

Scriptures and Doctrine :: A Response to a Brother "Almost Persuaded" of Full Preterism

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By Steve Gregg

I received and responded to the following correspondence today:

Steve,

What Scriptural passages help one avoid full preterism?

Jesus only spoke of one 'the end' - the end of the age. Paul and John and Peter constantly warned people to be prepared because the coming of Christ was imminent. And in 70 AD the temple / Old Covenant was ended.

I am in shock right now - I was a premil and after studying your teaching became partial preterist.

But I really am struggling to find a good Scriptural reason not to be preterist.

Jesus came - the temple was destroyed.

What if the Bible never intended to discuss the end of the world - only the end of the covenant? What if the resurrection to judgment occurred and now people are judged as they die?

Any Biblical push back would be appreciated.

Sâ€”

Hi Sâ€”,

I will address your concerns in the order that you presented them:

1) It is a mistake to say that Jesus spoke only of one "the end." This is not true, either of Jesus, nor of any biblical writer. There are many "beginnings" and many "ends"â€”depending upon what is under discussion.

John said that Jesus existed "from the beginning" (1 John 1:1) and also that the readers had heard the command to love "from the beginning" (1 John 3:11). Though not specified more precisely, it is intended to be obvious that these were different "beginnings."

Similarly, depending on what is being discussed, there are many "beginnings"â€”each, in its place, referred to as "the beginning" (e.g., Gen.13:3; 41:21; Isa.1:26; 40:21; Daniel 9:21; Luke 1:2; John 2:10; 6:64; 8:25, 44; 15:27; Acts 11:4, 15; 26:4; 2 Thess.2:13).

As there are many "beginnings," so are there many "ends" (e.g., Ruth 3:10; Prov.20:21; Eccl.7:8; Isa.46:10; 2 Peter 2:20; Rev.1:8)â€”each referred to, simply, as "the end".

The flood was described as "the end of all flesh" (Gen.6:13). There is the generic "the end" of the wicked man's life (Ps.73:17). The Psalmist says he will keep God's statutes "to the end" (Ps.119:33)â€”which presumably means simply to the end of his life. The harlot is bitter as wormwood "in the end" (Prov.5:4). The resolution of a court battle is also called "the end" (Prov.25:8, Matt.26:58). Death is "the end" of every man (Eccl.7:2). The destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, in 586 BC, is alternately called "the end" and "an end" (Ezek.7:2,3,6). Likewise, the destruction of the northern kingdom, in 722 BC, was referred to as "the end" (Amos 8:2). God's dominion is said to endure "to the end" (Dan.6:26)â€”which certainly must look to an "end" beyond AD 70!

There is certainly "the end" of the Old Covenant (e.g., Dan.9:26), but also, in one verse (Dan.12:13), both Daniel's death is referred to as "the end," and the future resurrection is said to occur at "the end of days." (this agrees with Jesus saying that the resurrection would occur "at the last day" (John 6:39, 40, 44, 54).

Matthew uses "the end" to refer to the end of the temple (24:3), but also to refer to "the end" of Jesus' legal proceedings before the Sanhedrin (26:58).

As did other biblical writers, Jesus also used the term "the end" variously, in different contexts.

In Matthew 24:6 & 14, it is probable that "the end" refers to the end of the Old Covenant, of Jerusalem and of the temple system. However, in Matthew 24:13, "He who endures to the end will be saved" cannot mean "he that survives until AD 70 shall be saved"! It surely means "the end" of one's individual life.

Jesus definitely spoke of "the end of the age" or "the end of this age" (Matthew 13:39, 40, 49; 28:20). The disciples also spoke of AD 70 as "the end of the age"â€”though, in their minds, they were probably not sure whether this event would also be the end of the world as we know it.

When we read "the end of the age," we must naturally ask, "Of what age?" Jesus spoke of more than one ageâ€”"this age" and "the age to come" (Matt.12:32). The latter age was to be when His disciples would receive eternal life (Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30), the powers of which age, we have already tasted (Heb.6:5).

Paul also spoke of multiple "ages to come" (Ephesians 2:7). More to our point, he spoke of "the ends of the ages" (1 Cor .10:11).

Thus, it is impossible to speak of only one "the end"â€”or even of only one "end of the age." Each "end" must be taken in its context and with sound exegesis. When Jesus said He would be with His disciples "until the end of the age"â€”He could hardly have meant AD 70, since most of the disciples were dead before that date, and the ones who lived beyond it (e.g., John) hardly found Christ to be absent from him after that date.

2) The "coming" of the Lord is more generic than full-preterists allow. It certainly refers to the judgment events of AD 70, in some places (e.g., Zech.14:1-2; Matt.21:40; 24:3). It also refers to multiple judgment events that occurred centuries after AD 70, like the time when God removed the lampstand of the church in Ephesus (Rev.2:5), and the time when He brought judgment on the careless church of Sardis (Rev.3:3). In the Old Testament, the same term referred to the conquest of Egypt by Assyria (Isa.19:1).

There is also a "coming of the Lord" in the future, at which time He will judge all nations (Psalm 96:13; 98:9; Matthew 25:31ff). There will, at that time, be a resurrectionâ€”both of the righteous and the unrighteous (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15)â€”which clearly did not happen in AD 70, since remains of dead bodies have been discovered which perished far more than 2,000 years ago.

3) The New Testament writers were not so sure of the immanence of the "second coming" as many suggest. In 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3, Paul said that this event was not immanent. He may well have hoped that it would occur in his lifetime, though he never declared that it would be so. The "we" in passages like 1 Thessalonians 4:15 & 17 does not mean "I, Paul, and you Christians in Thessalonika will be alive when the Lord comes." How could he suggest such a thing as that? Some of his readers would certainly die (as others in their church already had died) before AD 70. Paul himself also died before AD 70. Whether "the coming of the Lord" referred to Jerusalem's destruction, or to the end of the known world, Paul missed his prediction, if his "we" included himself among those who would be living at that time.

Paul sees the church as the collective body of Christ, enduring through the generations. "We who are alive and remain to the coming of the Lord" means, "Whichever representatives of our tribe who may be alive at that time..." Some of that tribe are still living today (to paraphrase Josephus).

It is not impossible for the biblical writers to have been mistaken, with reference to the particular timing of prophetic events, about which they cherished hopes, but no specific information. Jesus told them, "It is not for you to know the times and the seasons which the Father has put in His own authority" (Acts 1:7). Whether it be the timing of the Roman invasion or of the end of the world, these would certainly be matters, the timing of which were in the province of God's own authority. If these were not things for the apostles to know, it is unlikely that they knew them. They may have had opinions abo

ut themâ€”and even expressing themâ€”but they would have to have been offered as guesses, not promises.

Similarly, Paul clearly believed that he was going to make a brief stop in Jerusalem, and then turn around to visit Spain by way of Rome soon afterward (Rom.15:25-28). He little knew that he would be delayed more than three years by an intervening imprisonment in Caesarea. The apostles did not know the future, except in cases of special revelationâ€”which they rarely claimed to possess. If they thought the end of the world was upon them (as Peter may have believedâ€”1 Peter 4:7), then they were a lot like Christians throughout the ages who have always hoped as much. However, any "predictions" along these lines must be taken as wishful thinking, not certain knowledge, unless we are to discredit Jesus' statement in Acts 1:7.

4) Some full-preterists spiritualize the resurrection and judgment so as to claim that it invisibly happened in AD 70â€”but who can point to any significant improvement in the spiritual experience of Christians, say, in Corinth or Thessalonika, which can be said to have occurred when Jerusalem fell?

There is, indeed, an invisible reality, a kind of spiritual resurrection, spoken of in scripture. However, it did not occur in AD 70. It occurs when a person becomes a believer in Christâ€”and that happened to very many people prior to AD 70 (e.g., John 5:24; Eph.2:4-6; Col.2:12-13), as well as after.

The final resurrection at Christ's return is not to be a secret, spiritual phenomenon. It is described as a noisy affairâ€”which would be hard to miss (1 Thess.4:16; 1 Cor.15:52). It is physical, involving the emptying of the physical graves (John 5:28), and includes the righteous as well as the wicked (John 5:29). For the righteous, the body will be glorifiedâ€”the same body that was "sown in dishonor" is "raised in glory;" that body which was "sown in weakness" is to be "raised in power" (1 Cor.15:43). This mortal and corruptible body will "put on" immortality and incorruption (1 Cor.15:53). At that time, all the nations will be made to present themselves before Christ's judgment seat, and will be consigned either to eternal reward or to eternal flames (Matthew 25:31-46; Acts 17:31; Romans 2:5-10; 2 Tim.4:1; Revelation 20:9-15)

If such a resurrection of all the dead, and a judgment of all nations, had occurred in AD 70, it would be astonishing to find that none of the church fathers, a generation later, had heard of it! They did not notice the graves of the apostles and first-generation saints to have been vacated. They did not see the wicked nations judged and sent to the eternal fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. They give no evidence of believing, or having even heard, that such a thing had occurred in their parents' or grandparents' generation. Nor did anyone believe such a thing until modern timesâ€”which are times characterized by as many theological errors as there are fleas on a dog. I hope you will not be bitten.

In Jesus,
Steve Gregg