

## ~Matthew 24--Why I Became a Preterist~

By Donald Hochner

### Introduction

Before beginning, I would like to share with you a little background as to my Christian life-experience. In my early Christian life, I was a strong dispensational, pretribulational premillennialist. I held to that view for quite a few years. It was exciting to think about the future things called "eschatology." Many Christians tend to be fascinated with such doctrines as the Rapture, the Antichrist, the Second Coming of Christ, the events that surround us, etc. In my opinion and experience, I think many immature (and even some mature) Christians tend to be too preoccupied with these things and fail to rightly apply them to their walk with God. Also, most present conservative churches are dispensationalists and they always learned what their church taught without studying for themselves to see whether these things were so. We tend to learn only what the church teaches and make up our mind without learning other views. When we learn something that may have the truth and share it with the members or pastor, they may tell us it is heresy or tell us to not continue to study those views. I understand their concern, but what if they are wrong?

When I knew Jesus as my Lord and Savior, but had no idea about biblical doctrines, I just went along what the church taught. I used to admire John MacArthur's teachings and his writings. I thought he was one of the best. As the years went by, I began to notice some Scriptures that contradicted dispensationalism. But still I believed it was the best possible view as I was not yet aware that there were other views that Christians believed in like Amillennialism, Postmillennialism and Historic Premillennialism. So, for a time, I kept my questions tucked away in my mind. A few years ago, through the providence of God, I discovered a book by *R. C. Sproul called Chosen by God*. Before that time, I had not been acquainted with the Reformed teachings regarding the Sovereignty of God, Predestination, Election, the Five Points of Calvinism, etc. I was of the Arminian way of thinking, without being aware of it. I remembered I was somewhat insecure with my relationship to Christ. But that book, like fuel on a fire, caused my heart to flame. Eventually, I became a Supralapsarian. After I had read it, I decided to put eschatological teachings on hold (I was not at peace with dispensationalism because I was finding it confusing) and I began a study on the doctrine of salvation (soteriology).

I learned a lot more when I went to The Master's College. There I was convinced about the sovereign grace view; and it helped me to better understand the Scriptures as they were transforming my life. I decided to set up systematic theology to check every area in regard to my strengths and weaknesses. Systematic theology helped me to see the overview of the whole message of the Bible.

I have noticed that many Christians are weak in theology and do not understand how to apply it to their lives. I've also noticed that the two things in theology that create the most controversy within churches and denominations are soteriology and eschatology. Some people can be very emotional, sometimes because they are dogmatic or ignorant of others' views, or because they are prideful.

In time, I went back into eschatology even though I was afraid that it might turn out to be an endless search for the right doctrine. I decided to eliminate the dispensational view because of its many weaknesses and holes and because it was not compatible with Reformed teaching. Dispensationalists are

fine Christians and I love them dearly, but, in my opinion, they tend to use poor exegesis; they twist many passages or explain them away. Dispensationalists are always changing in their dispensational interpretations of the Scriptures, as they have historically since the doctrine was developed in the 1830's. But I shouldn't go into that now.

I switched to Historic Premillennialism for a time because I thought I could go between Dispensationalism and the Reformed view. Then I switched to Amillennialism because it was the most popular in the Reformed camp, and I thought it was the last choice. I saw that Postmillennialism is very similar to Amillennialism, but I disagreed with the view that Christ will return after all the nations of the world become Christian. I did notice, though, that Amillennialism also has its weaknesses; it splits some passages, making some verses fulfilled and others in the same immediate context unfulfilled. I was discontented but still searching.

At last, a friend of mine and I went to Dallas, Texas, for a *Ligonier Ministries Conference* to hear some well-known Reformed speakers. While there I met another deaf person, who believed that all the Scriptures were fulfilled. I learned that this belief is called **Full Preterism**. Since this doctrine was new to me, I was caught off guard and did not believe it at first. However, I was open minded and curious, so I asked him what book he could recommend; he gave me "*Last Days Madness*" by *Gary DeMar*. After I had read the book, it seemed to make sense to me, but I was skeptical because I was afraid of going too far and being led away from the truth. Later, I read and re-read some Scriptures and some other preterist books. In time, I realized that it was true that all the Scriptures were fulfilled, and I felt more at peace with preterism than I ever had with any other eschatological position.

Someone has written, "*Bible prophecy can be understood, but Futurist views have fallen far short for many reasons: their extreme physical/literalizing approach, their seeming inability to distinguish between figurative and literal language, and their failure to properly take into account the historical-grammatical-cultural context of the prophecies (specifically what they meant to their original audience). Even the most difficult prophetic passages come alive when approached properly. It is time to look at some alternatives, and the Preterist view is a great place to start.*"

However, even though I am at peace with preterism, I am still learning more and always reforming. After you read this article, I challenge you to believe what the Bible says in the passages we will examine. I pray that you may be open-minded and search the Scriptures as the Bereans did (Acts 17:10-11), with prayer. I would suggest you have the Bible, a Greek interlinear translation and the works of Josephus. You can check the list of books in the bibliography for whatever you need. I do not expect that you will agree with everything overnight. It may take some time to read and understand what Scripture says. Please be sensitive with your conviction and seek the Holy Spirit as your Guide. Keep searching for what you need to know until the Lord gives you peace in accordance with the truth of His Word. We must all continue to learn of the wonderful things of God, for His thoughts are higher than our thoughts and His ways than our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9) and the secret things belong to Him, but things revealed belong to us, that we may observe all the words of His law (Deuteronomy 29:29).

We are going to deal with Matthew 24 and why I am convinced that chapter was all fulfilled in A.D. 70. I'm not going into details with each verse but will give you a general idea.

**Matthew 24** is the foundational passage of eschatology; whatever view one holds stands, or falls, by this chapter. Let's look at verse 34. The key word in this verse is "generation." In *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, we see that the Greek word is *genea* : "*the whole multitude of men living at the same time.*" Also in *William F. Arndt and Wilber Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New*

*Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: "basically, the sum total of those born at the same time, expanded to include all those living at a given time. Contemporaries."*

I have noticed that many Bible commentators dance around this verse. Some say that Jesus was speaking to a generation that was not going to exist until thousands of years in His future. Others claim that the whole Jewish race was in view. These are not sound Biblical interpretations. The Greek word *genos*, rather than *genea*, is best translated "race," as in Acts 7:19; 17:28; Galatians 1:14; Philippians 3:5; 1 Peter. Take a look at the following passages which contain the word "generation": Matthew 11:16; 12:38-45; 16:4; 17:17; 23:35-36; Mark 8:38; 9:19; 13:30; Luke 7:31; 9:41; 11:16, 24-36, 50, 51; 17:25; 21:32; Acts 2:40. I challenge you to determine which of these verses refers to a time in our future. Also check these verses in Acts 13:36 and Hebrews 3:10. It is very clear that David served his kingdom for 40 years as well with the people of Israel in the wilderness. I wrote an article regarding the word "generation" in <http://www.angelfire.com/ca/DeafPreterist/gene.html>.

We must honestly and humbly accept the clear, straight-forward interpretation of Matthew 24:34: The generation to whom Jesus was speaking that day was not going to pass away until all the things of Matthew 24 came to pass. We must picture ourselves as if we were in that time. Remember that the whole New Testament was written before A.D. 70, to those who lived in that generation. "This generation" was a reference to the period within the 40 years between A.D. 30 to A.D. 70.

Look at the passages that lead into the Olivet Discourse. Read some of Jesus' parables that apply to the generation to whom He was speaking. See Matthew 21:33-46 (Mark 12; Luke 20:9-19); Matthew 22:1-14; and Luke 19:11-27, 41-44. We should not miss the straightforward manner in which Jesus spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70. I believe these are very helpful to understand what Jesus was saying before we come to the Olivet Discourse.

Immediately preceding the Olivet discourse, the disciples heard Jesus pronounce His "woes" on the Jewish leaders. Jesus ended His indictment of Israel's 1st-century religious leaders with this shocking surprise: "Behold, your house (temple) is being left to you desolate!" (Matthew 23:38). With this groundwork laid, we are ready to go into Matthew 24.

**Matthew 24:1-3** As Jesus' disciples had just heard His prediction of "desolation" for the temple and city, they no doubt felt bewildered and wondered, "Lord, you cannot mean this temple!" They must have been astonished when Jesus told them that the temple was going to be destroyed, with not one stone left upon another (*v. 2 and see Josephus in Wars VII:I:1*). So they were naturally curious about how and when those things were going to take place.

The disciples' question involved three interrelated events: (1) the time of the temple's destruction; (2) the signs that would signal Jesus' Coming; and (3) the sign that would bring about the end of the age.

Compare parallel passages in Mark 13:4 and Luke 21:7. The disciples' questions were related to the destruction of the temple and the end of the Jewish economy and to nothing else. There is no basis for a 2000-year "gap theory."

Most Bible interpreters think that the disciples wanted to know about the end of the planet. But the disciples did not ask about the end of the "world" (Gk. *kosmos*). Rather, with the temple and city as their main focus, they asked about the end of the "age" (Gk. *aion*). In Strong's exhaustive concordance, it says of the word *aion*, "spec. (Jewish) a Messianic period (present or future)." See also Matthew 12:32; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30; Ephesians 1:21.

One writer has written, *"In these passages we have two worlds or ages in contrast: 'This world' (age) and the 'world (age) to come'.... The expression 'world or age to come' implies that 'this world or age' must end. Will the 'world or age to come' also have an end? If not, then the expression 'last days' must apply to the closing period of 'this world or age.' Thus, in the end of 'this world' (whatever time is meant) is when God's eschatological program will be completed or consummated."*

Another writer wrote, *"They were asking when time would run out for the temple, the city of Jerusalem and the Covenant promises that were related to the Mosaic system, of animal sacrifices, ceremonial washings and priesthood."*

And another writer wrote, *"Time was divided by the Jews into two great periods, the age of the law and the age of the Messiah. The conclusion of the one was the beginning of the other, the opening of that kingdom which the Jews believed the Messiah was to establish, which was to put an end to their suffering, and to render them the greatest people upon the earth. The apostles, full of this hope, said to our Lord, immediately before his ascension, 'Lord, wilt Thou, at this time, restore the kingdom to Israel?' [Acts 1:6]. Our Lord alluded to His coming to indicate His taking vengeance upon the Jews by destroying their city and sanctuary." This "end of the age" was the end of the Old Covenant.*

You can check another article I wrote about "age" in

<http://www.angelfire.com/ca/DeafPreterist/aion.html> We will examine more about "the end."

**Matthew 24:4-12** Jesus responded by giving His disciples not one, but seven signs of the end. Let us examine them and note how each one came to pass. The list begins with certain events that would occur merely as "the beginning of birth pangs" (v. 8).

### 1. False Christs:

(v. 4-5) Simon Magus the sorcerer, mentioned by Luke in Acts 8:9-11. There are some more: Acts 5:36-37; 13:6-10. We will look more into this in Matthew 24:22-26.

### 2. Wars:

(v. 6-7a) We can turn to non-Christian sources, such as the Roman historian **Tacitus**, to determine this. He states concerning those years, "there were three civil wars; there were more [than three wars] with foreign enemies; there were often wars that had both characteristics at once." I could give you much more from the historians but I won't at this time.

### 3. Natural disasters:

**Famines** - During the reign of Claudius Caesar, there was a great famine which Luke mentioned in Acts 11:27-29. The Scripture says the famine was all over the world (Gr. oikoumene - the whole inhabited world, the Roman Empire). See in **Josephus, Antiquities XX:II:5**.

**Earthquakes** - We know that earthquakes happen all the time, all over the world. However, according to historical accounts, earthquakes were far from being rare occurrences for that generation. One writer wrote, *"And as to earthquakes, many are mentioned by writers during a period just previous to 70 A.D. There were earthquakes in Crete, Smyrna, Miletus, Chinos, Samos, Laodicea, Hierapolis, Colossae, Campania, Rome, and Judea. It is interesting to note that the city of Pompeii was much damaged by an earthquake occurring on February 5, 63 A.D." Josephus also mentioned that there was a great earthquake in Judea (Antiquities XV:V:2).*

### 4. Persecution:

(v. 9-10) We have seen many times throughout the New Testament that Christians were persecuted. The unbelieving **Jews** were the main persecutors of Christians from the time of Christ's death until A.D. 70



(7:54-60; 13:45, 50; 14:2, 5, 19; 17:5, 13; 18:6, 12-18; 19:8-9; 21:27-32, 36; 22:22-23; 23:12-22; I Thess. 2:14-16), and the heathen powers of Rome, especially **Nero Caesar**, persecuted them for a season beyond that. Most of the Apostles were killed during that time before the destruction of Jerusalem. You might want to read "*The Neronian Persecution*" in *Philip Schaff's The History of the Christian Church, vol. 1, p. 376-390.*

### 5. False Prophets:

(v. 11) Again, there are many warnings about the false prophets throughout the New Testament epistles: 2 Corinthians 11:13; 2 Timothy 3:13; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 4:1.

### 6. Apostasy:

(v. 12) Most Christians are looking for a future "falling away," but there is no doubt that the first-century church suffered through the ordeal of many falling away and betraying the believers. During that time, many of those calling themselves Christians lost faith under the pressure of the tribulations. Many returned to their corrupted Jewish system and its man-made traditions; they ignored the warnings of Christ and perished in the wars, as in 2 Timothy 3:1-5. That passage is a good example of the fact that "the last days" was the period roughly A.D. 30 and A.D. 70.

### 7. Worldwide Evangelization:

(v. 13-14) When we see the phrase "the end" in those verses, we should ask ourselves, "The end of what?" Many Christians today are looking for a future "end" of all things or consummation of this planet. Is that a Biblical expectation? No, it is not. Jesus was answering questions about the destruction of the temple and the "end of the age," i.e., the end of the Jewish dispensation, the Old Covenant order. I Corinthians 10:11 firmly substantiates that view. Remember Jesus is the End of the Law in Romans 10:4. In I Peter 4:7, Peter wrote that the end of all things is at hand. If words mean anything, the prophetic End was "soon" to take place in the early first century. Many commentators and preachers believe that we must preach the gospel to every individual on the whole planet so that Jesus' "second coming" can happen. I believe it is good to be evangelistic and to send out missionaries to every country. However, we must remember that Jesus was speaking to His "generation." We must let Scripture interpret Scripture.

**Matthew 10:22-23:** Jesus said to the disciples, "And you will be hated by all on account of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved. But whenever they persecute you in this city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you shall not finish going through the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man comes." This passage restricts the time of the fulfillment of Matthew 24:13, 14 to the first century.

The preaching of the gospel to the world found its fulfillment in a number of ways. First, at the day of Pentecost there were people in Jerusalem from "every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5-11). Those people took the gospel with them as they left Jerusalem after the feast, and became witnesses to the world of their Lord and Savior. cf. Colossians 1:6, 23; Romans 1:8; 16:26; 1 Thessalonians 1:8; 2 Timothy 4:17. And the word translated "world" in many translations is the Greek word oikoumene, "The inhabited earth." The gospel truly was preached throughout the Roman empire before Jesus came in judgment upon the temple and city of Jerusalem. The same Greek word was used in Luke 2:1; 21:26; Acts 11:28; 19:27; 24:5; Romans 10:18; Revelation 3:10; 16:14.

**Matthew 24:15** We come now to the well-known passage concerning "the abomination of desolation." It is the most popular passage in the dispensational camp. Dispensationalists believe that "the abomination of desolation" is going to take place in our future because of the 2000-year gap which they place in Daniel's Seventy Weeks in Daniel 9:24-27 (cf. 11:31; 12:11). It is important to know if the Bible,

especially the New Testament, predicts that the temple will be rebuilt in our future? **It doesn't!** Jesus' body is the Temple (John 2:19, 21). Do you think God would want the Jews once again to build a temple and begin to offer sacrifices? This would imply that the atoning blood of Christ is not sufficient or that it is a failure. The Book of Hebrews was written to show without question that the entire Old Covenant system with its priests, sacrifices, ceremonies, and temple was being done away with in Christ (Hebrews 8:13; 9:8-10; 10:12-14; 12:22-28; 13:20). If Jesus comes back and reigns on earth, He can no longer be our High Priest at the right hand of God in the heavenly Sanctuary (See Hebrews 8:1-4). A careful reading of Scripture will show that the abomination of desolation mentioned by Jesus was an event that was to be fulfilled during the lifetime of His disciples. We can refer to Luke 21:20, 21.

**Matthew 24:16-20** These verses still focus on Jerusalem and Judea. Jesus commanded His disciples that when they saw these events, they were to flee to the mountains before the judgment came upon Israel. The followers of Christ were expecting the temple's destruction. See Luke 19:43,44; 21:23, 24; 23:27-31. Was Jerusalem ever surrounded by the armies prior to A.D. 70? Yes. Did the Christians flee the city? Yes. We can read the historical records which recorded the events. *See Josephus' Antiquities X:XI:7. Eusebius in his book, III, V says, "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. Here, those that believed in Christ removed from Jerusalem, as if holy men had entirely abandoned the royal city itself, and the whole land of Judea."* See *Philip Schaff's History of the Christian Church, vol. 1, p. 391-404.*

Notice that Jesus used the second person in the three gospels: "When you see" (Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14; Luke 21:20). If Jesus had a far future generation in mind, would He not have said, "When they see...?" The plain interpretation of Jesus' words is that He was speaking to His disciples about things which were going to come upon their own generation.

Notice also the description of the era of the time of the end: flat-roof houses, Sabbath observance, field work, and primitive travel. Those things were certainly not applying to a present period of time. Without doubt, the destruction of the city and the temple was fulfilled by the Roman invasion in A.D. 66-70.

**Matthew 24:21** Many Christians believe that the "great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall" is still in the future. Some say that though in the first century there were terrible events, there will be a much worse tribulation in our future. Again, speaking of his own generation, especially of the war-events between A.D. 66-70, the historian *Josephus* writes, *"It is, therefore, impossible to go distinctly over every instance of these men's iniquity. I shall, therefore, speak my mind here at once briefly, that neither did any other city ever suffer such miseries, nor did any age ever breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness than this was, from the beginning of the world"* (*Wars V:X:5, c.f. VI:IX:4*). This coincides very well with Jesus' statement in Matt. 24:21. Cf. Daniel 12:1.

We can agree, can we not, that no other crime was as monstrous as killing the "Lord of glory" (1 Corinthians 2:8, also Luke 21:20; Acts 3:12-26; 1 Thessalonians 2:15). We should consider that no other generation will ever experience a time of divine punishment as severe as that which fell upon the unbelieving Jews in Christ's generation, because no other crime could ever be as great as the one which they committed. Because they rejected and killed their own living God in the flesh, God's wrath was poured out upon them (Matthew 12:31, 32; 23:31-38; 27:24-26; Luke 11:50-54; 21:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16; 5:1-4, 9; 2 Thessalonians 1:4-10).

**Matthew 24:22-26** These verses give no evidence that Jesus' discourse jumped to a period of time in the distant future. "Those days" apply to the tribulation period which led up to the destruction of Jerusalem.

Jesus promised that those days were to be cut short for the sake of the elect. The elect were the Jewish Christians who escaped the city. If they had not, the Romans would have killed them all. God controls all things by His power.

We have seen the previous passages in Matthew 24:4,5, 9-12 about the false Christs and the false prophets. Jesus warned His disciples in advance. The Apostle John in his epistles warned that many antichrists had gone out and that it was "the last hour" (1 John 2:18-19; 4:3; 2 John 7). Do we have any historical evidence that Jews used "signs and wonders" to deceive the many? Plenty! ***See in Josephus, The Antiquities of the Jews: XX:VIII:6; Wars of the Jews: VI:V:2, 3.*** I am sure that God used Josephus to witness these events and record them for us to read.

**Matthew 24:27-28** Jesus was to come "as the lightning comes from the east," that is, quickly and without warning. In the Bible, lightning often means the presence of the Lord or His coming in judgment (Exodus 19:16; 20:18; Job 36:30, 31; Ezekiel 21:15, 28, 29; Zechariah 9:14). We know that God was not physically present during any of these Old Testament comings.

Before we go further, let's keep in mind that thus far, all of the signs listed in Matthew 24 have reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. While there are without question many Christians looking at world events and assuming that the rapture must be near, this view is impossible based on what we have learned so far. There is no place in this context which talks about a "rapture" such as is taught in the dispensational camp. We will look more at this when we get into verse 31.

**The Jewish nation is represented here as a "corpse" and the Roman armies as the "eagles"** who have gathered together to destroy the unbelieving Jewish nation. It is interesting that Jesus spoke in much the same way as the prophet Jeremiah spoke before the destruction of Jerusalem in his day (See Jeremiah 7:1-34; 19:7). As He did in Jeremiah's generation, God was about to judge those who rejected His covenant in Christ's generation.

Before we come to the next verse, we need to go to Luke 21:22-24 which speaks of events which fall between Matthew 24:28 and 29. Notice Luke 21:22 says, "These are days of vengeance, in order that all things which are written may be fulfilled." This is a very important passage because it plainly teaches that all things written in Scripture were fulfilled by A.D. 70. The seventy weeks (Dan. 9:24-27) were completed at that time. See Daniel 12:7 and Revelation 10:5-7.

**Luke 21:23** is fulfilled. The historian Josephus recorded many of the atrocities which were committed during those days, in *The Wars of the Jews: II:XIV:8, 9; II:XVIII:1-5; III:VII:36; III:XI:2-4; III:X:9; IV:VI:3; V:IX:4; V:XI:1-2; V:XII:3-4 and VI:IX:3-4.* Those passages will help you get some idea what it was like in that perverse generation.

Also, notice "great distress upon the land, and wrath to this people." Which land and people was Jesus talking about in this context? It was the land of Israel and the Jewish people.

**Lastly, in Luke 21:24,** "They will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles be fulfilled." The "time of Gentiles" clearly refers to the four kingdoms described in Daniel 2 and 7. Rome was clearly the final kingdom to oppress Israel. With the destruction of the earthly temple and city of Jerusalem, and the granting of the eternal Kingdom to the Church, the "times of the Gentiles" was completed.

**Matthew 24:29** It is important to notice that this verse begins with, "But immediately after the tribulation of those days." Whatever this verse means, it follows "immediately after" the tribulation described in verses 15-28. There is no time gap of 2,000 years or more.

*Now about the sun, moon and stars:* The question is, should we expect the sun literally to be darkened and the moon to stop reflecting the light from the sun? Will literal stars fall from heaven? The earth would be an ice-ball without the sun, and would be destroyed if literal stars that are larger than the sun fell upon it. Jesus was not describing the end of the physical world. We should check how the Old Testament uses and applies this language, rather than allow our imaginations to run away with us. We must let Scripture interpret Scripture. We find in the Old Testament again and again such apocalyptic imagery being used to describe the downfall of political authorities and spiritual darkness. Consider these passages with the judgment of God:

**Israel in 722 BC ----- Isaiah 5:30; Amos 8:9**

**Edom in 703 ----- Isaiah 34:4-5**

**Egypt in 572 B.C. ---- Ezekiel 32:7-11**

**Babylon in 539 B.C. - Isaiah 13:6-17**

*It must be stressed that none of those cosmic cataclysms literally took place!* The disciples were very familiar with the Old Testament's figurative language. Joel 2:28-32 was quoted by Peter in Acts 2:16-21 on the Day of Pentecost. The cosmic events of that passage were being fulfilled on the very day of Pentecost. (It is important to see at this point Peter's precise statement that "the Last Days" had arrived.

See in 2 Peter 3:2-13 and Hebrews 1:1-2. Therefore, Peter exhorted his people, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" (Acts 2:40).) The Day of the Lord came in A.D. 70 (See Revelation 6:12-17 and how it is parallel to Luke 23:27-30).

Concerning the shaking of "the powers of the heavens" in Matt. 24:29: In A.D. 70, God removed the things that could be shaken, and in their place gave His people a Kingdom which can never be moved (Hebrews 12:18-28). The moveable things were the physical, tangible, hand-made elements of the old covenant (the tabernacle, priesthood, sacrifices, etc.) (See Hebrews 9:8-11, 23-28). Those things were removed when the saints, the Israel of God, came to the heavenly Mt. Zion. All has come to pass that was ever typified by the Law or prophesied by the prophets. In Christ is the fullness; there will never be any covenant better than Christ among us today.

**Matthew 24:30** This is a well-known verse by which many are convinced that the coming of Christ is still in the future. They believe that everyone in the world will see Christ's second coming up in the sky with all of His angels or with the saints for the judgment.

First, this passage says that it was the "sign" of the Son of Man. Second, though "all the tribes of the earth" is most often taught as referring to every group on the planet, it is not, because this context describes the events in Judea. In this context, it should be the "land" (of Israel) instead of "earth." (The Greek word *ge* here can mean either "earth" or "land.") Let's look at a word-for-word translation from a Greek and English interlinear: "And then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, and then will bewail all the tribes of the land and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and glory much." See these passages: Psalm 97:2; 104:3; Jeremiah 10:13; 51:16; Ezekiel 30:3; Joel 2:1-11; Nahum 1:3; Isaiah 19:1. The imagery of Christ riding on swift clouds describes His Divinity and sovereignty over the nations as their Judge.

Earlier in Matthew, Jesus told His disciples that some of them would live long enough to "see the Son of



Man coming in His kingdom" (Matthew 16:27-28; Mark 8:39-9:1; Luke 9:26-27). Many have twisted this verse. Jesus also told His accusers in Matthew 26:64, "Henceforth you shall see the Son of Man SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, AND COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN." If we deny that Christ came in His Kingdom in His generation, then we are affirming that Jesus was in error.

But Jesus came as He said He would and established the eternal kingdom after the destruction of the earthly Jerusalem. His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36); in other words, His kingdom is not physical, material or visual but is spiritual, a heavenly realm (Lk. 17:20,21; II Cor. 4:18). My understanding is that the beginning of this kingdom was at Pentecost (Acts 2:33-36), in fulfillment of Mark 1:14-15; but the coming of Christ in that kingdom with power, glory and victory over the enemy was not until the very end of the Jewish age in 70. This was when the saints possessed the kingdom. See these passages about the saints receiving the kingdom: Matthew 25:34; Luke 19:12-27, 41-44; 21:28-32; Acts 3:19-21; Hebrews 12:28; 2 Peter 1:11; Revelation 11:15-18.

His kingdom is without end (Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 1:33; Hebrews 1:8). Premillennialists believe there will be a 1,000-year kingdom of Christ on earth; a problem with that idea however is that 1,000 years is not eternity. Christ's kingdom is spiritual and is perpetually victorious. Remember, Jesus said that He was going to build His church and the gates of Hades would not overpower it (Matthew 16:18-19). His church is God blessed throughout all generations forever and ever (Ephesians 3:21).

**Matthew 24:31** Most interpreters would say that this is a "rapture" passage, specifically, the post-tribulation rapture. I do believe that this verse is related to 1 Cor. 15:51-52 and 1 Thess. 4:16-17. .

A look into the book of Revelation can help us to understand this better, keeping in mind that its symbols speak of the time which led up to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. In Revelation 11:15-19, after the destruction of Jerusalem, the seventh and last trumpet sounded; and as we know, the "rapture" was to take place at the "last trumpet." To me, this indicates that the "rapture/gathering" took place in A.D. 70.

I found some very interesting information recorded by two historians, *Josephus and Tacitus* during that event. In Josephus' *Wars of the Jews VI:V:3*, *"a certain prodigious and incredible phenomenon appeared; I suppose the account of it would be seem to be a fable, were it not related by those that saw it, and were not the events that followed it of so considerable a nature as to deserve such signals; for, before sun-setting, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armor were seen running about among the clouds and surrounding the cities...."* This event is also reported by the Roman historian Tacitus, *"In the sky appeared a vision of armies in conflict, of glittering armor. A sudden lightning flashing from the clouds lit up the Temple. The doors of the holy place abruptly opened, a superhuman voice was heard to declare that the gods were leaving it, and the same instant came the rushing tumult of their departure"* (*Tacitus, The Histories*, p. 279). You decide for yourself what you think about this.

**Matthew 24:32-33** Some interpreters have taken these verses to be speaking of Israel's becoming a nation again. But there is a problem when you look at the parallel passage in Luke 21:29 which shows that Jesus referred not only to the fig tree but to "all the trees." Jesus' parable of this fig tree was used as an analogy. He was speaking to His disciples who were going to see all these signs, so that they would then know that the coming of the Son of Man was near, "right at the door."

Jesus made it clear to the Jewish leaders of His day that the kingdom of God was going to be taken away from them and was to be "given to a nation producing the fruit of it" (Matthew 21:43, c.f. 1 Peter 2:7-10). In whose lifetime was this going to happen? Matthew 21:45 answers that question. The chief priests and the Pharisees experienced the Kingdom-transfer, and the "curse" upon the land of Israel which was

spoken of in the last two verses of the last book of the Old Testament (Malachi 4:4-5). You can check the article I wrote: "Who Is Elijah the Prophet?" in <http://www.angelfire.com/ca/DeafPreterist/elijah.html>.

**Matthew 24:34** Jesus made it clear that all the events outlined in the preceding verses were going to be fulfilled before the passing away of the early first-century generation. This is the key to Matthew 24, and then to all of the Bible's prophecies.

*One person wrote, "So, Jesus' predictions were fulfilled. He did not fail, nor do we need to engage in theological gymnastics to try to explain-away the seeming delay or postponement of His return. It happened right on schedule. Many knew the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. was important in God's scheme of redemption, but never understood its full significance. It has to do with the consummation of the plan of redemption. The final events of the redemptive drama came to pass in the first century within the apostles' generation (before A.D. 70). We live in the Garden of Eden now (if we are in Christ), just as sure as we can know we have 'eternal life.' These are present and abiding benefits, not pie-in-the-sky bye-and-bye. Christ has conquered all His enemies and has given us the Kingdom."*

**Matthew 24:35-25:46** Most interpreters have taken these verses to be speaking of the end of this world and a future final judgment of the human race. We must keep in mind that there is nothing in the context that indicates a break or gap of 2,000 years or more.

**"Heaven and earth"** are symbols of Israel and the Old Covenant (See Isa. 1:2-4; 24:1-5; 34:1-8). In Matt. 5:17-18, Jesus told His own people that His purpose in coming was not to destroy or overthrow the old Law by complete change. He said, "I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill..." He was the Messiah that was prophesied and promised in the Scriptures of the Old Testament (which contained and defined the Law of Moses), and Who came to fulfill the prophets, that is, the things that they prophesied. But if the prophecies have not been fulfilled, and if heaven and earth have not consequently passed away, then according to the plain teaching of Jesus in Matthew 5:18, every jot and tittle of the Old Testament is still in effect! However, we know that the old Law was, in fact, fulfilled and did pass away (Romans 10:4; Ephesians 2:14-16; Hebrews 8:13).

The "new heaven and earth" in Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21:1-3 is the church - believers with God dwelling among them. Do these verses relate to the present or to a time still to come? The two verses in Isaiah, carefully studied in context, show that the prophet was looking to the end of the Jewish age, with a vision of the Messianic blessings that were to be granted to spiritual Israel. We can see that the new Jerusalem of Isaiah 65:18 corresponds to the new Jerusalem of Galatians 4:26 and to that of Hebrews 12:22.

**2 Peter 3:10-12** Some of you may say, "But, what about in 2 Peter 3:10-12?" Verse 10 states that "the day of the Lord will come as a thief." This simile was used by Jesus in Matthew 24:43-51 where He was still speaking of His Own generation. And the Apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:2-6 unequivocally referred the quote to the destruction of Jerusalem. (See Revelation 3:3 and 16:15.)

Let's take a look at what the elements were that were going to melt away or be burned up. Does this word refer to the scientific idea of the elements of matter, all the "atoms" of the universe? The Greek word for elements used here is *stoicheion*, and it appears in the New Testament only seven times. The literal meaning of the word is "elements, rudiments, row or rank." We can look into the New Testament and compare these passages: Galatians 4:3, 9; Colossians 2:8, 20; Hebrews 4:17. These all have the same meaning regarding "elements." It was the old Law of Moses that Christians had left behind when they became new creatures in Christ. This means Christ ended its religious authority by fulfilling it at the

cross, and God destroyed the earthly manifestations of it at His fiery Coming in A.D. 70.

In the last part of verse 10 of 2 Peter 3, "The earth and its works will be burned up." The Jewish nation with its culture, religion, and political system was "burned up" in the war with Rome in A.D. 70. The Day of the Lord had come. The Bible does not speak of the physical destruction of this planet here or anywhere in the Scriptures. In fact, it speaks of the earth's permanence (Genesis 8:21; Psalm 104:5; Ecclesiastes 1:4). Could God reverse His promise? He cannot lie. I wrote an article "**Part Four - Stoicheia (Elements)" in Elements, By Don Hochner.**

**Revelation Finally**, I would like to mention briefly a few things about the book of Revelation:

We have strong evidence that the book was written by John before A.D. 70. Kenneth Gentry presented some great information in his book, *Before Jerusalem Fell*. In the Book of Revelation, John was writing to his contemporary Christian brothers about the things that were about to come to pass. The time was at hand (1:1, 3; 22:6, 7, 10, 12 & 20).

Notice that Jesus was speaking to the seven churches in Asia Minor and they were expecting Him to come soon (chapter 2 and 3). If Jesus did not come, what happened to His promise to those 1st-century churches? Those churches are not still in existence today. Remember the Apostle John in John 21:21-23? Is he still alive today or did Jesus not keep His promise? Jesus came in A.D. 70.

The Greek word "mello" is very important in this study, and it does not always appear in the English translations. I was surprised to find out about this. It means "about to be, almost, about to come." The word appears in Acts 17:30-31; 2 Timothy 4:1, Matthew 16:27-28; 24:6; Luke 21:7, 36; Acts 23:3; 24:15; Romans 8:18-20; Hebrews 1:14; 10:27; 1 Peter 5:1; and in Revelation 1:9; 2:10; 3:10. Please read those verses with any literal translation. You can also check the article I wrote "about to" in <http://www.angelfire.com/ca/DeafPreterist/mello.html>.

Here is a brief comparison of some of the relevant passages which you may find helpful:

- \* Revelation 6:15-17 -- Luke 23:27-30 -- "Fall on us..."
- \* Revelation 11:8; 14:8; 16:6, 19; 17:5-6, 18; 18:2, 10, 16, 18-21, 24 - Great city; Babylon the harlot - Jerusalem (Josephus: Wars VII:VIII:7)
- \* Revelation 13:1-10, 18; 17:8-17 - Beast = Nero and the Roman Empire
- \* Revelation 19:1-9 - Matthew 22:1-14; 25:1-13 - The Wedding Feast
- \* Revelation 20 - Matthew 13:37-43, 47-50; 25:14-46 - The Judgment
- \* Revelation 21-22 - 2 Peter 3:13 - New Heaven and New Earth

In the last chapter of Daniel, Daniel received a vision of the same events that John saw in his visions. For Daniel, the events he saw in prophetic symbols were to be fulfilled in a distant future (Dan. 12:4,9,13). If those same events that the Apostle John saw were to remain unfulfilled for centuries in even his future, the angel would have indicated to John the same thing that was indicated to Daniel. But that did not happen! In fact, just the opposite happened: **Compare Revelation 22:10 and Daniel 12:9**. The angel told the Apostle John, "***Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.***" But to Daniel He said, "***these words are concealed and sealed up until the end time.***" The fulfillment was far away for Daniel but near "at hand" for John. What must this imply? Remember God's warning in Revelation 22:18-19!

Where Are We Now? You may say, "If all prophecy was fulfilled in the past, how does that apply to us?"

We must apply to our life all of God's commands and precepts. As we face trials, persecutions, or

whatever circumstances surround us, we can look through the Old and New Testaments as examples of godliness. For instance, this was why God gave us Hebrews 11. Also we can rejoice always whether we live or die, we will always be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:16-24). We do not need to bemoan or excuse ourselves to have Jesus come quickly and get rid of this world. That "escapist" doctrine is not God's purpose (John 17:15-17). His grace is sufficient for us (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). And we have the privilege of spreading the Good News that Jesus Christ is our King and Savior. If we believe in Him, we have everlasting life; but if not, we go to eternal condemnation.

I find it frightening that many Christians actually think that if they do not make disciples as much as they should, and let the world get worse and worse, it may speed up Christ's second coming. Some of these "Christians" are indifferent about their Christian life. I think our society has been spiritually deteriorating because many such Christians have not been fruitful; they have not made a commitment to Christ's Kingdom to show the Light to the world.

Some Christians have been preoccupied over "last days madness" with time charts, wild speculations, and counting down to zoom up to heaven. They may not have been studying the Word of God as carefully as they should have. Many cults also have come up with different kinds of futurologies. I think that some who claim they are Christians have a faith that might be superficial or artificial, expecting the "rapture" to take place in their lifetime. That way, in case they are left behind, they know that they will have a second chance afterward and can believe in Jesus for real. Who knows? If many realized there is no second coming in the future as the preterist doctrine maintains, maybe their faith would be proven to be false and they might be caused to examine themselves (2 Corinthians 13:5 and 2 Peter 1:10). I have seen one of my friends who claimed himself a Christian (who knows?) and he told me that he does not mind if he misses the rapture because he would like to see the Great Tribulation.

I know that perhaps some of you are new to the Preterist view and find it shocking. You may disagree with this view and hold to your traditional view. All I ask is that we all be open-minded and let the Scriptures say what they say. Though preterism may not be popular, it is not new. I believe, if God is willing, it will be growing again as it grew in the early Church.

"Then the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him." (Daniel 7:27)

*Jesus says, "If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how shall you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" (John 3:12) Soli Deo Gloria!*