sake.</i>	<i><sup>17</sup> And you will be hated by all for My name's sake.</i>
		<i><sup>18</sup> But not a hair of your head shall be lost.</i>

The fact that the disciples experienced persecution prior to A.D.70 is too well attested in the Book of Acts to need documentation here. During their time following Jesus before His crucifixion no serious persecution (only criticism) was directed toward them personally. Jesus had enemies enough, always seeking pretexts for eliminating Him, but we read of no similar plots against His followers. At the worst, they became the targets of criticism for their slackness in following Jewish

law and customs. For the most part, they were not perceived as a danger to the establishment, as was Jesus. It was probably assumed that their movement would be neutralized by the killing of Jesus.

It was not until Jesus had gone, and His Spirit and mission continued through them as His body, that the disciples were regularly hunted and prosecuted in the courts. The disciples in the Book of Acts experienced persecution from both Jews and Gentiles, but since the main apostolic leadership resided in Jerusalem, the Sanhedrin and the synagogues were their first and primary persecutors. Jesus knew this would happen and here prepares them for this new development that would characterize much of their lives prior to the judgment that was to soon come upon their Jewish persecutors.

Jesus says *“they”* will persecute and kill you without naming an antecedent to the subject. Mark and Luke specifically mention the synagogues as the perpetrators of persecution, while Mark refers to *“councils”*—most likely referring to the sessions of the Sanhedrin gathered to confront the disciples.<sup>11</sup> Mark and Luke also mention persecution from *“kings and rulers.”* The latter need not refer to mistreatment they would suffer outside Palestine since Herod was called a king, and Pilate, the chief priests and the Sanhedrin were called rulers. A comparison of Acts 4:26 and 27 provides an example of the apostles identifying Herod and Pilate as the *“kings of the earth”* (which could be rendered “rulers of the land” [i.e., of Israel]), mentioned in their citation of Psalm 2:1f.

However, it is equally possible that Jesus has in mind rulers of other lands as well, since Matthew mentions that they will be hated *“by all nations”* (v.9), and Mark says the Gospel will be *preached to all the nations* (v.10). Did this international preaching and persecution happen prior to A.D.70? We know from the Book of Acts that Paul conducted a broad international ministry and was persecuted in many of the cities where he preached. While Acts does not mention the international ministries of the twelve, well-established traditions exist about Peter going to Rome, John to Asia Minor, Thomas to India, and the other apostles evangelizing (and being martyred) in various other Gentile nations. It is not believed that any of them except John survived much beyond A.D.70.

Jesus mentions even family members betraying one another. We have no reason to doubt that this happened to many Christian converts whose families remained unconverted from Judaism or Paganism.

Matthew, in this place, does not include the Marcan and Lucan material about family members betraying one another, nor the instructions not to premeditate their defense when on trial, but to trust the Holy Spirit to provide them with timely words. His omission of those details here is undoubtedly explained by the fact that he had previously included them in another context—in Christ’s discourse to the disciples being sent out on an earlier occasion (Matt.10:17-22).

This provides an example of Matthew’s editorial policies. It is reasonably certain that Jesus did not include these sentences in His instructions on that earlier occasion, since this passage specifically mentions international preaching and persecution, while their mission on that earlier occasion was to completely avoid *“the way of the Gentiles”* and to restrict themselves to evangelizing *“the lost sheep of the house of Israel”* (Matt.10:5-6). Therefore, in his consolidation of that earlier discourse, Matthew saw fit to borrow lines from the Olivet Discourse and to omit them from his version of the latter.

Jesus places an optimistic slant on these prospects of persecution and martyrdom. As God works *“all things together for good”* so the hardships of the disciples will be turned into opportunities for *“a testimony”* (Mark 13:9; 21:12). We know this was certainly true of Stephen’s ordeal (Acts 7), but Paul claimed also that his imprisonment in Rome had *“turned out for the furtherance of the Gospel”* (Phil.1:12). His being miserably imprisoned in the capitol city had provided opportunity for the

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<sup>11</sup> Acts 4, 5, etc.

palace guard, and even the household of Nero himself, to be penetrated by the Gospel, resulting in an unknown number of conversions (Phil.1:13; 4:22).

### 7. Endurance Necessary

Matthew 24	Mark 13	Luke 21
<i><sup>13</sup> But he who endures to the end shall be saved.</i>	<i>But he who endures to the end shall be saved.</i>	<i><sup>19</sup> By your patience possess your souls.</i>

If not for Luke’s paraphrase, we might find this comment ambiguous. To *endure to the end*, might be thought to mean survival until the end of the period culminating in A.D.70. This would not make a lot of sense, but since full-preterists think that the complete New Covenant salvation was not experienced by Christians before the Old System was abolished, there would be a possibility of their taking this verse in that manner. Luke’s version, however, suggests that physical survival is not what is in view, but faithfulness to Christ. Their faithful endurance of persecution, and even martyrdom (Mark 13:12; Luke 21:16), will keep them in possession of their souls. This is in contrast to one’s “losing his own soul”—spoken of as a poor trade for gaining the world in Matthew 16:26. Tragically, there were some who did not endure (Mark 4:16-17; 2 Tim.1:15; 4:10).

### 8. Gospel Preached to All Nations

Matthew 24	Mark 13	Luke 21
<i><sup>14</sup> And this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.</i>	<i>Paralleled earlier in v.10: (And the Gospel must first be preached to all the nations.)</i>	

This prediction in Matthew is included at an earlier point in Mark’s version (v.10). In both places the statement occurs in proximity with the prediction of persecution that the disciples will experience abroad. To the early believers, a few beatings, imprisonments, and martyrdoms were a small price to pay for seeing the Gospel spread to the whole world.

Did this universal proclamation occur prior to A.D.70? Paul spoke as if it had. He said, at the time of his writing Colossians (somewhere between A.D. 60 and 67), that the Gospel was being preached “in all the world” and that it “was preached to every creature under heaven” (Col.1:6, 23). All will recognize the use of hyperbole in these statements, but (it may be argued) if Paul could use such language hyperbolically, might Jesus have similarly done so here?

In discussing the unique phrases in Matthew’s version of the disciples’ question, above (v.3) I entertained the possibility that “the end of the age” might not have referred to the end of the Jewish age (though it might have). Since Matthew has noticeably added to this chapter material that looks beyond A.D.70 to the actual Second Coming of Christ, it is possible that he also deliberately expanded the question of the disciples to reflect this inclusion (if he did not alter the question, then Mark and Luke did, since they do not all render it identically). In anticipation of his additional eschatological material (vv.36ff), Matthew might have modified the question by adding the phrase “the end of the age” in reference to it. If so, then “the end” in the present verse, as in verse 3, might refer to the end of the Church Age, rather than the end of the Jewish age. It would render the world mission as continuing beyond A.D.70 and into our future.

Either interpretation can be reasonably defended. It really doesn't change much either way. Even if Jesus is here predicting that the Gospel would be preached internationally prior to the fall of Jerusalem (which it was), this would not alter the commission given to the Church to make disciples of all nations, which remains an unfinished task (Matthew 28:18-20).

### 9. Abomination of Desolation

Matthew 24	Mark 13	Luke 21
<p><sup>15</sup> "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place"(whoever reads, let him understand),</p>	<p><sup>14</sup> "So when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not" (let the reader understand),</p>	<p><sup>20</sup> "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near.</p>

As mentioned in our previous chapter, the popular Dispensationalist view of *the abomination of desolation* is that a future antichrist, in the midst of a future seven-year tribulation, will set up a statue of himself in a future Jerusalem temple as an object of global worship. They read this meaning, not only into the Olivet Discourse, but also into Daniel 9, where the strange expression which Jesus here employs first appears. Daniel 9:24-27 contains a prophecy of events that were to occur within a timeframe of 490 years. This period would begin with an edict to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem (v.25) and would end with the coming of the Messiah.<sup>12</sup>

The timeframe of the prophecy—490 years—ran its course and ended at or around the time of Jesus (as one would expect if Jesus is the Messiah predicted in the passage). In the prophecy, Daniel is told that the Messiah will confirm a covenant with Israel which is intended to last seven years (v.27), but that it will be cut short by the Messiah's death (v.26) resulting in His abolition of the sacrificial system (v.27).

In the context of this period, it is said that Jerusalem and the temple will be destroyed (v.26), which is also referred to as an abomination that would render the city and temple desolate (v.27). The latter we know occurred in A.D.70 and its approach was the signal for the disciples' flight to which Jesus refers (Luke 21:20ff).

The divinely-inspired interpretation of "the abomination of desolation" can be recognized by comparing the three versions of Jesus' statement printed side-by-side, above. Matthew, as usual, retains the Hebraism that Jesus borrows from Daniel, and Mark (less characteristically) does the same. Both Matthew and Mark imply that their readers may find it difficult to understand the phrase, and parenthetically urge their readers to make an effort to properly interpret it.

Luke has no hope of his Greek reader Theophilus being able to make sense of the unfamiliar expression, so he simply paraphrases it for the purpose of helping him understand that to which Jesus was referring. Unless Luke's interpretation was flawed (which a high view of scripture would rule

<sup>12</sup> Disagreements abound over which edict began the countdown. There were three contenders—one by Cyrus (538 B.C.) and two by Artaxerxes (458 and 445 B.C.). There is also dispute over which event in the life of Messiah corresponds to end of the period.



out), then the “*abomination of desolation*” is a Hebraic term referring to the approach of the Roman armies to destroy and desolate Jerusalem.<sup>13</sup>

### 10. Flight to the Mountains

<b>Matthew 24</b>	<b>Mark 13</b>	<b>Luke 21</b>
<i>17 Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house.</i>	<i>“then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 15 Let him who is on the housetop not go down into the house, nor enter to take anything out of his house.</i>	<i>21 Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart,</i>
<i>18 And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes.</i>	<i>16 And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes.</i>	<i>and let not those who are in the country enter her.</i>
		<i>22 For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.</i>

Upon seeing the approach of Roman forces against Jerusalem, the disciples in Judea are commanded to hurriedly escape from the city to a remote mountainous region. Since Jesus is describing first-century events, it should not surprise us to learn that such a flight of the Christians from Jerusalem actually occurred at the beginning of the Jewish War.

The Christian historian Eusebius, writing in A.D.325, records the successful flight of the Christians across the Jordan to a town in a hilly region, called Pella. They fled due to a “revelation” given to “approved” men. However, the revelation given through these men was only a confirmation of the warning Jesus had given here in the Olivet Discourse. Eusebius writes:

*The whole body, however, of the Church at Jerusalem, having been commanded by a divine revelation, given to men of approved piety there before the war, removed from the city, and dwelt at a certain town beyond the Jordan, called Pella.<sup>14</sup>*

### 11. Woe to Those With Encumbrances

<b>Matthew 24</b>	<b>Mark 13</b>	<b>Luke 21</b>
<i>19 But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!</i>	<i>17 But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!</i>	<i>23 But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!</i>

<sup>13</sup> This could have deduced from Daniel 9 alone if many interpreters did not make the gratuitous identification of the Messiah’s activities with those of a future antichrist. Daniel 9 nowhere mentions an antichrist. After introducing the Messiah as the main interest in the prophecy, he says that “*he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week (7 years)*” and “*he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering*” (v.27). Any natural reading of the passage would identify these accomplishments as those of the Messiah (since no other person has been the subject of any previous sentence in this prophecy). Astonishingly, Dispensationalists take the “he,” in both places, as a reference to a future antichrist—though no antichrist has been previously mentioned, and no future antichrist can arrive within the 490 year period which expired in the first century. Thus they attribute the accomplishments of Christ to an alleged antichrist!

<sup>14</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book III; chap.5

<p><sup>20</sup> <i>And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath.</i></p>	<p><sup>18</sup> <i>And pray that your flight may not be in winter.</i></p>	
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There is here no condemnation of those who have babies at that time—only sympathy for them. Being pregnant, or having small children to carry, would create greater hardship for those fleeing from an incoming invasion force. Jesus, in Matthew’s record, also says to pray that the flight not occur in winter or on the Sabbath.

The mention of the Sabbath as a consideration, coupled with the mistaken idea that these instructions apply to future believers, has been used in support of Sabbatarianism. Some argue that Christians are obligated to observe the Sabbath (Saturday), since Jesus indicated it would be undesirable if the need for flight were to occur on that day of the week. They apparently think there is here some allusion to the Jewish restriction of travel on the Sabbath. According to the rabbis, a “Sabbath-Day’s journey” was limited to about a mile. Jews were not to travel on Sabbath more than this distance from their homes. Sabbatarians think Jesus is saying, “If you have to flee on a Saturday you are out of luck, since you are forbidden to travel more than a mile on that day.” This interpretation of Jesus’ words is wrong in so many ways. Consider:

- 1) Jesus never expressed a duty of Christians to observe the Sabbath. It is an Old Testament law;
- 2) Even if Sabbath observance were mandatory for Christians, the *Torah* contains no restriction of travel on the Sabbath. The “Sabbath-Day’s journey” rule was not from God, but from rabbinic tradition, so Jesus would not have His disciples concern themselves about it;
- 3) Even if there were a general obligation for Christians to observe Sabbath, including the travel restrictions of the rabbis, this would hardly apply in a life-or-death situation. Elsewhere, when talking about the flexibility of Sabbath limitations, Jesus compared the meeting of one’s needs on the Sabbath to David’s eating “*the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat*”<sup>15</sup> when fleeing for his life. Jesus, and all the Jews, believed that David had been justified in breaking that ritual restriction forbidding non-priests to eat the showbread when his life depended upon it. Likewise, the Sabbath was made for [the benefit of] man, not man for [the benefit of] the Sabbath. It would be absurd for Jesus to say, “You must flee without delay...unless, of course, it is the Sabbath. In that case, you must remain in harm’s way until sunset.”
- 4) The mention of flight on the Sabbath occurs uniquely in Matthew (the only Gospel written specifically to a Jewish audience). Judean Christians would be the ones facing the danger, and they alone would be impacted by Sabbath concerns in their country. Mark and Luke make no mention of the Sabbath issue to their Gentile readers.
- 5) Flight on the Sabbath is compared with fleeing in the winter. Certainly, Jesus is not referring to the inappropriateness or illegality of flight under such conditions. Like pregnancy, nursing a child and winter weather, concern for flight on Sabbath would involve inconvenience, not breach of the law. Far from condemning flight on such occasions, He is sympathetic with the

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<sup>15</sup> Matthew 12:4

extra hardship endured by one traveling on foot in inclement weather, or while carrying an infant, or on a day when the gates of the city may well be shut and markets closed, preventing the possibility of purchasing emergency provisions for travel.

## 12. Tribulation

<b>Matthew 24</b>	<b>Mark 13</b>	<b>Luke 21</b>
<i><sup>21</sup> For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.</i>	<i><sup>19</sup> For in those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be.</i>	<i>For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people.</i>
		<i><sup>24</sup> And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.</i>
		<i><sup>25</sup> “And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring;</i>
		<i><sup>26</sup> men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.</i>
<i><sup>22</sup> And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened.</i>	<i><sup>20</sup> And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days.</i>	

The term “tribulation” (Gr. *thlipsis*, “pressure”) is a generic word for the universal experience of all Christians.<sup>16</sup> It has acquired a technical status in the minds of many prophecy students due to its use here. The word is here combined with the modifier “great” (Gr. *megale*), hence: “*great tribulation*.” Nothing in Matthew 24 suggests that Jesus is using this phrase as a label for a particular period, since “*great tribulation*” can simply be generic, meaning “lots of trouble.”<sup>17</sup>

However, Revelation 7:14 uses the same term, attaching to it the definite article: “*These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation*” (literally, “*the tribulation, the great one*”). In speaking of

<sup>16</sup> E.g., John 16:33; Acts 14:22; 1 Thessalonians 3:3-4; etc.

<sup>17</sup> As in Acts 7:11; Revelation 2:2

*“the great tribulation,”* John seems to be identifying some specific period of affliction—and is in all likelihood referring to that which Jesus predicted in our present passage.

Apart from the above two passages, the words *thlipsis megale(n)*, are found together only in Acts 7:11, and Revelation 2:22, referring to famine conditions in Canaan and to the punishment of Jezebel respectively. In these cases, the phrase is found without the definite article. Since in scripture *tribulation* is such a common term for affliction or persecution, it is not surprising to read of “great tribulation” in settings other than eschatological ones.<sup>18</sup>

In popular *Dispensational* parlance, “the tribulation” is identified with the seventieth week, in Daniel 9, and is regarded as a seven-year period at the end of the present age. Jesus, however, does not say how long this tribulation period will be, nor does He necessarily place it at the end of the present age. The most natural reading of the discourse would place this great tribulation immediately after the flight of the Christians from Jerusalem and Judea—which, as we have seen, occurred as early as the Romans were known to be descending upon Israel.

The main objection that many raise to the suggestion of a first-century “*great tribulation*,” is the description Jesus gave it in the words: “*such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be*” (Matt.24:21). If these words are taken literally, then Jesus is describing events worse than any others in history. Can one say this about the Jewish War?

Anyone who reads Josephus’ largely eye-witness account of that war would have to conclude that, if any known war would fit this description, then that war would be a strong contender for the title. Only those unfamiliar with the accounts would cavalierly dismiss that identification.

However, the words are not to be taken strictly literally, because Jesus is using a common biblical idiom. God promised Solomon a special gift of wisdom, “*so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you*” (1 Kings 3:12). Yet, we know this to be hyperbole, in view of the fact that Jesus described Himself as, “*a greater than Solomon*” (Luke 11:31).

Things that are extraordinarily terrible are often spoken of in terms as if they are *uniquely* terrible. Consider these examples:

- The locust plague in Egypt was described as uniquely severe: “*...previously there had been no such locusts as they, nor shall there be such like them*” (Ex.10:14). This locust plague is said to have been as historically unique in its severity as was the tribulation of which Jesus spoke. Yet, a later locust plague, in the time of Joel, was described in similar terms: “*the like of whom has never been, nor will there ever be such after them even for many successive generations*” (Joel 2:2).
- Even with reference to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, the words of Jesus simply cannot be taken strictly literally. There was an earlier destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by Nebuchadnezzar, which was, in almost every characteristic, like the destruction effected by the Romans.<sup>19</sup> Of the earlier fall of Jerusalem, Ezekiel said, “*I will execute judgments...And I will do among you what I have never done, and the like of which I will never do again...*” (Ezek.5:8-9). Yet Jesus said the same about the coming judgment in A.D.70. The two destructions of Jerusalem (586 B.C. and A.D.70) could not both be literally the very worst in history. One would have to be worse than the other or else they must be equally bad—neither of which options would allow the words to be taken literally.

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<sup>18</sup> Paul uses the similar phrase “much tribulation” in 2 Corinthians 2:4 and 1 Thessalonians 1:6

<sup>19</sup> Strikingly, the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and the repeat of that, in A.D.70, both occurred on the same calendar day—the ninth of Av, on the Jewish calendar.

It is enough that the tribulation of which Jesus speaks is horrendous above all other events in living memory or legend. The magnitude of the disaster need not be measured in body counts alone, but also in cosmic significance. The fall of Jerusalem in A.D.70 was the end of a historical and covenantal epoch, as no other holocaust ever was or has been since.

It is not clear what may be meant by the days being “shortened,” other than that the period will not be a protracted one, because, if it were to be much extended, “*no flesh would be saved*” (Matt.24:22; Mark 13:21)—which must mean there would be no survivors if God were not to curtail the length of the period of disaster. The expression “*no flesh*” (and its opposite, “*all flesh*”) are common biblical expressions to mean *nobody* (or *everybody*) of a particular group defined by geography, race, or other factors. So, when Jeremiah is told that God is bringing disaster on “*all flesh*” through the Babylonian military expansion (Jer.25:31) and that “*no flesh*” will have peace (Jer.12:12), or when Joel says that God will pour out His Spirit on “*all flesh*” at Pentecost (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:16-17), the expression does not have a global referent, but is limited to the geographical region under discussion.

The *great tribulation* is not said to affect any people other than the Jews in Israel, as Luke’s parallel paraphrases this expression: “*great distress in the land and wrath upon this people*” (21:23). “*The land*” refers to Israel and “*this people*” to the Jews.

The tribulation, then, would be either 1) that period of the Jewish War culminating in the siege of Jerusalem and its destruction, or else 2) a longer period that began at that point and continued for some time beyond those events—possibly even till modern times. If the latter position were taken, it would not be impossible to see the tribulations that came upon the Jews in that war as a continuing phenomenon through successive centuries of grievous outbreaks of anti-Semitism and holocaust, even to the present time. Interestingly, the parallel in Luke seems to suggest that this period will last “*until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled*” (21:24). The phrase, “*times of the Gentiles,*” is found only here in scripture, making it difficult to define with confidence. It may be restricted only to the period of the Romans trampling upon the city during the war, or it may refer to the entire present age in which God is dealing primarily with the Gentile World, rather than Israel. Each interpreter may hold to his own theory, but none can prove either of these alternatives beyond dispute. The one view for which no biblical argument can be made is that this tribulation is the future, long-delayed 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel 9. Nothing in scripture justifies that association.

If we take the *great tribulation* to refer to the afflictions that came on the Jews from A.D.66-70, then it would be reasonable to see the same expression in Revelation 7:14 the same way—and both full and partial preterists do so.

In Luke’s version, signs in the heavens are mentioned (v.25)—which may be taken either as apocalyptic imagery, or may refer to such phenomena as the literal darkening of the sun, a star shaped like a sword, a comet, and armored soldiers seen running among the clouds, which Josephus reports as having been observed at the time.<sup>20</sup>

Luke speaks of “*distress of nations*” during this period (v.25). Near the end of the war, Rome itself endured the better part of two years being torn apart by civil strife, political assassinations, and a series of usurpers each briefly assuming the throne of the self-dispatched Nero. In retrospect, historians often express amazement that the Roman Empire survived the ordeal. The situation was finally stabilized when Vespasian returned to Rome from the siege of Jerusalem (leaving it to his son Titus to finish the job) and became emperor.

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<sup>20</sup> Flavius Josephus, *Wars* 6:5:3

### 13. Premature Claims of Messiah's Return

Matthew 24	Mark 13	Luke 17
		<sup>22</sup> Then He said to the disciples, "The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it.
<sup>23</sup> "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe it.	<sup>21</sup> "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, He is there!' do not believe it.	<sup>23</sup> And they will say to you, 'Look here!' or 'Look there!' Do not go after them or follow them.
<sup>24</sup> For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.	<sup>22</sup> For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.	
<sup>25</sup> See, I have told you beforehand.	<sup>23</sup> But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand.	
<sup>26</sup> "Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; or 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe it.		
<sup>27</sup> For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.		<sup>24</sup> For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day.
		<sup>25</sup> But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.
<sup>28</sup> For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.		

This section warns against premature announcement or misidentifications of the Messiah's arrival on earth. During the Jewish War there would be people desperately looking for the Messiah to come and save them. Many impostors would exploit this desperation, claiming to be either Jesus having returned, or some other messianic deliverer. In times of such horror, embracing any hope, including a false one, is hard to resist. The disciples would not be deceived—though they might nearly have been deceived, if they had failed to heed this warning.

The expectation upon which the deceivers are preying is the concept of a literal appearance on earth of the Messiah—as opposed to the full-preterists' idea of a metaphorical "coming" in a judgment that does not involve an actual, personal return in human form on earth. The genuine coming of the Messiah was expected by the disciples to be literal and visible, which is why even the elect might almost be fooled by literal, visible people claiming to be Him. Jesus does not say, "But, of course, you

will not be in danger of deception. After all, you know that I am not coming back in such a literal, personal sense.” If Jesus is not coming in that sense, then He could have permanently inoculated His disciples from such deceptions just by saying, “But I am not coming back in that sense, so pay no attention to anyone who says that I have done so.”

Far from denying that His coming would be personal and visible, He insists that it will be so overwhelmingly visible that no one could claim He has arrived and is secretly residing in a certain room, or in the wilderness. Jesus, at His coming, will be as impossible to conceal as is the location of a corpse where the host of carrion-eating birds are inevitably gathered and encircling.

He contrasts the false claims of a secret arrival with the actual unmistakable visibility of His eventual coming, which our translations liken to a bolt of lightning. It is peculiar that he would say, as if it is axiomatic, that “*lightening... comes from the east and flashes to the west*” (Matt.24:27). Is it generally agreed that lightning travels from east to west? It is certainly not universally the case, and we would think it relatively rare that even a horizontal bolt of lightning would travel in a specifically westward direction (given the possibility of three alternative possibilities).

Though no English translation observes this, the word “lightning” used here (Gr. *astrape*) can (and elsewhere *does*) mean “bright shining.” This is the way the same word is rightly translated in Luke 11:36 where it speaks of the “*bright shining of a lamp.*” If the translators were to translate the same word consistently in Matthew 24:27, Jesus would then be seen to say, “*as the bright shining comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.*” He would instantly be recognized as comparing His coming to the sunrise—which none but the blind could miss.

#### 14. After Tribulation

Matthew 24	Mark 13	Luke 21
<sup>29</sup> <i>“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.</i>	<i>“But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; <sup>25</sup> the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.</i>	<sup>26</sup> <i>men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.</i>

The interpretation of this section, and the following one, becomes very interesting. These verses, on the one hand, contain familiar features and terminology that many of us have been accustomed to associate with the *Parousia* of Christ at the end of this present age. It seems counterintuitive to see it any other way. The assumption that these verses describe the actual Second Coming of Christ, coupled with the fact that they are said to occur “*immediately after the tribulation of those days,*” have been used as an argument against a first-century timing of the “*great tribulation.*” If the return of Christ comes immediately “after the tribulation,” then doesn’t this require an end-times occurrence the latter? This logic seems sound, but the premises may be flawed, which would lead to wrong conclusions regardless of the soundness of the reasoning. Are there assumptions that we may need to re-examine?

First, we do not know how long the tribulation period is to be. Jesus indicated nothing about its length, and Luke’s version may be taken to imply that this period extends through the entire “*times of the Gentiles*” (21:24). If “*the times of the Gentiles*” refers to the Church Age, then events of the “last day” would come immediately after, or at the end of, this present age.

On the other hand, the premise that the *final Parousia* is here in view may be mistaken. If it applies to A.D.70, then the tribulation after which it comes is merely the Jewish War. But how could anyone seriously think that such language as we find in these verses could refer to A.D.70? An increasing familiarity with apocalyptic imagery in the prophets has resulted in a growing number of scholars who recognize the use of such language throughout the passage. We have seen that when the same imagery is used elsewhere in scripture it commonly refers to the end of some earthly nation or empire, not to the end of the universe.

In all three parallel accounts, we read of the “*powers of the heavens*” being “*shaken*.” This image is also used in Haggai 2:6, which the writer of Hebrews seems to apply to the impending destruction of the temple (Heb.12:26). In Joel 3:16 the shaking of the heavens seems to refer either to the fall of Jerusalem or of her enemies, and in Isaiah 13:13 there is no doubt that it describes the fall of ancient Babylon in 539 B.C.

Three verses earlier in Isaiah, the fall of Babylon is said to be accompanied by phenomena such as are mentioned here: “*For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine.*” (Isa.13:10). Disruptions of the sun, moon and/or stars also are mentioned in connection with God’s ancient judgments on Edom (Isa.34:4); Egypt (Ezek.32:7-8); the northern kingdom of Israel (Amos 8:9); Judah (Joel 2:31; 3:15); and Jerusalem (Jer.15:9).

In none of these cases are the astral phenomena to be understood literally. They are apocalyptic images which refer to geopolitical upheavals. Jesus and His disciples would be more familiar with these Old Testament conventions than are most Christians today. They would have had no trouble recognizing Jesus’ statements as having an entirely mundane fulfillment in the collapse of a kingdom like Israel.

### 15. The Son of Man Coming

<b>Matthew 24</b>	<b>Mark 13</b>	<b>Luke 21</b>
<i>30 Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.</i>	<i>26 Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.</i>	<i>27 Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.</i>
<i>31 And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.</i>	<i>27 And then He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven.</i>	
		<i>28 Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.”</i>

Luke mentions one event here; Mark adds another; and Matthew adds yet a third and a fourth. We will then take Matthew’s version as the fullest account. There are four parts to this prophecy:



- 1) The “sign of the Son of Man” in heaven (only in Matthew)
  - 2) The mourning of the tribes (only in Matthew)
  - 3) The Son of Man coming on the clouds with power and glory (included in all three accounts)
  - 4) The mission of angels to gather the elect from around the world (only in Matthew and Mark)
- 1) The appearing of the “sign” of the Son of Man in heaven is unique (and lacking in any explanation) in Matthew. There, it is not the same as, but is distinguished from, “*the Son of Man coming...*” What is this *sign of the Son of Man in heaven*, if not the same as the *Parousia*? We can only speculate. The word order in the NKJV (used here) is different from that in the KJV. The phraseology can be read either way. The NKJV says “*the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven,*” making it something that will appear in the sky and be seen by looking upward. By contrast, in the KJV, the word order is flipped so as to read “*then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven.*” This slight change would not necessarily indicate that the sign *appears in heaven*, but that the sign, wherever it may be seen, is the indicator that the Son of Man truly is in heaven (in fulfillment of Daniel 7:13-14). The sign might well be a phenomenon seen on earth, which confirms to those who see it that Christ is reigning in heaven. That sign might be the final stage of the conquest, when the Roman troops broke through the walls of Jerusalem, or when they burned the temple—both would be signs on earth that Christ was being vindicated in heaven where He sits at the right hand of God. Those who murdered Him are now themselves destroyed and undone.
  - 2) The mourning of the “*tribes of the earth*” should probably be translated “*tribes of the land*” (the Greek would equally support either translation)—that is, the twelve tribes of Israel. The global earth is not usually described as consisting of “tribes,” but of “nations.” Israel, however, has historically been referred to as “the twelve tribes” of Israel.<sup>21</sup> Besides, this feature of the prophecy is probably related to the prophecy of Zechariah 12:10. There it is the House of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem who are seen mourning when they look on the one they have pierced. The grief and mourning of the tribes of Israel, seeing the one they have pierced vindicated in their own destruction, fits perfectly into the context of the fall of Jerusalem.
  - 3) There are several references in scripture to the Son of Man coming in clouds. We formerly examined the flexibility of this imagery in the prophets, even seeing Yahweh “*rid[ing] on a swift cloud*” and “coming” into Egypt, in the form of invading Assyrian armies (Isa.19:1). We saw that the coming of the Lord, in both Testaments, is a common expression for a divine judgment on one nation or another—or in the end on all nations combined.

It may be enough to say that such expressions can easily be a general reference to a divine judgment—in this case, on Jerusalem in A.D.70—but in this case, there may be a finer point to be put on it. We saw that the image of one like “*the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven*” originates in Daniel 7:13-14, where it speaks of Christ’s ascension through the clouds approaching the Ancient of Days to receive a throne and a kingdom. This is where Christ sits today, and has sat since His departure two-thousand years ago. We saw that Jesus said to Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, “*from now on [Gr. ap arti] you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.*” (Matt.26:64). In other words, He was

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<sup>21</sup> E.g., Genesis 49:28; Exodus 24:4; Ezekiel 47:13; Matthew 19:28; Acts 26:7; James 1:1; Revelation 21:12

saying, “Daniel 7:13-14 is to be immediately fulfilled. From now on, you will see the evidence of my rule before your eyes.”

This sentence resembles the form of Jesus’ words to Nathanael, “*from now on [Gr. ap arti] you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.*” (John 1:51).<sup>22</sup> Both statements refer to Christ’s status, borrowing imagery from Old Testament passages—Daniel 7:13-14, in the first instance, and Genesis 28:12, in the second. In both places, “*from now on (Gr. ap arti), you will see...*” probably means, “You are about to have your whole perception of me changed, as this reality becomes obvious to you.” Thus, Nathanael was soon to have a new understanding of Jesus being like Jacob’s ladder, the access between heaven and earth. Likewise, Caiaphas was about to learn that Jesus was Daniel’s reigning Son of Man. In our present passage, Jesus says this fact would also dawn on the tribes of the land as they see their rebellious kingdom falling around them.

- 4) The word for “*angels*” is *angeloi*, which is the ordinary Greek word for “messengers,” whether human or superhuman. Luke 7:24 uses this word to speak of the messengers who came to Jesus from John in prison, and Luke 7:27 uses the same word for John himself. In Luke 9:52, the word is applied to the messengers Jesus sent ahead of Him to secure lodging in Samaria, and James 2:25 uses this term of the spies who were sent to Jericho. While the scriptures more often use *angeloi* to speak of messengers from heaven—which is what we mean by our English word “angels”—it is just as natural in Greek to use the term for human messengers.

Therefore, the reference to *angeloi* being sent by God to all parts of the world to gather His “elect” to Himself could as easily refer to Christ’s missionaries, taking their mission to the Gentile world after the fall of Jerusalem. It is true that Paul and some others had already made much headway in evangelizing Gentiles even before A.D.70. When Jerusalem fell, however, even the Jewish Church was forced out into Gentile lands, and all evangelistic ministry was thereafter in non-Jewish lands. The sending of messengers to the Gentiles after the destruction of Jerusalem is also a prominent feature of Jesus’ parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22:7ff.

The elect are thus gathered, not into heaven, but into the community of Christ, His Kingdom and Church. The phrase, “*from the four winds, from one end of heaven to another*” (Matt.24:31) would mean “worldwide, from all directions, from one horizon to the other.”

Thus, every detail of this section can very feasibly (though not necessarily) be applied to A.D.70. We should note that this section falls within the body of the discourse that Jesus will later summarize as “*these things*” to be realized in His disciples’ own generation. Therefore, to apply it to the fall of Jerusalem is very reasonable.

Then again, if “*the tribulation of those days*” is taken to mean the whole era of the Jews suffering in the Gentile nations, then these verses might still be seen as a future coming of Christ in glory. If we allow that some material in this section of the discourse is mentioned parenthetically, or tangentially, we might take those parts as exceptions to the general statement that “*these things*” will be fulfilled in that generation. Such a suggestion is anathema to the full-preterist.

### 16. Fig Tree Analogy

<b>Matthew 24</b>	<b>Mark 13</b>	<b>Luke 21</b>
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<sup>22</sup> This quote follows the Textus Receptus. The Alexandrian text omits *ap arti*, “*hereafter*” or “*from now on*” in John 1:51.

<p><sup>32</sup> <i>“Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near.</i></p>	<p><sup>28</sup> <i>“Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near.</i></p>	<p><sup>29</sup> <i>Then He spoke to them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. <sup>30</sup> When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near.</i></p>
<p><sup>33</sup> <i>So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors!</i></p>	<p><sup>29</sup> <i>So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors!</i></p>	<p><sup>31</sup> <i>So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the Kingdom of God is near.</i></p>

This is a simple analogy taken from predictability in the natural world. After the winter, the leaves begin to return to the trees. Everyone can tell that winter is past and that summer is not far off. Likewise, seeing the signs that Jesus has spoken of earlier will alert the disciples that the predicted judgment is near.

A popular approach to these verses has been to see in them a cryptic remark about the reestablishing of Israel as a nation in the end times. The argument goes like this: “Israel is often likened in scripture to a fig tree. As the fig tree loses its leaves in the winter, so Israel as a nation “died” in A.D.70, losing every sign of life. In the end times, Israel is to be restored as a nation. This is what Jesus means by the fig tree ‘*budding*’ (Luke) and its ‘*put[ting] forth leaves*’ (Matthew and Mark). Jesus is saying that, when the nation of Israel comes back to life in the end times, then the Second Coming is not far off.

Problems abound with this interpretation.

First, it is not that common for the biblical writers to use the image of a fig tree for Israel. It is an image occasionally used, but far more often in scripture, fig trees are mentioned simply as part of the agricultural abundance of the land, alongside olives, grapes, pomegranates, and other products. The term “fig tree” occurs 43 times in the Old and New Testaments. Allowing for synoptic parallels and multiple occurrences in a single passage, it would be very generous to suggest that as many as four or five could conceivably be referring to Israel under the imagery of a fig tree. The remainder simply refer to actual trees.

Second, all three Gospel records refer to this as a “parable” (not a veiled prophecy). It is the pattern of most of Jesus’ parables to speak of a common agricultural or natural phenomenon—wheat seeds being planted and growing, mustard seeds growing, leaven’s activity in a lump of dough, etc.—and to parallel these to His kingdom concepts. This parable seems to be no different. That Jesus has ordinary fig trees in mind can be observed in Luke’s parallel where it reads, “Look at the fig tree, *and all the trees.*” Jesus is clearly referring to *a general phenomenon in nature* which applies to all trees. The reason for singling out a fig tree for special notice may be that there was a fig tree showing new growth nearby.

Third, this statement functions very much like a similar case, when Jesus said to His critics, “*When it is evening you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red’; and in the morning, ‘It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times*” (Matt.16:2-3). Jesus simply points out that there are natural phenomena that reliably signal upcoming conditions or events. He then says, “The same is true in the case we are discussing.”

Fourth, on one of the few occasions when a fig tree is generally recognized to be a symbol of Israel Jesus had recently cursed a fruitless tree. He announced that it would never again produce, nor would anyone ever eat fruit again from it (Matt.21:19; Mark 11:14). The disciples had heard and witnessed

this. How unnatural it would be for them to hear Jesus mentioning the re-foliating of a fig tree on this occasion and to assume that He was predicting the revival of Israel in stark contradiction to what they had heard Jesus say to the fig tree (representing Israel) just three days earlier.

It seems clear that nothing in the context of Jesus' statement about the fig tree justifies the imposition of a meaning that has to do with the future of Israel. While any such interpretation is fully gratuitous, the rejection of that interpretation rests on many sound exegetical considerations.

In Matthew's and Mark's accounts, Jesus says that when these things begin to happen, the event is "at the doors." James, writing only a few years before the Roman invasion of Judea, told his readers, "the coming of the Lord is at hand...the Judge is standing at the door!" (James 5:8-9). There can be little doubt that James was alluding to this statement of Jesus, and the event to which the signs were pointing in his own day as signals of the near ("at the door") destruction of Jerusalem.

### 17. "This Generation"

Matthew 24	Mark 13	Luke 21
<sup>34</sup> Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.	<sup>30</sup> Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.	<sup>32</sup> Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place.

There would appear to be three ways in which the phrase "this generation" has been taken by various interpreters:

A) One very popular way has been to join this prediction with the alleged prediction found concerning the fig tree two verses earlier. This view holds that the budding of the fig tree represents the re-establishment of the nation of Israel in the end times. The argument suggests that the generation living at the time of that event will not pass away until Christ returns. In the 1970s, it was popular to employ the following calculus:

- Israel became a nation again on May 14, 1948;
- The generation living at that time is to see the *Parousia* of Christ;
- A generation is forty years; Christ must, therefore, return no later than 1988;
- Since the Rapture must occur seven years before Jesus actually returns (the unique assumption of *Dispensationalism*), the Rapture must occur no later than 1981.

This reasoning depended upon several unproved assumptions, namely:

- that the fig tree represents Israel, and its budding occurred in 1948;
- that the Rapture will occur seven years prior to the *Parousia*; and
- that when Jesus said "this generation," He really meant to say "that (future) generation."

Subsequent history has demonstrated the fallacy of this argument—and its associated exegesis.

B) Another widely argued interpretation is that we should understand "generation" to mean "race," or "family." The word can bear this significance. On this view, Jesus was telling His disciples that that some family (The Jews? The Christians?), despite great persecution and harassment, would not become extinct before everything is fulfilled.

According to the lexicons, the Greek word *genea* does sometimes mean “those of a common stock,” but other times means “a multitude of contemporaries.” How did the Gospel writers use the term? In Matthew’s Gospel, the word occurs 10 times. In most of the occurrences, one could read into it either definition. There are three exceptions, all of which are in the same verse. Matthew 1:17 reads:

*So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen **generations**, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen **generations**, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen **generations**.*

Here there can be no mistaking the meaning of the word “generation.” Its meaning is exactly like that of our English word.<sup>23</sup> Also, there are apparently seven occasions when Jesus spoke specifically of “this generation”:

1. When He likened them to implacable children who rejected both John and Himself;<sup>24</sup>
2. When He said Gentiles who had believed having seen fewer signs than they had seen, would condemn them;<sup>25</sup>
3. When He likened them to a formerly demon-possessed man, to whom demons returned;<sup>26</sup>
4. When He called them evil for their continually seeking a sign;<sup>27</sup>
5. When He said His disciples should not be ashamed of Him in “this generation;”<sup>28</sup>
6. When He said He must suffer and be rejected by “this generation;”<sup>29</sup>
7. When He said all the bloodguilt of the martyrs would come upon their generation;<sup>30</sup>
8. When He said they would not pass away before the temple would be destroyed.<sup>31</sup>

It seems unlikely that Jesus was referring to the Jewish race, apart from those members of it specifically living in His time. Which Jews other than they had seen and rejected both John and Jesus? Which other Jews had seen the signs and had the demons cast out of them? Which, other than that very generation, would reject Christ, causing Him to suffer, and tempt the disciples to be ashamed of Him? What Jews, other than the contemporaries of Christ’s disciples, would endure to see the destruction of the temple and would experience the judgment coming upon the nation for its past history of consistently killing the prophets?

If Jesus was telling His disciples, on the Mount of Olives, that the entire race of the Jews (or even of the Christians) would not pass away before the temple was destroyed, we (and the disciples) might wonder, “Who asked anything about *them*?” If Jesus merely told His disciples that the Jewish race would endure scores of centuries into the future, then we must assume that He said nothing to the point of their question about when these things would be. He was instead addressing a point on which they had expressed no curiosity. By contrast, if He is speaking of the actual generation of their own

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<sup>23</sup> According to Wikipedia, “generation” refers to “all of the people born and living at about the same time, regarded collectively.”

<sup>24</sup> Matthew 11:16; Luke 7:31

<sup>25</sup> Matthew 12:41-42

<sup>26</sup> Matthew 12:45

<sup>27</sup> Mark 8:12; Luke 11:29-32

<sup>28</sup> Mark 8:38

<sup>29</sup> Luke 17:25

<sup>30</sup> Matthew 23:36; Luke 11:50-51

<sup>31</sup> Matthew 24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32

contemporaries, He is giving them a direct, applicable, and accurate answer. All things considered, there seems no warrant for understanding “*this generation*” in this passage as a reference to a “race.”

C) The third way to understand Christ’s statement would be to see Him as actually responding to the question they had asked Him about the timing of the temple’s destruction. It was their first question, and is never addressed by Jesus, if not in this verse. And it was a very good answer, too! When understood in this way, it ranks as the most specific, detailed prediction ever uttered by Christ which can be documented from secular history to have been fulfilled. The events He predicted happened within forty years of His words. What could be more appropriate than for Him to say, “This generation will not pass before it happens”? Besides, He had earlier made the same prediction, but using less ambiguous language: “*Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom*” (Matt.16:28).

### 18. Heaven and Earth Will Pass Away

Matthew 24	Mark 13	Luke 21
<sup>35</sup> <i>Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.</i>	<sup>31</sup> <i>Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.</i>	<sup>33</sup> <i>Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.</i>

This is the final prediction of the discourse recorded by Mark and Luke. The fact that Matthew continues the discourse through the rest of Chapter 24 and Chapter 25 either means that He knew more about the discourse than Mark or Luke knew, or he is bringing in material spoken by Jesus on other occasions. Given Matthew’s habit of gathering and combining related speeches of Jesus from different occasions, we have every reason to believe that he is also doing so here. This being the case, we cannot be certain that the additional material continues to address the same subject as His remarks given on the Mount of Olives. It might, but that would have to be decided from its content.

In Luke, the discourse on Olivet reaches its apex with the declaration that His words will endure beyond the passing away of the cosmos. All that remains are closing warnings to remain watchful and prepared which all three Gospels include.

When Jesus said, “*heaven and earth will pass away,*” what was He trying to communicate? Was He speaking hypothetically, so as to really mean “Even if heaven and earth were to pass away (which they will not), my words can never pass away”? Full-preterists do not believe the literal cosmos will ever pass away. Many preterists of both varieties assume that “*heaven and earth*” refers to the temple system. We have discussed this theory at length in Chapters Eleven and Twelve. The evidence suggests that this interpretation is not really warranted, though it would make perfectly good sense in this context. The problem is that, in the overwhelming majority of cases, “*heaven and earth*” unambiguously refers to the literal earth and sky. There is nothing compelling us to make an exception here.

Full-preterists often claim that the teaching of scripture declares the earth to be eternal—never having an end. The flaw in this assertion is that the passages upon which it depends are in the poetry books of the Bible,<sup>32</sup> where such hyperbole is commonplace. The second law of thermodynamics itself means that the solar system, in its natural state, cannot last literally *forever*. Eventually, entropy must claim everything. Christ’s statement is in the form of an actual prediction. We also have shown that

<sup>32</sup> E.g., Psalm 78:69; 104:5; Ecclesiastes 1:4

the best understanding of New Testament references to the New Heaven and New Earth would suggest an eventual end of the present natural order.

I maintain that the statement in the above verses must be seen as an actual prediction of the end of the natural created order. The purpose of Jesus mentioning it here is to emphasize the permanence of His words, by which all things were created, in contrast to the impermanence of all things that were thereby created.

Therefore, the Olivet Discourse climaxes with Jesus assuring His disciples, in the strongest of terms, that there is no possibility of His words failing. Conveniently, His point of comparison (the passing away of the present cosmos) allows for a second topic to be introduced. The events associated with the latter event are not pursued in the Olivet Discourse, as Mark and Luke record it. However, the introduction of that subject does afford to Matthew a natural segue to insert the things Jesus said in Luke 17 about that monumental final event. Matthew will rejoin Mark and Luke to include the final warnings with which Jesus closed the discourse on the Mount of Olives, but he first inserts material relevant to the new topic for which Jesus' final prediction provides a natural juncture.

### 19. The Unknown Day and Hour

Matthew 24	Mark 13	Luke 21
<sup>36</sup> <i>“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.</i>	<sup>32</sup> <i>“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.</i>	

If Jesus is here still speaking about A.D.70, then it seems superfluous to mention *that* day and hour. Most likely, Jesus and the disciples believed that their general question about timing had been adequately answered by their being told it would be within the lifetimes of some of them. If they had expected more precise dates, there would have been no need for their second question of “*What sign will there be that these things are about to take place?*” If, by their first question, they had been expecting to learn the date and hour, there would have been no need to ask for signs to indicate that the date was near. The calendar itself would tell them as much.

On a later occasion, when the disciples would ask about the timing of God’s program, Jesus would silence their inquiries and redirect their focus: “*It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority*” (Acts 1:7). Instead of delving into fruitless speculations about impractical questions, Jesus said they should busy themselves with their witness to the world (v.8).

Notice, in that pre-ascension statement, Jesus does not speak of specifics—like days and hours—but of broad general timeframes, which is the meaning of “*times and seasons.*” Jesus had given them a general timeframe for the fall of Jerusalem. Some of their generation would definitely live to see that, and they would need to know what to do when that happened. By contrast, there were more distant and ultimate matters, the timing of which God has kept to himself (Deut.29:29). It is not for the disciples to pry into these secret matters since such things will take care of themselves in due time. This is why it is so inappropriate for Christians today to be focused on the questions and speculations of the nearness of Christ’s Second Coming. Such things are not for us to know—and would confer no advantage if they were known.

Interestingly, Jesus did not scold or discourage the disciples when they asked Him, on the Mount of Olives, when the destruction of the temple would take place. Instead of rebuking them, He fully accommodated their curiosity with a lengthy and detailed answer. A few weeks later, when Peter inquired into the future fortunes of John, Jesus answered, essentially, that it was not for him to know

whether John might or might not survive till the eschaton. Instead, He simply commanded Peter, “*You follow me*” (John 21:21-22).

The statement before us, about not knowing “that” day or the hour, would seem to be addressing its immediate antecedent—the destruction of the cosmos, not of the temple. On this assumption, the emphasis in the sentence would be on the word “*that*”—of *that* day and hour (i.e., the one He had just introduced, as opposed to the *other one* they had earlier been discussing).

Of course, the full-preterist simply assumes that everything that follows, like the bulk of what went before, continues to discuss the end of the temple. However, they have no better reasons for saying this than that they assume this is true of every prophecy in the New Testament—a determination that they have already made concerning every prophetic passage prior to investigation. Since this prejudice is gratuitous, it would seem incumbent upon sincere disciples to examine each passage individually, and to draw conclusions from the evidence discovered in each passage. There are observable differences between the fall of Jerusalem in the previous discussion and that event discussed in the following material.

- First, the fall of Jerusalem is given a general time limit for its fulfillment, while Jesus essentially discourages any interest or consideration of the timing of the latter.
- Second, He encourages their keen interest in looking for the sign of the “*abomination of desolation*” (“*Jerusalem surrounded by armies*”—Luke 21:20) so that they might flee safely to the mountains. However, the second event will occur without warning, while the disciples are still mingling with unbelievers in their homes and their jobs, so that “one is taken and the other left” while they are right next to each other.
- Third, the fall of Jerusalem would be presaged by disasters, wars, famines, people’s hearts failing for fear, and general mayhem. By contrast, the event He now describes will occur while people are complacently eating and drinking (not starving), getting married, buying, selling, building, planting, etc. These peacetime activities would be ongoing right up to the Day of which He is here speaking. Those who succumbed to Noah’s flood and the overthrow of Sodom had that morning awakened to a peaceful and unexceptional day. There was no prior hint of danger. That it will be like that when He comes is the very point Jesus is making.

Matthew and Mark both include the “day and the hour” statement, but Mark records it without further elaboration as Jesus apparently did, leaving it as a contrast between the permanence of His words and that of the cosmos.

Matthew, by contrast, exploits the statement as a logical segue into the material he wants to bring in from Jesus’ separate discourse in Luke 17. We would ask the full-preterist to explain reasonably in what sense the things said in the following sections would be true of A.D.70 and the destruction of Jerusalem? There are two major predictions unique to these two segments:

- 1) It will be like the days of Noah and Lot (vv. 26-30), and
- 2) Of two people in immediate proximity to each other one will be “taken” while the other will be “left” (vv. 34-37).



My contention is that these statements are not meaningless or gratuitous, and are meant to tell us something about a particular judgment event. However, if Jesus spoke them concerning A.D.70, He was contradicting earlier statements. Also, if they are about that earlier subject, they simply failed to come true.

## 20. Days of Noah

<b>Matthew 24</b>	<b>Mark 13</b>	<b>Luke 17</b>
<i>37 But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.</i>		<i>26 And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man:</i>
<i>38 For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark,</i>		<i>27 They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark,</i>
<i>39 and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.</i>		<i>and the flood came and destroyed them all.</i>
		<i>28 Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built;</i>
		<i>29 but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all.</i>
		<i>30 Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.</i>

The likeness to the days of Noah and of Lot are popularly interpreted to be a reference to the moral corruption that existed in those men's days before divine judgment fell. Modern futurist prophecy teachers like to point out how evil our modern times have become and how they are, thus, like "*the days of Noah.*" However, in His statements, Jesus makes no allusion to the wickedness of the societies destroyed in the times of Noah or Lot. They were very corrupt times indeed, and Jesus could have pointed that out if He had wished to use that as a point of comparison.

Instead, Jesus identified an entirely different set of activities of those societies, mentioning nothing about their immoral behavior. The features of the "*days of Noah*" that interested Jesus were not their violent crimes (which was the focus of the Genesis account), but rather the innocent things they did in the course of normal life—eating, drinking, getting married—things that people do when life seems normal and when they do not think they will die later that same day. Likewise, in referring to the "*days of Lot,*" Jesus makes no reference to the immorality of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (as Genesis and Jude do), nor to their lack of compassion for the poor (as Ezekiel does). In fact, Jesus mentions nothing of their sins or moral behavior—a hard thing to avoid when talking about Sodom and Gomorrah! Instead, Jesus depicts them, right up to the day that Lot left Sodom, as engaged in

eating, drinking, buying, selling, building and planting—again, all innocent and legitimate things that people do when they are not expecting to be burned alive later that same day.

Jesus seems to have restrained Himself from speaking about the immorality of those people in order to focus attention on the complacent normalcy and cluelessness of their daily routines. Judgment overtook them when nothing gave them any indication that things were different from ordinary days. Jesus is saying that when He comes it will be without warning and will catch the sinners completely by surprise placidly involved in their daily routines (see Matt.24:42-51; 25:1-13). The moment before it happens, people will be enjoying an entirely unjustified sense of security (cf., 1 Thess.5:1-3).

Does this in any sense parallel the events of A.D.70? I think not. The destruction of Jerusalem occurred at the end of a hellish, five-month siege at the conclusion of a disastrous and bloody three-year war, in which none but the most foolish and brazen could have felt secure. True, some were so blinded by demonic spirits that, as Josephus reports, they imagined themselves to have had a chance of survival in the midst of the chaos and mayhem. However, most of the ordinary Jews at that time could only be terrified—even as Jesus described them: “*men’s hearts failing them for fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the [land]*” (Luke 21:26).

Even those who vainly hoped for survival could hardly have been described as engaged in the peaceful occupations of those Jesus described as complacently “*eating and drinking*” (according to Josephus, they were starving to the point of desperately eating excrement—and their own children!). Their lifestyles at that time could not be characterized by getting married, buying, selling, planting, nor building. Rather, they were insanely and hopelessly fighting for their lives day and night.

No, in His comparison with the days of Noah and Lot, Jesus was in no way describing the lives and times of the Jews just prior to Jerusalem’s fall.

### 21. One Taken, the Other Left

Matthew 24	Mark 13	Luke 17
<p><i><sup>40</sup> Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. <sup>41</sup> Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left.</i></p>		<p><i><sup>34</sup> I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left. <sup>35</sup> Two women will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left. <sup>36</sup> Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left.</i></p>
		<p><i><sup>37</sup> And they answered and said to Him, “Where, Lord?”</i></p>
		<p><i>So He said to them, “Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together.</i></p>

The expression “*left behind,*” popularized in the 1970s by Larry Norman’s Jesus People anthem, “*I Wish We’d All Been Ready*”—and, later, by the series of fictional prophecy novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins—is adapted from this passage in Luke 17 (and its parallel in Matthew 24). Interestingly, the actual expression “*left behind*” appears in neither passage. The text speaks of a series of cases wherein people are in close physical proximity to each other—working the fields,

grinding wheat, and sleeping side-by-side—at the moment of His coming. In each case, the refrain recurs: *“One shall be taken and the other will be left”* (Luke 17:34-36; Matt.24:40-41).

The popular notion that the one *“taken”* is being snatched away to heaven in the Rapture, while the other is *“left [behind]”* to face seven years of tribulation, is entirely contrary to the context. Even though, like Paul, I believe the Church will be *“Raptured”* to *meet the Lord in the air* at the *Parousia* (1 Thess.4:15, 17), our present passage is not making that point. In Christ’s context, He has just spoken of the days of Noah and distinguished between those who were saved in the ark and the others who perished. It was the latter whom the flood *“took away”* (or *“destroyed them all”* in Luke’s version). Those who were *“taken”* were not whisked away safely to heaven, but were destroyed in the judgment of the flood. It was those in the ark who were *“left”*—that is, they were saved and remained unharmed. This meaning seems unmistakable in the context. Immediately after mentioning the wicked of Noah’s day being *“taken away,”* Jesus continues: *“so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left”* (Matt.24:39-41).

The idea that, at the Second Coming, Christ will preserve the righteous alive while destroying the wicked, is consistent with Paul’s description of that event. Paul writes that Christ will be *“revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Thess.1:7-8). This will be true even while the wicked are in immediate proximity with their saved neighbors and family members. They may be even closer together than the Egyptians were to their Israelite neighbors when God sent His judgment of plagues on the former without harming the latter (Ex.11:5-7). There is a precedent for this expectation in Psalm 91 where the righteous are promised:

*A thousand may fall at your side,  
And ten thousand at your right hand;  
But it shall not come near you.  
Only with your eyes shall you look,  
And see the reward of the wicked. (vv.7-8)*

The idea that the wicked will be eliminated while the righteous remain to inherit the world is consistent with the Jewish hope stated in many other Old Testament passages. Proverbs 2:21-22 says:

*For the upright will dwell in the land,  
And the blameless will remain in it;  
But the wicked will be cut off from the earth,  
And the unfaithful will be uprooted from it.*

Psalm 37 repeatedly promised:

*For evildoers shall be cut off;  
But those who wait on the Lord,  
They shall inherit the earth.  
For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more;  
Indeed, you will look carefully for his place,  
But it shall be no more.*

*But the meek shall inherit the earth,  
And shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. (vv.9-11)*

*And He shall exalt you to inherit the land;  
When the wicked are cut off, you shall see it. (v.34)*

There is no scripture that speaks of the righteous being permanently removed from the earth, and the consistent biblical testimony is that *“the meek shall inherit the earth”*—as Jesus Himself affirmed (Matt.5:5).

Luke’s version alone records the intriguing exchange between Christ and the disciples that followed this prediction. After hearing Jesus repeatedly predicting, *“One shall be taken and the other shall be left,”* the disciples asked, *“Where, Lord?”*

They had no idea what was meant by people being *taken*. To where were they taken? Jesus’ cryptic answer was morbid and probably proverbial: *“Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together”* (v.37).

What does this mean? In view of the disciples’ query as to where those taken might have gone, Jesus seems to say, *“They should not be difficult to locate. Just look for the gathering of carrion-eating birds. That is where they will be found.”* That is, the people who have been “taken” are *dead*.

I say that this was likely proverbial among the Jews, because the thought harks back to an ancient Hebrew source where God is speaking about the eagle, and he says, *“Where the slain are, there it is”* (Job 39:30). There is a good chance that this statement had taken on a proverbial usage—not unlike our own proverb, “Where there is smoke, there is fire.” On this occasion Jesus’ use of the saying seems to have been a cryptic way of saying, “They are dead. They will be killed. Food for the birds.”

Did what Jesus describes here happen when Rome destroyed Jerusalem? Not in any sense that can be supported from the facts, nor from the wording of the prophecy. The slaughter of the rebellious Jews by the Romans was wholesale and indiscriminate. There were no righteous among them to be spared. According to Eusebius, the Christians had been forewarned and escaped from Jerusalem before the war began. This means that the holocaust of A.D.70 found none of the righteous working or sleeping in immediate proximity with the miserable victims slaughtered in that event. The events of Luke 17 simply did not occur in A.D.70, while those in the Olivet Discourse did.

What can account, then, for the full-preterist’s continuing to identify Luke 17:22ff with A.D.70 instead of the future coming of Christ? Apparently only one explanation can be given. It is the *a priori* assumption of *Full-Preterism* that the Word of God cannot predict more than one post-Ascension event. This assumption must be the starting and ending point in all exegesis for the full-preterist, no matter how gratuitous and unwarranted the premise may be, or how tortured the exegesis required to support it.

The Bible nowhere even hints that this full-preterist assumption is true. Ironically, the full-preterist freely admits that in the Old Testament the *“coming”* of God and the *“Day of the Lord”* are terms used to speak of a variety of judgment events. However, the acknowledged flexibility of these terms mysteriously vanishes when these interpreters come to the New Testament. There is no warrant for their assumption, and apart from that assumption, there is no warrant for artificially limiting oneself with such an exegetical straight-jacket when engaging in biblical studies.

## 22. The need to Watch

<b>Matthew 24</b>	<b>Mark 13</b>	<b>Luke 21</b>
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		<i><sup>34</sup> "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly."</i>
		<i><sup>35</sup> For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth.</i>
<i><sup>42</sup> Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.</i>	<i><sup>33</sup> Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is.</i>	<i><sup>36</sup> Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."</i>
<i>Paralleled in vv.45-46</i>	<i><sup>34</sup> It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch.</i>	
<i><sup>43</sup> But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into.</i>		
<i><sup>44</sup> Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.</i>	<i><sup>35</sup> Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—</i>	
	<i><sup>36</sup> lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping.</i>	
	<i><sup>37</sup> And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!"</i>	

Unlike the timing of the destruction of Jerusalem, which Jesus had several times placed within that generation, even He had no idea of the timing of the end of the cosmos and His own final *Parousia*. All he could say was essentially, "Just be ready all the time—just as if you knew a thief would come, but you didn't know when." Jesus could (and apparently did) say this about both events. Since Jesus Himself didn't know when the final *Parousia* might be, He could not know whether it might occur soon or long after the fall of Jerusalem. He never intimated anything about this since He would not affirm anything that He did not know to be the case. The mere possibility that some of the living disciples might also survive to see the latter event made it necessary for Him to urge them to be prepared.

Therefore, all of the accounts of the Olivet Discourse close with a general warning to remain alert and watchful. What does such watching mean? The term "*watch*" is frequently used to speak of not

falling asleep,<sup>33</sup> and it might well seem as appropriate in such a context as being aware that a thief would come to your home at some unforeknown moment. However, to literally deprive oneself of sleep can hardly be His meaning when describing an event decades or centuries away. No one can go that long literally without sleep.

No doubt “watching” in this context is a metaphor for being ready, at a moment’s notice, to be interrupted by Christ’s return, so as not to find oneself at a disadvantage in that moment. This is the idea expressed in 1 John 2:28: “*And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.*”

The point of these exhortations to “watch” is that the occurrence will come and take everyone by surprise. There will be no clear prior warning. Paul makes this point also—apparently alluding to this passage in Matthew—when speaking of the *Parousia*:

*But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. (1 Thess.5:1-3)*

Notice that Paul, like Jesus in Matthew, has the eschatological Second Coming (not A.D.70) in mind, since he mentions the sense of peace and security that the wicked will experience right up to the moment of their demise. The days and years prior to the denouement of the Jewish War were anything but peaceful or secure.

Those who waste their time seeking to calculate from the “signs of the times” how near the coming of Christ may be, sometimes seek to justify their efforts by citing the next verse in Paul’s passage:

*But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober...*

They point out that Paul said believers are an exception to the general rule of people being taken by surprise, as by a thief. Paul said that Jesus’ coming will not be like the coming of a thief *for us*. Thus, they say we can, and should, pay close attention to the alleged signs of the times, so that Jesus won’t take us by surprise.

But this would contradict everything Jesus said about awaiting His return. He said that event would indeed take everyone, including His servants, by surprise—like one whose house is invaded by a thief, or servants whose absent master returns without warning. Jesus did not encourage His servants to obsess about predicting the time of His return. The opposite is true! He said, since you don’t know what time He will come you must be continually engaged exactly as you hope for Him to find you at the moment of His unheralded appearance.

One must wonder whether those who are always trying to estimate the nearness of Christ’s return are not doing so simply to determine how necessary it may be for them to take their Christian duties seriously—as opposed to other times when His return might seem to be more remote.

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<sup>33</sup> Matthew 26:38, 40, 41; Mark 14:37; Luke 2:8; Ephesians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:6

The idea that believers will be aware of Christ's soon coming so as not to be surprised by His arrival is in direct contradiction with the plain words of warning in Matthew 24:44: *"Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect Him."* These were spoken to His faithful servants. They will have no particular reason to be expecting Him when the time comes.

What, then, did Paul mean when he said Christ's coming will not overtake us as a thief in the night? Simply that we are *always* watching (that is, prepared for it at any time). When Jesus comes, we will not have been aware that it would happen at that time, but we will not be at a disadvantage like one who is asleep and unprepared for the home invasion. We have been expecting Him, and live our lives always as if this might be the day.

Besides, He will not be like "a thief" to us, but like a welcomed Master returning to His loyal servants. Paul says that we are *"sons of the light and sons of the day."* We do not live in the shameful behaviors that people reserve for the night—which they prefer to do in the dark, hoping to remain undetected. For the wicked, it is always night, as they prove by their lifestyles of drunkenness and shameful behavior, as Paul points out. We do not engage in those "night" activities, so it is always "day" for us. Thieves do not generally come at daytime, but at night. That is why those children of the night will experience His coming like that of a thief. Of course, the return of a master to his household may occur at night or in the daytime—but whenever he arrives, his faithful servants do not experience his coming as an intrusion, like that of a thief, but as a welcome and long-anticipated reunion.





## *Chapter Fifteen*

### *Gathering up the Fragments*

There are additional arguments I have encountered either in my debate with Don Preston or in my correspondence with full-preterist friends, which did not get covered in the course of our previous chapters. Rather than ignore them, I thought I would take them up as individual points in this chapter.

#### **1. *The limits of Paul's range of eschatological preaching***

*Full-Preterist Argument:*

Paul said he preached nothing but the hope of Israel and only what was found in the Law and the Prophets (Acts 24:14-15; 26:21-22). While the Old Testament did predict A.D.70, it nowhere can be shown to have taught the Second Coming of Christ at the end of the world, so Paul must not have taught such a thing. Don Preston argued, "Paul said, *'Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come—that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.'* (Acts 26:22-23). If there is any eschatology not found in the Old Testament, Paul didn't know about it."

*Response:*

In our debate, Don Preston made this point frequently and emphatically. The statement of Paul, about his preaching nothing beyond what the Old Testament had previously taught, is not to be taken in an absolute sense, but only with reference to the concerns for which he had been brought to trial. Although the ostensible charges against him were that he had brought a Gentile into the temple, Paul believed he was on trial because he taught Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah. This teaching included the affirmation that the Messiah was to die and to rise again from the dead. These are the points that Paul said could be established from the Law and the Prophets.

It is true that Paul includes the statement that the Messiah would be "*the first to rise from the dead*" (implying that there would be a subsequent resurrection), but this is not the controversial point for which he has gotten into trouble. The Jews themselves, as he elsewhere points out, had no problem with his doctrine of the Resurrection of the Last Day (Acts 24:14-15). It was his declarations concerning the suffering, rising, and messiahship of Jesus that the Jews hated and it was these teachings that Paul claims do not go beyond the teaching of the Law and Prophets.

We must be careful about taking Paul literally when he says, "I have only taught thus-and-so." When reminding the Corinthians of his teaching among them, he said that he had taught nothing other than "*Jesus Christ and Him crucified*" (1 Cor.2:2). He does not even mention there that he had taught the Resurrection of Christ, which we know he did, according to 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. When a man's words have become controversial, it is common for him to say, "All I said was..." in order to clarify his position on the points under dispute. Such statements are not intended to summarize everything the man ever said on any occasion.

We know that Paul taught many things that were not found in Moses or the Prophets—including most of the teachings found in his epistles. He did not mean to give Agrippa the impression that he never taught anything which was previously unknown to the Jews. It is true

that he defended some of his points by appeal to earlier scriptural authority.<sup>1</sup> Yet, he also plainly claimed that his favorite topic, the Church as the Body of Christ, was a “mystery” that had never been revealed in Old Testament times and had only been recently revealed to the apostles and prophets.<sup>2</sup>

Paul specifically included his teaching about the Resurrection and the Rapture as being among the New Testament “mysteries” that God had thus revealed to him by the Spirit of God: “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep but we shall all be changed...” (1 Cor.15:51). It is therefore unwarranted to say, as Preston did during our debate, “If we cannot bring our eschatology within the framework of the fulfillment of God’s Old Testament promises made to Old Testament Israel, then I would suggest that we have the wrong framework.” Paul saw no reason to limit his teaching to what the Old Testament Jews had already taught. If he had, our New Testament would have been at least thirteen books lighter.

## **2. Israel’s festal calendar reaches its consummation in A.D.70**

### *Full-Preterist Argument:*

The feasts of Israel (or “feasts of the Lord”) symbolically foreshadowed the major features in the redemptive plan of God. Resurrection is the Old Testament hope and cannot be separated from the festal calendar which reaches its consummation in A.D.70.

### *Response:*

Don Preston often refers to Israel’s festal calendar as the context for the New Testament’s teaching concerning the consummation of the ages. He sees A.D.70 as fulfilling the last of the feasts of the Lord, so that nothing of significance is left to happen beyond that date. This approach seems to view Old Covenant Israel as if it is *everything*, so the end of Israel is the end of everything. The Bible recognizes Israel as uniquely significant for only about a millennium and a half—from 1400 B.C. to A.D.30. This is a very small slice of history, representing only a quarter of the 6,000 years since Adam. Important promises, judgments, vindications of the righteous, and other history occurred in the 2,500 years prior to Israel’s covenant status, as well as the two thousand years since the abolition of Israel. Salvation and judgment are supposed to come upon “the Jew *first*, but also on the Greek” (Rom.2:9-10), so what God did with Israel is not the only thing God cares about. Their career as a nation was (to re-purpose a term from the *Dispensationalists*) a mere “parenthesis” in redemptive history—which began with Adam and continues to the present.

When Israel became a nation at Sinai, they provisionally adopted the Abrahamic hope that had been established centuries earlier. Now the Church has adopted it (Galatians 3:16, 29). Preston’s view resembles *Dispensationalism* in treating the Church as of little prophetic significance, and everything eschatological as being related to national Israel. Yet, the role of the Seed of Abraham as a light to the Gentiles was also part of Israel’s Old Testament hope. This did not end, but had barely begun, in A.D.70..

A.D.70 was the end of the Jewish Phase of the Kingdom, but we have since moved into the international global phase.

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., Acts 13:33, 35, 47; Romans 1:1-2; 3:21; 4:3; 1 Corinthians 14:34; etc.

<sup>2</sup> Romans 16:25-26; 1 Corinthians 2:7-10; Ephesians 3:2-5; Colossians 1:25-26

Don says everything has to fit into Israel's festal calendar, but maybe only *everything to do with Israel* has to fit into that calendar. The festivals in the calendar, after all, were part of *Torah*. The passing of *Torah* might be the end of Israel's significant history as foreshadowed in holy festivals, without the slightest hint of its being the end of God's significant dealings with the world and humanity.

Abraham and his Seed are to inherit the world (Rom.4:13). This has not yet happened. It may not be a major concern in national Israel's hope, but it was certainly the primary issue related to Abraham's hope. Again, the small slice of history that the nation of Israel occupied represents less than a quarter of the story of God's redemption of man and the earth from the fall. Israel's festal calendar need not be consulted for matters unrelated to the defunct covenant of which it was a part.

### **3. *Paul's resurrection doctrine was limited to that found in Daniel 12:2 (A.D.70)***

*Full-Preterist Argument:*

Where did Jesus and Paul get their doctrine of the Resurrection of the just and the unjust? Jesus came to confirm the promises made to the fathers, and Paul was preaching what the law and the prophets said would come. Daniel 12:2 predicts the resurrection anticipated in the Old Testament, and it is referring to A.D.70.

*Response:*

Although I agree that Daniel 12 is most likely discussing the events of A.D.70, this is hardly an uncontroversial position. In fact, the majority of biblical scholars probably disagree with this identification. Of course, we do not determine our exegesis primarily from the opinions of the majority of scholars, but from scripture itself. Historically, those holding majority views on many subjects have often been incorrect.

Even if we agree that Daniel is predicting the fall of Second-Temple Judaism, it is gratuitous to insist that Paul had no information beyond what is contained in this one passage. As argued just above, Paul's eschatology was not limited to what he learned from Judaism. He also had the advantage of the teachings of Christ in the Gospels, as well as the mysteries that were revealed to him personally by the Holy Spirit. He even appears to appeal to both of these sources when speaking of his eschatology (see discussion of #1 and #2, above).

### **4. *The false teaching in Thessalonica presupposes a non-literal resurrection.***

*Full-Preterist Argument:*

False teachers in Thessalonica were teaching that the Day of the Lord had already come (2 Thess.2:1-2), and Paul warned the Christians not to believe such things. If the Day of the Lord refers to the end of the world, how could the Christians have been in danger of being fooled? Would it not be obvious to everyone that such a thing had not occurred?

*Response:*

This objection seems naïve. The New Testament attests repeatedly to the fact that there were false teachers who misrepresented Paul's teachings on many points,<sup>3</sup> and 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 would be one example. There are endless ways in which truth can be misconstrued. Obviously, those well-instructed in Paul's doctrine would know better than to think that the *Parousia* had already occurred. However, the infant Church in Thessalonica only had a few weeks of exposure to Paul's personal ministry prior to receiving his epistles and would therefore be vulnerable to slick false teachers. Charlatans might claim to have better acquaintance with Paul's doctrine, or might present a fake letter as from him—or even claim to have received personal revelations from God—contrary to what Paul really taught. That is why Paul writes here to correct them. The fact that the teachers might represent the Parousia as the kind of event that might already have occurred tells us nothing about what Paul himself actually taught. The concept of the Day of the Lord represented by the false teachers was clearly contrary to Paul's teaching so there seems no legitimacy in our referencing their view to determine what he actually believed and taught.

## 5. *The heresy of Hymenaeus and Philetus*

*Full-Preterist Argument:*

Similarly, Hymenaeus and Philetus were teaching that “*the Resurrection is already past*” and, by this teaching, were able to “*overthrow the faith of some*” (2 Tim.2:17-18). How could anyone persuasively teach that the Resurrection was a past event if the Resurrection is the physical raising of all dead bodies from their graves on the last day?

*Response:*

As with the previous objection (#4), this underestimates people's capability of being mistaken. Full-preterists should appreciate this propensity in Christians, since they think all Christians prior to 1970 were mistaken on one of the principal teachings of the Bible. The truth is, there are two “resurrections” in scripture—one spiritual, at regeneration, and the other eschatological and physical. Paul himself acknowledged that Christians had already experienced the spiritual resurrection (Eph.2:1-6; Col.2:12-13). It would be easy for a false teacher to persuade the gullible, using half the truth, that the spiritual resurrection which they had already experienced was the only one expected—especially in a culture where the very concept of physical resurrection was regarded as an absurdity. Hence, they would claim that, for those who are regenerated, “*The Resurrection is past.*” All it would take to deceive Christians on this point would be to emphasize what Paul *did teach* about regeneration while arguing that no further resurrection was ever anticipated—in other words, to teach them something quite like *Covenant Eschatology*. Are Christians vulnerable to believing such things? Look around.

## 6. *Why would the Jews want to kill Paul if he taught the same doctrine as theirs?*

*Full-Preterist Argument:*

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<sup>3</sup> E.g., Romans 3:8; 6:1, 15; 7:7; Galatians 1:6-7; 5:11

Why did the Jews want to kill him if, as he claimed, he was preaching the same doctrine they were?

*Response:*

The question appears to be challenging our premise that Paul taught the same doctrine of the Resurrection as did the Jews. Yet, this premise is not among the subjects open to dispute. We have Paul's own statements affirming this to be the case (Acts 24:15).

I cannot answer for anyone who wants to kill another person, since I have never had any interest in doing so myself. However, my impression is that those who do wish to kill other people do so because they find them to be *troublesome* and *inconvenient*—not because they agree or disagree on matters of eschatology. When the Catholic Church burned Jan Hus, it was not because he held a different view of the Resurrection than they held. In fact, he held the same view as theirs. Likewise, Paul was not pursued by the Jews because his view of the Resurrection offended them. They found him troublesome because of his beliefs about Jesus.

## **7. *There is precedent for non-physical resurrection in the Old Testament***

*Full-Preterist Argument:*

Ezekiel 37:11-14 describes a resurrection of bones and bodies into living flesh. This is precise language of resurrection from death. We know better than to take this imagery literally since we are specifically told it symbolizes the restoration of the nation of Israel from non-existence during the Babylonian exile to a nation in their own land again. Therefore, the Resurrection described by Jesus in John 5:28-29 is no more literal than is that in Ezekiel 37.

*Response:*

This is a *non-sequitur*. The existence of a case where resurrection imagery is found to be symbolic does not automatically become a governing hermeneutic for all passages on the Resurrection. We also know of non-literal use of resurrection imagery in the New Testament.<sup>4</sup> That is irrelevant in determining the nature of the eschatological Resurrection—a subject taught in entirely different contexts. One could as easily make the argument, “Because Ezekiel’s dry bones resurrection refers to the restoration of the Jews to their land in A.D.536, the Resurrection of John 5:28-29 must also be referring to a return of the Jews to their land.” Both arguments employ the same logic and neither is correct.

## **8. *In resurrection, it is not the same body that is raised, but one that God gives***

*Full-Preterist Argument:*

A full-preterist correspondent writes: “1 Corinthians 15:35-38 specifically says that the body that dies is not the body that is raised. These verses say that God gives us a body, which means our physical body will not be raised.”

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 2:34; Ephesians 2:5; Colossians 2:13

*Response:*

One should read what a passage actually says before deciding to use it in an argument. Paul does not say that God gives us a body—though even if he did, it would not make the point that this full-preterist intends to establish. Paul is talking about the plant that grows from a seed. The seed “dies” and then re-emerges with whatever body God “gives” it. To say that God gives the plant a body does not mean that that plant is a different organism from the seed itself. The cells in the actual seed provide the cells and DNA for the plant that grows from it. The plant is not a different organism, but a transformation of the original seed.

If Paul had said that God “gives” us a resurrected body, this would not make the intended point of the objector. It is fair to say that God gave Adam and Eve bodies, as well. Yet, Adam’s was made from existing dust and Eve’s from Adam’s “rib.” In the Resurrection God gives us bodies made from the decomposed dust of the mortal bodies in which we previously lived.

### **9. *Jesus’ substitutionary death was spiritual, thus the Resurrection He provides is spiritual***

*Full-Preterist Argument:*

The previous correspondent also writes: “The Old Testament says Jesus would die spiritually in our place (Isaiah 53:10-12). Also, during His crucifixion, Jesus quoted from Psalm 22, which refers to spiritual death. Therefore, He is the firstfruits of a spiritual, not physical, resurrection.

*Response:*

Neither Isaiah 53 nor Psalm 22 makes any reference to “spiritual death.” I assume this is being read into the words, “*He poured out His soul unto death*” (Isa.53:12). If the objector is saying that the “soul” (Heb. *Nephesh*) is here the “spirit,” then the Old Testament usage of that word should be studied more thoroughly. In Psalm 16, the Messiah says, “*you will not leave my soul in Hades.*” Peter indicates that this cannot refer primarily to David because David’s bones were still in the ground (implying that the verse speaks of physical resurrection—Acts 2:29). He says the verse refers to Christ’s body being raised from the dead. Even if the *soul* were to refer to the *spirit* of Christ being poured out, this is not a reference to something called *spiritual death*. When one is said to have given up the spirit, in scripture, it refers to physical death. “*The body without the spirit is [physically] dead*” (James 2:26).

Isaiah 53 speaks of Jesus being (physically) buried in the “*grave with the wicked—and with the rich at His death*” (v.9). Did the wicked and the rich experience *spiritual* death and burial with Him? Psalm 22 says He was brought down to “*the dust of death*”—which sounds every bit as physical as “*they pierced my hands and my feet*” (vv.15, 16).

The Bible nowhere refers to Christ dying a *spiritual* death (nor experiencing a *spiritual* resurrection). The atonement is always said to be accomplished by the shedding of Christ’s blood—a reference to the death of His physical body whose natural life is in the blood. Similarly, the only resurrection of Christ known to us was the Resurrection of His body from the grave, which is the same kind that is promised to us (1 Cor.15:49; Phil.3:21).

## **10. The existence of physical death before the fall of Adam**

### *Full-Preterist Argument:*

The same correspondent argues: "If 'death' came through sin (Rom.5:12), then this 'death' must refer to spiritual death, since physical death existed before the fall."

### *Response:*

The first premise is not established. There is no record of death of any kind existing before the fall. However, if the death of animals is what the objector has in mind, this is not what Paul is referring to in Romans 5:12. He is only discussing the human experience of death, which did not exist before the fall. If millions of animals had died before the fall, it would not have any impact on Paul's statement.

## **11. Why would Paul have to tell the Philippians that he had not yet been resurrected?**

### *Full-Preterist Argument:*

In Philippians 3:12, Paul tells the believers that he had not yet attained to the Resurrection or to perfection. If the Resurrection was the glorification and immortalization of the physical body, he would hardly have to mention to those who knew him that this had not yet happened.

### *Response:*

By this reasoning, the Resurrection cannot refer to anything observable, since everyone would then have noticed it and Paul would not need to tell them that he had not yet experienced it. On this view, the Resurrection must refer to something that no one would notice. Its impact on the Church would seem to be negligible if no one could tell whether or not it had occurred. Every spiritual benefit of the cross had long since been enjoyed from Pentecost onward.<sup>5</sup> It is hard to imagine what other invisible and imperceptible blessings they would be so eagerly anticipating.

## **12. Christ the firstfruit of resurrection could not be 2,000 years prior to the general harvest**

### *Full-Preterist Argument:*

The firstfruits are generally brought in just before the rest of the harvest. If Christ is the firstfruits, and the Resurrection of the saints is the harvest, one could hardly expect that 2,000 years would transpire between the two.

### *Response:*

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<sup>5</sup> See Ephesians 1:3; Colossians 2:10

Yet the one raising this argument believes that there was a gap of forty years between Christ, the firstfruits, and the harvest (A.D.70). If the comparison with the gathering of a literal crop in the field were to be pressed too literally no one would predict even a forty-year gap between the firstfruits and the harvest. Literal harvests come only days (not decades) after the firstfruits are brought in. Forty years between them would be incredibly long. In fact, a whole generation hoping to eat the harvest would starve to death before it was brought in. If the analogy of firstfruits and harvest is so inexact as to allow a gap of forty years then all bets are off how long the interval may be. Why is two thousand years too long? For this kind of metaphor what would be the correct interval?

### 13. Paul said, “first the natural, then the spiritual” (1 Cor.15:46)

*Full-Preterist Argument:*

In our debate, Preston thought it wrong for me to believe that the first resurrection is our spiritual rebirth, but that the second resurrection will be physical. Against the idea of the final resurrection being physical, Preston said, “Paul said, first the natural, then the spiritual—not the reverse.”

*Response:*

When Paul said, “*However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual,*” he was not contrasting two resurrections, but two bodies: 1) the natural body of Adam (one in which Christ participated prior to His death and resurrection), and 2) that of the resurrected Christ. Paul has just said that the human body is “sown” (in burial) as a “*natural body,*” but raised a “*spiritual body*” (v.44). This contrast between “natural” (literally, *soulish*) and “spiritual,” is paired with the contrasts between corruptible and incorruptible, dishonorable and glorious, weak and powerful states.

Again, Paul is not contrasting natural with spiritual *resurrections* (what would he be thinking of as a “natural” resurrection anyway?). He is contrasting the natural body of Adam with the spiritual nature of Christ in His resurrection body. We have a natural body now, prior to receiving a spiritual body in the Resurrection. Thus, the first body we received was natural, and afterward comes the spiritual.

Nor is the word “spiritual” being used as a contrast to “physical.” It is contrasted with *psuchikos* (pertaining to soul). This word is elsewhere translated “natural” describing the kind of man who does not receive the things of the Spirit of God (1 Cor.2:14). It also is translated as “sensual” alongside “earthly,” and “demonic” (James 3:15) and as describing one who is “sensual...not having the Spirit” (Jude 19). These are the only occurrences of the word in the New Testament. Whatever specific qualities it may suggest, physicality is not the principal trait in view. The word always describes physical people, to be sure, but their quality of being *psuchikos* is, in every instance, contrasted with being “spiritual” or “having the Spirit.” Our bodies that are buried are thus *psuchikos*, in contrast to the spirituality of the raised bodies. Nothing is implied here about non-physical bodies being raised. We could press for a contrast between the physical and the non-physical if not for the fact that Christ’s natural body was physical—and so was His spiritual body (Luke 24:39)!



**14. To say the earth will be restored to its original condition would require there to be marriage, since that existed before the fall—yet Jesus said there will be no marriage.**

*Full-Preterist Argument:*

This argument was made numerous times by Don Preston, in his book *Marriage and Giving in Marriage...in the New Creation??* (Yes, there are two question marks). Given the number of times he repeats it in his book, he apparently thinks it a particularly cogent point. Here is how it works: Both *futurists* and *partial-preterists* believe that the Resurrection is still in the future and that it will accompany a restoration of the physical creation to its unfallen condition. We also believe that the institution of marriage will no longer be a reality at that time. Here is Preston's argument: *If there is no marriage in that age, it cannot be a literal restoration of pre-fall conditions, since there was marriage before the fall.* In our debate, Don Preston said: *"If the new earth involves a restoration to the way things were before the fall, then what about the fact that Adam and Eve were told to be fruitful and multiply? This is a problem since you believe there will be no marriage."*

*Response:*

This is actually pretty easy. To say that the world will be restored to an unfallen state simply means that, in that new creation *"there will be no more curse"* (Rev.22:3). There will be no more death, sickness, pain, crying, etc.—just as before Adam sinned. The claim is not that there will be a complete "re-set" of history to begin all over again. There will be a Tree of Life, as before—but no Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The earth before the fall was unpopulated, and the purpose of marriage was to populate it. The new earth will be immediately fully-populated with all the redeemed—with no need for marriage or further reproduction. The pre-fall cosmos was an infantile creation. The new cosmos will be a mature creation. No biblical scholar ever argued that a restoration of a curse-free world would return history to "Square One," and require the original institution of marriage to exist as before. By the same argument, one could argue for the presence of the serpent and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the renewed creation. The purpose of marriage, like the purpose of the serpent and the tree, will not be relevant to the restored creation. The argument assumes a false premise, debunks a non-existent argument, and amounts to the immolation of a straw man.

**15. Gentile salvation was not made available until God was finished with Israel (A.D.70)**

*Full-Preterist Argument:*

I hope I have not misconstrued Don Preston's meaning (I admit, that it is obscure to me). In our debate, he made this argument, which I cite verbatim: *"Gentile salvation would flow from the consummation of Israel's promises...[Reads Isa.49:6f]...It says that Gentiles would not receive their salvation until Israel's eschatological plan [defined by the festal calendar] was consummated."*

*Response:*

This is one of the many times, when listening to full-preterist arguments, that one is tempted to simply respond, "And why are we being asked to believe any of this? Simply because you imagine

it to be so?" Though there is mention of Gentiles being saved, in Isaiah 49, the passage does not affirm any of the above points. Nor do I know of a passage that does.

The point Preston is making is that he sees the consummation of Israel's eschatological plan as taking place in A.D.70 and he believes that full salvation for the Church did not come prior to that. I believe that Paul (whose whole ministry and death occurred prior to A.D.70) would be surprised to learn that neither he nor his converts were fully saved. The suggestion that the salvation of people after A.D.70 (like us and the Christians we know) is somehow superior to salvation as it was known in the experience of Paul and the apostles beggars belief.

## **16. There can be no future end of the present age, according to scripture**

### *Full-Preterist Argument:*

There cannot be an end to the present age (hence, no future *Parousia*) because the Bible teaches that the current age has no end. (Kingdom of Christ has no end—Dan.2:44; Luke 1:33; Rev.11:15).

### *Response:*

The Kingdom established by Christ has no end, but it progresses through stages, as Jesus stated in the parable of the growing seed (Mark 4:26-29). Each phase has an end as it transitions to the next. The "seed" stage ended with the coming of the blade. The blade stage ended with the formation of heads. When the grain is ripe, the growth stage will also end, when the harvest comes. After the harvest, the Kingdom continues in its eternal, mature stage.

There is irony in the presentation of this argument, since Preston himself must believe that the stage that the kingdom was in during the time of the apostles (e.g., Rom.14:17; Col.1:13) came to an end with the introduction of whatever stage it is imagined to have entered in A.D.70. Whatever impact on the Kingdom is imagined to have occurred in A.D.70 can be understood, in biblical theology, to occur at the future *Parousia*. The only way Preston can object to this is if he wishes to deny that the Kingdom of God was in any sense present at the time when Jesus and the apostles were declaring it to be present. If it is acknowledged that Jesus and the apostles told the truth when they claimed this, then, whether one wants to make it A.D.70 or some future date, the Kingdom goes through stages, just as Paul clearly predicted:

*For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death...Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all. (1 Cor.15:25-28)*

Full-preterists must assume that this has already happened. This would mean that in A.D.70 Christ put all of His enemies under His feet, which is the precondition for that transition (1 Cor.15:24-26). I doubt if anyone except one whose mind is already immovably made up on the matter can be persuaded that there remain today no enemies of Christ still unconquered. It seems incredible to claim that every knee has bowed, and every tongue has confessed that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Philippians 2:10-11

## **17. The death penalty of Genesis 2:17 was not physical death**

*Full-Preterist Argument:*

Adam's sin-death was not physical death. How could it be? Were Adam and Eve's bodies changed physiologically when they sinned, making them mortal?

*Response:*

No such change was necessary. Adam and Eve were never anything other than mortals. That is a characteristic that distinguishes all created beings from the Creator, who *"alone possesses immortality"* (1 Tim.6:16). Mortals like ourselves (and like our first parents) must *"seek for...immortality"* in Christ (Rom.2:7)—represented, in their case, in the Tree of Life. The condition required for our first parents to live forever was not simply to refuse sin, but to eat of the Tree of Life (Gen.3:22). Their sin disqualified them for this privilege, thus preventing them from living forever. There was no need for their bodies to have undergone physiological transformation in order to be mortal. They were created that way.

## **18. Many passages that disprove full-preterism need to be taken proleptically.**

*Full-Preterist Argument:*

While it is true that Jesus and Paul, prior to A.D.70, stated that believers had already passed from a state of death to a state of life,<sup>7</sup> that they already had become the temple of God,<sup>8</sup> and that they already were a new creation,<sup>9</sup> these things were not actually true until A.D.70. As Don Preston asserted repeatedly in our debate, *"We need to take some of these passages proleptically."* A *prolepsis* is the anachronistic representation of a thing before its proper or actual time. In our debate, Preston said: *"I believe that eternal life, in 1 John—when John says, 'We have eternal life'—I believe once again we are dealing with a proleptic question. John could say 'we have eternal life, and this life is in His Son,' but they were still waiting for the Parousia to bring eternal life. Not a different kind of eternal life, but the consummation of the process that had begun."*

*Response:*

Here are some examples of genuine prolepsis:

- "You are a dead man!" (The person addressed obviously is not actually dead yet!)
- "In the pre-colonial United States..." (In pre-colonial times, no "United States" existed)
- "In his childhood, President Lincoln lived in a log cabin." (In his childhood, Abraham Lincoln was not President).

All such cases are readily recognized as unambiguously proleptic expressions. We can know for certain that these statements are made proleptically because we have certain knowledge, from other sources, that the situations they seem to assume were not yet realities in history.

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<sup>7</sup> John 5:24; Ephesians 2:5-6; Colossians 2:13

<sup>8</sup> John 14:23; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:20-22; cf., 1 Peter 2:5

<sup>9</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17

Is this also true of the statements of Jesus, Peter, John and Paul, referenced above? If so, there is nothing that would make this obvious—or demonstrable. The only argument for this claim is the *a priori* assumption that none of these things became realities until A.D.70. However, these very verses serve as key witnesses in the determination of whether that assumption has merit or is in error.

This argument then is a classic case of *begging the question*—the logical fallacy of employing, as part of an argument the very proposition that is under dispute. If Jesus, John, Peter or Paul had wished to state that these realities were already present in their own time, and were experienced by their own readers, what words would the full-preterist have allowed them to use in affirming this? Is it not safer (and more humble) to allow the statements of scripture to determine our theology, rather than the reverse?

**19. Matthew 8:11-12 and Luke 13:28-29 place the Resurrection and wedding feast at the same time that the “sons of the Kingdom” (apostate Israel) are “cast out—viz., A.D.70.”**

*Full-Preterist Argument:*

Jesus told the Pharisees:

*And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matt.8:11-12)*

Verse 11 obviously describes the Resurrection, because Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are at the table in the Kingdom. When would it be? It says in the next verse, “*When the sons of the Kingdom are cast out.*” This refers to the rejection of the apostates in A.D.70. Thus, the Resurrection occurs in A.D.70.

*Response:*

This conclusion is far from established by anything in the verse. There are three unprovable assumptions in this argument:

- That the time to which Jesus refers is the eschatological Resurrection;
- That the casting out of the Jewish nation occurs simultaneously with the sitting down of the righteous at the feast; and
- That the casting out of the apostate Jews refers to the destruction of Jerusalem, not of their exclusion from the Kingdom itself.

First, we are not told that this describes a post-resurrection timeframe. Jesus told the Sadducees that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were living as He was speaking (Luke 20:37-38), and He also had previously announced that the Kingdom had already arrived, speaking prior to any Resurrection (Luke 17:20-21; Matt.12:28). Paul said that the Colossian believers, along with himself, had already been “*translated...into the Kingdom of the Son of His love*” (Col.1:13).

Those who believed in Jesus had their place “at the table” in that Kingdom, along with believers of all times, including the patriarchs named in the passage. There is almost certainly no reference in Jesus’ remark to a literal furnished table with guests in chairs. Jesus and His disciples were already at the wedding feast which is why they did not fast (Matt.9:14-15). They were joining the patriarchs in the celebration of that “meal.” Nothing in scripture suggests that being in the Kingdom awaits the Resurrection, as Preston suggests.

Second, Jesus does not necessarily say the children of the Kingdom (the Jews) would be cast out at the moment that the Gentiles sat down at the table. Being a Christian is what it means to participate in that feast. There were Gentiles doing so prior to A.D.70, and there have been many doing so since then, as well. The Jews would look upon this role-reversal with chagrin, but the time of their grief is not placed at the time of the Resurrection, nor at the moment of the first Gentiles being seated. Jesus simply mentions the reversal of privileges between the (believing) Gentiles, and the (unbelieving) Jews. In fact, Matthew’s version speaks of the inclusion of Gentiles prior to mentioning the casting out of the Jews. Luke’s Gospel mentions them in reverse order. Jesus is not discussing the chronology of events, nor does He affirm that they occur simultaneously. Jesus predicted that many Gentiles would also find their place at this “table”—but that would largely take place after (not simultaneously with) the destruction of Jerusalem (Matt.22:7-10).

Third, the “casting out” of Israel is not necessarily simultaneous nor synonymous with the destruction of their city. It is true that this was when they were “cast out” of their land, but the land of Israel is not synonymous with the Kingdom. Jesus speaks of their being cast out of the Kingdom and the fellowship of the patriarchs. Nothing requires us to see this exclusion from the Kingdom as equivalent to the physical destruction of their city, temple and nation. These things were destroyed in A.D.70—not as a means of casting Israel out of God’s Kingdom but as a consequence of it. The Church was identified with the Kingdom prior to the destruction of Jerusalem. As soon as the Kingdom came to be identified with the Church the unbelieving Jews would by definition be excluded from it.

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There are many arguments put forward by the full-preterists that we have not addressed. I have not intended to exhaust the list, though there are none that I know which I am deliberately omitting. We have examined the points of greatest significance in deciding the status of *Full-Preterism* as a viable system. Our coverage of the topic, while not comprehensive, will acquaint the reader with the principal propositions of those in this movement and the kinds of argumentation they employ. I leave some of the work of refutation to others who may encounter other arguments from that sector. Feel free to contact me about any unaddressed matters that you may find particularly challenging in the system.



## *Epilogue*

In this book I have repeatedly attempted to emphasize the value of solid biblical exegesis in settling disputes over Christian doctrine. My main theme, which may have gotten occasionally obscured in the thicket of detailed arguments, is that *Full-Preterism* did not appear in an environment of theological indecision where various conflicting viewpoints had long competed for acceptance. It is true that eschatology has long been a contested field, but what has never until very recently been disputed is whether biblical eschatology predicts an end of the present world order and a day in which every score will be settled with justice.

It is true that *Full-Preterism* allows for a personal settling of all scores for each individual in heaven or hell, but it allows for no final resolution of the longstanding conflict between God and sin throughout history. In its view, sinful men continue generation after generation throughout an eternal future on earth. There is no plan for restoration, nor for resolution. God must endure the evil and defiance of mankind as a rebel race without end. This is the opposite of what historical Christianity, following the biblical teaching, has always affirmed.

Someone recently asked me to define the difference between “optimistic amillennialism” and “postmillennialism.” I said it is only matter of degree. The optimistic amillennialist looks for the Gospel to be *significantly successful* in the conversion of the nations prior to Christ’s Second Coming, while postmillennialism expects *total conquest* of the world through the Gospel. The latter view simply extends the vision of the former a little further in the same direction in which it was already gazing.

Someone might think that *Partial-Preterism* and *Full-Preterism* would be similarly related. The former recognizes that many passages popularly applied to the *Parousia* at the end of time are actually about the events of A.D.70. *Partial-Preterism* still reserves the fulfillment of a considerable number of passages for the future Second Coming. Isn’t *Full-Preterism* simply doing the same thing as is the partial-preterist, but including only a few more passages to the A.D.70 category?

One person posting online wrote, “If *Full-Preterism* is a heresy, then *Partial-Preterism* is partial heresy.” This suggests that for one to believe that some prophecies have been fulfilled in the past is to enter the realm of heresy differing only slightly from those who deny all future fulfillment of any prophecy. Yet Christians have always believed that some biblical prophecies were fulfilled in the past. The partial-preterist, like all other Christians, sees two categories of biblical prophecies—those already fulfilled, and those remaining to be fulfilled. It only adds a few more to the first category than some others do. The full-preterists, by contrast, deny the existence of the entire second category. The partial-preterist’s difference of opinion from that of any other believer about the past fulfillment of biblical prophecies is merely one of *degree*. The full-preterist’s difference is one of *kind*.

*Partial-Preterism* is a positive position that affirms the past fulfillment of much of prophecy, as all Christians do, while denying no biblical doctrine. By contrast, *Full-Preterism* is a negative position, denying the future historical hope of Christianity. Again, no essential Christian doctrine is denied by *Partial-Preterism*. *Full-Preterism* rejects a key element of the Christian worldview—namely, the eventual restoration of all of creation in Christ (Acts 3:21; Rom.8:21; Col.1:20).

*Covenant Eschatology* claims that Paul preached nothing eschatological other than the hope of Israel—which is then identified with the events of A.D.70. It seems strange to suggest that “the hope of Israel” was for their people to be slaughtered and their whole nation annihilated by Roman invaders. Where is the rabbi who ever expressed such a “hope”? If it is argued that the “hope of Israel”

refers to the Messiah and the salvation that He brings, then it was not necessary to wait until A.D.70 for this to come. A full generation earlier Christ had come bringing salvation to all who received Him.

Like many erroneous theological systems, *Full-Preterism* begins by setting up a restrictive paradigm into which every passage of scripture must be forced, however unnaturally. Yet, its advocates seem to require no exegetical justification for the adoption of the paradigm itself. If an articulate teacher says, “This is what *everything* is about—and I will show you how it all fits...” a gullible listener often fails to ask the all-important question: “How do we know that everything is really about *this*? Might there be other things besides *this*?”

The ploy of the innovator is to justify his limited range of possibilities by claiming that the Bible itself imposes that limit. Didn’t Jesus say that the invasion of Jerusalem by the Romans occurred in order that “*all things that are written may be fulfilled*” (Luke 21:22)? Therefore, everything was fulfilled in that event.

Yet Jesus speaks only of the prophecies written in the Old Testament. None of the New Testament prophecies had been written at the time Jesus spoke these words. What warrants our extending His words include to those things outside the range of His statement? With the coming of the New Covenant might it not be reasonable to expect the coming of new prophetic promises not included in the Old Testament? Is not the New Covenant said to be based upon “*better promises*” than those found in the Old Covenant (Heb.8:6)?

As we have shown, *Covenant Eschatology* argues that Paul predicted nothing new that had not previously been found in the Old Testament (and that the Old Testament does not unambiguously speak of any end-of-the-world events). They base this on Paul’s affirmation that he was “*saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come*” (Acts 26:22). Would this mean that Paul had received no eschatological insights and taught nothing beyond the expectation of the rabbis?

The rabbis expected a physical resurrection at the end of the present phase of world history, to be followed by a renewed physical planet. *Full-Preterists* deny such a hope and claim that Paul did not teach it. It seems they need to “choose a lane.” Did Paul preach the fulfillment of the Jewish hope or didn’t he?<sup>10</sup>

*Full-Preterists* insist that all of the New Testament predictions *must have* had a first-century fulfillment because Paul said that they were “about to” (*mello*) occur, and that his phrase “*we who are alive and remain*” refers only to those of his own generation. We have shown, in Chapter Six, that these claims are unwarranted.

The words “*must have*” in the previous paragraph make up the core of the full-preterist argument. It cannot be shown that anything like the things the Bible predicts at the Second Coming of Christ really occurred in A.D.70. This remains true even if we were to reinterpret the Resurrection as referring to a metaphorical or collective one and the New Heavens and New Earth to speak only of a covenantal transition.

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<sup>10</sup> Of course, Paul’s statement is not referring to the limits of his eschatological teaching, but, as he says in the following verse, only of the suffering and resurrection of Christ. Paul is not speaking of everything that he ever taught on every subject, any more than when he told the Corinthians, “*I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified*” (1 Cor.2:2). Paul himself repeatedly claimed that he preached “the mystery” which had never been taught in the Old Testament or in generations earlier than his own (e.g., Eph.3:3-6).



It also cannot be shown that all the nations were gathered before the judgment throne of God,<sup>11</sup> and that every man received the just reward of all he had done, whether good or bad.<sup>12</sup> In fact, no such thing occurred by any plausible definition.

To the full-preterist, these things simply “must have” happened. Why? Simply because they have decided that their artificial policy of forcing everything into A.D.70 must be accepted, though nothing in scripture demands the adoption of such a framework.

I must agree with former full-preterist, Todd Dennis, in his assessment (cited earlier) of the system “based entirely upon deductive reasoning.” Deductive reasoning is a good policy, but requires beginning with a valid premise.

When one removes the artificial restriction created by *Full-Preterism* which insists that all prophecy must be fulfilled no later than A.D.70, there remains little of substance to its unique arguments. They certainly are not exegetically warranted. Much less do they meet the enormous burden of proof required to overthrow the unanimous exegetical conclusions of every branch of the Christian faith over the past two thousand years. We have said that this burden demands superior exegesis, and we have shown that, in that department, the system completely fails to deliver.

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<sup>11</sup> Mathew 25:32ff; Acts 17:31

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 16:27; Romans 2:6-10; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:12-13



## ***About the Author***

Steve Gregg's teaching ministry began in Southern California, near the beginning of the "Jesus Movement" revival, in 1970. Throughout the ensuing half-century, he has taught around the world on every continent, directed a small Bible school (called *The Great Commission School*), in Oregon, for sixteen years, as well as numerous small, summer-long discipleship programs, in Santa Cruz, CA.

Steve has been the on-air host of a daily radio talk show entitled *The Narrow Path*, since 1997. As of 2022, this program airs weekdays on about 45 radio stations nationwide and is streamed worldwide over the Internet from the website: [www.thenarrowpath.com](http://www.thenarrowpath.com). The program's format is one of real-time, call-in, Bible questions and answers.

He has also authored many magazine and journal articles, including several for the *Christian Research Journal*. These can be found online at [www.Matthew713.com](http://www.Matthew713.com).

Over 1,500 of Steve's recorded, classroom Bible lectures are posted online. These can be downloaded free of charge from [www.thenarrowpath.com](http://www.thenarrowpath.com). The catalogue of lectures includes in-depth verse-by-verse expositions through the entire Bible, as well as hundreds of in-depth topical lectures on biblical subjects of interest to believers. He has also engaged in formal public debates with Christians and atheists throughout his ministry career. These lectures, debates and every resource at the website, may be downloaded free of charge.

There is also a free mobile app available for Android and iPhones from which the radio program can be heard (live or in archives), and where the lectures from the website can be streamed (search: [thenarrowpath.com](http://thenarrowpath.com)).

Several Youtube channels contain libraries of videos of Steve's lectures. The main one can be viewed at [www.youtube.com/user/Biblegate](http://www.youtube.com/user/Biblegate).

Based upon his lifetime teaching labors, Steve was offered and awarded an honorary D.Div. from Trinity Theological Seminary (Evansville, IN), in 2017.

Previous books by the same author:

- *Revelation: Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (1997, revised 2013)
- *All You Want to Know About Hell: Three Christian Views of God's Final Solution to the Problem of Sin* (2013)
- *Empire of the Risen Son, Book One: There is another King* (2020)
- *Empire of the Risen Son, Book Two: All the King's Men* (2020)

