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Editor's Note...

We have run out of copies of our *You've Gotta Be Kidding, Right?* video.

I WAS IN THE final stages of finalizing this issue for the printer when we received the news that my wife's step-dad had suddenly passed away. Since I was already running late with the issue, rather than delay it for an undetermined amount of time I decided to quickly wrap things up and send it to the printer. That meant quickly filling in some partial pages here and there, and foregoing my wife's usual final fine-tooth comb edit. (It's amazing how much she catches after I and others have gone over it several times. I think that after a while I simply start reading what I think should be there, rather than what is actually there in print. She's also great at catching little inconsistencies "you capitalized this word here but not there.") Therefore, this issue may be a bit unpolished and contain some typos and/or layout inconsistencies.

We have run out of copies of our *You've Gotta Be Kidding, Right?* video, which means that we've distributed at least 6,000 copies! I just recently had my computer system upgraded and now have to reinstall my video editing software. Then I have to make a mailing address change in the video (we've moved since we first produced the video) before having more copies made. Because of our unplanned trip to Missouri, the holidays, and then a heavy work load in January, I likely won't be able to have more copies made till sometime around February or March. Once we have the new copies I'll repost the ordering page on our web site and make an announcement in the magazine.

FCG has signed up for the Amazon Smile program, which means that if you use our link to access your Amazon account, Amazon will donate 0.5% of all your purchases to FCG! The link is listed in the Amazon ad on page 2 of this issue, and we also have a link on the web site's homepage.

I apologize for the brevity of this update, but I need to finish a few things in this issue and send it off to the printer.

Blessings,

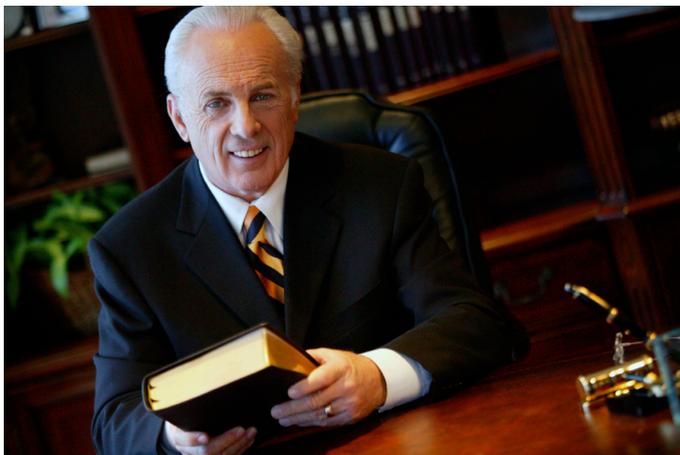
Brian



Victor Suman



Due to an oversight on my part, in the previous issue I failed to post a picture of Victor Suman with the other photos and information regarding his preterist ministry in India (sorry Victor!).



John MacArthur on Preterism

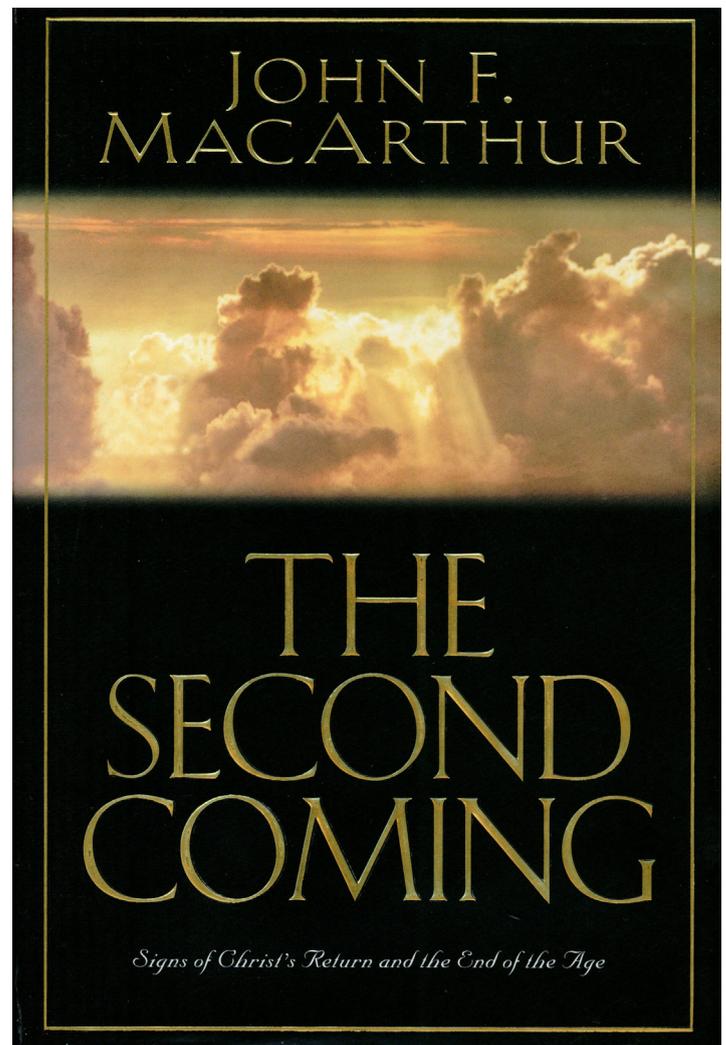
“Those who have abandoned the hope of Christ’s bodily return have in effect abandoned true Christianity.” (p. 9)

But lately even some traditionally conservative, professedly “Bible-believing” Christians have attacked the doctrine of Christ’s literal, bodily return. A view fast gaining notoriety is *hyper-preterism* (sometimes called *full preterism* or “realized eschatology” by its advocates). Hyper-preterists build their whole theology on a misunderstanding of Christ’s words in Matthew 24:34: “Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.” (pp. 9-10)

“... posionous hypothesis ...”. (p. 12)

“All true believers long for the day when Jesus Christ will return to earth.” (p. 48)

“... serious heresy ...”. (p. 80)



The Single Coming of Jesus in Matthew 24 and Acts 1:9-11

by Roy Lee Scott

As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?”

“Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, 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. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” (Matt 24:3, 30-35 ESV)

IN OUR PREVIOUS ARTICLE, we saw that in Acts 1:9-11 we had testimony of Jesus’ coming by a reliable second-hand source, namely, the two men in white. In Matthew 24:1-51, however, we have a different source testifying to Jesus’ coming—Jesus Himself. Jesus was and is God, and therefore He cannot lie; however, we must be very careful here and fully understand what it means to say that Jesus cannot lie. Any information given by Jesus is and must be perfect, and therefore any question answered by Jesus cannot be a lie.

Now there is a facet of Jesus not telling a lie that can be very subtle, tricky, and easily overlooked—lies of omission. Not correcting pre-existing misconceptions is an example of a lie of omission. Consider a person asking a question of Jesus, and *inherent in that question* was a misunderstanding of the truth or a demonstrated ignorance of all the relevant facts and details on the part of the person asking the question. If Jesus was to answer that question and not correct the person’s misunderstanding or ignorance of the truth, then by definition Jesus would be guilty of a lie by omission.

In other words, to put it more succinctly, in order to avoid a lie by omission Jesus must answer the question that is being asked of Him according to the *actual* truth, not according to the inquirer’s *misunderstanding* of the truth. Anything less would allow the person asking the question to walk away thinking that their question has

been answered according to their understanding of the facts, *when in fact it has not been answered in such a way*. That person would walk away thinking that their unknown misconceptions of the facts are, in fact, correct, since Jesus’ answer did nothing to indicate that there were any misconceptions inherent in the question being asked. This concept of lies by omission, set against the highest standard of Jesus Himself, is crucial to a proper understanding and analysis of Matthew 24:1-51. For indeed, in Matthew 24:3, we have the disciples asking Jesus, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?” As described above, Jesus’ answers must be free from any lie, *including any lies of omission*.

Matthew provides a long, detailed answer to the disciples’ question regarding “these things,” culminating in His coming and the “close of the age.” Jesus then says in v. 34 that *all of the things just described would occur within the generation of those hearing Jesus*. (Rather than indicating an additional coming, Matthew 24:36-51 describes the *specific* time frame of His coming, in contrast to the *general* time frame of “this generation” that was just presented in verse 34. These two time frame explanations are connected by the word “*but*” in verse 36, demonstrating a contrast between the two explanations of a single coming.) Notice that the disciples querying Jesus did *not* ask about “this”

appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven.

Roy Lee Scott

Roy considers himself an amateur philosopher and is an avid computer artist. He attended the historic *First Presbyterian Church* of downtown Pittsburgh under Dr. Robert J. Lamont. He received his BA from the University of Pittsburgh in 1980.

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coming, or ask of a “first” coming. This point is easily missed but very crucial to observe. For the disciples to ask of “this” coming is to directly imply the idea that there must be another coming called “that” coming. *Similarly, to inquire of a “first” coming, one must necessarily have in mind a “second” coming. For if someone has in mind only one coming, then they would simply ask of the (or your) “coming,”* that is, the single and only coming they understood there would be. There would be no need at all to speak of there being a “first” coming without there also being a “second” coming in mind.

In order to have a yet future coming of Jesus—a coming that would be 2,000 years after Jesus walked the earth—that coming *must* be referenced in Jesus’ answer to His disciples to avoid a lie of omission. Yet there is no additional coming mentioned in Jesus’ answer other than the coming that was to occur in their generation. Recall that the disciples asked Jesus about a coming they called “your” coming, *not* “this” coming, or a “first” coming, which would indicate that they had additional comings in mind. But Jesus did not correct the disciples’ single coming concept, and, as far as the disciples were concerned, when they walked away there was only “one coming”—a coming that was to occur within their generation. If there was to be an additional coming that is to occur sometime in our future, *then Jesus let those disciples walk away without any knowledge of that additional coming,* but rather, with the *erroneous* concept of a single coming that would occur before their generation ended. This, without doubt, would have been a lie of omission on Jesus’ part. But we know that Jesus would not have done that. Therefore, the disciples’ concept of a single concept must be correct.

In conclusion, we also read in Matthew 24:30 a direct reference to the “*coming on the clouds,*” a topic we examined in our previous analysis of Acts 1:9-11. This ties together the “coming” of Acts 1:9-11 with the “coming” of Matthew 24:1-51 and shows them to be *one and the same “coming.”* However, to support this claim, we must first deal with a non-literal and errant translation of the first part of Matthew 24:30. Note the ESV’s translation:

“And then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man”

A literal translation reads, “*And then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven*”¹ (The KJV, ASV, and RSV follow this literal translation). This changes the meaning of the verse from saying that a *sign* of the Son of Man is to appear in heaven, to there being a sign *that the Son of Man is in heaven.*² It is not *the sign* that is in heaven, but *the Son of Man!* The verse concludes “*and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*” As mentioned in our previous study of Acts 1:9-11, the Old Testament has numerous examples of the phrase “*coming on the clouds*” referring to a “judgment coming” of God.³ Therefore, Matthew 24:30 refers to the *judgmental destruction of Jerusalem and the temple as the sign that the Son of Man is reigning in heaven.*⁴ This dual reference to “*coming on the clouds*” ties together perfectly the coming of Acts 1:9-11 with the coming of Matthew 24:1-51 as *one and the same “coming.”* Also, the “*coming on the clouds of heaven*” in verse 30 brings further clarity regarding the reference to the “manner” of the cloud in Acts 1:11; namely, the reference is not to a physical cloud in the sky. The cloud *was to originate in and be a “cloud of heaven” where the Son of Man is reigning.* One must also remember that in Matthew 24:34 Jesus said that His coming would occur within the generation of those listening to Him. This fact, along with the realization that Matthew 24:1-51 and Acts 1:9-11 refer to the same coming, provides further evidence that *the coming of Acts 1:9-11 was to occur within the lifespan of those present and to whom Christ was speaking.* Therefore, the same singular “coming” spoken of in Acts 1:9-11 and Matthew 24:1-51 is not a “coming” that will occur in our future, for indeed, it has already occurred. †

1. Alfred Marshall, *NASB-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek and English* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 79
2. J. Marcellus Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory*, (Phillipsburg, NJ, P&R Publishing, 1971), 137
3. *Ibid.*, 140-143
4. *Ibid.*, 137

Creation to Consummation

Heavens and Earth in Biblical Cosmology

by Ed Stevens

WHY DO WE PRETERISTS have such a difficult time convincing our futurist friends of the first-century fulfillment of the end time events? I believe it is partly because neither of us (preterists or futurists) adequately understands *biblical cosmology*.

Futurists can easily grasp the significance of the *time* statements, but they immediately take refuge in their belief that nothing like an “end of the world” has yet occurred. They simply cannot believe the end of the world occurred in the first century because planet earth has not been destroyed, paradise has not been restored on earth, nor are we saints living in *heaven now*.

Thus, futurists are letting their presumptions about the *nature* of fulfillment redefine the *time* of fulfillment—“soon” cannot mean soon, “shortly” cannot mean shortly. But that puts Jesus and the New Testament authors’ integrity as true prophets in jeopardy. So in order to rescue Christianity from the jaws of the critics, we need to let the *time* of fulfillment (“soon” *does* mean soon) define the *nature* of fulfillment.

While it is true that futurists have overly literalized and globalized the end time events, consequently missing their first-century fulfillments, it is also quite possible that we preterists have gone to the opposite extreme of overly spiritualizing and localizing (or “covenantalizing”) the end time events. Perhaps the biblical truth about the *nature* of fulfillment lies somewhere between these two extremes. Thus, we need to reconsider our concepts of the *nature* of fulfillment, and a study of *biblical cosmology* is the place to begin.

Our understanding of the phrase “heavens and earth” is a case in point. Futurists deny that the old heavens and earth have passed away and that the new heavens and earth have arrived. Even though they have misunderstood the *covenantal-change* significance of the first-century end time events, it may be the case that some of us preterists have likewise misunderstood the *cosmological* significance of those events by claiming that they were *fulfilled in a covenantal or spiritual sense only*, without any real cognitive, visible, audible, or tangible experience of those events by the saints who remained alive at the time of the Parousia.

This is why we need to take a closer look at the meaning of this phrase “heavens and earth” as it is used in the Bible. This phrase is not just symbolic, apocalyptic, or covenantal terminology—it is *cosmological* language!

What Is Cosmology?

The “cosmos” (Gk. *kosmos*) is the orderly arrangement of the created universe, including both its heavenly and earthly realms. *Cosmology* in modern science is the study of the nature of our physical and observable universe, its arrangement, and how its various parts relate to each other. In contrast, *Biblical Cosmology* focuses on how God and the normally *unseen* spiritual realm interacts with man and the *seen* physical realm. Biblical Cosmology attempts to

explain how both realms interrelate to each other. Notice the contrast between the *invisible* things in the heavens and the *visible* things on the earth mentioned in Col. 1:16 – “*by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.*”

As Christians we believe there is an *invisible* realm that is different in nature from the *visible* realm in which we dwell. And that *unseen* realm has been there since the beginning of creation (i.e., “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*” Gen 1:1). But we usually return a blank stare when we are asked to explain what the *unseen heavenly realm* is like, and how it interacts with and relates to the *visible earthly realm*. But that is what biblical “cosmology” is all about.

Meaning of KOSMOS and OIKONOMIA

The Greek word *kosmos* basically means an orderly arrangement, adornment, or decoration of something, as, for example, in the English word *cosmetics*. *Kosmos* is used 186 times in 151 New Testament verses, where it is most often translated as *world*. In regard to the visible *world* of people, it can refer to how we are organized socially, politically, economically, or philosophically into a *world order* or orderly system, such as the *ancient world* or the *modern world*. It can also apply to the unseen realm, such as the *angelic world*, and can apply to anything which is organized around or associated with some physical, spiritual, or philosophical principle, such as the *philosophical world* or the *religious world*.

Kosmos can also refer to the whole creation, including both seen and unseen realms. “*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth*” (Gen 1:1). The heavens and the earth mentioned here refer to the whole *created world*, including everything in both the seen and unseen realms. But in many contexts, the phrase *heavens and earth* has the connotation of a *world order* or orderly arrangement (Gk. *kosmos* cf. Acts 17:24; Rev 11:15; 13:8; 17:8), or an *administration* of world affairs (Gk. *oikonomia* cf. Eph 1:10; 3:9; 1 Tim 1:4). In this context, the meaning of the *NEW heavens and earth* seems to be that the entire world (Gk. *kosmos*), including both the seen and unseen realms, will operate under a new set of laws or a new covenantal arrangement or administration (Gk. *oikonomia*). That is how 2 Peter 3 seems to be using this phrase: The old arrangement or old administration of the world, with its leaders and laws and elementary principles (Gk. *stoicheia*), was destroyed, so that the new orderly arrangement (*kosmos*) or administration (*oikonomia*) could be set up.

How the word KOSMOS relates to the Kingdom

Furthermore, it appears that the word *kosmos* can refer

The phrase heavens and earth is not merely a technical language for cosmology, nor a technical term referring to the Temple in Jerusalem.

The New Heavens and Earth

Studies in Redemptive History

Edward E. Stevens

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to just one part of the heavens and earth. For instance, in John 18:36, Jesus says: “My kingdom is not of this world [Gk. *kosmos*]. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is **not from here.**” (NKJV)

Here, the word *kosmos* is applied only to the visible earthly realm (“the world below”), and not to the heavenly realm (“the world above”) from where Christ’s kingdom actually comes. His kingdom is a new arrangement of the universe, both in the unseen realm of heaven and in the seen realm on earth. His Kingdom emanates from heaven, and manifests itself on earth through the visible Church. This kingdom is a new world, or new arrangement of the world, based on the redemptive work of Christ—a new heavens and earth. The old arrangement of the world passed away, and Christ’s new world order (*kosmos*) or administration (*oikonomia*) was set up.

Root Meaning of ‘Heavens and Earth’

As is the case with many Hebrew and Greek words and phrases, there is a basic root meaning, along with several connotations, applications, or adaptations of that meaning in their various contexts. Before looking at some passages which define this phrase more precisely, we first need to examine the basic root definition.

Genesis 1:1 is the first place in the Bible which mentions “the heavens and the earth.” Here it is referring to the creation of both the *seen* realm (the earth and the visible realm) and the *unseen* realm (the heavens above where God and the angels are). Robert McCabe explains this very well for us:

The “heavens” of this verse (Gen 1:1) refer to God’s creation of the upper register and the “earth” the lower register. This upper register does not refer to the visible sky above the earth

but to the invisible heavens that are the created dwelling place for God and his angels. Likewise, the lower register refers to the earth and the visible heavens above it.¹

Bruce Waltke further explains the meaning of this phrase in Genesis 1:

... “the heavens and the earth” is a compound phrase that must be studied as a unity. In connection with this phrase in Gen 1:1, Cassuto made this comment: “In language, as in chemistry, a compound may be found to possess qualities absent from its constituent elements. For example, anyone who does not know what ‘broadcast’ denotes, will not be able to guess the connotation of the word from its separate elements ‘broad’ and ‘cast.’ Likewise, it will prove erroneous to study the words ‘heavens’ and ‘earth’ in isolation from one another.”

Furthermore, in trying to decide the meaning of the compound “the heavens and the earth,” Cyrus Gordon

noted that pairs of antonyms often mean “everything” or “everyone.” For example, in English, the expression “they came, great and small” means that “everybody came.” . . . So here, “the heavens and the earth” are antonyms to designate “everything,” and more specifically “the organized universe, the cosmos.” In fact, *Wisdom of Solomon* uses the Greek words *ho kosmos* [the world, or orderly system] to refer to Genesis 1:1.

This is undoubtedly the sense of the compound in the summary statement concluding the creation account: “Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts” (Gen 2:1). The compound occurs again in this sense in the summary statement introducing the stories about man at the time of the creation of the universe: “This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created” (Gen 2:4). In both of these summaries a world [or cosmos] is in view.²

Although the basic reference of this phrase is to the created universe, both in its seen and unseen realms, it does take on different connotations and nuances depending on how it is used in each verse. So the context is the determining factor regarding which connotation is applied to the phrase. Both Matthew 5:17-20 and 2 Peter 3 are good examples of this, and we will look at them below.

Lest there be any doubt about whether the New Testament writers shared the same cosmological perspective as the Old Testament writers, all one needs to do is simply compare the usage of “heavens and earth” in the following Old and New Testament texts: Exodus 20:4; Philippians 2:10; Colossians 1:16; Revelation 5:3; 13.

What the ‘heavens and earth’ are NOT

The phrase *heavens and earth* is not merely code language for *covenant*, even though there is a covenantal arrangement between God (in Heaven) and His human creation (on Earth). Nor does the phrase refer to national *Israel only*, to the exclusion of the rest of God’s creation in both the *seen* and *unseen* realms. Nor is the phrase merely a technical term referring to the physical *Temple* in Jerusalem. The Temple was *not* the old heaven and earth, even though it *was* the place on earth where, according to the Jews, Heaven and Earth met (see Josephus *Antiq.* 8:106-108 [8.4.2]; and 1 Kings 8), and was a microcosmic *representation* of the heavens and earth. According to Josephus, the Temple was divided into three parts which represented the *heavens, the earth, and the sea*. But Josephus does not refer to the Temple as *being* the heavens and earth, but rather as *representing* the heavens and earth (*Antiq.* 3:123 [3.6.4]; 3:181 [3.7.7]). Though the curtain at the door of the Temple sanctuary had cosmic symbols embroidered on it, which *represented* things in the heavens and on earth, the Temple was not the heavens and earth themselves, but merely a *representation* of those things (Wars 5:212-214 [5.5.4]).

In the beginning God created a lot more than just a covenant

continued on p. 10

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New Heavens

by Edward E. Stevens

... continued from p. 9

or a covenant people. He created the heavens and the earth, which included all things in both the seen and unseen realms (Gen 1:1), as well as all the relationships and interactions between those two realms.

Meaning of 'Heavens and Earth' in Biblical Context

The best way to come to grips with the meaning of any word or phrase like "heavens and earth" is to study all of its occurrences in the Bible. We can discern a phrase's meaning from how it is used in each particular context. So we will look at what "heavens and earth" means as it is used in a few key biblical texts: Matthew 5:17-20; 24:35; Hebrews 12; and 2 Peter 3. (This same meaning is also used in some of the other prophetic occurrences of the phrase, such as Isaiah 65-66 and Revelation 20-22, but we do not have the space to deal with them here.)

Matthew 5:17-18

17 "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I say to you, until **heaven and earth pass away**, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished." (Matt 5:17-18 NASB)

Futurists consider this one of Jesus' most challenging sayings to accept, simply because they do not think *heaven and earth* have passed away. However, it is clear that the Mosaic Law is no longer bound upon anyone, and could not be properly observed even if it was binding—there is no temple, priesthood, or sacrificial system in Jerusalem. But, as Don Preston has repeatedly pointed out to his futurist debate opponents, circumcision is still very much a part of the Mosaic Law, as is Sabbath-keeping. Circumcision and Sabbath-keeping are more than merely a few jots and tittles! Yet Jesus said that not one bit of the Law would pass away "until heaven and earth passed away." Either the futurist needs to admit that heaven and earth has indeed passed away, or he needs to keep the Sabbath and make an appointment with a Mohel (a rabbi who performs circumcision) who can help him keep every jot and tittle of the Law!

However, it is not enough for preterists to simply assert that the old heaven and earth passed away in AD 70 (Matt 5:18 and 24:35). Futurists demand that we also clarify what that heavens and earth was, and how it passed away at AD 70. It was the Old World Order (Gk. *kosmos*) that had been in place since the beginning (Gen 1:1), the orderly arrangement of the whole universe, including the unseen spiritual realm and the visible earthly realm. That orderly world (Gk. *kosmos*) was corrupted by the Fall of Adam and destined to perish, to be replaced with a new world order set up by the Messiah.

Because of the Fall of Adam, the *heavens and earth* had to be reorganized around the sacrificial system, which was instituted immediately after the Fall when God slew the

sacrificial animal(s) and covered Adam and Eve with the skins. They "died with" that animal on that day and "put on" its skin to cover their shame. Jesus *fulfilled* that sacrificial typology on the Cross, so that we can "die with" Him and "put on" His righteousness to cover our guilt and shame. Jesus and the apostles indicated that all of the typology involved in the sacrificial system would be *fulfilled* in their generation (Matt 23-24; Heb 7-12). Every jot and tittle of the Law would be *fulfilled* (Matt 5:17-18), so that "some of those standing there would not taste death" before they saw the Son of Man coming with His Kingdom (Matt 16:27-28). The Kingdom is identified in Hebrews 12 as being the *New Heavens and Earth*. It is the new covenantal *world order* that was inaugurated by the Cross of Christ and permanently established by His shaking and removal of the old covenantal world order at His return in AD 70. This new heavens and earth is the new world (*kosmos*) which is administrated (*oikonomia*) by the New Covenant in Christ's blood.

Both world orders, the old and the new, were organized and governed by covenants, so it is appropriate to speak of them as *covenantal worlds* (see Heb 7-12). That is what Heb 12:26-28 is referring to when it says that the old heaven and earth would be shaken and removed so that "*those things which cannot be shaken may remain.*"

The best way to come to grips with the meaning of any word or phrase like "heavens and earth" is to study all of its occurrences in the Bible.

2 Peter 3:5-13

5. . . **the heavens** existed long ago and **the earth** was formed out of water and by water, 6 through which **the world** [Gk. *kosmos*] at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. 7 But by His word the **present heavens and earth** are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. . . . 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which **the heavens** will pass away with a roar and **the elements** [Gk. *stoicheia*] will be destroyed with intense heat, and **the earth** and its works will be burned up. . . . 12 . . . **the heavens** will be destroyed by burning, and **the elements** [Gk. *stoicheia*] will melt with intense heat! 13 But according to His promise we are looking for **new heavens and a new earth**, in which righteousness dwells. (2 Pet 3:5-7, 10, 12-13)

This is a favorite passage of futurists, which they think proves their earth-burning, universe-collapsing, universal-Armageddon style end of the planet and the universe. When interpreted literally and materialistically, this passage might seem to support their concept of the nature of fulfillment. However, as we all know, there are many futurists who do not interpret 2 Peter 3 as a literal fiery end to the material universe. At least two of my futurist seminary instructors taught that this deconstructive language is referring to the burning of Jerusalem in AD 70. Another graduate of that

seminary wrote a short 57-page book teaching that same idea.³ There are several other futurists who teach an AD 70 fulfillment of 2 Peter 3 (e.g., John Owen, Milton S. Terry, Cornelius Vanderwaal, Robert Young, John Lightfoot, and Peter Leithart). Leithart has one of the best treatments of 2 Peter I have read.⁴ So it is not just full preterists who interpret 2 Peter 3 as fulfilled in AD 70, but a host of futurist interpreters take that approach as well, so that the burden of proof for all interpretations of 2 Peter 3 rests equally upon both futurists and preterists.

Futurist scholar L. S. Chafer, in his comments on 2 Peter 3, points out that “the Apostle Peter mentions three phases of the world or earth: (a) the world before the flood, or ‘the world that then was’ (3:5-6); (b) ‘the heavens and the earth which are now’ (3:7); and (c) the ‘new heavens and a new earth’ that are yet to be (3:13).”⁵

How do these three different worlds mentioned by Peter relate to the two (old and new) heavens and earths to which Jesus, Paul, and John refer? They can easily be harmonized when we see that the first two of those worlds mentioned by Peter (“the world that then was” and “the heavens and the earth which are now”) are both included in the old heavens and earth (the old world order) that was about to pass away.

Conclusion

As we noted at the beginning of this article, futurists have challenged us to explain *what the heavens and earth are*, and *how* the old heavens and earth were replaced by the new heavens and earth in AD 70. We showed that “*in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*” (Gen 1:1). We noted that this phrase is not just talking about a covenantal arrangement with people. Even though it may include covenants in its relationship to people, it is not referring to that covenant or the covenant people exclusively, or even primarily.

Rather, we have seen that the phrase *heavens and earth* is used with various connotations depending on the context. In historical texts such as Genesis, it refers to the whole created universe, including both its seen and unseen realms. But in soteriological or eschatological contexts, it takes on the connotation of a new world order (Gk. *kosmos*) or new administration (Gk. *oikonomia*) of the universe in both its seen and unseen realms.

This gives us an explanation of “heavens and earth” that works well in such passages as Matthew 5:17-20; 24:35; Hebrews 12; 2 Peter 3; Isaiah 65-66; and Revelation 20-22.

If this article has not addressed all the questions that you have about the meaning of this phrase, then please email me (preterist1@preterist.org) with those concerns. If warranted, I’ll write another article to further develop this explanation. †

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2. Bruce K. Waltke. “The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1–3. Part 3.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132:527, Jul 1975: p 218; bracketed info added.
3. Gerald Wright, *Second Peter Three: Jewish Calamity or Universal Climax?* Includes expositions of Matthew 24 and Hebrews 10:25. Fort Worth, Texas USA: Star Bible and Tract Corp., 1976.
4. Peter J. Leithart, *The Promise of His Appearing: An Exposition of Second Peter*. Moscow, Idaho USA: Canon Press, 2004.
5. Lewis Sperry Chafer. “Angelology Part 4.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 99 (1942): p 280.

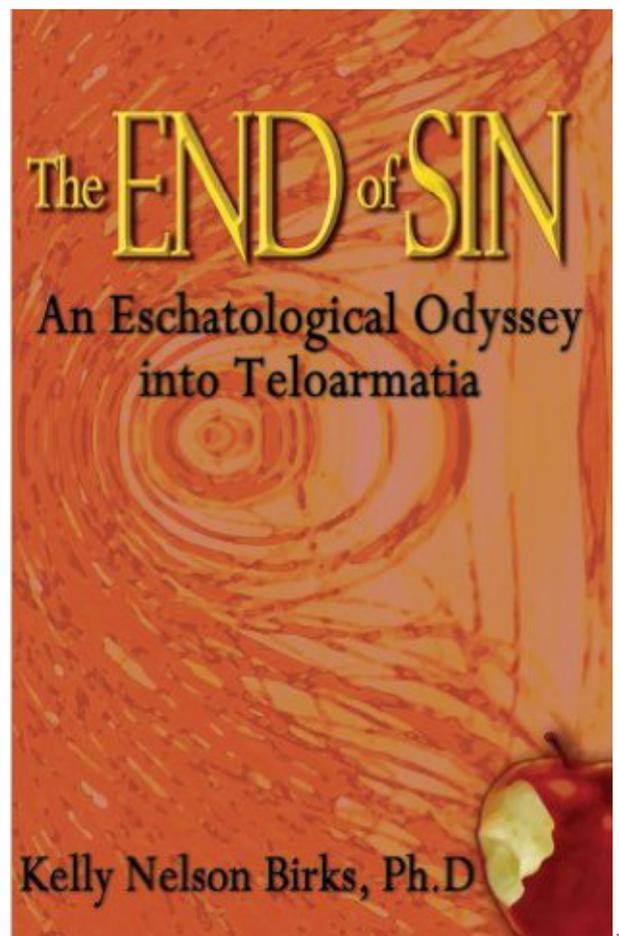
Dr. Kelly Nelson Birks

5-26-1957 — 3-12-2015

The preterist community lost a pastor and teacher with the passing of Dr. Kelly Nelson Birks earlier this year. “Dr. B,” as some knew him, was a past contributor to *Fulfilled!* Magazine, and held a BA of Pastoral Theology, a Masters degree in Theology, and two doctorates in Biblical studies—one in Philosophy and one in Ministry.

Kelly also authored *The End of Sin*, and had just completed a Youtube series on the book of Revelation.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=00rBa1KEfw8&list=PLIU0rkjBKPYPY-3hocDcdASbYYXKLQmlXeY>



Ethics and Eschatology

by Don Preston

“Many preterists believe that passages such as Titus 2:13 refer to the coming of Christ in A.D. 70. This means that the hope of the second coming applied only to those Christians living between the time the epistle was written and the destruction of Jerusalem, namely, A.D. 65-70. It’s interesting to note that just one verse earlier—in Titus 2:12—Paul said that Christ’s first coming (mentioned in verse 11) has instructed us ‘to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age.’ And as we live through ‘the present age,’ we are to be ‘looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus’ (Titus 2:13).

“If Titus 2:13 was fulfilled in A.D. 70 with Christ’s return, the ‘present age’ in verse 12 would have ended when verse 13 was fulfilled. Therefore, the entire admonition in verse 12 was applicable only to Christians up until A.D. 70. This means the instruction ‘to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age’ does not apply to our current age, but to the past age that ended in A.D. 70 when ‘the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus’ was manifested in the destruction of Jerusalem. This (sadly) is one of the practical implications of the preterist view, as applied to this passage and to most of the imperatives relating to the Christian life as found in the New Testament” (*The End Times Controversy*, 422).

THIS OBJECTION IS FAIRLY common, and Ice is not alone in offering it. I have heard it in several formal debates, but, the “Objection” does not survive long in the light of Scriptures. It seems not to have dawned on those making the objection that it comes back to negate their own eschatology!

One of the common—but false—views of eschatology is that at the coming of Christ there is no more evil in the world. I grew up holding to that view, but discovered it was wrong. The proper view of eschatology is that even after the “end” life continues on earth. There are nations outside the City, the New Jerusalem, and those nations are called to come into the City to find healing (Rev 22:1-4). Outside the City, there are still “*dogs, liars and those who work abomination.*” What we find in Scripture is that the goal of eschatology was that God would establish “Sanctuary,” a safe haven of life and righteousness, called “*The Tabernacle of God is with man!*” (Rev 21:3). That is all I will say on this in this article, since I want to examine more closely the objection at hand.

Take note of the extreme problem that Ice’s own objection poses for him. He believes that the kingdom does not arrive until the Second Coming of Christ. Ice also believes that John the Baptizer legitimately offered that kingdom to Israel when he said: “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has drawn near*” (Matt 3:2). But, Ice believes this kingdom offer was withdrawn from Israel due to her unbelief:

“I believe the scriptures teach that Israel could have obtained her much sought after messianic kingdom by recognizing

Jesus as the Messiah. We all know the sad reality, the Jews rejected Jesus. As a result the kingdom is no longer near but postponed, awaiting Jewish belief, which will occur at the end of the Tribulation.” (*The Great Tribulation Debate*, Grand Rapids, Kregel, 1999, 115B).

Here is the question: Was John’s call to ethical living in light of the impending kingdom also withdrawn with the kingdom? Was the call to repent postponed, since the kingdom was postponed? Ice would not affirm this, under any condition. In fact, in the dispensational view of things, during the millennial kingdom ethics are paramount! So, in Ice’s own theology, the Second Coming, which ushers in the kingdom, does *not* negate the demand for ethical living—if anything, it enhances it because of the nature of the kingdom itself.

For John, ethics would not cease in the kingdom. *The arrival of the kingdom would demand ethical living*, for in the Old Covenant prophecies of the kingdom, righteousness and holiness—you know, ethical living—is the chief characteristic of the kingdom!

Look at Isaiah 32 and the prediction of Messiah’s kingdom:

“*Behold, a king will reign in righteousness, And princes will rule with justice. . . . Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, And righteousness remain in the fruitful field. The work of righteousness will be peace, And the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever. My people will dwell in a peaceful habitation, In secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places, Though hail comes down on the forest, And the city is brought low in humiliation*” (Isa 32:1-2, 17f).

Negate Ethical Exhortation and Demands?

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It should be noted that in the kingdom depiction given in Isaiah 32, *evil continues to exist* (vv. 6-8), but is overcome by those of faith-Sanctuary!

As Sam Frost effectively demonstrated (before his departure from the truth of Covenant Eschatology), in the “age to come,” the age following the resurrection, life and human existence on earth, would continue:

“In the new age *Ezekiel* pictures the restored Israel being brought back into the Land. God will dwell with them and they will dwell with him. He will ‘increase them with men like a flock’ (36.37). Again, ‘they will dwell there, even they, and their *sons* (*ben*), and their *sons of sons* forever . . . I will place them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them forever’ (37.25,26). It is clear from this passage and numerous others that in the restored ‘age to come’ multiplication of children will continue, and it is perhaps to this well known aspect of that time the Sadducees are alluding to. How can these seven brothers and the one woman have children in that age to come restoration/resurrection? The prophets are clear that in that time, ‘they shall walk in my statutes and observe my judgment’ (37.24), and ‘David shall rule over them’ (37.24).’ (*Exegetical Essays on the Resurrection*, Ardmore, Ok. JaDon Management Inc., 2010, 95-96).

So, if life, procreation, and walking in the statutes of the Lord and “*observing my judgments*” exist in the resurrection age—the age to come, exactly how does the fulfillment of the resurrection somehow negate the call for ethical living? On the contrary, the arrival of the kingdom demands holiness and righteousness in those who would enjoy the kingdom blessings.

This is Paul’s point in Galatians 5:19f:

“*Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*”

[Side Bar: It would be utter nonsense to argue that one would not inherit the kingdom if practicing those vices prior to AD 70, but that after the arrival of the kingdom in AD 70 they

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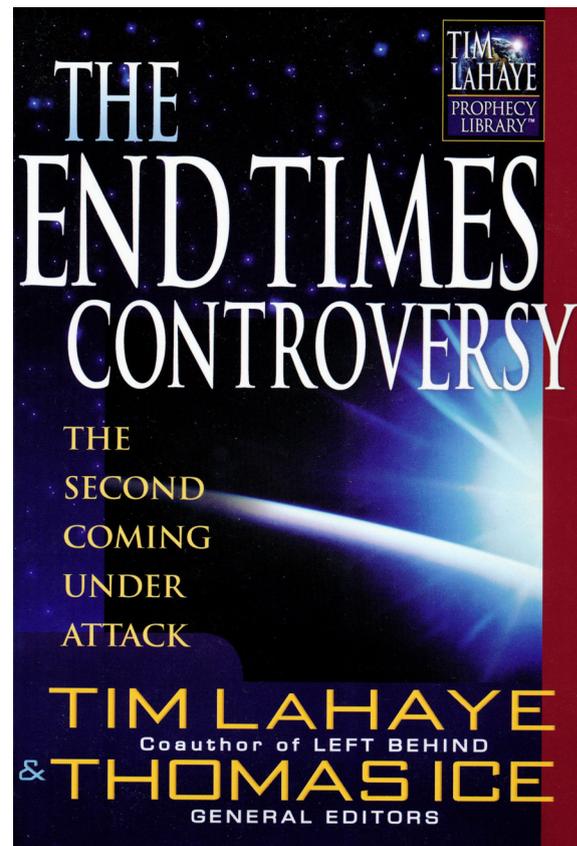
somehow do now enjoy the kingdom in spite of practicing those vices!]

Notice that Paul is drawing on Isaiah 32, when he says, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness . . .”. So, just as Isaiah foretold the coming of the kingdom of righteousness, but acknowledged the continuance of evil at the same time, Paul also warns against unrighteousness in those who desired—or desire—to enjoy the blessings of the kingdom of righteousness.

Note that in 2 Peter 3, the New Creation is “*where righteousness dwells*” meaning that *righteousness is demanded in the New World!* This motif of the New Creation demands ethical conduct. In Ephesians 4 and the parallel in Colossians 3, Paul urged his readers to, “*put off the old man which is corrupt, and put on the new man, which is created in the image of him who made them.*” So, the New Man, the New Creation, is to be conformed to the image of Christ, putting to death the Old Man of corruption, self indulgence and immorality!

Paul repeatedly told his audiences that they had “*died with Christ*” (Rom 6:3f; Eph 2; Col 2 & 3, etc.) and having died with Christ, they were to be conformed to His image. That

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Ethics

by Don Preston

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image, to repeat, is the image of holiness and righteousness.

Note that the New Creation would be perfected at the Parousia (Rev 21) and would be an unending Creation, thus negating the idea that ethics are not mandated in the New Creation. Only if we ignore or deny the ethical (*righteous*) nature of Christ Himself can this be argued, however! Observe also that while eschatology was part of that narrative, it is the nature of Christ Himself, His image, that is the real ground of the ethics of the New Creation.

Notice now, Romans 13:11-13:

“And do this, knowing the time, that now 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. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.”

Paul called on the Roman brethren, in light of the impending Day of the Lord, to “*walk properly, as in the day.*” Do you catch the significance of that term? Here is a call for holiness, for ethical living in direct connection to eschatology. But, instead of indicating anything remotely resembling the objection that ethical mandates cease at the Parousia and in the kingdom, Paul called on the Romans to live “*as in the day.*” They were to live as if they were already living in “The Day.” The contrast here is between “darkness,” *the darkness of unholy living*, and the Day, the life of obedience and holiness that Paul discussed in Romans 6:16f.

The force of this—as I noted above—is precisely what most people believe when not seeking desperately to refute Covenant Eschatology. They understand that the arrival of the kingdom would not negate the call to holiness, but rather emphasize it! Life in “The Day,” i.e. the kingdom of God, demands holiness!

Someone may respond that the New Testament is replete with ethical mandates in direct connection to the imminent Day of the Lord, and that, based on these texts, eschatology is absolutely necessary as motivation for holiness. I would suggest that this is somewhat shallow.

Did God use eschatology exclusively to call Israel to holiness? Patently not! What was the key motivation? I suggest that we can find the answer in a New Testament text which cites the Old Testament principle: “*Be holy because I am holy*” (1 Peter 1:16, citing Lev 11).

What was the key motivation for holiness, even in the Old Testament? It was the holiness of the God who called them! Not eschatology. Not a “rule book.” No, it was the holiness of the Lord! As stated above, the foundation of ethics now is being conformed to the image of Christ, being, “*the righteousness of God in him*” (2 Cor 5:21).

When we can more fully grasp that “The Tabernacle of God is with man,” and that He dwells in us and we in Him, the full power of what this means for living in His presence will become more and more meaningful and powerful to us.

Rules can never be a proper motivation to holiness; Israel proved that very effectively! Threats of punishment, i.e. eschatology, are not a foundational motivation. No, a loving and living relationship with God is the true motivation for holy living! Just as in a strong marriage, rules, laws, and regulations are not what keeps each mate faithful, caring, sensitive and devoted—it is love and a desire to please. So, in our relationship with the Lord, fear of the Day of the Lord is not our motivation. The fact that we live in him and that he loves us should be more than sufficient!

When we know what He loves, we want to love that. When we know what He hates, we want to hate that. When we know what offends Him, what pierces His heart, we want to avoid those things at all cost! Why? Because we love Him! *Because of our relationship with Him!* The more we grasp what it means that God has come to dwell with us, in a loving, living relationship, the more that reliance on “fear of the Day” as motivation for holiness will disappear into the background. Replacing it will be our desire simply to please the God who has saved us and made us His!

A failure to understand the true purpose of eschatology—the establishment of Sanctuary, not the obliteration of evil from the world at large—is part of the reason for the objection. But obliteration of evil from the world is a false concept. Even those who raise the objection teach that the arrival of the kingdom would demand holiness!

Ethics in light of eschatology was a reality in Scripture. But, it was not the exclusive or even the over-arching motivation. Ethical mandates were to prepare them—and even us—for “relational ethics,” living in the kingdom—being conformed to the image of our Savior. Knowing the heart of God and pleasing Him has always been the real key to true ethical living.

The objection is, therefore, overruled! ✠

Life in the Kingdom

Present day living in light of past fulfillment

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ATTITUDE IN BIBLE STUDY

IHAVE A SEVENTH-DAY Adventist commentary on Hebrews by M. L. Andreasen that, upon occasion, I'll pick up and read a few pages. At the end of each chapter Mr. Andreasen has a section of "Additional Notes," and I was struck by a particular collection of notes from Ellen G. White on the topic of Bible study. So often when we read thoughts such as these, we whole-heartedly agree and think "if only so-and-so, or this group, or that denomination would heed these sound instructions." As preterists, it's so easy to have futurists in mind when we read these type of admonitions. So, to bring the topic closer to home, I've supplied some alternate readings in [brackets].

"[Preterists] ~~Those~~ those who desire to know the truth have nothing to fear from the investigation of the word of God. But upon the threshold of investigation of the word of God, inquirers after truth should lay aside all prejudice, and hold in abeyance all preconceived opinion, and open the ear to hear the voice of God from His messenger. Cherished opinions, long-practiced customs and habits, are to be brought to the test of Scriptures; and if the word of God opposes your views, then, for your soul's sake, do not wrest the Scriptures, as many do to their soul's destruction in order to make them seem to bear a testimony in favor of their errors. Let your inquiry be, What is truth? not, What have I hitherto believed to be truth? Do not interpret the Scriptures in the light of your former belief, and assert that some doctrine of finite man is truth. Let your inquiry be, What saith the Scriptures? Let God speak to you from His living oracles, and open your heart to receive the word of God."
(*Review and Herald*, March 25, 1902, p. 177)

"[As a preterist] You should not search for the purpose of finding texts of Scripture that you can construe to prove your theories; for the word of God declares that this is wresting the Scriptures to your own destruction. You must empty yourselves of every prejudice, and come in the spirit of prayer to the investigation of the word of God."
(*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 308)

If [preterists] ~~you~~ search the Scriptures to vindicate [their] ~~your~~ own opinions, [they] ~~you~~ will never reach the truth. Search in order to learn what the Lord says." (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 112)

"How shall we [preterists] search the Scriptures? Shall we drive our stakes of doctrine one after another, and then try to

make all Scripture meet our established opinions? Or shall we take our ideas and views to the Scriptures, and measure our theories on every side by the Scriptures of truth? Many who read and even teach the bible, do not comprehend the precious truths they are teaching or studying.

"[Preterists] ~~Men~~ entertain errors, when the truth is clearly marked out, and if they would but bring their doctrines to the word of God, and not read the word of God in the light of their doctrines, to prove their ideas right, they would not walk in darkness and blindness, or cherish error. Many give the words of Scripture a meaning that suits their own opinions, and they mislead themselves and deceive others by misinterpretations of God's word." (*Review and Herald*, July 26, 1892, p. 465)

"As we [preterists] take up the study of God's word, we should do so with humble hearts. All selfishness, all love of originality, should be laid aside. Long-cherished opinions must not be regarded as infallible. It was the unwillingness of the Jews to give up their long-established traditions that proved their ruin. They were determined not to see any flaw in their own opinions or in their expositions of the Scriptures; but however long men may have entertained certain views, if they are not clearly sustained by the written word, they should be discarded. Those who sincerely desire truth will not be reluctant to lay open their positions of investigation and criticism [regarding the Rapture, the Resurrection, the Millennium, etc.], and will not be annoyed if their opinions and ideas are crossed. This was the spirit cherished among us forty years ago." (*Review and Herald*, July 26, 1892, p. 465)

As quoted in *The Book of Hebrews*, by M. L. Andreasen, pp. 215-217. †

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Preterism . . . *it's about time!*

It's about the time Jesus told His disciples that He would return—this(His) generation!

It's about the time the New Testament authors told their readers Jesus would return—soon, near, at hand, shortly!

It's about time for a scriptural explanation other than delay!

It's about time for a "last days" view that doesn't conjure up gaps and parenthetical ages!



Preterism
Preterism

...maybe it's about time you looked into it!