

Responding to Keith Mathison on the Time Statements, pt. 3

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THIS IS OUR THIRD to in a series of responses to Keith Mathison’s attempt to negate the time indicators of the imminent parousia and the end of the age in the New Testament corpus.

In his book, *When Shall These Things Be?*, Keith Mathison appealed to Haggai’s promise that the Lord would “shake heaven and earth” in a “little while.” He claimed that this prophecy was not fulfilled for 520 years (p. 165, 3rd paragraph) in Hebrews 10:37.

As usual, Mathison actually falsifies his own theology when he attempts to make an argument against true preterism. Consider that if Haggai 2 was fulfilled in AD 70, then “heaven and earth” was shaken (removed), at that time, and, *this is critical*, it means that the Lord came, as promised, in Hebrews 10:37! And if 10:37 is fulfilled as Mathison’s words demand, that means that the temporal imminence of 10:37 must be taken as objective, not elastic. It also means that Christ’s “second appearing” of 9:28 is fulfilled and Mathison’s futurism is destroyed! Mathison has inadvertently destroyed his own argument.

Of course, Mathison’s entire point is that in Haggai it says that “in a little while” the Lord would shake heaven and earth and that the wealth of the nations would be brought to build (rebuild) the temple. What Mathison, and many commentators, commonly ignore is that the Lord *did* shake the nations, and the wealth of the nations *did* contribute to the rebuilding of the temple.

As R. A. Taylor writes:

In Haggai’s day this enrichment took place as a result of the decision on the part of the Persian rulers, beginning with Cyrus, to facilitate the rebuilding of the temple by extending financial resources for that purpose. This language also envisages an apocalyptic breaking in of the divine presence in sudden and violent terms and as such seems to have eschatological dimensions. This is the significance attached to Haggai 2:6 by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who sees here an anticipation of the messianic age. In Hebrews 12:26–29 he says: At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” The words “once more” indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our “God is a consuming fire.” (R. A., Taylor, & E. R

Clendenen, *Haggai, Malachi*, Vol. 21A, (Nashville; Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2004), 159).

Taylor is clearly correct, based on Ezra 1:2-4:

Thus says Cyrus king of Persia:

All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem. And whoever is left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides the freewill offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.

It may be rejoined that Ezra 1 is to be dated circa BC 539 while Haggai chapter 2 is circa BC 520, thus apparently putting Haggai's prophecy after the fact. But this objection does not negate the facts. Cyrus (Ezra 1) authorized the giving of gold and silver for the rebuilding. And those gifts were given (Ezra 1:6f). The Jews began the project, but got discouraged, due to nearly 20 years of opposition by the Samaritans (Ezra 4:24) before Haggai appeared and rejuvenated their enthusiasm and desire to do the work (Ezra 5:1-2). In fact, at that time the enemies of the rebuilding project were actually commanded to contribute to that work out of their royal treasuries (Ezra 6:8-12). The work proceeded and the temple was rebuilt and dedicated in circa BC 515 (Ezra 6:14-15). Thus, the work of Haggai to rebuild the temple was in fact financed by the gifts from the nations—just as he had prophesied—and it was done quickly.

So, there was an imminent “shaking of the nations” that brought the wealth of the Persians—and, as the dominant world empire of that time, the wealth of all the nations under Persian control—to Jerusalem. It did not take 520 years for that to be fulfilled, and thus, Mathison's objection is overruled!

So, what about the fact that Hebrews cites Haggai? When the writer of Hebrews cited Haggai, he was essentially saying, “Just like God acted imminently to fulfill His word in the days of Haggai, so He was about to act “once more” to shake the heaven and earth. Hebrews may even be employing a form of type and anti-type. But the fact is that Mathison is simply ignoring the testimony of both Scripture and history in his desperate attempt to negate biblical time words.

What is so fascinating, and counterproductive to Mathison, is that in Hebrews 12, the writer was reminding his readers how the Lord had acted “in a little while” to fulfill the words of Haggai. Therefore, with that reminder he was likewise indicating the imminent shaking, not of material creation (just as Haggai was not referencing the shaking of material creation), but the removal of the Old Covenant world. The fact is that in both Haggai and Hebrews, the promises of imminent actions by the Lord were fulfilled.

There is strong scholarly support, throughout history, for the idea that Hebrews 12:25f was not predicting the dissolution of material creation demanded by Mathison's argument.

The noted Reformed scholar John Owen, commenting on Hebrews 12:25ff on the shaking of heaven and earth, took the position that it referred to the removal of the Old Covenant world. (John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, W. H. Gould, seven Vols., Grand Rapids, Baker, 1855 / 1980, Vol. 7, 366f), cited in David Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, (Ft. Worth; Dominion Press, 1987, 413).

In modern times, William Lane says, "The explicit association of 'the earth' with Sinai and the old covenant (v. 25b, 26a) implies that 'the heaven' is to be associated with the new covenant (25ac). 'Earth' and 'heavens' are symbols of the revelation at Sinai and of the new covenant revelation to the writer's generation, respectively." (William Lane, *Word Biblical Commentary, Hebrews 9-13*, Vol. 47b, (Dallas, Tx.; Word Publishers, 1991, 480).

Similarly, even Kenneth Gentry sees that Hebrews 12:25-28 was not predictive of any future cosmological catastrophe. He wrote: "The change of the age is finalized and sealed at the destruction of Jerusalem." He cites Mark 9:1; Galatians 4:25f; Hebrews 12:18-29. (Kenneth L. Gentry and Thomas Ice, *The Great Tribulation Past or Future?*, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1999, 63).

Gentry offers this as well on Hebrews 12:18-28:

The writer of Hebrews contrasts the old covenant and the new covenant (Hebrews 12:18-28), pointing out that the new covenant recipients are currently receiving (*paralambanontes*, pres. act. Prtcp.) 'a kingdom which cannot be shaken' (Hebrews 12:28). This kingdom will 'remain' after God shakes down the old covenant order at the temple's destruction in AD 70 (Heb. 12:26-27; cp. 8:13), destroying those temple implements made with hands (9:11, 24; Mk 14:58; Acts 7:48)." (Kenneth Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, Draper, VA., Apologetics Group, 2009, 259).

(For more on this issue of the end of the Mosaic age—at the destruction of the temple—as the shaking of heaven and earth, I suggest reading Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Lewis, "Jesus, the Temple and the Dissolution of Heaven and Earth" in "Apocalyptic in History and Tradition," edited by Christopher Rowland and John Barton, "Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha," Supplement Series 43, 117f).

Thus, Mathison's attempt to deny, to negate and to mitigate the temporal imminence of Haggai is specious and untenable. We have much more to say in response to Mathison, but must leave that to subsequent articles. †