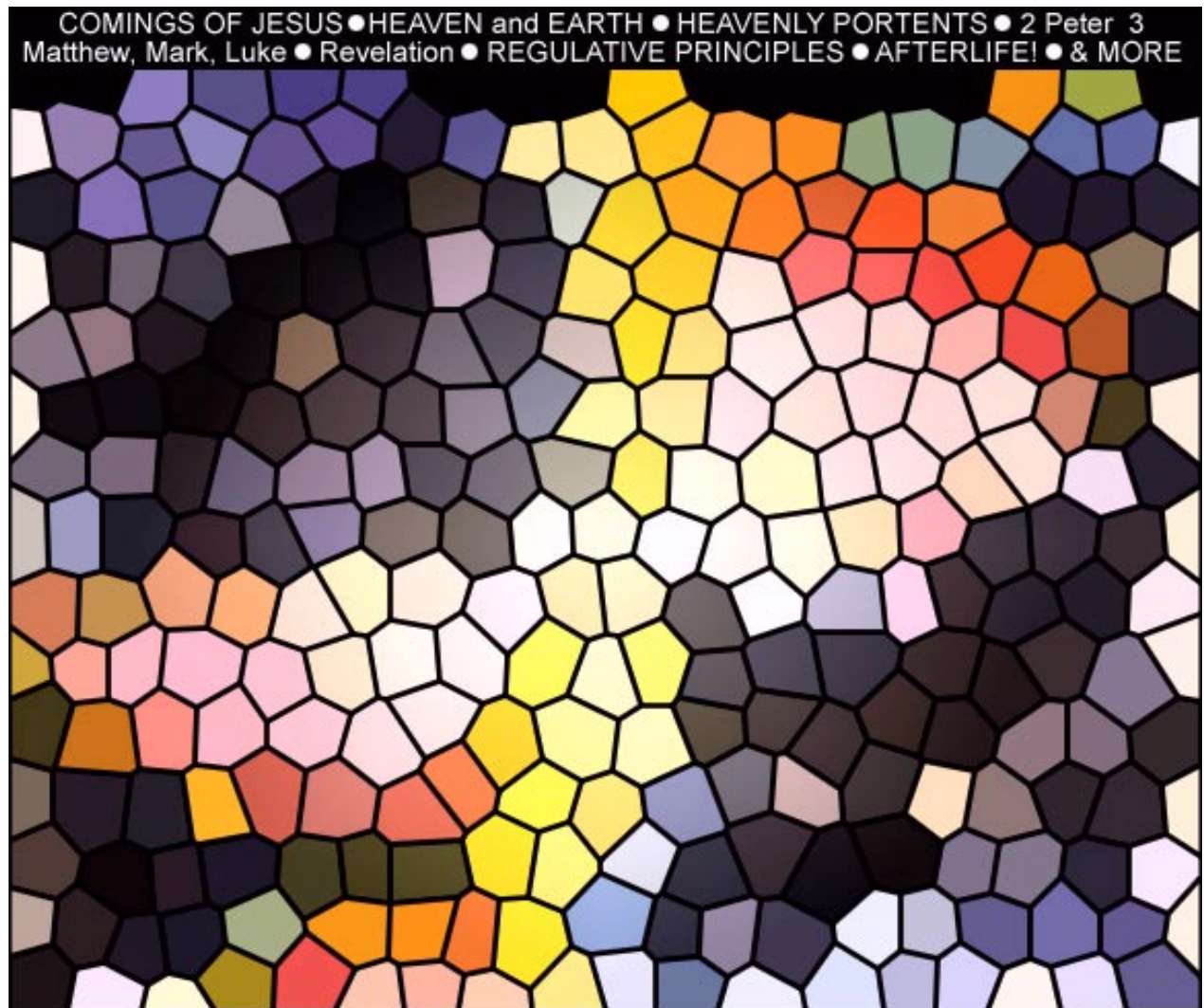


DAYS OF FUTURE PASSED YOU MISSED IT

BY

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just a MATH PROFESSOR



Days of Future Passed: You Missed It

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For the gentle reader:

In the New Testament and related writings, I quote exclusively from my own translation from Greek. If you don't like my translation, locate the nearest Greek New Testament and reconstruct the text for yourself. I urge you to examine everything carefully *for yourself*. In doing so, become a successful Christian knight – recognizing that the End about which the NT heralds prophesied has already come. Otherwise, you might wind up as “knights who fight Satan, never reaching the End.” We wouldn't want that.

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Dedication:

I formally dedicate this work to **Galileo Galilei** (1564-1642),
the great Italian scientist and philosopher,
about whose agreement with the theory of Copernicus that the Sun is at the center of the Solar System
the inquisitors of Catholic Church unanimously declared that
“this proposition is foolish and absurd in philosophy, and formally heretical since it explicitly contradicts
many places the sense of Holy Scripture, according to the literal meaning of the words and according to
the common interpretation and understanding of the Holy Fathers and the doctors of theology.”
(Consultant's Report, 24 February 1616)

Preface

This little project began as what was *supposed to be* a brief summary of Ken Gentry's *Have We Missed the Second Coming?* (Victorious Hope Publishing, 2016) and a rebuttal of a few of the issues that he takes with Full Preterism. It quickly became much more than that.

Suddenly this was a history of Preterism, a history of the American Restoration Movement, a proper description of *Sola Scriptura*, and a commentary on 2 Peter 3, the Synoptic Gospels, 1 Corinthians 15, and Revelation.

In his writings, Gentry has tried to make Full Preterism into a recent development in eschatological philosophy that compels its adherents to believe every single thing with which one might possibly disagree. The vast majority of the opinions with which he disagrees are independent of Full Preterism, and the larger issue quickly develops: a need for creedalists to realize that whenever an uninspired human being or group states something that they believe, it is simply an opinion. Honest disagreements over such issues are *matters of opinion*. In the end, the whole disagreement is about that one issue: about whether there is an organization that has a monopoly on Biblical interpretation, or whether the individual has a right and responsibility to contradict the groups whenever the Bible disagrees with their teachings.

Typos and Other Organizational Matters Having Nothing to Do With Preterism

Let us group these minor corrections (objections?) to Gentry's work together because they are not important enough to interrupt a discussion of the main body of the book.

Page 15, ¶ 5, line 1

The correct spelling of the Latin word for "past" is *praeteritus* (Latin, *PRÆTERITVS*), which comes from the verb *praetereo*. The source of the word *Preterist* is actually not *praeteritus* but *praeter*, which has several meanings. When addressing time it usually means something akin to "before" or "past."

Page 17, footnote

The first edition of Greene's quote in English is from 1591. That Greene was translating directly from Latin rather than merely dropping the verb is evident from his 1584 work, *Gvvydonius, or the Carde of Fancie*, in which we read (on the page numbered 5):

"...I giue thee this Ring of gold, wherein is written this sentence, *Praemonitus, Praemunitu* •. A Posie pretie for the wordes, and pithie for the matter, shorte to bée rehearsed, and long to bée related, inferring this sence, that he which is fore-warned by friendlye counsaile of imminent daungers, is fore-armed against all future mishappe and calamitie, so that hée maye by fore-warning preuent perills if it be possible, or if by sinister fortune he cannot eschew them, yet hée maye beare the Crosse with more patience and lesse grieve."

Page 62 – There is an "e" in Walter Bauer's last name, but it is missing.

Organizationally, *Have We Missed the Second Coming*, by Kenneth Gentry, is somewhat messy or sloppy – making this book difficult as well. For example, Gentry includes generously a list of abbreviations at the beginning of the book. Afterward he begins citing works by Full Preterists (such as Ed Stevens). However, one does not find any of those abbreviations in the list at the beginning of the book; instead, you will eventually locate them on **page 90** of the book – when you have nearly finished reading.

Occasionally also we find him revisiting the same topics. For example, if you want to find out what he says about the End of the World (or "Consummation"), you will have to look in three different places. What he says in each place is not substantially different, but in order to obtain all of the details you will have to do some searching. In addition to chapter 6 (which he mentions as having been included in another book previously), it becomes apparent that he has assembled bits and pieces of previously-written articles (see p. 14 ¶ 1) – so that his book does not flow well. In this response, (to the greatest extent that makes sense) we will try to group similarly-themed items together. This will not always be possible. For example, Gentry cites 1 Corinthians 15 in reference to the afterlife, but the passage also relates to the Second Coming. Thematically the responses ought to remain separate.

An Introduction

The book purports to address the philosophical differences that Gentry, a “partial” preterist, has with Full Preterism. He claims to provide “a brief introduction, summary, and critique of the system.” This is something that he truly does not do. Nowhere in the book does he lay out in detail the support for the Full Preterist viewpoint; where that support appears there are only short patches. What he does include causes me to suspect that he does not understand the viewpoint that he is critiquing. For example, he describes a single verse in Luke as though it were crucial to the Full Preterist viewpoint – when in fact it is barely relevant to the discussion. [If that verse about “all” prophecies being fulfilled were absent, it would not cause us to place anything in the future.] He frequently gets bogged down in the “weeds” of what he believes to be philosophical results of believing Full Preterism; in fact, those items are independent of Full Preterist eschatology. There are Full Preterists who do not believe such things, and there are non-Preterists who do. In a few cases those beliefs are actually found in greater proportions among Futurists!

The author opines that anyone who believes that every Biblical prophecy was “fulfilled before the end of the first century” ascribes to “*Hyper-preterism*” (Page 17, ¶ 1). In stating his opinion in this manner, he has thus far *assumed* that the view is untrue and has chosen to assign a negative label to the viewpoint that agrees with his own. He refers to “the dangers” of Full Preterism (p. 16), introducing Full Preterism with the claim that it has to do with “excess, exaggeration.” Calling his opponents’ viewpoint a “recent innovation” and his own view “orthodox” is not simply an error; it is an element of information control known as “loading the language.” Dr. Robert Jay Lifton describes the effort to load language this way:

“The most far-reaching and complex of human problems are compressed into brief, highly-reductive, definitive-sounding phrases, easily memorized and easily expressed. These become the start and finish of any ideological analysis.”¹

If he is successful in employing it, loaded language, consisting ultimately of “God terms” and “devil terms,” allows an ideologue to dismiss his opponent without addressing the issue. By labeling his own view “orthodox” (= “correct”) and an opposing viewpoint as “dangerous” and “excess[ive],” he is enticing the reader to prejudge his opposition the same way that he has. Instead of examining all things to determine what might be good, loaded language is designed to create prejudice against alternative viewpoints. As he continues, there is further evidence of this tactic.

Next (Page 17, ¶ 3), the author attempts to bias the reader against full preterists by grouping them with the Jehovah’s Witnesses and Latter-Day Saints, whom he believes the reader will think to be un-Christian. Like the members of these outside groups, he claims that Full Preterists also point to Biblical passages that “*seem* to affirm their position.” In a broader sense, every Christian group believes that the Bible supports their teachings, but Gentry means to imply that Full Preterism is simply wrong. One ought to point out at this time that his viewpoint on the issue disagrees with that of Futurists and Historicists, but he does not create such a negative association for those other two groups; neither does he simply identify the processes of full preterism as being similar to those of Historicists. He does not appear to acknowledge the existence of the Idealist perspective of Revelation. His focus is on condemning a viewpoint that might seem right to people who currently agree with his view. If Full Preterism is right, it will attract people away from his view; therefore, that alternative viewpoint is dangerous.

¹ *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*, Robert Jay Lifton (1961), ch. 22. Page 429 in the 1989 edition.

Gentry mentions the end of the world next (Page 18, ¶ 2, lines 3-4). In order to assemble common threads together (as Matthew does), see my notes on “the Consummation” – below.

Were there Many Comings of Jesus, as Gentry suggests?

He uses this term in order to avoid referencing the παρουσία by its traditional name, the Second Coming. There have been “many” comings, so this one really isn’t “second,” he says. The use of the expression is connected with an interpretation that Hebrews 9 is referring to the same event found in Matthew 24: “[The Anointed One] will come into view (without errors) **a second time** for salvation by those who are expecting him.” Since Revelation uses the expression “I am coming quickly” more than once, this adds to the support for the use of the expression.

As we will see shortly, if and only if we label all sorts of metaphorical things as “comings of the Messiah,” we could stretch what we read to indicate multiple arrivals of Jesus. However, when the author of Hebrews wrote that the Messiah was coming “a second time,” that author meant only one event – excluding any of the additional metaphors to which Gentry refers. It is an obfuscatory tactic, then, to muddy the philosophical waters by looking at many possible “comings of Jesus.” The only “coming” that is a subject of eschatological debate between Partial and Full Preterists is the one that Gentry believes signals the end of the world, and which Full Preterists believe was the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in AD 70. The disagreement concerns whether the passages that Futurists interpret to signal the end of the world really belong in the same context as the passages that all Preterists acknowledge to be connected with the destruction of the Temple. To the Full Preterist, it would not matter whether one believed that there had been 972 “comings of Jesus” – as long as the ones that were subjects of **prophecy** all took place in the First Century.

Page 19, ¶ 6, last two lines – continuing to page 20

Gentry cites **John 14:16ff.** as referring to what he labels as “the Spirit’s indwelling of the born-again believer which will begin at Pentecost.”

The concept of an “indwelling” spirit is important to Gentry here, because denominationalists use it as a basis for claiming that people who disagree with them either do not have or do not listen to the holy Spirit. The so-called indwelling of the Spirit, and whether or not John 14 is talking about it, have been the subject of controversy outside of eschatological circles for many years. On one end of the argument we have this:

John 14:16 belongs with the verses that precede it.

The passage is applicable to all Christians.

Therefore, as one author writes:

Every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ has experienced baptism in the Holy Spirit. That is why Paul could state, “For **we were all** baptized by one Spirit into one body... **we were all** given the one Spirit to drink.” As we read in Acts chapter 2, baptism in the Holy Spirit began on the day of Pentecost. ... [Beginning with Acts 10,] every believer received the baptism in the Holy Spirit the moment they believed. (“Baptism in the Holy Spirit,” ed. Greg Outlaw, AllAboutGod.com, 2015)

That is to say, Christendom today is to be characterized by the same miraculous signs that were present in the New Testament: languages; prophecy; healing; raising the dead. Also, the Holy Spirit guides the individual to the truth. On the other end of the same argument, we have:

John 14:16 belongs with the verses that precede it.

Jesus was not telling every Christian but the Twelve that he would “not leave them orphans.” As for the gift of holy breath, John tells the story of Jesus granting the miraculous guidance to the Twelve (Jn 20). Although there are general principles (e.g., Love) everywhere in the gospels, the promise of special guidance in Jn 16 does not extend beyond the Twelve. The passage was applicable only to Jesus’ listeners and was talking about the miraculous reminder that the apostles would have of the things that Jesus had said to them while he was with them. It does not apply to anyone except for those people.

Another alternative viewpoint is this: the passages that refer to the Spirit living within someone are representative and metaphorical. There is no “literal indwelling” of the Spirit. God guides people through the Bible.

Each of these viewpoints about John 14 is independent of eschatology, but Gentry requires a specific one of them. [Hmm...maybe he is the one with a whole *theology* centered around his eschatology – something of which he accuses Full Preterists of having.] Gentry (p. 20) insists on the concept of literal “comings” of Jesus in order to demonstrate that there are several such “comings,” saying that “He comes to us spiritually in the person of the Holy Spirit.” It is important to his priority to make this into a “coming of Christ.” That way, Gentry can depict Jesus as having spoken about “coming back” to judge Priestly Judaism (AD 70) and about “coming back” at the mythical End of Time. See? Multiple arrivals.

The “coming in fellowship” (as he puts it) in **Rv 3:20** is certainly intended as a metaphor. In the letter to Laodikeia, Jesus had these things to say to those people (in part): “Look, I am standing at the door, and I am knocking. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will enter to him and I will dine with him, and he with me.” Was Jesus literally standing at their doorways? No. Was he literally knocking on their doors? No. Did he mean that he wanted to eat dinner literally with them? No. This is a symbol for Jesus telling them that he was waiting to welcome the “unpalatable” Laodikeians back if they only “changed their minds.” This was all a metaphor.

In **Matthew 18:20**, Gentry claims that the word, come, is “necessarily implied”. It isn’t, but in order to make his case for oodles of comings of Christ, he needs this to be an actual “coming,” and he needs for it to apply to everyone. If this isn’t a literal “coming,” then he has none. There is no way he can stake out a claim that the Second Coming is supposed to be physical – or anything but a metaphor. A “literal arrival” is not what Mt 18:20 promises, however. Instead, what Jesus was saying at that point in the conversation was specific to the apostles.

“Indeed I am telling **you**, as many things as **you** should bind on the earth will be bound things in heaven, and as many things as **you** should let go on the earth will be loosed things in heaven.

"Again indeed, I am telling **you** that if two **from among you** should agree together on the earth, about any matter they should ask about, it will be done for them by my Father who is in the heavens.

For when there are two or three who are gathered for my name, I am there in their midst."

What Jesus tried to convey was that his envoys (apostles), who would be guided miraculously, would be able to speak on his behalf. Therefore, it would be just like he was there agreeing with them and approving of what they said. This was not for everyone, and it most certainly was not an actual “coming of Jesus.” It relates instead to the citation from the Hebrew Bible that he has just mentioned to his

students: “at the mouth of two or three witnesses every declaration would stand.”² Jesus trusts them to speak on his behalf because whatever they say will be the truth.

The “coming at **death**” (p. 21) is actually the reverse. It is the good person who goes to be where Jesus is, and not the other way around.

Although Gentry claims otherwise (Page 21, ¶ 4), the mortal one (“son of man”) in **Daniel 7** is representative of Israel, not of the Anointed One. As we see in other passages, “coming in clouds” is a **metaphor** for judgment. Gentry is aware of this, for he mentions it himself on page 22. It is not a literal or physical “arrival.” When the NT authors reapply this passage, they *do mean* that the Second Coming – the coming in judgment – will be figurative and not literal. But in mentioning these, Gentry has done the opposition a favor. There was only one other coming about which Jesus prophesied, and like the other supposed “comings of Christ” that coming was **not** physical and **not** literal.

When Gentry opines (p. 23 ¶ 3) that “the universe will not endure a naturalistic heat destruction,” he is making **science** his real enemy as far as this matter is concerned. In the first place, “biological evolution” has nothing whatsoever to do with the “life” cycle of stars, although there is an “evolution” that takes place (in the sense of “development”). There are likely many quadrillions of stars that do not support organic life, and for these stellar development still goes on. It is the observation (based on what is called a Hertzsprung-Russell Diagram) that stars follow certain patterns of development – based on their ability at each stage to fuse hydrogen into helium. Summarizing a page at Keene University (UK), here is the basic sequence of progression for a typical star the size of the sun.

Stage 1- A star condenses out of a nebula into a globule of gas and dust and contracts under its own gravity.

Stage 2 - A region of condensing matter heats and starts to glow forming **Protostars**.

Stage 3 - At a high enough temperature, nuclear reactions start.

Stage 4 - The star begins to release energy, stopping it from contracting even more and causing it to shine. It is now a **Main Sequence Star**.

Stage 5 - 10 billion years later, all of the hydrogen has fused to form helium.

Stage 6 - The helium core starts to contract further and reactions begin to occur in a shell around the core.

Stage 7 - The core is hot enough for the helium to fuse to form carbon. The outer layers begin to expand, cool and shine less brightly. The expanding star is now called a **Red Giant**.

Stage 8 - The helium core runs out, and the outer layers drift of away from the core as a gaseous shell (called a **Planetary Nebula**).

Stage 9 - The remaining core (80% of the original star becomes a **White Dwarf**, then eventually cools and dims. When it stops shining, the now dead star is called a **Black Dwarf**.³

The above information is not particularly controversial, but at this point in his narrative Gentry requires that stars not change. If the sun will burn out on its own (by God’s own design), then the End of the World that he requires might be billions of years away. However, just as a common fire burns out once there is nothing left to burn, stars like our sun will also burn out when their nuclear fuel supply is

² Dt 19:15

³ “The Life of a Star,” students at Keene University (UK), undated. See also Fraser Cain’s series on Universe Today.

exhausted. To support his view Gentry cites **2 Thess 1**, which says nothing about destroying all life on the planet. Let's see what Paul does say:

"On its behalf [on behalf of God's kingdom] you [the readers] are also suffering—since it is just with God to repay with affliction those who are afflicting you [God would repay the supporters of Priestly Judaism in the First Century], and to repay you who are being afflicted with rest with us (in the revelation of the Lord Jesus from the sky with messengers of his power: in a flame of fire, giving retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not listen to the good message of Jesus our Lord.)

"They will pay a just thing, eternal destruction away from the Lord's presence and from the glory of his strength—when he comes to be glorified in his holy ones and to be wondered about in all those who have trusted, because our testimony about you was trusted —during that day."

Whom does God punish in this passage? Those people who were causing such distress and affliction to Paul's readers in Thessalonica. When their religion was destroyed along with the Temple (in AD 70), they lost their access to God. Therefore, they were (metaphorically) given justice through the fires of destruction. In this passage Paul does not promise such a fate for anyone else, and he certainly doesn't mention the end of the universe.

Forward into the Past: The Old Tells Us About the New

The New Heaven and Earth (Isaiah 65-66)

In order to explain both 2 Peter 3 and Revelation 21, we must examine the direct context of Isaiah 65-66, in which we first read about a “new heaven and earth.” The author of the end of Isaiah wrote these chapters just after the exile, c. 539 BCE. Isaiah 65-66 is a single narrative concerning what life without the temple could be like when the people returned to the land. The context of the passage is as follows: Upon returning to the land, the Israelites discovered people living in there. Some of the people seemed to lack a concern about a return to temple life. At the beginning of chapter 65, we read about that state of affairs. When Israel returned to the land they were strangers. God let himself be found by those who were not searching for him. He opened his arms to an estranged people (65:2) who ignored his teachings (65:4). Some people among them, however, were devout. Applying a saying about wine to himself (v.8), God insisted on sparing Israel on account of the good people who were there. The bad people would receive their own punishment (vv. 11-16), while the good would be blessed (65:17ff.), as follows:

“For, look, I am creating a **new heaven and a new land**, and the earlier things are not remembered –nor do they ascend into the heart.

“But rejoice and be glad forever that I am the creator, for, look, I am creating rejoicing in Jerusalem, and gladness in her people. And I have rejoiced in Jerusalem, and have been joyful in my people. Not heard in her anymore is the sound of weeping, or the sound of crying.

“In it, there is no more a newborn baby or an elderly man who does not complete his days, for the young man will die one hundred years old, and the hundred-year-old sinner is cursed. And they have built houses and lived in them –and planted vineyards, and eaten their fruit. They do not build, and have another live. They do not plant, and have another eat. For as the days of a tree are the days of my people, so also my chosen people will consume the work of their hands. They do not work for emptiness, nor do they produce for trouble, for they and their offspring are the seed of the blessed Yahweh. And it has happened. They do not still call, and I answer. I am listening while they are still speaking. Wolf and lamb feed as one, and a lion eats straw like an ox. As for the serpent, dust is its food. They do no injustice, nor do they ruin, at all on my holy mountain,’ said Yahweh!

Yahweh said this: ‘The sky is my throne, and the land is my footstool. What is this house that you are building for me? And where is this, my place of rest? Hasn’t my hand made all of these things? And all these things mine,’ says Yahweh. ‘And to this one I look attentively: to the one who is humble and quiet in spirit and who trembles at my message.’ ”

In the new state of affairs (v. 17), the sins of the past would be forgotten. Relatively speaking, there would be peace and prosperity (vv. 18-21). Unlike the time before the Exile, during which people constructed homes that wound up being seized and lived-in by others, people would have enough security after the Exile to build homes that they themselves would live in (vv. 22-23). In this, then, evil has been defeated, and there is peace (vv. 24-25).

As for Solomon’s temple, it was not fully reconstructed and rededicated until 516 BCE, and God points out that it was never necessary to begin with (66:1-2); his people may serve him without it. That is the

“new heavens and earth” – life without the temple. Whenever an author cites this verse in the New Testament, it always indicates that the temple was unnecessary, would be removed, and that life would be better without it. In fact, anyone who quotes from the passage more broadly always refers to the temple’s being superfluous. We see this clearly when Stephen quotes Isaiah 66:

[David] found favor before God and asked to find a tent for the House of Jacob, and Solomon constructed a house for him.

"However, the Highest One does not dwell in handmade places, as the prophet says, "Heaven is my throne, and the land is my footstool. What house will you construct for me?', says Yahweh. 'Or what is my place of rest? Hasn't my hand made all of these things?'" (Acts 7)

The book of Isaiah concludes with the God affirming through the prophet that Yahweh’s enemies would be destroyed and that the new state of affairs would include Israelites returning from all over the region (66:18-19). This is indeed what happened.

When Revelation 21 quotes Isa 65:17, it is in the same context: *And I saw “a new sky and a new land,” for the first sky and the first land went away, and the sea is no longer.* The “sea” refers to the Bronze Sea (or wash basin) that had been placed in the Temple by Solomon (1 Kings 7), which was removed by Ahaz although it was regarded as necessary for ritual cleansing (2 Kings 16), and which was later destroyed by the Chaldeans (2 Kings 25). In Revelation, the fact that the Sea is unnecessary indicates that all of the people are ritually pure; they no longer need cleansing.

Daniel 12

At the beginning of his *fourth chapter*, Gentry describes Daniel 12:1-2 as being about what he calls “the eschatological resurrection.” Nothing of the sort was in view when the author wrote what he wrote. The author was writing exclusively and only about events that took place in his own time – during the II century BC. Here I cite my book, *Post-Apocalyptic Christianity*:

And at that time Micha-El will stand up -- the great prince who stands for the children of your people, and there will be a time of affliction, like which there never has been since the nation existed, even to that very time. And at that time your people will be saved -- everyone who is found written in the scroll.

The author predicts the restoration of the temple and attributes the judgment of Antiochus Epiphanes to Micha-El, God's messenger-warrior who fights on behalf of Israel. The time of affliction on Israel will be the worst in its history, but those who did not forsake the covenant (as Antiochus had directed them to do) would be spared.

And many of those who are asleep in the dirt of the ground will wake up: some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

The Jewish people who died in the Maccabean Revolt would be symbolically judged collectively. In actuality, each person's judgment was at the time of his death, but here they are portrayed as happening at the same time. Everyone who left the covenant would be disgraced (and destroyed when they died), but those who kept God's principles would have eternal life.

And those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to what is right will shine like the stars to the most remote age.

This is a promise for the faithful Judeans of the period. The wise ones were the ones who kept the covenant, and after Antiochus' death, everyone would realize their wisdom. And those pious Jews who

were able to persuade Hellenized Jews to return to what they knew to be right would also be regarded as having been wise.

*But Dani-El, you seal up the sayings, and seal the scroll, until the time of completion.
Many will wander about, and knowledge will increase."*

This is a tip from the author that he is writing in the guise of Dani-El. The written message has little to do with the time of Dani-El but is intended for the time of Antiochus IV -- the author's lifetime. From Dani-El's perspective, the prophecies are for a much later time, and so the sayings are "sealed up." This can be contrasted with the sayings in Revelation, which were **not** to be sealed up because the portrayed time of writing and the time of fulfillment were the same.

When the New Testament authors reapply Daniel, they point backward into history in order to explain that something very similar was about to happen in their own time. Gentiles were going to come in and destroy the temple. That was the sign of God's judgment. The bad people were going to be destroyed, but this time the bad people were the supporters of Priestly Judaism. It wasn't the end of time in 164 BC, and neither was it the end of time in AD 70.

Heavenly Portents as Judgment

"Why do the birds go on singing?

Why do the stars glow above?

Don't they know it's the end of the world?

It ended when I lost your love." ("The End of the World," Dee & Kent)

Second Peter (chapter 3), which Gentry also cites in support of end-of-the-world predictions, contains the usual "heavenly portents" about judgment. In that case, the judgment to which Peter was referring was the end of the religion of Priestly Judaism. We know for sure this because of the author's reference to the "new heaven and earth." In making that reference, the author cites Isaiah 65, which is about life without the temple:

Now Yahweh's day will arrive like a thief. In it, the heavens will be released with a roar. Now the elements will be released and burnt up, and will the land and all the deeds in it be found?

Since these things will all be released in this way, what sort of people is it necessary for you to exist as, in holy conduct and piety? We are expecting and hastening the day of God's presence, through which the heavens will be on fire and will be released, and through which the elements will be burnt up and melted. But, according to his promise, we are expecting "a new heaven and a new earth" in which right dwells.

The heavenly portents of judgment appear in several places throughout the Old Testament -- each time referring to events that (by the time 2 Peter was written) had already past. Here are a few references to the heavenly portents.

Yahweh has sworn by Jacob's pride, "Surely I will never forget any of their deeds. Won't the land tremble for this, and all who live in it mourn? Yes, **all of it shall overflow like the river, and it will sink like the river of Egypt.** And it will be in that day, says the Lord Yahweh, that **I will make the sun set at noon, and I will darken the land in the light of the day.** And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into howls. And I will bring up sackcloth on all loins, and **baldness on every head.** And I will make it like

the mourning for a loved one; and the end of it will be like a day of sorrow.” (Amos 8:7-10)

Writing in about 750 BCE, Amos announces a day of judgment for the people of the northern kingdom of Israel. He refers to that judgment as “the day of Yahweh” (5:20) and predicts heavenly portents. None of these things literally happened, but what Amos predicted did come true. In 722 BCE, the Assyrians brought judgment on behalf of God, and the kingdom of Israel was wiped out. The kingdom certainly had the opportunity to return to God. According to Amos, his forecast of doom was given first to King Jehoachim II. Several kings reigned after Jehoachim, but the account in 2 Kings records that they did what was evil in Yahweh’s sight. As a result, the political state Israel was destroyed, but the land was not trembling, the sun did not set at noon. None of those things happened physically; they were all metaphors for judgment.

“The burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw....

“Howl, for the **day of Yahweh** is near; it is coming like destruction from the Almighty. (Isa 13:6)

“For look, **Yahweh’s day** is coming – cruel both with emotion and rage – to **make the whole habitation a desolate place, and to destroy the sinners from it. For the stars of the sky and their constellations will not give their light. The sun will be darkened in his going forth, and the moon will not give its light. And I will visit the badness of the whole habitation, and the sin of the impious, and I will stop the arrogance of the proud, and will humble the high-minded.**

“The remnant will be more rare than refined gold, and the human being will be more valuable than the ore of Ofir.

“For I will **make the sky shake, and the land will quake from its place, on account of the anger of Yahweh of the hosts, and the day of his fierce anger.** (vv. 9-13)

“And Babylon, which is called glorious among kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans’ pride, will be like **when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It will not be inhabited for the time of the age, nor will it be lived in for many generations....** (v. 20)

This passage was written during the Exile, well before the time of Cyrus. After the death of Nabu-kudurri-usur II (Nebuchadnezzar) in about 562 BCE, the kingdom of Babylonia went into turmoil. Between 562 and 556, the much weakened Babylon was ruled by Amel-Marduk (562-559), then Nergal Sharra-usur (559-556) and Labashi-Marduk (556). The Medes (v. 17) were God’s agent of destruction here. The city was not literally destroyed, nor did the stars and moon stop shining, but Babylon’s power was devastated forever. After this, the last Babylonian kings, Nabu-na’id and Bel-sarra-usur, were actually Assyrians. This was followed by the empire’s final conquering by Koorush (Cyrus); during this time and afterward, Babylon spent many years with but a shadow of its former glory.

“Look, Yahweh is **depopulating the habitation, laying waste to it, ripping its surface and scattering its inhabitants. ... The land will be completely depopulated and completely plundered, for Yahweh’s mouth has said these things....** Now the land is being polluted by its inhabitants, since they have violated the Torah, altered the statutes, and broke the everlasting covenant....

“The broken city is wasted. Each house is shut so that none may enter.... Desolation is left in the city, and the gate [or houses] **are forsaken to ruin.**

"All of these things will be in the land in the midst of the nations, **shaken like the shaking of an olive tree** – like the gleanings when the grape harvest is over. [Those who remain on the land] raise their voices, they call out for joy; they call out from the sea about Yahweh's glory....

"For the high windows have been opened, and the **foundations of the land are shaking**. The land is broken with trouble; the land is divided; the land is confused ... For its lawlessness has overpowered it. It will fall, never to rise again.

"It will happen that day that **Yahweh will punish** the creation in heaven and the kings of the land on earth. They will be gathered like prisoners in a pit and will be shut up in the prison, and they will be visited after many days.

LXX: "Then the bricks will be baked, and the wall will fall down,"

MT: "Then the moon will be ashamed, and the sun will pale, "because Yahweh will rule in Zion and in Jerusalem, and he will be glorified in the presence of the old people."...

"Because Yahweh's hand will [give] rest on this mountain, and **Moab will be trampled** in its place, like straw is trampled in the urine of a manure pile." ...

"For he has humbled those who live in the high places: the secure city. He lays it low; he casts it to the ground; he **beats it down to dust**."...

"Yahweh our God, others have ruled over us besides you, but we will name only your name. The dead do not live, nor do their ghosts rise. You have punished them; their memories are destroyed."...

v. 19 MT: "**Your dead will live; my corpses will rise**. You who lie in the dirt, wake up and shout for joy.

v. 19 LXX: "**Your dead will live**; those who lie in the grave, wake up and shout for joy."

...
 "My people, proceed. Enter your rooms, and close your doors behind you. Hide for a short time until [Yahweh's] rage has passed. For, look, Yahweh is about to come out from his [holy] place to visit the sin of those who live on the land. And the land will reveal its blood and will not hide its murdered.

"In that day, with his holy and great sword Yahweh will punish **Leviathan the fleeing snake: the perverted dragon**. And he **will execute the dragon that is by the sea**."

"And it will be in that day that Yahweh start threshing, from the flowing river to the brook of Egypt, but you will be gathered up one by one, sons of Israel. And it will be in that day that a great **trumpet will be blown**, and those who were being destroyed in the country of Assyria and who were scattered in the land of Egypt will come and bow down to Yahweh on the holy mountain at Jerusalem." (Isa 24 – 27)

This section was likely written just around the time when the Assyrians overran the northern kingdom of Israel (722 BCE), during the Assyrian siege of Tyre (724 – 720 BCE). Assyria had conquered Moab at around 735 BCE, so the two forces were united at the time.

In chapter 10 of his own book, Hosea records that a (Moabite) king named Shalman (=Salmanu) sacked and destroyed a place called Beth-Arbel ("House of God's Court"). In 2 Kings 13, we read about roving

bands of Moabites that began to enter the land of Israel, beginning with the death of Elisha, one hundred or so years before this oracle. The mythical beast, Leviathan the dragon, is to be identified here with Nineveh, the great city of Assyria. Nineveh is also the “great fortified city” of 25:2.

At 26:14, the dead who will no longer live is a reference to the Assyrians along with their gods, which do not really exist and will be forgotten. At 26:19, the author makes a deliberate contrast with what he said earlier in vv. 13-14:

“Yahweh our God, others have ruled over us besides you, but we will name only your name. The dead do not live, nor do their ghosts rise. You have punished them; their memories are destroyed.” Clearly, the author is not writing about a future bodily resurrection for everyone. In fact, the dead “not living” is equated with the oppressors being forgotten by history. However, God was going to restore the Israelites to their country. In verse 19, “your people will rise to life” was intended in that same context. When the author writes, “leave your graves and shout for joy,” he calls upon the oppressed readers themselves – the “dead” – to praise God for what he was about to do for Israel. The oppressors will be forgotten, but God has remembered his people. There is nothing here about the afterlife, and there is nothing here about a bodily resurrection for everyone. Most of all, there is nothing in the heavenly portents that indicated literal destruction.

“And it happened that Yahweh’s message came to Micah the Morashtite in the days of Yotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw about Samaria and about Jerusalem.

*“Peoples, hear the message. Pay attention, land and all that is in it; and Yahweh will be a witness against you – Yahweh, from his holy house. Because, look, Yahweh will leave his place, and will descend, and will **trample the high places of the land**. And the **mountains will be melted** underneath him, and the **valleys shall be ripped apart – like wax in the presence of fire; like water flowing down a cliff**.*

“Because the impiety of Jacob are all these things, and for the sin of the house of Israel. What is Jacob’s impiety? Isn’t it Samaria? And what is Judah’s sin? Isn’t it Jerusalem?

*“And I will place Samaria as a heap in the field, and as a place for the planting of vineyards; and I **will pull down its stones into chaos**, and I will reveal its foundations.*

*“And all of its carvings will be cut to pieces, and all of its rented buildings will **be burned with fire**, and all of its idols will I make disappear; since she has gathered them from the rented buildings of a prostitute, and they will return to the rented buildings of a prostitute.” (Mic 1:1-5)*

Micah lived during the VIIIth century BCE and wrote the early chapters to explain what was going on in the land of Israel. The oracle predicts the desolation of Samaria and a later invasion of Jerusalem. This prophecy came true when Assyria overran Samaria in 722 BCE. However, the mountains did not melt. The valleys were not torn apart. God did not literally trample the land. These things were metaphors.

After referring to the seizure of the kingdom of Israel, Micah describes the destruction of the cities in Judah during the invasion of Sennacherib in 701 BCE. This passage is interesting because the cities’ fates are not literal but are plays on words, based on the names of those cities in Hebrew. Micah forecast judgment on Israel because of its idolatry, and God’s agents were going to melt those idols.

On the twenty-first of the seventh month, Yahweh’s message came to Haggai the prophet saying, “Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Yehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people

saying, 'Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? And don't you see it now like nothing in your presence? And now be strong, Zerubbabel,' says Yahweh. 'And be strong, Joshua son of Yehozadak, the high priest. And be strong all you people of the land,' says Yahweh. 'And work; for I am with you,' says Yahweh almighty. '[I have established what I covenanted with you when you left Egypt.] My spirit continues in your midst; you will not fear,' since Yahweh almighty says this: "Yet once and for all, **I will shake the sky, and the land, and the sea, and the dry land.** I will shake all the nations, and they will come – the chosen of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory,' says Yahweh almighty. 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' says Yahweh almighty. 'The glory of this later house will be greater than the first one,' says Yahweh almighty, 'and in this place I will give peace,' says Yahweh almighty." (Hag 2:1-9)

This passage was a prophecy given by God in the year 520 BCE, to which the author of Hebrews refers in chapter 12. In Hebrews, the writer indicates that something similar was about to happen (in 70 CE, a few years after the treatise was authored) to what had happened years before as Haggai had predicted. Hebrews cites Hag 2:6 as "Still once and for all I am shaking not only the earth but also heaven." Similar language (to Hag 2:6, 2:21) occurs in Luke's version of Jesus' prediction of the **destruction of the temple**. That was not what Haggai was originally predicting. The later authors were borrowing language from an earlier prophecy as a means of indicating that something similar was about to occur. People who were familiar with what had happened before would know exactly what Jesus and the author of Hebrews meant to convey.

We read in Haggai 2:6, "*For Yahweh almighty says this: Yet once and for all, I will shake the sky, and the land, and the sea, and the dry land.*" The Septuagint and the NT citations of the passage contain no reference to time here. The Masoretic text adds a word that may mean "soon" or may mean "a small thing," or even that the oracle consists of "a few words." This oracle (and the one found at the end of the chapter) predicts a change in the state of affairs. It further predicts that the temple that was being rebuilt by Zerubbabel (2:2) would be occupied (vv. 3, 9), and that it would be better than Solomon's original temple. This second temple was completed less than three years after Haggai's prophecy and was dedicated for use in 516 BCE.

What about the changes regarding the nations? Cyrus had sacked Babylon in 539 BCE, during the Battle of Opis. In the years surrounding Haggai's oracle, Babylon rebelled more than once – achieving independence briefly in 521-520 and again in 514 BCE. The rebelling king, Arakha the Armenian, called himself "Nebuchadnezzar IV" in order to give credence to his claim of rightful authority, but his efforts were thwarted. This time, the city was re-captured by the Persians, who destroyed parts of the city's defensive walls. Babylon was never independent again, and Arakha wound up being the last "King of Babylon." So, Haggai did indeed intend to convey that the destruction of Israel's enemies would happen soon, but the sky and land were not *literally* shaken.

When we read similar language in places like 2 Peter 3, we are supposed to look back at all of the previous uses of the heavenly portents and to realize that the author is writing about God judging people. In this case, the reference to the "new heavens and earth" refers explicitly to life without the temple, and the reader is supposed to know that the judgment about which the author was writing was the destruction of the Temple and Priestly Judaism.

A Survey of AD 70 References in the New Testament

The Elements of 2 Peter 3

Immediately prior to mentioning Isaiah's "new heaven and earth" – which were about life without the Temple, that Biblical author mentions "the elements." Specifically, he writes, "**the elements will be burnt up and melted.**" This is another indicator that the end of Priestly Judaism is intended – and not the end of the world.

The Greek word rendered as "element" is στοιχεῖον (stoicheion), usually found in the plural as στοιχεῖα.

The Liddell-Scott-Jones lexicon gives the basic meaning in the context we read in the NT as

4. generally, *elementary or fundamental principle*

As examples, LSJ cites...

"Tell me, Aristippus, if it were necessary for you to take charge of two youths and educate them so that the one would be fit to rule but the other would never think of asserting himself, how would you educate them? Shall we consider it, beginning with **the elements** about food?"

Aristippus said, "It seems to me that food is the first, for one cannot live if one does not eat food."
(Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, II, 1:1)

"See to it that the best among them shall have the honors, while the others will be done no injustice; for these are **the first and greatest elements** of advantageous government." (Isocrates, *Panathenaicus*, 2:16)

"And broadly, whatever provisions in the laws we describe as advantageous to constitutions, these are all preservative of the constitutions, and so is the supreme **elementary principle** that has been often stated, that of taking precautions that the section desirous of the constitution shall be stronger in numbers than the section not desirous of it." (Aristotle, *Politics*, V, 1309:16)

Yes, this concept of a fundamental principle is exactly the usage that we see in the New Testament. Here are **all** of the uses of "element(s)" in the NT:

When we were babies, we were enslaved under the **elements of the creation**. But when the full amount of time went by, God sent out his son (born of a woman, born under the Torah) so that he would redeem those who were under the Torah – so that we would receive sonship... But now, since you know God (or rather, are known by God), how can you turn again to those **weak and poor elements**? Do you want to be enslaved to them again, as you were from the beginning – observing days, and new moons, and seasons, and years? I am afraid for you ... perhaps I have labored for you worthlessly? (Gal 4)

See to it that no one be preying on you through speculation and empty deceit, which is according to human tradition and according to the **elements of creation** and not according to the Anointed One... If with the Anointed One you died from the **elements of creation**, why are you subjecting yourselves to rules, as though you were living in creation? "You should not touch. You should not taste. You should not handle." (Col 2)

Now Yahweh's day will arrive like a thief. In it, the heavens will be released with a roar. Now the **elements will be released and burnt up**, and will the land and all the deeds in it be found?

Since these things will all be released in this way, what sort of people is it necessary for you to exist as, in holy conduct and piety? We are expecting and hastening the day of God's presence, through which the heavens will be on fire and will be released, and through which the **elements will be burnt up** and melted. But, according to his promise, we are expecting "a new heaven and a new earth" in which right dwells. (2P 3)

For also, though you are bound to be teachers – on account of the time – again you have the need of someone to teach you **the elements** of the beginning of God's oracles. (Heb 5)

In each case in the NT, the author employs the word "elements" to indicate **rudimentary teachings**. In each case the author is referring to foundational teachings being learned, returned to, or destroyed. The foundational things that are destroyed in fire (Gal, Col, 2P) constitute the whole way of life that was built around the temple. Therefore we see that Peter intended to convey precisely the following:

We are expecting and hastening the day of God's presence, [the day of judgment against Priestly Judaism] through which the heavens will be on fire and will be released [the current religious system will go away permanently], and through which the **elements will be burnt up and melted** [God will destroy even the foundational teachings of Priestly Judaism]. But, according to his promise, we are expecting "a new heaven and a new earth" [a state without the temple, and without the religion], in which right dwells.

Concluding this thought, we say, **"Don't worry. It's NOT the end of the world."**

Neither passage cited by Gentry refers to Jesus at all, or specifically to him "coming." Yes, the judgment on Priestly Judaism was the Second Coming, but the term "coming" is just a symbol. It was never, as Gentry puts it, "the personal, sovereign intervention of the Lord Jesus Christ." Gentry's attempt to frame it in those terms automatically causes a prejudiced view of the passages themselves. As an example that demonstrates a problem with adding a literal component to apocalyptic language, Revelation 6:1 clearly states that a lamb opens the seals on a scroll. Since no literal sheep has ever deliberately opened up the seals of a scroll – that we know of (!) – clearly such a thing has never happened in history! If you are thinking at this point that the scroll is a metaphor and that the lamb represents the Messiah, you are right, but we cannot look for a literal, physical event or we will be disappointed every time. More seriously, when Jesus said, "Don't think that I will accuse you to the Father. Moses, in whom you have hoped, is the one who is accusing you" (Jn 5), he was not implying a literal accusation from Moses against his listeners. Such language indicates something symbolic.

Gentry uses a favorite proof-text of Futurists to support his case that the second coming must not have occurred: he cites Acts 1 (p. 23 ¶ 4). As I indicate in my book, "in the same way" referred not to any aspect of flying around the world but to the sudden occurrence of the coming in judgment. This sudden nature is mentioned in many places throughout the NT, including the passage in 2 Peter. The Eleven were looking at Jesus when he was suddenly obscured. They so expected to continue to see him that they kept on staring into the sky.

And, after saying these things, he was lifted up as they were looking, and a cloud withdrew him from their eyes. And as they looked attentively into the heavens (as he was going away), look! Two men were standing near them in white clothes. And these men said, "Men, Galilaians, why are you standing and looking into the sky? This Jesus,

who has been taken up from you into heaven, this one will come back in the same manner that you saw him going into heaven."

Jesus did not fly around the sky. He was lifted up (possibly no more than a few feet). As they looked up, divine messengers were standing there. Then a cloud covered him, and he began to vanish (go away) in the cloud cover. He didn't fly around the city. He didn't fly all the way up into space. He was just gone...somewhat literally in a puff of smoke.

Passages identifying the Second Coming as being both soon and **sudden**:

"if the ruler of the house knew on what guard the **thief** was coming, he would watch out and would not allow him to dig into his house. On account of this, you too should become prepared, because **you don't know at what hour the Son of Man is coming.**" (Mt 24 = Lk 12)

For just as the **lightning** comes out from the east and is apparent as far as the west, the presence of the Son of Man will be this way. (Mt 24 = Lk 17)

"But if that bad slave should say in his heart, 'My lord is taking his time,' and if he should begin to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with those who get drunk, that slave's **lord will come in during a day when he is not expecting and at an hour that he doesn't know**, and he will cut him in half and will place his portion with the hypocrites." (Mt 24)

"Now while they were going away to buy, the bridegroom came, and the prepared ones came with him for the wedding festivities, and the door was shut. But afterward, the rest of the virgins came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open for us!' But he answered, saying, 'Indeed I am telling you, I don't know you.' Therefore, **watch out, because you know neither the day nor the hour.**" (Mt 25)

"Therefore, watch – for you do not know when the Lord of the house is coming, if at evening, or at midnight, or at the rooster crow, or at morning) – **lest he come suddenly and find you sleeping.** Now what I tell you, I am saying to all people: watch." (Mk 13)

"But pay attention to yourselves, lest your hearts be burdened with gluttony, and drunkenness, and life's anxieties, and that day should come upon you suddenly. For **it will come** upon all those who dwell on the face of all the land **like a snare.**" (Lk 21)

But about the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to be written to. For you know yourselves accurately yourselves that **as a thief comes in the night, so Yahweh's day is coming.** When they say, "Here are peace and safety," then their **sudden destruction** will be standing, as labor pains come to the one who has *a baby* in her womb. And they will not escape. (1 Thess 5)

For you have a need of endurance, so that, having done what God wants, you would obtain the promise. For in but "a very, very little time,"⁴ "**what is coming will come and will not delay**...But my just one, out of trust, will live." And "if he should shrink back, my soul does not delight in him."⁵ But we are not ones who shrink back into destruction. On the contrary, we live in trust, to the point of the soul's preservation. (Heb 10)

"Therefore, be longsuffering, brothers, until the time of **the Lord's presence.** Look, **the gardener is looking out toward the honorable fruit of the land**, suffering long over it until he receives early and later harvests. You be longsuffering also. Steady your hearts, because **the time of the Lord's presence has neared.**

Brothers, don't gripe against one another, so that you may not be judged. Look, **the judge has been standing in front of the doors.** (Ja 5)

⁴ Isa 26:20 from the LXX

⁵ Hab 2:3-4 from the LXX

Yahweh of the promise is not slow, as some consider slowness. On the contrary, he is being longsuffering toward us, not wishing for anyone to be destroyed, but for all to hold to a change of mind. Now **Yahweh's day will arrive like a thief.** (2P 3)

Therefore, if you are not watchful, **I will have come like a thief**, and by no means will you have known at what hour I will have come upon you. (Rev 3)

"Look, I am coming like a thief." (Rev 16)

The second coming is not a "flying" arrival but was an event that would appear sudden to those who thought that the temple was always going to stand. Even if we were to think that Jesus was literally flying around at that time, we should still recognize that "in the same manner" means something deeper than the physical event of flying.

Gentry will not believe that the Second Coming and the coming in judgment against Priestly Judaism were the same event. I understand that, and certainly this rebuttal will not convince him of anything that he does not wish to believe. However, I find it somewhat humorous that Gentry pauses (Page 25, ¶ 2-3) in order to express disagreement over the fact that Rabbinic Judaism does not acknowledge the *first* coming of the Messiah when Gentry treats the *second* coming with the same disbelief. Applying it now to the second coming, I will repeat back at Gentry the same quote that he cites from Athanasius: **"Accordingly, the Jews [or Gentiles] are creating myths, and the season they think to be present has passed by."**

Matthew 24 = Mark 13 = Luke 12, 17 & 21

When Gentry gets into the meat of the main passage(s) dealing with the Second Coming (Page 26, ¶ 3), he refers (line 1) to the placement of Mt 24:4-33 in the past as being "exegetically necessary." He needs to say this in order to avoid having to deal with the viability of the Futurist point of view. Therefore, in dismissing any possibility that the segment of Matthew 24 remains in the future, he simply ignores the futurist question entirely. Yet there are many Futurist authors (like the one whose quote follows) that expressly place the passage in the future.

"The Apostles came to Jesus and asked Him about the end of the world, and how would people living then know it was happening. It went like this:

"And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet." (Mt 24:2-6)

"So Jesus begins to tell them about how things will gradually heat up and increase until we reach the time that we call the Last Days. The Book of Matthew continues, giving more and more details and time clues until we reach the "big clue", the biggest one of them all. Stating in Matthew 24:32, Jesus says this:

"Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." ("The Fig Tree Prophecy of Matthew 24," from *Now the End Begins*, c. 2014)

The Full Preterist certainly agrees with Ken Gentry that Mt 24:4-33 has been fulfilled. However, the honest scholar does not get to simply ignore the possibility that the millions who believe honestly that the passage is still in the future might be correct. The fact that Gentry casually dismisses the Futurists in order to condemn the Full Preterists ought to make one pause to consider his motivation. Why might he have done so – considering the fact that he addresses Futurism elsewhere? Because if the readers permit a Futurist argument right here, they might conclude that the main choices for interpreting Matthew 24 are these: is it all in the past, or is it all in the future?

Gentry spends approximately two pages regarding that particular segment of Matthew, beginning with yet another dismissive statement: “That Matthew 24:2-33 (excluding v. 27) is already fulfilled *seems quite obvious* on the following bases.” Yes, claims Gentry, it *seems quite obvious* that the whole Futurist viewpoint is wrong, so let’s attack Full Preterism. Were Full Preterists to reply that it “seems quite obvious” that scholars need to spend only two pages dismissing Partial Preterism, he would no doubt be outraged. One wonders at this point whether Gentry regards Futurists as his intellectual equals.

The statement earlier quoted (from page 27) is already telling: “...Matthew 24:2-33 (excluding v. 27) is already fulfilled....” Wait. Gentry is going to explain to us that there is a gap between verses 34 and the rest of the chapter, but now he has a single-verse gap in verse 27? So it would seem. His explanation, in **a footnote**, is as follows:

“Verse 27 mentions the second coming – but only to distinguish it from the metaphorical coming of A.D. 70 of which is speaking in this section of the discourse.” Gentry wishes for us simply to skip over verse 27 as though it is an *aside*, but if we refuse to do so then he wants us to believe that in the middle of a discussion about one topic, Jesus diverges to a *previously-unmentioned* topic in order to avoid confusion. If that were truly the case, he should have said nothing here. But let us see that this is not the case. Verse 27 belongs with the context of the surrounding verses.

"Therefore, when you see "the desolating detestable thing," that was declared through Daniel the prophet,⁶ standing in the holy place" – the one who reads, let him think – "then those who are in Judea should flee to the mountains, the one on the roof should not descend to take the things from his house, and the one who is in the field should not turn back to take his cloak. Woe to the ones who have babies in their bellies and those who are nursing in those days!

"But pray, so that your flight would not happen in winter or on a Sabbath. For then there will be great affliction, the likes of which has not happened from the beginning of creation until the present, neither should it by any means happen. And if those days were not cut short, no flesh would be saved. But on account of the chosen ones, those days will be cut short.

"Then if someone says to you, 'Look, here is the Anointed One,' or, 'He is here,' do not believe. For false Anointed Ones and false prophets will rise up, and they will give great signs and wonders, and so they will deceive, if possible, even the chosen ones. Look, I have told you in advance. Therefore, if they should say to you, 'Look, he is in the desert,' don't go out. If they say, 'Look, he is in the private places,' do not believe. For just as the lightning comes out from the east and is apparent as far as the west, the presence of the Son of Man will be this way. Wherever a corpse may be, the vultures will be gathered there.

⁶ Dan 11:31, referring to the presence of Gentiles inside the Temple doing something unacceptable

"Now immediately after the affliction of those days, "The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens"⁷ will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will be in the sky, and then all the tribes of the land will lament, and they will see "the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky" with power and much glory. And he will send his messengers with great war-trumpets, and they will gather his chosen ones from the four winds – from the extreme points of the heavens to their other extremes."

Jesus makes an admonition beginning with "when **you** see...." Gentry would agree with the Full Preterist position that "you" refers to the people who were alive at the time, and most particularly his listeners. He would agree that the subsequent paragraph about "**your** flight" not being in winter (so that the people would be able to travel farther each day) refers again to the people of Jesus' time. He agrees that the "great affliction" that was about to befall the Israelite people was the First Revolt. The next paragraph begins with people searching for the Messiah, who would be about to come in judgment. There were going to be rumors of the Messiah's coming all over the place, Jesus says, but he urges his listeners not to believe them. Then Matthew's account includes the statement that Gentry **claims** to be 2000 or more years removed: "For just as the lightning comes out from the east and is apparent as far as the west, the presence of the Son of Man will be this way." But wait. Jesus was just talking about what it was going to be like when he comes in judgment in AD 70. Verse 27 merely says that his appearance would come quickly, like lightning, and would be apparent to all Jewish people. It fits perfectly with what he was just saying. The "corpse" in the next verse is the religion of Priestly Judaism, operating out of Jerusalem. Again it fits the context. The next paragraph about the heavenly portents, now again Gentry agrees with the Full Preterists: this is about the judgment that took place in AD 70. There is no sudden change in subject in verse 27; Jesus is talking about the same things in 27 that he is discussing in the surrounding verses.

So what's the problem? Matthew used the word παρουσία (parousia, presence) in verse 27 – the word that is used to describe the so-called "second coming."⁸ If verse 27 belongs with the rest of the verses – and it does – then Jesus must be talking about the Second Coming throughout chapter 24. If we recognize this, then we must conclude that either the whole chapter is in the **future** or it is all in the **past**. His viewpoint would be invalidated. Either we become Full Preterists at this point, or we turn to Futurism; there is no in between. Not wishing to draw attention to the dichotomy created by the verse at this time, Gentry dismisses it in a footnote.

Gentry's analysis of the Futurist viewpoint of Matthew 23-24 is something with which the Full Preterist would concur. The discussion began with Jesus lamenting over Jerusalem. When some of his listeners made observations about the Temple, he insisted that it was going to come down. The phrase from Matthew reading, "Therefore, when you see "the desolating detestable thing," that was declared through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place – the one who reads, let him think – then those who are in Judea should flee to the mountains....," we observe that this is paralleled by the following wording from Luke's version: "Now when you notice Jerusalem surrounded by encampments, then you should know that its desolation has come near. Then those who are in Judea should flee into the mountains...." From the context we observe, then, that the "detestable thing" is connected with the

⁷ See Isa 13:10, Ezek 32:7-8, Amos 8:9

⁸ It is for the same reason that he places 2 Peter 3 in the future, despite Peter's deliberate references to life without the temple.

approach by the Roman armies, and that Jesus was telling those specific people that when they saw this happen, they should flee. This is definitely about what happened during the First Revolt.

I agree with Ken regarding Jesus' use of "this generation" to mean those people living in and around Judea during the First Century. Jesus' use of the expression is very consistent in all gospel accounts:

"Now to what will I liken **this generation**?" (Mt 11:16 = Lk 7)

"Ninevite men will stand up during the judgment with **this generation**, and they will condemn it, because they changed their minds at Yonah's heralding, and look: someone greater than Yonah is here. The southern queen will rise up in judgment with **this generation**, and she will condemn it, because she came from the outlying areas of the land to hear Solomon's wisdom, and look: someone greater than Solomon is here." (ch. 12, partly paralleled in Mark 8 and Luke 11, which add...)

"**This generation** is an evil generation. It seeks a sign, and a sign will not be given to it, except for the sign of Yonah. For just as Yonah happened as a sign to the Ninevites, in the same way the Son of Man will also be a sign to **this generation**."

"Indeed I am telling you, all these things will come upon **this generation**." (ch. 23 = end of Lk 11)

"Indeed I am telling you that by no means will **this generation** pass away until all these things happen." (Mt 24 = Lk 21)

"But first it is necessary for him to suffer many things and to be rejected by **this generation**. And just as it happened in the days of Noah, it will be the same way in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating, they were drinking, they were getting married, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark and the flood came and destroyed them all." (Lk 17, which parallels the END of Matthew 24, with an additional statement about "this generation"). Gentry realizes that this parallel between the end of Matthew 24 and Luke 17, with its unambiguous statement about "this generation" causes him a problem. He postpones any discussion of Lk 17 = Mt 24 until page 49, instead stating strongly about the Futurist position here that:

"We also find 'this generation' in [parts of Matthew, ignoring Mark and Luke]. **Only with great difficulty may these verses mean anything other than Jesus' contemporary generation.**" (p. 29)

He then cites Thomas Ice himself writing that, "It is true that **every other use** of 'this generation' in Matthew... refers to Christ's contemporaries." Gentry's ellipsis refers to Ice's citation of the same passages mentioned above. Of course, Ice also ignores the parallel passages. Ice's comments go on to claim that the use of "this generation" is determined by context; therefore, Jesus means whatever generation he might have been talking about. In that one instance in Matthew, then (and by extension in Luke), he means a generation in the far future – even though when he isn't talking about the second coming he **always** means "the people who were living in the First Century."

Let's look ahead to page 49 of Gentry's book, and let's address the context of Lk 17 = Mt 24.

Interspersing parallel segments from the accounts, and using Luke's self-styled chronological record to set the order of the discourse, we read...

"Now he said to the students, "Days will come when you will strongly desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see one. And they will say to you, '**Look there,**' or, '**look here.**' Do not go away, nor should you follow. **For just as that lightning that flashes from under the sky shines into another part of the sky, so will the Son of Man be in his day.**" [Luke]

This parallels the following statements in Matthew:

"Then if someone says to you, '**Look, here** is the Anointed One,' or, '**He is here**,' do not believe. For false Anointed Ones and false prophets will rise up, and they will give great signs and wonders, and so they will deceive, if possible, even the chosen ones. Look, I have told you in advance. Therefore, if they should say to you, 'Look, he is in the desert,' don't go out. If they say, 'Look, he is in the private places,' do not believe. **For just as the lightning comes out from the east and is apparent as far as the west, the presence of the Son of Man will be this way.**" [Matthew]

We see that so far both accounts are clearly talking about the same single event. First, people search for the Messiah and do not find him. Then he comes suddenly like a flash of lightning, and his coming is apparent to all [Jewish people].

"But first it is necessary for him to suffer many things and to be rejected by **this generation**. And just as it happened in the **days of Noah**, it will be the same way in the **days of the Son of Man**. They were eating, they were **drinking**, they were **getting married**, they were being **given in marriage**, until **the day that Noah entered the ark and the flood came and destroyed them all**.

"Similarly, this is just as it happened in the days of Lot. They were eating, they were drinking, they were purchasing, they were selling, they were planting, they were constructing. But on the day Lot exited from Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all.⁹

"It will be according to the same things on **the day when the Son of Man is revealed**. In that day, don't let the one who is on the roof, with his goods in the house, descend to pick them up. And similarly, don't let the one who is in the field turn back. Remember Lot's wife!

"The one who might seek to acquire his life will lose it, but the one who should ever lose it will save it. I am telling you: That night there will be **two people on one bed; one will be taken along, the other will be dropped.**" [Luke 17]

"But about that day and hour no one knows: neither the messengers of the heavens nor the son, no one except the Father alone. For just as in the **days of Noah**, the **presence of the Son of Man** will be that way. For as in those days before the flood, they were dining and **drinking, marrying and giving in marriage**, until **the day that Noah entered into the ark** – and they did not know *it* until **the flood came and took everything away** – the **presence of the Son of Man** will also be this way. **Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken along, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding in the mill; one will be taken along, and one will be left.**

"Therefore, watch out, because you don't know on what day your Lord is coming. But you know this: that if the ruler of the house knew on what guard **the thief** were coming, he would **watch out** and would not allow him to dig into his house. On account of this, **you too should become prepared**, because you don't know at what hour the Son of Man is coming." [Matthew 24]

Luke 21, which contains the other elements of the "earlier" part of Matthew 24, concludes with

"**But pay attention to yourselves**, lest your hearts be burdened with gluttony, and drunkenness, and life's anxieties, and that day should come upon you **suddenly**. For it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the land **like a snare**. But **keep watch** in every season, begging so that you might prevail to flee out of these things that are about to happen and to stand in the **presence of the Son of Man**."

And they answered, saying to him, "Where, Lord?" Now he said to them, "**Where the corpse is, there also will the vultures be gathered.**" [Luke]

⁹ See Gen 19.

Wherever a corpse is, the vultures will be gathered there. [Matthew 24:28]

"Now learn from the analogy of the **fig tree**: when its branch has already become tender and it **puts out its leaves, you know that the summer is near**. In the same way also, **when you notice all these things**, know that **he is near**, at the doors. Indeed I am telling you that by no means will **this generation** pass away until **all these things happen**. **The sky and the land will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away.** [Matthew 24]

And he told them an analogy: "Look at the **fig tree** and all the trees. When they are already **spreading out**, and when you see it for yourselves, **you know that summer is already near**. In the same way also, **when you notice these things happening**, know that **God's kingdom is near**. Indeed I am telling you that **this generation** will by no means pass away until even **all things have happened**. **The sky and the land will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away.**" [Luke 21]

Clearly the parallel in Luke links together the earlier portions of Matthew 24 (prior to v. 35) with the later section. This is all a single context. Even as Gentry begins to analyze Luke 17, he first acknowledges that "A quick reading of the fuller passage in Matthew 24:4-51 alongside Luke 17:22-37 seems to demand that we drop any division in Matthew...." (page 50). In the next paragraph he tosses in a disclaimer that **"...this issue is not really a crucial matter. Orthodox preterists see no doctrinal problems arising if we apply all of Matthew 24 to AD 70."** I will do exactly this later and will observe that it creates a problem for Gentry. In fact, the temporal gap in Matthew 24 is the crux of his entire book. Although Gentry explains in a long paragraph that **"it would not matter"** if we were to understand all of Matthew 24-25 as being in the past because (as he puts it) "we find the second advent in numerous other passages," he offers us nothing in this book in that respect except for passages about the afterlife that do not mention the Parousia (presence, "second coming").

Gentry claims that the contexts of the two passages (Luke 17 and the first part of Matthew 24) are entirely different – failing to realize that Jesus likely said precisely the same thing at more than one time, and not recognizing that not all of Matthew is arranged chronologically (as Luke claims his account is). Far from Luke "mixing up the material" (p. 49), Matthew often assembles together bits and pieces of different contexts, creating "sermons" (such as Mt 5-7). There we observe that Mt 5:13 – 38 appear in different locations in Luke (and Mark).

Mt 5:13 appears in Luke 14 and Mark 9.

Mt 5:14-16 appear in Luke 8 and Mark 4.

Mt 5:17-20 appear in Luke 16.

Mt 5:21-26 appear in Luke 12.

Mt 5:27-32 appear in Luke 16.

Most of Matthew 5-7 appears in Luke 6, but we should also observe that:

Portions of Matthew 6 appear in Luke 11, 12, and 16.

Portions of Matthew 7 appear in Luke 11 and 13.

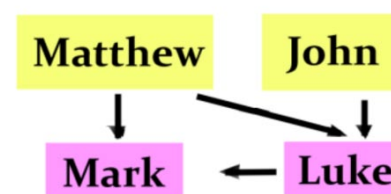
Matthew has created a much larger discourse out of what had been smaller discussions of the same topics spread throughout Jesus' time. Jesus certainly addressed the same subjects at more than one time; Luke preferred to keep those pieces separate from one another.

One of you might be thinking, **"I see that Jesus spoke about the same things in different times and different ways, but that doesn't mean Matthew has them out of order."** Let's look at a point on which there is no controversy.

In Matthew 8, Jesus heals the servant boy of a centurion. After that he heals Peter's mother-in-law of a fever. Mark's account indicates that Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law much earlier – shortly after returning from being tested in the desert (Mark 1). Luke's reckoning agrees more with Mark's – placing the event much earlier (Luke 4). Now we might naively claim that Peter's mother-in-law was deathly ill on many occasions, but each account only mentions exactly one such illness.

Also, Luke's account depicts the cleansing of a leper and a paralyzed man in chapter 5, just as Matthew does – sort of. Matthew has Jesus heal the leper, then Peter's mother-in-law, and then the paralyzed man. In **both** accounts these things happen right before the "call" of Matthew/Levi. If you are still not convinced that Matthew and Luke frequently depict the same events (not just similar ones) in different orders, one suggests that at your leisure you obtain a book on Gospel Parallels or go to gospelparallels.com; you will see that there are quite a few such instances.

There is no philosophical problem with Matthew's having rearranged some events thematically. He noted that there were times at which Jesus addressed, for example, the second coming, and at one of those locations in his narrative he included the comments that had been made on several different occasions. Given the tight chronology that exists between Luke and John, I tend to agree with a two-gospel (source) hypothesis for the Synoptics as shown in the diagram, but we do not need to dig too deeply into what is



called the Synoptic Problem at this point. If we acknowledge that Matthew wrote before Luke, that Luke and Matthew either had a common source or that Luke used Matthew as a source, and that Luke did indeed write everything out "in order" [Lk 1], then we can conclude without going further into the brush that Matthew's priority as an author did not always include writing everything in order.

If indeed, as Gentry claims, Matthew's account records an *aside* in 24:27 – a statement about the second coming that is totally disconnected from the words around it (which were about the destruction of the Temple), then Jesus was deliberately causing confusion! The contexts of Luke 17 and Matthew 24 are identical. During the time right before the judgment (AD 70), people would be looking for the Messiah, but they would be wrong. When he appeared it would be suddenly like lightning and would be known to everyone in the land. Using the same words in the same context appears to confuse Ken Gentry, for in Luke 17 "no one is commenting on the Temple" (p. 51), but rather all those words are about the second coming. In Matthew, some of those same words are about the temple – except for the verse about lightning, which is about the second coming. That's how Gentry sees it, but again it is more logical to believe that both passages are talking about the same event. Consequently, either Matthew 24 is entirely in the future, or it is entirely in the past. It is no wonder, then, that he begins with the disclaimer that "...this issue is not really a crucial matter."

Matthew 24: Gapped or Gapless?

The issue really belongs with the context of Matthew 24, but Gentry does not address it until page 73 – when he assigns the issue its own chapter, numbered the fifth. We will address it here – referring to Gentry's later chapter as we go. After telling us that he was content to apply all of Matthew 24 to the First Century, Gentry seems compelled to explain why this cannot be the case, in his opinion. Again, the lurking reason seems to be that *if* there are no gaps, *then* everything there is either past or future. A Full Preterist would not disagree with Gentry's assessment that Mt 24:34-35 belong with the material above it and are part of the narrative about the destruction of the temple.

Gentry has already stated his opinion regarding Luke 17 (pp. 49-53). He is convinced that Luke must be using similar language to Matthew while talking about other events. After all, in Matthew's account the narrative is all in one place, while in Luke parts of the narrative are in different places and were spoken by Jesus at different times. Yet on page 77 he is convinced that there is a "transition indicator" in Matthew 24, so let's compare Matthew 24 to Mark 13 and Luke's account together. The context of Mark 13 is the same as that of Matthew 24; Jesus' talk about the destruction of the temple occurs immediately prior to his arrest in chapter 14. The first segments of Mark clearly parallel those in Matthew 24 and Luke 21. Clearly the beginnings of all three accounts are describing the same event occurring at the same time. Mark's phrasing of the students' question indicates that they were asking about the destruction of the Temple – about which Jesus had spoken. The wording in Matthew indicates that the same event was known also as the presence (παρουσία) and conclusion of the age; Gentry does not acknowledge that the context only speaks of one event, so let's continue.

Mr. Gentry does not dispute that the early portions of both accounts concern the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem at AD 70; therefore, at this time let's skip down closer to the portion that he refers to as "transitional" and what I usually refer to as the "temporal gap."

"But during those days, after that affliction, "The sun will be darkened...." [Mark]

Gentry agrees with Full Preterists that Matthew and Mark are still talking about the destruction of the Temple. Matthew's version reads:

"Now immediately after the affliction of those days, "The sun will be darkened...." [Matthew]

These are certainly the same. Next, Gentry claims that these were Matthew's concluding comments, but as we shall see they were not.

"Now learn from the analogy of the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and it puts out its leaves, you know that the summer is near. In the same way also, when you notice all these things, know that he is near, at the doors. Indeed I am telling you that by no means will this generation pass away until all these things happen. The sky and the land will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away." [Matthew]

"Now the analogy from the fig tree. When its branches have already become tender and it puts out leaves, you know that the summer is near. Similarly also, when you notice these things happening, know that he is near, at the doors. Indeed I am telling you that by no means will this generation pass away until all of these things happen to them. The sky and the land will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away." [Mark]

This is where Gentry introduces his gap. He claims that Jesus starts here talking about the Second Coming immediately thereafter. From a Full Preterist standpoint he surely *was* talking about the Second Coming, but that *Parousia* was the same event as the destruction of the Temple. Mark's account continues:

"But no one except the Father knows about that day or hour: neither the messengers in heaven nor the son. Look, watch out. For you don't know when the season is. Like a person, one who travels abroad, leaves his household and gives each of his slaves the authority to do his work, he also gave the

doorman a precept, so that he would watch. Therefore, watch—for you do not know when the Lord of the house is coming, if at evening, or at midnight, or at the rooster crow, or at morning)—lest he come suddenly and find you sleeping. Now what I tell you, I am saying to all people: watch.” [Mark]

Remember that in Mark, the only subject in question was the destruction of the temple – just like we read in Luke. His students never mentioned the second coming, or the end of the world, or asked him about any matter other than the Temple in Jerusalem. Matthew’s version is longer, but he is clearly explaining the same concept of vigilance in the same way:

"But about that day and hour no one knows: neither the messengers of the heavens nor the son, no one except the Father alone. ... "Therefore, watch out, because you don't know on what day your Lord is coming. ... Blessed is that slave whom his lord finds doing this when he comes. Indeed I am telling you that he will set him over all his possessions. But if that bad slave should say in his heart, 'My lord is taking his time,' and if he should begin to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with those who get drunk, that slave's lord will come in during a day when he is not expecting and at an hour that he doesn't know, and he will cut him in half and will place his portion with the hypocrites. There, there will be crying and grinding of teeth.” [Matthew]

In Mark’s version all of these things here apply to *the temple*. In Luke 21 also, his students *only* asked him about the temple. This is because the presence and the destruction of the temple come at the same time. Let’s examine these side by side, along with Luke:

Matthew	Mark	Luke
they should say to you, 'Look, he is in the desert,' don't go out. If they say, 'Look, he is in the private places,' do not believe [AD 70]	And then if someone says to you, 'Look! Here is the Anointed One! Look there,' do not trust him. [AD 70]	Days will come when you will strongly desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see one. And they will say to you, 'Look there,' or, 'look here.' Do not go away, nor should you follow. [AD 70, but Gentry says future]
For just as the lightning comes out from the east and is apparent as far as the west, the presence of the Son of Man will be this way. [Gentry says future]		For just as that lightning that flashes from under the sky shines into another part of the sky, so will the Son of Man be in his day. [AD 70, but Gentry says future]
Wherever a corpse may be, the vultures will be gathered there. [AD 70]* *The “corpse” is the ritual religion that was going away.		And they answered, saying to him, "Where, Lord?" Now he said to them, "Where the body is, there also will the vultures be gathered. [AD 70]
Now immediately after the affliction of those days, the sun will be darkened... [AD 70]	But during those days, after that affliction, the sun will be darkened... [AD 70]	And there will be signs with sun and moon and stars... [AD 70]

they will see “the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky” with power and much “glory.” [AD 70]	they will see “the Son of Man coming in clouds” with much power “and glory.” [AD 70]	And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and much brilliance. [AD 70]
And he will send his messengers with great war-trumpets, and they will gather his chosen ones from the four winds—from the extreme points of the heavens to their other extremes. [AD 70]	And then he will send out the messengers and gather up his chosen ones from the four winds, from the farthest point of the land to the farthest point of the sky. [AD 70]	
Now learn from the analogy of the fig tree... [AD 70]	Now the analogy from the fig tree. [AD 70]	And he told them an analogy: "Look at the fig tree... [AD 70]
Indeed I am telling you that by no means will this generation pass away until all these things happen. [AD 70]	Indeed I am telling you that by no means will this generation pass away until all of these things happen to them. [AD 70]	I am telling you that this generation will by no means pass away until even all things have happened. [AD 70]
But about that day and hour no one knows: neither the messengers of the heavens nor the son, no one except the Father alone. [Gentry says future]	But no one except the Father knows about that day or hour: neither the messengers in heaven nor the son. [AD 70]	
For just as in the days of Noah, the presence of the Son of Man will be that way. [Gentry says future]		But first it is necessary for him to suffer many things and to be rejected by this generation . And just as it happened in the days of Noah, it will be the same way in the days of the Son of Man. [AD 70, but Gentry says future because of Matthew]
		They were eating, they were drinking, they were getting married, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark and the flood came and destroyed them all. [AD 70]
		It will be according to the same things on the day when the Son of Man is revealed. In that day, don't let the one who is on the roof, with his goods in the house, descend to pick them up. And similarly, don't let the one who is in the field turn back. [AD

		70]
Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken along, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding in the mill; one will be taken along, and one will be left. [Gentry says future]		I am telling you: That night there will be two people on one bed; one will be taken along, the other will be dropped. [AD 70]
Therefore, watch out, because you don't know on what day your Lord is coming. [Gentry says future]	Look, watch out. For you don't know when the season is. [AD 70]	But pay attention to yourselves, lest your hearts be burdened with gluttony, and drunkenness, and life's anxieties, and that day should come upon you suddenly. [AD 70]
Blessed is that slave whom his lord finds doing this when he comes. [Gentry says future]	Like a person, one who travels abroad, leaves his household and gives each of his slaves the authority to do his work, he also gave the doorman a precept, so that he would watch. [AD 70]	But keep watch in every season, begging so that you might prevail to flee out of these things that are about to happen and to stand in the presence of the Son of Man. [AD 70 = 2nd Coming]

There is certainly no justification for a temporal gap anywhere in Matthew 24-25. Luke 17, Luke 21, and Mark 13 are not talking about *similar* events but about the very same event. Now as to whether that event might be in the past or in the future, this seems clear from the introductory context. Both Luke 21 and Mark 13 indicate that the students were only asking about the destruction of the temple.

Tim LaHaye, who was best known for his *Left Behind* series of novels, wrote this about the first two verses of Matthew 24:

“History records that our Lord’s words were fulfilled *to the letter* in AD 70. In that year the Roman army under the command of Titus destroyed the city of Jerusalem ... And so Jesus’ prophecy was fulfilled literally; not one stone was left upon another.”¹⁰

Elsewhere LaHaye claims that “Matthew 24:4-41 refers to the seven-year Tribulation period (Daniel 9:24-27)” – which he connects not only with Mark 13 and Luke 21 but also with Revelation 6.¹¹ LaHaye envisions no gap in Matthew 24:4-41, repeatedly referring to the narrative as continuous – including verse 27, and including the verses after the Fig Tree analogy. However, since the context of the question posed by Jesus’ students so clearly involved the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in AD 70, LaHaye considers that beginning in 24:4 Jesus only answers about the future Second Coming of Jesus. Thus, he places a gap of over 2000 years in the narrative between Matthew 24:2 and Matthew 24:4. Both Tim LaHaye and Ken Gentry posit gaps in the narrative of Matthew and for the same reason: in order to take the Second Coming out of the past and place it into the future. [In order to justify a pre-tribulation “rapture,” some futurists even propose that the structure of Matthew must suggest that verses 36-44

¹⁰ *Are We Living in the End Times?*, Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins (2004), chapter 4.

¹¹ *The Popular Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy*, ed. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson (2004), pp. 249f.

are to take place prior to the events described in vv. 4-35.] A lot of jumping around in time is required in order to force any portion of Matthew 24 or 25 into the far future. It is far more rational and reasonable to recognize instead that all of the events predicted in Matthew 24-25 lie in the past.

Therefore we ought be compelled to take Gentry's initial suggestion to heart, recognizing all of Matthew 24-25 (= Mark 13 = Luke 17, 21) as having pertained to the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 and to no events outside the First Revolt. As Gentry wrote, **"Orthodox preterists see no doctrinal problems arising if we apply all of Matthew 24 to AD 70."**

AD 70 in Revelation 1-19

Now that we have examined the totality of what the author says about Matthew 24, let's return to page 29 of Gentry's book – where the author begins to explain his viewpoint about Revelation. He begins boldly with the thesis statement that "the judgments in Revelation 4-19 lie in our past." With that statement, too, Full Preterists agree and most Futurists disagree.

Not long after telling us that whether Matthew 24 is all about AD 70 or about the far future is **not crucial**, Gentry states (page 30) that "Revelation relates closely to the Olivet Discourse" and that the Revelation is "a symbolic re-working" of what is found in Matthew 24. His list of parallels link...

1. Mt 24:34 with Rv 1:1,3
2. Mt 24:30 with Rv 1:7
3. Mt 24:4ff. with Rv 6:1-8
4. Lk 21:24 with Rv 11:2 and Mt 23:35 with Rv 18:24

He seems to intend to convey that portions of Revelation employ language that Jesus had already used to describe the destruction of the Temple, and a Full Preterist would certainly agree with this. However, it is somewhat surprising that Mr. Gentry links Matthew 24 so closely to Revelation, for if the fulfillment of Matthew 24 lies in the future, then so does the fulfillment of Revelation 4-19 – invalidating his viewpoint. That is, by placing parts of Matthew 24 in the future he has left his argument open to a Futurist counter-argument. Furthermore, if there are no temporal gaps or asides in Matthew 24, then too there is no justification for placing any temporal gaps or asides into Revelation. Consequently, all of the prophetic portions of Revelation are either past or future.

As Gentry begins to examine Revelation (Page 30 ¶ 4, Line 7), he lays the groundwork for the Full Preterist view, and his reasoning about the expectation of an immediate fulfillment is sound. The book of Revelation, as a literary unit, begins and ends with parallel statements of imminence. Just as the opening statements include the wording, "the things that will necessarily happen in a short time" and "the season is near," so also the scroll of the prophecy concludes with "things that are necessary to happen in a short time," twice stating also that "I am coming quickly." The author clearly intends to convey that the entire prophecy (and not just portions thereof) will be fulfilled **"in a short time."** As Gentry himself asks rhetorically (p. 31), "What clearer terms for contemporary expectation could John use...?" The Full Preterist certainly finds himself in agreement and wonders why Gentry – having dismissed the Futurist viewpoint of Matthew 24 by calling his own view "obvious" – focuses on comparing his view to Futurism and not to Full Preterism when it comes to Revelation. It appears that this section of the book originally stemmed from an article or articles comparing Futurism and Preterism.

Next (Page 31 ¶ 3 and following) Gentry diverges into a defense of the fact that the first recent formulation of any form of the Preterist viewpoint of Revelation was made by the Jesuit priest, Luiz del Alcazar (Alcasar). Gentry's defense is two-pronged. First he refers briefly to two of the references to past fulfillment that are found in writings prior to Alcasar. Secondly he points out that the Futurist view was likewise not detailed until a Jesuit priest, Francisco Ribera, published his own book in the late XVI century. This leaves him open to an attack from Historicists.

The Historicists would claim here that both detailed formulations – those of Preterism and Futurism – were Catholic responses to the Historicist view that was popular among the leaders of the Protestant Reformation. The first complete Historicist commentary of Revelation had been published by Joachim of Fiore in 1190; the viewpoint was popular among both the Lollards and then the Protestants. Therefore, Gentry would have been better served had he traced the origins of the different viewpoints – at least as far back as Victorinus. Still, he probably does not anticipate many Futurists reading this particular book – and likely even fewer Historicists.

Still concerned with the possibility of a future fulfillment of the early chapters of Revelation (Page 32 ¶ 1), the author reasons that no Futurist is a “pure” Futurist because they regard passages like Isaiah 7:14 as having been fulfilled. This is clearly a *misstatement* of the Futurist viewpoint. The Futurist would claim that “no prophecy **of the end times** has been fulfilled yet,” or “the prophecies after Jesus’ resurrection remain for future fulfillment.” For instance:

The basic premise of the futurist viewpoint is that the majority of the prophecies in Revelation still await a future, literal fulfillment. This view of interpreting Revelation is very popular today, particularly among dispensationalists. It is the method used by the authors of the bestselling *Left Behind* series. Those who hold this view generally believe that everything after Revelation 3 will be fulfilled in the future.¹²

Notice that the citation does not refer to earlier prophecies. Futurists do not interpret prophecies about earlier matters as being unfulfilled because those things are not a part of Futurism at all. Beginning at least with God promising land to Abraham's descendants, they look at past matters as being in the past, but for them the end-times prophecies (“the last days”) are unfulfilled. Thus it is disingenuous to say that there are no pure Futurists – since no one has ever claimed to be such a thing as Gentry describes. This is a straw-man argument against a position that does not exist. He appears to have a great deal of trouble creating a fine line between the Futurist viewpoint and that of the Full Preterist. The Historicist would agree with him in saying that part of Revelation was fulfilled, but the Historicist viewpoint about the meaning of Revelation 4-19 would conflict on the whole with Gentry's expressed opinion.

AD 70 at the End of Revelation

In his present book, we are scarcely told anything at all about what Gentry believes concerning Revelation 20-22. His end-note references at the end to Biblical passages give us:

Rev 21-22 (page) 42
 Rev 21:20 (pages) 17, 56
 Rev 22:6 (page) 30
 Rev 22:10 (pages) 30, 60

¹² “What is the Futurist Interpretation of the Book of Revelation?” from gotquestions.org

If he cites Revelation 21:20 anywhere, I certainly do not see where – nor would I understand why. In examining the pages themselves, the verse in question must be Luke 21:22 instead of Rev 21:20. These instances should be added to his list of appearances of Lk 21:22. This leaves us with only three references to any verse or verses in Revelation after chapter 19. One ought to find this to be curious because Full Preterists would generally agree with him completely when he states about chapters 4 – 19 that “the judgments in Revelation 4-19 lie in our past.” We differ on how to interpret Revelation 20 – 22. Yet oddly he spends nearly **four pages** defending the viewpoint that Rev 4-19 has been fulfilled; he spends no time at all – in this book subtitled “A Critique of the Hyper-Preterist Error” – attempting to establish a time frame for chapters 20 – 22. Instead of spending time establishing portions of Revelation as having been fulfilled in the First Century, it would have made more sense to ignore revelation entirely. His choice as to which fragments of thought to assemble into this book is difficult to comprehend on that account.

For the information regarding how he differs from Full Preterists on the end of Revelation we must go to his website. There he writes:

“Although the vast majority of Revelation focuses on events that will occur “soon” (Rev 1:1, 3), the Revelation 20 section on the thousand years begins, but is not completed, in the first century. It projects itself into the distant future, allowing a glimpse of the end result of the events beginning in the apostolic era.”¹³

He marks out Rev 20:4-6 as having taken place in the First Century.

“The “rest of the dead” do not participate in this first century, spiritual resurrection. In fact, they “do not live again until the thousand years” is finished (Rev 20:5). For John’s purposes, these dead probably refer to “the rest,” who were killed in Revelation 19:21 — the associates of the beast (Nero) who is slain in the context of AD 70. In the future they will be physically resurrected (implied) in order to experience “the second death” (eternal torment in both body and soul, Mt 10:28), which occurs on Judgment Day (Rev 20:11–15).”¹⁴

He appears to believe that the “thousand years” of Revelation began in AD 70 and is still going on today. He writes:

“This dramatic imagery [Rev 20:1-6] teaches that Satan has been “bound” so that he “should not deceive the nations any longer.” This allows all those who are spiritually resurrected believers to “reign with him” in his kingdom. Despite popular misunderstanding of this passage, this vision speaks of realities already established in Christ’s first coming, as we can tell from several reasons.”¹⁵

“Christ has bound him so that he may not dominate us.”¹⁶ [emphasis added]

Elsewhere, in direct response to a question about the end of Revelation, he writes something about the future. Given that he has recognized Revelation 22 as pointing to a fulfillment of the entire book “soon,” is all of Revelation in the past? He says:

¹³ “Long Reign in Short Book?” Kenneth Gentry, Postmillennialism Today (his blog), June 7, 2016.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ “Satan’s Binding; Your Hope (1)” Kenneth Gentry, Postmillennialism Today (his blog), December 11, 2015.

¹⁶ “Satan’s Binding; Your Hope (2)” Kenneth Gentry, Postmillennialism Today (his blog), December 14, 2015.

“As a matter of fact, I do see some historical events in Rev that stretch beyond its near-term time frames. By the very nature of the case, these are rare, since John brackets both ends of his prophetic work with near-term indicators. But these do exist.

“I believe that Rev 20 is the one place where the reader is taken into the distant future from John’s day. In fact, I believe we are taken through history to the very end. Let me explain.

“In Rev 20 we read six times of a thousand-year period of time. This clearly points beyond the near term and projects out into the distant future. Whatever John means by his reference to the “thousand years,” he surely cannot mean a short period of time. In Scripture a thousand years is deemed a long time. And the number “one thousand” pictures an enormous number, even where it is not understood literally....

“This is true of the one thousand year period in Rev 20. The thousand year reign of Christ must indicate an enormously long reign. And indeed, most non-dispensationalist or non-premillennialist scholars hold that the this period represents Christian history from the first century to the last, whenever that may be.

Consequently, we must understand John to be making a **rare breach¹⁷ of his time-constraints.** ...

“We must recognize, however, that the thousand years of Rev 20 actually **begin in the first century**. In fact, I believe they begin in the context of AD 70. Upon the judgment of the beast (Nero’s death) in AD 68) and the collapse of the temple and th[e] false prophet (the high-priesthood) in AD 70, the martyred Christians will be exercising rule in heaven with Christ.

“When you compare Rev 6:9 with Rev 20:4 you will note the strong parallels of words and sentiment. In Rev 6:11 the martyrs are told they must wait only ‘a little while longer,’ i.e., until the conclusion of the judgment of Israel.”¹⁸

If we are correct in our reading, Gentry wants for his readers to believe that the **entire book of Revelation** is about the First Revolt and destruction of the Temple during the First Century – except for a few aside comments made in chapter 20. Gentry writes in his current book of the last two chapters of Revelation that “The new creation language suggests a first-century setting” (p. 42). This is a quote from *Four Views on the Revelation*, in which Gentry is one of the authors to explain a “view.” In that book he explains his viewpoint further.

Revelation mentions two events in succession: first a resurrection, and secondly, a death. These are called the “first resurrection” and the “second death.” John never mentions a “first death,” but Gentry infers one. He never mentions a “second resurrection,” either, but Gentry infers one. He then claims “The first resurrection is – salvation.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Unless John was writing about pants or birthing, Gentry intended to spell the word “breach.” Just a typo.

¹⁸ “Distant Events in Revelation?” Kenneth Gentry, Postmillennialism Today (his blog), March 25, 2015.

¹⁹ “The Resurrections,” section in Preterist chapter, Kenneth Gentry, *Four Views on the Revelation* (1998).

That is not what Revelation itself says, however. If we agree with Gentry that chapters 1-19 of Revelation have passed, then the First Resurrection must also be in the past, for John wrote:

“And I saw thrones, and the souls of those who had been chopped up on account of Jesus' testimony and on account of God's message, and who did not worship the wild animal nor his image, and who did not receive the mark on their foreheads and on their hands—and they sat on the thrones.

“And they lived and reigned with the Anointed One for one thousand years.

“This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection. The second death has no authority over these people. On the contrary, they will be God's and the Anointed One's priests and will reign with him for the one thousand years.”

Agreeing with Gentry, a Full Preterist might determine that the wild animal (“beast”) is a figure that we find in chapter 13, which is in the *past* from our perspective (at this point in the narrative). The operative part of chapter 13 reads:

“And it was given to him to give breath to the image of the wild animal, so that the image of the wild animal might also speak and act, so that as many people as would not **worship the image of the wild animal** would be killed. And he makes all people—the little ones and the great ones, and the wealthy and the poor, and the free and the slaves—that they would give themselves **a mark on their right hand or on their forehead**, and that no one would be able to buy or sell except for the one who has the mark, the name of the wild animal, or the number of his name.”

According to Revelation the people that were part of the thousand-year reign in chapter 20 (the First Resurrection) were the “martyrs” who had **died** during the thousand years. Throughout that whole period they had been dying on behalf of the message, and on behalf of Jesus’ testimony, and they had not “taken the mark” of the beast. Gentry believes that Nero (and then Vespasian) is the Beast. This is certainly a legitimate viewpoint, and I once agreed with him. I believe now that the wild animal represents the civil governments that went along with and supported Priestly Judaism. These are specifically the locally-based rulers of Judea after the time of Jesus, but the people who were dying on behalf of the message had been dying for a very long time prior to that. Here’s **another excerpt** from *Post-Apocalyptic Christianity*.

The second wild animal to emerge appears first to be like a sheep (lamb) but speaks like a dragon. We might call him a “wolf in sheep's clothing”. The civil ruler of the Roman province of Judea wields the authority of the Empire itself and uses it for evil purposes. He speaks like the dragon (the ritual religion) although appearing harmless. This wild animal comes from the land – i.e., he is a natural human being who lives in Palestine (v.18). He is described in terms of the false prophets, who claimed to be leading the people to truth but instead brought them destruction. The political ruler, having the power of the Empire, could seemingly do anything. He was deceiving the people by being politically joined to the Empire – in effect having them worship the Empire. Those who did not embrace the state and its ways were persecuted or put to death. In this, the continued adherence to the ritual religion of Priestly Judaism was equal to rejecting God and following the cult of Divus Nero – Nero as a living divine being. The expression about the mark comes from Exodus 13, where the ritual practice of Pesach (Passover) was labeled as “a sign on your hand and as a reminder on your forehead, so that the teaching of Yahweh may be on your lips.” At this point in history the opposite was true. The obsession with ritual was a

direct rejection of God's teachings. The Judean people would not trade equally with anyone whom they regarded as an apostate. Here, this is portrayed as not being able to act without taking the "mark."

Gessius Florus was the procurator immediately prior to the breakout of the First Revolt. According to Josephus, it was Florus' brutal, violent rule that led to the revolt.

"Now Gessius Florus, who was sent by Nero as Albinus' successor, filled Judea with many bad things. Now he was born in the city of Clazomene, and brought along with him his wife, Kleopatra, who was no less evil as he was. (Through her friendship with Nero's wife, Poppea, he obtained this rule.) Florus was so bad and so violent regarding his authority – so excessive were the bad things that he brought to them – that the Judeans praised Albinus as though he had been their benefactor. For indeed he [Albanus] had hidden his evil and was careful that it might not be discovered by everyone." (*Antiquities* XX:11:1)

When the anti-Roman Sicarii faction robbed people, he protected them in return for a cut of their plunder – so that the surrounding towns were being looted. He favored the Greeks over the Judean nationals. His corruption stirred up the people to rebel against the Empire. Eventually he stole from the treasury, claiming the money was owed in tribute. The man was a ... beast.

...the use of the number 666 is more likely connected with the weight of the annual tribute to the last king of united Israel – Solomon. When he ruled the whole land, Solomon received an annual tribute of 666 gold talents. This figure is recorded in both 1 Kings 10:14 and in 2 Chronicles 9:13. Such an exact value, excluding plenty of other income, should not expect to be fixed from year to year. The number represents not only the wealth of the political ruler but also his pride. Solomon had spent the money (1 Kgs 10:15ff.) not to help the people in some way but to secure his own political place. He had a great throne constructed, decorated his palace with gold, and sent out a fleet of ships to accumulate more wealth.

Since the people had demanded a political ruler when God wanted them to be ruled by him directly through the judges, the political (or civil) ruler represented everything that was bad about the relationship between Israel and the other nations. We certainly see this in 1 Samuel 8.

"Then all of Israel's older people gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, 'Look: you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Make for us a king to judge us like all the nations....'" Samuel took this personally, believing that the people did not accept him as their judge. That wasn't the case. "And Yahweh said to Samuel, 'Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but **they have rejected me** from being king over them.'" The political rulers were from the very start a symbol of the people's rejection of God's rule. Since the number associated with Solomon's opulence was 666, that number represented the political rule in Judea during the First Century.

End excerpt. Whether the second wild animal was Nero or the Judean rulers, the figure represents a person who was living during the First Century and who does not presently exist. It would be a grievous mistake to transpose either Caesar or the ruler of Judea into any time beyond the First Century.

Indicating his so-called second resurrection, Gentry writes, “John does not expressly mention the second resurrection in Revelation 20. We imply²⁰ that from three factors in the text....” Actually, *neither John nor any New Testament author ever uses the expression “second resurrection.”* The concept doesn’t exist. Aside from the incorrect analysis that the language necessitated a “second resurrection,” it is “the judgment scene in verses 12-13” which leads him to believe that this part of chapter 20 is in the future. Why is that? Because he already believes that there is a future, collective, final judgment; therefore, this is it. He is interpreting the Bible according to his own opinion; the issue is that he does not believe that is what he is doing.

Now who was being judged in that judgment in verses 12-13? The dead: all of the dead. Specifically, these are all of the good dead people (those who had died on behalf of the message) and all of the bad dead people (those who had supported Priestly Judaism). There is no imagery here of everyone on earth being slain, or of the mythical end of time. The people who were judged were the ones who were on either side of the conflict that had been occurring for 1000 years and which had just ended (in the narrative) in the great affliction – the First Revolt. Portions of chapter 21 indicate the aftermath of the judgment in chapter 20, as do vv. 22:1-5. None of the images in Revelation are outside of the First Century, and we do not need to formulate a “breach” of John’s time constraints.

Consequently and yet again, if we encounter no reason to place an “aside” into the text, then our most likely conclusion is that either all of the prophetic portions of Revelation are in the past, or all are in the future. Preferable to Gentry’s viewpoint that a few paragraphs lie in the future would be the Historicist viewpoint that Revelation has been unfolding continually throughout the last 2000 years.

AD 70 in 1 Corinthians 15

First let’s take a brief excursion into the book of **Hosea**. This is not merely a diversion, for Paul cites Hosea in 1 Corinthians 15.

The author wrote Hosea 6:4 and Hosea 13:3 in order for us to compare them with one another.

Hos 6:4 – “What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears.” (NIV)

Hos 13:3 – “Therefore they will be like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears, like chaff swirling from a threshing floor, like smoke escaping through a window.” (NIV)

These connect the oracles of the book; it is not possible to explain chapter 13 without explaining the book’s context.

The Israelites had committed two chief offenses and angered God. These were:

- a. They established kings.
- b. They were idolaters.

We see these listed in Hos 8:4, where we read:

“They set up kings without my consent; they choose princes without my approval. With their silver and gold they make idols for themselves to their own destruction.” (NIV)

These are the same problems about which we read in chapter 13. In urging Israel to throw out their idols, the author writes, “a craftsman has made it; it is not God.” (8:6)

“they make idols for themselves from their silver, cleverly fashioned images, all of them the work of craftsmen.” (13:2)

²⁰ Here he means “infer.”

So we see that the book of Hosea does not “break.” It does not suddenly begin to talk about other things. Based on our understanding of the context, in chapter 13 the author forecasts the end of the northern kingdom of Israel because of their idolatry. The chapter begins with a discussion of their idolatry; verses 10-11 focus on their reliance on human leaders. Verse 12 begins their judgment.

Where now is your king that he may save you in all your cities, and your judges of whom you requested, “Give me a king and princes”? I gave you a king in my anger and took him away in my wrath.

V. 12 – Israel’s sins have been accumulating.

V. 13 – Israel’s judgment in metaphor is like giving birth.

The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up; his sin is stored up.

The pains of childbirth come upon him; he is not a wise son, for it is not the time that he should delay at the opening of the womb.

Verse 14 is cited by Paul.

Will I rescue them out of the hand of Sheol and redeem them from death?

Death, where is your victory?

Sheol, where is your sting?

Regret is hidden from my eyes.

Vv. 15-6 – Yahweh will dry up Israel’s spring, causing its destruction. Israel hunted the wind (12:2) finding a wind/spirit of prostitution (4:12); now it will be destroyed by a “wind” from God. She “bears her guilt” on account of her rebellion against God.

The context sets up Paul’s citation. In his time, Israel was about to be judged because of its ritual religion, which was a rebellion against God. “Will I rescue them out of the hand of Sheol and redeem them from death? Death, where is your victory? Hades, where is your sting? Regret is hidden from my eyes.” The NET Bible is probably correct in rendering the beginning of the verse as rhetorical questions, **“Will I deliver them from the power of Sheol? ... No, I will not!”** God hides his eyes from Israel’s regret and allows Death and Hades to bring on their effects. Paul quotes this passage in its correct and original context.

That context does not concern Gnosticism. Gentry uses Gnosticism rather than local customs to explain 1 Corinthians 6, 7, and 11. His explanation of the readers’ desire to abstain from sex (ch. 7) is clearly in error, though, for the Nag Hammadi library of Gnostic literature contains several references to sexuality in marriage. Here is a simple example:

One will clothe himself in this light sacramentally in the [sexual] union.

If the woman had not separated from the man, she should not die with the man. His separation became the beginning of death. Because of this, Christ came to repair the separation, which was from the beginning, and again unite the two, and to give life to those who died as a result of the separation, and unite them. But the woman is united to her husband in the bridal chamber. Indeed, those who have united in the bridal chamber will no longer be separated. Thus Eve separated from Adam because it was not in the bridal chamber that she united with him.²¹

²¹ Gospel of Philip, Isenberg translation, vv. 85-86.

The Gnostic “sacrament of the Bridal Chamber” was no allegory but a “sacred embrace” that indicated the spiritual blending of a man and a woman. Married Gnostics who participate in sex “kindle the light,” whereas people who have sex because of carnal desire live in darkness. The Corinthians’ concern was about the coming of the destruction of the temple. They did not want to sleep together – possibly having children – if they were going to have to uproot themselves (or be slaughtered) in a very short time.

Paul was conscious of that shortness of time, but he did not want for married people to risk stumbling by sleeping with prostitutes, so he urged married people to have sex. In general, though, the time was so short that people who were unmarried ought to remain so (vv. 25-27, 29f.). Paul’s language that “it is a nicer thing on account of the situation of distress in which you stand... since the season is short ... the scheme of this creation is going by, and I want you to be carefree” – these things all refer to the judgment that was coming soon. Although the readers were not near Jerusalem, they could anticipate some manner of persecution as a result of the upcoming conflict between the Judeans and the Romans. There is nothing here about Gnosticism, and likewise there is no Gnosticism in chapter 15.

In response to their questions in chapter 15, Paul wanted to explain to his readers a few things about what was going to happen when the judgment against the evil religion comes. I envision their question being something like this: “If we’re all supposed to participate in this judgment, what happens if some of us die before it happens?” It is a question similar to what the Thessalonians asked.

However, some of his readers were not convinced that there is an afterlife; Paul proves that first. In addressing the spiritual nature of the afterlife, we will examine shortly many of the details about 1C 15; Gentry covers the matter twice in his book. The context of the letter’s authorship is important because the Corinthians were under the impression that those who survived until AD 70 would receive some sort of reward, but everyone who was already dead had ceased to exist because they were unsure about the afterlife. Most of what Paul was writing concerns the existence of the afterlife, but he returns to the details of their question in verses 20-34. Verses 35-50 express speculations over the nature of the afterlife. The rest of 1C chapter 15 concerns Paul’s statement that everything would be different after the war.

Now I am making known to you, brothers, the good message that I announced to you, which you also received, in which you have been standing, and through which you are being saved if you hold to a certain message that I announced to you—unless you trusted inconsiderably.

The use of “are being saved” refers to the upcoming destruction of Priestly Judaism. This is what the readers were being rescued **from**: from the end of their access to God. The “certain message” was the internalization of the Torah. Rather than trying to serve God by sacrificing animals, Paul’s readers understood that they were to engage in loving relationships (e.g., 1C 13). They knew for sure that the upcoming judgment was about to happen. They didn’t doubt that.

For I delivered to you among the first things what I also received, that the Anointed One died on behalf of your error according to the writings, and that he was buried, and that he was raised up during the third day according to the writings, and that he was seen by Kefa, then by the Twelve. After that, he was seen on high by five hundred brothers at once, of whom the majority remain to the present day, but some have gone to sleep.

After that, he was seen by Jacob. After that, by all of the envoys. But last of all, he was seen by me as well, as though I were born late.

For I am the least of the envoys; I am not fit to be called an envoy because I persecuted God's assembled. But by God's generosity, I am what I am, and his generosity toward me did not become worthless. On the contrary, I worked more abundantly than all of them. (Now it was not I, but God's generosity that is with me.) Therefore, whether it is I or they, we are heralding this way, and you trusted this way.

Another thing that the readers did not doubt was the essence of what they had heard about Jesus. They didn't doubt what they had heard about Jesus, so Paul began there.

1. Jesus died and came back from the dead. There were many witnesses of this (including Paul), and the readers themselves believe it. He uses absurdities to make the readers realize that they do know this is true themselves. Therefore, there is life after death.

But since it is being heralded that the Anointed One was raised from among the dead, why are some of you saying that there is no resurrection from among the dead? Now if there is no resurrection from among the dead, not even the Anointed One has been raised. Now if the Anointed One has not been raised, then our heralding is meaningless, and your trust is meaningless. But we would also be found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified according to God that the Anointed One was raised; God did not raise him up if indeed the dead are not raised. For if dead people are not raised, neither was the Anointed One raised; but if the Anointed One was not raised, your trust is deceptive: you are still in your errors. Then also those who have gone to sleep in the Anointed One have been destroyed. If only in this life we have hope in the Anointed One, then we are the most pitiful of all people.

Once again the readers knew this. If Jesus was in the afterlife, then there must be an afterlife. That was simple reasoning. In case any of them were tempted at that point to doubt Jesus' resurrection, Paul has presented himself and many others as legal witnesses to Jesus' resurrection. Unless all of those people were sadly deluded – and they weren't – the afterlife exists because Jesus went to it. We find a hint of their question here. If there is no afterlife, then “those who have gone to sleep [died] in the Anointed One” – Jesus' followers as opposed to the people who practiced Priestly Judaism – “have been destroyed.” Dead is dead if there is no afterlife, and if Paul and the others are so crazy as to think they have spoken with a resurrected Jesus, then they should be pitied! By this time the readers shouldn't question the existence of the afterlife, but they still had their question.

Concerning the Corinthians' Question

But now, the Anointed One has been raised from among the dead as a first fruit of those who have gone to sleep.

Jesus was not the first person to enter the afterlife, but as the Messiah he was the first “Messianic” (Christian) to die.

For since there is death through a human being, there is also a resurrection of the dead through a human being. For just as in Adam all people die, in the same way also all people will be made alive in the Anointed One. But each one will do so by his own

arrangement. The Anointed One was a first fruit. After that, those who were the Anointed One's in his presence.

2. The next point is that Jesus wasn't the only one in the afterlife.
 - a. Everyone is able to choose like Adam chose: to reject God's teachings (go back into ritual religion) and die, or to accept God's teachings (Love and Trust) and live. Here, the ritual religion is part of rejecting God's teachings, so...

Then the end will come, when he will have delivered up the kingdom to Father God, when he will have deactivated all rule and all authority and power.

- b. "Then the end will come" refers to AD 70, when the sacrificial system was going to be gone for good. Death itself is powerless for the person who lives by the spiritual Torah. The end of the war would prove conclusively that God is over everything: the ultimate authority. The end of Temple worship is the deactivation of the rule of ritual religion.
 - c. There is no access to God among the idolatrous religionists.

For it is necessary for him to be king until indeed "he has placed all of his enemies under his feet."²² Death, the last enemy, has been stripped of power, for "he has arranged all things under his feet."

When Paul cites Psalm 110 in the *past tense*, he is conveying that for Jesus the job is done at that point. When the temple was destroyed, the enemies were all subjected to him. Death, in the permanent and final sense, was completely powerless. Vindicated at the temple's destruction, the Christian would be perfectly hopeful in joining the dead (good) people in eternal, spiritual life.

But when it is said, "all things are arranged under him," it is a given that the one who arranged all things under him is an exception. But when he has arranged all things under him, then also the son himself will arrange himself under the one who arranged everything under him, so that God may be everything in everything.

This is a statement about Jesus' relationship to his Father – in case one of the readers might wonder how "all" things (including God) could be arranged under the Anointed One. The paragraph brings everything into God's perfect order once ritual religion is gone.

Otherwise, what will those people do who are being baptized on behalf of the dead, if dead people go wholly unraised? And why are they being baptized on their behalf? And why are we in danger every hour? "I die each day." I say this by the boasting about you that I have in Anointed Jesus our Lord. If I were to fight a wild animal in Ephesus, according to my humanity, what would it profit me? If dead people are not raised up, "we should eat and drink, for we die tomorrow."²³

3. The readers were thoroughly convinced that Israel was going to be judged, and that access to God through the temple would be taken away. Why would they undergo such a struggle if they were going to be destroyed along with the rest? Therefore, there is an afterlife.

²² Psa 110:1 in the past tense!

²³ Isa 22:13 from the Septuagint

4. Were they still unconvinced? People were suffering for the dead, and “being baptized” is used as a metaphor for suffering here (as it is in Mk 10:38). Why do that if there was no afterlife? Truly they knew that all good dead people were still alive spiritually.
5. In Isaiah 22, a judgment on Jerusalem was coming (just as there was when Paul was writing in the First Century), and there was no hope. If/when the Assyrian armies came, the end could not be stopped, and so, everyone might as well be happy now. Death was certain, and there would be no point in trying to avoid it. That quote continues with, **"Surely this wrong will not be forgiven of you until you die."** With God coming in judgment again, if there were no afterlife, there would be no point in doing anything. Just accept God's judgment on Israel and die with many of the others. But Paul's point was that life was not that hopeless.

Do not be led astray: **"Bad relationships corrupt beneficial ethics."**²⁴ Be awake justly, and do not err, for some people have an ignorance of God. I am saying this to nourish you.

6. The quote comes from Menander's "Thais". Menander was a Greek dramatist who lived from 342 BCE to 291 BCE. Menander's works were peppered with easy to remember sayings like the one that Paul quoted. Paul affirms Menander's saying, implying that the readers should not listen to the foolish people who were denying that there was an afterlife, or that the dead could not participate in the judgment of Priestly Judaism along with the living. Paul advised his readers to watch such matters carefully, realizing that those people were just ignorant.

Answering the Corinthians About the Nature of the Afterlife

But someone will say, "How are the dead people raised? Now what kind of bodies do they come in?" People without wisdom! ... Now I sound like this, brothers, because flesh and blood are not able to inherit God's kingdom, nor will the corrupt thing inherit incorruptibility.

In the chapter “Excursion into the Afterlife!” we will examine in detail the nature of the afterlife, so let us be brief here. Paul doesn’t want his readers to get distracted wondering all kinds of trivial questions about the afterlife; he wants to return to his main point. These questions probably represent what the non-afterlife faction was asking the readers. Paul’s seed analogy expresses that his readers should not expect something that is not physical to be the same as something physical, and they should expect to leave their physical bodies behind when they die.

He related this matter also to the relationship between Adam and Jesus. Adam had been made a living being (literally, "a living being/soul," Gen 2:7). That's a natural, biological, physical being. By contrast, Jesus' resurrection made him into "a life-giving spirit." Even so, those good people who die are spiritual beings, just as they had been physical beings. Even Jesus traded his physical body in for a spiritual self. The spiritual one came afterwards, just as Jesus had come after Adam. In life, we bear the physical image of Adam, who was "dusty"; in the afterlife, good people live on to resemble "the heavenly one,"

²⁴ This quote comes from Menander's play, *Thais*. One extant fragment reads, "(Lovely Thais, sit beside me; I detect, but still abide thee /) A horse rider? Pest! Methinks, though I have suffered this, that none the less I'd now be glad to have her. Sing to me, goddess, sing of such an one as she : audacious, beautiful, and plausible withal; she does you wrongs ; she locks her door ; keeps asking you for gifts ; she loves no one, but always makes pretence. Bad relationships corrupt beneficial ethics."

Jesus, who is now no longer physical. What summarizes this is one of Paul's beautiful sayings, "**Flesh and blood are not able to inherit God's kingdom.**" The body must be left behind because the afterlife is not physical, and that's the conclusion of the matter regarding the nature of the afterlife.

Back to the Question at Hand

Now Paul returns to his main thesis: They were expecting to die in the First Revolt. Some of them may have been expecting the end of all things, when what was coming was merely the end of Jewish life as they knew it.

Look, I am telling you a secret: indeed, not all will go to sleep, but we will all be changed in the smallest amount of time, in the blinking of an eye, during the last war-trumpet. For it will blast, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed. For it is necessary for this corruptible thing to be clothed with incorruptibility, and for this mortal thing to be clothed with immortality.

So Paul told them that they would not all die during the First Revolt, but everything would be different after the judgment on Priestly Judaism. In his allegorical description, as soon as the judgment began, everything they knew would change. Those Christians who died innocently during the conflict would be part of the afterlife right away. While in their bodies, they were mortal, but they would be (metaphorically) "clothed with immortality" in order to be with God."

Now when this mortal thing is clothed with immortality, then the message that was written will occur: "Death was swallowed"²⁵ in victory.

Paul has already quoted Isaiah 22 concerning the coming of certain death at the hands of the Assyrians and their allies. At this point he returns to the same narrative. There is a parallel between chapter 25 and chapter 17, beginning with the description of the fallen city – which chapter 17 identifies with Damascus, representing Syria. The Assyrian chronicles indicate that the siege of Damascus lasted for two years. 2 Kings 16 reports that king Ahaz of Judah struck a pact with Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria. After Tiglath-Pileser's attacks on Damascus, he attacked Israel (2 Kings 16). This eventually resulted in the subjection of the northern kingdom of Israel to Assyria.

Isa 25:6f. describes in metaphor a celebration by the faithful people of Judah – whom God was protecting. In this context of victory over an earthly foe, Isaiah writes:

He will **swallow up death for all time**, and Yahweh God will wipe tears away from all faces, and he will remove the reproach of his people from all the earth; for Yahweh has spoken.

Got that? The defeat of the bad guys who opposed God's people is the swallowing up of death. It is not the **literal, physical** end of Death. So, how does Paul apply "death" in his letter to Corinth, where (after the temple is destroyed) Isaiah's statement occurs in the past tense?

"Where, death, is your victory; where, death, is your sting?"²⁶

²⁵ Isaiah 25:8 in the past tense.

²⁶ Hos 13:14

Death's sting is error, but the power of error is the Torah. But thanks be to God, who has given us the victory through our Lord, Anointed Jesus. And so, my beloved brothers, become steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the Lord's work, knowing that your toil in the Lord is not worthless.

This is where Paul quoted Hosea. God was going to bring on Death and Hades (the grave) for the idolaters. Here, those are the people following ritual religion and rejecting their Messiah's teachings. His application to their legalism is summed up in the next statement: "Death's sting (or poison) is sin, but the power of sin is the Torah." The victory over death comes through Jesus' spiritual teachings, and in Paul's reading the saying is fully realized when someone actually dies. Death is not the end. What is it here that makes people fear death? Sin. The unfaithful fear death because of its finality, but for the Christian it is not final. "The power of sin is the Torah" because the religion used the Torah to bind people to the rituals as a means of reminding them of death in the hope that they might escape it. Jesus' teachings aren't just hope; they're victory.

Death **was** rendered powerless; it has no victory. It NO LONGER has a sting because the priesthood and the temple are gone. This is the situation of the freed church, the new Jerusalem of Rev 21. Death's sting is sin, he says. The "power of error is the Torah." Where did that come from? The legalism that accompanied the ritual religion was a perpetual reminder of sin and sinfulness, but the free person would have a consciousness of forgiveness rather than guilt once the temple was out of the theological picture. After the destruction of the temple (and, symbolically, the religious system), sin was made powerless (without anyone to impose a code on others), and therefore death should have no sting. Paul was describing victorious Christian living after the removal of the temple. Therefore, he thanks God for giving the victory, through Jesus' teachings.

Do You See What I See?

Hermeneutical Principles Examined

Gentry claims first that “clearer statements” should be used to interpret the “less clear.” In addressing the hermeneutical principles proposed by Gentry (Page 26, ¶ 2), let us first quote Thomas Ice of the (Futurist) Pre-Trib Research Center – who was writing in opposition to this very point of Gentry’s: “What may be presumed to be a clear statement by one person may not be for another. If hermeneutics should not be *a priori*, how does one ever start the process of biblical investigation without at least assuming an approach that could then be verified? That is the approach commonly taken by literalists; they believe that their hermeneutic has been verified from the Scriptures themselves as a result of dealing with specific texts.” (“Dispensational Hermeneutics,” Thomas Ice, 2009)

Dr. Ice has spoken well. What one person thinks to be “clear” might be the muddy passage to another, and the context of the supposedly-clear passage might be different than one believes it to be. We certainly see this in the examination of Matthew 24-25 – which Full Preterists interpret within the context of a single conversation about the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and into which Partial Preterists (like Gentry) force a temporal gap of 1900 or more years. What if, indeed, it is clear that Jesus was talking about a group of events that were all going to happen to the people of his own generation? Then it is the post-apocalyptic viewpoint and not Gentry’s that must be correct. This is what he seems not to understand: the fact that there are rational, honest truth-seekers who disagree.

Regarding Gentry’s appeal to letting the Bible interpret itself, this is a fine quip that is literally impossible. A book of writings does not “interpret” itself; that is the job of the human being who reads it in its original languages, or translates it, or reads it in translation. The name of this principle is the Analogy of Faith, and Gentry misstates it.

“There is a principle of biblical interpretation called the analogy of faith that is popularly understood to mean “Scripture interprets Scripture,” or “Scripture interprets itself.” This is actually a misunderstanding. Not every Scripture is interpreted by another Scripture... The analogy of faith is not the principle that Scripture interprets Scripture, but that all Scripture is in agreement and will not contradict itself. It assumes the unity and harmony of teaching throughout the Bible. In other words, when multiple passages say something about a topic (either explicitly or implicitly), then what those passages say about that topic will be consistent and will not be contradictory. For example, Psalm 34:15 speaks of God having eyes and ears, whereas John 4:24 says God is spirit. The analogy of faith means that these passages are not contradictory, as they might appear at first glance. We can reconcile them when we recognize that in Psalm 34:15 the author is using a figure of speech and is not asserting that God has literal, physical eyes and ears. He is asserting, rather, that God watches over His people and hears their cries for help; whereas in John 4:24 Jesus is asserting that God is not a physical being, therefore, the physical location of His worshipers is not what is most important to Him. The analogy of faith forces us to dig further to understand how passages that appear to be contradictory should be understood.” (“The Analogy of Faith: Does Scripture Interpret Scripture?”, Thomas A. Howe *Christian Research Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (2006))

In trying to interpret the Bible (or any text), we certainly do not rip it out of its social and cultural context, allowing it to “interpret itself.” That’s not what the principle means. The principle, if we agree

to it at least in part, means that we ought to assume that the Bible has been subjected to enough scrutiny to verify that it is not self-contradictory. Interpretation requires thought and analysis. As to which passages, narratives, and teachings were attempting to convey the same thing, that is subject to interpretation. One does not simply quote from a “religion in sound bites” – stringing together passages arbitrarily. The reader, not the Bible, interprets. Otherwise we might very well be the butts of the famous joke:

One day I was praying to God to show me what to do with my life, so I opened the Bible and pointed to a random verse. It read, “Judas went out and hanged himself.” I was confused, so I pointed to another random verse, which said, “Go and do likewise.” Now I was really bothered, so I did it again. This time the Bible said, “Whatever you are doing, do quickly.”

That’s how “Scripture interprets Scripture” without a human being interpreting it. It would be a random process. Simply, that is not how one ought to interpret any writing – ancient or modern. Instead, one ought to ask and answer various questions in order to interpret that text critically. What were the cultural considerations? Does the passage apply to those specific people (listeners or readers), to a narrowly-defined group of people (Corinthians), to a more broadly-defined group (Israelites, Romans, gentiles), or to everyone? Are there multiple valid explanations of the same teaching? Many times there are. We should not simply claim that we are simply reading the Bible while everyone else is doing it wrong. The other viewpoints are probably *valid*, even though we disagree with them.

Gentry’s Points of Disagreement & Regulative Principles

Immediately after he has spent several pages (29-33) explaining that most of Revelation was fulfilled in the First Century – something with which Full Preterists *agree*, the author changes gears in order to compile a list of teachings which he considers important. Most of these do not directly correlate with eschatology, but he believes that these are matters of disagreement with Full Preterists. In asserting that matters of eschatology are important, and that matters connected with Full Preterism are not ἀδιαφορά (irrelevant things, or matters of opinion, p. 33 footnote), Gentry stakes out a popular position that there are “matters of faith” and “matters of opinion.” Among matters of faith, he claims that some things are “commanded” and others are “forbidden.” There are several opposing conceptualizations of these “regulative principles.” Gentry’s interpretive framework is just one of them.

First, “whatever is not authorized is forbidden.” This viewpoint, popular among the churches of Christ and to an extent among the Presbyterian Church, expresses itself as follows: instrumental music in worship is not authorized in the New Testament; we observe no instances of the use of instrumental music prior to the organization of the Catholic Church in the IV century. Therefore, instrumental music (such as the organ) is forbidden during worship. This very argument is made by the majority of churches of Christ.

In this camp, examples may be viewed as **binding** rather than loosing. That is, if an example tends to indicate a single manner in which a practice was done, then it is best to follow that example. Examples that were purely cultural are not binding. Modes of baptism might fall into this category (depending on the denomination). For example, BaptistDistinctives.org states that, “...Baptists concluded that immersion of a person’s entire body in water was the only biblical way to baptize. Therefore, in spite of persecution, inconvenience and ridicule, they began to practice baptism only by immersion.”

Robert C. Welch of the non-institutional churches of Christ writes in Truth magazine, “Those brethren today who want the church to support their human institutions of benevolence, education and evangelism hate the examples of churches doing the work themselves with one church sending to another church where the need exists, and the church sending to the evangelist; the examples omit their institutions.” (Vol. 34, Article 190)

Second, “whatever is not forbidden is acceptable.” Both Catholics and Lutherans generally follow this principle of interpretation. On the issue of music we might say that playing instruments during worship is not forbidden; consequently it is allowed. We might also say here “if it is not expressly mentioned, then it is a matter of opinion.” There is still disagreement in the case over what to do when there are examples in the Bible that appear to indicate a “pattern” of how people did things.

As a subset of the second view, we may state that “even many Biblical examples are matters of opinion.” A Biblical example is not binding unless the speaker or author (or God) expressly declares it so. For example, Jesus and his students ate their Passover meal in an upper room. This was simply the room that was available to them. We do not need to do any activities in an upper room although we might choose to do so. Along the same line, and jokingly, there is no need to give birth in a barn or stall simply because Jesus was born in one.

Third, “much of what we see in the Bible is temporal and/or cultural.” In this instance even some things that we see in the Bible as instructions were intended for the readers – and not as general teachings. With this way of thinking, Paul was addressing a specific social and cultural issue unique to First-Century Corinth when he wrote, “The wives should be silent in the assemblies. For it is not allowed for them to speak; on the contrary, they should be submissive, just as the law says also. Now if they want to learn something, they should ask their own husbands at home. For the wives' speaking in the assembly is a social disgrace.” Even though Paul passed along specific advice, that advice is not binding for anyone other than those people at that time.

These regulative principles affect the interpretation of passages that one believes to be connected with matters about which the Bible appears to be silent, or about which there is very little information, or concerning which there are several schools of thought. Now that we observe the different formulations of regulative principles, we are able to decide whether we agree with Ken Gentry that certain beliefs of individual Full Preterists are “forbidden.” However, there is no need to accept Gentry’s regulative principles, those of any particular group, or anyone else’s if you believe they make the Bible more difficult to properly interpret.

Gentry's First List of Objections

Gentry is preparing to stake out a position that Full Preterism necessitates the holding of opinions that are “forbidden,” making Full Preterism “heretical” in his opinion. He introduces his framework of disagreement with the Full Preterists by describing ten teachings which he believes are a product of Full Preterism and which he finds to be important errors. Among these, only two are actually necessitated by Full Preterist eschatology: the Second Coming has happened, and that Second Coming was the “final judgment” mentioned in Revelation.

His other points include:

The nature of the Afterlife, which he separates into

The Resurrection of the Dead;

The Resurrection of the Body;

The Doctrine of Hell;

The Consummation (i.e., the End of the World);

The Holy Spirit's work;

The Trinity;

The Rule of Satan;

The Nature of the Gospel of Christ.

Unless a Biblical scholar has been living in a cave, he must realize that there has been widespread disagreement among Christians about these issues for no less than 100 years. Believing differently that Gentry on those issues is not a result of holding the Full Preterist viewpoint, and whether or not someone acknowledges that the Second Coming has already happened is entirely independent of whether (s)he believes different from Gentry on any or all of the other issues that he mentions. His doing so is a red herring – a smoke screen. It appears to be an attempt to make his viewpoint that “most of Revelation has been fulfilled” look so different from the Full Preterist viewpoint that “all of Revelation has been fulfilled” that his reader will not want to examine the other viewpoint any further. Not only do many groups already differ from him on those other issues, but most of those who disagree are Futurists.

A Related Issue Not Connected With Eschatology

Before we begin looking at the items on the list, let us point to the discussions in the Presbyterian Church about Evolution. Ken Gentry is a Presbyterian who is a former pastor. At their 222nd General Assembly (in 2016), the Presbyterian Church (USA) approved of the following statement in support of the teaching of the scientific theory of Evolution:

“Many of the beloved stories found in the Bible—the Creation, Adam and Eve, Noah and the ark—convey timeless truths about God, human beings, and the proper relationship between Creator and creation expressed in the only form capable of transmitting these truths from generation to generation. Religious truth is of a different order from scientific truth. Its purpose is not to convey scientific information but to transform hearts.

“We the undersigned, Christian clergy from many different traditions, believe that the timeless truths of the Bible and the discoveries of modern science may comfortably coexist. We believe that the theory of evolution is a foundational scientific truth, one that has stood up to rigorous scrutiny and upon which much of human knowledge and

achievement rests. To reject this truth or to treat it as 'one theory among others' is to deliberately embrace scientific ignorance and transmit such ignorance to our children. We believe that among God's good gifts are human minds capable of critical thought and that the failure to fully employ this gift is a rejection of the will of our Creator. To argue that God's loving plan of salvation for humanity precludes the full employment of the God-given faculty of reason is to attempt to limit God, an act of hubris. We urge school board members to preserve the integrity of the science curriculum by affirming the teaching of the theory of evolution as a core component of human knowledge. We ask that science remain science and that religion remain religion, two very different, but complementary, forms of truth." (letter of the Clergy Letter Project)

The rationale for approving the statement explicitly states that "It is important for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to be clear that people do not need to reject evolution to affirm their faith." (from pc-biz.org)

Gentry wrote a rather lengthy piece about Evolution and its place in the Presbyterian Church. In part, his thesis reads:

"Some Reformed Christians **deny** that God created the heavens and the earth in six literal days. This denial brings them into clear contradiction with the Westminster Standards, which teach that the Lord God created the heavens and the earth "in the space of six days" (WCF 4:1; LC #15, SC #9)....

"The language of the Confession and the sentiment of the Westminster divines **are so obvious** that even detractors from six-day creation have admitted the meaning of the Confession. One such opponent of six-day creation, Edward D. Morris, writes: "But the language of the Confession, in the space of six days, must be interpreted literally, because this was the exact view pronounced by the Assembly."...

"A **denial** of the Confessional position on creation is a **denial** of a foundational principle of the Confession and our "system of doctrine." The Presbyterian Church in America deems "the doctrine of creation" to be one of "the fundamentals of our standards" (M19GA 2:479, 481). Not only so, but this **denial** of six-day creation is also a capitulation to the most significant unbelieving opposition to Scripture and Christianity today, a secular, humanistic-based science that proceeds from a chance oriented universe by means of uniformitarian science (although some state that they do not hold to any form of evolutionary theory)....

"As Reformed Christians committed to the integrity of the inspired word of God, we must hold to the teachings of Scripture, rather than the ever-changing doctrines of man. Genesis is foundational to the whole Bible; Genesis 1 is foundational to Genesis."²⁷

While the Presbyterian Church at large has taken steps to acknowledge that the Bible is not a science textbook, Gentry belongs to the Reformed Presbyterian Church General Assembly – an offshoot that forbids the teaching of evolution, Pentecostal/charismatic teachings, Dispensationalism, Arminianism, abortion, gay rights, and feminism. Given what he has been claiming about Full Preterists, surely he must think that the larger body of Presbyterians are now apostates – that they have left God.

He writes with the same attitude toward Pentecostals – that his own knowledge is, *a priori*, superior:

²⁷ "Reformed Theology and Six Day Creation," Kenneth Gentry, *Chalcedon Report*, September, 1998.

“Christianity has moved from a foundationally Word-based approach to God to an almost total experience-based approach. And when charismatics even attempt to root their experience in Scripture, **they fail to understand** the Scriptures generally and eschatology particularly.”²⁸ Although I agree with his ultimate assessment that “Biblical tongues no longer exist” (in part 7), I would characterize Charismatics as believers who are striving to connect with an experience that they read about in the Bible.

Gentry dismisses Futurist Premillennials this way: “the premillennial view presents an **absurd situation**. On this view mortals who are aware that immortal, resurrected saints have been ruling them for a thousand years will nevertheless revolt against those immortals in trying to defeat them. This **does not make sense**.”²⁹

When we see how the same author characterizes believers in evolution, in the modern application of the spiritual gifts, and in a premillennial rapture, we understand that he is treating Full Preterists consistently with his treatment of other Christians who disagree with him. We should not be surprised that he does not treat Full Preterism as a viable alternative to his own belief system. Thus, when he describes in his current book that Full Preterism is connected with other beliefs that alarm him, we likewise ought not be surprised.

²⁸ “Tongues and Eschatology (1),” Kenneth Gentry, Postmillennialism Today (his own blog), May 26, 2014.

²⁹ “Millennium as a Dispensational Problem,” Kenneth Gentry, Postmillennialism Today (his own blog), February 7, 2014.

Excursion into the Afterlife!

Now let us examine Gentry's exposition on the afterlife. This will be our second of two looks at 1 Corinthians chapter 15. Earlier we observed the rest of the context of Paul's discussion about the dead – and the connection between the passage and the destruction of the temple. Gentry peers into the afterlife several times in his book: on pages 34-35, 45-46, 108-109, and throughout his fourth chapter (pp. 57-71). Immediately, though, Gentry has said some things about the afterlife and about "spiritual bodies," and we may address those issues separately.

Terminology

Firstly, let us examine the senses of the term **αναστασις**, "resurrection." The word literally indicates "standing up" and may mean, broadly, any condition of standing or rising up. With respect to the context of life after death, it may mean

"the afterlife" [the location or state to which one goes after death];

or "the act of entering the final state (or afterlife)";

or "return to earth after death" [being placed back into one's physical body].

In metaphor the word also indicates "the advancement to a higher or superior state." The word occurs in each of these senses in the New Testament.

In the sense of "the afterlife," we observe:

"I am the resurrection and the life." This is itself a play on words. Jesus' teachings bring life after death, and they are the abundant earthly life as well.

"Therefore, during the resurrection, whose wife, of the seven, will she be?" They weren't questioning him about an event – about the act of entering the afterlife. The Zadokites (Sadducees) did not believe that there was an afterlife, and they used the word "resurrection" to mean "afterlife" here.

"I am being judged about hope and the resurrection of the dead."

"Now when he said this, a dispute between the Perushim and the Zadokites occurred, and the crowd was divided. For indeed Zadokites say there is no resurrection, nor a messenger or a spirit. But Perushim acknowledge both."

"Women received their dead from the resurrection...."

In the sense of "the act of (dying or) entering the final state (or afterlife)," we read:

"It is also the same way with the resurrection of the dead."

In the sense of "return to earth after death," we see:

"...a witness of his resurrection with us."

"And with great power the envoys gave the testimony of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus."

"And as they were descending from the mountain, he gave them a statement, that they should relate what they had seen to no one, except after the Son of Man should be raised from the dead. And they took hold of the statement to themselves, inquiring, 'What is it 'to be raised from the dead'?'"

In the metaphorical sense of advancement to a superior state, we read:

"And don't be partners with those unfruitful deeds of darkness, but rather even reprove them. For it is a disgrace even to say the things that are done by them in secret! But all things that are reprov'd by the

light are made apparent, for all the things that are made apparent are light. So it says, "Wake up, sleeper, and rise from among the dead, and the Anointed One will shine on you.""

In the sense of being stirred up to fight in a war, we see the verb being used in Plutarch's *Lives* (Life of Coriolanus 21:4), and this sense may also appear in the New Testament (1 Thess 4:16).

Except for the most literal meaning of "stand up," authors may contrast previous writers with one another in order to gather shades of meaning. If one pulls potential nuances from other authors, it may become easy to lump certain Biblical uses together or to confuse them with one another.

The Hebrew Word She'ol & the Greek Word Hades

Sheol (or she'ol) is literally the grave. Everyone who dies goes to Sheol. Every literal use of the word she'ol in the Hebrew Bible refers to the grave; most metaphorical uses of she'ol also mean "grave." So when Isaiah describes the King of Babylon as being in Sheol, he means the grave:

"All your pomp has been brought down to the grave [Sheol],
along with the noise of your harps;
maggots are spread out beneath you
and worms cover you." (Isa 14:11, NIV)

Job likewise describes Sheol as a literal grave:

[The wicked] spend their years in prosperity
and go down to the grave [Sheol] in peace...
One person dies in full vigor,
completely secure and at ease,
well nourished in body,
bones rich with marrow.
Another dies in bitterness of soul,
never having enjoyed anything good.
Side by side they lie in the dust,
and worms cover them both. (Job 21:13, 23-26)

In the earlier Jewish writings, the bodies of evil people go to the grave, and they are gone; the bodies of good people go to the grave, but the people themselves are elsewhere. Since Sheol is described in metaphor as being opposite to heaven in a few passages (e.g., Psa 139:8), one presumes that heaven may be the state or location of the afterlife, but this thought seems to have developed after the close of the Old Testament.

The Greek word, Hades, translates Sheol where it appears. In Jewish thought Hades meant the same as Sheol: if you go to Hades you are dead. Hades is the grave (as Sheol), which is the portal for entering the afterlife. The Greeks envisioned Hades as a much more robust place, and we examine the Greek concept of the Afterlife elsewhere in this document – in response to a question about why the Greeks mocked Paul.

Gehenna

The metaphor of Gehenna grew out of a literal place on earth, the Valley of the Son of Hinnom (Gai ben-Hinnom), which is described in Joshua 15:8. Located on the south side of Mount Zion, Gehenna became

known as a place where Moloch was worshipped through rituals of burning (See 2 Kgs 23:10; 2 Chr 28:3; 33:6; Jer 7:31). Topheth, located in Hinnom, was the “burning place” where the idolatrous burnt sacrifices were made. Isaiah uses Topheth as a symbol of destruction:

“Topheth has long been prepared;
it has been made ready for the king.
Its fire pit has been made deep and wide,
with an abundance of fire and wood;” (Isa 30:33, NIV)

The NRSV reads “burning place” instead of Topheth, but since “the king” (melech) is also the word that signifies Moloch, the placement of the two words (Moloch and Topheth) together is surely deliberate. The king will be destroyed with a metaphorical burning as in Gehenna. Jeremiah describes the people of Jerusalem as filling up Topheth (earlier mentioned as in Gehenna):

So will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter’s vessel, so that it can never be mended. In Topheth they shall bury until there is no more room to bury. Thus will I do to this place, says the LORD, and to its inhabitants, making this city like Topheth. And the houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah shall be defiled like the place of Topheth—all the houses upon whose roofs offerings have been made to the whole host of heaven, and libations have been poured out to other gods. (Jer 19:11-14, NRSV)

Whoever goes to Gehenna is destroyed permanently in “fire.”

We find the concepts of both the grave and of Gehenna in the New Testament.

Since the afterlife is a **difficult issue for people to interpret**, it has led to several schools of thought regarding the nature of the afterlife and the point at which one enters it. Here are some of the questions that Bible students have discussed.

- **Does everyone enter an afterlife, or are evil people destroyed?**
- **Do people enter the afterlife immediately upon dying, or do they wait “somewhere” for a period of time?**
- **When they enter the afterlife, do they receive back their physical bodies? If not, is the term “spiritual body” a metaphor for something? Do Christians have it “now” or receive it later?**
- **Is the act of “resurrection” individual or collective?**
- **What happens to bad people?** [Either they are utterly destroyed at death, or have a chance to be redeemed after death, or destroyed at the end of time, or they go to a place (or state) in which they are tortured forever.]

None of these are simple issues, and since all of the expositors are merely interpreting the text without actually visiting and returning from the afterlife, there is no clear and obvious answer. As we shall see, it will be quite easy to argue in favor of different answers to those questions.

Ken Gentry quotes both Ed Stevens and Don Preston in association with the different segments of his accusations about the afterlife. One of his quotes from Stevens (on page 34) purports to be from Stevens’ “Response to Gentry’s *Analysis of the Full Preterist View*,” which Gentry labels on page 90 with the abbreviation RGA. The introductory letter from that 1997 response appears online³⁰, but it does not

³⁰ <http://www.worldwithoutend.info/www321wp/response-letter-towards-gentrys-analysis-of-the-full-preterist-view/>

contain the language that Gentry cites. That language no doubt appeared in the complete response ... as a reply to the 1995 publication of Gentry's "Brief Theological Analysis of Hyper-Preterism."³¹

While it would be superior for us to examine the context of Stevens' statement, Stevens has elsewhere said that he disagrees with Gentry over the "time and nature" of the resurrection. What Ed Stevens actually believes is what he calls the "**Immortal Body at Death**" view. That is, as soon as a good person dies, (s)he leaves the physical, earthly body behind and enters the immortal, spiritual state in that new body. This viewpoint does not stem from Full Preterism.

One Futurist writes that "one second after death" a Christian will be in heaven with God:

What happens in the very next second or less after a person dies? The destination clearly depends upon whether a person has repented and trusted in Christ or whether they have rejected their only hope of eternal life (Acts 4:12; 16:30-31). Paul seemed certain that after he died he would be present with the Lord....

First, [Paul] says that his "departure is near." This departure being near is written within the context of this paragraph where he says that "there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day." What day!? It seems clear that Paul's departure is near and that then there will be awarded to him "the crown of righteousness" on *that day*! Do you see that? He is near his earthly departure and what awaits him is a crown of righteous to be given to him on that day! It appears to be the same day that he departs that he will receive this crown. He could have modified this sentence to the effect of saying, "Then, at the Lord's return, I will receive the crown of righteousness" but he doesn't. He says that it will be awarded to him on "that day!"³²

Other commentators depict the good person as entering heaven when they die, but they do not at that time receive their "immortal bodies" (1C 15); that happens at the End of Time. Such a view is halfway between this one and "Immortal Body at the End of Time," below.

Others hold to the "**Immortal Body Now**" view: even while we are still in our physical bodies, Christians are living in their glorified spiritual bodies. Under this view, Christians are transformed in this life; that transformation puts us into our "immortal bodies." While we are physically alive, we are still living in a shell – a mortal body, but we are currently partaking of immortality. Support for this view usually comes from examining passages in which the authors say that we *have* eternal life (now) – as opposed to awaiting eternal life. The Christian is a new creation. The language indicating these concepts is clearly present in the New Testament; disagreement occurs over whether the "immortal body" or "spiritual body" in 1C 15 is the same as that eternal life in the present. It is no large step to the Immortal Body (or "Heaven") Now view from this statement:

We exist now as a new humanity (Eph 4.24, Col 3.10), bearing as children the image of the new Adam (1 Co 15.45, Ro 5.14) of the new Creation (Ro 8.29, 2 Co 5.17), himself the very image of very God (2 Co 4.4, Col 1.15). We live now as a heavenly people on and in earth (Eph 2.6, Phil 1.27, 3.20, Col 3.1, Heb 12.22) being Spirit-filled temples of God (1 Co 3.16), being the points at which heaven now meets earth. We live now as

³¹ http://www.preteristarchive.com/Modern/1995_gentry_analysis-hyperpret.html

³² "Do Christians Go Immediately to Heaven After They Die?" Jack Wellman, WhatChristiansWantToKnow.com, retrieved 09Nov2016.

people of the Age to Come. In Christ, we, the church, now are the intruders in this fallen age. The New Creation has already been birthed in the midst of the old.³³

Others believe that a **“Corporate Body View”** is correct: the “resurrection” consisted of the Christians being (collectively) raised out of the dying religion of Priestly Judaism during the period from Pentecost (Acts 2) to the destruction of the Temple. To an extent this was advocated by Robert Townley who *was* a Full Preterist. Under this viewpoint, 1C 15 does not tell us anything about what the afterlife is like. To glean that information, we would have to look elsewhere.

One view among futurists is the **“Immortal Body at the End of Time”** view: the dead leave their bodies here on earth, but their spirits go somewhere until the end of time. At that point, they will go before a literal judgment and receive their spiritual bodies.

Futurist Jeff Logan cites Isaiah 57, which reads in part, “For the righteous man is taken away from evil; he enters into peace. They rest in their beds: each one who walked in his upright way.”

His comment was, “They perish and enter into peace to rest in their beds (their graves).” About Daniel 12 he comments, “Daniel was told ... that at his death he would rest until the resurrection (at the end of the days you [Daniel] will rise to receive your allotted inheritance). So again it teaches that at death we go to our sleep, we are at peace. We rest there until we arise at the end of time, the resurrection. Nowhere does it teach we go to either heaven or hell at death.”³⁴

Among all of the above, only the Corporate Body View appears to be associated with Full Preterism more than with any other eschatological viewpoint. This is because of the intrinsic connection between AD 70 and the proposed timing of the receipt of the “corporate body.” However, this view does not result from Full Preterism, for there are many Full Preterists who believe one of the other opinions to be the most accurate one. Furthermore, as it stands at this level the viewpoint merely takes 1C 15 out of the “afterlife equation.” It does not necessarily describe any view of the afterlife by itself.

Let us stake out positions here in response to Gentry that do not rely on holding any particular eschatological viewpoint.

Is anyone in the afterlife now? Some people say “no: they are in a waiting place.” I will answer **yes**. Here is a sketch of some of the Biblical support for that viewpoint.

At **the Transformation** (Mt 19 = Mk 9 = Lk 9), Peter and the others were **awake** to see and hear Moses and Elijah, and to hear God speak. This was not a “vision” of Moses and Elijah. These **were** Moses and Elijah. Therefore, Moses and Elijah were alive and recognizable. They were not in a state of sleeping or any such thing.

When Jesus responded to the Zadokites charge that there was no afterlife, he declared, “But about the resurrection of the dead, haven't you read what was declared to you by God, saying, “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaak, and the God of Jacob?” He is not a god of dead

³³ “Your eternal life with God has already begun – So start living it!” Jim (no last name given), The Third Moment, December 5, 2011.

³⁴ “At Death the Righteous Enter Into Sleep Awaiting Resurrection,” Jeff Logan, Discuss What Happens When We Die, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, June 15, 2013.

people, but of living." (Mt 22) When God said "I AM Abraham's god" instead of "I WAS Abraham's god," he meant to convey that Abraham and the others were not dead but alive.

In 1 Sam 28, Saul saw and interacted with Samuel's ghost. He was physically dead but was active and recognizable, as the Bible says, "Saul knew it was **Samuel**." After some discussion, Samuel tells Saul, "tomorrow you and your sons will be with me." That is, they were going to die. Saul deeply regretted what he had done, and after the battle with the Philistines he killed himself. It is also clear that Samuel was not merely "sleeping." Not only was he awake, but also he was able to observe what was going on and to receive prophetic information from God.

In 2 Maccabees 15, Oniah (a good man and the former high priest) prays for Judah Maccabee. Then he observes and recognizes the ghost of **Jeremiah**, who had been with God and who interacted with him. "Take this holy sword, a gift from God, with which you will strike down your adversaries." Once again the passage doesn't say it looked like Jeremiah, or that people thought it was Jeremiah. This was Jeremiah, and he gave something to Judah Maccabee.

"But the souls of the just are in God's hand, and no torment will ever touch them. In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be suffering, and their leaving us to be destruction; but they are at peace." (Wisdom of Solomon 3)

In the above passage, the souls (not the bodies) of the good dead people are with God immediately after death. They are not in a waiting place but are already in bliss.

That people are in that afterlife now is in evidence not only in the references to the prophets but also in the statement from Hebrews 11 that "Women received their dead from the resurrection." That is to say, people returned from the afterlife. This refers explicitly to the people who were raised from the dead by Elijah and Elisha.

Paul was a Perush (Pharisee). He acknowledged both the afterlife (resurrection) and the existence of the spirit as distinct from the body:

"Now Paulus knew that one part of them were Zadokites and the other were Perushim. He called out in the Sanhedrin, "Men, brothers: I am a Perush, a son of Perushim. I am being judged about hope and the resurrection of the dead."

"Now when he said this, a dispute between the Perushim and the Zadokites occurred, and the crowd was divided. For indeed Zadokites say there is no resurrection, nor a messenger or a spirit. But Perushim acknowledge both." (Acts 23)

Is the afterlife physical? Gentry appears to say "yes." I will claim that it is **not**. Here is some support.

"The first person was from the earth, dusty. The second person was from heaven. Whatever kind the dusty one was, this kind also the dusty ones are. And whatever kind the heavenly one was, this kind also the heavenly ones are. And just as we carried the image of the dusty one, we should also carry the image of the heavenly one. Now I sound like this, brothers, because flesh and blood are not able to inherit God's kingdom, nor will the corrupt thing inherit incorruptibility." (1C 15)

In the same passage the spiritual body is contrasted with the animal, physical body. The NT regularly contrasts "flesh" with "spirit," as though the desires of our physical nature pull us away from God. The NT twice says that Yahweh God "is a spirit."

Later in *Have We Missed...* (p. 68), Gentry claims that the natural body does not mean the physical body. Paul contrasts the human body that is **ψυχικός** with the body in the afterlife that is **πνευματικός**. The normal Greek use of **ψυχικός** is to indicate that which relates to the soul (**ψυχή**), which is the font of the emotions. The adverbial form **ψυχικῶς** may also mean “emotional,” as it does in 2 Macc 4:37, where we read “Therefore Antiochus was emotional, and was filled with mercy, and cried.” The Greeks occasionally used it in a sense meaning “spiritual,” but Jewish Greek was different. The Jewish people normally used **ψυχή** to indicate biological life, and the word is usually translated “life” or even “being.”

In Genesis 2:7, when God breathed life into Adam’s inanimate body, it was at **that point** that he became a “living being” (“living soul,” **ψυχή**). The word indicates biological life.

That “soul” in the LXX indicates BODILY life and not some other kind of life is evident from Numbers 6:6, where we read that when someone takes a vow...

“in all the days of his vow to Yahweh he will not go near to any dead **ψυχή**.” This means a dead being, but it necessarily refers to the corpse itself as being the “dead person.” For this reason both the Greek word and the Hebrew word it translates (**נֶפֶשׁ**, *nephesh*) are usually rendered into English as “(dead) body” (as in the NIV, NLT, ESV, KJV, HCSB, ISV, Tanach). The word is also used to indicate a corpse (or corpses) in Lev. 19:28; 21:1, 11; 22:4. Num. 5:2; 6:11; 9:6, 7, 10; 19:11, 13; Hag 2:13.

Ezekiel 27:13 has human beings physically traded like property.

In Numbers 11:6, their lives (**ψυχή**) were “drying up” as the people hungered for the manna.

In Jeremiah 2:34, innocent beings (**ψυχή**) possess blood.

In the New Testament we see a usage of Jesus in which the biological life is traded in for eternal life of a different sort. This use occurs in John 12.

“The one who affectionately loves his life (**ψυχή**) will lose it. And the one who hates his life (**ψυχή**) in this world will keep it into eternal life (**ζωή**).”

In the Old Testament, the natural body possesses blood, as we see in Genesis 9:4, which reads:

“But you will not eat meat which has the blood of life (**נֶפֶשׁ**, **ψυχή**) in it.”

Leviticus 17:11 explains this as, “**ἡ γὰρ ψυχή πασης σαρκος αἷμα αὐτοῦ ἐστίν**” = “The life (**ψυχή**) of the flesh (**σὰρξ**) is in the blood (**αἷμα**).” That is, a living biological being (“soul”) possesses flesh and blood. It is exactly the concept of the physical body that Paul was writing about when he said, “Now I sound like this, brothers, because flesh (**σὰρξ**) and blood (**αἷμα**) are not able to inherit God’s kingdom, nor will the corrupt thing [the **ψυχή**] inherit incorruptibility.”

According to Paul, the body associated with physical life – the one that is **ψυχικός** – cannot be and is not morphed into the spiritual body. The physical body remains in the grave permanently. Thus we see that when Paul contrasts the natural body with the spiritual body, he means that the natural body is physical – it is the corpse that one leaves in the grave.

The viewpoint that the spiritual body is not physical is taken by the **Futurist** author, Murray Harris, whom Ed Stevens cites. Gentry dismisses Harris as a “controversial theologian.” He fails to state that Harris is far from being “controversial” in any respect except for his disagreement with Gentry on this one issue. Harris’ book, *The Seven Sayings of Jesus on the Cross*, is highly respected, as are his commentaries on several New Testament books. Harris was also one of the translators of the New International Version of the Bible in 1973.

When Murray Harris began to publish writings in a widespread fashion about the nature of the spiritual body (c. 1976), he envisioned either a “change or exchange” from the physical body to the spiritual (“Resurrection and Immortality: Eight Theses,” Murray J. Harris, *Themelios* 1.2 (Spring, 1976), p. 55). Within the next fifteen years Harris came to the viewpoint that Jesus’ resurrected spiritual body was different from ours in that it also rested in his physical body. The resurrection of Jesus’ physical body was a necessary sign, but it is not something that happens to all Christians. That something was different about Jesus in his resurrected physical body was evidenced by the fact that he could teleport anywhere and appear at will. Thus, Jesus’ resurrection was different from simply entering the afterlife.

Murray Harris is no Preterist. The viewpoint about the nature of the body is not a result of realizing that Jesus’ second coming took place in AD 70.

For other issues regarding the notion of the transformation of the physical body, see Dan Harden’s notes: <https://www.ecclesia.org/truth/physical.html>

Does the physical body of the typical resurrected person stay in the grave, or is it transformed when we enter heaven? Answer: **The body stays in the grave.**

“Men, brothers, it is lawful to speak freely to you about our ancestor David: that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is among us until this day.” (Acts 2)

David was certainly in the afterlife with God – like Samuel, Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, and the others we have mentioned earlier – but his body was still in the grave. The physical body is shed permanently and is not taken up again.

Chrysanthus and Daria were Christians who lived in the III century under Roman persecution. During the renovation of a cathedral in 2008, excavators discovered the bones of a Christian couple from the period that are believed to be the bones of the two martyrs. The story surrounding the two people may not be true, but the bones did belong to Christians who were wealthy and lived relatively stress-free lives (free of physical labor).

According to the legend, Chrysanthus was the only son of a Roman senator from Alexandria who grew up in Rome and converted to Christianity.

His father, unhappy at the move, arranged for him to marry a high priestess called Daria in the hope he would cast off his new religion.

But the plan backfired when Daria too embraced Christianity and the couple worked together to convert thousands more to the faith.

Authorities in Rome arrested them for proselytising and they were buried alive in a sand mine in the city in around 283AD.³⁵

Whether those devout Christians who suffered persecution were Chrysanthus and Daria is still uncertain; however, the bones of these good people remained in their graves until they were excavated over 1700 years later.

What about the nature of Hell? Is it a place of eternal torment? Gentry says yes; thus, we will say no: and that Full Preterism has nothing to do with it. The word Gehenna indicates destruction, and the word Hades (= She'ol) indicates the grave. Going to She'ol is a poetic way of saying you're dead. Going to Gehenna means you no longer exist.

Aside from the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus – created by Jesus in order to explain the fact that most people would not believe he was the Messiah even after his resurrection – there is no direct support for the torment theory. Bad people go to Gehenna, which means they are destroyed. The metaphor for destruction is fire.

Is there support outside of Full Preterism for this concept? Yes, and it has been around as a minority view throughout Christian history. The **Church of England** now supports it, saying, "Hell is not eternal torment, but it is the final and irrevocable choosing of that which is opposed to God so completely and so absolutely that the only end is total non-being." ("The Mystery of Salvation," 1995, p. 199) In *The Problem of Pain*, author CS Lewis appears to support the viewpoint that bad people cease to exist when they die.

Notice that in bringing forth support for viewpoints about the nature of the afterlife we have never once mentioned the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. Instruction about the nature of the afterlife are **wholly independent of eschatology**. A futurist, for example, might determine that one's own final judgment takes place at the point of death rather than at the end of time. A Full Preterist might decide from the text that while Jesus returned in AD 70, when someone dies (s)he still waits around to be judged. The nature of the "spiritual body" has been the subject of discussion for many years.

The Greeks Mock Paul About the Afterlife

Later in his book, Gentry asks why the Greeks should mock Paul over the afterlife? (Page 45 ¶ 4) That's quite an interesting question since most Greek people *believed* in an afterlife. In the Greek conceptualization the soul was by nature immortal. When a person died, the immortal soul left the body and was transported to the entrance to Hades (the Underworld). This entrance was a physical place on earth. The afterlife required a journey, and that journey cost money. Therefore the survivors typically placed a coin over the mouth of the deceased in order to pay the transportation fee to Chiron (Charon), the fabled boatman of the River Styx (or, alternatively, across the river of Pain). People who had not been buried properly might return to earth (in the form of dreams or visions) to demand a burial!

In the most ancient Greek epics, there were no alternatives to the gloomy place called Hades – ruled by the deity of the same name. In later Greek philosophy, the mystic religions modified Hades so that

³⁵ "1,700-year-old Saints' skeletons prove legendary tale of virgin Christian martyrs who were buried alive in ancient Rome was TRUE," *Daily Mail* (UK), April 22, 2011.

Minos the Judge would determine whether someone went to the pleasant islands or fields of Elysium or the torment of Tartarus (imprisonment). To some, only the truly virtuous wound up in Elysium. Leaving sacrifices to the shrines of the gods helped to determine which version of the afterlife one went to, although some believed that once you were forgotten by your descendants you returned to Hades and remained there. Only a few heroic figures ever came back from Hades.

Their conceptualization of the afterlife was physical, and as time passed their imaginations populated the place(s) with rivers, trees, and (of course) gods. Paul surprised the Athenians by proclaiming that Jesus had promised entry into a different sort of afterlife – if people lived lives of love. No sacrifices to shrines were necessary. No one wound up in a dark hole like Hades, and the evil simply ceased to exist at the point of death. Thus it was their practice of appeasing the gods at shrines that Paul pointed to. Paul probably astonished them by approving of a quote from Aratus declaring all humanity to be the offspring of Zeus. They had missed the point about the Creator being Yahweh, but they had the notion correct about being children of God. Since we're children of God, we do not practice rituals at shrines. In identifying Jesus as having returned from the dead, as far as they were concerned he was making Jesus out to be as great as their epic heroes. If only they realized he was far greater.

Gentry's citation of Lk 20:35 indicates that again he does not understand the use of "resurrection" to indicate the "afterlife." He asks, somewhat surprisingly, "Why do we not leave this world like Enoch and Elijah?" The only way that Gentry can conceive of "resurrection" is that people live in a state of perfection. If he examined Rv 22, he would see that the "new Jerusalem" (God's people on earth) is surrounded by nasty people. There are still evils on earth, and there are still lessons to learn here. Gentry asks again, "what is the resurrection of the lost?" The term "lost" does not appear in John 5:29. The "lost" (or "lost sheep") is an expression that indicates Jewish people who have wandered away from the Torah because the religion of Priestly Judaism got in their way. What he does mean is "how is one to understand this"?

"Don't wonder about this, because an hour is coming in which all those in the tombs will hear his voice and will come out: those who have done good things will come out to a resurrection of life; and those who have practiced foul things will come out to a resurrection of judgment."

Here "life" is contrasted with "judgment." Bad people have continued, spiritual life in the afterlife when they die. The so-called "afterlife" of bad people is not what the Greeks envision but is instead "judgment": permanent death. Cessation. As Paul wrote, "For death is the wage of error, but God's free gift is eternal life in Anointed Jesus our Lord." The options are not life in one state or life in another, but life in the afterlife or DEATH.

Acts 24:15

I agree with Ken Gentry that Acts 24 (which he addresses on pages 61-64) *is* about the afterlife. When each person dies, he is judged. He either is snuffed out or continues into eternal life. This is not about AD 70, and it is not about a collective future event. As is occasionally the case, the collective is a metaphor for the individual judgment. Entering the final state is something individual that happens to each person when (s)he dies. As to what that final state entails, we examined several points of view about that earlier.

The Other Three Points from Gentry's First List

We have seen so far that the items on his list that are not directly connected to the Second Coming are independent of it and therefore are not products of Full Preterism. Gentry would like for his readers to believe that belief that the Second Coming has happened leads to a world of other things – hoping that the reader will be appalled by the slippery-slope argument and avoid listening to what Full Preterists have to say. This is likewise true with the other items.

The Consummation (i.e., the End of the World)

Page 18 contains a mischaracterization of the Full Preterist viewpoint. Most (none?) believe that the world will “exist forever and ever.” It is merely the case that the Bible does not predict any such thing as the end of the world. If physical cosmologists are correct, the sun will make the earth uninhabitable in 1,000,000,000 years or so. Since humanity will have discovered a way to leave the earth long before that, the time frame is unimportant. Eventually (somewhere between 1 trillion and 100 trillion years from now), the whole universe will be uninhabitable. Either it will collapse back on itself and heat up or it will expand and begin to freeze. By that point humanity (and whatever other intelligent species might be out there) will have to figure out how to create fuel from what is left, or at some point everything will die. The Bible makes **no attempt to predict** anything of the sort.

In other comments (Page 23, ¶ 2), Gentry assumes but does not prove that the Bible speaks of the destruction of the planet. If anyone were to assume this, then of course there must be prophecies in the Bible that have not yet been fulfilled. But of course this is both an unreasonable and invalid assumption. There are many things about which the Bible does not speak – even in “linear” history. The destruction of the planet is one thing that the Bible does not address. In fact, all of the prophecies in the Bible were intended to unfold during the time of the people who were living when the prophecy was given. Being God, he is certainly free to tell us if the world is about to end, but he hasn't done so yet.

In his “Consummation” section, Dr. Gentry cites one person's opinion that the world as we know it will not end at all. Is this belief a necessary result of Full Preterism? As a Full Preterist myself I can state unequivocally that it is not. I accept that it may be possible for someone to think that, but I know of no one else who does.

Full Preterism does teach that the Bible **does not predict** the end of the world. That is true. It does not predict most events, and yet they still happen. The Bible does predict the end of that age: the age in which Priestly Judaism had been the dominant form of Yahweh worship. The Messianic Age is not an age of physical perfection but an age in which Jesus' explanation of the principles of the Torah is free to shine in all of its glory. The Torah was not a random set of regulations, neither was it simply a legal code. The principles were there in order to explain how to live the abundant life. Jesus' teachings on that subject were consistent with those of the prophets whom he quoted, but the religious leadership had made those things obscure. People dwelling in that new kingdom are free.

The end of the world is not a concern. If the world were ending today, that knowledge should not affect how the honest truth-seeker lives. Would you be any kinder? Gentler? Friendlier? Then be that way now. Only temporal things (like whether you should obsess over your high utility bill) would fall away if a devout person knew the world was going to end. The Bible does not address the subject, and there is no need. If God ever does want to tell us about the end of the world – perhaps 1,000,000,000 years from now – he certainly may choose to do so.

The Holy Spirit's Work

Once again this matter is independent of one's understanding of the role of AD 70. There are Full Preterists (and others with similar viewpoints) who are Charismatic/Pentecostals. These believe that the miraculous spiritual gifts are still available today. John Noë is among them. He has written that "I now believe the whole divisive area of eschatological views can be fully synthesized, harmonized, reconciled, and unified,"³⁶ and refers to himself as a Preterist Idealist. As he has stated, "the entire prophecy of Revelation was BOTH fulfilled circa A.D. 70 and is ongoingly just as relevant ever since but is now universal and timeless in its various manifestations."³⁷ He contends that the miraculous signs that the apostles possessed are still available to all Christians today:

"Make no mistake; Jesus Christ was charismatic. Paul was charismatic. The early Church was charismatic. But if the cessationists are correct, Christianity is no longer charismatic. And our 1st-century brethren are no longer our models of the Christian life. Therefore, we have no model and everything is up for grabs."³⁸

There are others who are less well-known but more "classically Full Preterist" who also teach of a spirit-filled ministry today. The vast majority of charismatics are futurists, not preterists, and there are Full Preterists who take the mainstream Protestant viewpoint that God communicates to people today mainly through the Bible. Some Full Preterists believe in a "literal indwelling" of the holy Spirit in believers today, while others believe that the so-called "indwelling" was metaphorical or representational. All of these other beliefs exist likewise among Futurists and Historicists; they are entirely independent of eschatological teaching. Whether or not a Full Preterist takes this view or that view about the work of the holy Spirit is entirely coincidental.

The Trinity

The Trinity is one answer to the question, "What was or is Jesus' relationship to his Father?" Most Full Preterists are Trinitarians and have never questioned this doctrine that was passed down to their group by the Catholic Church. Some support the teaching wholeheartedly. Others might just as well be supporters of Oneness (or Sabellianism, Modalistic Monarchianism) – as the United Pentecostals teach. Some might be strict monotheists. Some might have another viewpoint not mentioned here. Each one of these viewpoints goes back at least to the 3rd century. Therefore, whether Full Preterists agree with the doctrine of the Trinity or one of the other opinions is again wholly unrelated to their belief that Jesus' returned in judgment in AD 70 and is not coming back in another form.

The Rule of Satan

This issue is actually connected with one's concept of Satan. Specifically, the Hebrew word (and its Greek translation and transliteration) indicates an enemy...an adversary. Sometimes the word is used in an ordinary sense of a human enemy. At other times the word appears to indicate the supernatural enemy of God's plan. Likewise, the word that is often translated as "devil" (δίαβολος) means "accuser."

³⁶ *Unraveling the End*, John Noë (2014), p. 123.

³⁷ Facebook posting on the subject, November 4, 2016.

³⁸ "Cessation Theology: 14 Classic Objections," John Noë (2016), p. 3.

One role of the Enemy (Satan) – as we find in Job – was as an accuser. But there are plenty of human accusers, too.

Example: When Jesus tells Peter, “Go behind me, enemy,” it is because Peter has just said that he did not want Jesus to be killed. Since being crucified was part of his mission, Peter was acting as an enemy – a “satan.” He was not “possessed by Satan.”

In 1st Timothy 5, some have already turned aside to follow the enemy,” probably refers to Priestly Judaism – it does not indicate literal “devil worship.”

The difficulty lies in determining which uses of “enemy” refer to human enemies. Full Preterism does not necessarily lead to any teaching about Satan. The enemy (or Enemy) was defeated at AD 70, yes, but one may conclude that the defeat in Revelation was with respect to the establishment of a legalistic, ritualistic mindset; Satan might be active in all other respects...or not. Once again this is a point that is independent of Full Preterism.

The Nature of the Gospel of Christ

Many Full Preterists appear to have what I would call a very traditional view of the message. When we examine how Gentry interprets it, we see that his chief concern is that Full Preterists – being generally Protestants – regard the various creeds written by religious groups as being simply representations of their own opinions and not statements of Truth or Fact. This is to say that most are Protestants, and yes, some are Restorationists.

He is appalled by David Green’s statement that “Some preterists and others have said that since the creeds were written by, and have been endorsed by, the “institutional church,” (meaning potentially, the false church) there is no reason to presume that the true Gospel ever found its way into the creeds. I cannot agree with this view, as it is not credible that the true Church has, throughout all history, been radically disconnected from the visible Church.” (“Preterism and the Ecumenical Creeds,” David A. Green (March, 1999), <http://www.preteristcosmos.com/precreed.html>)

It is not Green’s formulation of “the gospel” with which Gentry disagrees. It is Green’s assertion that the traditionalist religious groups are merely expressing their own opinions that has Gentry riled up. His problem is not with Full Preterism but with Protestantism at large. This is why he refers to Full Preterism as “untethered from the anchor of historic Christianity” (p. 38). For him that is a frightening thing rather than a liberating one, and God intended for us to be liberated from institutionalized religions governed by human opinion.

What Remains is This

Gentry summarizes (Page 39 ¶ 2) what he believes to be five prophecies that remain for future fulfillment. Two of those five, the Second Coming and the Final Judgment, conflict with the central tenet of Full Preterism which states that these things took place with the destruction of the Temple.³⁹ Another one has not yet appeared in this book: “the establishment of the consummate, **physical** new creation.” This statement is not among the ten points in chapter 1. Throwing in the interpretive word, “physical,” is

³⁹ More accurately, some aspects of the “final judgment” relate to AD 70, and some are personal. These separate concepts were mashed together in the past to create a doctrine of Final Judgment.

what makes this prophecy “unfulfilled” in Gentry’s eyes. As we have already seen, the other two items (the end of the world, the physical afterlife) neither are connected with Full Preterism nor result from it.

Matters of Historical Importance

A Brief (?) History of Preterism

“Preterism was an especially well-known interpretive approach in the 1800’s and early 1900’s, though until recently ‘preterism’ never described an entire theology.” (Gentry, Page 39 ¶ 3, first sentence)

Neither does it do so now. Aside from matters that are connected directly with one’s perception of the Second Coming,” neither Full Preterism nor Partial Preterism are directly associated with “an entire theology.” Should eschatology be *consistent* with one’s perception of other spiritual matters? Certainly, but there is no set of other beliefs that *must* flow from one’s eschatological belief. Full Preterists, being typically Protestant, disagree over the details of what the Bible teaches on other subjects – just as the Baptists disagree with the Presbyterians over the nature of Baptism, and as both of those groups disagree with the United Pentecostals regarding Baptism’s efficacy.

Gentry asserts (Page 40 ¶ 1, Lines 4-5) that “this extreme form of preterism arose as a movement in the early 1980’s.” He regards *The Parousia* by J. Stuart Russell (published in 1878) as an antecedent of sorts and summarizes the leading belief of Full Preterism in this statement:

“...AD 70 witnesses the final accomplishment of *all* prophecies not fulfilled before that time.”

Gentry then explains his belief that “the modern movement” arose from the churches of Christ in the early 1980’s, because many members of the American Restoration Movement (of which the churches of Christ are a part) have accepted Full Preterism as the most accurate explanation of the teachings about the end times. Although several members of the churches of Christ have been prominent advocates of Full Preterism in recent years, Gentry’s opinion is in error. The modern history of both Full and Partial Preterism goes back much further than the early 1980’s, and at the beginning, it was certainly not associated with the churches of Christ. At this point I will excerpt and append my own book, *Post-Apocalyptic Christianity*, which contains segments devoted to the historical development of the viewpoints. **Begin excerpt.**

In modern times, both the Post-Apocalyptic and Partial Preterist viewpoints trace back to the early 17th century, at which point, basically, it is impossible to distinguish them. If Luis Alcasar’s *Investigation of the Hidden Meaning in Revelation*⁴⁰ (1614) is indeed the first preterist book, then recent preterism likely emerged in response to the Historicist point of view. In Alcasar’s interpretation of Revelation, First-Century Christianity triumphs over Priestly Judaism and then over Roman idolatry. He seems to conclude with the conversion of pagan Rome to Christianity in the fourth century. Alcasar, then, responds to Historicism with a viewpoint placing all of Revelation in the past. In this sense, then, he was a post-apocalyptic. However, his view did not limit the events in the book to the First Century; instead, he allows for some historical development [after the First Century].

Still responding to Historicism, preterist authors after Alcasar began to comment on the “beast” of Revelation and on the “antichrist” of 1 John – claiming that these were figures from the first century. Thomas Hayne (1645) was convinced that all of Daniel had been fulfilled in the First Century; Joseph Hall repeated the idea (1650) but was unconvinced that the paradigm should be expanded to include Revelation. Hayne explained that the Millennium in Revelation was also over:

⁴⁰ In Latin, *Vestigatio Arcani Sensus in Apocalypsi*.

“The famous kingdom of Christ and Christians, and this notable binding up of Satan for a thousand years begin both together. Dr. J. Alstede, Mr. J. Mede, Mr. Archer, The Glimpse joyntly hold this undeniable.

But the famous Kingdome of Christ and Christians began moe years then one thousand five hundred agon, as I have above proved.

Therefore the notable binding up of Satan began one thousand five hundred years agon, and therefore is past long before our time.”⁴¹

Three years later, Henry Hammond wrote about the Millennium, “Constantine’s receiving the faith, and concluding of the persecutions, and by decree proclaiming liberty of Christianity, may most properly be styled *the binding of Satan, the dragon*, that sought to *devour the child as soon as it was born*; and then the beginning of *the thousand years* will fall about A.D. 311, at which time the conversion of heathen Rome to Christianity is set down....”⁴²

Hammond allowed for a “double” start to the thousand years of Revelation 20, and therefore he accepted a “double ending.” Taking the thousand-year period to be somewhat literal, his interpretation is somewhat historicist at this point – rather like that of Alcasar before him. In this respect, neither Alcasar nor Hammond were true “preterists” in the modern sense, but their viewpoints were closer to preterism than to historicism. Of a similar mind was Fermin Abauzit, whose *Essai sur L’Apocalypse* (1730) contended that the final three chapters concerned the spread of the church after the fall of Jerusalem. Abauzit’s primary concern, however, was whether or not Revelation ought to appear in the New Testament canon. After Abauzit’s death, Johann Gottfried Herder took up the mantle, publishing a book that viewed all of Revelation in the past – but which allowed for an Idealist interpretation also. That is to say that while Revelation was about the First Revolt and destruction of the Temple, one may also view it symbolically as representing the struggles encountered by Christendom.

As a response to the Adventist movement started by William Miller (c. 1822), the number of alternative explanations grew. By 1840, the Preterist movement was developing several schools of thought. Four German papers were written identifying Nero Caesar with the number of the second wild animal in Revelation: 666. Ephraim Currier’s studies led him to believe that a “rapture” of sorts had occurred in the First Century. He used a *sola-scriptura* Restorationist ethic in arriving to his conclusions. In his words, “*In the following pages, the writer has consulted the Bible itself for his guide, and this must be his apology for departing from all other religious systems now in existence of which he has any knowledge.*”⁴³ In pointing to the role of the destruction of the temple, Currier was “post-apocalyptic” (or full preterist) in the sense that he would likely have been accepted by modern full preterists as one of their own.

He writes, for example, “*...at the end of the world, or Jewish dispensation, when the unbelieving Jews were punished according to their sins, those who had not perished by the sword or famine, were driven from their country, and were no longer to be God’s servants, or holy people; then according to the scriptures, was the whole house of Israel brought up out of their graves, brought into the land of Israel, death, the last enemy, destroyed, and the reign of Christ, as king of the Jews ended.*”⁴⁴

⁴¹ *Christs kingdome on earth, opened according to the scriptures*, Thomas Payne (1645), p. 72.

⁴² *Paraphrase and Annotations upon the New Testament*, Vol. IV, Henry Hammond (1653).

⁴³ *The Second Coming of Christ, and the Resurrection*, Ephraim Currier, p. 3 (1841).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

Currier had once been associated with the Universalists. Although separated from them by 1841, he learned that some of their ideas were correct, and he extended beyond what they taught – to something about the second coming of Jesus and about hell.

“...the limitarians of every sect, have always held that the coming of Christ to raise the dead, and to reward every man according to his works, as taught in the gospels, and in the epistles, is yet future. It is well known, also, that, connected with this event, is the sentiment that there will be a final separation of the righteous and wicked, that all who have not been born of the spirit, shall be banished from every hope of happiness, and doomed to suffer eternal pains. Until within about sixty years, very few have been bold enough to dissent from this awful doctrine.”⁴⁵

“There is much said and written in these days, about the coming of Christ; or as it is called, his second coming. With the Bible for my only guide, I have come to a different conclusion, perhaps, from any other person on earth, whether learned or unlearned...That time **I understand to be at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, or soon after.**”⁴⁶

Facing disputes over his preterism, Currier later wrote, “And I believed, and I still believe that if any person will read all the passages in the Bible, from the 12th chapter of Genesis to the 8th chapter of Revelation, with no other view than to understand its true meaning, he will find that **in every single passage where the second coming of Christ is spoken of, it refers to his coming in the clouds of heaven immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem.**”⁴⁷

Currier’s ideas regarding Matthew 24 are similarly focused on the past: “Some have attempted to evade the force of this by saying that by ‘*generation*’ in this passage is not meant that these things should take place while that generation should remain on earth...But all these things are mere shifts, in order to make the word of God bend to human notions.”⁴⁸

Even though Currier considered there to be but one “second coming,” and that Revelation 20 and 21 were fulfilled in 70 CE, his beliefs differed from those of *modern* full preterists in one respect. Currier was convinced that the events of Revelation were not to be fulfilled in order, so that some parts of Revelation were still in the future. Therefore, for Currier, not every prophecy was fulfilled in the First Century. Still, the contemporary expressions of the post-apocalyptic viewpoint owe a great debt to Ephraim Currier.

Following Currier by a few years was Dr. Samuel Lee. Lee was opposed to “the papal antichrist theory” of the Historicists. With his preterist account of Daniel, Lee “solved the great and apparently insoluble problem.” However, Lee was as concerned with Catholicism as the Historicists were, and although for him all prophecy has been fulfilled, he was determined that the final chapters of Revelation were concerned not with 70 CE but with the fall of pagan Rome and the rise of Christianity under Constantine. Aside from his notion of a delay in the final fulfillment, Lee was in every other respect a full preterist.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 23.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 24 – citing a letter that Currier had published on April 4, 1840.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 47.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 140.

Writing of the timing of the Millennium – and placing Daniel’s 70 weeks and Revelation together, he places the judgment on Priestly Judaism at the end of the thousand years (Revelation 20) and opines, “according to the place just cited, this must come *immediately* after the *thousand years*’, or millennial [sic] reign of the saints; ... that is, the period that elapsed from the resurrection of Christ to the fall of Jerusalem; and, therefore, Satan must have been bound during this period.”⁴⁹

Robert Townley left the Church of England because of his growing conviction that the post-apocalyptic view of the end times was correct. Refuting an Historicist construct, he writes, “We confine [the millennium] within the period of Jerusalem’s desolation....” He was convinced that Rev 20:4 “militates against the doctrine of a future Millennium.”⁵⁰ Townley was familiar with Lee’s work and agreed with portions thereof, but he became convinced that the whole of the prophecy of Revelation was fulfilled within the First Century.

John Humphrey Noyes, founder of the Oneida Community, concluded during this same period that the “second coming” of Jesus occurred in 70 CE. However, he posited an additional arrival – for lack of a better term, a “third coming” – that was still in the future.

By 1847 Erasmus Manford, a Universalist, had entered the discussion. A prominent debater, Mr. Manford was convinced that the second coming of Jesus occurred in 70 CE. However, he too looked forward to a future coming “to raise the dead” that was not connected with judgment. In his mind, Revelation 20 “preceded the gospel dispensation.” Viewing no other “coming” in judgment, Manford was convinced of universal salvation.

The appearance of what contemporaries labeled the **Praeterist Scheme** attracted the attention of other commentators. Edward Bishop Elliott’s commentary defends Historicism against both Futurism and Praeterism. Believing both viewpoints to be products of Catholicism designed to oppose the Historicist scheme, he describes the Praeterist viewpoints as having “the prophecy stop altogether short of the Popedom.” The central views with this label either explain revelation with respect to the “catastrophe” of the Jewish Nation or of “Pagan Rome.” That is, some Praeterists confined the whole prophecy to the First Century (Vespasian or Domitian), and some extended into the subsequent centuries but stopped short of the Fourth Century. He was equally annoyed with Futurists who “shoot over the head of the Popedom into times yet future.”⁵¹ He was familiar with and mentioned Dr. Lee.

That Praeterism then consisted of what we today identify as “Full” and “Partial” forms, and that both forms were recognized as being part of Praeterism is evident in the citations from the period about the Praeterist Scheme. Elliott, previously mentioned, identifies the distinction between the two this way: “Differing on points of detail, yet (with the exception that Hartwig and Herder pretty much confine themselves to the *Jewish* catastrophe, and Ewald, Bleek and De Wette to that of *heathen Rome*) it [German Praeterism] may generally be described as embracing *both* catastrophes: the fall of Judaism being signified under that of Jerusalem, the fall of Heathenism under that of Rome....”⁵²

⁴⁹ *The Times and Events of the Visions of Daniel and St. John, Investigated, Identified, and Determined*, Samuel Lee, 1844 (1851), p. 43. He views the time afterward to be “altogether exempt from *Millennial* considerations” (p.45).

⁵⁰ *The Second Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ: a Past Event*, Robert Townley, p. 96 (1845).

⁵¹ *Horae Apocalypticae, or A Commentary on the Apocalypse*, Vol. 4, E. B. Elliott, p. 488 (1847 edition).

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 499.

The discussions of such detail in the nineteenth century undoubtedly contributed to the distinctions between partial preterists and full preterists. James Stuart Russell, who knew Lee's work, disagreed with Lee's placement of some chapters of Revelation after the year 70. His 1878 book, *The Parousia*, establishes that all of the first nineteen chapters of Revelation were in the past; however, he struggled with the "thousand years" of chapter 20. He recognized the existence of a full-preterist view that would "bring the whole within the prescribed apocalyptic limits,"⁵³ but he chose not to accept that a "thousand-year period" in Revelation could refer to "a period of very short duration" – such as the time between the resurrection of Jesus and the fall of the Temple. His book forms the basis for the "temporal gap" viewpoint held by many modern partial preterists, opining that the end of the thousand years falls "outside the apocalyptic limits altogether."⁵⁴

End excerpt. Authors in the 20th century continued to write from a Preterist perspective, but many theologians were distracted from other pursuits by the growing popularity of Dispensationalism. Still, Marion Morris wrote,

"As we understand it, the heaven and earth that was destined to pass away and to be superseded by a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwell righteousness was the old covenant with its priesthood and sacrifices and the earthly ungodly men of that generation, who believed neither the writings of Moses nor the words of Jesus."⁵⁵

"Then the end shall come'...and other Scriptural sayings of similar import, do not refer to the destruction, the end and desolation of this planet."⁵⁶

Clifton Voss was a Full Preterist from the Great Depression until his death. He and his wife, Effie, were so convinced that their understanding of eschatology was correct that when they purchased a graveyard plot in about 1955 they had a tombstone constructed demonstrating that the "last days" ended in AD 70 and identifying the time after AD 70 as corresponding to the "new heavens and earth" of Revelation. He passed away in 1972, and she joined him in the afterlife in 1984. Their tombstone remains there in Oklahoma. Clifton Voss was not a prolific author, but as a member of the churches of Christ he certainly influenced the spread of Full Preterism among the group's members. That is where Gentry picks up the story, apparently wishing for his readers to believe that there were no advocates of Full Preterism prior to the 1980's. Instead, Preterism and Historicism developed together originally – as eschatological explanations. Eventually they diverged into two distinct viewpoints, and Preterism likewise separated into multiple opinions "differing on points of detail."

Concerning the American Restoration Movement

In his sixth chapter, which repeats elements of his chapter in *When Shall These Things Be*, Dr. Gentry briefly mentions the Stone-Campbell Movement, or American Restoration Movement. Gentry expresses his opinion that the restoration ethic "impacts" the Full Preterist movement. His citation of a secondary source in reference to Alexander Campbell is puzzling. Primary sources are certainly available and would have provided him with a greater understanding of the movement and its central figures. Here is a brief history of the origin and scope of that movement.

⁵³ *The Parousia*, James Stuart Russell, (1878), p. 514.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 522.

⁵⁵ *Christ's Second Coming Fulfilled*, Marion Morris, p. 6 (1917).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Commencing at the end of the 18th century, several groups interested in church unity began to take hold in different parts of the United States. A Methodist, **James O’Kelly**, united three smaller congregations of likeminded people in Virginia with the concept that rather than be called “Methodists” they should simply refer to themselves as Christians – so that every Christian everywhere was welcome. In 1804, O’Kelly met **Barton W. Stone** – a Presbyterian from Kentucky – who was likewise inclined toward unity and had been working to that end for three years. At this point, the Second Great Awakening was gaining momentum, and Stone participated in several “revival” events.

On June 28, 1804, Stone and his congregation in Cane Ridge, KY, determined that in order to be unified with all Christians throughout the world it was necessary for them to give up the denominational title of “Prebyterian.” In so doing, they took other actions, including the following:

Imprimis. We will, that this body die, be dissolved, and sink into union with the Body of Christ at large; for there is but one body, and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling.

Item. We will that our name of distinction, with its Reverend title, be forgotten, that there be but one Lord over God's heritage, and his name one.

Item. We will, that our power of making laws for the government of the church, and executing them by delegated authority, forever cease; that the people may have free course to the Bible, and adopt the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

Item. We will, that the people henceforth take the Bible as the only sure guide to heaven; and as many as are offended with other books, which stand in competition with it, may cast them into the fire if they choose; for it is better to enter into life having one book, than having many to be cast into hell.

Item. We will, the Synod of Kentucky examine every member who may be suspected of having departed from the Confession of Faith, and suspend every such suspected heretic immediately, in order that the oppressed may go free, and taste the sweets of Gospel liberty.⁵⁷

Alexander Campbell was a minister in Pennsylvania whose own research came to agree with the Baptist teaching that baptism must be practiced by immersion and not any other mode. Upon arriving at that conclusion in 1812, he and his family were immersed. After that, his congregation was accepted into a fellowship of Baptist churches. Soon he moved to Virginia – by that time being a popular debater in support of Baptist teachings.

Campbell eventually determined that baptism was for the forgiveness of sins, and in that respect and several others he disagreed with Stone – whom he met in 1826. At first they were separate allies, but in 1832 they chose to combine their groups...at that point forming the Restoration Movement. It was Campbell who had said that “Christianity consists infinitely more in good works than in sound

⁵⁷ Excerpted from “Last Will and Testament of Springfield Presbytery,” as cited in *Biography of Eld. Barton Warren Stone, Written by Himself* (1847), pp. 51-53.

opinions,”⁵⁸ and he demonstrated that tenet in his relationship with Stone – who at one time had Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians all meeting with him.

Campbell conceived of Restoration as distinct from Reformation in 1824. While he was traveling around, he came to address a group at Town Fork, Fayette County, Kentucky. He had been thinking about the work of the reformers and found that some of it had been unfinished. From this lesson he wrote the first of a series of articles on “A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things,” which he published in his *Christian Baptist* magazine. In his words:

“Since the great *apostacy* ... many *reformations* in religion have been attempted..... The page of history and the experience of the present generation concur in evincing that, *if any of those restorations began in the spirit they have all ended in the flesh.*” Campbell thought that the greatest reforms in history had been the least celebrated, so that he considered translator John Wycliffe’s role in restoration to have been more important than Martin Luther’s. “The reformations most celebrated in the world are those which have departed the least from the systems they professed to reform.”

“The question remains yet to be decided, whether a *conference* of Methodistic clergy, with its bishop in its chair, and the laity at home, is any reformation at all from the *conclave* of English prelates, headed by a metropolitan or an archbishop. ... All of the famous reformations in history have rather been reformations of creeds and of clergy, than of religion. ... Human creeds may be reformed and re-reformed, and be erroneous still, like their authors; but the inspired creed needs no reformation, being, like its author, infallible.” For this reason, Campbell determines: “Human systems, whether of philosophy or religion, are proper subjects of reformation; but Christianity can not be reformed...A RESTORATION of the *ancient order of things* is all that is necessary to the happiness and usefulness of Christians.”⁵⁹

Alexander Campbell viewed the ultimate goal of the previous reformations to have been this: do what the Bible says, discarding any human opinion that is contrary. A reformation that removes only one or two inaccurate practices or teachings and stops at that point was regarded by both Campbell and Stone as being ineffectual and incomplete. Both Stone and Campbell soon became convinced that most members of their denominations were unwilling to examine the Bible – to see whether tradition and practice agreed or disagreed with it.

“...no man ever achieved any great good to mankind ... who did not fight for it with courage and perseverance, and who did not, in the conflict, sacrifice either his good name or his life. John the harbinger of the Messiah, lost his head. The Apostles were slaughtered. The Savior was crucified. The ancient confessors were slain. The reformers all have been excommunicated.... If I am not traduced, slandered, and misrepresented, I shall be a most unworthy advocate of that cause which has always provoked the resentment of those who have fattened upon the ignorance and superstition of the mass, and have been honored by the stupidity and sottishness of those who cannot think and will not learn.”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ He said this several times. See, for example, *The Christian System*, Alexander Campbell (1843), p. 130, and *The Christian Baptist*, Vol. 1, No. 9 (April 5, 1824), p. 223.

⁵⁹ “A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things (I),” *The Christian Baptist* (February 7, 1825), pp. 152ff.

⁶⁰ Alexander Campbell, *The Millennial Harbinger* (Vol. 1, No. 1, 1830) p. 8.

Gentry's outline of the history of the movement errs (on p. 99 and in that chapter's earlier incarnation in another book) by linking the churches of Christ to "Alexander Campbell in the 1830's." Stone, Thomas Campbell, Alexander Campbell, O'Kelly, and others were active considerably longer, with O'Kelly having been one of the earliest supporters of Methodism. The use of the term "Campbellite" is actually improper after the 1832 union of the once-separate movements, although some people continued to use the term inaccurately after the so-labeled "Stoneites" and "Campbellites" united.

Ultimately, the Restoration Movement diverged after the deaths of Stone (1844) and Campbell (1866). Stemming from the movement are the groups known with various qualifiers as the Christian Church, the churches of Christ, and the Disciples of Christ. We will read more about the Restorationist ethic later when we examine the development of creeds in Christendom – since Gentry's observation is accurate when he notes that several prominent Full Preterists today are or were members of the churches of Christ.

After briefly referring to what some Full Preterists teach, and after indicating that many Futurists consider Partial Preterism and Full Preterism to be branches of the same philosophical tree, Ken Gentry returns (p. 43) to a bulleted list of points on which he disagrees with Full Preterists. This is not the same list of objections that he presented in chapter one, although there are elements of overlap.

He divides his objections this time into the following headlined categories:

- **Creedal Failure**
- **Hermeneutic Failure**
- **Resurrection Errors**
- **Christology Implications**
- **History and Church Errors**

The hermeneutical and resurrection questions have already been addressed, and Gentry only briefly summarizes his objections on pp. 44-5. The resurrection headline leads to a new question, as does the Christology segment. We begin with creedal failure.

Why Creeds Fail

The expression “creedal failure” indicates Gentry’s largest objection to Full Preterism, the Charismatic movement, Arminianism, and the other matters that he opposes: he thinks “tradition” indicates Truth rather than opinion. He states unequivocally that “No ecumenical creed of the church allows for the second advent occurring in AD 70” (p. 43). For the traditionalist, this makes Full Preterism dangerous. For anyone who is interested in restoring Biblical teachings, all this means is that there are a lot of contrary opinions out there. No volume of opinion establishes a fact.

“A person is smart. People are dumb, panicky, dangerous animals – and you know it. Fifteen hundred years ago everybody *knew* the Earth was the center of the universe. Five hundred years ago, *everybody knew* the Earth was flat, and fifteen minutes ago, you knew that people were alone on this planet. Imagine what you’ll *know* tomorrow.” (“K,” Men in Black, 1997)

Sometimes We’re All Wrong

One extremely popular belief about a subject far less controversial than the Second Coming is that “slaves built the pyramids in Egypt.” Having been fascinated by Egypt as a child, I read a lot about the society of the Pharaohs. I have said for years that we don’t actually know who built them. *Harvard* magazine broke the story in 2003 that the builders of the pyramids were more likely highly-skilled workers who were no one’s property. By 2010 that theory had been fleshed out with discoveries such as the tombs of some of the workers themselves. Although Herodotus (the ancient Greek historian) had labeled them as slaves, he was mistaken, and nearly all of human civilization passed along a tradition that has proven to be incorrect.

People reading the account of the Exodus also believed that slaves built the pyramids, adding a detail that they were probably *Hebrew* slaves. That detail became so popular that Menachem Begin, prime minister of the modern state called Israel, publicly stated in 1977 his belief that Hebrew slaves were among those who built the great structures. However, the pyramids were completed at least 900 years prior to the time of the Exodus. Heber (or Eber, ancestor of the Hebrews) may have been living at the time (depending on the chronology), and his family were not slaves. Archaeological evidence suggests that there were approximately 10,000 people working on each pyramid, and that the construction likely took 30 years. The pyramids were built, “without oppression and forced labor, but out of loyalty to the pharaohs,” as one former director of the British Egyptian Museum (Dieter Wildung) described it.

It turns out that the widespread and unanimous historical tradition about the construction of the pyramids was incorrect, as facts discovered in the past 25 years have revealed. All I had been able to say to friends (at least as recently as 1992) was that we didn’t know who built the pyramids. Now we know that they were **not** slaves at all.

I can sense Gentry objecting to my having related a social tradition to a religious one. However, the analogy is quite proper. When fallible human beings get together to decide what must be true, they often get it wrong.

Gentry finds it impossible to believe that one generation after the destruction of the temple people already went astray. Keep in mind that there were people who were **already** going astray over the issue during Paul’s lifetime. The people who honestly believed that “the resurrection has already happened”

(2 Tim 2) – they certainly weren’t under the mistaken belief that the EARTH HAD BEEN DESTROYED. And Paul didn’t counter them by saying, “That’s about the end of the world, and hey, the earth is still here.” No. They all agreed that what had been predicted was the end of the age, but some people inaccurately believed that it had happened already. They thought that God had already judged Priestly Judaism, but Paul had to correct them. There were many such issues of disagreement between the close of the New Testament period (c. 66) and the First Ecumenical Council (325), but after the death of the last inspired envoy, the discussions over issues had no inspired human mediator.

From the First Revolt to the Third Century

Now here is what happened as the First Revolt ended. The Christians had fled – just like Jesus had told them to do: “those who are in Judea should flee to the mountains” (Mt 24 = Lk 2). While the details of the account of Eusebius (*History of the Church* III 5:3 and III 11:1-2) may have been fabricated at some point or at least in doubt, the references in Josephus⁶¹ to flights from Judea by Jews during the revolt leave little doubt that there is truth at least in the *generality* of Eusebius’ report that the early Christians left Jerusalem and the surrounding area during the conflict and returned to Jerusalem shortly thereafter – remaining at least until the time of Hadrian in the II century. We may think little of the names that Eusebius provides on account of their being unattested in any earlier writings.⁶²

The Jewish Christians were divided, and many of them left. The demographics of the church after the First Revolt were almost exclusively gentile. Hostility began to develop between Jews and Christians – which were now regarded as distinct groups. During the II century Jewish authors wrote in opposition to Jesus and his followers, such as

On the eve of the Passover Yeshu [*Yeshua*, Jesus’ given name] was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went out and called out, “He is going to be stoned because he has practiced witchcraft and enticed Israel to apostasy. Let anyone who can say anything in his favor come forward and plead on his behalf.” But since nothing was brought forward in his favor he was hanged on the eve of the Passover, [the eve of the Sabbath].⁶³

The gentlest of Christian writings from the same century tended to identify Jewish and Christian people as separate groups – an example of these being the highly-edited “Defense of Aristides Before Hadrian” (c. 125), whose original form no doubt separated Christians from Barbarians, Greeks, and Jews. Other Christian writings were less kind. The author of the Letter of Barnabas spiritualized the historical elements of the Torah so that they no longer applied to the Jewish people:

But you will say, the people have been circumcised as a seal. No, for in the same way is every Syrian and Arabian and all the priests of the idols. Do all those then too belong to the covenant? And even the Egyptians are circumcised!

⁶¹ In *Wars of the Jews*. For example, “After the disastrous defeat of Cestius [Gallus] many prominent Jews fled from the city like swimmers from a sinking ship.” (II 10:1)

⁶² For a reasonable description of the aftermath of the Revolt, see “Fleeing Forward: the Departure of Christians from Jerusalem to Pella,” VHR van Houwelingen, *Westminster Theological Journal* 65 (2003), pp. 181-200.

⁶³ Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 43a.

Therefore, beloved children, learn about all things abundantly, that Abraham, who was first to bring in circumcision, looked ahead spiritually to Jesus, when he circumcised after receiving the secret of the three letters.

For the writing says that "Abraham circumcised three hundred eighteen males of his household." What then was the secret thing given to him? Notice that he says "eighteen" first and then "three hundred." In the number eighteen, "I" and "H" means "ten" and "eight." Here you have Jesus.

And because the cross was how we would have favor, he adds "three hundred." So he revealed Jesus in the two letters, and the cross in the remaining one.⁶⁴ (Barnabas 8)

As we will see shortly, when the Christians did discuss issues with one another, they disagreed, and they always had trouble unraveling the Biblical writings – just as we still do today.

The first meeting of the rabbis where the canon of the Hebrew Bible was discussed took place in about 65 AD, in the home of Hananiah ben Hezekiah.⁶⁵ This was a gathering of followers of R. Hillel and R. Shammai. At the time there was agreement about most of the Writings – the third part of the Hebrew Bible. However, three books deserved some discussion: Song of Songs; Qohelet (Ecclesiastes); and Esther. The school of Hillel preferred that Ecclesiastes be acknowledge as sacred, but the school of Shammai objected. At that gathering, the Shammaites prevailed, and Ecclesiastes was excluded from the canon. At that point, in 65 AD, the third division of the Hebrew Bible, the Writings, was added to the Bible.

The details of what took place at Yamnia (Jamnia, Yabneh) (c. 90) are sketchy. The Torah and Prophets were already closed collections well before the First Century. In his book, *Against Apion* (or "Concerning the Antiquity of the Jews," ch. 93), Josephus stated that the Jewish people regarded twenty-two books as sacred. Of these, Josephus mentions that there were four books that were not among the Torah or prophets: *"The remaining four books contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conduct of human life. It is true, our history has been written since Artaxerxes in much detail, but it has not been esteemed of authority similar to the former by our ancestors, because there has not been an exact succession of prophets since that time."* Solomon Zeitlin (expressing the widely-accepted view) writes, "The fact remains that Josephus had in his Canon, twenty-two books, instead of twenty-four." Zeitlin, a Jewish scholar, believes that two more books, Ecclesiastes and Esther, "were added later."⁶⁶

During the latter part of the First Century (AD), the rabbis declared that certain books in the Old Testament were to become part of the Hebrew Bible. The expression for this is that the books "defile the hands." [Ordinary paper does not "defile the hands" and therefore does not require hand-washing.] At Yamnia, they essentially confirmed the discussion that had taken place in 65 among the schools of Hillel and Shammai, but further discussion of the three "excluded" books was necessary. Zeitlin's view is that Song of Songs was accepted at Yamnia, but the other two (Ecclesiastes and Esther) were still under debate, with the dispute over Ecclesiastes being resolved at that time.

Zeitlin cites the Talmud as indicating that the Book of Esther "does not defile the hands." He reasons it this way: "That the Book of Esther was not included among the Scriptures which were canonized in the

⁶⁴ One way to write 18 in Greek was IH = 10 + 8. The Greek word IHΣΟΥΣ, Jesus' name, begins with those letters. The number 300 in Greek was expressed by a tau: T. This was the shape of the cross on which Jesus was crucified.

⁶⁵ See for example *The Pharisees: Preservers of Judaism*, Frieda Clark Hyman (2001), p. 144.

⁶⁶ *The Canon and Masoreh of the Hebrew Bible*, Sid Z. Leiman [ed.], 1974.

year sixty-five can be proved from the fact that in Megillat Taanit, where all the semi-holidays are recorded, the Festival of Purim is among them." He notes that listing the holiday there would have been unnecessary if Esther had been part of the Bible. He notes that the rabbis whose sayings are recorded in the Talmud inferred from the Megillat Taanit that fasting is not allowed on Purim. "It would not have become necessary for the Tannaim to infer this law from the Megillat Taanit if they had the Book of Esther in the Bible."

Zeitlin also notes that *later* rabbis drew such inferences directly from the Book of Esther. Therefore, Esther was included at a later date. Esther proved problematic for many rabbis because it does not mention God. Therefore, at some time in the third century Esther came to be included in the canon of the Hebrew Bible -- essentially due to its use in the popular holiday of Purim.

Bloch opines that the **growth of Christianity** during the middle of the First Century, and the desire of Christians to include their own writings, caused the rabbis to decide that a "fixed text of Hebrew Scripture" was necessary. He writes, *"Fear that the Gospels, the teachings of which they did not regard as of the authentic Jewish grain, may in the course of time assume a position equal with that held by the Hebrew Bible prompted the early rabbis to discourage their reading and ultimately to deny them a place in the national literature of the Jews by banning them from the body of Jewish literature."*⁶⁷

Christians were referred to by the other Jewish people from the mid-first-century onward both as *nazorim* (followers of Jesus, who was from Nazareth) and as *minim* (a word that indicates sectarians). The term "minim" could also include other groups, but it was typically used of Christians. At Yamnia, it was declared that *"the Gospels and the books of the Minim are not Sacred Scripture."*

The Christians had refused to fight the Roman armies when Jerusalem was under siege, increasing the tension among the two groups. For approximately fifty years, both Jewish and Christian leaders wrote and spoke condemning things against one another.

The Babylonian Talmud (Tractate Shabbath) reads:

"The blank spaces and the Books of the Minim may not be saved from a fire, but they must be burnt in their place, they and the Divine Names occurring in them. Now surely it means the blank portions of a Scroll of the Torah? No: the blank spaces in the Books of Minim. Seeing that we may not save the Books of Minim themselves, need their blank spaces be stated? — This is its meaning: And the Books of Minim are like blank spaces."
(Folio 116a)

The Christian writings could be left in a burning fire... to be destroyed even on a Sabbath day. Why? Because they were like blank pages. They further opined that, "The margins [in] the gospels [and] the books of the minim do not defile the hands. The books of ben Sira and all the books which were written from that time and onwards do not defile the hands." (R. Yohanan ben Zakkai) Thus, the books from the time of ben Sira onward (132 BC) were discarded along with the Christian writings. Everything else might be included, subject to discussion.

It is during all of this conflict that some rabbis began to refer to the gospels (Greek word εὐαγγέλιον) by the similar-sounding term "*ewan giliom*" — a worthless blank scroll. Before leaving this section, we must note that Christian authors of the early Second Century were just as condemning toward Jews. Some of

⁶⁷ "Outside Books," Joshua Bloch, included in *The Canon and Masoreh of the Hebrew Bible*, p. 90.

the Christian writings from the period make arguments that the Jews were essentially anti-God. This growing hostility of the two groups for one another appears to have led to the exclusion of the Christian books and the Deuterocanonical Books from the canon of the Hebrew Bible. For many years, Christians retained those books and others for regular use, and they kept writing.

The Christians spent some time rebuilding their numbers after the split. Since Christianity was still under persecution from the Roman government, we find no writings between AD 68 and about 112. By this time the entire generation of people to whom Jesus spoke had passed away. Most of the generation after them had passed away. None of them possessed a New Testament. Some of them possessed incomplete collections of Paul's letters. Others had one or more of the accounts of Jesus' life. Some of them had the other letters, and a few had copies of Revelation.

We only possess now three **Greek manuscripts of Revelation** that predate the development of the text types at the beginning of the IV century. The two that have been known the longest are p¹⁸ (a fragment of Revelation 1 from c. 300) and p⁴⁷ (sections of Revelation 9-17 from c. 250). The most recent discovery, p⁹⁸, may date as early as the first half of the III century; it contains Rev 1:13-2:1.⁶⁸ Where manuscripts exist from the early period, if Revelation was found at all it circulated by itself. The book was not universally accepted as authentic until very late. [Some objections were being made as late as the VIII century, but most objections had ended by the IVth.] There are no known manuscripts of the last few chapters of Revelation until Codex Sinaiticus; by contrast we possess 17 early manuscripts of John's account of Jesus' life – including a fragment of chapter 21. Analyzing Revelation was simply not something that the early Christians were inclined to do.

Some Christian writings of the II century have been given early dates by scholars who are inclined to support some concept of Apostolic Succession; most other scholars have not taken to examine the dates of those writings. The earliest post-apostolic writing that is currently extant and not a forgery is probably the letters of Ignatius (c. 112 – 117). However, there is an interesting non-Christian writing from c. 105 that has content relevant to this discussion.

The **Letter of Mara bar Serapion** (c. 105) was probably written by a gentile worshiper of God after his own city was destroyed by the Romans. The letter was most likely written well before 130, when the seeds of the Second Revolt were taking root. It contains a reference to Jesus in connection with the destruction of the temple.

“What are we to say, when the wise are dragged by force by the hands of tyrants, and their wisdom is deprived of its freedom by slander, and they are plundered for their intelligence, without a defense? *They are not wholly to be pitied.* For what benefit did the Athenians obtain by executing Socrates, since they received as retribution for it famine and pestilence? Or the people of Samos by the burning of Pythagoras, since in one hour the whole of their country was covered with sand? **Or the Jews by the murder of their Wise King, since from that time their kingdom was driven away from them? For with justice God gave a repayment to the wisdom of the three of them. For the Athenians died by famine; and the people of Samos were covered by the sea without**

⁶⁸ P⁹⁸ notably lacks the phrase “and the one who is alive” (καὶ ὁ ζῶν) from 1:18. See “Another Look at P. IFAO II 31 (p⁹⁸),” Peter Malik, *Novum Testamentum*, 58 (2016), pp. 204-17.

remedy; and the Jews, brought to desolation and expelled from their kingdom, were driven away into every land. No, Socrates did not die, because of Plato; nor yet Pythagoras, because of the statue of Hera; nor the Wise King, because of the new precepts that he enacted."

Those Christian writings that mentioned the judgment, from this time forward until the end of the III century, tended to merely parrot or amplify the wording that they found in the gospels. None of the authors were scholars attempting to examine different viewpoints. These were gentiles who struggled to interpret the writings that they had inherited from the Jews, and by the middle of the II century they differed from one another on several issues.

None of the legends about the lives of any of the second- and third-century Christian "leaders" can be verified. By the time Ignatius wrote, there was likely no one around him who had witnessed the destruction of the Temple. Whatever information he had was obtained in the form of snippets of stories, although perhaps there were people who had read Josephus' writings in Greek. His letter to the Ephesians is the only one that references the Second Coming, but that letter exists in such a disturbed state that the reference "These are the last times" may have been inserted much later in the century. The other Ignatian letters provide no indication as to how he may have viewed the role of the destruction of the Temple – apart from later embellishments to those letters.

Gentry mentions Eusebius' fanciful tale about the grandsons of Jesus' own brother, Jude – claiming there that they were looking for a future judgment. Let's examine more closely what Eusebius (c. 340) actually does say:

"Domitian, having shown great cruelty toward many, and having unjustly put to death no small number of well-born and notable men at Rome, and having without cause exiled and confiscated the property of a great many other illustrious men, finally became a successor of Nero in his hatred and enmity toward God. He was in fact the second that stirred up a persecution against us, although his father Vespasian had undertaken nothing prejudicial to us." (*History of the Church*, III:17)

"It is said that in this persecution the apostle and evangelist John, who was still alive, was condemned to dwell on the island of Patmos in consequence of his testimony to the divine word. Irenaeus, in the fifth book of his work *Against Heresies*, where he discusses the number of the name of Antichrist which is given in the so-called Revelation of John, speaks as follows about him: "If it were necessary for his name to be proclaimed openly at the present time, it would have been declared by him who saw the revelation. For it [or he] was seen not long ago, but almost in our own generation, *at the end of the reign of Domitian*."

"To such a degree, indeed, did the teaching of our faith flourish at that time that even those writers who were far from our religion did not hesitate to mention in their histories the persecution and the martyrdoms which took place during it. And they, indeed, accurately indicated the time. For they recorded that in the fifteenth year of Domitian" (*History of the Church*, III:18)

Eusebius then introduces what he claims to be a report from someone named Hegesippus. There is no way presently to verify that such a person ever existed, for his supposed writings exist only in citations from Eusebius. Eusebius alleges that this Hegesippus wrote in the second half of the second century,

claiming that during near the end of the reign of Domitian (80 or so years before Hegesippus and nearly 250 years before Eusebius), he said:

"Of the Lord's family there were still living the grandchildren of Jude, who is called the Lord's brother according to the flesh. It was reported that they were of the family of David, and they were led to Domitian Caesar by the Evocatus. For Domitian feared the presence of Christ as Herod also had feared it. ... Now when they were asked about Christ and his kingdom, of what sort it was and where and when it was to appear, they gave a statement that it was not a kosmic or earthly one, but a heavenly and angelic one, **which would happen at the conclusion of the age, when he would come in glory to judge the living and dead**, and to repay everyone according to his works. At these things, Domitian did not pass judgment against them; on the contrary, looking down on them as of no importance, indeed he let them go, and by a decree put a stop to the persecution of the assembly. But when they were released they ruled the assemblies because they were witnesses and were also the Lord's relatives. And after peace was established, they lived until the time of Trajan." (*History of the Church*, III:20)

After this, in the same section Eusebius reports that Tertullian had written that Domitian had persecuted the Christians like Nero had done. The chief problem with this is that there is no evidence (at least prior to 250) that Domitian ever persecuted Christians. Neither Suetonius, nor Tacitus, nor Cassius Dio, or any other Roman writing refer to a persecution of Christians by Domitian. None of the information that he reports about a persecution is likely to be true, and Origen (c. 250) reported that there had been few Christian martyrs up to his time. Eusebius was simply wrong about the persecution.

Eusebius also wrongly uses the word Antichrist in reference to the "beast" of Revelation, which figure is never called the Antichrist. Regarding the quote from Irenaeus, Gentry himself affirms GB Caird's assessment that "Unfortunately, however, 'Second-century traditions about the apostles are demonstrably unreliable.'" ⁶⁹ Clearly considering that it was at least possible that Eusebius was wrong on this point, Gentry brings up George Edmundson's *The Church in Rome in the First Century*: "Edmundson feels that Eusebius imparted this wrong historical data as a result of reading too much into Origen's comments on Matthew 20:22. That is, apparently Eusebius merely assumed that John was exiled to Patmos under Domitian, based on Origen's obscure comment.' Edmundson thus surmised that this led Eusebius astray in his historical arrangement of the data at this point." ⁷⁰ Were it not an option to discount Eusebius' report, Gentry would not have done so.

It is then during the fabricated persecution under Domitian that Eusebius claims Judah's grandchildren were brought before the Emperor himself. The claim that Domitian feared "the presence (παρουσία) of Christ" is likewise exactly the sort of propaganda that Eusebius typically created. More likely none of this information reliable reports any belief of any Christian prior to about the middle of the III century.

There is a reference in the letter attributed to "Clement of Rome" (c. 115 – 140) to a future coming. Curious is the fact that the author does not refer to any New Testament passage to support his belief but instead quotes Habakkuk. The author or authors are reporting a tradition "that the Lord – *even* the holy one that you are looking for – is coming suddenly into his temple" and that "the resurrection is about to be." The author was not a historian, and the Biblical wording did indicate that there had been

⁶⁹ *Before Jerusalem Fell*, Kenneth Gentry (1989), p. 60.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

something in the future to look for. Even so, it is clear that he was not looking ahead to the End of the World, for he never refers to the heavenly portents. Instead, he looks only toward a resurrection event of some kind. His evidence in favor of an afterlife is another legend: the story of the mythical phoenix. Of this letter Gentry writes that if Full Preterists are right then, “Clement of Rome lives through AD 70 and yet has no idea he is resurrected.” This is likely inaccurate. Whoever wrote that letter was neither Jewish nor in Palestine. He lived as an adult in the third generation of Jesus’ followers and – based on his own writings – struggled to understand the Biblical writings even more than people today do. We have no way to verify that he had any knowledge whatsoever of what life had been like in First Century Judea, and it certainly seems to the contrary that he did not.

The author of the Shepherd (of Hermas, c. 120-140) seems to be the earliest writer to apply Revelation to his own time. He writes, “You are blessed, as many as endure the great affliction that is coming, and as many as do not deny their lives. For the Lord swore about his son's life, that those who denied their anointed one would be rejected from their life – those who are now about to deny in the coming days.” (Vision 2) The author later refers to himself as undergoing similar “afflictions” (same Greek word), so it may be the case that he was not saying that Revelation was referring to a future time but instead that what they were about to go through was similar to what had already transpired. Hermas does not tell us enough in order for us to know.

Then what is the early evidence? There is practically nothing, and almost all of what we do possess was edited later. What we observe is that most authors merely quote what writings they possessed – trying hard to understand them. The ignorant gentile authors of the middle part of the century and thereafter whose writings are at least partially extant were mainly concerned with the dispute between their groups and the Marcionites. Occasionally they mentioned a future judgment because they had made only a cursory examination of the Jewish writings that they did not understand. They merely used the language that they found in there, and that language became the basis for constructing a future Second Coming. By the 4th century they were so far removed, both temporally and culturally, from the authors of the New Testament that their opinions only provide us with a snapshot of what they were thinking and practicing in their own time – not in the First Century.

The Earliest Creeds

The earliest formulation of what seems to be a creed, or statement of faith, comes down to us in edited form in the letter of Ignatius to the Trallians. The original letter is to be dated c. 112, but this particular addition is probably a response to Docetism. There are a few such comments in the writings of Ignatius, which appear to have been added a generation later (perhaps 135 to 140). This particular statement expresses the author’s or editor’s own beliefs – not about religious matters in general but about the conviction that Jesus had been a natural human being:

“Therefore, shut your ears when anyone would speak to you apart from Jesus Christ
 who was descended from the family of David *through* Maria,
 who truly was born,
 ate and drank,
 was truly prosecuted by Pontius Pilatus,
 was truly crucified and died,
 who was also truly awoken from the dead,
 his father waking him up,
 and which according to analogy (ομοιωμα)

his father is waking up those of us who trust in Christ Jesus,
without which we do not have true life.”

Regarding other writings that supposedly date to the Second Century, we are unable to trust that anything attributed to Irenaeus is legitimately his, since he comes to us only through Eusebius over a century later. The writings of Tertullian exist in manuscripts no earlier than the XI century and have been redacted, or are wholly spurious. Praxeas was a Oneness theologian who believed that God the Father was acting in another role as the Son. That is, the Father was the one who suffered, died, and who judges. If we can believe the extant text (supposedly Tertullian’s letter against Praxeas), he separated the roles of Father and son, assigning the role of judgment to the son, and saying his opinion briefly that the son is “coming to judge the living and the dead” (2:6) – language that he has cobbled from 2 Tim 4.

Cyprian (c. 250) refers to the introduction of an expression of faith which he required of converts in order to baptize them. By this time we see in others (e.g., Origen) that they have taken it upon themselves to write summary statements of faith, so that their own followers would indicate verbally that they did not agree with one of the other groups – the groups that held to different opinions. Some of these were expressed verbally at the point of baptism.

To an extent Marcion (c. 140) found himself responsible for much of this creedalism. As his beliefs became more popular, he incorrectly reasoned that when Paul referred to “my good message” (“gospel”), he was referring to something written. Marcion favored Paul over the other authors and allegedly produced an edited version of Luke’s account which he used.

While we should not accept much of the individual statements of detail found in the supposed writings of Tertullian, there is found there an excellent example of the development of the word “gospel” to indicate or include writings.

Therefore, we must follow the clue of our discussion, meeting each of our opponents’ efforts with reciprocal vigor. I say that my gospel is the true one; Marcion, that his is. I affirm that Marcion’s gospel has been altered; Marcion affirms that mine is. Now what is to settle the point for us, except for that principle of *time*, which rules that the authority lies with whichever is found to have been more ancient and assumes as an elemental truth. Corruption belongs to the side that is convicted of comparative lateness in its origin.⁷¹

The author of that segment of text, whether Tertullian or not, has pointed to a great difficulty that we still see today in the distinction between Full and Partial Preterism – and with the other viewpoints as well. They are mere opinions constructed on the Bible, and an opinion dating back to the Second Century is not equal to the text of a First Century document. The fallibility of human opinion is why Luther said

“Go to the **Bible itself**, dear Christians, and let my expositions and those of **all scholars** be no more than a tool with which to build aright, so that we can understand, taste, and abide in the simple and pure word of God; for God dwells alone in Zion.”⁷²

This is also why Calvin said

⁷¹ Against Marcion, 4:1f. We also read there, “Marcion, on the other hand, you must know, ascribes no author to his Gospel.”

⁷² Christmas address, 1522

"First we affirm that we desire to follow *scripture alone* as a rule of faith and religion, without mixing it with any other things which might be devised by the *opinion of men* apart from the Word of God, and without wishing to accept for our spiritual government any other doctrine than what is *conveyed to us by the same Word of God*, and without addition or diminution, according to the command of our Lord."⁷³

It is why Calvin and others wrote

"...**no authority** whether of **antiquity**, or custom or numbers, or human wisdom, or judgments, or proclamations, or edicts, or decrees, or **councils** or visions, or miracles, should be opposed to these holy Scriptures, but on the contrary, **all things should be examined**, regulated and reformed according to them."⁷⁴

Jesus was unafraid to confront human tradition with what he knew to be right, because bad traditions cling forever if one does not confront them.

Now he also told this analogy to them: "No one puts a patch from a new cloak onto an old cloak. But if they do, it rips the new one, and that patch from the new one does not agree with the old one. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. But if they do, the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled out, and the wineskins will be destroyed. On the contrary, one must put new wine into new wineskins. And no one who has drunk the old wants the new, for he says, 'The old is better.'" (Lk 5:36-39)

Thus we find ourselves with the dilemma of Restoration. As Gentry does, we may choose not to question a creed – pretending to ourselves that "of course it is right." Or we may reject every statement of faith that we find to disagree with the Bible – respecting the right of everyone else to do the same. As Barton Stone and his allies wrote in 1804:

"A creed, or confession of faith, is considered both as a summary of doctrines taught in the Bible, and an explanation of them. If it were left in its own place, to occupy the low ground of human opinion, it might do some good. But the moment it is received and adapted as a *standard*, it assumes the place of the Bible; it is the explanation, according to which we must understand the original law, the *word* of the living God."⁷⁵

This is the danger that arises whenever one provides history with a veto, rather than a vote: the human opinion becomes equal in someone's mind to God's Truth. This is precisely where the *sola-scriptura* Protestant (if there are such things today) must disagree with Ken Gentry. He writes (pp. 106-7):

"[Ed] Stevens ... is arguing as if my belief in a future, bodily return of Christ is my 'own interpretation.' This is absolutely mistaken and is contrary to the whole point of my referring to the creeds. The view that I hold is that of the historic Christian church throughout the ages."

In easy-to-digest terms, Gentry claims that his opinion is not merely his opinion because *other people agree share and have shared the same opinion*. John Calvin pointed to the Iconoclast Controversy as an example illustrating that the opinions of councils were merely opinions. Even though the Seventh Ecumenical Council of the (still undivided) Church decreed ...

"To summarize, **we** declare that we **defend** free from any innovations **all the**

⁷³ "The Geneva Confession," Article I, John Calvin (1536).

⁷⁴ "The French Confession of Faith," Article V, John Calvin, et. al. (1559)

⁷⁵ Excerpted from "Apology," as cited in *Biography of Eld. Barton Warren Stone*, Written by Himself (1847), p. 232.

written and unwritten ecclesiastical traditions that have been entrusted to us."

And

1. "If anyone does not *confess* that Christ our God can be represented in his humanity, let him be **anathema**.
2. If anyone does not *accept* representation in art of evangelical scenes, let him be **anathema**.
3. If anyone does not *salute* such representations as standing for the Lord and his saints, let him be **anathema**.
4. If anyone *rejects* any *written or unwritten* tradition of the church, let him be **anathema**."⁷⁶

...John Calvin expressly disagreed with the opinion of the Ecumenical Council, stating instead...

It is now about nine hundred years since the Council of Constantinople, convened under the Emperor Leo,⁷⁷ decided that images set up in churches should be pulled down and smashed. A little later, the Council of Nicaea, which the Empress Irene, in hatred toward the first council, assembled, decreed the restoration of images. Which of these two shall we acknowledge as legitimate? The latter, which gave images a place in churches, has subsequently prevailed among the people. But Augustine says that this practice involves an ever-present danger of idolatry.⁷⁸

On this detail he was comparing two councils, but his general point was that they were fallible opinions. Calvin flatly rejects the opinion expressed at Nicaea – still valid in the Catholic Church today – and concludes the matter by stating, "Now let the Romanists go and boast (as they are accustomed) that the Holy Spirit is fastened and bound to their councils." Calvin goes on to refer to "errors" in the councils, whether provincial or general (ecumenical). Even the First Ecumenical Council, which condemned Arius, had backed off somewhat from their pronouncements against him. Arius issued a formal response (328) that was rejected by his chief opponent, Athanasius, but which was regarded reasonably well otherwise. Complaints against Athanasius (334) resulted in *his* exile, and Emperor Constantine then recognized Arius as a Christian.⁷⁹

"What were the Romish arguments from the days of the Nicene debate down to the pontifical anathema?

They were, Truth is one – therefore, true believers cannot differ.

But they *do* differ – therefore, there is heresy.

Heresy must be kept out. Make a creed to keep it out;

and as to which side *is* heresy, "Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus" – that is, heresy is the opinion which is in the *minority*."⁸⁰

And so it is that creeds fail. Each group that splinters from another claims that its own creed is superior to the creed of the group that it left behind. In reality these are all merely opinions – most of which were made by honest but fallible truth-seekers. Creeds fail not because a heretic rejects them without cause but because honest Christians find them to have ultimately disagreed with the Bible.

⁷⁶ *Definition* of the Second (Ecumenical) Council of Nicaea (787).

⁷⁷ The council was actually convened by Constantine V, not Leo III.

⁷⁸ *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV:9:9, John Calvin (1536, 2006), pp. 1172-3.

⁷⁹ Possibly the victim of poison, Arius died the day before his "official" reinstatement ceremony, but at the time of his death he was *not* considered to be a heretic.

⁸⁰ "The Bible a Sufficient Creed," Charles Beecher, *Millennial Harbinger* (October, 1846), p. 572.

The Attachment to Creeds and Traditions

As in every previous generation, there are people in this generation who do not acknowledge other people to be their equals. They feel a compulsion to control others: to limit their behavior to within limits that *they themselves* wish to have the authority to define. We observe this frequently in religious and political discussion. This is that separation of opinions into “important” and “unimportant” matters that we examined briefly earlier.

One element of the desire to control what is different comes in what I call pedigrees. Pedigrees have existed in religious circles since the invention of the concept of disciplic succession within the religion. The second-century Christians agreed that Jesus taught the Truth.

In the struggle against heresy [in reality, disagreement], the debate finally came to the issue of the authority of the church. All agreed that the true message was the one taught by Jesus. The Gnostics claimed that they had some secret access to that original message through a succession of secret teachers. Marcion claimed that he had access to that message through the writings of Paul and Luke—which, however, had to be purged of what did not agree with Marcion’s views regarding the Old Testament.⁸¹

The Gnostics used their concept of succession to oppose Marcion’s direct appeal to the Bible. At that time, the non-Gnostic, non-Marcionite Christians set out to do the same thing. They created lists of people whom, they claimed, had taught the message consistently since the time of Jesus. A list might go back to John or to Peter, but ultimately they were at least pretending to trace their belief systems back to Jesus. They rejected both sola scriptura and any sort of secret knowledge. Whatever Jesus needed to forward to his followers, he told the apostles.

If those apostles had received any such teaching, they in turn would have passed it on to those who were to follow them in the leadership of the church. Therefore, were there any such secret teaching, it should be found among the direct disciples of the apostles, and the successors of those disciples, the bishops.⁸²

Also in use among most Muslims and in the International Society of Krishna Consciousness, disciplic succession is a means of restraining the development and proliferation of alternative viewpoints. If you did not get that information from a source that agrees with “us,” then by assumption both you and that information are wrong.

A seminary is a college, controlled by a certain denomination or sect, from which one might receive a degree in a religious subject. Usually the denomination considers that degree to be preparation for ordination or service as a member of the clergy in that denomination. In this regard, the history of the modern Christian seminary traces itself back only as far as the Reformation. As reformers began to found schools that taught clergy, the Catholic Church responded to the Reformation by convening the Council of Trent, which met in a series of 25 sessions beginning in 1545 and ending in 1563. During the twenty-third session in 1563 the council made determinations with regard to seminaries. We read in part:

⁸¹ *The Story of Christianity: Volume 1*, Justo Gonzalez (2010 edition), p.79.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 80.

The bishop, having divided these youths into as many classes as he shall think fit, according to their number, age, and progress in ecclesiastical discipline, shall, when it seems to him expedient, assign some of them to the ministry of the churches, the others he shall keep in the college to be instructed; and shall supply the place of those who have been withdrawn, by others; that so this college may be a perpetual seminary of ministers of God. And that the youths may be the more advantageously trained in the aforesaid ecclesiastical discipline, they shall always at once wear the tonsure and the clerical dress; they shall learn grammar, singing, ecclesiastical computation, and the other liberal arts; they shall be instructed in sacred Scripture; ecclesiastical works; the homilies of the saints; the manner of administering the sacraments, especially those things which shall seem adapted to enable them to hear confessions; and the forms of the rites and ceremonies. The bishop shall take care that they be present every day at the sacrifice of the mass, and that they confess their sins at least once a month; and receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ as the judgment of their confessor shall direct; and on festivals serve in the cathedral and other churches of the place.

... the holy Synod ordains, that bishops, archbishops, primates, and other Ordinaries of places, shall constrain and compel ... those who possess any dignities as professors of theology, and all others to whom is attached the office of lecturing, or of teaching, to teach those who are to be educated in the said schools, personally, if they be competent.... And the aforesaid masters shall teach those things which the bishop shall judge expedient. And, henceforth, those offices, or dignities, which are called professorships of theology, shall not be conferred on any but doctors, or masters, or licentiates in divinity, or canon law, or on other competent persons, and such as can personally discharge that office; and any provision made otherwise shall be null and void: all privileges and customs whatsoever, even though immemorial, notwithstanding.⁸³

Gradually the Protestants moved toward the same model that the Catholics employed: the seminary (and later, other religious colleges) would require both instructors and students to be trained in their denomination's doctrines and interpretations. Graduation and employment meant agreeing with those denominational beliefs. This is every bit as true today.

For example, Dallas Theological Seminary states on their website:

While our faculty and board annually affirm their agreement with the full doctrinal statement (below), students need only agree with these seven essentials:

1. the Trinity
2. the full deity and humanity of Christ
3. the spiritual lostness of the human race
4. the substitutionary atonement and bodily resurrection of Christ
5. salvation by faith alone in Christ alone
6. the physical return of Christ
7. the authority and inerrancy of Scripture.⁸⁴

⁸³ Decree on Reformation, Chapter XI, Council of Trent, July 15, 1563.

⁸⁴ "DTS Doctrinal Statement," <http://www.dts.edu/about/doctrinalstatement/>, retrieved 10 Nov 2016.

The “full doctrinal statement” is a large creed – too large to repeat here. There is a lot in the seven points to which students must agree in order to remain students. The faculty statement contains 21 articles and is far more detailed.

Through the colleges and their creeds, the denominations ensure that people who associate with them have agreed to support their teachings. Furthermore, anyone who has not received a degree from one of their institutions of learning may fall under suspicion, would not be qualified to teach at one of their institutions, and would not be employable as a member of their clergy. The system exists in order to keep out alternative viewpoints.

When Gentry wrote of John Noë that his not being a degreed member of a clerical class “highlights the (all too typical) problem,” he went on to imply that people who are not trained by a carefully-screening religious group in matters such as “systematic theology” and “church history” really shouldn’t be studying or engaging in discussions about religion because lacking such formal training is not “helpful to biblical interpretation at all.” He is upset that “theological laymen” like Dave Hunt (“a trained accountant”) and Tim LaHaye (“a professional counsellor”) are involved in “popularizing eschatological systems.” The quotes are from pages 89 and 90 of Gentry’s book – a chapter that was included earlier in *When Shall These Things Be* (edited by Keith Mathison, 2004). Should Gentry retract his comments about Noë now that the latter has earned a PhD in Theology from Trinity Theological Seminary and the University of Liverpool? Or would he disregard Noë’s doctorate because he disapproves of his belief system? Considering the fact that Tim LaHaye held a Doctorate of Divinity degree from Western Theological Seminary, it is reasonable to conclude that Gentry has ignored (or deliberately disregarded) the degree when assessing LaHaye’s knowledge. After all, LaHaye’s degree did not result in LaHaye agreeing with Gentry; therefore, it must have been invalid.

Historically, the use of degrees was always a denominational tool for the task of information control. When he entered the monastery, Martin Luther held a Master of Arts degree in grammar, logic, rhetoric, and metaphysics from the (secular) University of Erfurt. His later doctorate in theology from the University of Wittenburg only served to help him to pull away from those teachings of the Catholic Church that he believed were in opposition to the Bible. Five years later he posted his famous “95 Theses.” Did the Catholic Church praise Luther for his studies? No. He was condemned as a heretic in 1520. His degree was not essential to the learning process, and they disregarded it because it did not result in agreement with them. John Calvin’s master’s degree was interdisciplinary, and his doctoral degree was in Law. True, he was interested in theology, but no more so than are the lay people like Dave Hunt. Calvin was Catholic indeed, but he began to disagree with the Church’s teachings, and within four years of receiving his master’s degree he had been exposed to Protestantism and had “converted.” Calvin developed his own systematic theology over a period of over 20 years – and not through studying church history or by adhering to Catholic creeds.

Regardless of their antiquity, Calvin and his allies regarded the celibacy of the priesthood, the confessional, and the establishment of monasteries as “perverse doctrines of Satan.”⁸⁵ In each of Luther’s and Calvin’s cases – and in reality – it was neither their schools nor their degrees that mattered, but the fact that they had studied the Bible. These pages have been sufficient to address the matter of “creedal failure,” and to a greater extent, issues arising from the snobbery of refusing to accept the opinions of people who do not possess the pedigrees associated with our own denominational groups.

⁸⁵ Geneva Confession (1536), article XVII.

In the famous film version of the Wizard of Oz (MGM, 1939), when the Wizard bestows gifts upon the Scarecrow, Tin Man, and Lion, these gifts are not the gag gifts that they had been in the book. Instead they poked fun at the social order. The gifts distinguished between the actual qualities of possessing a brain (intelligence and knowledge), a heart (emotion and sympathy), and courage, and society's recognition of those things. When the Wizard begins with "back where I come from," it indicates the authors poking fun at Western Society.

Why, anybody can have a brain. That's a very mediocre commodity. Every pusillanimous creature that crawls on the earth, or slinks through slimy seas has a brain!

Back where I come from we have universities - seats of great learning - where men go to become great thinkers. And when they come out, they think deep thoughts, and with no more brains than you have. But - they have one thing you haven't got - a diploma! Therefore, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Universitatis Committeatum E Pluribus Unum, I hereby confer upon you the honorary degree of Th.D.⁸⁶

At this point the Scarecrow receives his diploma and spouts intelligent-sounding gibberish – proving that the diploma had not made him any smarter. One should never confuse someone's pedigree with actual learning – whether that learning is done at home, in a university setting, or anywhere else.

⁸⁶ *The Wizard of Oz* (film), MGM (1939).

Other Stray Objections from the Rabbit Hole

It's Not Really About the Afterlife (1)

In his next point of disagreement, Gentry claims (Page 44 ¶ 1) that Full Preterists believe that “we are now (supposedly) in our resurrected states and have the outpoured Holy Spirit and his gift of teachers, whom he gives to protect us from every wind of doctrine.” At this point he cites Eph 4 three times, where we read:

“Now to each one of us the favor was given, according to the measure of the Anointed One's gift. So it says...

“And indeed, he gave the envoys, and the prophets, and the good messengers, and the shepherds and teachers, for the restoration of the holy ones to the point of work of service, for the construction of the Anointed One's body, until all of us should reach the point of the unity of the faith and the recognition of God's son – until we should reach a measure of stature of the fullness of the Anointed One, so that we would no longer be babies, being carried about by every wind of teaching (in the trickery of human beings, in craftiness) to the system of deceit.

“But, being truthful in love, we should grow up into him in all things.”

This matter and the one below it do not stem from the afterlife itself but from an interpretation of the “resurrected state” as being something that necessitates the abandonment of religious system or evangelism. In my own opinion the *events of AD 70* do relate to those two issues – but the afterlife does not have anything to do with them.

All of these things were there in the past – during the First Century. We do not have them now, but they had them then. The miraculous signs were there to create a clear distinction between Priestly Judaism and Jesus' explanation of the Torah – demonstrating that the people who had those gifts also had the Truth. The envoys and prophets are not around today – nor are any of the others. The “system of deceit” to which Paul refers in the passage is Priestly Judaism (or “ritual religion”). The religionists were trying to trick Paul's readers throughout the region into leaving Jesus for Priestly Judaism. The miraculous guidance of the prophets kept them strong until they no longer needed such a point of distinction between the two groups.

Next the author claims conditionally (Page 44 ¶ 2) that “if AD 70 fulfills all prophecy and if the entire New Testament speaks to issues in the pre-AD 70 time frame we do not have any directly relevant passages for us.” This is a broad generation of what he believes *must* result from the precondition; it does not express the position of any Full Preterist to my knowledge, unless possibly it is the Israel-Only group. His precondition inaccurately explains the position taken by the vast majority of Full Preterists. Jesus replaced the Torah with the relationship principles of Love and Trust: he did not remove them and leave people with nothing. Jesus removed the concept of *religion*, but he brought a deeper and personal relationship with God and with one another.

Paul explained this in Romans 13: “Owe nothing to anyone except love to one another. For the one who loves the other is fulfilling the Torah. For there is this: “You will not commit adultery. You will not murder. You will not steal. You will not strongly desire.”⁸⁷ And if there is any other precept, it is brought

⁸⁷ All from Exodus 20

under a head by this saying, “You will love your neighbor as yourself.”⁸⁸ Love for your neighbor works no wrong. Therefore, love is a fulfillment of the Torah.”

John explains the same concept this way:

“Beloved, we should love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been fathered by God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love. God's love for us was showed in this: that God sent his unique son into the creation so that we might live through him. Love is this way: it isn't that “We loved God,” but that, “He loved us” and sent his son as an atonement for our errors.

“Beloved, if God loved us this way, we are bound also to love one another. No one has ever observed God. If we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is made complete in us. In this way, we know that we are remaining in him and he in us: because he gave us from his breath. And we observed and are testifying that the Father sent his son to be savior of the creation. Whoever acknowledges that Jesus is God's son, God is remaining in him and he in God. And we have known and trusted the love that God has in us.” (1J 4)

For the most part Full Preterists find that there are plenty of relevant teachings in the Bible. There are no *prophecies* directed toward us (or anyone in the future), but the Bible's philosophical and ethical instruction is not prophecy. Those things that God was explaining through Moses, through the prophets, and through Jesus extend far beyond prophecy. It is a gross mischaracterization to claim that the Full Preterist regards nothing in the Bible as being applicable beyond the First Century.

It's Not Really About the Afterlife (2)

“Adam's sin has *physical* effects, as well as judicial and spiritual effects.” (Page 45 ¶ 2, Lines 3-4)

In this case Gentry's viewpoint isn't even representative of the Presbyterian denominations as a collective, or of Protestants in general. This disagreement with the majority is fine, but Gentry does not wish to acknowledge it. On this issue, some believe that Adam would not have died (physically) had he never sinned. Others believe that Adam's death “on that day” was metaphorical, “spiritual.” Both Adam and Eve, and every animal, and every plant, were already going to die a physical death. The narrative, if literally true, indicates that it would have been necessary for them to eat regularly from a specific tree in order to remain physically alive for a prolonged time. The tree itself would have been superfluous had Adam and Eve been immortal.

At any rate, the belief that Adam was punished for his own actions, and that we are not punished for his actions, is widespread and is not connected with Full Preterism. Gentry attempts to dismiss the Full Preterist by claiming that such a viewpoint implies that “the physical world is superfluous,” but there is no Full Preterist (back at least as far as Townley) who claims such a thing. Once again Gentry has created his own mythical pitfall.

For “Paul and the Afterlife” (p. 46), I have placed this discussion at the end of the earlier talk about the subject of the afterlife.

⁸⁸ Lv 19:18

Gentry's questions for Full Preterists continue. At this point (Page 47 ¶ 1) I am answering the following objections from Ken Gentry for myself alone. I do not claim to represent any other post-apocalyptic (Full Preterist). Neither do I claim that my viewpoints on these issues all result from Full Preterism.

Christology Implications (pp. 46-7)

After reprising his comments on Acts 1:9, Gentry says...

Gentry: "If AD 70 ends the Messianic reign of Christ then the glorious Messianic era prophesied throughout the Old Testament is reduced to a forty year inter-regnum."

I reply: No. There is no "glorious Messianic era." That concept was fabricated by gentile expositors who did not understand the Jewish writings. The New Testament reapplies prophecies that had already been fulfilled – none of which was about a glorious era. The eras in Jewish history had been ordinary periods of time on earth, and so is the period of time in Revelation 20. The Millennium is not a period of glory; it was the time prior to the destruction of the Temple, and that's all it was. I note that some Full Preterists have allowed the thousand years to continue after the First Century, but every prophecy in the book of Revelation has been fulfilled.

History and Church Errors (pp. 47-8)

Gentry: "Sin will dwell forever and ever."

I reply: Apart from the eventual end of the universe, I would agree. Even more strongly, this was the whole point of God's having created humanity in his image, beginning with Adam. This physical universe is a place of instruction. It is our school. As long as people have bodies, they have desires, and there is free will. As long as there is free will, there is the *possibility* of evil. Since one may choose between right and wrong, one may choose wrongly. We are not mind-numbed robots, nor shall we be in the future. As Revelation concludes, the people inside the new Jerusalem are good people living victorious lives, but they still come face to face with "the dogs, and the alchemists, and the sexually errant, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and everyone who is affectionate to and who does falsehood" (Rv 22:15). The earth does not change after Jesus; the earth does not change after the Second Coming, either. Our concept of relationship with God was what needed to change.

Gentry: "Shall we limit the Great Commission to the pre-70 era?"

I reply: The so-called Great Commission was merely a renewal of the commission to the Twelve in Matthew 10. It was fulfilled at Pentecost, and Jesus guided them miraculously until the end of the age: AD 70. Throughout their lives they remained in the region of Palestine – even when there was persecution (Acts 8:1f.). They stayed put because their mission had been fulfilled. The message had gone to Jews of all nations (Acts 2). I believed this while I was still a Futurist and am still convinced of it. However, again let me note that I speak only for myself here. Most Full Preterists apply Mt 28:20 ("I am with *you*") to be something specific to the Twelve, but they extend 28:19 to Christianity (or the Church) as a whole – something that I do not do.

Gentry: “Is the Lord’s Supper superfluous today”?

I reply: I disagree with many other Full Preterists on the matter, so that the issue is not connected with Full Preterism. There never was a ritual in the First Century. The Second Century gentiles created it after misunderstanding that “do this for my remembrance” meant “when you eat with your fellow Christians, behave lovingly.” That is exactly how Paul applied it in 1st Corinthians. That there was no ritual is evidenced by the fact that any instruction about such a thing is entirely absent from Matthew, Mark, and John. It is found in Luke because of his connection to Paul, and Paul explains what it means: eat together lovingly.” We see from John’s version that during the final dinner he was reminding his students to love one another. That is again exactly what Paul tells the Corinthians. By the way, I believed this, too, while I was still a Futurist.

Another Straw Man: “ALL” Will be Fulfilled Gentry’s Chapter 3

Gentry says that Full Preterists “wrongly interpret the statement [in Lk 21:22] as if Jesus is speaking *universally* of absolutely *all* prophecies that have *ever* been written...” (Page 53 ¶ 5). Again I believe that he mischaracterizes the statements of Full Preterists. If perhaps there are preterists who interpret Lk 21:22 to indicate all prophecies ever, then I have not met them.

The line, “these are the days of retribution, so that all the things that were written would be fulfilled” is about the prophecies about the original destructions and desecrations of the temple that Jesus was reapplying to point forward to the upcoming destruction of the temple in AD 70. Jesus pointed backward in order to point forward. As a simple example demonstrating that not every prophecy was fulfilled in the Temple’s destruction, AD 70 is not mentioned anywhere by Jesus or any apostle as being a “fulfillment” of this prophecy to Moses:

“Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came forth abundantly, and the assembly and their herd animals drank. But Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron, ‘Since you did not trust me, to treat me as holy in the presence of the sons of Israel, so you will not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.’” (Num 20:11-12)

There were plenty of prophecies that **were not about AD 70**. By the time Jesus said these things, everything in the Hebrew Bible had already been fulfilled as the author had intended, and the Messiah had come – the successor to Adam, to Abraham, to Jacob, to Moses, to Elijah, to Elisha, and to David. He had done similar things but greater. Both John the Baptizer and Jesus heralded the central role of the Messiah as being to bring down the thousand-year-old Temple. By AD 40, those were the only predictions that remained unfulfilled ... and they were on their way to fulfillment for the people of Jesus’ generation.

Backword

“All things in the universe” are not completed, but finally we are. We have come to the end of our examination into Ken Gentry’s opinions about Full Preterism. Apart from simple disagreement, the real problem that the traditionalists have with Full Preterism is the same problem that they have with the principle of putting the Bible ahead of all human opinion: they want very badly for there to exist today a human organization with the spiritual authority to interpret the Bible. They want to accept their

tradition without question. These have taken what Martin Luther and John Calvin said and have wished to turn it into exactly the opposite. When Luther separated out the intertestamental literature into a separate category of Apocrypha, and when he separated Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation as having “from ancient times had a different reputation” than “the true and certain chief books of the New Testament,” he did not intend for people to shrug their shoulders and accept his opinion as fact. Luther intended for people to go down the same road that he went down – that is, that each person ought to determine for himself which books were truly inspired. Therefore he wrote about Revelation, “About this book of the Revelation of John, I leave everyone free to hold his own opinions. I would not have anyone bound to my opinion or judgment. I say what I feel. I miss more than one thing in this book, and it makes me consider it to be neither apostolic nor prophetic.”⁸⁹ Even concerning what was *in* the Bible, it was up to each of us to determine the truth as we saw it.

In doing so, Luther took Christendom all the way back to Marcion. Prior to Marcion there were various Christian writings circulating, and the followers of Jesus simply used whatever they had. This practice may have followed that of the NT authors themselves, who occasionally quoted from “outside sources.” We observe from the earliest known manuscripts that some had copies of Paul’s letters, some had one or more of the accounts of Jesus’ life – often together with Acts. Some of the other letters circulated together, too, and when they did have a copy of Revelation it was often alone. For the Old Testament they used the Septuagint – which by this time was filled with later writings. Marcion’s personal canon was closed and limited, just as Luther’s was later. He was the first to sort through the extant writings and limit his collection. The Letter of Barnabas, the Shepherd, and “First Clement” appear in some bound copies of the Bible from the IV and V centuries, so the concept of a localized canon slowly passed away after Marcion. Luther reserved for himself the same right to examine the books that supposedly comprised the Bible and to determine which were actually inspired by God. His opinions regarding the book of James changed at least twice during his lifetime. Would that same freedom be acceptable for us today? According to Luther it would. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) went further than Luther regarding the intertestamental literature. They **declared to be uninspired** and excluded altogether these books that had been part of all Christian Bibles since the beginning – including Luther’s translation.⁹⁰

By contrast, Gentry and his allies apply a principle best enunciated as *prima scriptura*; that is to say, that the contents of the Bible are illuminated by Church tradition – and not by individual study. They prefer to believe that theirs is the correct understanding of the principle of *sola scriptura*, and that many Protestants are mistaken in applying that principle to the individual. *Sola scriptura*, if we believe in such a thing, does allow for the examination of other viewpoints. History provides snapshots at what other people thought, and those opinions might be useful. Gentry and his allies would like for the opinions of an organized religious group to have some authority.

In their efforts to place the right to interpret the Bible properly in the hands of a collective, they write things like this: “The Church was established by Jesus Christ himself and given authority by Him. Jesus

⁸⁹ Luther’s Preface to Revelation, *Luther’s Works Volume 35: Word and Sacrament I*, 1522, translated into English 1960, p. 398. In the German of the 1522 edition: “An diesem buch der offinbarung Johannis las ich auch yderman seyynes synnes walden will niemant an meyn dunckel odder vrteyl verpunden haben. Ich sage was ich fule Myr mangellit an disem buch nit eynerley, dass ichs wider Apostolisch noch prophetisch hallte...” (p. 402).

⁹⁰ “The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of the Scripture, and therefore are of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings.”

gives the Church an authority of ‘binding and loosing’ that is not given to every member of the Church as individuals (Matt 18:18).⁹¹ However, we have already seen in reference to Mt 18:20 that the passage gives the authority to the Twelve alone, because of their personal knowledge of him and of the miraculous guidance that they were to receive. Jesus trusted his friends. He did not trust a business founded hundreds of years later.

The conflict of the traditionalists is not with Full Preterism; it is with Martin Luther – and anything that they regard as “new” (including science) – because they require tradition and creeds in order to maintain their faith. Trusting God to handle the important matters, allowing others to hold their own opinions about a wide variety of issues, and accepting those others as their equals is a scary proposition for the traditionalist. As Keith Mathison wrote:

Almost every Christian who has wrestled with theological questions has encountered the problem of competing interpretations of Scripture. If one asks a dispensationalist pastor, for example, why he teaches premillennialism, the answer will be, “Because the Bible teaches premillennialism.” If one asks the conservative Presbyterian pastor across the street why he teaches amillennialism (or postmillennialism), the answer will likely be, “Because that is what the Bible teaches.” Each man will claim that the other is in error, but by what ultimate authority do they typically make such a judgment? Each man will claim that he bases his judgment on the authority of the Bible, but since each man’s interpretation is mutually exclusive of the other’s, both interpretations cannot be correct. How then do we discern which interpretation is correct?⁹²

They do not want the answer to be: “follow your conviction.” They want someone to “slip them the answer,” and better yet, they want the answer to be something that *they already possess*. It would be difficult to sort through the teachings of every group out there; let’s just assume that your own group is correct. Now there is no need for study, and if you do study, always remember that your group is right. Don’t consider alternate ideas like Full Preterism, or Historicism, or the Oneness of the Godhead, or Jesus’ name baptism, or any of the ideas that people outside of your own group promote. Do you see how *easy* that makes everything? Mathison refers to “the doctrinal boundaries of Christian orthodoxy” (p. 242), and that’s precisely what he means. *Human beings are setting boundaries* in defining which interpretations must be correct.

Citing Charles Hodge, Mathison concludes that such an orthodoxy must exist, and it must be reflected in the creeds. For...

“If the essential teachings of Scripture are clear (perspicuous);

“if the Holy Spirit has been promised to guide the Church into the knowledge of the truth of Scripture;

“if the entire Church for thousands of years confesses to being taught by the Spirit the same essential truths in Scripture,

then it follows that those truths are what the Scripture says.”⁹³

⁹¹ *The Shape of Sola Scriptura*, Keith A. Mathison (2001), p. 267. It was Mathison who edited the “Restored response” to Full Preterism in 2004 – in which Gentry’s chapter 6 first appeared.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 239-40.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

The matter is simple, then. Mathison makes three assumptions. If all of those preconditions are true, then (he believes) his conclusion follows. However, on the first matter the groups disagree as to which teachings are “essential” or “clear.” Therefore, either the precondition is false, or is not verifiable, or the essential teachings are not what the groups claim them to be. I side with the latter conclusion. John labels as Truth the fact that Love and Trust are the whole duty of humanity. “Love is a fulfilment of the Torah” is the Truth that may be discovered by any individual – one who either possesses or does not possess any Jewish writings. Knowledge of that essential Truth does not lead to knowledge of any of the details of Jewish history, and certainly not to finer points of the matters that the organized groups label as dogma.

Is Baptism clear? Some denominations basically do not practice it. Some perform baptism only by immersion, while others pour or sprinkle. Some claim that the wording that is spoken when one is baptized is important; others say that it is not. Some say that one’s baptism is not valid unless performed by a Church official; others say that the baptizer is not important. Some say that baptism is essential for salvation; others say that it only marks entry into a formal church group. With millions of people around the world disagreeing over what they consider to be “matters of salvation,” such things are not “clear.” ***Whenever millions of people disagree with you, then your viewpoint is not obvious.***

Is the nature of Jesus’ relationship to his Father clear? In the IV century, as today, there were many schools of thought regarding the issue. Not only is the matter unclear, but also scholars have become adamant over the years about one such opinion or another. The groups even disagree as to what constitutes the Bible. Mathison’s first assumption does not follow.

We have already seen that the promised holy Spirit (John 13-17) was inspirational in nature. It guided the apostles to remember clearly all of the things that Jesus had taught them while he was alive and they were with him. This miraculous guidance does not extend to anyone today. Mathison’s second assumption is also falsifiable.

The “entire Church” has never taught the same thing about any issue. They disagreed with one another on points of interpretation during the First Century, they did not all agree at any point to any of the creeds that were passed by those who strongly desired to silence their opponents, and they still do not teach the same things today. Mathison’s third presupposition is demonstrably incorrect. His conclusion not only does not follow but is false. Those opinions that are held to be true by an organized group may be altogether false, or altogether true, or partially true, or utterly unimportant.

The concept of orthodoxy works this way: Each group decides *a priori* that its teachings are right – orthodox. Therefore those who disagree are heterodox and heretical. The group never admits what everyone ought to know: honest scholars have different opinions, and no volume of opinion establishes a fact. The principle known as *sola scriptura* begins with the faith that God will guide every individual to whatever truths are necessary (Romans 1-3). It is usually in the unnecessary things that we differ. The problem remains that those unnecessary things are the ones that we cling to most violently.

That’s it, folks. You can go home now.

**“They would not listen. They did not know how.
Perhaps they’ll listen now.”** (“Vincent,” Don McLean)