

Responding to Keith Mathison – pt. 4

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AS WE EMBARK ON our fourth installment in our response to Keith Mathison, there is something else the reader should know about Mathison’s eschatology and his view of time statements. Commenting on Hebrews 11-12, Mathison says this about the subject of “Zion” in Hebrews 12:

Christians are now experiencing the fulfillment of the eschatological hopes of Israel (Keith Mathison, *Age to Age: The Unfolding of Biblical Eschatology*, Phillipsburg, NJ; P & R Publishing 2009, 625).

Mathison chronicles the promises listed in Hebrews 12:21f and insists:

“Under the New Covenant we *have come* to Mt. Zion. We *have come* to the heavenly Jerusalem. We *have come* to the church of the firstborn. We have come to Jesus, the mediator of this glorious New Covenant... That which the Old Testament believers looked for in faith has come, and they have now received what was promised” (*Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope*, 1999, 135; his emphasis).

However, in the very next paragraph Mathison affirms, “the fullness of the blessing is yet future, because we await the consummation.”

Just think about that. The eschatological hope of Israel, according to Hebrews 11 was the heavenly New Jerusalem whose builder and maker is God. What is fascinating—perhaps more than a little revealing—is that included in the eschatological hope delineated in Hebrews 11 was “the better resurrection”! Yet, Mathison did not list that as part of the eschatological hope that “Christians are now experiencing.” Does Mathison expect us to understand the terminology—the time statement—of “now” and “has come”? How does he determine the actual temporal proximity of “now” and “has come” yet then try to convince us that “at hand,” “soon,” “shortly” and “quickly” are to be ignored?

How can Mathison (consistently) emphasize the “now” of the blessings, honoring the temporal statements, but then insist that “the fullness of the blessing is yet future, because we await the consummation”? There are no New Testament passages that, properly understood, would ever suggest, hint, or imply that the “fullness of the blessings” were not to come for two millennia.

It appears that on the one hand Mathison uses time words to emphasize what Christians have NOW. He even explains how those promises were once *far off* from the patriarchs, but again, emphasizes that they are now given to the saints. But, after emphasizing the temporal contrast between the Old and New Covenant saints, he immediately turns around and does his best to negate and mitigate the inspired texts of the imminence of the end.

More from Mathison

In his *Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope*, (Phillipsburg, NJ; P & R Publishing, 1999, 167), Mathison has this to say about time statements:

Telescoping - telescoping occurs when the prophet describes events that are now known to be widely separated in time, but does so without giving any indication that they are so separated. For example, Daniel 11-12.

The problem with this quote/claim is that it is based on presuppositional theology. Notice that Mathison says, “the prophet describes events that are now known to be widely separated in time, but does so without giving any indication that they are so separated.” What does Mathison mean by claiming, “It is now known” that the fulfillments of the prophecies were “widely separated in time”? What he means by this is that since his concept of the nature of the fulfillment of Daniel was not fulfilled imminently, he therefore “knows” that the ultimate fulfillment lies in some other time, far removed from the textually stated time frame.

What is to be noted about his reference to Daniel 11-12 is that the background for the vision is given in chapter 10 (to which Mathison conveniently omits any reference). There Daniel was told:

In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a message was revealed to Daniel, whose name was called Belteshazzar. The message was true, *but the appointed time was long*; and he understood the message, and had understanding of the vision.” Then in verse 14 Daniel was told by the angel: “Now I have come to make you understand what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision refers to many days yet to come” (v. 14).

Thus, twice at the introduction of the vision that extended all the way through Daniel 12, the prophet was told that the events were NOT NEAR, but in fact “refers to many days yet to come.” Now, notice that the only thing that was truly near Daniels’ day was the receiving of the vision—the consummation of the vision was not near, and the angel clearly said so. We have the right to ask therefore, just exactly where in that vision, that was emphatically said to extend over a long period of time, do we get the idea that some things were near but in fact they were far off. Mathison is patently grasping at straws. His objection is overruled. †