



## **~A full-grown baby--at Pentecost or 70AD?~**

Written by Don Preston

A key point of controversy surrounding the Preterist view of eschatology is the contention that the church/kingdom was not fully established on Pentecost but was in a state of incompleteness until the Old World was taken out of the way in A.D.70. Every anti-Preterist which this writer has read or heard has made a major issue over this point. It would seem that this issue is one which our opponents believe is dangerous, and evidently they believe it easy to refute. As we shall seek to demonstrate, however, it is not the Preterist that has a problem with this issue, it is the one who holds to the traditional concept of eschatology; and especially in regard to the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit.

### **Miracles and Maturity**

As a young man I attended several debates between my brethren in the churches of Christ and those of the "Pentecostal" persuasion. In every one of those debates, and in every written account of debates on miracles, the brother in Christ was sure to note that miracles were part and parcel of the INFANCY STATE OF THE CHURCH. Scriptures such as I Corinthians 13 and Ephesians 4 were carefully "exegeted," showing that as long as there were miracles the church was a "child," "immature," and "dependent."

Those same scriptures were offered as proof that when all revelation was completed; and it was powerfully and carefully shown that the purpose of miracles was to reveal and confirm the word; then and only then would miracles cease. When all revelation was given and confirmed the church would have arrived at maturity. Standing complete the church would then no longer have a need for miracles.

These arguments are logical and true. They are based squarely on the Bible. In I Corinthians 13, Paul, in no uncertain terms spoke of the age of miracles as a time of "partial" vs. the complete or "perfect"; the "childish," as opposed to the coming "manhood" or maturity; the "darkly" vs the "clearly" stage of knowledge. The same is true of Ephesians 4.

There was no problem at all for these polemicists to insist that the church went through a transitional state in which she was incomplete in her constitution and on her way to maturity. This was the case when they were debating the Charismatics. But now, when those of us who were raised on that teaching have begun to apply the very things they were saying in their debates and writings, we are accused of being false teachers!

Preterists, at least this one, I cannot speak for them all, believe the church was established in infancy on Pentecost. She was incomplete in organization (there were no elders for some time), she was incomplete in composition (there were no Gentiles converted on Pentecost were there?); and she was incomplete in her constitution (revelation was not completed until later). Is it heretical to teach this? It seems so, at least to some.

The adversaries of realized eschatology are quite adamant in insisting that the church/kingdom was established in full power, full glory, full maturity on Pentecost. In both tapes and written articles non-

Preterists challenge Preterists with statements such as "Name one thing that the church did not have in completeness, power and glory on Pentecost that it did have later."; or "If the church was not established in complete power, and glory on Pentecost it was not the kingdom of God!"

What follows will demonstrate the fallacy of teaching the church was established in full power, glory, completeness, and maturity on Pentecost.

### **Some Powerful Implications**

If it is the case that miracles were to equip the church to do the work of the ministry until the church came to maturity, Ephesians 4:8-16, and; if it is the case that the church was established in full completeness and maturity on Pentecost; then it must be true that miracles were to equip the church to do the work of the ministry only until Pentecost. This automatically implies that the church was established and in existence sometime prior to Pentecost!

If it is the case that all revelation and confirmation of the word had to happen before the church would come to maturity, Ephesians 4:8-13; and if it is the case that the church was established in full completeness and maturity on Pentecost; then it must be the case that all the word had been revealed and confirmed prior to Pentecost. This automatically implies that the entirety of what we call the New Testament, since written after Pentecost, is not divinely revealed and confirmed! Now whose doctrine has dangerous implications?!?

If it is the case that the church was established in full glory and completeness on Pentecost, and; if it is the case that the church was established on Pentecost prior to the conversion of the Gentiles; then it must be the case that the conversion of the Gentiles was not essential to the establishment of the church in full glory and completeness. It is the case the church was established on Pentecost prior to the conversion of Gentiles. Therefore, per the anti-Preterist posit the conversion of the Gentiles was not essential to the completeness of the church! But any one who knows the Old Covenant scriptures knows that the calling of the Gentiles was part and parcel of the establishment of the kingdom, Isaiah 2, 11, 65, Amos 9:11, etc..

If it is the case that the church was established in full power and completeness on Pentecost, and; if it is the case the church was established without elders, then it must be true that the church was established in full power and completeness without elders. What we have then is a full-grown church that was not even fully organized!

If it is the case that the purpose of miracles was to reveal and confirm the word of God until all of that word had been revealed and confirmed, I Corinthians 13, Ephesians 4, and; if it is the case that when all God's word had been revealed and confirmed by miracles the church would be at a state of maturity, Ephesians 4; then it must be true that the presence of miracles demonstrated the immaturity of the church. There were miracles after Pentecost; therefore the church was still in a state of immaturity after Pentecost. But if miracles were for the purpose of bringing the church to maturity (by revealing and confirming the word) and would cease when maturity arrived; and if it is the case full completion of the church was established on Pentecost then there should have been no miracles after Pentecost. Since there obviously were miracles after Pentecost this proves that either **1).** miracles were not solely for the purpose of revealing and confirming the work, (does this not open the door to the Charismatic contention of miracles for edification, personal growth, faith; and thus a continuing need today for them?) **2).** the contention that the church was established in full completeness and power on Pentecost is false. Since it is the case that miracles were for the purpose of revealing and confirming the work, Mark 16:17-20, Acts 14:3, I Corinthians 13, Ephesians 4; it must be true that the church was not established in full completeness on

## Pentecost.

Brethren, these are but a few of the implications of insisting that the church was established in fullness, complete power, and maturity on Pentecost. The truth has been presented in years past as we have noted above. Why is it that we would abandon that truth? Surely, integrity demands that we not make arguments just to win debates! We do not change our arguments to fit the occasion do we? Is truth not unchanging?

If it is true, when we debate Charismatics, that the church was established in infancy on Pentecost and grew to maturity and completion with the aid of miraculous revelation and confirmation of the word, then it is true when eschatology is discussed as well!

Summary: The posit that the church was established in full completion on Pentecost implies several things which are false. It implies that the purpose of miracles was not to reveal and confirm the word; it implies all revelation was complete before Pentecost; it implies all books written after Pentecost are uninspired, (that is the entirety of the New Testament!); it implies Gentiles were not necessary to the composition of the kingdom; it implies the eldership is not a vital part of the organization of the church.

We are told, often in strident terms, that Preterism is dangerous and heretical. But is there not something wrong with a doctrine that says the church was indeed born on Pentecost, but it was born a full grown baby? Perhaps it is time for those who so fervently oppose realized eschatology to take a fresh look at what their own doctrines imply. Perhaps it is time for some calmer consideration, honorable dialogue, and humble submission to the Word on the part of all.