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THE PURPOSE OF MATTHEW’S GOSPEL — PART I

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This series of articles represents an attempt to unveil the argument of Matthew’s Gospel. An argument is different than a typical journal article, which usually centers on a key exegetical issue; rather, an argument seeks to set forth the central point of a biblical book and then relate the contents of the entirety of the book to this central point. An argument asks what is the content of the book and how do each of its component parts contribute to its subject?

Attempting to uncover the argument of the canonical books is one of the most important exercises that a biblical interpreter can become engaged. While exegesis certainly has its place, it is of little value unless the interpreter first sees the general flow of thought of an entire book. Without first discovering a book’s argument, the interpreter is confined to straining so intensely at the veins on the leaves of the tree that he forgets what the forest looks like. However, Matthew’s message can best be appreciated only after the interpreter first grasps several key background issues. These background issues will be addressed in this article and Matthew’s argument will be traced in the subsequent article.

AUTHORSHIP

External evidence favors Matthew as the book’s author. External sources include Pseudo Barnabas, Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Justin Martyr, Papias, Irenaeus, Origen, Eusebius, Jerome, Dionysius, Theophilus, Cerinthus, Valentinus, and Tatian. Other sources confirming the authenticity of Matthew include the Didache, Ignatius, and Barnabas’ Epistle. The virtual unanimous voice of the early church is that Matthew is the book’s author. One wonders how such powerful tradition and external testimony could have emerged if Matthew had not written the book.

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Interestingly, the earliest copies of the book contain the superscription “according to Matthew.” Only Matthean authorship explains the church’s early acceptance of the book.

*Internal* evidence also demonstrates Matthean authorship. Although Matthew does not identify himself as the book’s author, such an omission is not surprising. As a tax gatherer (10:3) he no doubt felt shame regarding his former profession and therefore omitted his name from the book. Interestingly, the book also omits other stories that Jesus told about tax gatherers (Luke 18:9-14; 19:1-10). Matthew’s reluctance to identify himself as the book’s author no more disqualifies him from being its writer than John’s continual reference to himself as the disciple whom Christ loved (John 19:26) disqualifies him from being the author of the fourth Gospel. If a forger had written the book, he probably would have used a prominent name as opposed to creating an anonymous work.

Despite Matthew’s desire for anonymity, several internal clues still point to him as the book’s author. For example, while the other Gospel writers refer to a party given for the Lord in Matthew’s house (Mark 2:14-15; Luke 5:29), Matthew referred to this same event as taking place in “the house” rather than “his house” (9:10). Moreover, while the other writers refer to this occasion as a great banquet (Luke 5:29), Matthew referred to it simply as a dinner (9:9-10). Also, unlike the other Gospel writers’ list of the various disciples, the phrase “tax collector” is only associated with Matthew in Matthew’s list of the disciples (10:3). Additionally, while Matthew’s Gospel simply alludes to Matthew as a “tax gatherer” (10:3) or a publican (9:9), the other evangelists used his surname Levi when referring to him (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27, 29). Interestingly, Paul followed a similar practice by only referring to himself with his post conversion name when penning his letters.

Matthew the tax collector would be a logical candidate as the book’s author since it contains more financial references than any of the other Gospels. Allusions to money and rare coins are replete throughout the book. Only Matthew speaks of a “talent” (18:24; 25:14-30). This monetary denomination was a sum of such magnitude that only a tax gatherer would have been familiar with it. Indeed, Matthew used three words for money that none of the other Gospel writers used (17:24, 27; 18:24). Other financial terms found throughout the Book of Matthew include debt, account-taking or reckoning, and money-changers (18:23-24, 27; 25:19, 27). With the exception of debt, these terms are unique to Matthew. Matthew is also unique in comparison to the other Gospel writers through his employment of the terms gold (*chrusos*), silver (*arguros*), and brass (*chalkos*). Interestingly, only Matthew records Christ’s payment of the two-drachma tax (17:24-27).

Other factors make Matthew an appropriate candidate for the book’s writer. For example, his occupation as a publican (Matt 9:9; Mark 2:14; Luke
5:27) would have meant that he was literate and adept at keeping records. Also, because Matthew was from Capernaum (Mark 2:1-14), he would have been a logical candidate to write the Gospel since it seems to place a special emphasis upon this city (4:13; 9:1; 11:23). Furthermore, because Matthew was a Jew living inside the land, he would have been familiar with the Jewish geography, history, customs, ideas, classes, and terminology that are so prominently displayed throughout the book.

Matthew’s biography demonstrates God’s grace. As a tax gatherer (Matt 9:9; Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27), he was considered both a thief (Luke 3:12-13; 19:2, 8) and a traitor by his peers. In biblical times, tax gatherers were placed in the same category as sinners, Gentiles, and harlots (Matt 5:46; 18:17; 21:31-32; Luke 7:34; 15:1; 18:13). Despite this vile background, Christ extended grace to him and even selected him to write the first book of the New Testament canon featuring Christ’s royal identity.

While Levi was his surname (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27), Matthew was his apostolic name. His name means “gift of the Lord.” He was the son of Alphaeus (Mark 2:14) and his hometown was Capernaum. The ministry of John the Baptist and Christ may have already impacted him since he immediately obeyed the Lord and followed him when called (9:9). Matthew walked with Christ for most of His ministry and was therefore an eyewitness to Christ’s incarnation and earthly ministry. Matthew is listed as being in the inner circle as one of the original twelve disciples (Matt 10:1-4; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16). Luke also mentioned him as waiting with the other disciples for the Holy Spirit after Christ’s resurrection (Acts 1:13).

Some sources indicate that Matthew later became a member of an ascetic, Judaistic branch of Christianity. However, membership in such a group should not be construed as legalism on Matthew’s part since legalism runs counter to the character of Matthew’s Gospel and because the early church seemed to adhere to some aspects of the Mosaic Law (Acts 15:29). Matthew probably preached in Judea for fifteen years before becoming a missionary to various foreign countries. While one source indicates that Matthew preached in Ethiopia and Persia, another source indicates that he traveled to Parthia. Nothing definitive is known of Matthew’s death although one source indicates that he died in Ethiopia of natural causes.

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE

Eusebius quoted Papias as indicating that Matthew originally recorded the “oracles” or logia in Hebrew. Therefore, many believe that Matthew wrote his
Gospel in Aramaic and that this original copy was later translated into Greek. However, several reasons make it unlikely that Matthew is a Greek translation from the Aramaic. *First*, Matthew’s Gospel contains no Aramaisms. *Second*, Matthew’s clarification of Jewish customs (Matt 27:7-8, 15) would be an exercise in redundancy if Matthew’s original readers were Palestinian, Aramaic. *Third*, if the book was translated from Aramaic to Greek, then one would not expect Aramaic words to be retained and given a translation as one often finds in Matthew’s text (1:23; 27:33, 46).

*Fourth*, many scholars believe that Matthew’s book does not read like a translation but rather an original. *Fifth*, early works quoting Matthew, such as those of Ignatius and the Shepherd of Hermas in addition to the Didache, do so in Greek rather than Aramaic. *Sixth*, although Semitic traces are detectable in Matthew, this is not surprising given Matthew’s Semitic background. *Seventh*, although there are thousands of Greek manuscripts of Matthew’s Gospel dating back to the fourth and fifth century, there is not a single Aramaic copy of Matthew’s Gospel. Furthermore, no church father ever refers to an Aramaic translation. Therefore, Matthew probably wrote his entire book in Greek rather than Aramaic.

If this is true, then how is Papias’ statement to be understood? Several options are possible. Perhaps Matthew wrote some of the sayings of Christ in Aramaic, which another used along with other documents to create Matthew’s Gospel. However, this option should be dismissed since it also involves attributing Matthew’s Gospel to someone other than Matthew. Perhaps Matthew wrote everything except Christ’s discourses in Greek. Perhaps Papias just meant that although Matthew was written in Greek, it was composed according to a Hebrew literary style. Perhaps Matthew wrote two Gospels, one in Aramaic and the other in Greek. While the former was not inspired and preserved, the later was inspired and preserved. However, because there is no manuscript evidence of a former Aramaic Gospel, this theory rests upon speculation.

Perhaps Papias was in error regarding the language used or even confused Matthew’s Gospel with the Book of Hebrews. Perhaps Eusebius misconstrued what Papias said. One truly has no possibility of verifying Papias’ words since one is only aware of them through the pen of Eusebius. Indeed, nearly all of the knowledge of early fathers supposedly contending for Matthew’s Hebrew origin is cited by Eusebius. Therefore, there is no possibility to validate if Eusebius accurately recorded what they said. The credibility of Eusebius’ writings has been attacked in other areas since he sometimes incorporated the apocryphal stories. In sum, it seems best to

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conclude that Matthew wrote his Gospel in Greek and to hold to Papias’ statement loosely until more information is forthcoming.

SOURCES AND SYNOPTIC PROBLEM

The issue of whether Matthew used sources in compiling his material leads into the whole controversy regarding the “synoptic problem.” This problem involves creating a suitable explanation in order to explain the similarities and differences between the three synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke).¹ The first explanation is the *interdependence theory*. Adherents of this view maintain that the first Gospel writer relied upon oral tradition in composing his work. The second writer then depended upon the work of the first writer. The third writer then consulted the work of the first and second writers. However, there is no blatant evidence that one Gospel writer depended upon the work of another Gospel writer. Furthermore, the theory fails to explain the omissions and differences between the Gospels.

The second explanation is the *fragment theory*. According to this view, each Gospel writer drew from various short written narratives. Some narratives contained Christ’s parables. Others contained Christ’s miracles. Still others contained information about Christ’s passion. This view has in its favor the fact that Luke indicated that narratives were in existence for the Gospel writers to draw (Luke 1:1-4). This view also explains the differences among the Gospels. However, the theory suffers because there is no evidence of the degree to which Luke and the other writers depended upon these outside sources. Indeed, it is not known if Matthew or Mark consulted such sources. Also, it fails to explain the agreement among the Gospels. Additionally, there is no external proof that these written narratives ever existed.

The third explanation is the *oral transmission theory*. According to this view, oral tradition was transmitted from the apostles and became fixed through constant repetition. The Gospel writers then drew from this tradition when composing their books. This theory takes advantage of the importance of oral tradition to the early church. It is because the Jews committed volumes of material to memory that it is likely that the early church followed this practice as well. Oral tradition was also significant in the early church since its immediate focus was evangelism rather than literary output. However, the theory suffers because it fails to explain why eyewitnesses would have depended upon tradition in composing their works. It also fails to explain why

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¹ Similarities can be seen among the three Gospels in terms of arrangement, content, sentence and word order, and word usage. Differences can also be seen among the three Gospels in terms of arrangement of materials, content of individual passages, and material unique to each Gospel.
so many divergences exist among the Synoptic Gospels if tradition was as fixed as the theory’s proponents argue.

The fourth explanation is the urevangelium theory. This theory states that oral tradition was encapsulated in an original Gospel. All three Gospel writers then drew from this first Gospel in composing their material. However, the theory suffers by failing to explain the differences and omissions among the synoptic writers. Also, there is no manuscript evidence of an original gospel. Indeed, no biblical or patristic writer ever makes reference to such a gospel. Furthermore, why would eyewitnesses depend upon an outside source?

The fifth explanation is the two-document theory.

**THE TWO-DOCUMENT THEORY**

This theory assumes that Matthew and Luke borrowed from Mark. This assumption is based on the fact that 606 of Mark’s 661 verses are found in Matthew and 320 of Mark’s 661 verses are found in Luke. On the one hand, 7% of Mark is unique. On the other hand, 93% of Mark’s Gospel can be found in Matthew and Luke. Also, both Luke and Matthew seem to follow Mark’s order. Whenever one of the writers departs from these orders, the other follows it. The presupposition of Marcan priority is also made on the basis of the fact that Matthew and Luke seem to stabilize of Mark’s primitive and harsh language (Mark 4:35-41; Matt 8:32-37) and Mark is a smaller Gospel that was later expanded by Matthew and Luke. “Q” is a document supposedly created in Antioch in AD 50–70. It is said to have consisted of 200-50 verses and accounts for the common material found in Matthew and Luke that is absent from Mark (Matt 7:3-5; Luke 6:41-42; Matt 23:37-39; Luke 13:34-35). The major weakness of the two-document theory is that it does not account for the

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4 Examples include the roughness of Mark’s style and grammar in addition to his preservation of some Aramaic words.
material unique to Matthew or Luke. For example, the Good Samaritan material is found in Luke (10:25-37) and yet omitted from Mark and Matthew.5

This weakness has given rise to the sixth explanation, which is the four-document theory.

THE FOUR-DOCUMENT THEORY

![Diagram of the four-document theory]

This theory builds upon the two-document theory but also includes “M” and “L.” “M” was allegedly written in AD 60 from Jerusalem. Its 300 verses contain material found in Matthew that is not found in Mark or Luke. Such material includes various parables, material followed by an introductory formula, and anti-pharisaical yet pro-Jewish mission material. “L” was allegedly written from Caesarea in AD 60. Its 580 verses contain material found in Luke that is not found in Matthew or Mark. Such material includes Christ’s detailed sayings, fourteen parables, thirty narratives, and those aspects of Christ’s ministry emphasizing the need for humility, attacking self-righteousness, and comforting the common man. The main strengths of both the two document and four document theories is that they incorporate the understanding that the Gospel writers consulted sources (Luke 1:1-4) and they attempt to explain the source of all the material found in the Synoptics.

However, despite the strengths of these theories, they are fraught with problems. First, they assume Marcan priority. Marcan priority is problematic since it may wreak havoc on the dating of other New Testament books. It is because Mark received his material from Peter in Rome that Mark’s Gospel was probably written near Peter’s death in AD 68. Consequently, if Mark was written in AD 67, Matthew and Luke may have been written after AD 70.6 This

5 Other weaknesses associated with Marcan priority and the existence of “Q” are explored subsequently in the weaknesses involving the four-document theory.

6 Some tradition indicates that Mark wrote during Peter’s life (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 2.15.2, 6.14.6, 6.25.5). Due to the widespread presupposition that this literary production transpired late in Peter’s life, an AD 67 date for Mark
late date for these books seems strange since both of them predict the coming AD 70 judgment without commenting upon its fulfillment in history (Matt 21:41; 22:7; 23:36; 24:2; Luke 21:20-24). Such an absence is particularly problematic for Matthew because of his interest in using fulfilled prophecy to validate Christ’s messianic credentials. Also, if Luke was written after AD 70, Acts was written even later since it was the sequel to Luke. However, Acts was probably not written after AD 70 since it makes no mention of this event. It is more likely that Acts was written in AD 62–64 since the book cuts off abruptly with no mention of the outcome of Paul’s impending trial before Caesar.

Marcan priority is also problematic since tradition favors Matthean priority. Tradition unanimously states that Matthew wrote first. Tradition should be accepted unless it is first proven to be unreliable. Another problem with Marcan priority is that it fails to explain why Matthew, who was an eyewitness to the events, would need to borrow from Mark who was not an eyewitness. For example, when describing a banquet in his own home (Matt 9:9-13), why would Matthew use Mark as a source (Mark 2:13-17) instead of recounting this event from his own perspective as an eyewitness? Furthermore, Marcan priority makes Mark the most authoritative Gospel. However, Mark should not be considered the most authoritative Gospel since he was not an apostle and Matthew was an apostle. This hierarchy should be reversed. Finally, the Jewish content of Matthew argues for its priority since the early church at its inception was primarily Jewish. It stands to reason that the most Jewish Gospel would be the first to be written in the church age since the church was primarily Jewish at its earliest stages.

Second, there is no manuscript evidence confirming the existence of “Q,” “M,” or “L.” Patristic and biblical writers fail to mention any of these documents. If these documents were so instrumental in producing the Gospels, it seems strange that the early church would not have preserved them; rather than being the product of early Christianity, they instead seem to be the product of nineteenth century scholarship.

Third, it is unlikely that Matthew and Luke used Mark. For example, the two and four document theories fail to explain the agreements of Matthew and Luke contrary to Mark. This phenomenon occurs over 200 times.

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seems appropriate. However, it should be noted that other tradition (Irenaeus, Against Heresies, 3.1.1-2) indicates that Mark wrote after Peter’s death (AD 68). If this latter tradition is true, then the case becomes overwhelming for assigning a post AD 70 date for Matthew, Luke, and Acts.

7 Second century figures Irenaeus and Clement held to Matthean priority. See also Eusebius’ citation from Origen conveying adherence to Matthean priority. Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, 6.25.4.

8 This cannot be material from Q; it can only be said to come from Q when the material appears in Matthew and Luke but not Mark.
Interestingly, Mark sometimes includes material (Mark 14:72) that is not incorporated by either Matthew or Luke. Also, Luke failed to incorporate material from the middle section of Mark (6:45-8:26). Additionally, “Luke followed Mark’s order when Matthew did not and Matthew follows Mark’s order when Luke did not.”

The seventh explanation for resolving the synoptic problem is the **composite or eclectic theory**. This view is the most attractive one and is built upon several factors. *First*, this view not only takes into consideration the fact that Matthew was an eyewitness but also acknowledges that Mark and Luke were one person removed from the eyewitnesses. By way of analogy, although only Peter, James and John were eyewitnesses to Christ’s transfiguration (Matt 17:1-2), they communicated this event to others subsequent to Christ’s resurrection (Matt 17:9). Similarly, Mark as a Jerusalem resident not only had access to the eyewitness testimony of the Jerusalem apostles, but he also had access to the testimony of Peter (1 Pet 5:13). Mark also could have heard Christ’s direct teaching, heard the various sermons of the apostles, and received information from Luke (Phlm 24). In the same way, Luke had access to eyewitnesses (Luke 1:2) such as Mary. Luke also had ample opportunity to interact with other apostles since he journeyed to Jerusalem with Paul (Acts 21:17). Luke also had access to the Apostle Paul. Since he had contact with the other apostles and received direct revelation from God, Paul’s testimony would have proven to be valuable.

*Second*, this view also takes into consideration the prevalence of oral tradition (John 21:25). Since Acts 20:35 contains a statement by Christ not found in the Gospels and because the book of 1 Corinthians (7:10; 11:25) records statements by Christ before most of the Gospels had been written, oral tradition was obviously prevalent and exerted influence over the Gospel writers. *Third*, this view acknowledges that the Gospel writers could have consulted written sources (Luke 1:1-4). *Fourth*, this view acknowledges that the Gospel writers could have consulted one another’s work. *Fifth*, this view explains the differences among the synoptics in terms of each writer selectively including and excluding material that fit with his purpose in writing. *Sixth*, this view acknowledges the miraculous intervention of the Holy Spirit who could have revealed new truth to the writers just as He revealed new truth to Paul (John 14:26; 16:12-13; 2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:20-21).

**DATE**

Matthew obviously had to have been written prior to AD 110 since Ignatius mad reference to the book. Liberals typically date the book after AD 70 since

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they believe it is impossible that Matthew could have known of the events of AD 70 ahead of time (Matt 21:41; 22:7; 24:2). However, this position emanates from an anti-supernatural bias rather than sound scholarship. Others date the book late on the basis that the book incorporates a baptismal formula that began later in church history (28:19). However, this statement could have just as easily proceeded from the lips of Christ.

Still others suggest a late date on the basis of the continuation of the name of the potter’s field (27:7-8) and the continuation of the story that the disciples stole the body (28:13, 15) even “to this day.” Late date proponents argue that this phrase suggests a lengthy period in between the transpiring of the recorded events and the writing of the book. However, not too long of an intervening time period is needed in order to accomplish these events. Interestingly, these events actually result in an argument for a pre-AD 70 date since they presuppose no major upheaval for national Israel. Other factors arguing for a pre-AD 70 date include references to the city of Jerusalem as if it were still standing (4:5; 27:53) in addition to a lack of mention of the fulfillment of Christ’s prophecies of Jerusalem’s destruction. Matthew certainly would have mentioned this event if his book were written after the fact because of his interest in using fulfilled prophecy in order to establish Christ’s messianic credentials. If the book was written to Jewish believers living inside the land of Israel, it obviously must have been written prior to AD 70.

Irenaeus moved the date even earlier when he says that the book was written during Nero’s reign while Peter and Paul were in Rome.¹⁰ Since these apostles were martyred in AD 67–68, the book obviously had to have been written prior to this time. Whether one dates the book closer to AD 70 or earlier depends upon whether he adheres to Marcan or Matthean priority. Since Mark was probably written around AD 65, adherence to Marcan priority causes Matthew’s Gospel to be dated even later. However, as previously explained, Marcan priority is problematic. It counters tradition, forces an eyewitness to depend upon a secondary source when recounting events, places Mark’s non-apostolic Gospel into the most authoritative position, ignores the logical reality of the most Jewish gospel being written at a time when the church was heavily Jewish, and forces Matthew, Luke and Acts to be given a post-AD 70 date. Due to the preference for Matthean priority, a date of AD 45–50 for the composition of Matthew’s Gospel seems appropriate.

PLACE OF WRITING

Numerous suggestions have been made for the place of writing of Matthew’s Gospel. Among them are Alexandria, Edessa, Syria, and Caesarea. However,

¹⁰ Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, 5.7.2.
Judea and Syrian Antioch are the primary places where it is believed that Matthew’s Gospel originated. The Judean place of writing is affirmed because that is the general place where Matthew lived and worked in the years following the birth of the church. However, it seems preferable to argue that Matthew wrote his Gospel from Syrian Antioch. Interestingly, Ignatius was the first known church father to quote from Matthew’s Gospel. Ignatius was the Bishop of Antioch. Also, if Matthew’s stylistically Hebraic Gospel was originally composed in Greek, then Antioch would serve as a logical place of origin for the book since the city was primarily comprised of Greek speaking Jews. Antioch would also be an appropriate place to write the book from since the city served as the base of operations for the church’s early Gentile missionary outreach (Acts 11:19-30). Matthew’s emphasis upon Gentile inclusion and Israel being presently set aside would serve as a helpful explanation for the church during this critical transitionary time period.

RECIPIENTS

Although no specific target audience is mentioned, various clues make it apparent that Matthew had a believing Jewish audience in mind. The Jewish nature of the letter is apparent by noting several factors. First, the book contains a disproportionate number of Old Testament citations and allusions. Of the books 129 Old Testament references, 53 are direct citations and 76 are allusions. On thirteen occasions, Christ’s actions are said to be a fulfillment of the Old Testament. Second, the book follows a five-fold division. The five major sermons of the book are delineated through the repetition of the concluding formula “when He had finished saying these things” (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). This fivefold structure would have immediately been recognizable to the Jewish mind since Jews had a tendency to categorize items, such as the Books of Psalms and the Pentateuch, according to a fivefold division. Third, although originally written in Greek, the book evidences a Hebraistic style, parallelism, and elaboration.

Fourth, τότε (“then” or “at that time”) reflects a Jewish style. While this term is employed ninety times in Matthew, it is only used six times in Mark, fourteen times in Luke, and ten times in John. Fifth, the vocabulary of the book is distinctly Jewish. The following Jewish terms are found in the book: David, Jerusalem as the Holy City (4:5; 27:53), city of the great king (5:35), lost sheep of the house of Israel (10:6; 15:24), kingdom of God, and kingdom

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11 While the word David appears nine times in Matthew, the word only appears three times in Mark, three times in Luke, and not once in John.
of heaven. \textsuperscript{12} Sixth, the subject matter of the topics covered is distinctly Jewish. Among the topics covered are the Law, ceremonial defilements, Sabbath, kingdom, Jerusalem, Temple, Messiah, prophecy, prophets, David, Abram, Moses, scribes, Sadducees, and Pharisees.

Seventh, Matthew’s genealogy reveals a Jewish audience since Matthew traced Christ back to David and Abraham rather than back to Adam (Luke 3). Eighth, Matthew placed a special focus upon the Apostle Peter. Since Peter was the apostle to the circumcised (Gal 2:7-8), Matthew’s focus on Peter harmonizes with the Jewish emphasis of his book. Ninth, unlike the other Gospels that explain Jewish customs to Gentile audiences, Matthew left these same Jewish customs unexplained. This is true not only with regard to Jewish rulers (Matt 2:1, 22; 14:1; Luke 2:1-2; 3:1-2) but it is also true with regard to ceremonial cleansing (Matt 15:2; Mark 7:3-4). The customs that Matthew does explain are of Roman rather than Jewish origin (Matt 27:15). Although some of Matthew’s writings seem to anticipate at least some kind of Gentile audience by giving the interpretation of some Jewish words (1:23; 27:33, 46), it does seem to be a general rule that Matthew provides fewer interpretations of Jewish customs than any other Gospel writer.

Tenth, various church fathers, such as Irenaeus, Origen, and Eusebius believed that Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience. Not only was Matthew written to a Jewish audience but also to a believing audience. In other words, Matthew’s audience primarily consisted of Jewish Christians. Both Eusebius\textsuperscript{13} and Origen\textsuperscript{14} indicated that Matthew was written to those within Judaism who came to believe.

PURPOSES AND MESSAGE

Matthew wrote in order to accomplish three purposes. First, he wrote to convince his Jewish audience that the Christ in whom they had believed was indeed the long awaited Jewish messiah. Therefore, Matthew demonstrated that Christ was the rightful heir to the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants. Matthew appeals to a variety of devices to accomplish this purpose such as genealogies, fulfilled prophecy, messianic titles, kingdom teachings, and miracles. Since the Jewish understanding was that the kingdom would be immediately established

\textsuperscript{12} Interestingly, “kingdom of heaven” appears thirty two times (3:2; 4:17; 5:3, 10, 19-20; 7:21; 8:11; 10:7; 11:11-12; 13:11, 24, 31, 33, 44-45, 47, 52; 16:19; 18:1, 3-4, 23; 19:14, 23; 20:1; 22:2; 23:13; 25:1, 14) and “kingdom of God” (6:33; 12:28; 19:24; 21:31; 21:43) appears only five times. These terms are synonymous. However, the multiple references to the former and the scant references to the latter also reflect a common Jewish reluctance of mentioning God’s name directly.

\textsuperscript{13} Eusebius, \textit{Ecclesiastical History}, 3.24.6.

\textsuperscript{14} Eusebius, \textit{Ecclesiastical History}, 6.25.5.
upon the arrival of the king (Isa 9:6-7; Matt 20:20-21), the next logical question that a Jew would ask is, “if Christ is indeed the Jewish king then where is His kingdom?”

Therefore, Matthew wrote for the second purpose of explaining why the kingdom had been postponed despite the fact that the king had already arrived. In order to accomplish this purpose, Matthew carefully traced the kingdom program. Here Matthew explained the kingdom’s offer to the nation (3:2; 4:17; 10:5-7; 15:24), its rejection by the nation (11—12; 21—23; 26—27), the present interim program for those who will inherit the kingdom (sons of the kingdom) due to Israel’s rejection of the kingdom (13; 16:18), and the nation’s eventual acceptance of the kingdom (23:38-39; 24:14, 31; 25:31). The notion of a past rejection and future acceptance of the kingdom by national Israel would lead to the question, “what is God doing in the present?”

Therefore, Matthew wrote for the third purpose of explaining God’s interim program. Here, Matthew introduced the interim program that the sons of the kingdom will experience (Matt 13) in addition to the advent of the church (Matt 16:18; 18:17; 28:18-20). The church age represents God’s present earthly program in between Israel’s past rejection and future acceptance of the king and His kingdom. Since Christ’s disciples would play foundational roles in the church (Eph 2:20), Matthew explained how Christ prepared them not only for His death but also for their new role in the church age.

At the time of writing, the Gentiles were beginning to become more prominent in the church; consequently, the Jewish believers needed an explanation for this Gentile inclusion. Therefore, Matthew explained how God’s interim program would thrust the Gentiles into prominence (2:1-12; 8:11-12; 13:38; 15:22-28). In sum, Matthew selectively (John 20:30-31; 21:25) included material from Christ’s life in order to accomplish these purposes. Therefore, the message of Matthew is the confirmation to Jewish Christians that Jesus is their predicted king who ushered in an interim program by building the sons of the kingdom into the church in between Israel’s past rejection and future acceptance of her king.

SUB-PURPOSES

In addition to this overarching purpose, Matthew wrote to accomplish three sub-purposes. First, Matthew wanted to confirm the Jewish Christians in their faith. He wanted them to understand that the Jesus in whom they had believed was indeed the Jewish king. This was true in spite of the fact that the kingdom had not immediately materialized according to their expectations and instead God’s program had taken a new direction. Second, Matthew wrote to offer the believing Jews an explanation regarding Gentile inclusion in God’s present program. This was an explanation that the believing Jews desperately needed
since the church was on the verge of becoming predominately Gentile through the coming three missionary journeys launched from Syrian Antioch. Therefore, Matthew wrote his Gospel from this very locale for the purpose of assisting the church through this delicate transition. Third, Matthew wanted to encourage the Jewish Christians. Therefore, he explained that although Israel had rejected her king, God was going to use this negative act for the positive purpose of including the Gentiles. He was also going to restore the kingdom to Israel in the future.

STRUCTURE

Matthew’s Gospel contains several structural markers. One way of structuring the book is by tracing the previously described kingdom program from its offering to the nation, its rejection by the nation, the interim program for the sons of the kingdom due to the kingdom’s absence, the re-offer of the kingdom to the nation, and the nation’s eventual acceptance of this offer. A related pattern is the transition from Christ’s public teaching and miracles to the nation (1—12) to His private teaching and miracles for the benefit of the disciples (13—28). His public miracles and teachings displayed in the first half of the book are related to the offer of the kingdom to Israel. However, after it becomes apparent that Israel’s religious leaders will reject Christ (12:24), He then transitioned into a private ministry directed toward the disciples. In this phase, His miracles were used primarily as teaching devices for the benefit of His disciples. Furthermore, no longer was Christ teaching for the benefit of the nation but now He taught in parabolic form in order to conceal truth from the nation and instead to reveal truth to His disciples who will become the leaders in the soon to be birthed church. The offer of the kingdom that was so prevalent in the first part of the book (3:2; 4:17; 10:7) is omitted from this second section of the book.

However, another clue involves the twofold repetition of the phrase “from that time on” (4:17; 16:21). These two phrases reveal the two great purposes for Christ coming to earth. The first great purpose involved His offering the kingdom to Israel (4:17). The second great purpose involved dying on the cross (16:21). These two purposes are related to each other in the sense that Israel’s rejection of the kingdom offer was made official with the nation’s decision to hand Christ over to the Romans for execution.

Another structural clue is the repetition of the concluding phrase “when He had finished saying these things” (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). This formula alerts the reader to the book’s five major discourses. Each discourse concludes with this phrase. Therefore, the five major discourses include the Sermon on the Mount (5—7), the missionary discourse (10), the kingdom
parables (13), the discourse on humility (18), and the Olivet Discourse (24—25).

A final structural clue involves geography. Christ’s life and ministry seems to transition through three geographic movements. The first section of His life ministry occurs in Bethlehem and Nazareth (1:1—4:11). The second major section of His life and ministry is in Galilee (4:12—16:12). The third major section of His ministry is in Judea (16:13—28:28).

CONCLUSION

This article has sought to discuss several key background issues that will help the reader better comprehend Matthew’s argument. Among the items discussed were authorship, original language, sources and synoptic problem, date, place of writing, recipients, purposes and message, sub-purposes, and structure. The actual tracing of Matthew’s argument throughout his Gospel will be the subject of the subsequent article.
PRETERISM AND MATTHEAN TIMING OF PROPHETICFULFILLMENT

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The thesis of this article is that preterism, as it relates to the second coming, fails to interpret exegetically and/or historically various time-indicators within the Gospel of Matthew. To support this claim, it is necessary to discuss introductory matters in relation to preterist interpretation, and then finally examine the time-indicators to determine the timing of prophetic fulfillment.

PRETERIST INTERPRETATION

Preterism (Latin for “past,” in regard to time) is the view that the majority (sometimes all) of Bible prophecy has already been fulfilled. The preterist viewpoint affirms that Titus and the Roman armies already fulfilled major prophetic events, such as the Olivet Discourse and Book of Revelation, when they destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70. For instance, Kenneth L. Gentry Jr. wrote:

Revelation has two fundamental purposes relative to its original hearers. In the first place it was designed to steel the first century Church against the gathering storm of persecution, which was reaching an unnerving crescendo of theretofore unknown proportions and intensity. A new and major feature of that persecution was the entrance of imperial Rome onto the scene. The first historical persecution of the Church by imperial Rome was by Nero Caesar\(^1\) from A.D. 64 to A.D. 68. In the second place, it was to brace the Church from a major and fundamental re-orientation in the course of redemptive history, a re-orientation necessitating the destruction of Jerusalem (the center not only of Old Covenant Israel, but of Apostolic Christianity [cp. Acts 1:8; 2:1ff; 15:2] and the Temple [cp. Matt. 24:1-34 with Rev. 11]).\(^2\)

Preterists believe they have adequately interpreted the historical background by relating the fulfillment of major prophetic events to the time of the original audience. For instance, the preterist viewpoint is thought to best interpret Christ’s words in Matthew 24:34 (“Verily I say unto you, This

\(^1\) In order to make Nero’s name the numerical equivalent of 666, preterists use the Greek form, “Neron Caesar” written in Hebrew characters as follows: N=50, R=200, W=6, N=50, Q=100, S=60, and R=200.

generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled”), and other references to the coming of Christ as “quickly” or “at hand” (Matt 4:17; 10:7; Mark 10:15; Luke 21:30-31; Rev 2:5, 16; 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20). Since the events of the Olivet Discourse and the Book of Revelation parallel each other, then these passages are understood to refer only to events that occurred in the first century. The following chart indicates the different types of preterism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prophetic Timing</th>
<th>Mild Preterism</th>
<th>Partial Preterism</th>
<th>Full Preterism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coming of Christ</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resurrection</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last Days</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mild preterism interprets the Book of Revelation as fulfilled in both the first century with the fall of Jerusalem and the fifth century with the fall of Rome. The first half of Revelation refers to AD 70 when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the second half refers to the judgment upon Rome. Therefore, the majority of Bible prophecy has already been fulfilled when God brought His wrath upon Israel and Rome. Partial preterists understand the majority of Bible prophecy as fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem, but they still anticipate a future second coming and resurrection/judgment. Full preterism believes that all eschatological prophecies were fulfilled in AD 70 and that there will only be a spiritual resurrection rather than a bodily resurrection. Consequently, full preterism is heretical. The preterist view teaches the destruction of God’s enemy, Israel, is indisputable proof for the divine establishment of Christianity.
In a manner similar to dispensationalists, preterism places profound emphasis on the context of the Olivet Discourse. Jesus’ words in Matthew 23:38 (“Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!”) are said to be fulfilled in the destruction of the Temple as prophesied in Matthew 24:1-3. Matthew 24:34 prophesies that this generation will not pass away until all these things [false christs, wars, famines, earthquakes in 24:4-14] occur; however, the preterist believes this has to be fulfilled in the days preceding AD 70 for the prophecy to be true. The abomination of desolation is fulfilled in the siege of Jerusalem and the coming of the Son of Man is in the judgment upon Jerusalem.

Citing Matthew 23:36 (“Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation”), Kenneth Gentry commented,

It seems totally clear that He is speaking to the religious rule of that day, to the religious center of Israel, to the culture of His time, and He is pointing out sin in them. And He says, ‘Woe unto you.” Why? Because these great tributorial things will be coming upon them: those who betrayed Him, those who had Him crucified, and those who persecute Jesus’ followers from city to city—the first century Jews here being confronted in their leadership. It is important to recognize that ‘that generation’ was objectively the most wicked generation of history for ‘that generation’ committed the worst crime and the worst sin of universal history. It crucified the Son of the living God by rejecting Him though He did many wonderful deeds in their presence.

Matthew 23:36 does indicate the imminence of judgment upon the nations, in addition to the religious leaders, for all their violence against the prophets. As a result, the generation will be rejected in regards to the King establishing His kingdom among them (23:37-39). However, this rejection is not permanent as the “until” in Matthew 23:39 indicates. Christ will establish the prophesied kingdom when the nation repents in faith. Indeed, one of the purposes of the tribulation is to bring Israel into a state of repentance whereby they confess in teaches a restoration of a future national Israel (Joel 3:1; Amos 9:11-15; Zeph 3:20; Zech 12:10). It is biblical to affirm that great blessings are yet to come for the nation of Israel in the future. Although she has been temporarily set aside as a nation in the fulfilling of the covenants, God will ultimately bring the nation to a place of prominence where she will be a blessing to all the nations of the world. God’s covenant people, Israel, were not cast away; rather, “judicial blindness” (to use Darby’s term) was brought on the people. The stumbling block to the Gentiles (and preterist amillennialists and preterist postmillennialists) was not that Israel should fall and be rejected permanently; rather, the temporary “casting away” was to allow salvation to come to the Gentiles in order that Israel would be provoked to jealousy (Rom 11:7-11).

belief that Jesus is Messiah. It is at the end of the tribulation period, that all living Jews will acknowledge Jesus as Messiah, and Romans 11:25-27 will be fulfilled when “all Israel shall be saved.”

Gentry then attempted to connect the indictment upon the nation in Matthew 23 with the phrase “this generation” in Matthew 24:34. This is taken to mean that the prophesied events in the Olivet Discourse have already been fulfilled. J. Marcellus Kik indicated the same reasoning.

Since, then, the obvious sense of the word generation must be taken, then the obvious sense of the sentence in which it appears must also be taken, which is, that all the things which Christ mentioned previously occurred before the passing away of the generation living at the time when Jesus spoke. And this would mean that it has found fulfillment in the destruction of Jerusalem in the year A.D. 70.\(^7\)

The generation of Jesus’ day was being left with her house desolate as the Messiah indicated His judgment upon the Temple (Matt 23:38; 24:2 cf. 5:35; 17:25-26; 21:12-16). The questioning of the disciples in Matthew 24:3 was in response to this judgment. Jesus answered by warning the disciples against “false Christs” who would be saying that the end has come. In contrast, Jesus stated that when they hear of many claiming to be the Messiah and see “wars and rumours of wars” that “the end is not yet” (24:4-6). Matthew 24:7-14 indicates why the false messiahs and wars do not indicate the end time. It is only when the cataclysmic events and preaching of the gospel of the kingdom occur together that the end shall come (24:14).

Partial preterists will interpret Matthew 24:36 variously. For instance, Gentry interpreted the pronoun this in 24:34 as a different period than indicated by the pronoun that in 24:36. In other words, 24:36 refers to a time when the second coming occurs.

“this’/’that” do not have to point to wholly different things. But in this context their juxtaposition strongly suggests such. . . .

On the other hand, DeMar interpreted that in 24:36 to refer also to the destruction of Jerusalem. He interpreted 24:36—25:30 to refer “to events leading up to and including the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.” Therefore, in this view, the parable of the householder was fulfilled within the time of the faithful and unfaithful servants, which would be no longer than forty years after the ascension of Christ. 9 For example, DeMar wrote:

There is no indication that Matthew 25:31-46 describes a single event. Rather, the passage describes a judgment over time, related to Jesus' dominion as an “everlasting dominion” (Daniel 7:14). . . . The King of glory is continually judging and reigning among the nations, and He will not cease from this work until “He has abolished all rule and all authority and power” (1 Corinthians 15:24). 10

In light of the contrasts with other more moderate preterists, it is important to understand why there is such a necessity in the mind of preterists to date the events of the Olivet Discourse in AD 70. R. C. Sproul explained the preterist view on literal interpretation.

The cataclysmic events surrounding the parousia as predicted in the Olivet Discourse obviously did not occur “literally” in A.D. 70. Some elements of the discourse did take place “literally,” but others obviously did not.

This problem of literal fulfillment leaves us with three basic solutions to interpreting the Olivet Discourse:

1. We can interpret the entire discourse literally. In this we must conclude that some elements of Jesus' prophecy failed to come to pass, as advocates of “consistent eschatology” maintain.
2. We can interpret the events surrounding the predicted parousia literally and interpret the time-frame references figuratively. This method is employed chiefly by those who do not restrict the phrase “this generation will not pass away . . . ” to the life span of Jesus' contemporaries.
3. We can interpret the time-frame references literally and the events surrounding the parousia figuratively. In this view, all of Jesus' events

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prophecies in the Olivet Discourse were fulfilled during the period between the discourse itself and the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.\footnote{R. C. Sproul, The Last Days According to Jesus (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 66.}

It should be obvious to dispensationalists that Sproul made false accusations. Dispensationalism (what Sproul calls “consistent eschatology”) does interpret the Olivet Discourse literally, but no dispensationalist would say, “some elements of Jesus’ prophecy failed to come to pass.” Preterists place profound emphasis upon the demonstrative pronouns in verses 34 and 36 of Matthew 24, but only a futurist interpretation seeks to understand those pronouns within the context.

Demonstrative pronouns help locate and identify nouns or other pronouns. Pronouns substitute nouns when the nouns they replace can be understood from the context. They also indicate whether they are replacing a singular or plural tense and identify in what location (near/far) the speaker places himself in relation to the object. The following chart identifies whether the pronoun indicates substitution of a singular or plural word and if the pronoun gives a location as either near the speaker or at a distance from the speaker.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Demonstrative Pronouns</th>
<th>Tense</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>this</td>
<td>singular</td>
<td>near</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that</td>
<td>singular</td>
<td>far</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>these</td>
<td>plural</td>
<td>near</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>those</td>
<td>plural</td>
<td>far</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As an example, if a speaker wished to refer to books that are at a distance from him, he would say, “You take these books and I will take those.” As another example, if a speaker wanted to refer to a singular book that is near him, and was able to be understood readily in the context of his speech, then he would say, “I bought this last year.”

In Greek, there are two demonstrative pronouns. Frequently, these demonstratives will be used independent of a noun and carry the intensity of a substantive. The most common use of the demonstrative pronoun is with a noun and carrying the strength of an adjective. In other words, the noun will contain the article and the demonstrative pronoun can be found in the predicate position but never in the attributive position (e.g., δό οὐς οὗτος or οὗτος δό οὗς).
Greek Demonstrative Pronouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pronoun</th>
<th>Tense</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>οὗτος</td>
<td>singular</td>
<td>near</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>οὗτοι</td>
<td>plural</td>
<td>near</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ἐκείνος</td>
<td>singular</td>
<td>far</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ἐκείνοι</td>
<td>plural</td>
<td>far</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The purpose of demonstrative pronouns in both English and Greek grammar is to help identify where the speaker places himself in relation to the object. Central to preterist eschatology is a first century fulfillment of the Olivet Discourse. The preterist interpretation of the Olivet Discourse requires Jesus to place Himself in a relatively near relation to the events of Matthew 24—25. If this is the scenario, as the preterists contend, then Jesus would have used οὗτος and οὗτοι in order to indicate relatively near events.

In four verses, Jesus used the relatively distant demonstrative pronouns: ἐκείνοις ταῖς ἡμέραις (24:19); αἱ ἡμέραι ἐκείναι (24:22); τῶν ἡμερῶν ἐκείνων (24:29); and, τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης (24:36). When speaking of His coming, Jesus used the relatively distant demonstrative pronouns. When Jesus spoke of the events that will occur prior to His coming, He used the relatively near demonstrative pronouns since this would fit His perspective at the time of His coming: ταῦτα (24:8) and οὕτως (24:33). In other words, Jesus was speaking of His future coming, and then used the near demonstratives to describe the eschatological events that will precede His future coming.

When Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, this [οὗτος] generation will not pass away until all these [ταῦτα] things take place” (24:34), He was referring to the same generation that belongs in the distance (eschatologically). By identifying the demonstrative pronouns, it becomes clear that Jesus was referring to the generation that witnesses the events of the Olivet Discourse with His coming in a future time. If Jesus intended to speak of a first century fulfillment then He would have used the relatively future demonstrative, ἐκείνοι, for the events that would occur among the generation that would witness His coming. In other words, Jesus was not using relatively far demonstratives to describe what He prophesied of Himself in relatively near demonstratives, that is, as He viewed the future from His present earthly location. Only the generation witnessing all the events prophesied in the Olivet Discourse will be the generation to witness His return. Commenting on the

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12 Perhaps a fifth reference could be added in 24:38 (ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείνων) due to the likelihood that the pronoun was omitted accidentally. Both the UBS and Nestle-Aland include ἐκείνων in brackets. Metzger rated its inclusion with a “C” grade. See Bruce M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1994), 52.
parallel passage to Matthew 24 in Luke 21, Lukan scholar Darrell Bock assented:

What Jesus is saying is that the generation that sees the beginning of the end, also sees its end. When the signs come, they will proceed quickly; they will not drag on for many generations.

Nonetheless, in the discourse’s prophetic context, the remark comes after making comments about the nearness of the end to certain signs. As such it is the issue of the signs that controls the passage’s force, making this view likely. If this view is correct, Jesus says that when the signs of the beginning of the end come, then the end will come relatively quickly, within a generation.\(^\text{13}\)

MATTHEAN TIME-INDICATORS

Matthew 10:23. “But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes.

This passage is frequently cited by preterists as demanding fulfillment in the first century. A. T. Robertson cited the various interpretations of 10:23.

Some refer it to the Transfiguration, others to the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, others to the Second Coming. Some hold that Matthew has put the saying in the wrong context. Others bluntly say that Jesus was mistaken, a very serious charge to make in his instructions to these preachers.\(^\text{14}\)

Obviously, Christ was not incorrect in speaking of His coming. There is mention of judgment, but the question is whether this is the judgment of AD 70 or the judgment that will precede Israel’s conversion since the Son of Man comes in response to the faith of believing Israel. Sproul would disagree, as evident in his favorable citation of J. Stuart Russell.

Again, if Russell is correct in concluding that the coming referred to in this text is the parousia of Christ,\(^\text{15}\) then the primary time-frame for the parousia

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\(^\text{15}\) "In this passage we find the earliest distinct mention of that great event which we shall find so frequently alluded to henceforth by our Lord and His apostles, viz., His coming again, or the Parousia. . . . Who can doubt that ‘the coming of the Son of Man’ is here, what it is everywhere else, the formula by which the Parousia, the second coming of Christ, is expressed? This phrase has a definite and constant signification, as much as His crucifixion, or His resurrection, and admits of no other
must be restricted to a forty-year period. It surely did not take the disciples much more than forty years to cover the boundaries of Palestine with the gospel message.\textsuperscript{16}

Referring to 10:16, M’Neile commented, “But there is no evidence that the apostles during their short tour were ever in peril; in Mt. ix. 36, x. 6 their hearers are προβατά; they did not become wolves till the Lord’s death.”\textsuperscript{17} The persecution that is spoken of in 10:23 is a reference to the persecution to occur in the tribulation period (Daniel 9:26). Ironside added, “The last part of Matthew 10:23 is . . . difficult to apply unless we see that in the coming hour of tribulation there will be a noble band of witnesses acting upon this same commission.”\textsuperscript{18}

Furthermore, verse 20 is clearly an allusion to Joel 2:28. The context of Joel is the tribulational outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the nation of Israel since there is nothing that occurred on Pentecost (according to Acts 2:16-21) that was prophesied in Joel 2. Not only did M’Neile make a strong case for the fact that a first century fulfillment does not fit the context, but also the allusion to Joel 2:28 leads to the conclusion of fulfillment in the tribulation period. It is because of the persecution in the tribulation that the Jews must flee from city to city. The encouragement to the faithful Jewish remnant in the tribulation is that Messiah will come before they have reached an end of the cities of Israel.

Identifying the time of the fulfillment of 10:23 is determined upon the context of the Lord’s words. The grammar of Matthew 10:16-23 finds numerous parallels with the Olivet Discourse in Matthew in addition to Mark 13 and Luke 21. Particularly verse 23 parallels other occurrences of the phrase in Matthew 16:28; 24:27, 30, 48; 25:13; 26:64; Mark 13:26; Luke 18:8; 21:27.\textsuperscript{19} Russell noted this also.

It seems scarcely appropriate to the particular period, and to belong more properly to a subsequent charge, viz., that recorded in the discourse spoken on the Mount of Olives (Matt. xxiv.; Mark xiii.; Luke xxi). Indeed, a comparison of these passages will go far to satisfy any candid mind that the whole

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Sproul, \textit{Last Days}, 56.}
\footnote{The New Testament of the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, n.d.), 7.}
\end{footnotes}
paragraph (Matt. x. 16-23) is transposed from its original connection, and inserted in our Lord’s first charge to His disciples.”

It is correct, as Russell wrote, “There is therefore as strong evidence as the nature of the case will admit, that ver. 23 and its context belong to the discourse on the Mount of Olives. . . . It is an admitted fact that even the Synoptical Gospels do not relate all events in precisely the same order; there must be greater chronological accuracy in one than in another.” Additionally, he wrote, “There is no evidence that the disciples met with such treatment on their first evangelistic tour.” The context that has been considered thus far, and the parallels with the Olivet Discourse, only sought to demonstrate the importance of clearly identifying the time of fulfillment for Matthew 24–25. The parallels identify the period as the coming of Christ to judge the earth.

The culmination of the events of Matthew 10:16-23 will occur in the tribulation. The height of those events will be the coming of the Son of Man. It is because of the grammar of 10:23 that it is seen to refer to events that will not be completed until the second coming (cf. Matt 16:27-28; 19:28; 24:27, 30, 37, 39, 44; 25:31; 26:64). Although Hendriksen is amillennial, he did interpret correctly on Matthew 10:23.

With respect to the words that follow there is a wide difference of opinion among commentators: for I solemnly declare to you, you will certainly not finish (going through) the cities of Israel before the Son of m an comes. Among the many explanations of this passage there are a few that I would definitely reject:

1. Since we know that the second coming did not occur Jesus must have been mistaken.
   Answer: If Jesus was mistaken about this important point how do we know that he was not also mistaken about others? Both doctrine and ethics are thus undermined and destroyed.

2. Matthew misplaced this passage.
   Answer: Another “easy” way to get rid of a difficulty. There is no evidence to support this theory.

3. The meaning is: “before the Son of man catches up with you.”
4. The reference is to the terrible judgment upon the Jews in the years 66-70.
   Answer: Nos. 3 and 4: There is nothing in the context that in any way calls for or suggests this explanation.

Something else must be borne in mind. These explanations ignore the fact that in the other Matthew passages in which the coming of the Son of man is mentioned and described the reference is linked with the second coming. It is a

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21 Ibid., 27.
22 Ibid.
coming “in the glory of his Father,” “with his angels,” “to render to every man according to his deeds” (16:27, 28); a coming when Christ shall “sit on the throne of his glory” (19:28); a coming that will be “visible” (24:27); “sudden and unexpected” (24:37, 39, 44); a coming “on clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (24:30; cf. 25:31; 26:64). It would be strange therefore if from 10:23 any reference to Christ’s exaltation which attains its climax in the second coming would be wholly excluded. Besides, as to theory No. 4, this is all the more questionable because here in 10:23 the context (see verses 22b, 28-32) is very definitely one of comfort, not one of terror. The destruction of Jerusalem is predicted not here in chapter 10 but in 22:7; 23:38; see also 24:2, 15.

Furthermore, the title, Son of man, is significant in relation to the Person of Christ. Depending on the context, the title may have different meanings. Psalm 8:4 presents the question, What is man, that Thou dost take thought of him? And the son of man, that Thou dost care for him? Ezekiel was called Son of man (2:1) in contrast to the majesty and power of the Lord. In these examples, the expression emphasizes the humanity of a person in relation to God.

In Daniel 7:13, the Aramaic bar’enās, Son of Man, is a Messianic title. When Jesus confessed these words before the high priest, He was giving an unequivocal declaration that He was the divine Messiah, who would one day judge all men. The title portrays Him as the Representative Man. It is used in relation to His first coming (Luke 19:10), His death and resurrection (Matt 12:40; 20:18; 26:2), and His second coming (24:37-44; Luke 12:40).

In addition to Jesus using the term to refer to His future coming on the clouds of heaven, Bruce Metzger supplied two other uses of the term by Jesus: 1) descriptive of His earthly ministry of teaching and healing (Matt 8:20; 11:19; Mark 2:10, 28); and, 2) referring to His sufferings, death, and subsequent resurrection (Matt 20:18, 28; 26:45; Mark 8:31; 10:33). Jesus’ use of the title expresses His humanity as the unique God-man. The title Son of Man indicates a personal and visible coming of the Lord, which did not occur in AD 70. Interestingly, even Calvin noted the lack of contextual basis for the preterist interpretation of 10:23.

Difficulty lies in ascertaining what is meant by the coming of the Son of man. Some explain it as denoting such a progress of the gospel, as may enable all to


\[25\] John Calvin consistently wrote against the preterist interpretation; it appears that he would be historicist in regarding to the timing of prophetic fulfillment.
acknowledge that Christ is truly reigning, and that he may be expected to restore the kingdom of David. Others refer it to the destruction of Jerusalem, in which Christ appeared taking vengeance on the ingratitude of the nation. The former exposition is admissible: the latter is too farfetched.  

At this present time, the kingdom is not here on earth. For instance, it is in the commissioning of the kingdom that Jesus instructed,

These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: “Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ‘And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ ‘Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give [Matt 10:5-8].

According to Matthew 10, the kingdom of heaven on earth was promised and it would be evidenced in the miracles of the twelve disciples. The gospel of the kingdom was only to be preached to Israel; however, the nation rejected the offer of the kingdom. It is due to this rejection that Jesus said, “Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! ‘For I say to you, from now on you shall not see Me until you say, ‘BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!’” (Matt 23:38-39).

The nation of Israel rejected the kingdom violently (11:12); therefore, the earthly kingdom will be removed from that generation (11:20-24). It is important here to note that Israel did not have a wrong view of the earthly kingdom; rather, it is removed because they would not repent in order to receive the kingdom. Desolation would then occur in Israel until the nation repents and confesses belief in Jesus as Messiah.

Matthew 16:27-28. “For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS. “Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.”

These verses relate to the manner in which preterists interpret Matthew 24—25, since they believe it was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem. The parallel passages are Mark 9:1 and Luke 9:27. In these verses, Jesus promised some of His disciples they would not die until they see the Son of Man coming in His

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kingdom. M’Neile commented, “The saying [βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ] in all three forms, is in accord with x. 23, xxiv. 34 (Mk. xiii. 30, Lk. xxi. 32). . . .”

Perhaps, it is best to first delineate what the prophecy is not referring. First, the prophecy of Matthew 16:27-28 is not the fulfillment of the kingdom promised in the Old Testament since none of the disciples witnessed the fulfillment of those specific prophecies before dying. Second, it is not a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem. Matthew 16:27 is referring to the final consummation of the Son of Man in glory to judge the world, which will begin the kingdom on earth (cf. Dan 7:9-14), and the following verse is in prospect of His transfiguration (μεταμορφώθηκε; cf. Matt 17:2; Mark 9:2).

The transfiguration is a preview of the glory and power of the King that will be visible at His second coming (Matt 17:1-13; cf. 2 Pet 1:16-21) prior to the institution of His kingdom (Matt 16:27). Robertson wrote, “The apocalyptic eschatological symbolism employed by Jesus here does not dominate his teaching. He used it at times to picture the triumph of the kingdom, not to set forth the full teaching about it . . . There would be climaxes and consummations.”

Sproul believes the fulfillment of this passage is in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. In other words, the timing of Matthew 16:28 is connected in such a manner with other preterist proof texts so that the majority of the Olivet Discourse has already been fulfilled.

The term coming that appears in the Greek text of Matthew 16:28 is not the word parousia. Nevertheless, Jesus does speak of a “coming” of the Son of Man. The expression “shall not taste death” clearly refers to dying, so we may render the text to mean that some who were hearing Jesus’ words on this occasion would not die before witnessing some kind of coming of Jesus. Matthew speaks of the coming of Christ “in His kingdom.” Mark speaks of their seeing the kingdom of God come “with power” (9:1), and Luke simply says that they will see the kingdom of God (9:27).

Similarly, DeMar wrote:

If we maintain that the future event Jesus is describing is still in our future, then how should we interpret His statement that some of those with whom He was speaking would still be alive when He did in fact “come in the glory of His Father with His angels”? Some claim that the “coming” Jesus had in mind was the transfiguration. But the transfiguration cannot be its fulfillment since

27 M’Neile, Matthew, 248.
28 It should be noted the phrase, ὁμήρως ἔγγο ὦμιν, divides the thought of 16:27 from 16:28.
30 Sproul, Last Days, 53-54.
Jesus indicated that *some* who were standing with Him would still be alive when He came but *most* would be dead. If we adopt the view that the transfiguration is the fulfillment, we must conclude that most of the people with whom Jesus spoke were dead within seven to ten days after Jesus’ prediction (Matthew 17:1)! Hardly possible. 31

Preterists are forcing the passage to state more than intended. In order to understand Matthew 16:27-28, it is necessary to simply consider the background of the transfiguration. Some of the disciples already understood the rejection of the religious leaders (16:1-12). Peter had just given his confession of Christ, the Son of the living God (16:16). From that time Jesus Christ began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day (16:21). Christ then rebuked Peter for his attempts to resist the will of God, saying, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s” (16:23). The not setting of Peter’s mind on God’s interests is the occasion for the instruction that discipleship is costly (16:24-26). Christ’s purpose here was to make it clear that His suffering will precede His glory (cf. 1 Pet 1:11). His disciples must also endure suffering for when the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, then they will be recompensed (cf. Rom 8:18; 2 Cor 1:7; Heb 2:10; 1 Pet 4:13; 5:1).

At this point, the transfiguration would strengthen the disciples’ faith in light of the painful experience of the death of Christ and also prepare them for suffering. Jesus’ words to His disciples that following Him requires one to *take up his cross* in the likelihood that one’s own life would be lost is in harmony with His foretelling of His own death. The transfiguration was only witnessed by Peter and James and John (17:1), which would certainly fulfill the words *there are some* in 16:28. The contrast with the destruction of Jerusalem, if the preterist view is taken, is that the apostle John was the only living disciple of the original twelve at that time. Furthermore, the appearance of Moses and Elijah at the transfiguration would confirm that the death of Christ on the cross was in fulfillment of the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. In his comments on the parallel passage in Mark’s Gospel, Lane elaborated:

Ch. 8:38 served to warn those who choose to stand with the world in its contempt for Jesus that his apparent weakness and openness to humiliation will be reversed in an awesome manifestation of his glory as the eschatological Judge. The function of Ch. 9:1, with its reference to “the Kingdom come with power,” is to provide certainty that the Son of Man will indeed come with glory, and that those who now share his sufferings will also share in his exaltation. Its reference is to an event sufficiently near that certain individuals

31 DeMar, Last Days, 34-35.
present will be privileged to see a manifestation of the sovereignty of God in a triumphal unveiling of Jesus dignity.” Nothing short of this can satisfy the expectation prompted by Jesus’ promise, which is intended to strengthen the people of God for their coming ordeal. The tension of their own “hiddenness” in a world which seeks to lead them to denial and which heaps abuse upon them when they are stedfast is acute, and requires an open manifestation of God’s sovereignty.

The immediate sequel to Jesus’ solemn promise is the account of the transfiguration (Ch. 9:2-8). This indicates that Mark understood Jesus’ statement to refer to this moment of transcendent glory conceived as an enthronement and an anticipation of the glory which is to come. It is instructive to compare II Peter 1:16-18, which speaks of “the power and the parousia of our Lord Jesus Christ. Peter made known to his churches the power that was to be revealed at Jesus’ coming in terms of the glory which had been revealed in the transfiguration. This expresses precisely the relationship between Ch. 8:38 (parousia) and Ch. 9:1 (transfiguration). The transfiguration was a momentary, but real (and witnessed) manifestation of Jesus’ sovereign power which pointed beyond itself to the parousia, when he will come “with power and glory” (Ch. 13:26). The fulfillment of Jesus’ promises a short time later (Ch. 9:2) provided encouragement to the harassed Christians in Rome and elsewhere that their commitment to Jesus and the gospel was valid. The parousia is an absolute certainty. The transfiguration constituted a warning to all others that the ambiguity which permits the humiliation of Jesus and of those faithful to him will be resolved in the decisive intervention of God promised in Ch. 8:38.

On the issue of what the disciples would observe before death, A. L. Moore wrote, “It is not said in Mk. 9, I that death would exclude certain ones from seeing the awaited event. . . .” Following a reference to Moore in a footnote, Lane added, “All that is required by Jesus’ statement is that ‘some’ will see a further irruption of the power and sovereignty of God before they experience the suffering foreseen in Ch. 8:34-35. The basis of selection is left entirely unspecified.”

Not only is “the immediate sequel to Jesus’ solemn promise . . . the account of the transfiguration” in the Markan account (8:38—9:13), but also it is “the immediate sequel” in the Matthean (16:28—17:13) and Lukan account (9:27-36). McClain stated, “The most natural reference is to the Transfiguration.

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33 Sproul, Last Days, 54-55.
35 Lane, Mark, 313.
which occurred a few days later.”

The fact that each of the Synoptic Gospels records the transfiguration, immediately after the same words of Christ, favors the correct interpretation to be that Jesus was speaking of His transfiguration, not the destruction of Jerusalem. McClain continued, “The connection between the prediction and its fulfillment has been obscured in Matthew by an unfortunate chapter division. But the conjunction with which chapter 17 begins clearly establishes the unbroken continuity of thought between 16:28 and 17:1, as also in the accounts of Mark and Luke where no chapter division occurs.”

Similarly, Ironside commentd on the contextual support.

The closing verse should really be the first verse of Matthew 17. Whoever edited the book of Matthew and divided it into chapters and verses made the break in the wrong place. In this verse Jesus was referring to the great event that followed “after six days”—the transfiguration, which presented the kingdom of God in embryo.

In the corresponding accounts in both Mark and Luke this announcement is linked directly with the transfiguration scene. The announcement is, in fact, the key to a right understanding of this glorious vision that was intended to be a representation of “the kingdom of God come with power” (Mark 9:1). This is confirmed for us by the apostle Peter . . . (2 Peter 1:16,18). There the Savior appeared in that glory in which He will be manifested when He returns to take His great power and reign (Revelation 11:17).

Matthew 23:39. “For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, ‘BLESSD IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!'’”

This passage is also cited frequently by preterists. They assert you must refer to the generation present when Christ spoke these words. The obvious question should be when did the Jews cry out, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”, as the Romans lay siege to the city of Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple? In fairness to the preterists, this verse appears (at first glance) to support their contention. The use of generation or this generation in Matthew 11:16; 12:34, 39, 41-42, 45; 17:17; 23:33; Mark 8:12, 38; 9:19; Luke 3:7; 7:31; 9:41; 11:29-32, 50-51; 17:25 appear to be the generation that is contemporary with Jesus’ first coming. However, context alone will solve the issue.

After Jesus’ stinging condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees, He said to them, “Truly I say to you, all these things shall come upon this

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37 Ibid.
38 Ironside, Matthew, 123.
39 Ibid., 124.
generation (Matt 23:36). In keeping with the context, all these things must refer to the AD 70 judgment upon the nation of Israel. Jesus said to them, “Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! (23:38). Again, in fairness, preterists ask a good question when inquiring for reasons why there would be a change to an eschatological generation in Matthew 24:34.

The reason dispensationalists interpret this generation in Matthew 24:34 as eschatological is because the context determines the meaning of the word. Preterists assume generation and this generation are technical terms in Matthew’s Gospel any time the words are used in a prophetic context. Matthew 23:39 introduces a shift between the AD 70 generation and a future generation. The hope of Israel is the Messiah, but not until the nation cries, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,” will she experience the blessings God has purposed for her. There is no repentance or hope for Israel in the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. In the preterist system, there is no logical sense in which one can say hope is Christ coming in judgment upon Israel.

The dispensationalist offers a far better interpretation of the hope Christ offered Israel in Matthew 23:39. In keeping with the context, the Olivet Discourse gives the eschatological events that must occur before God will give her the hope He has promised. Therefore, it is consistent with a literal grammatical-historical interpretation to understand Matthew 24:34 as referring to an eschatological generation who will witness the events leading to the physical return of Jesus Christ to establish His kingdom.

It is the generation which witnesses all the events of the Olivet Discourse that will also be the generation to experience the hope that will come in the deliverance of Israel at the second coming. It should be obvious He is speaking to a future generation, since Jesus already told the AD 70 generation “. . . the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it” (Matt 21:43). Dispensationalists agree the AD 70 generation would experience God’s judgment, but a future generation will experience an unprecedented trial that will result in her repentance and hope of the Messiah’s return.

Matthew 24:15. “Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), . . .

Since Jesus prophesied the Jewish Temple would be destroyed (24:2), preterists want to know how Matthew 24:15 could refer to a rebuilt Temple. Dispensationalists do not deny the Lord’s prophecy in Matthew 24:2 was fulfilled literally in AD 70. Indeed, the fulfillment of the prophecy is a major

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40 DeMar, Last Days, 79-84.
apologetic defense for the trustworthiness of Scripture. Preterists insist that all of the prophecies in the Olivet Discourse have already been fulfilled in AD 70. His **COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory** would certainly fall into the category of fulfillment of **all these things** (Matt 24:30; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27). The preterist interpretation eventually leads to a denial of the second coming of Christ to earth as a literal physical and visible event.

Preterists demonstrate the presence of false messiahs, **wars and rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, martyrdom, false prophets**, increasing lawlessness, and the preaching of the **gospel of the kingdom throughout the whole [Roman] world** as the fulfillment of Matthew 24:4-14 prior to AD 70. Therefore, the prophecy concerning the abomination of desolation in Matthew 24:15 would have been fulfilled either before the destruction of Jerusalem or in the actual destruction of the Temple.

DeMar believes the abomination of desolation occurred in one of four possible events. The **first option** is the Zealots. “At the outbreak of the Jewish War, the Zealots moved in and occupied the temple area. They allowed persons who had committed crimes to roam about freely in the Holy of Holies, and they perpetuated murder within the temple itself.” The Zealots even invested “the clown Phanni as high priest.”

The **second option** is the Idumeans, who “came to Jerusalem at the behest of Zealot leaders to participate in their revolutionary cause against the Romans.” Both Idumeans and Zealots slaughtered close to ten thousand people and murdered the chief priest Ananus. Their actions filled the outer court of the Temple with the blood of the slain before AD 70.

The **third option** is the Romans who captured Jerusalem and burned the Temple. The Romans brought their banners into the Temple opposite the eastern gate and offered sacrifices to them. “This Roman abomination was reminiscent of what Antiochus Epiphanes did to profane the temple and altar more than two centuries before.”

The **fourth option** is the historical event that DeMar favored as the fulfillment of the abomination of desolation. “It is likely, however, that Jesus had more in mind than the abominable acts that took place in the temple by the Romans, Idumeans,” and Zealots. According to DeMar, the apostasy of Israel

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best describes the desolation of the Temple. The abomination is the apostasy of the Jews.

The preterist interpretation of the abomination of desolation in Matthew 24:15 is to relate the event with the Roman “eagle” banners (representing their gods) erected in the Temple and the offering of sacrifice to those gods after the destruction of Jerusalem. The *vultures* in 24:28 are also interpreted as “eagles.” According to preterism, Jesus was prophesying of these eagle banners as symbolic of the Roman soldiers. Therefore, the return of Christ is symbolic of the Roman armies coming in judgment. Prior to His crucifixion, Jesus told the religious leaders that they would see *the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven* (26:64). Preterism interprets this to mean when judgment occurred in Jerusalem, the religious leaders would see Jesus intuitively. In other words, they would understand that the destruction of Jerusalem was Jesus coming in judgment. The *end of the age* then is the Jewish age so that now the kingdom relates to the church age. The last days ended with the destruction of Jerusalem. The return of Jesus was in judgment rather than a physical return.

The dispensationalist has a far better interpretation of the abomination of desolation and does not face the inconsistencies of the preterist position. The abomination of desolation in Matthew 24:15 *which was spoken through Daniel the prophet* is best interpreted when seen in relation to the abomination of desolation committed by Antiochus Epiphanes. When Matthew 24:15 is interpreted in this manner, the desolation of the Temple by apostate hearts also includes the actual worship of a pagan deity through use of the Temple consecrated to God. Although DeMar believes the Jews desolated the Temple with their apostasy and the Roman banners in the Temple were the pagan worship, it does not adequately explain Matthew 24:16-20. For instance, *those who are in Judea, on the housetop, or in the field* would not have time to obey the words of the Lord since the Romans would have already taken over the city and Temple.

The dispensational interpretation is to view Antiochus Epiphanes as prefiguring the person and events in Daniel 9:27 and 12:11.\(^46\) If this view is

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\(^46\) “When one reads the prophecies of Daniel concerning the final world power, he witnesses a systematic narrowing of the prophetic focus devoted to this infamous character. Daniel 2 records the final Gentile power of this age emerging as the revived Roman empire, which includes a western ‘leg’ and an eastern ‘leg.’ This two-fold division of the revived Roman empire implies the a 10-nation confederacy evidenced by the toes of the image. Chapter 7 teaches explicitly that this end-time empire with its 10 kings will eventually sharpen the focus to introduce an 11th king, ‘the Antichrist.’ Chapter 8 continues to sharpen the focus by blending the person, career and realm of Antiochus Epiphanes (ancient Syrian king) in the same manner as that of the Antichrist. The strength of the message of Daniel 8 is recounted in chapter 11 with an even tighter
taken, then the abomination of desolation is fulfilled by a person, as in Daniel 8 by Antiochus during the Maccabean War. Second Thessalonians 2:4 prophecies of the \textit{man of lawlessness . . . who opposed and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God}. The dispensational interpretation correlates best with the parallel pages and 24:16-20 which gives instruction following the abomination of desolation. Furthermore, dispensationalists refer to an intercalation in Daniel 9:24-27. Of course, preterists reject this doctrine which is one reason they argue for a first century fulfillment of the Olivet Discourse. The rejection of an intercalation in Daniel 9:24-27 causes more problems than preterists may wish to admit.

DeMar may wish to reference the doctrine of an intercalation as “this phantom time period,” but the concept is demonstrated clearly. For instance, Isaiah 9:6 prophesies, \textit{For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us [obviously the first coming]; and the government will rest on His shoulders [obviously the second coming]}. In Zechariah 9:9-10, there is an obvious time gap. In verse 9, the Messiah is \textit{just and humble} riding on \textit{the foal of a donkey}. This is a literal prophecy fulfilled in the “triumphal entry” of Christ recorded in Matthew 21. In verse 10, the Messiah is prophesied to bring an end to war and peace to the nations. Both preterists and futurists have to recognize a time gap between the verses. The phenomenon of a time gap in Scripture is not unusual, as preterists would have their readers believe.

The book of Malachi is another good example of a time gap between prophecies. Malachi 3:1 predicts God’s messenger, John the Baptist, who will prepare the way for the Messiah. In the same verse, Malachi prophesies of the Messiah who \textit{will suddenly come to His temple}. \textit{The day of His coming is a time of judgment for He is like a refiner’s fire and like fuller’s soap} (3:2). Obviously, a gap exists between the forerunner and the coming of the Messiah whether one adopts a preterist or futurist interpretation.

A time gap in Daniel 9:24-27 is just as obvious as the other passages. Daniel 9:24 prophesies of many blessings for the Jews and Jerusalem (cf. 9:19) which have never been fulfilled. Daniel 9:25 prophesied accurately of the decree of Artaxerxes that allowed Nehemiah to \textit{rebuild Jerusalem}. Daniel 9:26 also prophesied accurately, \textit{after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing}. Then, 9:26 prophesied, \textit{the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary}. From the decree of Artaxerxes in 9:25, the crucifixion of Messiah and the destruction of Jerusalem in 9:26 the focus offering more details. It is in that chapter that one again witnesses this almost imperceptible merger from the arch-type, Antiochus, to his clone-like anti-type, the Antichrist” [Phillip Goodman, “The Coming Antichrist: Jewish or Gentile,” in \textit{Eternal Ministries’ Newsletter} (November-December 2000), 2].

\textsuperscript{47} DeMar, \textit{Last Days}, 305.
prophecy has been sequential. The wording of 9:25-26 would imply that the seventieth week does not immediately follow the sixty-ninth week. There is an indefinite time gap between the verses. Furthermore, Daniel 9:24 still remains unfulfilled.

The seventieth week is synonymous with the eschatological tribulation. At the beginning, the Antichrist makes a peace covenant with the Jewish people. The abomination of desolation in 9:27, which Christ prophesied as future in Matthew 24:15, will initiate an unprecedented time of great tribulation. It is this period that leads to the second coming. The sequence of events is that the abomination of desolation precedes the great tribulation that results in the return of the Lord. An intercalation between 9:26 and 9:27 is a divine requisite. The preterist interpretation does not keep with the context since they interpret non-literally the events prophesied in Matthew 24:15. It is impossible that Matthew 24:21 could be interpreted to have occurred in AD 70. Furthermore, the events of 24:29-31 are connected to the abomination of desolation in 24:15. Kik recognized this difficulty.

These words, they say, can only find fulfillment at the second coming of the Lord and have nothing whatsoever to do with the destruction of the Jewish dispensation and the city of Jerusalem. . . . The honest conclusion then is: Our Lord was mistaken when He said, “This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.”

Our Lord was not mistaken though. “This generation” is not a reference to the first century, but is referring to that generation living when all the signs of Matthew 24 will occur. The generation that will witness all the signs of the Olivet Discourse occur will also witness the end. It is when Christ returns that faithful Israel will be regathered from their place of hiding during the tribulation in order to enter the millennial kingdom. At this time, the Land Covenant (and all other covenants) will be fulfilled (Matt 24:31; Isa 11:11-16; 27:13; Jer 16:14-15).

Preterism demands that the pronoun you in Matthew 24:15 must refer to the Jewish audience at the time of the discourse. DeMar has written repeatedly: “‘This generation’ always means, without exception, the generation

48 Kik, Eschatology of Victory, 31-32.
of people alive at that time.”  

That statement is not true! Scripture sometimes employs you to address a future generation, as in Deuteronomy 30:1–9. The passage entails a period of both dispersion and captivity that still awaits final fulfillment. Deuteronomy 30:1–3 prophesies the expulsion of national Israel out of the land for disobedience. Following a future repentance of Israel, the Messiah will return (30:3–6). God will restore Israel to the land that He has given her (30:5) and He will bring salvation to Israel as a nation (30:4–8). The enemies of Israel will undergo judgment (30:7). The nation of Israel will then receive her covenantal blessings. Ezekiel reaffirmed the covenant in his prophecy, which was yet future (Ezek 16). Clearly, the pronoun you refers to more than the first generation of readers.

Matthew 24:21. “For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will.”

DeMar responded to this passage by quoting R. H. Charles who wrote that Matthew 24:21 “is a stock eschatologic expression.” In other words, preterists interpret the passage as an Old Testament figure of speech. Three passages are referenced in the attempt to support this spiritualization.

The first passage is 1 Kings 3:12. God said of Solomon, behold I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you. The second passage is 2 Kings 18:5. Speaking of Hezekiah, the writer recorded, He trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel; so that after him there was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor among those who were before him. The third passage is 2 Kings 23:25. Speaking of Josiah, the writer recorded, And before him there was no king like him who turned to the

52 Deuteronomy 30:1–9 uses the generic second person plural, you, twenty-five times (see also 4:30).
53 Scripture and history indicate two dispersions of the nation of Israel. The first occurred in 586 BC when the Babylonians took the Jews into captivity, and the other occurred in AD 70 when Titus and his armies destroyed Jerusalem. Even though Israel became a nation-state in 1948 and controls part of the Promised Land, the dispersion is still in effect since AD 70. However, the fact that there are several million Jews in Israel is significant to the end times.
55 DeMar, Last Days, 109.
LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him.

Certainly, DeMar concluded correctly that Christ surpasses even Solomon (Matt 12:42). He added, “Similar language is used to describe judgments brought on nations by God.”\(^{56}\) Exodus 10:14 and Joel 2:2; Exodus 11:16; Ezekiel 5:9 and Matthew 24:21; Daniel 9:12 and 12:1; and, Joel 2:2 are cited as examples of passages that use similar expressions, such as there was none, or such as shall never be again. Preterists conclude the expression is a Semitic idiom that uses hyperbolic language to communicate something or someone very great. According to such an understanding, in the Olivet Discourse, Christ was merely saying there would be a very great tribulation which was fulfilled in AD 70.

The preterist interpretation may appear to provide a significant response to the dispensationalist but it does not answer adequately the following verse: “And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short.\(^{57}\) Preterists attempt to interpret no life would have been saved as a reference to “life in the land of Israel.” Not only does such a view ignore the context between 24:21 and 24:22, but also it fails to consider πᾶσα σώφρενη as a technical term for all humanity (not just “life in the land of Israel”). The phrase is used eight times in the Greek New Testament (Matt 24:22; Mark 12:20; Luke 3:6; Rom 3:20; 1 Cor 1:29; 15:39; Gal 2:16; 1 Pet 1:24), and with the exception of 1 Corinthians 15:39 it refers to all humanity. In First Corinthians 15:39, πᾶσα σώφρενη not only includes all humanity but also all animal life.

The preterist interpretation limits the meaning of πᾶσα σώφρενη so it can only mean “life in the land of [AD 70] Israel.” However, such an interpretation does not explain adequately the context and the grammatical construction. The dispensational view understands Matthew 24:21 to be of such magnitude that the life of all humanity is threatened unless Christ returns to earth.

Matthew 24:27, 30. “For just as the lightning comes from the east, and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. . . . “And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory.

Preterists interpret Matthew 24:27 to mean the coming of Christ in the AD 70 judgment was as terrifying as lightning. DeMar wrote, “In the Bible, lightning often signifies the presence of the Lord or His coming in judgment (Exodus

\(^{56}\) Ibid., 111.

\(^{57}\) Ibid., 121.
Preterism and Matthean Timing

19:16; 20:18; Job 36:30; Ezekiel 21:15, 28; Zechariah 9:1 4). . . . The lightning and thunder did not terrify the people. They had seen such things before. What frightened them was the reality that the Lord had come. What the people saw was the manifestation of the Lord’s coming even though they did not actually see Him.”

Therefore, it is a spiritual coming as opposed to a bodily coming.

Exodus and Deuteronomy do record the presence of God as evidenced by lightning. Ezekiel and Jeremiah record the judgment of God as likened to lightning. In Matthew 24:27, 30 it is necessary to consider the context to discern accurately the analogous reference to lightning in relation to the second coming of Christ and the meaning of  \( \text{προσώπω} \) itself. Contextually prior to the giving of the Olivet Discourse, Christ declared His rejection of Israel and the willfulness of Israel’s rejection (Matt 23:37-39). The disciples asked Jesus three questions that involved two intertwined thoughts: (1) destruction of Jerusalem; and, (2) a new welcoming of Christ. In the mind of the disciples, the destruction of the Temple and city, the coming of Messiah, and the end of the age encompassed one amalgamated sequence of events. The basis for their understanding was Zechariah 14.

Christ did not correct the disciples’ understanding in the Olivet Discourse. He did warn the disciples to use discernment concerning events about to occur. Furthermore, He wanted them to be on their guard concerning false Christs and \textit{war and rumors of wars} which will characterize the current age, \textit{for those things must take place.}

Matthew’s Olivet is the only usage of  \( \text{προσώπω} \) in the Gospels; it was used there four times. The disciples used the word first (24:3) and Christ used the word three times. Each time Christ spoke of His coming, the clause is identical. His words are: \( \text{oúτος έσται η \text{προσώπω} \text{τοΰ} \text{υιω} \text{τού} \text{ανθρωπος} } \) (24:27, 37, 39). Kik believed “with verse 36 a change of subject matter occurs.” He stated:

The expression, “that day and hour,” gives immediate evidence of a change in subject matter. In the First Section (24:4-35) the plural “days” is employed; in the Second Section (24:36-25:46) the singular “day” comes to the fore. . . . Consequently the disciples had no difficult understanding that Christ had changed the subject in verse 36 from the judgments upon Jerusalem to the judgment that was to occur at his second coming.

\[\text{58} \text{Ibid., 123-24.}\]
\[\text{59} \text{The simple word έσω in 23:39 indicates that Christ’s rejection is not eternal!}\]
\[\text{60} \text{Alfred Edersheim, \textit{The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah} (McLean, VA: MacDonald, 1883; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 773.}\]
\[\text{62} \text{Kik, \textit{Eschatology of Victory}, 158-59.}\]
Since the usage of the near demonstratives has already been addressed, it will be sufficient here to say that Jesus was using the relatively near demonstratives as He was mindful of the future from His present earthly location. He was clear that only the generation witnessing all the events prophesied in the Olivet Discourse would be the generation to witness His return. Not only does the preterist misunderstand the use of the relatively near demonstratives, but also he confuses the meaning of παρουσία prior to 24:36 (viz. 24:27) and after 24:36 (viz. 24:37, 39). Since the παρουσία τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου in 24:37, 39 is the second coming, then 24:27 must also refer to the second coming since the same clause is used in all three passages. Furthermore, the first usage of παρουσία in 24:3 by the disciples would carry the same meaning. Each time παρουσία was used in Matthew 24 it refers to the physical, second coming of the glorified, resurrected Lord Jesus Christ to earth.

DeMar ignored context when interpreting 24:30 as fulfilled in AD 70. He wrote, “. . . there are verses which describe God ‘coming on the clouds’: ‘Behold, the LORD is riding on a swift cloud, and is about to come to Egypt’ (Isaiah 19:1; cf. Psalm 104:3).” DeMar added, “The sign is that the Son of Man is enthroned in heaven (Hebrews 9:24). . . . The Greek word that is translated “sky” is best translated “heaven.” In heaven does not modify sign. Jesus was not telling them to look for Him in the sky. . . . He told them that they would see a sign that proved He was in heaven, sitting at His Father’s right hand (Acts 2:30-36).”

Continuing his commentary on 24:30, DeMar correlated the coming of the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven to Daniel 7:13-14. According to this interpretation, the coming occurs in heaven. He wrote, “Notice that the coming of the Son of Man in Daniel 7 is not down but up! The Son of Man, Jesus comes up “with the clouds of heaven” to “the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him.” Just one page later, DeMar interpreted Christ’s words in 26:64 to mean that Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin would see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN in the destruction of Jerusalem. The religious leaders would see the power of the Son of Man in His cloud judgment (the billowing smoke in the sky from the destruction). At this point, Zechariah 12:10 was fulfilled in regard to the nation of Israel.

As evident in the preterist statements, the system again fails to consider the overall context. The mourning of Israel, according to Zechariah 12:10, is

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63 DeMar, Last Days, 160.
64 Ibid., 165.
65 Ibid., 161.
66 Ibid., 167-68.
explained by the verses which follow. Zechariah 12:1-9 prophecies the final conflict for the nation of Israel; rather than the destruction of Jerusalem (as in AD 70), God destroys *all the nations that come against Jerusalem* (12:9). Once God intervenes on behalf of Israel by destroying her aggressors, Israel will receive two provisions from God (12:10—13:9). *First,* the Holy Spirit is outpoured in blessing upon the Jews who repent in regard to Christ *whom they have pierced.* *Second,* the benefits of Christ’s death will be applied to the repentant Jews (13:1). The mourning in Zechariah 12:10 is the national repentance of Israel that results in deliverance and cleansing. *The sign of the Son of Man* is not the judgment of Israel but the exact opposite; it is concerned with the national repentance of Israel, as Paul stated in Romans 11:25-27.

DeMar made reference to Daniel 7:13-14 as “the passage that Jesus quotes in Matthew 24:30.” DeMar focused on the direction of the coming of the Son of Man in Daniel 7. Certainly, it does seem that Christ was alluding to Daniel 7:13. The Hebrew verb, אֱלֹהָ הָאֵלֶּה, is the intransitive sense of arrival (“to arrive” or “to reach”) and does not indicate direction. Daniel is the only writer to use the verb אֱלֹה הָאֵלֶּה (4:11, 20, 22, 24, 28; 6:24; 7:13, 22). Daniel used אֱלֹה הָאֵלֶּה eight times but not once does it convey the idea of direction. Furthermore, neither does the preposition יְהַו itself indicate direction. The Hebrew means simply that the Son of Man did מָתַח the Ancient of Days when He ascended into heaven. If the Hebrew did describe direction, it would merely indicate the Ancient of Days granting the Son of Man authority. The real question to ask is where the authority of the Son of Man will be manifested. Matthew 24:30 indicates the authority will be evident in the visible appearance of the Son of Man following the national repentance of Israel when Jesus Christ returns to earth to rule and reign. Keil wrote:

> In this very chapter before use there is no expression or any intimation whatever that the judgment is held in heaven. No place is named. It is only said that judgment was held over the power of the fourth beast, which came to a head in the horn speaking blasphemies, and that the beast was slain and his body burned. If he who appears as a son of man with the clouds of heaven comes before the Ancient of days executing the judgment on the earth, it is manifest that he could only come from heaven to earth. If the reverse is to be understood, then it ought to have been so expressed, since the coming with clouds of heaven in opposition to the rising up of the beasts out of the sea very distinctly indicates a coming down from heaven. The clouds are the veil or the “chariot” on which God comes from heaven to execute judgment again His enemies; cf. Ps. 18:10f., 97:2-4; 104:3, Isa. 19:1, Nah. 1:3. This passage forms the foundation for the declaration of Christ regarding His future coming.
which is described after Dan. 7: 13 as a coming of the Son of man with, in, on the clouds of heaven; Matt. 24:30; 26:64; Mark 18:26; Rev. 1:7; 14:14.68

Matthew 24:34. “Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

Although Matthew 24:34 is the preterist mantra, the reference here to this generation is a difficult passage to correlate with the preterist system. Preterists seek to demonstrate that whenever this generation is used in the Gospels, it refers to the first century generation. Additionally, Christ was speaking to the disciples prior to His crucifixion. In Matthew 23:36, this generation refers to those who would witness the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. Dispensationalists should agree with the last statements, but disagree with the first statement.

It is not true that the prophecies of Matthew 24:4-33 were all fulfilled in AD 70. The only manner in which such a view could be held is by ignoring the other more obvious verses which demand an eschatological fulfillment (e.g., the meaning of παροιμία and the interpretation of Matthew 23:39; 24:22; and, 24:27, 30).

Dispensationalists generally interpret this generation to speak of those who will witness all these things of Matthew 24 (Luke 21:32 reads, all things), which includes the literal and physical return of Jesus Christ. The issue concerning the near and far demonstratives has already been discussed; therefore, analysis here will focus on the verb γεννηται. It seems the best way to understand γεννηται is as an ingressive aorist, which means an event has occurred but the emphasis is on initiation. The destruction of the Temple should be understood from its initiation, which would bear the meaning “begin to take place.” The prophetic chronology for all these things of Matthew 24:34 would begin with the first century generation, but not find final fulfillment until the second coming.

It is interesting here to note that the texts of prophecies were the first texts to which commentaries at Qumran were organized. The pesharim was not intended to explain the prophetic texts, but to reveal the mysteries concerning prophetic fulfillment. Such mysteries would be hidden from the prophet himself, but revealed to the Teacher of Righteousness (Pesher on Habakkuk, or Habakkuk Commentary, 7:1-5). In other words, the Qumran literature indicated more than historical prophecies for past generations, but also used the term “last generation” to indicate several generations. The Qumran usage of “last

generation” is similar to the New Testament usage in 1 John 2:18 for the ἐσχάτη ὁδός which means the last period in the history for the current age.

*Matthew 26:64.* Jesus said to him, “You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.”

This passage has been addressed more fully in the response to preterist interpretation of Matthew 24:27, 30. Preterists understand this passage to mean those to whom Christ spoke these words had to witness a first century fulfillment or Jesus was in error. Preterists cite a first century fulfillment against the liberal view that Jesus was wrong in giving this prophecy.

The first century generation had to see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING in His kingdom (this meaning is taken from Dan 7:13-14) before they died. The destruction of Jerusalem was the sign that Jesus was enthroned in heaven AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER. Matthew 26:64 does not provide the timing of when the religious leaders would see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING in His kingdom. It is certain when Jesus Christ reveals Himself to them in all His glory in the future judgment, these religious leaders will acknowledge Jesus for who He is, even though they did not acknowledge Him in their earthly life.

**CONCLUSION**

This article introduced matters concerning preterist interpretation, including the various forms of preterism. Although not addressing all the issues involved, the article has demonstrated historically and/or exegetically that preterism cannot be substantiated biblically (especially regarding crucial time-indicators for the preterist position). The Matthean time-indicators for prophetic fulfillment are better interpreted futuristically (dispensationally) by use of a consistently literal historical-grammatical hermeneutic. The Matthean time-indicators are crucial to the preterist interpretation, and are the keys to interpreting major Bible prophecies. However, it has also been demonstrated that the use of demonstrative pronouns by Jesus indicate He was referring to the generation that witnesses the events of the Olivet Discourse with His second coming in a future time. Scripture does not teach the foundational claim of preterism that the coming of Christ occurred in AD 70. Therefore, Christ is yet to appear in power and glory; the generation that witnesses the events of the Olivet Discourse (and Revelation 6—18) will witness that return, as Christ delivers His saints, judges the wicked, and establishes His millennial kingdom.
THREE CRITICAL EXEGETICAL ISSUES IN MATTHEW 24: A DISPENSATIONAL INTERPRETATION

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The Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24—25 contains the fullest record of the Lord’s prophetic teaching during His earthly ministry. Each of the five great discourses (or sermons) by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew (chs. 5—7, 10, 13, 18, 24—25) are of utmost significance to His followers, but the Olivet Discourse is given a unique importance since Matthew added the word “all” to the formula at its conclusion by which he ends each discourse.¹ The end of the discourse reads: “When Jesus had finished all these sayings. . . .” (Matt 26:1 ESV).² In other words, it is the culmination of the great blocks of teaching in Matthew. Indeed, it is Jesus’ Farewell Discourse or Testament in Matthew’s Gospel.³

² At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7:28 (ESV) reads: “And when Jesus finished these sayings. . . .” This is the typical formula used at the end of the first four discourses.
³ Many scholars since the time of Friedrich Busch, Zum Verständnis der synoptischen Eschatologie: Markus 13 neu untersucht. Neutestamentliche Forschungen (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1938), 4:44, have viewed the discourse as being a Farewell Discourse rather than an apocalypse in terms of its genre. See, for example, W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 3:326. Several elements separate the discourse from Jewish apocalypses. Apocalypses are invariably pseudonymous (being falsely attributed to an authoritative figure from the past), and are replete with bizarre images, heavenly secrets, esoteric symbols, ex eventu prophecy (prophecy of an event after it actually occurred), and timetables; its revelations come via a heavenly mediator. None of these are true about Jesus’ discourse. The teachings in the discourse come from Jesus himself who discourages sign seeking and end-times calculations. The discourse discourages premature apocalyptic fervor and contains more parenetic (exhortations and commands) and parabolic material, than that which merely unfolds the future. G. R. Beasley-Murray, A Commentary on Mark 13 (London: Macmillan, 1957), 18, wrote of the Eschatological Discourse: “There is no other apocalyptic writing known to me which contains so high a proportion of admonitions and in which instruction and exhortation are so completely interwoven.” For further information on the Olivet Discourse as a farewell discourse see Neil D. Nelson Jr., “‘Be Ready for the Hour Is Unknown’: A
Jesus, like biblical leaders before Him, such as Jacob (Gen 47:29—49:33), Moses (Deut 31:1—34:38), Joshua (Josh 23:1—24:30), Samuel (1 Sam 12:1-25), and David (1 Chron 28—29), near to the occasion of His death prepared His followers to face the future without His physical presence. Farewell discourses usually contain warnings concerning false teachers (Matt 24:4, 5, 11, 23-26; cf. Acts 20:17-18; 2 Tim 2:16-18; 3:1-8; 2 Pet 2:1-22; 3:16-17), appeals to remain faithful and to exercise loving behavior toward one another (Matt 24:4-14, 36-51; 25:1-30; cf. 2 Tim 1:13-14; 3:14-17; 2 Pet 1:5-12; 3:14-15), predictions of woes and tribulations (Matt 24:4-13, 15-28), warnings of judgment against those who persecute his followers or who do not carry out his commands (Matt 24:38-51; 25:11-13, 24-30, 41-46), and blessings to come to faithful followers (Matt 24:31, 33; 25:10, 20-23, 34-40, 46b).

Jesus prophesied what the future would involve and prepared His disciples and those who would follow in their example to understand and to face future events and difficulties forewarned and forearmed. He prepared them for ongoing faithfulness to Christ, His people, and His commission while they awaited His return. The disciples with their heads clouded by ambitions of immediate glory (e.g., Matt 18:1; 20:20-28; cf. Luke 19:11; Acts 1:6) desired a definitive pronouncement which would give them the signs and times for which they were looking (Matt 24:3). Jesus did not give them an apocalypse that would enable them to see where they were on the end-time timetable and how close they were to the end of history. He gave them what they needed to know to face a future fraught with adversity and to accomplish a successful mission to the nations. He united predictions of the future with exhortations concerning the conduct required of faithful and wise followers.

The importance of the Olivet Discourse as his Farewell Sermon and great prophetic teaching makes sound interpretation of the discourse imperative. However, as Wilkins wrote: “Jesus’ predictions in this discourse have produced an almost dizzying array of interpretations.” This study will deal with three crucial interpretive issues in Matthew 24, showing the strength of a futuristic dispensational interpretation in comparison with other schools

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Literary Critical Exegesis of Matthew 24” (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2000), 253-57.

4 Both 2 Timothy and 2 Peter may be considered farewell speeches of Paul and Peter respectively (see 2 Tim 4:6 and 2 Pet 1:12-15).

5 Michael J. Wilkins, Matthew, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 789. See D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, 12 vols., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 8:488-95, for a sample of the many issues with which an interpreter must interact in regards to the interpretation of the discourse. Matthew 24 is often considered the most difficult chapter to interpret in the Gospel of Matthew.
and varieties of interpretation. The interpretive issues which will be covered are: 1) The identification and timing of the events in Matthew 24:15-31; 2) The referent of “this generation” in Matthew 24:34; and, 3) Whether “one is taken, one is left” in Matthew 24:40-41 refers to the rapture or to the second coming.

ARE THE ABOMINATION THAT CAUSES DESOLATION, THE GREATEST TRIBULATION, AND THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN PAST OR FUTURE EVENTS?

Turner helpfully divided approaches of evangelical interpreters into four classifications based on how much of the discourse they assign to the AD 70 fall of Jerusalem and the Temple, and how much they assign to the end of the age. Preterist or historical interpreters believe Matthew 24:1–35 was fulfilled in the first century, especially in the judgment of God upon Jerusalem. While moderate preterists tend to believe that Matthew 24:36–25:46 discusses the end of the age and the second coming, full or extreme preterists believe that all the events in the discourse were fulfilled at the fall of Jerusalem and even the second coming, resurrection, and final judgment are all past events. Futurist interpreters, while differing as to whether Matthew 24:4-14 refers to the interadvent age, or wholly or partly to a future “great tribulation” period

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6 The author of this article does not mean to imply that dispensational interpretations of the discourse are monolithic. There is some variation in dispensational interpretation of these issues. Indeed, concerning the difficult problem of the meaning of Matthew 24:34 (“Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place”), several dispensationalists have changed their views after continued study. Few dispensational writers on an academic level today continue to hold that “this generation” refers to Israel as a nation. However, such an interpretation had been a popular view decades ago.


8 Examples of moderate or partial preterists include David E. Garland, Reading Matthew (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), 240-41, 244-49; Gibbs, Jerusalem and Parousia, 183-208; and R. T. France, Matthew, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 333. R. C. Sproul, The Last Days according to Jesus (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 66, 158, regards himself a partial preterist, but believes that all of Jesus’ prophecies in the Olivet Discourse were fulfilled in the period between the discourse itself and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. He still believes in a literal second coming, future resurrection, and final judgment based on other New Testament texts. He admitted to being “still unsettled on some crucial matters” (158). His purpose in that book was not to exegete Matthew 24—25, but to evaluate the claims of partial and full preterism.
immediately before the end, assign all of 24:15-41 to the future. There are two types of mediating positions, the traditional and the revised preterist-futurist positions. The traditional preterist-futurist position understands 24:15-26 as a “double reference” prophecy referring in a perspective common to biblical prophecy in the near view to the events of AD 70 and in the far view to the end of the age. The revised preterist-futurist view of Carson sees AD 70 as the subject of 24:15-21 and the church age being addressed in 24:22-28.

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Preterists and the Parousia

There are significant problems with the preterist and preterist-futurist views of Matt 24:15-31. For example, the view of preterists like France, Garland, and Sproul is that “this generation” in Matthew 24:34 must refer to Jesus’ contemporaries who experienced “all these things” (24:33-34) including “the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (24:30b). To protect the veracity of the Lord and the authority of Scripture this then mandates that Matthew 24:27-31 refers not to the second coming, but rather to a coming in judgment on Jerusalem in AD 70. However, in the context of the discourse words like παρουσία (“coming,” 24:27), ἐρχόμενον (“coming,” 24:30), and δόξης (“glory,” 24:30) likely refer to the second coming of Christ. Παρουσία is used in Matthew 24:37, 39 (“the coming of the Son of man”), which are verses these moderate preterist interpreters take to refer to the future return of Christ. To see παρουσία in Matthew 24:27 as a symbolic or spiritual coming of the Lord would be to use the word in a way unprecedented in Matthew and in the entire New Testament. Forms of the verb ἐρχόμαι (“come”) which is used in Matthew 24:27, are used throughout the rest of the discourse in passages that clearly speak of the second coming (24:42, “your Lord is coming”; 24:44, “the Son of Man is coming”; 24:46, “when he comes”; 25:10, “the bridegroom came”; 25:19, “the master of those servants came”; 25:27, “at my coming”; and, 25:31, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory”). In Matthew 25:31, the word “glory” is used twice (δόξης, δόξης) of the Lord’s glorious presence at His second coming.

eschatological tension. For Pate, both Revelation 6—18 and parallel events in the Olivet Discourse were partially fulfilled in AD 70 yet have their ultimate fulfillment in the future. Darrell L. Bock, Luke 9:51-24:53, Baker Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 1675-77, carefully differentiated between the account in Luke 21:20-24 which describes Jerusalem’s fall and the account in Matthew 24:15-22 which looks at the end-time and speaks of consummation. He took a futurist view on this section in Matthew.

13 Παρουσία also refers to the Second Coming in Matthew 24:3.
14 Stanley D. Toussaint, “A Critique of the Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse,” Bibliotheca Sacra 161 (October-December 2004), noted that παρουσία is always used of the actual presence of a person and that in 1 Corinthians 15:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 8; James 5:7-8; 2 Peter 1:16; 3:4, 12; and 1 John 2:28 it refers to the Lord’s presence at the Second Coming.
15 Blomberg, Matthew, 363.
The coming of the Son of Man with His angels to divide humanity at the future judgment accompanying the second coming is emphasized previously in the kingdom parable in Matthew 13:41 (cf. 13:49) and later in Matthew 25:31 (cf. 24:44; 26:64). The reward of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked at the second coming, in fact, is a major theme throughout the rest of the Olivet Discourse (cf. 24:40-44, 45-51; 25:1-13, 14-30, 31-46). That is the same event spoken of in Matthew 24:27-31.

The event described in Matthew 24:27-31 is also both universal and unmistakably visible to all on earth, which was not the case in the local judgment which befell Jerusalem in the first century. There is a very strong emphasis here on the universal visibility of the coming of the Son of Man (24:27, “for as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man”); 24:30, “then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”) in contrast with repeated warnings concerning deceptive reports of a secret coming (24:23-26). This coming judgment causes all the tribes of the earth to mourn since Jesus’ return means judgment. It also means that the elect throughout the globe in 24:31 (who are dispersed so widely because they have been obedient to the Lord’s commission cf. 24:14; 28:19-20) will be gathered by the Lord’s angels to enter into the kingdom, eternal life, and the joy of the master (cf. 25:21, 23, 34, 46). Only a physical return of the Lord in total judgment satisfies the language in 24:27-31. The use of Daniel 7:13-14 in Matthew 24:30, where one like a son of man comes with the clouds of

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17 Gustav Stählin, “κοπετώς, κόπτω,” in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-76), said that the word “mourn” in Matthew 24:30 par. is “the world’s mourning for itself in its final, hopeless distress.” The world has come to the realization that it is too late and each one grieves concerning their personal fate at the “immediately impending judgment of God.” The mourning of those soon to be judged contrasts with the gathering of the elect into the kingdom by the Lord’s angels. The consistent pattern throughout the rest of the discourse of dividing humanity into two groups begins here. When the sign of the Son of Man (the sign is the Son, a genitive of apposition) appears it is too late to repent (cf. Rev 1:7). An alternate interpretation is taken by Toussaint, “Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse,” 477-79. He said that the mourning is the repentance of the tribes of Israel when Jesus returns in fulfillment of Zechariah 12:10. If so this would be further proof of the future salvation of Israel in line with Matthew 23:39.

18 There is no rapture found in the Olivet Discourse. Blomberg, Matthew, 363, no pretribulationist himself, correctly affirmed this.
heaven and receives authority over all the nations from the ancient of Days, also signals that Matthew 24:29-31 is speaking of the future return of Christ. In Daniel 7, God passed judgment on the four kingdoms that dominate the earth and gives all authority to one like a son of man (Dan 7:13-14). His kingdom will be over all the earth and He will reign forever.

**The Abomination and the Great(est) Tribulation**

There are several events or references in Matthew 24:15-28 which do not fit an AD 70 fulfillment. Matthew declares that the abomination comes first, followed by the great tribulation and flight. The abomination causes desolation.\(^{19}\) However, in the siege of Titus in AD 70, the tribulation preceded the abomination. In Daniel, the abomination is always linked to the Temple. The abomination of desolation takes place “in the holy place”; that is, in the Temple. However, when the Romans entered the Temple with their standards, it was too late to escape and for flight into the mountains.\(^{20}\)

The phrase “abomination that causes desolation” comes from the book of Daniel (Dan 9:27; 11:31; 12:11; cf. 8:13). Abomination (bδέλαγμα) refers to “what defiles a sacred place and causes it to be left desolate.”\(^{21}\) While originally it referred to the act of Antiochus Epiphanes IV (who in 167 BC outlawed Jewish religious practices, slaughtered swine on a temple altar devoted to Olympian Zeus, and then destroyed much of the Temple precincts and the city of Jerusalem, Dan 8:13; 11:31; 1 Mace 1:54, 59; 4:38; 6:7; 2 Macc 8:17), Jesus by His words in Matthew 24:15 (“when you see . . .”) foresaw a yet future fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy shortly before the end of the age. The Danielic reference in Matthew 24:15, points the reader to Daniel 9:27 and 12:11 which look at the consummation and the end of the age.\(^{22}\) Daniel 12:2-3,

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\(^{19}\) Preterists are quite divided as to the specific event in the first century which Matthew called the abomination of desolation. See Toussaint, “Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse,” 479-80, for four possibilities. France, *Matthew*, 340-41, a preterist himself, identified problems with various preterist views as to the exact identity of the event and came to no conclusion other than that it had to occur in AD 66-70.

\(^{20}\) Toussaint, “Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse,” 480.


\(^{22}\) Matthew 24:15 with its formula “spoken of through the prophet Daniel” is different than the other “fulfillment” quotations in Matthew in that although it has other essential elements of a fulfillment formula, it is the only one that lacks an explicit reference to any fulfillment of the prophet’s words, in this case, the text of Daniel. Matthew therefore intentionally did not want this text to be understood as fulfilled. See Fred W. Burnett, *The Testament of Jesus-Sophia: A Redaction-Critical Study of the*
11, 13 speaks of the time of the end and the resurrection of the righteous. Daniel 9:27 speaks of Daniel’s seventieth week and a future figure who will establish himself as God in the Temple in the middle of the seven years which precede Christ’s Second Advent.23

Further, AD 70 was not “great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be (24:21).” Though Josephus reported terrible atrocities, the tribulation Jesus was predicting here must be greater than the devastation caused by the universal flood in Noah’s day to which Jesus in context directly compared the events of the end (24:37-39).24 Matthew 24:22 says, “if those days had not been shortened, no human being (flesh) would be saved.” Πᾶσα σῶμα (“all flesh”) is a technical term referring to all humanity nine times in the New Testament (Matt 24:22; Mark 13:20; Luke 3:6; John 17:2; Acts 2:17; Rom 3:20; 1 Cor 1:29; Gal 2:26; 1 Pet 1:24).25 “All flesh” here is not limited to Jews who died in Judea in the first century; rather it implies that all humanity would be extinguished in the future “great tribulation” as happened at the flood (except for Noah and his family), if not for God’s intervention for the sake of His elect. Jesus here was speaking of an event much worse than AD 70.

A final proof that Matthew 24:15-28 speaks of the great tribulation of the future, rather than of a first century event is in Matthew’s use of the words “cut short” in Matthew 24:22 and “immediately” in 24:29.26 Carson, because of the word “immediately” understood Matthew 24:22-28 to refer to the entire interadvent period of the tribulation now stretching almost 2,000 years. But then “immediately,” seems to have lost all meaning and effect and it is hard to

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23 Other revelation in the New Testament identifies the future abomination as a person (Mark 13:14 where the masculine participle “standing” refers to a person standing where he should not),23 who proclaims himself to be God and is called “the man of lawlessness” (2 Thess 2:1-9) and “the beast” whom earth dwellers are made to worship (Rev 13:1-18).
24 Lowery, “Theology of Matthew,” 190. Josephus, Jewish War 5-7, reported the death of 1.1 million Jews, but most scholars believe that the population of Jerusalem during the feast time was closer to 150,000. In any case the world (and the Jewish people) have experienced greater tribulations than this in the past century.
25 In 1 Corinthians 15:39 Paul used the phrase in the sense of all human and animal life, an even wider usage. See Toussaint, “Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse,” 481.
26 For more on this see Nelson, “Exegesis of Matthew 24,” 185-88.
see how God has “cut short” or limited the days (24:22). Jesus said, “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened . . . then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven” (24:29-30). This means that immediately after the great and unparalleled tribulation described in Matthew 24:21-26, the second coming will occur. The words εὐθὺς or εὐθέως (“immediately”) in all 18 occurrences in Matthew mean “immediately,” “at once,” “without delay,” or “instantaneously.” The word means the same thing here in this context. Futurists have no difficulty in seeing the parousia immediately after the future abomination that causes desolation and the great tribulation. This unparalleled tribulation will last about three and a half years according to Daniel 9:27; 12:7, 11; Revelation 11:3; 12:6, 14. God “cut short” the days by limiting them to 1,260 days (Rev 11:3). Preterists who use Matthew’s “immediately” in 24:29 to tie the siege of Jerusalem to a symbolic “parousia” of Christ in a temporal judgment on Jerusalem err because “immediately after the tribulation of those days” (24:29) refers back to “those days” (24:22) of the future great tribulation. Preterist-futurists who stretch the tribulation to include the whole interadvent age rob the words “immediately” and “cut short” of their plain meaning in Matthew.

The futurist interpretation of Matthew 24:15-28, the view of most dispensational interpreters, best explains this important section of Jesus’ sermon. The combination of the temporal and inferential conjunctions “therefore when” which begin Matthew 24:15-28 signal a shift to the important topic of a major event prophesied in Daniel 9:27 and 12:1-12, the still future event when Antichrist erects his image in the Temple to be worshipped, which in turn commences the never to be equaled “great tribulation,” which lasts three and one half years. God cuts this tribulation short for the sake of His elect. The tribulation then ends immediately as Christ comes in His full glory to judge the nations and to gather His elect, that is tribulation saints, into His kingdom.

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27 Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon, 320-21. Redaction critics see εὐθέως as a deliberate redactional addition to his Markan source in order to deliberately connect the tribulation to the parousia.
28 Carson, “Matthew,” 594-95 differentiated between the time of the “great distress” of AD 70 in Matthew 25:15-21 and the general interadvent age in 24:22-28. Therefore Jesus did not affirm that his second coming would be immediately after AD 70. A better solution is to see that 25:15-28 is one unit. The word καὶ (“and”) in verse 22 ties 24:15-21 to 24:22-28. Therefore the event, which is “immediately” before the second coming, is the great tribulation, which commences with the great abomination.
29 Wilkins, Matthew, 777.
30 The disciples addressed by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse represent Jewish tribulation saints in Matthew 24:15-31. They also represent both the church and Jewish tribulation saints in Matthew 24:4-14, which covers the entire interadvent age (church
THE IDENTITY OF “THIS GENERATION” IN MATTHEW 24:34:
WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE DO NOT PASS AWAY
UNTIL ALL THESE THINGS TAKE PLACE?

View #1: Contemporaries of Jesus Witness the Second Coming

Perhaps the most difficult phrase to interpret in the entire Olivet Discourse is “this generation will not pass away until all these things take place” (Matt 24:34). Some interpreters have concluded Jesus taught (erroneously it ends) that His contemporaries would be alive at His Second Advent. The most decided criticism of this interpretation is that it makes Jesus a false prophet and the church perpetuated this error when it continued to pass on these words after the disciples had died. However, Jesus (in Matthew’s Gospel) is portrayed as one who is absolutely true and who teaches the way of God truthfully (Matt 22:16). In Matthew 24:35, the verse immediately following, Jesus pledged His truthfulness on this prediction and everything else in the discourse when He said: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.” Jesus’ prophecies, including that of 24:34 are more dependable than the universe itself. Further, in Matthew 24:36 Jesus strongly affirmed: “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.” How could Jesus on the one hand assert that His own contemporary generation would see the fulfillment of all His prophecy and then assert just two verses later that no human, not even He, could know the time of fulfillment?


For example, Davies and Allison, Matthew, 3:367-68, affirmed that Matthew 24:34 teaches all the events of verses 4-31 (including His return in glory) would occur before all his contemporaries had died. Since some of Jesus’ contemporaries were probably alive when Matthew wrote, “he did not have the problem we do.” They say that most modern commentators take this view.


This is an absolute prohibition of any knowledge of the time. The expression “day and hour” is a formula using synonymous parallelism which refers to time in general, with the word “day” being used frequently in Matthew for the time he will come in eschatological judgment (Matt 7:22; 10:15; 11:22, 24; 12:36). In the following
View #2: Contemporaries of Jesus Witness the Coming of Jesus in AD 70

The preterist interpretation of this phrase and Matthew 24 in general is a reaction to the interpretation of the first view. Their view is that Jesus’ contemporaries will not pass away until they see all the things of Matthew 24:4-31, but “all these things” must therefore be restricted to the events of AD 70. However, “all these things” in Matthew 24:34, as previously demonstrated, include the future abomination that causes desolation, the future great tribulation, and the second coming itself.

View #3: Contemporaries of Jesus Witness the Beginning of End Time Events

Another view takes the verb “take place” in 24:34 (γένηται) as an ingressive aorist, which would produce the meaning “this generation will not pass away until all these things begin to take place.” This view is unlikely for several reasons. First it ignores the comprehensive nature of the word “all.” To impose a limitation on the words “before all these things take place” really makes Jesus say: “before some of these things take place.” “All” has a naturally comprehensive force throughout the discourse (24:2, 8, 9, 14, 22, 30, 33, 34, 47; 25:5, 7, 29, 31, 32). Also, not all these things begin to happen by AD 70. The future abomination (24:15), great tribulation (24:21-22), and the second coming (24:27-31) do not begin to take place during the lifetime of Jesus’ context in the discourse “day,” “part (watch) of the night,” and “hour” are used interchangeably of the unexpected time of the coming of the Son of Man (Matt 24:42-44). Matthew 24:50 and 25:13 again use “day” and “hour” in parallelism. See Blomberg, Matthew, 365.

Preterist-futurist interpreters, such as Blomberg, Matthew, 363-64; Donald A. Hagner, Matthew 14-28, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1995), 715; and, Craig S. Keener, A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 588-90, have a similar interpretation, but they restricted the reference of “all these things” in Matthew 24:34 to the events of Matthew 24:4-26 or 24:15-26 which they said were fulfilled in the fall of Jerusalem in the first century.

In Matthew, since the immediately following pericope (24:36-44) and the immediately preceding context (24:29-31) both speak of the parousia, this suggests that “all these things” in 24:34 include the end as well as the preliminary events which announce the certainty of its arrival. The words of Matthew 24:35 also refer to the consummation of all things. When Jesus spoke of “all these things” in verse 34, He was surveying all the events He had just announced.


contemporaries. Moreover, the aorist subjunctive γένηται is much more likely a consummative aorist in light of the prophetic nature of Jesus’ statement.\(^\text{39}\) In Matthew 5:18, a verse with a very similar phraseology, γένηται is certainly a consummative aorist. The verb γίνομαι is used of consummated events in 24:6, 20, 21 [2x], and 32.\(^\text{40}\)

**View #4: This Generation Is Israel as a Race**

An old view abandoned today by many dispensational interpreters is that “this generation” in Matt 24:34 refers to Israel as a race.\(^\text{41}\) However, while 24:34 implies that “this generation” will pass away after the events of 24:4-28 occur, Matthew envisioned a mission to Israel until the parousia (10:23), a conversion of Israel before the second coming (23:39; cf. Rom 9—11; Isa 66:22; Zech 8, 13-14), and the presence of Israel in the kingdom (Matt 19:28).\(^\text{42}\) In other words, Israel in contrast will not pass away when “all these things take place.” The word “until” (ἐως) means “up to the point at which and no farther” here, implying “this generation” (unlike Israel) will “pass away” in judgment at the second coming of Christ.\(^\text{43}\) Also the fig tree in the parable of Matthew 24:32-35 is not a type of Israel. Jesus instead used it to make a straightforward analogy.\(^\text{44}\) Just as the budding fig tree inevitably results in a harvest of figs, so the events of 24:4-25 will inevitably usher in the judgment of the Son of Man at His

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\(^\text{39}\) See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 558-61. It could also be a constative aorist, which is the most frequent use of the aorist tense.


\(^\text{41}\) For example, this was the former view of Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 281, which he abandoned in *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 405.


\(^\text{43}\) For a full discussion see Nelson, “Exegesis of Matthew 24,” 204-09. This “exclusive” use of ἐως predominates in eschatological contexts in Matthew (e.g., 13:30; 23:39). The verb “pass away” means to come to an end or to perish. See Johannes Schneider, “παρέχωσι,” in *Theological Dictionary*, 2:681-82.

\(^\text{44}\) This is evident in the Lukan parallel where Jesus said: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees.” Any deciduous fruit tree would make the same point.
coming. “This generation” will pass away in judgment when Christ returns, but Matthew extends the promise that Israel will be preserved and will enter into the kingdom.

View #5: This Generation Is an Evil Kind of People Who Oppose Christ and His Messengers

A fifth view, which is an old dispensational view and at the same time relatively new in current dispensational circles takes seriously both the Old Testament background of the word γενεά ("generation," הָנִּ֣מְנָֽה in the Hebrew OT) and how “this generation” (ἡ γενεά αὐτῆς) is characterized throughout Matthew and the rest of the New Testament. Ἡ γενεά αὐτῆς in Matthew 24:34 describes unbelieving, rejecting humanity, unresponsive to God’s messengers, and headed toward eschatological judgment.45 John Nelson Darby, the acknowledged father and developer of dispensational premillennialism, made the point over a century and a half ago that ἡ γενεά αὐτῆς in Matthew 24:34 refers to an evil type of people. He wrote:

The difficulty as to “this generation shall not pass away” is a prejudice flowing from the English use of the word “generation.” It is quite as much used for a moral class in scripture, as for the period marked by human life; and if Deuteronomy 32:5, 20 (where this very subject is treated of) be referred to, the sense is plain.46

Again Darby commented:

As to the generation not passing away, a reference to Deuteronomy 32:5, 20, will give the plain and sure sense of it, and that in reference to this very subject [the Lord’s coming]. The mere common use of the word is a class of persons, as, the generation of the wicked, not the period of a man’s life.47

The primary Old Testament background for Jesus’ reference to ἡ γενεά αὐτῆς here is in the Old Testament descriptions of the rebellious Israelites during their wanderings in the wilderness (cf. Numb 32:13; Deut

45 Modern dispensationalists who take this view include: Lowery, “Theology of Matthew,” 100; Williams, “Mark,” 139, 161; and Nelson, “Exegesis of Matthew 24,” 159-221; idem., “This Generation,” 369-85. Darrell Bock, Bible Knowledge Key Word Study, 247-48 said this negative ethical view or the idea that once the end starts it will be completed in a generation are the most likely views.
47 Ibid., 11:372.
Exegetical Issues in Matthew 24

2:14; Ps 12:7; 78:8; 95:10). Adjectives such as “evil,” “perverse,” “adulterous” and “faithless” used by Jesus to characterize “this generation” (Matt 12:39, 45; 16:4; 17:17) come from the Song of Moses (Deut 32:5, 20). Culver noted that the Hebrew word תּוֹת (“generation”) “is used widely to indicate a class of men distinguished by a certain moral or spiritual character,” such as in the phrase “generation of the righteous” or “generation of the wicked.” He said this metaphorical (non-chronological) use of the word is theologically the most significant use of תּוֹת in the Old Testament and becomes the basis of Jesus’ use of γενεᾶ (“generation”) in the Gospels.

Psalm 12:7 (11:8 LXX) uses the exact phrase ἡ γενεὰ οὗτη and says: “You, O Lord, will keep them [LXX “us”]; You will preserve him [i.e., the godly man] from ‘this generation’ forever.” “This generation” is described in this context as lying, boastful, proud, violent, and wicked. The godly do not belong to this generation, though they live among these evil people of their age (cf. Acts 2:40; Phil 2:15). Matthew seems to have juxtaposed the phrase “this generation” in 24:34 with his account of the days of Noah (24:37-39), an explicit type of the coming of the Son of Man. This seems to be a purposeful echo of Genesis 7:1 where Noah is described as the sole righteous man in “this generation” (τῇ γενεᾷ τούτη), which is described as wicked, violent, corrupt, and self-absorbed in Genesis 6:5-11. Noah, like the godly man in Psalm 12, lived among, but did not belong to “this generation.”

A study of the use of ἡ γενεὰ οὗτη (Matt 11:16; 12:41, 42, 45; 23:36; 24:34) and γενεὰ with other descriptive adjectives (12:39, 45; 16:4; 17:17) used in the same sense, reveals that the kind of people identified with the words “this generation” are characterized as those who reject Jesus and His messengers and the salvific message they preach, who remain unbelieving and unrepentant, who actively test and persecute Jesus and His messengers, and who will face eschatological judgment. The pejorative adjectives given to “this generation” (evil, adulterous, faithless, perverse) throughout the Gospel are qualities that distinguish between those who are subjects of the kingdom and those who are not.

The use of “this generation” in Matthew 23:36 directly before the Olivet Discourse is particularly instructive. There Jesus’ prophetic condemnation falls on “this generation” both for murdering the righteous men of the Old Testament (23:29-31, 35) from the beginning of the Hebrew canon (Abel) until the end (Zechariah in the last book of the Hebrew Bible, 2 Chronicles; note Jesus says: “whom you murdered”) and for scourging, and

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48 Williams, “Mark,” 139.
killing, and crucifying “prophets, and wise men, and scribes” (i.e., His disciples; cf. Matt 5:12; 7:24; 10:41; 13:52) all the way until the second coming. The contemporaries of Jesus did not murder Zechariah (23:35-36), nor will they murder Jesus’ disciples until the end of the age. Therefore the phrase “this generation” here and in 24:34 extends beyond Jesus’ contemporaries to also include the murderers of God’s servants in the Old Testament and forward to those who will persecute disciples until Jesus’ return (23:39). Since the persecution extends until the Son of Man comes (10:23; 23:34; 24:9-14, 15-26), the judgment also does not fall until that time.

The reader of Matthew 24:34 should therefore interpret ἡ γενεὰ αὐτή (“this generation”) in the same way it has been consistently used throughout Matthew, as a kind of people who reject Jesus, who remain hostile to Jesus’ disciples, who are blind to the signs of His coming, and who remain opponents of the Gospel and its messengers until the end. Then finally they “will pass away” at the judgment when Christ returns.50 In the context of Matthew’s Gospel, the disciple is not above his teacher, nor is the servant above his master (10:24-25). The obedience of Christ in the midst of “an evil and perverse generation” as He endured its hostility and obstinate unbelief, becomes then the pattern for his disciples.51 The Lord’s teaching in Matthew 24:32-35 is that the followers of Christ will continue to endure the persecution and opposition of “this generation.” This sinful class of opponents of Christ and his messengers will continue to be present directly until the coming of the Son of Man. However, saints have the sure hope, based on Christ’s word (24:35) that Jesus as Son of Man will come and gather them into His kingdom and vindicate them by judging “this generation.” Just as Christ suffered, so will disciples in this age. Just as Christ was subsequently glorified, so they will “inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (25:34).

**View #6: This Generation Is All the People Alive at the End**

A final view, held by several dispensationalists is that “this generation” refers to all the people who are alive when Jesus returns.52 This view says that the

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50 The discourse says that this evil type of people (“this generation”) will be “swept away” (24:39), “taken” in judgment (24:40-41), dichotomized and put into hell (24:51), “shut out” of the marriage feast (25:11-12), “cast into outer darkness” (25:30), and they will go into the eternal punishment prepared for the devil and his angels (25:41, 46).

51 In Matthew 17:17, Jesus was exasperated with a “faithless and perverse generation” ensnared in the grip of Satan. He exclaimed: “How long am I to be with you?” But to his disciples at the end of the Gospel he proclaimed: “And behold I am with you always, to the end of the age” (28:20).

52 For example, Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1980), 279-80; Glasscock, *Matthew*, 475; Benware,
end-time generation will see the completion of the end-time signs. It seems somewhat tautologous to say that the last generation will not pass away until the end-time events conclude. Jesus hardly needed to state this sort of truism. However, the emphasis in this interpretation is that when the end comes, it comes quickly. The generation that experiences the great tribulation will also witness the end.\footnote{Bock, \textit{Luke 9:51-24:53}, 1688-92.}

The major problem with this view is that it ignores the negative force of \textit{η γενεὰ αὐτή (“this generation”)} throughout the New Testament and Matthew in particular and the moral use of the phrase in the Old Testament. The negative connotation of the phrase as referring to ungodly people united in their opposition to God’s messengers is found in all previous uses of \textit{η γενεὰ αὐτή} (Matt 11:16; 12:39, 41, 42, 45; 16:4; 17:17; 23:36). The reader of the Gospel would naturally understand the phrase to have the same connotation in Matthew 24:34.

This view also ignores the implication that “this generation” will “pass away” at the second coming. Only the wicked belong to this type of people. This evil generation will be “swept away” in judgment and put into hell (24:39, 51). The righteous in contrast will inherit the kingdom and enter into eternal life in the presence of the Son (25:20-23, 34, 36). Therefore, “this generation” in Matthew 24:34 refers to an evil and faithless people guilty of resisting the messengers and the message of Christ. This view best aligns with the use of the phrase throughout Matthew and the purpose of Jesus in the discourse and the Gospel to prepare the disciples to endure the rejection of unresponsive humanity as they obediently serve Christ and others and thus ready themselves for the Lord’s glorious return.

\textbf{ONE TAKEN, ONE LEFT: DOES THIS REFER TO THE RAPTURE OR TO THE SECOND COMING?}

The language “one is taken and one is left” in Matthew 24: 40, 41 suggests to some that the Rapture of the church is being addressed.\footnote{Bock, \textit{Luke 9:51-24:53}, 1691-92.} However, the only future coming of the Son of Man described in the discourse is the glorious and universally visible return of Christ (24:3, 27-31; cf. 24:14, 33, 50-51; 25:1-13, 14-30, 31-46). The language of 24:27-41 does not suggest that a different event...
Matthew 24:40-41 occurs in the context of judgment. The future time of judgment at the second coming is compared with the day when Noah entered the ark and “the flood came and swept them all away” (24:39). The day of judgment, concerning which no one but the Father knows the timing, parallels the sudden judgment and loss of life of the unresponsive in Noah’s time. As the wicked were “swept away” in that day, so the world will “pass away” (24:34) at the future arrival of the Son of Man. This universal judgment is that of the second coming, not a pretribulational rapture. The parallel passage in Luke 17:26-37 makes it especially clear that the reference is to the judgment at the second coming. That passage after mentioning the destruction brought by the flood and the fire and sulphur raining upon Sodom, mentions that “one will be taken, and the other left” (Luke 17:35). When the disciples ask Jesus, “Where, Lord?” He responds with a grisly image of the gathering of vultures (17:37).

The synonyms ἐρρέν (“taken away” or “swept away,” 24:39 from αἱρέω) and παραλαμβάνεται (“taken,” 24:40-41 from παραλαμβάνω) seem here to stand for analogous concepts. Just as the entire generation of the flood was “taken away” in the cataclysm of Genesis, so “this generation” in its entirety will be “taken” in the judgment of the parousia. The thoughts are parallel, not contrastive. The difference in verbs may be due to precision of description (“swept away” ESV is an apt translation of ἐρρέν in relation to the flood) or to stylistic variation. If “taken” in 24:40-41 means being taken in judgment, this eliminates reference here to the rapture, that is, being caught to meet the Lord in the air. However, granting that the reference in 24:36-44 is to the second coming, the point then becomes virtually moot as to whether “taken” in 24:40-41 means gathered to meet the Lord (cf. 24:31) or taken in judgment (cf. 24:39). The essential point is that a permanent separation of humanity occurs at the second coming with the righteous being taken into the kingdom and the unrighteous being taken in judgment.

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55 Blomberg, Matthew, 366. Contra Hart, “Chronology of Matthew,” 242-44, elsewhere in Matthew the phrase περὶ δὲ (24:36) is used to continue discussion of the same subject or to continue the movement of the narrative (20:6; 22:31; 27:46).
56 Bock, Bible Knowledge Key Word Study, 236, said: “The fact that the stress is on judgment means there is no rapture here.”
57 Carson, “Matthew,” 509. Lowery, “Matthew,” 100, said that παραλαμβάνω (“taken” in 24:40, 41) is often a positive term in the Gospel (e.g., 1:20, 24; 2:13, 14, 20, 21; 17:1; 26:37). However, it is used in a bad sense significantly in 27:27 (cf. 4:5, 8). Ἀφίημι (ἀφιέται, “left”) in 24:40-41 can carry a negative connotation in Matthew (4:20, 22; 8:22; 19:29; 23:38; 26:56), but it also has positive connotations in 4:11, 20, 24; 6:12.
CONCLUSION

This study has presented a futuristic, dispensational view of three important exegetical issues in Matthew 24. The evidence derived from a careful study of the Olivet Discourse in the context of Matthew’s Gospel suggests that both the preterist and the preterist-futurist views of Jesus’ teaching about the abomination of desolation and the great tribulation of Matthew 25:15-26 are incorrect; neither event occurred in AD 70. The abomination that causes desolation is a yet future event near the end of the age in which the image of the Antichrist is erected in the Temple and Antichrist himself is worshipped as God. This is the meaning of Daniel 9:27 and 12:11 (also indicated in 2 Thess 2:1-12; Mark 13:14; Rev 13:1-18). The great tribulation is also a yet future event which is of such severity that it exceeds the devastation of the universal flood in the days of Noah. All humanity would perish in this tribulation except for the intervention of God on behalf of tribulation saints. This greatest of all tribulations occurs “immediately” before the second coming of Christ.

The preterist view that equates “the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (24:30) with his symbolic coming in the judgment of AD 70 is also in error; rather this is the literal, visible coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in His full glory and power. The use of the vocabulary to describe His coming elsewhere in Matthew and in the Olivet Discourse itself, and the stress on the universal visibility of the parousia should assure believers of the validity of Jesus’ own precious and great description of his Second coming.

A study of “this generation” as used in Matthew and in its Old Testament background shows that it speaks of a wicked kind of people through the ages who are steadfastly opposed to the messengers of God and who are described as faithless, evil, perverse, and adulterous. Jesus did not promise His saints a future mission free from difficulties. Indeed, the Olivet Discourse is full of predictions of tribulation and opposition. In the Parable of the Fig Tree (Matt 24:32-35) Jesus affirmed that his followers will experience the difficulties mentioned in Matthew 24, but that as they see Jesus’ predictions come to past they may be assured “that he is near, at the very gates” (24:33). They will face opposition from the same sort of evil people who opposed the prophets and Jesus before them, but when all these things take place, “this generation” which is evil, will “pass away.” Then the faithful servants of Jesus (24:45-47) will be vindicated and they will enter into the kingdom and the joy of their master.

Finally, Matthew 24:40-41 does not speak of a pretribulation Rapture. The rapture is not the subject of the Olivet Discourse, but the second coming is. The second coming is certain, yet its timing is unknown. Therefore Jesus called in the strongest terms for His saints to be faithful, prepared, and ready for His return. If this is the case in relation to the second coming, “how much more
important is it for people to be prepared for the unannounced and ‘sign-less’ resurrection and rapture of the church.”

A PALATABLE CALVINISM: LIMITED ATONEMENT IN THE THEOLOGY OF JOHN PIPER

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Regardless of whether one thinks favorably or unfavorably about him, the ministry of John Piper has silenced those who accuse five point Calvinists of destroying the impetus for missions and evangelism.¹ How has this been accomplished? The success and widespread acclamation of Piper’s books and other resources is impressive in light of his theological stance, especially that of limited atonement. The doctrine of limited atonement, elsewhere called particular redemption or definite atonement does have difficulties and has historically been the source of great debate. One’s position on the doctrine of the atonement has many logical and theological implications: some theoretical, some practical. How one understands Christ’s cross manifests a crucial role in theological issues such as the Gospel call and assurance. This article suggests that Piper’s Calvinism, specifically his doctrine of limited atonement, has taken on certain modifications that enable his theology to be widely accepted without great controversy.²

PIPER’S OFFICIAL POSITION

John Piper’s website is clear that he adheres to the five points of Calvinism (TULIP). On this website, he specifically addressed the matter of limited atonement and briefly defended his position. The explanation of limited atonement includes two important points. First, Piper and the Bethlehem Baptist Church Staff asserted, “in the cross God had in view the actual redemption of his children. And we affirm that when Christ died for these, he did not just create the opportunity for them to save themselves, but really purchased for them all that was necessary to get them saved, including the grace of regeneration and the gift of faith.”³ This is important to note because it

¹ For example, he stated, “Our confidence in evangelism comes from God’s freedom to ‘have mercy on whomever he wills’ (Rom 9:18).” John Piper, The Justification of God, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 11.
² This entire article was sent to John Piper’s assistant, Justin Taylor, to ensure that Piper’s theological position was represented fairly.
connects God’s intentions in the cross particularly with the elect, propitiation is solely for the redeemed and none else.

Secondly, Piper and Bethlehem Baptist created a second or dualistic intention in the cross: “We do not deny that all men are the intended beneficiaries of the cross in some sense.” He continued citing biblical evidence for this position.

1 Timothy 4:10 says that Christ is “the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.” What we deny is that all men are intended as the beneficiaries of the death of Christ in the same way. All of God's mercy toward unbelievers—from the rising sun (Matthew 5:45) to the worldwide preaching of the gospel (John 3:16)—is made possible because of the cross.

This is crucial because it introduces the issue of duality in his doctrine of atonement. Therefore, Piper can tell all people that Christ died for them—he simply does not know how or to what extent. Though this dualist intention is present, he clearly stated that “Christ died for all the sins of some men.”

AMYRALDIANISM

How does this perspective correspond with traditional Reformed theology? This is an important question as Reformed theology has been by no means uniform. Since at least the seventeenth century, Reformed theology has responded to necessity to strands of theology within its ranks that have been found aberrant by those adhering to a more stringent system of limited atonement. An example of this is the debate which continues today over John Calvin’s own view of the extent of the atonement. Calvin’s own views aside, there were definitely theologians within the Reformed churches who held to a Calvinistic system that differed from both Arminianism and the more stringent forms connected with a strong view of limited atonement. The name of this more mediate Calvinistic system is often termed Amyraldism, or Amyraldianism, after Moises Amyraut.

It is important to note that this was actually a much wider movement than one man. The view of the atonement held by Amyraut was taught at the

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\(^4\) Ibid.

\(^5\) Ibid. Francis Turretin also affirmed that blessings to reprobates come from the cross, but he did not explore a strong duality of wills as Piper did. Francis Turretin, *The Atonement of Christ*, trans. James R. Wilson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 125.

\(^6\) Bethlehem Baptist, “Five Points of Calvinism” [on-line].

\(^7\) The following definitions see hypothetical universalism as the heart of Amyraldianism and/or Amyraut’s theology: Melanie Parry, “Amyraut,” in *Chambers Biographical Dictionary* (Edinburgh: W & R Chambers, 1990), 42; Andrew T. B.
theological school of Saumur, France. Amyraut modified certain doctrines regarding Christ’s work in what is understood to be the traditional Calvinist position. Roger Nicole, provided a helpful synopsis of Moises Amyraut’s theology.

In his [Amyraut’s] *Traité de la Prédestination* (1634) he claimed that God, moved by his love for mankind, had appointed all human beings to salvation provided they repent and believe. He sent his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to die for the sins of all mankind in order to implement this purpose. . . . Grace thus is seen as universal in the provision for salvation but as particular in the application of it.

The teaching of Moises Amyraut, his teacher John Cameron, and others at the French academy of Saumur made an impact on the acceptability and apologetics of the Calvinist Gospel call. This was done with the confidence that their position on the extent of the atonement was commensurate with both the Synod of Dort (1618) and the teachings of John Calvin. Martin Klauber explained how this teaching made Calvinism more palatable.

One of the main Roman Catholic objections against reformed theology was that Calvinism minimized the love and justice of God in favor of God’s decrees. The concepts of mediate imputation of Adam’s sin and hypothetical universalism upheld the reformed doctrines of the depravity of man and divine election while emphasizing that God offered each individual the fair opportunity to come to a saving knowledge of Christ.

The traditional view of limited atonement takes care to avoid giving unbelievers the notion that Christ’s death was specifically for them before they believe. This avoids presumptuous speculation on the extent of Christ’s work

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Roger Nicole disputed that this was a true defense of Calvin. Roger Nicole, review of *The Controversy Over the Theology of Saumur, 1635–1650: Disrupting Debates among the Huguenots in Complicated Circumstances*, by F. P. van Stam, *Westminster Theological Journal* 54 (Fall 1992): 394.

on the cross. The Gospel is simply to believe and repent rather than introducing common formulas such as “Christ died for you.”

Given this background, it is pertinent to consider the issue of Piper’s soteriology and its relationship to Amyraldianism and limited atonement. While the specific matters of the Gospel call and assurance are addressed specifically, the thrust of the case for considering Piper’s soteriology as Amyraldianism rests on how these areas relate to the core idea of God’s will. It is being asserted here that a reasonable case can be made that Piper’s position on the atonement differs from the traditional Reformed doctrine of limited atonement.

Piper did seek to extricate himself from the appearance of Amyraldianism. In their broad case against Calvinism, Walls and Dongell argued that a dualistic approach wherein “Christ died for the elect in a different sense than he died for the non-elect” goes against the “substance” of the traditional limited atonement view. For this reason, supporters of the traditional view of limited atonement such as B. B. Warfield have labeled these tendencies in generations past as “inconsistent particularism.” The official statement regarding limited atonement on Piper’s website explicitly denies Amyraldianism in concept, though not by name.

If you say that he died for every human being in the same way, then you have to define the nature of the atonement very differently than you would if you believed that Christ only died for those who actually believe. In the first case you would believe that the death of Christ did not actually save anybody; it only made all men savable. It did not actually remove God’s punitive wrath from anyone, but instead created a place where people could come and find mercy—IF they could accomplish their own new birth and bring themselves to faith without the irresistible grace of God.

Two key tenets are denied by such a statement. First, it is denied that the death of Christ made all men savable. Secondly, that the atonement created a hypothetical situation wherein all people can be saved on the condition of faith.

12 Compare with J. I. Packer on the puritan John Owen: “Preaching the gospel, he [Owen] tells us, is not a matter of telling the congregation that God has set his love on each of them and Christ has died to save each of them, for these assertions, biblically understood, would imply that they will all infallibly be saved, and this cannot be known to be true.” J. I. Packer, A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990), 139.

13 Jerry Walls and Joseph Dongell, Why I am Not a Calvinist (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 12.

14 Warfield listed Amyraldianism under the title “inconsistently particularistic” and he criticized it as having the same problems as the “Lutheran and the Arminian.” B. B. Warfield, The Plan of Salvation (Avinger, TX: Simpson Publishing Company, 1989), 17.

15 Bethlehem Baptist, “Five Points of Calvinism” [on-line].
Piper also posited a further attempt to strengthen his position on limited atonement by stating, “The death of Christ actually saves from ALL evil those for whom Christ died ‘especially.’”\textsuperscript{16}

It is fairly certain that Piper would decry the label of Amyraldian due to his assertion that the atonement is “definite.”\textsuperscript{17} He may even believe that his position on the atonement is commensurable with a traditional view of limited atonement. However, Piper’s discussions on the death of Christ suggest that he does not follow this traditional view. In spite of this, many of his works exhibit certain tendencies which evidence a hypothetical universalism which is the theological heart of Amyraldianism. The case for re-labeling Piper’s soteriology needs to be grounded on his perspective of God’s will. His official explanation of TULIP as set forth on his webpage entitled “Are There Two Wills in God?: Divine Election and God’s Desire for All to Be Saved” introduced a dualistic approach to God’s will. The introductory statement of this essay states:

My aim in this chapter is to show from Scripture that the simultaneous existence of God’s will for “all persons to be saved” (1 Tim. 2:4) and his will to elect unconditionally those who will actually be saved is not a sign of divine schizophrenia or exegetical confusion. A corresponding aim is to show that unconditional election therefore does not contradict biblical expressions of God’s compassion for all people, and does not nullify sincere offers of salvation to everyone who is lost among all the peoples of the world.\textsuperscript{18}

Throughout this essay he argued from the Bible that it is wrong to think that one can be reductionistic about the complex will and thoughts of God. This is grounded in his theology of Christian hedonism which is theocentric. While God has a real and genuine desire for all to be saved he is “committed to something even more valuable than saving all,” that is, the “full range of God’s glory.”\textsuperscript{19} This explains why God has what can be rightly considered to have a dualistic or multi-intention approach to salvation. According to Piper, God desires all to be saved and desires that only the elect should be saved. This he argued, is a well repeated biblical pattern.

This analysis of Piper’s soteriology seeks to trace how this dualism has effected his doctrine of limited atonement and several of its corollary doctrines.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} John Piper, \textit{Taste and See} (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2005), 252. The chapter referenced here includes statements that Piper preferred an infralapsarianism over a supralapsarianism due to his statements about God’s passive actions toward the reprobate.
\textsuperscript{18} John Piper, \textit{The Pleasures of God: Revised and Expanded} (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2000), 313.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 333.
Historically speaking, it seems that he has indeed moved away from the traditional view of limited atonement. A. A. Hodge, for example, averred that a position of “two wills or purposes in God in respect to man’s salvation” is a system identical to the position of Amyraut, Cameron, and the theological school of Saumur.20 Perhaps this is a signal that the features of modern day Calvinism is changing. By examining the Gospel call and assurance it will be determined whether Piper can maintain his propositions against Amyraldianism.

THE GOSPEL CALL

What exactly is the good news of the Gospel? Certainly both limited atonement proponents and others would point to Christ, but the issue requires more specificity. Certain questions get to the heart of this matter regarding the nature of the Gospel call. For example, how is an unbeliever to know that God loves him? Should unbelievers be told that Christ loves them if this love was shown primarily in the atonement, which is limited in scope? Does the Gospel call consist of a universal statement of God’s love, calling sinners to faith and repentance? How this call is framed and of what it consists are important questions because one’s view of the atonement plays a large role in the answers given.

Integral to Piper’s “Christian Hedonism” is pointing to God as the source of joy. That God is the source of everlasting joy is central to the Gospel call.21 Believers are to evangelize by “showing a dying soul the life-giving beauty of the glory of God, especially his grace.”22 The nature of Christ’s limited atonement does little to hinder Piper from pointing all people to the availability of this life-giving beauty and attracting glory. This is, in a manner of speaking, already a hypothetically universal atonement, for all people must suppose that God’s glory in the cross can be their source of joy. Piper illustrated: “This is how the Gospel is defined. When we are converted through faith in Christ, what we see with the eyes of our hearts is ‘the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God’ (2 Corinthians 4:4).”23 In another place he summarized the Gospel call as follows: “This ‘calling’ is the

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20 A. A. Hodge, *The Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 375. Hodge seemed to view God’s eternal and present will as being singular and having a singular salvific intention in the cross.
21 “Following a no-God—whatever his name or whatever his religion—will be a wasted life. God-in-Christ is the only true God and the only path to joy.” John Piper, *Don’t Waste Your Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), 38. Compare with statements concerning joy as duty in John Piper, *The Dangerous Duty of Delight* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2001), 27.
22 Piper, *Don’t Waste Your Life*, 34.
23 Ibid., 40.
merciful act of God to remove natural deadness and satanic blindness, so that we see Christ as true and good.”

The Gospel call of Piper gives great emphasis on the cross as displaying God’s glory, but does it also display his love in a universal fashion? Piper’s use of John 3:16 brings a complexity to the answer. On the one hand, Piper brings both believers and non-believers into a personal appropriation of Christ’s work through his use of key pronouns. He asked, “How shall God love us?” However, Piper moved quickly to the issue of “eternal life” which is to “know God and his Son, Jesus Christ,” who is the only one who can satisfy one’s soul because of His “excellence” or glory. It is not clear that Piper’s quick move to glory did justice to John’s emphasis on God’s love.

In Piper’s writing it is hard to distinguish between God’s love and God’s glory; and this is purposefully so. The love of God is considered penultimate and God’s glory ultimate. He stated, “In fact, that is what divine love is in the end: a passion to enthrall undeserving sinners, at great cost, with that will make us supremely happy forever, namely, his infinite beauty.” In his book *The Passion of Jesus Christ*, it is hard to understand how this glory calls a sinner individually with an assurance that is personally available. What is important to note is that God’s love is not demonstrated in being a substitutionary sacrifice, rather it is in the infinite measure of glory. The “degree” is emphasized rather than the legal nature of propitiation. In his review of *The Pleasures of God*, Bruce Ware’s understanding of the Gospel call of Piper is similar.

If God is not satisfied in being God, there is no reason we should think our satisfaction will be found in him. But, happily, God’s call to come to him to find what truly satisfies (e.g. Isa 55:1-3; Jer 2:11-13; Matt 11:28-30; Rev 22:17) is predicated on his own knowledge and experience of possessing the only true delight there is, in none other than in himself.

Ware’s assessment highlighted the fact that the biblical basis for a Gospel call of glory is not without biblical merit; the issue is whether Piper’s limited atonement prevents an equally biblical Gospel call of love that is demonstrated

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26 Ibid., 35.
27 “Christ’s dying for his own glory and his dying to show love are not only both true, they are both the same.” Piper, *Passion of Jesus Christ*, 82.
28 Piper, *Taste and See*, 44.
in a substitutionary sacrifice. For Piper, the Gospel call does focus on the cross and the love shown therein; but it is primarily a love that leads to the excellencies and glory of Christ which can satisfy and attract unbelievers.

When setting forth a Gospel call of love, the love flows not from propitiation or substitution but from the very fact that the Son of God was crucified. Piper asked, “What if . . . God really is the most admirable being in the universe? Would this not imply that God’s summons for our praise is the summons for our highest joy? And if the success of that summons cost Him the life of His Son, would that not be love (instead of arrogance)?” Here, it is difficult to find room for a Gospel of love for the unsaved wherein they can know Christ died as a substitution. Though assurance is discussed in the next section, it is sufficient to note that the sinner can be assured that God loves him or her because of the objective fact that the command to find joy in the cross cost the Father the life of His Son. This conjoining of love and glory would not be so problematical if one could be certain that love toward the sinner as its own theme is not flattened by the theme of glory.

At the very point when one could suggest that the theme of glory in the cross totally overshadows the theme of love in the cross, Piper surprised the astute reader. It would seem a natural theological conclusion to stress the joy-filled, attractive glory of the cross rather than its message of salvific love, which is only as broad as the elect for the classical limited atonement position. However, Piper seemed to disavow Warfield and the classical Calvinist tradition of limited atonement by presenting a “dualism” or a hypothetical universalism. On the same page wherein the extent of the atonement is limited to those who trust Christ, he made the following Gospel call: “But when, by grace, we waken to our unworthiness, then we may look at the suffering and death of Christ and say, ‘In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the [wrath-absorbing] propitiation for our sins’ (1 John 4:10).” Elsewhere he stated, “The measure of God’s love for us is shown . . . [in] the degree of his sacrifice in saving us from the penalty of our sin.”

Clearly Piper did not completely believe that Christ was the propitiation for all people, which would be the absolute antithesis of the limited

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31 John Piper, *Life as a Vapor: Thirty-One Meditations for Your Faith* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004), 159.
32 For example, Francis Turrettin viewed “a love of God towards the whole human family” as an Arminian tenet. Turrettin, *The Atonement of Christ*, 119.
33 Piper, *Passion of Jesus Christ*, 21 (emphasis in original). Compare with this statement: “No, Father, love is this: At great expense you made yourself my glory and my boast. . . . You sent your Son, the blazing center of your glory and your love.” Piper, *Don’t Waste Your Life*, 186.
atonement position. What he seemed to be doing was moving the reader to appropriate Christ by hypothetically assuming that Christ’s death was for him or her. Piper does not know if this love connected with propitiation is objectively true, but at times he assumed it to be so, creating a Gospel call that is essentially Amyraldian in nature. A message of God’s love to all was crucial to Amyraut who stated, Christ “died to fulfill the decree of the Father, which proceeded from an equal love to all.”

Again, according to A. A. Hodge, this is a modification of the classical limited atonement view. Hodge averred that a “love of mankind in general, coexisting with a good pleasure to allow the majority of those so loved to perish, some without even the knowledge of the redemption provided at such cost, and others without any saving interest in it” is antithetical to the traditional view of limited atonement.

The preface of *Don’t Waste Your Life* yields a key fact in this analysis: Piper wrote this particular book for an audience of both Christians and non-Christians. While making clear statements regarding a limited atonement, Piper also brought the reader (both Christian and non-Christian) into a literary “us” which appropriates Christ as a hypothetically universal atonement. He wrote, “To bring *us* to this highest and most durable of all pleasures, God made his Son, Jesus Christ, a bloody spectacle of blameless suffering and death.”

Again, he brought the reader into an assumption that the extent of Christ’s death was specifically for the reader: “To bring *us* to this highest and most durable of all pleasures, God made his Son, Jesus Christ, a bloody spectacle of blameless suffering and death. This is what it cost to rescue *us* from a wasted life.”

Other references invited the reader to assume with John Piper not simply a participation (*us*) but an understanding and appropriation of the cross that is personal (*my*). In one of his short meditations it is clear that the reader should appropriate these statements: “Christ became *my* damning record of bad (and good) deeds. He endured *my* damnation.”

There is then a tension that exists in the Gospel message of Piper. On the one hand, his Christian Hedonism focuses on the infinite glory and joy that God displayed in sending His Son to die on the cross. There is a universal love, but it is not clear that a sinner can know good news of God’s love that is rooted in a substitutionary sacrifice.

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35 Moises Amyraut, as quoted by Frances Turrettin, *The Atonement of Christ*, 155.
37 Piper, *Don’t Waste Your Life*, 9. Other books such as *Life as a Vapor* used inclusive language but did not specify or have an obvious intention toward non-believers.
38 Ibid., 38.
39 Ibid., 38.
40 Piper, *Passion of Jesus Christ*, 33.
ASSURANCE

One’s doctrine of the atonement has a significant impact upon the doctrine of assurance. On the unlimited atonement side of the debate, R. T. Kendall stated, “Had not Christ died for all, we could have no assurance that our sins have been expiated in God’s sight.” Likewise, M. Charles Bell stated, “We have assurance in union with him [Christ] on the basis of his work of atonement.”

Those ascribing to limited atonement, such as J. I. Packer, state that assured faith is based solely upon “the sufficiency of Christ, and the promise of God.” Assurance for the “limited atonement” position is thus ex post facto in connection with conversion because as Roger Nicole explained, “assurance, if it is to be reliable, needs to be grounded in something that actually makes a difference between the saved and the lost.” Those on the “unlimited atonement” side view the Gospel as providing its own objective assurance of faith: Christ died for you, Christ loves you and this is assured by virtue of His blood shed for you.

The central issue in this section is whether assurance is viewed as the essence of saving faith or whether assurance comes after saving faith when one’s works may be considered.

In the classical limited atonement model, God’s salvific intention and will are oriented exclusively upon the elect. However, Piper drifted from this position in his essay “Are There Two Wills in God?” He clearly demonstrated that God often operates with more than one intention, making the case that the “simultaneous existence of God’s will for ‘all persons to be saved’ (1 Tim. 2:4) and his will to elect unconditionally those who will actually be saved is not a sign of divine schizophrenia or exegetical confusion.” Nevertheless, how does the sinner know this “will for all to be saved” applies subjectively? Is the

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42 M. Charles Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology: The Doctrine of Assurance* (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1985), 25. In this area, Bell agreed with Kendall and argued at length that this was John Calvin’s view.

43 Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 140.


45 “It is false, however, that all men are bound to believe that Christ died for them simply and absolutely.” Turrettin, *The Atonement of Christ*, 177.

atonement part of this revelation and the ground of assurance? Randall Zachman asked this relevant question: Is assurance predicated “on the basis of what God has done for us once for all in Jesus Christ, revealed to us in the gospel through the Holy Spirit? Or do we know this on the basis of what God is doing in us through the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit?”

Understanding Piper’s doctrine of assurance means understanding his theology of “Christian Hedonism.” Central to his “Christian Hedonism” is the joy that is found in knowing Christ. He defined limited atonement as “the assurance that indestructible joy in God is infallibly secured for us by the blood of the covenant.”

Having an assurance of this joy is a decisive issue because while Christ’s person and work may be infinitely sufficient in the classical view of limited atonement, this is not primarily due to God’s intentions for the whole world. While most who adhere to limited atonement believe that the Gospel can be offered genuinely because of Christ’s infinite sufficiency, rarely is Christ viewed as being offered as a source of joy to all men. A believer’s joy is a knowledgeable faith that Christ has done something on the cross. Piper stated, “That very statement is the key to endurance and joy. ‘Christ Jesus has made me his own.’” However, when is this knowledge that “I am his own” possible?

When addressing Christians, Piper freely pointed to the atonement as the objective ground of assurance: “And He is for us. The gospel is the good news that, because of Christ’s blood and righteousness, we are justified by faith alone, and God is for us forever.” In a different book, he connected assured faith with joy, “I am saying that gladness in God is the goal of all saving work, and the experiential essence of what it means to be saved.” He continued, rooting the subjective in the objective: “So when I speak of making someone glad in God . . . I include the all-sufficient redeeming work of Christ in death and resurrection (Romans 3:24-26).” Here, joy is the essence of an assured faith which is confident in the cross for salvation. In Future Grace, he stated, “The hand that turns the key is faith, and the life that results in living by faith in future grace . . . By faith I do not merely mean the confidence that Jesus died for your sins, but also the confidence that God will also with him freely give us

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48 Piper, Taste and See, 73.
49 Piper, Passion of Jesus Christ, 49.
50 It could be argued that this statement is thinking after conversion, being in a book primarily for Christians. Piper, Life as a Vapor, 169 (emphasis in original).
51 Piper, Don’t Waste Your Life, 104.
52 Ibid., 104 (emphasis in original).
all things’ (Romans 8:32). These references speak of a joyful assurance in the objective (what God has done), but the imminent issue is not addressed because it is not clear whether this joy in redemption and propitiation is offered to the unbeliever as integral to the Gospel.

Piper specifically addressed assurance and the approximate question: How can I know that I am of the elect? Before addressing this matter, he stressed specifically his primary view that that Christ’s death is limited in extent. Regarding the cross, he asked:

“For whom? It says, ‘Christ loved the church and give himself up for her’ (Ephesians 5:25). ‘Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends’ (John 15:13). ‘The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give himself a ransom for many’ (Matthew 20:28).

Piper’s question leads to the following: Am I among the “many”? In this case, it seems the logic of particular redemption side prevails. He did not assure the reader that the cross itself testifies to the sinner that he or she is among the “many.” Faith is not described as an act of “appropriation” or a grasping of infinite joy; rather, he stressed verses such as Acts 16:31, 10:43, Romans 10:13, John 1:12, and 3:16 to impress upon the reader the command to simply believe. In this case, one can assume that assurance is a more subjective matter as it seems that Piper was intending to hinge assurance on one’s belief or unbelief. The self, or, what God is doing in individuals primarily testifies of God’s will.

Piper’s answer to that of Zachman’s question was that neither the objective nor the subjective exclude the other. The role of subjectivity was explained in his more detailed exposition of the doctrine of assurance: Taste and See. He began the work by disavowing that either God for us (the objective warrant) or God in us (the subjective warrant) dominates the other; he desired to hold both in tension. He viewed the objective warrant as “the finished work of Christ on the cross” and the subjective warrant as “our faith” which is composed of both “spiritual sight of glory (or beauty) in the Christ of the gospel” and “a warranted resting in this glorious gospel.” Initially it appears as though even the subjective is composed of an outward look to Christ. However, the question of “ground” reappears. Both the spiritual sight of Christ and the resting are explained in identical terms: seeing and understanding that

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53 Piper, Future Grace (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1995), 13 (emphasis in original).
54 Piper, Passion of Jesus Christ, 30-31 (emphasis in original).
55 This assertion is somewhat tentative as it is unclear what he intended to communicate by quoting all of these verses without an explanation.
56 Piper, Taste and See, 87.
Christ is “glorious.” In light of Christian Hedonism this means that faith is finding joy in the offer of the joy of the glorious cross. However, this is somewhat circular because one has not been assured that this substitutionary sacrifice is extended to all. The “joy” is either grounded on a hypothetical universalism or it is a commanded joy that is not grounded in a universal atonement. In other words, one can only have a certainty that Christ on the cross is pro nobis (i.e. for him) until he views Him in His glory and rests upon Him in faith. If one grants with Piper that Christ did not die for all, assurance of salvation is not grounded in a knowledge that Christ is in one’s place, but rather that Christ is simply glorious on the cross without any reference to the sinner.

Assurance in the theology of John Piper is closely related to his view of the atonement. The cross of Christ demonstrates the full glory of Christ which is divine love; it is what calls the sinner to ultimate joy and satisfaction. It is because this glory is infinite that it is sufficient for a universal Gospel call and a corresponding assurance; one could surely say that this glory is enough to satisfy. Nevertheless, herein lies a difference between Piper and Amyraldianism: the later emphasizes that assurance is the essence of faith that Christ was on the cross for all sinners, whereas the former emphasizes that assurance is based on the fact that Christ’s death is sufficient to meet God’s demand for joy in him.

That there is an objective and a subjective side to assurance which must be held together necessitates an objective grace and a subjective grace. The objective grace of the cross must communicate to the unconverted that Christ is for him or her; subjective grace from the Holy Spirit confirms this with faith. A. A. Hodge viewed the distinction between objective and subject grace as an Amyraldian doctrine that deviated from the Reformed tradition on limited atonement. He noted that Amyraut held that objective grace rendered salvation universally available to all men and that subjective grace was designed for the elect alone and graciously gave the ability to believe the Gospel. Hodge averred that Christ was only offered as objectively as he was subjectively received. In other words, “the actual ends effected are the exact measure of the real ends designed.”

Piper did not exactly follow either model exactly by accepting the distinction between objective and subjective grace on the one

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57 In the first instance, he stated, “For faith to be real there must be a supernatural ‘light’ that God shines into the heart to show us that Christ is glorious” and in the second instance he stated that people are not saved because “they have never come to see the glory of Christ as compellingly glorious.” Ibid. (emphasis added).


59 Ibid., 361.
hand, while on the other hand insisting at times that faith is required for one to know that God has a salvific stance toward a specific sinner.

The question of whether Piper is truly following in the legacy of John Calvin is a difficult question because the process of answering it requires an immersion in a whole litany of debates over historical theology (the scope of which is beyond this article). To summarize, contemporary theologians like Bell, Clifford, Daniel, Kendall, Thomas, (in addition to the Saumur schoolmen) and others believe that Calvin taught a universal atonement and a view of faith that had assurance as its very essence. Assuming this position, Piper differed from both Calvin and Luther, who maintained, “the conscience—whether of the infidel or the believer—cannot testify to itself as to God’s will toward us.”

Zachman explained that the “testimony of a good conscience has a legitimate place in both Luther’s and Calvin’s theology; yet such testimony does not tell us about the grace or favor of God toward us, but only about the sincerity of our response to that grace in faith and love.”

By not allowing the objective warrant of the cross of Christ to supersede faith, one’s works are always a part of assurance in Piper’s theology. In other words, one can only have a certainty that Christ on the cross is pro nobis until he views Him in His glory and finds himself resting upon Christ in faith. If one will grant Piper that Christ did not die for all, one can only have assurance of salvation until enough works are produced to testify to one’s own conscience whether there is actual evidence of this faith. Therefore, saving faith is not, by Piper’s definition an assured faith because while it will always produce works instantaneously, these works may not be self evident to the believer instantaneously. This a posteriori syllogism is as follows: “Christ died for all who believe and repent; but I believe and repent; therefore, he died for me.”

This is similar to Francis Turrettin who stated, “even all those who hear the Gospel are not bound to believe directly and immediately, that Christ died for them, but mediately.” Piper’s view, like Turrettin’s, arguably falls under the scrutiny of Kendall’s thesis wherein he argued that the Puritans followed a model that departed from Calvin and made assurance subjective via personal introspection of works.

Again, a tension exists within Piper’s soteriology. The cross offers infinite joy and satisfaction in God but the faith that appropriates this is not fully assured. This is in conjunction with some theological language that invites the sinner to find assurance in appropriating Christ and His work based upon the hypothesis that Christ was one’s substitute and redeemer on the cross.

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61 Ibid., 6.
63 Ibid., 177.
CONCLUSION

There is an internal paradox within Piper’s view of limited atonement. On the one hand he affirmed, “there is no dispute that Christ died so that we may say to all persons everywhere without exception: God gave his only begotten Son to die for sin so that if you believe on him you may have eternal life.” On the other hand, he denied that “God intended to make salvation possible for all persons.” Consequently, must one tell the world that “Christ died for your sins” all the while knowing such was not God’s intention? Unfortunately, Piper’s theology of God’s will and the possibility of multiple intentions is not applied consistently to this problem. This paradox is often solved via a hypothetical universalism but not in a strong enough way to label him as fully Amyraldian. He cannot fully maintain his case against Amyraldianism, but nor should he be labeled as such without qualification.

Combining Christian Hedonism with limited atonement presents difficulties that destroy the congruity of Piper’s theology. Piper responded to the demand for joy in God as secondary by stating: “They say things like, ‘Don’t pursue joy; pursue obedience.’ But Christian Hedonism responds, ‘That’s like saying ‘Don’t eat apples; eat fruit.’ Because joy is an act of obedience. We are commanded to rejoice in God.” For Piper, duty-joy is essentially equal to duty-joy; they are one and the same. However, what is referent for this duty-joy? It is joy in a limited atonement as classically understood? This is a difficult question. In some places this joy is not presented as immediately being connected with a propitiatory sacrifice because it cannot be immediately known as such. When limited atonement presents a significant challenge to the Gospel call and assurance, some aspects are modified in an Amyraldian-like manner in order to provide for appropriation of Christ as a propitiation. The sinner is called to find joy directly and immediately in “Christ for me.” In such cases the parlance of palatable Calvinism is this: God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him whom one is to assume to be the savior and redeemer of all men.

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64 Piper, Taste and See, 326.
65 Ibid., 326.
67 Ibid., 21.
THE ROLE OF THE RESURRECTION IN CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS: AN ANSWER FROM PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETICS

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In 1 Corinthians 15:14, the apostle Paul left little doubt about the centrality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ for the Christian faith. He asserted bluntly and unequivocally, “if Christ has not been raised then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.” As Gordon Fee has noted, “There seems to be little hope of getting around Paul’s argument, that to deny Christ’s resurrection is tantamount to a denial of Christian existence altogether.”

THE RESURRECTION AS SOMETHING “TO BE PROVEN”

Sensing the crucial significance of the resurrection, Christian apologists have typically approached the resurrection as a problem to be solved or its denial a challenge to be addressed. In short, the resurrection of Jesus is understood as “something to be proven,” or short of proven, that which is the “best explanation of the evidence” such that any rational person ought to believe it. This procedure usually involves seeking some “neutral” ground or commonly accepted criteria upon which to build an empirical argument based on the historical facts or evidences found in the resurrection narratives. Typical in this

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1 Gordon D. Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 745. Fee’s comment concerns the entire passage of 1 Corinthians 15:12-19. Fee added, “Yet many do so—to make the faith more palatable to ‘modern man,’ we are told. But that will scarcely do. What modern man accepts in its place is no longer the Christian faith.”

2 Stephen T. Davis, Risen Indeed (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 168, argued, “Clearly, anyone who wants to argue in favor of belief in the resurrection of Jesus—as I am doing—must make a powerful case.” Hank Hanegraaff, Resurrection (Nashville: Word, 2000), 15, wrote similarly, “It is precisely because of the strategic importance of the resurrection that each Christian must be prepared to defend its historicity. Because of its centrality to Christianity, those who take the sacred name of Christ upon their lips must be prepared to defend the reliability of the resurrection.”


4 A “softer” version of this approach is advocated by Davis who sought only to demonstrate (presumably to the unbeliever) that it is rational for a supernaturalist to believe in the resurrection. Davis, Risen Indeed, 2, 169, 173.
regard is the work of William Lane Craig. Craig began by establishing “the factors that historians typically weigh in testing a historical hypothesis.” He identified seven of these and then proceeded to apply them to the “hypothesis” of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, specifically “God raised Jesus from the dead.” The evidences used to test the hypothesis are three: the empty tomb, the postmortem appearances of Jesus, and the origin of the disciples’ belief in the resurrection. His conclusion is that the “hypothesis” of the resurrection is “the best explanation of this body of evidence.” In another work he stated the point simply:

The historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus consists primarily in the evidence supporting three main facts: the empty tomb of Jesus, the appearances of Jesus to his disciples, and the origin of the Christian faith. If it can be shown that the tomb of Jesus was found empty, that he did appear to his disciples and others after his death, and that the origin of the Christian faith cannot be explained adequately apart from his historical resurrection, then if there is no plausible natural explanation for these facts, one is amply justified in concluding that Jesus did rise from the dead.

The Flaws of the Resurrection “To Be Proven” Approach

There are several problems with the approach that the resurrection is something “to be proven.” First, one may consider just two of the “factors that historians typically weigh in testing a historical hypothesis.” The sixth factor, for instance, says “the hypothesis must be disconfirmed by fewer accepted beliefs” and the fourth factor says “the hypothesis must be more plausible . . . than rival hypotheses.” Craig concluded that the resurrection hypothesis is well substantiated in the light of these factors. Of course, this is predicated on the assumption that the Gospel narratives, which relay the evidence, are themselves reliable documents. If one does not accept the reliability of the Gospels, the credibility of the evidence is suspect and the hypothesis is accordingly weak. Even if the Gospel records are accorded a measure of historical reliability the evidence will be implausible unless one “abandons the philosophical prejudice against the miraculous.” For his part Craig wrote, “I cannot think of any accepted beliefs that disconfirm the resurrection hypothesis—unless one thinks

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5 Craig has reproduced this same basic line of argument in several of his works, in addition to his contribution in Jesus Under Fire is chapter 8 in Reasonable Faith, rev. ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 1994) and The Son Rises: Historical Evidence of the Resurrection of Jesus (reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000).
6 Craig, “Did Jesus Rise,” 143.
7 Craig, The Son Rises, 45.
8 Craig, “Did Jesus Rise,” 163.
9 Ibid.
that ‘Dead men do not rise’ is disconfirmatory. But then we are just back to the problem of miracles again.”

So then, in the effort to establish the historicity of the resurrection, the matter must begin with establishing the historical reliability of the Gospel narratives and then it withdraws from “looking at the evidence” to the question “are miracles possible?” If one holds a “philosophical prejudice” against the miraculous, such that “the dead do not rise,” then the historical evidences will probably not be compelling. The situation here appears to be similar to the one envisioned by Richard Swinburne.

Swinburne suggested that there are of two kinds of evidence; one he calls “historical evidence” and the other is called “background evidence.” The former kind of evidence is that of personal experience, “testimony of witnesses and physical traces” (in Craig’s understanding this would be the three historical evidences). The “background evidence” wrote Swinburne, “will be evidence of what normally happens.” As Swinburne described the “background evidence,” it is something of a “paradigm.” Or, might it be said that the “background evidence” is a worldview or a set of presuppositions? In any case, when there is a “clash” between this background evidence and the historical evidence, Swinburne wrote, “it must be that either that background theory is false or that the historical evidence is misleading. In any such ‘clash,’ he suggests we must weigh the two types of evidence against each other.”

Swinburne applied all of this to the question of the resurrection of Jesus and noted (as one might expect, given what has been noted regarding the “philosophical prejudice against the miraculous”) that David “Hume was concerned with just such a clash.”

Hume, of course, denied the credibility of miracles, in part, because he defined a miracle as “a violation of the laws of nature.” This was part of Hume’s “background theory.” Additionally, Hume’s background theory was based on something he called “uniform experience.” Where is this leading? In critique of Hume, Swinburne noted, “Hume’s worst mistake was to suppose

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10 Ibid., 165.
12 Ibid.
13 Paradigm is not his term, but it suggests itself because Swinburne used the illustration of what he called “the Aristotelio-Ptolemaic theory” of planetary motion as an instance of “background evidence” to which is compared and contrasted the “historical evidence” of Tycho Brahe’s observations on planetary motion. The scientific allusion naturally brings to mind the work of Thomas Kuhn!
15 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
that the only relevant background theory to be established from wider experience was a scientific theory about what are the laws of nature. . . . If there is no God, then the laws of nature are the ultimate determinants of what happens. But if there is a God, then whether, and for how long and under what circumstances laws of nature operate depend on God.\textsuperscript{18} Swinburne suggested that there is a “lot of evidence for the existence of God”\textsuperscript{19} but his “main point is that we need that sort of background theory, well supported by evidence [this is taken to mean, one needs the theory “God” supported by evidence for God in the background theory] if our evidence [here he means the historical evidence] is to give a significant overall probability to the resurrection.”\textsuperscript{20} In other words, it would seem that only if one’s background knowledge includes the existence of God, are miracles credible; and, only if miracles are credible may one proceed to determine if a miracle has actually occurred by examining the historical evidence.

At this point, while the chains of sentences without interruption in this article, which are made necessary in order to follow the evidentialist’s argument, are making it harder to understand the argument, the objection to this method of substantiating the credibility of the resurrection by the marshalling of historical evidences should be getting clear. As Craig has virtually conceded, if the background knowledge is “dead men do not rise” the resurrection hypothesis is disconfirmed.\textsuperscript{21} This may be a “philosophical prejudice” or it may be the presupposition of the convinced naturalist who has a reasonably good grasp of the “evidence of what normally happens,” or it may be the supposed “uniform experience” of the skeptic. In any case, given (or presupposing) the background knowledge “dead men do not rise” the result is the historical evidences will not be plausible. Historical evidences will only be compelling given a harmonious “background theory.” Only if God’s existence is “presupposed” or in some fashion supported by evidence, such that the miraculous is plausible, may any particular miracle be judged plausible by historical evidences.\textsuperscript{22} Craig attempted to address this problem by stating that the “hypothesis” he was examining is “God raised Jesus from the dead.”\textsuperscript{23} Craig seemed to assume that any theistic background knowledge will alleviate the problem of implausibility for his historical evidences. He wrote, “I should say that the hypothesis that God raised Jesus from the dead has about zero implausibility with respect to our background knowledge.”\textsuperscript{24} However, if one

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  \item \textsuperscript{18} Swinburne, “Evidence for the Resurrection,” 198.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 202.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 206 (emphasis added).
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Craig, “Did Jesus Rise,” 165.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} What would “God” mean to someone who denied the resurrection?
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Craig, “Did Jesus Rise,” 146.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
considers that Craig’s stated hypothesis is “God raised Jesus [the Messiah, the Son of God] from the dead” there must be evidence that the “God” of the hypothesis is the Trinitarian God of the Bible. It is difficult to imagine the Deists or Muslims conceding that this hypothesis has “zero implausibility with respect to the content of their particular background knowledge.” The background knowledge of those theists would still render the hypothesis “God raised Jesus from the dead” implausible in spite of the historical evidences. The apologist would need to marshal some evidences to the effect that background knowledge is not merely theistic but that the “God” being referred to in the hypothesis is the Trinitarian God of the Bible. Clearly much has to be demonstrated before Craig’s hypothesis “God raised Jesus from the dead” has anything like “zero implausibility” based on the historical evidence. However, it is difficult to imagine what specific sort of evidence one might present for the Trinitarian God of the Bible apart from the Bible itself. Once again it is clear that without the presupposition of the Trinitarian God of the Bible the “historical evidences” will be less than plausible in a “clash” with an incommensurate “background theory.”

However, could a background knowledge, which includes “dead men do not rise,” be weak enough and the historical evidence for the resurrection be compelling enough to overcome the problem? Craig apparently thought so given a situation in which all hypotheses are equally implausible to the (naturalist’s) background knowledge. If no explanation of the empty tomb is any more compelling than another in the background knowledge (of either supernaturalist or naturalist) then the greater plausibility (or lesser implausibility) must be decided on “the specific evidence itself.”25 Craig for his part would have no such “philosophical prejudice” and proposed to “leave open the possibility of adopting a supernatural explanation if the facts should so warrant.”26 However, this is simply to play fast and loose with the notion of “background knowledge.” Such knowledge is not “constructed” by the evidences or facts but is constitutive of what counts as evidence or fact. “Facts and events have ultimate meaning only within and by virtue of the context of the world view in which they are conceived.”27

Furthermore, if there was a case in which all explanations of a purported historical fact or evidence were equally implausible one can think of at least one option not considered by Craig—the purported event did not

25 Ibid.
26 Ibid. This author would strongly suspect and fervently hope that his brother in Christ has done more than this! Indeed, the author does believe and hope his brother has “sanctified Christ as Lord in his heart.”
happen! That is, if all reports of an event are implausible the most plausible solution is the reports are fictions and the event is fictitious. So again, the problem is relegated to the question of the reliability of the Gospel records. It might also be noted that while highly unlikely, there is, given the background knowledge of the naturalist (unfortunately), a greater degree of plausibility for the explanation that the disciples stole the body than there is for the resurrection. There may be nothing (in the records) to indicate that these disciples stole the body of Jesus, and it may seem quite implausible that they did so, but in the wider background knowledge of the naturalist grave robbing is not unheard of while it remains true (again, in the wider background knowledge of the naturalist) that “dead men do not rise.” In short, it simply is not the case that the hypothesis “the disciples stole the body” has zero plausibility in the wider background knowledge of a naturalist.

However, could the evidentialist grant the resurrection hypothesis another life by answering these objections (and better ones)\(^28\) to his method with complicated formulas measuring the probability of the resurrection hypothesis given the conclusions of “natural theology?” In the volume *Five Views of Apologetics*, Craig suggested, “if we allow that the moral argument as well as the *kalam* argument succeeds, we have enough information for the evidentialist’s case to proceed.”\(^29\) However, this has not solved the problem previously identified with respect to the Deist and the Muslim. The deliverances of natural theology (of which there is much to remain dubious\(^30\)) simply do not connect necessarily with the hypothesis “God raised Jesus from the dead,”\(^31\) such that the hypothesis has “zero implausibility” even granting the


\(^{29}\) Ibid., 327.


\(^{31}\) In brief, this author does not think Craig successfully answered Clark’s objections to evidentialism. The author’s symbolic logic skills are no match for Craig’s, but it just seems (intuitively) that if the historical evidence (which may be accepted as reliable only after the Gospel records are themselves demonstrated to be reliable), depends for its plausibility upon the background knowledge of the possibility of miracles, which is in turn dependent on the success of the deliverances of natural theology, the case has not been made stronger but weaker because of the multiplication of prerequisites. Here is the point: there is a good reason to think that the “chain” of “historical evidences” (from documents that require demonstration of reliability) linked to “the possibility of miracles” linked to the “deliverances of natural theology” is one that is not stronger as the links are added but weaker. On another note, it seems that to appeal to an anecdote of a purportedly successful evening of evidentialist apologetics as Craig did (“A Classical Apologist’s Closing Remarks,” 327-28) is an instance of the
background knowledge of God’s existence. Simply put, whose God, which God, is in the background knowledge delivered by natural theology?

To summarize the evidentialist’s approach, he seeks to employ historical criteria that are neutral and accepted by everyone to establish his “hypothesis” “God raised Jesus from the dead.” However, he must first establish the credibility and reliability of the Gospel records and then apply the “neutral criteria” (of course, the application of the criteria might be so strong that no hypothesis is deemed plausible and so the question of the credibility of the records is reopened). Nevertheless, when such criteria are employed they are controlled by the background knowledge of the hearer and so the evidentialist must become natural theologian to overcome the philosophical prejudice against the miraculous. However, even then the deliverances of natural theology are not guarantors of the essentially Christian hypothesis “God raised Jesus from the dead.” So the evidentialist must present evidence of the Trinitarian God of the Bible. However, if he could do that, then attempts to prove the resurrection hypothesis would probably be moot; whereas failure at any “link” in the chain gives the unbeliever all he needs to dismiss the hypothesis.

Another more troubling problem with this procedure is the implicit (and sometimes explicit) separation of the “historical fact” of the resurrection of Jesus and the “theological meaning” of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The problem created for the apologist by this move should be obvious. One may ask what prevents someone from affirming the “historical fact” of the bodily resurrection Jesus of Nazareth while denying that it proves anything about Christianity (or the background knowledge of a Trinitarian theist)? This is precisely the thesis of Pinchas Lapide. Lapide, “a Jewish New Testament theologian,” wrote, “according to my opinion, the resurrection belongs to the category of truly real and effective occurrences . . . a fact of history.” Of the resurrection he wrote, “something must have happened which we can designate as a historical event since its results were historical.” In the introduction of Lapide’s book, Carl E. Braaten asked the obvious question, “If Lapide believes

informal fallacy of an appeal to the people or perhaps a causal fallacy—perhaps it was much more the loving community than the evidentialist apologetics that generated the positive response Craig noted!

32 See Wilbur M. Smith, Therefore Stand (Boston: W. A Wilde, 1945), 386, who wrote, “The meaning of the resurrection is a theological matter, but the fact of the resurrection is a historical matter.”


34 Ibid., 6.

35 Ibid., 92

36 Ibid., 127-28.
in the resurrection of Jesus, why then is he not a Christian? . . . Lapide’s answer is very simple: Because the resurrection does not prove that Jesus is the Messiah . . . yes, the resurrection happened, but no, this doesn’t prove he is the Messiah.”

It would appear that Lapide’s Jewish background knowledge has allowed him to accept the historical evidences without accepting the meaning that Craig and other evidentialists assume for these evidences based on their Trinitarian background knowledge. Indeed, what would prevent anyone from accepting the historical evidences as “facts” even so far as accepting the “fact” of the bodily resurrection, and proceed simply to dismiss them as oddities worthy of a segment on *Ripley’s Believe it or Not?*

Even if the apologist, using autonomous values and patterns of reasoning, does show that the body of Jesus was probably resuscitated [or experienced some sort of revivification] the naturalistic unbeliever need not conclude that Christianity is true, that Jesus is God, or even that God exists. . . . The naturalist may, his presuppositions undisturbed, accept that the body of Jesus came back to life, reasoning that if we had more information, we would be able to understand the “natural factors” that were no doubt involved however infrequently they occur.

Only by starting with the background knowledge of the Trinitarian God of the Bible, and by presenting the claims of Christ within the entire system of fact and meaning entailed in Christianity will the evidences be properly interpreted. Furthermore, this whole procedure of establishing “factors of historical credibility” and marshaling evidences for the historicity of the resurrection, stands in marked contrast to the procedure of the Apostles depicted in the book of Acts. In Acts 2, the resurrection is a key fact about Christ in Peter’s message (2:22-36). Here the resurrection functions to explain the phenomena of Pentecost by explaining that the same Jesus who was crucified, was raised, and “having been exalted to the right hand of God . . . has poured forth this which you both see and hear” (2:33). If one accepts that “God raised him up” (2:24), one must accept that “God made him both Lord and Christ” (2:36). In Acts 4, the resurrection is the validating claim that supports the assertion the lame man was healed (3:6-8) “by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene” (4:10). Moreover, in Acts 17, to the philosophers at Athens, Paul claimed that God “will judge the world in righteousness,” and in confirmation of that intention he “furnished proof to all men by raising Jesus from the dead” (17:31). Quite clearly, in this instance, the resurrection is appealed as “that

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37 Ibid., 15. For Lapide, the resurrection is a “Jewish faith event.”
39 Ibid., 646.
which proves” not an event to be proven by historical evidences. Simply put, the Apostles never approach the resurrection as a historical fact that needs to be proven or established as credible, they used the truth of the resurrection as a fact that proves that Jesus is the Messiah!\footnote{40}

At this point, an evidentialist may suggest that when the Apostles claimed to be “witnesses” of the resurrection they themselves were appealing to “the evidence of the postmortem appearances” (cf. Acts 2:32; 3:15; 4:33; 5:32; 10:39, 41; 13:31; 26:22). Actually, the term “witness” (μαρτυρεῖς, 2:32) and the related “testifying” (μαρτυρόμενος, 26:22) do not have the connotation “presenter” or “presentation” of evidences but rather simply that of “proclaimer/proclamation of Christ.” The key to understanding each of these uses of μαρτυρέω is Acts 1:8b where Jesus commissioned His Apostles to “be My witnesses.” Jesus was not telling His men to take the physical evidence of their own eyewitness testimony and relay that evidence to others. He was telling them to take the power of the Holy Spirit (1:8a) and preach Christ. As Lothar Coenen observed in The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, in Acts the term μαρτυρέω is no longer used for “witnesses of facts, but specifically for the witnesses of the risen Lord, who by this qualification are authorized and legitimated as his witnesses among the nations.” Therefore, a witness is one who bears “the full proclamation of the message of Christ.”\footnote{41} This sense of “witness” makes the best sense of all the uses of “witness” in Acts in contexts dealing with the proclamation of the resurrection. For instance, in Acts 5:32, the Apostles affirmed, “we are witnesses of these things and so is the Holy Spirit.” Clearly the “witness” of the Holy Spirit is not an objective presentation of physical evidences. Neither the Apostles nor the Holy Spirit were involved in a process anything like the seeking of some “neutral” ground or commonly accepted criteria upon which to build an empirical argument based on the historical facts or evidences. They were involved in a mission of proclamation of what they knew to be true! They were preaching from the background knowledge of the presupposed existence of the Trinitarian God of the Bible who raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

\footnote{40} It would be a facile response to say that people in the modern era need rational arguments and “historical evidences” which people in the first century did not require. It is a form “historical prejudice” (or hubris) to suggest that men are more sophisticated today and that we therefore must have “rational arguments” which the (what? credulous?) first century men did not require. That sort of historicism is what lay behind the “demythologizing” enterprise of Bultmann.

In contrast to the approach of the Apostles is the evidentialist’s approach. In short, the evidentialist has presented the apologetic argument in a fragmentary manner. He has done so in order to avoid “circular reasoning.” He tries to establish neutral, value free historical evidence that is interpreted on its own terms, not by some “philosophical prejudice.” As Craig has said, he desired to “remain open to the possibility of adopting a supernatural explanation if the facts should so warrant.” However, the historical evidences will be persuasive of the hypothesis, “God raised Jesus from the dead,” only when they are interpreted through the background knowledge of (one who accepts the reliability of the Gospel records) supernaturalism cum theism cum Christian-Trinitarianism. Alan G. Pagett’s article in The Resurrection identified the fallacies of this approach. Padgett wrote concerning what he called “the neutrality two step.” He described the two-step as follows: first scholars recognize that everyone has some kind of bias (i.e. background knowledge); then,

Having recognized the prejudice of perspective, however, scholars still seem to hope that our biases and prejudices can be overcome through careful religious neutrality and scientific method. Let us pay attention to the facts and hope that all this interpretation stuff goes away. . . . As long as we focus on the right methodology, are rigorously skeptical of the sources and are as neutral and scientific as possible excluding religious presuppositions, then the prejudice of perspective will not affect our results.

This, said Padgett, is self-delusion on the part of scholars. He cited several examples of this “neutrality two-step” one of which is Gary Habermas, a conservative apologist. Habermas was quoted as writing, “The best approach to take towards history is one of caution, as we should try and recognize this subjective bias and then make the proper allowance for it.” Habermas’ statement, wrote Padgett, “is an almost perfect example of what I mean by the neutrality two-step.” However, the neutrality two-step has a “fundamental flaw” (viz. “all data is already infected by theory. Worldviews don’t just give us the questions we ask: they also affect our understanding of the evidence and our historical judgment. There is no such thing as data apart from some

42 Craig, “Did Jesus Rise,” 146.
44 Ibid., 292.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid., 292-93.
Furthermore, the neutrality two-step is self-deluding; it claims neutrality but actually leads to a bias against religious commitment for the premise of neutrality is “we can think for ourselves without reference to or dependence upon God.” Perhaps this bias is what Craig attempted to challenge when he stated being open to the supernatural (as opposed to the naturalist’s prejudice against the supernatural). Apparently he was attempting for an even more neutral neutrality! However, he too committed the error of the neutrality two-step for he assumed he can start (or appear to start) without presuppositions or constitutive background knowledge that the supernatural (God) does in fact exist (this author does not think Craig does or can; but for that, as a Christian brother he is thankful). Simply put, no set of “historical hypothesis testing factors” escapes from the influence of some “background knowledge.” Presuppositions are unavoidable; merely acknowledging them does not make them disappear. Padgett suggested that the myth of the neutrality two-step be exposed as fallacious and abandoned. This author would agree.

THE RESURRECTION AS SOMETHING THAT PROVES

As depicted in Acts, the Apostles did not approach the resurrection as a problem or a hypothesis to be proven. They did not marshal arguments for the plausibility of the hypothesis based on credible evidences. The pertinence of this inarguable observation must not be overlooked by a facile historicism which suggests that such argumentation was not needed because the men of the first century held an un-scientific or pre-scientific or even theistic worldview. It must be understood that the common “background knowledge” of the men of the first century was (like the common “background knowledge” of the men of the twenty-first century) “dead men do not rise.” Take, for instance, just as examples, the philosophers of Athens in Acts 17 or the Sadducees (cf. Acts 23:6-8). It may be called “philosophical prejudice,” Satanic blindness, (2 Cor 4:4), the blindness of sin, (cf. 1 Cor 1:17—2:16), or simply the “uniform experience” of the men of the first century, but whatever cause it is observed that the Apostles faced this background knowledge that “dead men do not rise,” not by evidences and rational arguments for natural theology. In the teeth of this “background knowledge,” the Apostles preached “Christ is risen from the dead!” For the Apostles, the resurrection was the proof of the message they preached (salvation is found in Jesus Christ). This is the proper use of the resurrection in Christian apologetics.

Theologian Thomas F. Torrance helped to understand why the resurrection must be the proof of the Christian message. Torrance, as any who

47 Ibid.
are familiar with his work will know, sought a “rigorously scientific theology.” However, as Colyer explained:

A theology is scientific not when it conforms to the presuppositions or procedures of a universal science . . . or even of other special sciences (scientiae speciales) such as natural science. Rather, in Torrance’s mind theological science, like every special science, has its own particular scientific requirements and material procedures determined by the unique nature of its object or subject matter.\(^{48}\)

Colyer continued:

Thus theology can be scientific if God is knowable and when theology proceeds in accordance with the nature of its object—when it allows actual knowledge of God to determine the appropriate mode of knowing, to disclose the inherent relations in that knowledge and to generate the conceptual structures and their interrelations (and even the form of life) appropriate to that knowledge. So, for Torrance, a scientific theology is simply a theology governed from beginning to end by the nature of the knowable God.\(^{49}\)

Torrance applied this method to the resurrection in *Space, Time and Resurrection*.\(^{50}\) He began by stating:

“I make no apology for taking divine revelation seriously. If God really is God, the Creator of all things visible and invisible and the Source of all rational order in the universe, I find it absurd to think he does not actively reveal himself to us but remains inert and aloof, so that we are left to grope about in the dark for possible intimations and clues to his reality which we may use in trying to establish arguments for his existence.”\(^{51}\)

Torrance acknowledged that there is a place for rational argumentation and a form of “natural theology,” but this must be “a proper natural theology” according to the principles of the scientific theology, “not a natural theology as an independent conceptual system, antecedent to actual empirical knowledge of God upon which it is then imposed, quite unscientificaly, as a set of necessary

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\(^{49}\) Colyer, *How to Read Torrance*, 22.

\(^{50}\) Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1976).

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 1. This may be understood as advocating the methodological principle “ontology precedes epistemology.”
epistemological presuppositions.” In other words, the author understands this to say that if Christians are going to be truly scientific in their theology they should not attempt to begin by constructing a theology (natural theology) on a set of epistemological presuppositions that are incommensurate with the subject matter under investigation (viz. God). Are the epistemological presuppositions of natural theology incommensurate with the “living God, the Creator of us all, the God who is there, the Trinitarian God of the Bible?” Well, yes; the natural theologian (remember that this is one link in the evidentialist’s chain) must deny that the natural evidences are inextricably linked to the self-revelation of God in His Word. He must deny that investigation into the possible existence of God is dependent ultimately upon “the God who is there.” The natural theologian begins with the premise that his own knowledge is independent of God’s knowledge as if he were an autonomous entity; when according to the (Christian) theology to which he ostensibly aspires he is a creature dependent on God at all points of his existence and thinking. He has denied what he seeks to establish by his method of seeking. Or, to put it the other way around (and quoting Torrance in part): “If we try to reach knowledge of God from some [supposed] point outside of God [actually an impossibility and a denial of Acts 17:28a], we cannot [later claim to] operate with a point in God by reference to which we can test or control our conceptions of him, but are inevitably flung back on ourselves.” In other words, one can never arrive at and completely rest his theology upon God’s sovereign self-revelation if he has arrived at that place through autonomous efforts in natural theology. Indeed, our autonomous efforts never do get us to that place; human autonomy and divine sovereignty are mutually exclusive epistemological standpoints.

Consequently, Torrance wrote:

Rigorous scientific procedure makes it incumbent upon us first to essay an interpretation of the Bible within its own distinctive framework, [can one say, starting with the background knowledge with which it itself operates?] on its own intelligible grounds, and try to make rational and religious sense of what it has to say about God and the world and his saving activity in history, without prejudging all that from an alien framework of thought, and certainly without automatically excluding its supernatural message as academically unthinkable for “modern man.”

Accordingly, he continued,

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52 Ibid.
54 Torrance, Space, Time and Resurrection, 5.
the theologian [and the apologist] handle[s] the New Testament by reflecting on its reports in the light of the reality which they claim to indicate, and tries to understand that reality [for himself and others, apologetically] . . . by letting his mind fall under the power of its intrinsic significance.

The theologian takes his stance, therefore, within the conjoint semantic focus of the manifold structure of the New Testament witness . . . for that is how he derives the all-important intuitive insights which guide his theological inquiry, but they are insights correlated to and controlled by the intrinsic significance of God’s self-revelation. How those insights arise in his mind he is unable to say beyond that it takes place under the generative power of the Word and Spirit of God himself.

Thus there begins to form in his understanding a coherent grasp of the subject matter into which he inquires . . . so that his apprehension may be progressively informed and shaped under the self-evidencing force and intrinsic significance of their objective content, i.e. the self-revelation and self-communication of God through Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit. 56

Therefore, it is not through arguments for the credibility and reliability of the documents of the New Testament that one comes to appreciate their “truth” or their “truthfulness”; rather, it is through seeking to “think the thoughts of the Word after the Word,” by interpreting the New Testament Scriptures within “the framework of the objective meaning which gave rise to the layered character of the apostolic tradition” 57 that one comes to understand the “background knowledge” of the Scriptures themselves. When one understands that framework with and in and by which the Scriptures operate, one comes to understand their “truth.” After this the arguments for their credibility and reliability find easy acceptance.

In sum, the “scientific theologian” and the apologist who wishes to be consistent with his theology, pursues his task with the “background knowledge” appropriate to the subject matter— the living, self-revealing God, and appropriate to the “framework of objective meaning” found in the Scriptures. Torrance suggested:

The framework of objective meaning which concerns the theologian here is bound up with the incarnation of the Son of God to be one with us in our physical human existence . . . and therefore it is bound up with the resurrection of Jesus Christ in body . . . Thus the incarnation and the resurrection,

55 Perhaps it would be helpful to mention at this point that the definition of apologetics assumed in this article is that of John Frame, Doctrine of the Knowledge of God (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), 87, who wrote, “Apologetics may be defined as the application of Scripture to unbelief and as such may be seen as a subdivision of theology.”

56 Torrance, Space, Time and Resurrection, 5, 11.

57 Ibid., 13.
bracketing within them the whole life and activity of Jesus Christ, constitute together the basic framework within which the New testament writings for all their rich diversity are set.\textsuperscript{58}

In short, the incarnation and the resurrection are, in Torrance’s terms, \textit{ultimates} of the framework of knowledge upon which the objective meaning of the New Testament is based. Torrance wrote, “As such, then, the incarnation and the resurrection together form the basic framework in the interaction of God and mankind in space and time, within which the whole Gospel is to be interpreted and understood.”\textsuperscript{59} And it should be added: within which the task of apologetics must be done. “But” he stressed “they are \textit{ultimates}, carrying their own authority and calling for the intelligent commitment of belief and providing the irreducible ground upon which continuing rational inquiry and theological formulation [and apologetic activity] take place.” He concluded, “It is a case of \textit{fides quarens intellectum} or \textit{credo ut intelligam} as St. Anselm variously formulated the scientific principle operative here.\textsuperscript{560}

Torrance recognized that he was open to the charge of “circular reasoning” but he stated that this is the “proper circularity inherent in any coherent system operating with ultimate axioms or beliefs which cannot be derived or justified from any other ground than that which they themselves constitute.” The \textit{ultimates} of a system “are not provable within it but may be proved with reference to a wider higher system.” However, wrote Torrance, the \textit{ultimates} with which we are concerned are \textit{ultimates} “for which in the nature of the case, there is no wider higher system with reference to which they can be proved.”\textsuperscript{561} Consequently, “the incarnation and resurrection are \textit{ultimates} which must be accepted or rejected, as such, for they cannot be verified or validated on any other grounds than those they themselves provide.” In other words, the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ are constitutive elements of the framework or background knowledge of which they are a part as objective history. Torrance continued:

Thus regarded, the incarnation and resurrection are the basic all-embracing miracles upon which the Christian gospel rests [as evident in Acts], miracles which, by their nature, are not verifiable in terms of the kind of evidence or argument which obtain within the natural sciences where we are concerned only with natural processes and the natural order of things [or could one say “uniform experience?”].

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 13-14.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 20.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 15.
Torrance trenchantly observed, “If they were verifiable in that way, they would not be miracles far less ultimates.” He added, “it is illogical, as Michael Polanyi shows, to attempt to prove the supernatural by natural tests, but it is no less illogical to justify ultimates in terms of what is not ultimate.” Therefore, if the resurrection is an ultimate in the system of Christian truth, as such it cannot be rightly understood as first an objective fact apart from the system and then as a foundational element of the system for the system will not be possible whatsoever unless both the fact and the meaning of the resurrection are understood at once.

Now this means we cannot interpret the historical happening of the resurrection of Jesus, any more than his birth and life, without doing it from within the free movement of his life and agency [the framework of the New testament, that is, background knowledge]. In other words, we can interpret the resurrection [use the resurrection in apologetics] only if we interpret it [use it apologetically] theologically as well as historically. It will not do, however, to interpret it merely ‘theologically’ as if it could be done apart from history, for that would be to mythologize and docetize it, and then we would have nothing to interpret. Nor can we interpret it [use it apologetically] merely ‘historically’ in the sense that we interpret other historical events in human history, only by reference to human agency and natural processes, for that would be tantamount to insisting that all we have here is an ordinary historical happening, and so rejecting from the start the claim that the Agent is the Son of God.”

One thought from Van Til is pertinent.

To talk about presenting [to the natural man] the fact of the resurrection without presenting its true meaning is to talk in an abstraction. The resurrection either is what the Christian says it is, or it is not. Any individual fact of this system is what it is primarily because of its relation to the system. It is therefore a contradiction in terms to speak of presenting certain facts to men unless one presents them as part of this system. The very factness of any individual fact of history is precisely what it is because God is what he is. It is God’s counsel that is the principle of individuation for the Christian man. God makes the facts to be what they are.

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62 Ibid., 22.
63 Ibid. “As acts of God,” Torrance wrote of the incarnation and resurrection, “they are finally explicable only from grounds in God and are therefore ultimates which are not open to complete formalization, or therefore verification, within the natural order of things in which the nevertheless share.”
64 Ibid., 94; cf., 46
65 Van Til, Christian Apologetics, 95, 97.
How then should Christians employ the resurrection in their apologetic? The resurrection should proclaim it for what it is, just as the Apostles did—an ultimate in a system. A system that “stands or falls with respect to its power as a whole to command our acceptance.” What this will entail is not a fragmentary presentation of historical evidences, plus a defense of the reliability of the Gospels, plus a justification of the “miraculous,” plus seeking the deliverances of natural theology, but essentially a clash of “background knowledge” or simply worldviews. The Christian will seek to witness faithfully to the truth of God’s self-evidencing Word about the Risen Christ, the Second person of the Trinity, who died on the cross for sinners (cf. 1 Cor 2:2). Indeed, he will be prepared to proclaim the whole framework of New Testament thought, the whole of the background knowledge of the Scriptures. Are Christians then at an impasse apologetically, with a clash between incommensurate worldviews based on ultimates that are not provable? Torrance understood the issue here, but the answer is not to attempt a neutrality two step; rather one retains the integrity of the system and presents it confidently.

When human thought comes up against such an ultimate conflict between rival frameworks of thought or conceptual systems and the fundamental outlooks that lie behind them [incommensurate worldviews], it is poised on the threshold of a far-reaching change of mind or conversion. The conflict cannot be solved by formal argument between two rival systems of thought, but only through radical commitment to the intrinsic claims of the subject matter, through a movement of the mind in which we allow it to fall under the power of the intrinsic intelligibility of things in the conviction that we can do no other in sheer fidelity to the truth.

Torrance suggested this is “essentially the way that the incarnation and the resurrection came to be accepted by the early Church and classical Christian theology.”

The incarnation and resurrection forced themselves upon the mind of the Church against the grain of people’s convictions, [one thinks of 1 Cor 1—2] as ultimate events bearing their own intrinsic but shattering claims in the self-evidencing reality and transcendent rationality of God himself, and they took root within the Church only through a seismic restructuring of religious and intellectual belief.

Torrance’s words sound very much as if they were “destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God” and they were

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66 Ibid., 15.
67 Ibid., 16-17.
68 Ibid., 17-20.
“taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:5). Torrance affirmed, “It is still that way that the incarnation and resurrection force themselves upon our minds. It confronts us as an objective reality which must be accepted or rejected on its own ground.”

Consequently, Torrance said this is not a blind leap of faith or lacking objective credibility because these ultimates provide their own “kind of objectivity which makes itself accessible to our apprehension, creating the condition for its recognition and acceptance.” At this point it must be added that it takes the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit to make the condition in view possible; and then indeed, as Torrance continued, one understands the “intelligible, objective reality of God’s self-revelation in the incarnation and resurrection” by faith.

CONCLUSION

Once again, then, the resurrection should be employed in Christian apologetic as the Apostles employed it: the proof of the claims of Christ, an ultimate in a system or worldview that has, by the impact of its objective reality in the system as a whole, self-evidencing authority to compel its acceptance. Before concluding, this article may be supplemented with a few insights from New Testament scholar N. T. Wright in his impressive volume The Resurrection of the Son of God. Wright sensed the difficulty of affirming the resurrection in the face of “the principles of post-Enlightenment historical epistemology.” To affirm the resurrection “seems to require the suspension of all our normal language about how we know things about the past.” Simply put, Wright suggested that faced with any other historical problem, if one had the sort of “evidence” one has in “the empty tomb and the ‘meetings’,,” and if there was an explanation as thorough and satisfying as the bodily resurrection, one “would accept it without a moment’s hesitation.” However, that is not the reality. Moreover, it is “not because we inhabit a modern scientific worldview,” which seems to mean it is not just a post-Enlightenment philosophical prejudice for which one can blame David Hume! It is rather, said Wright, because while

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69 Ibid., 18. He added, “In the life and work of Jesus Christ we are confronted with an ultimate self-revelation of God into the truth of which there is no way of penetrating from what we already know or believe we know, far less of establishing or verifying it on grounds that are outside of it.”

70 Ibid., 18-19.

71 Ibid., 19.


73 Ibid., 710.

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid., 711.
one can know many things that make other historical events credible by the type of evidences Craig listed—empty tomb, appearances—“What we do not know—. . . because at this point all human history tells the same story—is that someone who is well and truly dead can become well and truly alive again.”

In other words, all the background knowledge says the same thing: it is not possible to know if “dead men do, or do not rise.” Furthermore, Wright said, “The Christian story about Jesus does not try to suggest otherwise” and “The fact that dead people do not ordinarily rise is itself part of the early Christian belief, not an objection to it. . . . The fact that Jesus’ resurrection was, and remains without analogy is not an objection to the early Christian claim. It is part of the claim itself.”

Wright then made this point:

The challenge for the historian . . . is not simply a matter of whether one believes in ‘miracles’ or the supernatural, in general, in which case (it is supposed) the resurrection will be no problem. If anyone ever reaches the stage where the resurrection is no problem, we can be sure a mistake has been made somewhere, that they have constructed a world in which this most explosive and subversive of events—supposing it to have occurred—can be domesticated . . . No: the challenge comes down to a much narrower point, not simply to do with worldviews in general, or with the ‘supernatural’ in particular, but with the question of death and life, of the world of space, time and matter and its relation to whatever being there may be for whom the word ‘god’ or even ‘God’, might be appropriate. Here of course there is no neutrality. Any who pretend to it are merely showing that they have not understood the question.

It would seem this is another means of saying that the resurrection is not one bare historical fact to be hypothesized over or an issue confronting philosophical prejudice (on either side of the question), rather it is an ultimate! Wright’s insight is an ultimate of sorts whether one affirms or denies the resurrection. He noted that for a believer to affirm “Jesus of Nazareth was bodily raised from the dead” is a “self-involving statement.” One cannot say this with “minimal involvement.” “If it happened, it matters. The world is a different place from what it would be if it did not happen. The person who makes the statement is committed to living in a different world, this newly envisioned universe of discourse, imagination, and action.” However, then Wright observed, “In the same way—this is not so often noticed, but just as important—for someone to say ‘Jesus of Nazareth was not bodily raised from the dead is equally self-involving.” This may seem minimal as involvement

76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid., 711-12.
79 Ibid., 712.
progresses, but “such a statement then belongs within, and reinforces, the universal pagan worldview, the ‘modernist’ post-enlightenment worldview, and (no doubt) many other variations on, or anticipations of, both of them. That is why, ironically, such a denial is usually felt to be unimportant (for it reinforces a widely held worldview), except when warding off the challenge of mainstream orthodox Christianity.” The point is that the resurrection should be proclaimed as that ultimate which challenges its own denial and exposes the self-involving aspect of its denial. The apologist should use the resurrection to expose the worldview of the one who would deny the resurrection for what it is: namely, inadequate and unsatisfying for more than just epistemological questions but comprehensively inadequate and unsatisfying in regards to human “discourse, imagination, and action” (evidently it is inadequate if it excludes or misplaces “the God who is there,” that is, the Trinitarian God of the Bible). The essential nature of the resurrection should be stressed. The whole system, of which the resurrection “this most explosive and subversive of events” is an ultimate, should not be compromised by methods of historical testing which are suited to confirming that which normally happens or serendipitously useful for occasionally discovering that which extraordinarily happens. That whole system and the resurrection should be stressed not only as the “least implausible of the alternative explanations” for the historical evidences but also as the ultimate that it is in background knowledge of the New Testament, the proof that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Above all, the resurrection must never be considered apart from its meaning in the whole system; indeed, it cannot be understood whatsoever if it is considered outside the New Testament framework, without its own appropriate background knowledge. The evidentialist (it seems) understands this and so attempts to supply the appropriate background knowledge by the deliverances of natural theology. However, as demonstrated, natural theology if undertaken outside the background knowledge of the Scriptures fails to supply the full, right, or appropriate background knowledge; indeed, it cannot because the attempt has within it the denial of that which seeks—a sovereign self-revelation from God. In short, the evidentialists “chain” of arguments is an attempt to reproduce the system. However, the framework of the New Testament’s thought, the background knowledge of the Scriptures, and the ultimates of the incarnation and resurrection cannot be reproduced in fragments; they must be accepted or rejected as a whole system for that is where the power (along with the Spirit, 1 Cor 2:5) for “conversion” resides. Nevertheless, will it work? It can be said if one follows the approach of the Apostles in Acts it will work. Torrance, as demonstrated, suggested, “the incarnation and resurrection” “forced themselves upon the minds of the early

80 Ibid., 714.
Christians . . . in sharp antithesis to what they had believed about God and in genuine conflict with the framework of secular thought or the worldview of their age.”

Consequently, it did work. “As to the possibility and likelihood of the sinner’s accepting the Christian position, it must be said that this is a matter of the grace of God.”

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81 Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, 17.
Book Reviews


This immense work includes contributions from fourteen leading Baptist thinkers. Four issues are addressed in regards to eight Christian doctrines. In regard to the biblical doctrine, each chapter addressed the issues of the biblical teaching, the belief of the church historically, the coherence with other doctrines, and the impact of the doctrine for the church today. Some authors worked from Genesis to Revelation in condensing the biblical teaching on a biblical doctrine, whereas others relied more upon an exegetical dictionary approach. The eight sections include: bibliology (prolegomena, natural and special revelation); theology proper (the nature, works, and agents of God); anthropology (human nature and sinfulness); Christology (the person and work of Christ); pneumatology (the person and work of the Holy Spirit); soteriology (the work of God); ecclesiology (the nature, attributes, and marks of a church); and, eschatology (personal and cosmic). The contributors to this work have all written concerning the theological discipline for which they are well-known (e.g. David Dockery [and David P. Nelson] on special revelation, Mark Dever on ecclesiology, Russell Moore on eschatology). The conclusion is Albert Mohler’s excellent series from his blog on “The Pastor as Theologian.” Each of the contributors believes “that the task of theology must be recovered in the church if it is to have vitality and health in the twenty-first century” (p. viii). Each chapter provides a fair and gracious representation of various doctrinal views (even the chapter on eschatology written from a covenant premillennialist perspective). This work is highly recommended for pastors, students, and scholars; it would be an excellent textbook for the theology departments.

Ron J. Bigalke Jr.


For the last fifteen years or so when Hank Hanegraaff, host of the *Bible Answer Man* radio program, fielded questions on eschatology it was very clear that he has been against the futurist perspective. Hanegraaff has told his audience for years that he was studying the field of eschatology and would announce his views in a book one day. Hanegraaff’s book has now been released, entitled *The Apocalypse Code*, and has confirmed his rhetoric and tone heard for the last
fifteen years on the radio as Hanegraaff has been treating dispensationalism as if it were a cult. Even though Hanegraaff always insisted that he was open-minded and had not adopted a specific view of eschatology, it has always been equally clear to anyone who is schooled in the various views that he had all along rejected dispensationalism and embraced his own version of a preterist/idealist scheme. However, he has never admitted his scheme; and even after the release of his book still refuses to classify his own conclusions in spite of the fact that he assigned labels to virtually everyone else.

Hanegraaff ridiculed Hal Lindsey’s 1997 book, *Apocalypse Code* as one who claimed to understand the book of Revelation. Until the present generation,” declared Hanegraaff of Lindsey, “the encrypted message of the Apocalypse had remained unrealized” until Lindsey cracked the code (pp. xv-xvi). Hanegraaff believes his book will be away from dispensational futurism and toward his preterism/idealist scheme.

Hanegraaff contended that his book is about “Exegetical Eschatology to underscore that above all else I am deeply committed to a proper method of biblical interpretation rather than to any particular model of eschatology” (p. 2). If that is his goal then he has fallen far short of the mark! Hanegraaff’s proposed interpretative approaches, if implemented, would send the church back to the Dark Ages hermeneutically. He may want to produce only a method of interpretation, but the moment anyone applies a method it produces an outcome or model of eschatology. Furthermore, the Book of Revelation is not written in code (where does Revelation say that?), therefore, no need to break the code as Hanegraaff contended. The great majority of the book is a rant against Hanegraaff’s distorted view of dispensationalism in general and Tim LaHaye in particular. There is precious little actual exegesis, if any at all, to support his preterist/idealist eschatology; however, there are great quantities of some of the most vicious tirades against LaHaye and many other Bible prophecy teachers that this reviewer has ever read in print.

Hanegraaff appeared rather proud to tell readers that the principles of his methodology is “called Exegetical Eschatology or e²” (p. xxvii), as if no one before he came along had ever produced a view of eschatology from proper exegesis. Interestingly, for someone who claimed such a deep commitment “to a proper method of biblical interpretation” (p. 2) it is stunning to realize that Hanegraaff’s “method” was stated as principles, rather than an actual method like the historical-grammatical. “I have organized the principles that are foundational to e² around the acronym LIGHTS” (p. 3), said Hanegraaff. The letters of the acronym LIGHTS stands for the following principles: L refers to the literal principle, I represents the illumination principle, G stands for the grammatical principle, H for the historical principle, T means the typology principle, and S is for the principle of scriptural synergy (pp. 3-10). Only half
of Hanegraaff’s principles can even be classified as interpretative methods, the other three are best classified as theological beliefs.

Illumination is a work of the Holy Spirit on the believer that enables him to see or understand God’s Word. An unbeliever is blinded to the truth of God (1 Cor 2:14); however, a believer is in a state in which he is able to see and understand God’s truth (1 Cor 2:9—3:2). This theological truth is not an interpretative method. Typology is not a method for exegeting Scripture, instead, as Paul said, some Old Testament events were types, patterns, illustrations, or examples to help live the Christian life (1 Cor 10:6, 11).

Hanegraaff defined his principle of scriptural synergy as a belief “that the whole of Scripture is greater than the sum of its individual passages . . . that individual Bible passages may never be interpreted in such a way as to conflict with the whole of Scripture” (p. 9). Traditionally this is called the analogy of faith, that Scripture interprets Scripture. This also is a theological outcome and not a method. This principle also presupposes that one already properly understands the meaning of all of the other passages that are supposed to shed light upon the one in dispute. Such is not the case.

Hanegraaff’s new book anointed Tim LaHaye as the head of this new cult, replacing Hal Lindsey the former “whipping boy,” and is the prime target in his sub-Christian attack on LaHaye and other Bible prophecy advocates. Strangely, Hanegraaff is known for often quoting the famous maxim: “In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity.” So where is the liberty and charity in practice that he advocates in theory? Charity and liberty towards those with whom he disagrees is totally absent in Hanegraaff’s new book. Indeed, his new book actually competes with the writings of Gary North for the most invective per paragraph and makes Gary DeMar appear to be a fairly nice guy. It is one thing to disagree with another Christian (Hanegraaff and any other Christian has a right to voice their disagreement with other Christians), but to call his fellow brother in Christ a racist (pp. xx–xxiii) and a blasphemer (pp. 189, 225) because he advocates a different view of Bible prophecy goes well beyond any kind of Christian virtue.

“Furthermore,” said Hanegraaff, “there is the very real problem of racial discrimination” (p. xx). Hanegraaff took LaHaye’s commonly held view that Israel has a future in God’s plan, added a touch of his famous misrepresentation of another’s view, and LaHaye had become a racist. It would seem that the same Hanegraaff logic applied to God in the Old Testament would also make the Lord a racist for choosing Israel “out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth” (Deut 6:6–8). It follows that if one sides with God on this issue then Hanegraaff would think that such an individual believes in salvation by race instead of grace. LaHaye does believe that God has chosen Israel, but like all dispensationalists, he also believes that Israel will be saved in
the future by the same gracious Gospel that is available to all mankind—Jew or Gentile.

Hanegraaff’s blend of preterism and idealism produces an eschatology that is viciously anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian. His brand of replacement theology teaches that national Israel has no future since the church replaces her.

Just as Joshua is a type of Jesus who leads the true children of Israel into the eternal land of promise, so King David is a type of the “King of Kings and Lord or Lords” who forever rules and reigns from the New Jerusalem in faithfulness and in truth (Revelation 19:16; cf. 19:11). In each case, the lesser is fulfilled and rendered obsolete by the greater [p. 201].

As is typical within systems of replacement theology, Hanegraaff rendered much of the Old Testament obsolete by what is said to have occurred in New Testament theology. He said, the “relationship between the Testaments is in essence typological” (p. 170). Future prophetic promises, which usually relate to Israel, are rendered as mythical or mere types and shadows of something else, but never what they actually say. Through alleged hermeneutical ideas, such as Hanegraaff’s so-called, “typology principle,” he interpreted future promises to Israel allegorically as fulfilled through the church. Such deconstruction of God’s Word renders the future promises to Israel as mythological and not true historical records of God’s veracity (Hanegraaff realized that his typological principle would appear as allegorical interpretation so he attempted to deny this on pp. 171–72). Therefore, one is not surprised that Hanegraaff does not believe that the seventy weeks of years (490 years) in Daniel refer to literal years that actually elapse in specific history; instead, he said, “the seventy sevens of Daniel encompass ten Jubilee eras and represent the extended exile of the Jews that would end in the fullness of time—the quintessential Jubilee—when the people of God would experience ultimate redemption and restoration, not in the harlot city, but in the holy Christ” (p. 194). Hanegraaff regularly called Jerusalem “the harlot city.”

This book is not only filled with factual error throughout, but teaches that most Bible prophecy has already been fulfilled and advocated the following preterist viewpoints: Nero was the beast of Revelation (i.e., the Antichrist), the Olivet Discourse and most of the Book of Revelation were fulfilled by events surrounding the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem, and the tribulation was also fulfilled in the first century. Hanegraaff is certainly no lover of Israel since he taught that God divorced the harlot Israel (he needs to read the end of Hosea) and took a new bride—the church, supports the pro-Palestinian claims against Israel, and even accused Israel of the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. Hanegraaff embraced and argued for many viewpoints that are detrimental to sound Bible study and interpretation. Not surprisingly, this book
is not recommended, unless one is looking for an example of how not to study the Bible for all its worth.

Thomas Ice


This book defines Biblical Theology (in part) as “that approach to Scripture which attempts to see Biblical material holistically and to describe this wholeness or synthesis in Biblical categories” (p. 16, according to the definition of Elmer Martens). For the most part, each chapter addressed a certain theme from the entire Bible in a more or less canonical order. The contributors wanted to demonstrate the Scripture’s unity in diversity (the subtitle). The chapters are as follows: “The Covenant Relationship” (Scott Hafemann), “The Commands of God” (Thomas Schreiner), “The Atonement” (Frank Thielman), “The Servant of the Lord” (Stephen Dempster), “The Day of the Lord” (Paul House), “The People of God” (Elmer Martens), and “The History of Redemption” (Roy Ciampa). They made it clear that these are not the seven most important themes in the Bible. Each author was allowed to write on a theme of his own choosing.

In the first chapter, Hafemann asserted, “‘covenant’ is the biblical-theological concept used to explain (1) the essential character of God as King or Sovereign Ruler, (2) the election of a people under his rule who, as his ‘adopted’ children, live in dependence upon him, and (3) the corresponding nature of God’s bond with them as their ‘Sovereign Father’” (pp. 21-22). He continued, “. . . the covenant becomes the interpretive lens for seeing clearly the conceptual and historical unity of the Bible in the midst of its diversity” (p. 23).

The many facets of the word “law” were examined in chapter 2. Schreiner noted, “. . . God’s commands are for the good of human beings and are an expression of his love” (p. 68). In chapter 3, Thielman promoted substitutionary atonement, rightly declaring it as “the most natural understanding of Isaiah 52:13—53:12” (p. 107f).

Dempster (ch. 4) did a fine job of elucidating the terms “servant” and “slave” and discussing the expression “the Servant of the Lord” as a designation. House could have analyzed judgment as a whole in the Scriptures but narrowed the field to the Day of the Lord (ch. 5). He reasoned that anytime God intervenes in history, it is a Day of the Lord yet he also made it clear that the Day of the Lord has not occurred yet. He defined the Day of the Lord as follows: “Stated simply, ‘the Day of the Lord’ is the conviction expressed in the Bible that at specific times through specific events God’s rule will be re-established on earth and the elect will be released from sin’s sources, adherents, and effects now and/or forever” (p. 181, part of it is a quote from Rowley).
In the sixth chapter, Martens (p. 225) summarized the issue of the people of God by writing that the “chapter explores the various dimensions of [the] declaration [‘I will be your God and you shall be my people’] as a way of illustrating the unity of the two Testaments.” Ciampa wrote in the final chapter (pp. 254-55): “The history of redemption approach to Scripture seeks to uncover the biblical authors’ own understanding of the events and their significance within the unfolding narrative context in which they are found.” Those who desire to study Biblical Theology would do well to consider this book.

Charles Ray


With the staff of Watchman Fellowship, James K. Walker (president of Watchman Fellowship) has supplied readers with a biblical and evangelical guide for understanding the “diverse landscape of American spirituality” (p. 7). This guide is a comprehensive A-to-Z guide that contains over 1,700 concise entries. Clear definitions, key details, cross-references, and website addresses are provided to the reader. Each entry contains only essential information. As a rapid-reference dictionary, it is only a beginning point for understanding religion and spirituality in America. General definitions of the term _cult_ are provided in the introduction, in addition to Christian definitions of cults, occult, and the New Age. For the past two decades, Watchman Fellowship has identified cults according to the “mathematical formula”: addition to Scripture, subtraction from Scripture, multiplication of requirements for salvation, and division of adherent’s loyalty (pp. 11-12). Biblical and practical advise is given for families who may have a loved one “join a new religious movement or alternative faith” (pp. 13-14). This concise guide is a resource that every Christian should have for quick reference, as a helpful tool in being faithful to biblical commands to speak the truth in love (Eph 4:14-15) and to contend earnestly for the faith (Jude 3).

Ron J. Bigalke Jr.


This work has been the standard book on dispensationalism since it was first published in 1965. Ryrie is so clear and logical it is difficult to find fault with what he wrote. He successfully corrected some misunderstandings and myths
about this system. He began by explaining dispensationalism as a whole and then spent the rest of the book elaborating on what he had just written. He defined a dispensation as “a distinguishable economy in the outworking of God’s purpose” (p. 33). He spoke of the etymology of oikonomia (“stewardship”) and how it is used in the Bible. He stressed the fact that the length of time a dispensation covers is not nearly as important as the idea of supervision or “stewardship.”

In succeeding chapters the author addressed the matters of the number of dispensations (it is not a priority issue), the historical roots of dispensationalism (it did not “start” with J. N. Darby), and Ryrie’s well-known threefold sine qua non. It can be argued that chapter 5 is the most significant one, wherein Ryrie discussed hermeneutics. All biblical and theological disputes, not just dispensationalism, are reduced to how one interprets Scripture. Dispensationalism correctly and consistently utilizes a literal (or normal) method of interpretation.

Ryrie spent the next three chapters giving details on dispensationalism’s relationship to soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. Some of his main points are that dispensationalism does not teach two ways of salvation, the church is distinct from Israel, and dispensationalism’s literal interpretation naturally leads the student to a pretribulational, premillennial doctrine. He then refuted progressive dispensationalism (ch. 9; is it really dispensationalism?), covenant theology (ch. 10; it is basically the antithesis to dispensationalism), and ultradispensationalism (ch. 11; some dispensationalists have pressed dispensationalism too far). The volume concludes with a plea to carefully study dispensationalism and not just dismiss it beyond the bounds of what is true. The bibliography has been expanded to include Ron Bigalke’s Progressive Dispensationalism (an analysis of the movement) and The Truth Behind Left Behind by Hitchcock and Ice. A brand new feature lists several websites that one can visit to learn more about dispensationalism. No book on the market explains dispensationalism better than this one does.

Charles Ray


MacArthur convincingly explained why the truth is worth defending. He utilized the Bible, church history, and logic in the process. His catalyst was the Book of Jude, especially verses 3 and 4. Specifically the author was concerned about a movement known as the Emerging Church. As it should be, terms are carefully defined. His biblical definition of truth “is that which is consistent with the mind, will, character, glory, and being of God” (p. 2). On page 43, he
clarified the meaning of apostasy: “the technical name for serious, soul-destroying error that arises from within the church.” In the first chapter, he did a fine job of clarifying modernism and postmodernism and their influence on society. In the fifth chapter, he gave a history lesson on Sabellianism and Arianism and then he admonished the church to not make those mistakes again. MacArthur provided much evidence that all Christians should be concerned about what is happening in these days. “In reality, the church today is quite possibly more susceptible to false teachers, doctrinal saboteurs, and spiritual terrorism than any other generation in church history” (p. 165). These are not trivial matters. At least two of the leaders in the Emerging Church movement have called Christ’s substitutionary atonement on the cross “cosmic child abuse” (pp. 168-69). Near the end of the book, the author challenged believers with the following words: “It is time for the faithful remnant to draw clear lines and step up our energies in the Truth War—contending earnestly for the faith. In light of all the biblical commands to fight a good warfare, it is both naïve and disobedient for Christians in this postmodern generation to shirk that duty” (p. 173). This reviewer encourages all believers to read this book to know what is occurring among today’s church.

Charles Ray


This immense work (fifteen years in the making) from the Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI) includes contributions from more than two hundred leading scholars. There are 626 entries that address social issues, thinkers, politicians, magazines, books, historical events, political philosophies, concepts, organizations, and more. The entries are both authoritative and provocative. The uniqueness of this volume is the emphasis upon the theoretical as opposed to the political. There are contributors and entries representative of agrarianism, capitalism, fusionism, libertarianism, neoconservatism, paleoconservatism, and religious and secular conservatism. At a time when American conservatives share concern about the future of conservatism, this volume was published at an opportune time. Much conservative self-examination should result from this work, especially considering the neoconservative subversion of the Reagan revolution. As with any encyclopedia, there will be frustration with the inclusion of some entries and subsequent omission of others. For instance, conservative intellectualism as dominated by the Intercollegiate Studies Institute and *National Review* is given
primary concentration, which certainly provides more respect for American conservatism. This work is an essential reference for conservatives.

Ron J. Bigalke Jr.


Susan Blackmore, Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of the West of England, interviewed twenty-two eminent neuroscientists and philosophers, who have devoted much of their lives to understanding human brains. Each of the interviewees was candid with Blackmore about fundamental philosophical issues. The discussions range “from the curious (do bees have consciousness?) to the profound (is our sense of having a self just an illusion?)” (back flap). The essential issue is consciousness: its origin and separateness from the brain. The discussion began with the uniqueness of the problem of consciousness, that is, how do the physical processes in the brain give development to a subjective experience. Discussion progressed toward particular research interest in consciousness, distinction between conscious and unconscious brain processes of the brain, and the question of the intellectual denial but experiential illusion of free will.

The weakness of the book is the format. It is always difficult to publish a book of interviews due to the irregularity of thought development. Nevertheless, the book does provide several interesting insights. This book is a lively read that both scientists and philosophers will appreciate. However, even Blackmore confessed that after the interviews she did not have any clear answers to the fundamental issue. Whatever conclusions are formulated, the engaging and instructive conversations on consciousness demonstrate this issue will not reach a conclusion in the near future.

Ron J. Bigalke Jr.


Wayne Grudem, Research Professor of Bible and Theology at Phoenix Seminary in Scottsdale, Arizona, is one of the leading writers on the roles that God has prescribed in Scripture for men and women in the church and home. This work has been condensed from his previous work, Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth, and is equally careful and thoughtful. In the opening
chapter, Grudem reminded his readers that Scripture “clearly states that men are not superior to women and women are not inferior to men” (p. 20). Although men and women “were created with equal value and dignity before God,” each “were created to fill different roles” (pp. 20-21) in the church and home (pp. 20-66). The sin nature, however, is the polarizing reality that created imbalance between men and women. Consequently, he wrote, “It is clear that the idea of headship and submission within a personal relationship was not a cultural idea whose time has passed. . . . In fact, the idea of headship and submission has always existed, for it is part of the eternal nature of God Himself” (p. 28). The relationship of the Trinity is an example of such leadership and submission. “Just as in the Trinity there are equality, differences, and unity among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so in marriage there are equality, differences, and unity that reflect the relationships within the Trinity” (p. 24). “Just as God the Father and God the Son are equal in deity, equal in attributes, but different in role, so a husband and wife are equal in personhood, equal in value, but different in the roles God have them” (p. 27). As a thorough representation of biblical teaching, this work elevates and honors women by regarding them as equal to men in dignity and value. Grudem is realistic that the ongoing debate concerning men and women in the church and home is not going to reach a consensus anytime soon. Nevertheless, the author did want to present the clear biblical teaching concerning God’s intent for men and women. The relentless influence of feminism in the church and world makes this careful and thoughtful work an essential tool (after the Bible) for men and women in understanding their God-given roles. This thoroughly biblical work presents the arguments and facts conclusively that evangelical feminism is contrary to God’s will, and to continue to act in a manner contrary to Scripture is to be in a spiritually dangerous position.

Ron J. Bigalke Jr.


C. John Sommerville, Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Florida, has written a valuable book concerning the increasing marginalization of secular universities. This intelligent work is essential reading for all who share concern about the quality of higher education and the secular eroding of its intended purposes. “The American university has embraced a thorough secularism that makes it increasingly marginal in a society that is characterized by high levels of religious belief” (front flap). Sommerville explored a number of perspectives in which the secular universities have undermined their mission through an indifference toward religion. One perspective is the failure to define
human nature in favor of a mere professionalism. Another perspective is the obvious leftist thinking that dominates the universities. As a result of such secularism, the university is increasingly marginalized. The author proposed critical engagement with ethical and religious teaching in the university. Sommerville has articulated an engaging challenge that secularists will struggle to counteract.

Ron J. Bigalke Jr.


The 21 chapters of this readable book are divided into six major sections, each dealing with the how’s and why’s of evil and suffering. Every major section ends with a three-page summary of its subject matter. The work is not so much a theodicy (which part of it is) as it is a how-to book on dealing with sin. Another point in its favor is that it is grounded in Scripture. The content of virtually every subheading is based on a Bible passage.

The book is easy to use because these subheadings are numerous. The reader can quickly find his or her way through its pages. Hicks began at the end. He first went to the book of Revelation. Doing so emphasizes one of his main points: recalling future glory will provide help when dealing with present suffering. From Revelation 15:3-4, the author gleaned the following truths:

a. God is totally good  
b. God is sovereign  
c. God will deliver His people from evil  
d. God is dealing with evil  
e. All history, and so all suffering, is purposeful  
f. At the end of the age everyone will acknowledge the justice and glory of all that God has done.

Hicks made some statements which are well-taken and memorable. “[A]lthough for us humans suffering and evil are a mystery, they are not a mystery to God” (p. 15). “There is no contradiction between sin being punished and the sinner being forgiven” (p. 39). A built-in study guide and a bibliography supplement the work. For those wanting to look further into the issue of evil and suffering, this is a very informative and useful book.

Charles Ray

Kistemaker is Professor Emeritus of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary. It is claimed this book “helps you take a closer look at the miracles of Jesus to better understand the purpose behind each one. By carefully laying out cultural background, symbolism, and Old Testament connections, Kistemaker shows you how these miracles relate to the way you follow Jesus. The result is a detailed exploration that will deepen your understanding of Jesus’s miraculous works” (back cover). The author did not quite meet these expectations. Each of the 36 small chapters (out of 42) surveyed a particular miracle and provided some insight as to its interpretation (main body) and application (“points to ponder”). The miracles were grouped by kind (nature, sick made well, etc.). Jesus’ deity, sovereignty, and description as King of Kings and Lord of Lords are repeatedly stressed. The last third of the book was devoted to miracles that happened to Jesus and not by Him necessarily (virgin birth, resurrection, etc.). Kistemaker was also correct when he asserted that the purpose of miracles is to confirm who Jesus is (p. 9). The chapter entitled “Paying the Temple Tax” (Matt 17:24f) did provide some good insight. Unlike the other miracles, it benefits Christ directly. Even more interesting is that He usually was not afraid to challenge the spiritual leaders (and thus offend them), but here He encouraged Peter to pay the tax “lest we give them offense” (v. 27).

The author implied God will always heal: “hidden sins must be confessed to purify the soul. When sin has been forgiven, the Lord sends healing and performs the miracle of restoring the body. Jesus makes the whole person well, body and soul” (p. 62). In other places, however, he was somewhat confusing. “Scripture teaches that the healing process depends on faith in God, for both the one who prays and the patient for whom prayer is offered. However, when there is no healing, it is highly inappropriate and even damaging to say to the patient that he or she lacked the necessary faith to be healed” (p. 248). The second half of the preceding paragraph is the correct assessment. In John 5, the man healed by the pool of Bethesda “did not know who [Jesus] it was” (v. 13). If the man did not know who Jesus was, then how could he have faith in Him? In the chapter on Christ’s ascension, the writer failed to mention the most important reason for that event; namely, so people would know (by many witnesses) that Jesus returned to heaven (Acts 1:2-11; 1 Cor 15:3-8) as opposed to discrediting Christ by saying, “Where is He now? Was He a real person or did He just disappear?” This book is good overall but no better than other similar works.

Charles Ray

Iain Duguid is professor of Old Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary (Escondido, CA). This commentary is one of the volumes in the Preaching the Word Series (R. Kent Hughes, gen. ed.). As the subtitle suggests, the author’s main theme was God helping believers through difficult times. Just as the Lord was with the Israelites during forty years of wandering in the wilderness, so Jesus is present with believers as they journey through this rugged life. A relevant verse is John 1:14 which reads, “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us. . . .” As most readers of the JODT know, the verb “dwelt” can mean “tabernacled” (cf. Rev 7:15).

Duguid did not directly address the issue of the large numbers (Numb 11:21; 26:51) but seemed to take them literally (p. 31). He did provide his opinion on the strange incident of the women drinking the bitter water (5:20-28). The writer stated this was not magic but a way to leave the judgment in God’s hands (pp. 73-75). Another well-handled explanation concerned the destruction of the Midianites in Numbers 31. “There is, in fact, nothing ethnic about this conflict, for this war is part of God’s larger war on sin and evil” (p. 330).

If there is one weakness to the book, it is the difficulty the reader has in finding the comment on a specific verse. The subheadings are abundant but they are not assigned verse numbers. However, this statement is not to dissuade anyone from buying this book. It is an excellent survey of Numbers. Many illustrations and stories of application populate each chapter (and the illustrations are indexed). Let all learn a major lesson from Numbers and determine to obey the Lord without grumbling.

Charles Ray


This helpful reference work is part of the Tim LaHaye Prophecy Library. It is subtitled “Understanding the Meaning of Every Prophetic Passage.” The contributors will be familiar to most JODT readers: Mal Couch, Arnold Fruchtenbaum, Steve Ger, and Randall Price. Each of the 66 books is examined from a dispensational viewpoint. The chapters begin with a brief introduction to the canonical book in question. Of course, the more crucial passages are given more attention (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel). The Book of Revelation alone occupies 43 pages. Significant symbols and terms are explained (abomination of desolation, white horse, restrainer, etc.). The reader is further assisted by charts and diagrams (more than thirty in number), and by an extensive bibliography (some 280 entries). This commentary comes highly recommended for those interested in prophetic studies.

Charles Ray

Goldingay is professor of Old Testament at Fuller Seminary. His work is a volume in the Baker Commentary on the Old Testament, Wisdom and Psalms Series. The introduction was designed to cover all the volumes on the Psalms in this series. It is more than fifty pages in length (literary structure, prophecy, types of psalms, etc.), yet the details are not overwhelming. His primary text was the Leningrad Codex. In addition to other sources, the author also consulted the LXX, Jerome, the Targum, etc. Each psalm is analyzed according to the following pattern: the author’s own translation (sometimes awkwardly literal), interpretation (which likewise covers date, authorship, etc.), and theological implications. Goldingay attempted to limit the technical material to the footnotes (which contain many resources that supplement the bibliography) but did not always succeed. The author expressed his philosophy on translation thus: “I have assumed that variants in post-MT Hebrew manuscripts constitute post-MT errors or ‘corrections’ rather than preserving pre-MT readings, but I have occasionally referred to these on that understanding. I have noted some modern proposals for emending the text, though also rarely followed them, and I have also rarely followed modern proposals for understanding Hebrew words in light of Arabic or Ugaritic” (p. 11). He commented on the superscriptions, and although he considered them a part of the text, he did not consider them to be a part of verse one. Apparently Goldingay did not believe there is such a thing as a Messianic psalm. Psalm 22, for example, “is not a prophecy” (p. 341). On page 73, he wrote, “Yhwh’s covenant with David seems to be suspended; there is no David on the throne. So what is to happen to Yhwh’s commitment to David? Yhwh’s answer is that it is fulfilled for the people as a whole.” The main body of the book precedes a glossary, bibliography, and some indices. The subject index is unique in that it is arranged psalm-by-psalm. Those looking for information on the literary aspects of the psalms should consider this work.

Charles Ray


In this helpful book, three viewpoints are presented concerning the difficult issue of remarriage after a divorce has occurred. The emphasis is on remarriage and divorce per se. Gordon Wenham, Senior Professor of Old Testament at Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education (Cheltenham,
England), argued for the “No remarriage after divorce view.” His argument proceeded in four stages: (1) attitude of the early church; (2) the New Testament outside Matthew; (3) Matthew’s Gospel; and, (4) the Judaism of Christ’s day. Wenham believes that for Jesus to approve of remarriage after divorce (Matt 5:22; 19:9) would cause Him to take the side of the Shammaite Pharisees (p. 31).

William Heth, Professor of New Testament and Greek at Taylor University, used to agree with Wenham (even co-authoring a book on remarriage with him) but now believes remarriage is permitted for adultery (specifically unrepentant sexual immorality; p. 59) or desertion. He looked to Matthew 19:9 and 1 Corinthians 7:15 to defend his case. He also identified a poll in which the majority of Christians support his view. The author asserted marriage covenants are not like biblical covenants in that the former can be broken (p. 61). He contended that Malachi 2:16 should be emended to read, “the man hates divorce,” not “God hates divorce” (p. 65; contrary to KJV, NASB, NIV, and NRSV).

Craig Keener, Professor of Biblical Studies at Palmer Theological Seminary, took the position that remarriage is permissible beyond adultery and desertion. He added abuse to the list (p. 103). He did call divorce “sin” on page 104. Keener seemed to question whether or not Jesus’ words should be taken literally. He gave examples of hyperbole in the New Testament (p. 104, etc.). He also contended that taking the “no remarriage is permissible because it is adultery” position to its logical conclusion would mean churches should attempt to divide second marriages. That abortion, pornography, drug abuse, etc. are not directly addressed in Scripture is no different than concluding remarriage is implied in the New Testament. Keener summarized his viewpoint with these words (p. 119): “I have argued that divorce is permissible for adultery, abandonment, and abuse (not, of course, for such contemporary claims as “incompatibility” or “growing apart”). I have also argued that the primary point of Jesus’ teaching is the exclusion of divorce, so we should recognize later remarriages as legitimate marriages (i.e., we should not seek to break them up), whether or not we concur with the grounds for the divorce. This is not to deny the propriety of exercising church discipline in the case of a clearly invalid divorce, but to suggest that two wrongs (i.e., the breaking up of a subsequent union) do not make a right.” All three of these men defended their viewpoint admirably. Regardless of what position is accepted on this matter, this book is well worth reading.

Charles Ray

Hubbard is pastor of Lake Tanglewood Community Church (Amarillo). He has put together a straightforward commentary on the Book of Revelation. It has more technical information than most books of this size but the exposition is average. He deviated little from the common dispensational interpretation. There are seven black-and-white illustrations yet no formal Introduction. The author inserted much Greek terminology, but it is not necessary to understand Greek grammar to benefit from his work for he often explained what is meant by it. Two examples will suffice in demonstrating the depth of the material. On page 16, he wrote, “. . . is an Aorist Indicative Active verb . . . it implies completed action. . . .” Similarly, page 171 stated, “. . . are both Present Participles of Attendant Circumstance.”

Revelation 1:19 is utilized as an outline for the book. Hubbard asserted that the Apocalypse is mostly in chronological order except for three “flashbacks” (Rev 7:1-17; 10—14; 17—18). He understood the “seven Spirits” (1:4) to be the Holy Spirit (p. 12); “the angel of the church in” is a special angel assigned to that church (p. 25); the 144,000 are Jewish witnesses in the tribulation (p. 89), and the “seven mountains” (17:9) are symbolic of Rome (p. 164). Genesis 37:9 speaks of Joseph’s dream of the sun, moon, and stars bowing down to him. Using this verse as his basis, the author interpreted Revelation 12:1 as follows: the woman is Israel, the sun represents Jacob, the moon is Rachel, and the 12 stars are the 12 tribes (p. 125). Here and elsewhere he rarely gave attention to alternative interpretations. It is not clear where Hubbard stands concerning the possibility that the letters to the seven churches are to be equated with various stages of the church age. He wrote, “It can be illustrated that the various characteristics of these seven churches of John’s day parallel those that have existed throughout the Church Age right up until the time when Jesus will return. Every local assembly in every generation can learn from these letters” (p. 25). Those interested in studying Revelation would do well to consult this commentary.

Charles Ray


In practical terms, Smallman described the experience of the new birth. The term “born again” is used frequently with little thought of its biblical meaning. The author is commended for clarifying the biblical teaching of the new birth, as the sovereign work of God. The most important part of his book is an exposition of John 3:1-8. Smallman was emphatic that an authentic conversion experience will express itself by genuine faith in Jesus Christ. The author
believes regeneration precedes faith, and compared spiritual birth to physical birth, as the following diagram illustrates (p. 24).

**PHYSICAL BIRTH**

Consequently, as physical birth is a process, so is the spiritual birth. The author stressed “the importance of beginning to think in terms of process rather than event” (p. 26). Regeneration is the sovereign inner working of God, which is followed by the season of one’s spiritual life, or effectual calling (p. 27, “which simply means *it works* [i.e. effectual]: when God calls, *we come*”). The effectual calling of God will result in faith and repentance, that is, conversion. Since the spiritual birth is a process, every person’s experience is unique; consequently, the new birth is experienced by all kinds of people in a variety of circumstances. Smallman’s main emphasis is appreciated: “We are not called to be salesman for Jesus, trying to close the ‘deal’ no matter what it takes; we are called to be midwives, available and ready to help with the birth [i.e. the spiritual cry of faith and repentance]” (p. 71). Nevertheless, the author’s understanding of regeneration as a process is somewhat unique, even among those who believe regeneration precedes faith.

Given the nature of the stories in this book, it was not a surprise (and indeed expected) for the author to refer to “seekers” (p. 52). A serious danger of this work is the emphasis upon experiences of people (pp. 62, 78-79, 116, 126) and viewing regeneration as a sometimes lengthy process. For instance, he wrote, “people need to be ‘belongers’ before they become believers” (p. 55). The church, therefore, should be “a missional congregation,” which means the church (not regenerate Israel) is “blessed to be a blessing” and the evangelistic mandate to the church of being a witness is distorted. Although the author affirmed the expression “covenant children” for his own family, “there are also stories of prodigals who never come home” (pp. 141-46).

This book was written to help Christians understand the new birth and how to use that understanding in evangelism. There are several helpful concepts in this book that are practical and thoughtful; however, there are several confusing elements that result in a recommendation with stronger reservations.

Ron J. Bigalke Jr.

Berding, Associate Professor of New Testament at Talbot, has subtitled his book “Rethinking the Conventional View.” The conventional view is that the charisma discussed in four places in the New Testament (esp. 1 Cor 12) is spiritual gifts to be used in ministry. His alternative is that the charisma are spiritual ministries. The author may be splitting theological hairs. One passage where this issue might be significant is Ephesians 4:7-13 (esp. 4:11-12); it refers to God giving apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors-teachers. Berding believes this passage causes problems for the conventional view. He asserted (correctly) these cannot be abilities but ministries (or offices), yet he categorized that list with the other lists of items (Rom 12; 1 Cor 12) that traditionally have been called spiritual gifts. However, nowhere is the list in Ephesians 4 identified as charisma (or pneumatikos, 1 Cor 12:1). There is another problem with the lists. He labeled (p. 15) “service” (Rom 12:7) as “ministry.” This reviewer is not sure how to distinguish between the two. If “service” is taken as a gift instead, then the matter makes more sense. The author also contended that some items are both abilities and ministries, namely the 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 list (p. 34). He stated that these are “miraculous ministries [that] require special enablement.” “Faith” is one of the items on the list. He defined “faith” not as reliance upon God but the kind of faith that can move mountains (p. 213). Are not the mountain-movers exercising great reliance? Then how is “faith” miraculous in the same way that healings and tongues are? Berding maintained that all the items listed throughout the New Testament are ministries and not abilities. Since they are ministries he “would encourage believers to seek out what God wants them to do” (p. 197). On page 199, he stated that it is “unnecessary” to seek one’s ministry. Which is it? This debate has been ongoing for some time and this well-written book sheds much helpful light on the issue.

Charles Ray


This volume is the result of ten years of work by more than 300 competent scholars of the Stone-Campbell Movement. The encyclopedia is a major reference work consisting of more than 700 articles that address significant events, individuals, places, and theological convictions that formed the
Restoration Movement of the early nineteenth century. The descendents of the Restoration Movement include the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Churches of Christ (acapella), and the Independent Christian Churches (Churches of Christ). The presentation is lively with illustrations and photographs from around the world. Moreover, an extensive index eases reference and research. An authoritative and scholarly text of the historical and theological expressions of the Restoration Movement has been greatly needed for those seeking to understand accurately its various contemporary expressions and for students of church history in the modern era. This work is comprehensive with practical information that is carefully presented and easy to read; it is a standard reference work of immense need and value.

A question often asked concerning churches of the Stone-Campbell Movement is the priority of water baptism (i.e. do they proclaim a biblical Gospel). This indispensable guide allows authoritative answers to be obtained with ease. For churches of the Stone-Campbell Movement, baptism by immersion is “the culmination of a process of salvation begun with faith in Jesus Christ, repentance of sin, and public confession of faith in Christ, followed by faithful service to Christ as part of a congregation of fellow believers.” Regarding assurance of the favor and love of God, “baptism was the assurance to a penitent believer of God’s forgiveness” (p. 57). Alexander Campbell asserted, “remission of sins can not, in this life, be constitutionally enjoyed previous to immersion” (p. 59). Barton Stone also defended “the doctrine of immersion for forgiveness of sins” (p. 61). The Christian Churches (Disciples) affirmed “‘one baptism for the remission of sins’—and that it involves a dipolar emphasis on God’s grace and the ‘amen’ (‘yes!’) of faith. . . .” Whereas some of the Churches of Christ “have hesitated to make baptism the utterly defining moment in a Christian’s salvation,” the majority of others “would affirm baptism as essential to salvation but retain the caveat that God has the prerogative to save the pious unimmersed” (p. 65). “Invariably those from Churches of Christ have defended the propositions that baptism is for the remission of sins and is essential for salvation” (p. 66).

Eschatologically, three “American movements influenced the Stone-Campbell Movement in the nineteenth century: Shakers, Mormons, and William Miller’s premillennialism” (p. 304). Campbell publicized a postmillennial view, whereas Stone espoused a covenant premillennialism (pp. 304-05). “Never prominent among Disciples, premillennialism asserted itself only among some conservatives. . . .” Debates “in the 1930s and following,” in addition to Max Lucado’s When Christ Comes (1999), “helped to entrench . . . amillennialist convictions.” Full preterism “is a twentieth-century minority position among Churches of Christ espoused by Max King . . . and a small number of Churches of Christ in Ohio” (p. 306).

Ron J. Bigalke Jr.

This commentary interprets every passage of Scripture phrase-by-phrase with word studies throughout the volume. Brief introductions address author, date, time, and setting for each biblical book. Each introduction also discusses the character of God and Christology of the biblical book being studied, in addition to information on important doctrines, important people, important words, and important Scripture passages that will help understand the “core theme” of each biblical book. An outline of each biblical book not only appears at the beginning of each, but is also integrated throughout the commentary. Cross-references to The MacArthur Bible Handbook will ease more thorough studies. Theological persuasions are evident throughout: distinction between Israel and the church (p. 868), credobaptism (pp. 1438-39), cessationism (pp. 1597-99), unconditional election (p. 1683), pretribulationism (pp. 1756-59), particular redemption (pp. 1951-52), and premillennialism (pp. 2034-35). There are many new charts, in addition to new features, such as the word studies and recommended books, which make this volume a considerable improvement to The MacArthur Study Bible.

Ron J. Bigalke Jr.


Anthony B. Robinson, President of the Columbia Leadership Network in Seattle, is convinced that theology is essential for healthy congregations. He lamented that so many among the church neglect the importance of thinking theologically, and that many church leaders believe theology is only for pastoral staff. The importance of theology is due to the fact that “lack of theological content and reasonable clarity may also be the core of the current malaise of many mainline Protestant congregations and denominations” (p. 5). Theological conviction is indeed connected to the vitality of the church.

The opening chapters address negative understandings of theology, and what occurs when churches do not give priority to thinking and speaking theologically. When priority is not given to theology, congregations are obviously uncertain of their beliefs. The risk is a church where nothing is at stake. The church “has become a club, or is tending in that direction, and is no longer fully the church” (p. 25). Without core convictions, “leadership is ineffective,” the church is unable “to deal with conflict,” becomes “out of
balance,” “structure eclipses Spirit,” and personal autonomy and freedom “is so prized that the church loses any sense of coherence, center, or purpose” (pp. 24-30).

No church should be reminded, “How a congregation thinks matter.” However, much of churchianity fails to understand that theology does matter: “Thinking creates feelings. Feelings motivate actions.” Robinson encouraged his readers to “reclaim the richness of theology for congregational life” (p. x), and believes accurately that the church can understand theological terminology. “In other areas of life, people of faith, use sophisticated nuanced ways of thinking. So why not apply the same sophistication to matters of faith?” The way in which the church thinks about life does affect their practice. “Careful thinking about theology helps a congregation preach what it practices and practice what it preaches” (p. xi).

Essential to Robinson’s argument is the truth that biblical revelation was given independent of personal preferences: “Scripture is among the most important of our core convictions” (p. 47). Core convictions of Scripture are integral to the vitality of the church. Therefore, attention was given in subsequent chapters to the Trinity, God the Creator, hamartiology, the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and Christian living, ecclesiology, sacraments and ministry, and eschatology. The importance of these core convictions is that too often congregations are “theologically underfund[ed]” and “misled and confused about their identity and purpose” (pp. 8, 158). It is essential that the church understand her “God-given nature and calling. Forgetting or neglecting this, congregations easily devolve into clubs or personality cults or service agencies with their associated liabilities and distortions of the gospel message” (p. 173). The last chapter, “Pastor as Teacher: Congregation as Learning Community,” provided suggestions for prioritizing theology in the life of the church. The reintroduction of core beliefs is not the strength of this work, but it is the attention given to the truth that theology matters. There is much agreement and thankfulness for the opening chapters, and the emphasis upon theology in the life of a healthy church. If one reads this book and can only identify points of disagreement (and there are some for this reviewer) with the author’s theology in latter chapters, it would be an inadequate and unfortunate understanding of the author’s main intent.

As Anselm said, “Theology is faith seeking understanding.” The tremendous attention upon the supernatural and paranormal in contemporary society demands an “articulate theology” (p. 13). Robinson wrote, “Christianity ought always to be more than beliefs and that right living must accompany right belief, I can’t imagine that right living is helped by a lack of clarity or conviction about our core beliefs” (p. 24). This book is essential reading to reaffirm the integral relationship between belief and practice.

Ron J. Bigalke Jr.

This book appears to be self-published by the Independent Fundamental Churches of America. Vosburgh is the Chairman for the Church Extension Council. The work is illustrated by 45 small pictures. It begins with a description of the IFCA and then provided some detail as to its history. Those wanting to know more about the IFCA and its ministries would do well to read this book.

Charles Ray


Julian Baggini, Editor and Co-publisher of The Philosophers’ Magazine, has written an examination of the disputes and philosophical issues that influence the news headlines of the day. The author demonstrated the practicality and relevancy of philosophy. The author proved his point by addressing the major questions that are the basis of current issues, such as abortion, cloning, environmentalism, euthanasia, genetically modified foods (“Frankenfood”), human rights, religious belief, and the war on terrorism. If one is able to understand basic philosophical ideas, then he is better equipped to analyze the headlines. Consequently, one is able to think critically concerning the most important matters and thereby able to make a thoughtful decision on issues in the news. For instance, the first chapter addressed “the problem of knowledge” and whether there is objective truth. For those who believe in the “crude relativism currently so popular in society,” Baggini wrote, “then ask yourself if you could believe the following: it is true for some people that six million people were killed in the holocaust but it is not true for others. It is no more true to say that the world is spherical than it is to say it is flat. The view that there is life after death and that death is the end are both equally true” (p. 28). Of course, to consent with these statements is to surrender “all rational discourse.”

Baggini believes, “experience should tell us that certainty is often inversely proportionate to knowledge. The fanatic who believes without question is wrong more often than the sceptic who feels certain about nothing” (p. 36). How are things to be proven beyond “reasonable doubt”? Baggini affirmed the method of reasoning known as abduction, which is an informal demand to convincing details, that is, a hypothesis clarifying understanding or enlightening knowledge that otherwise would not be considerable or
understandable. Abductive argumentation suggests the possibilities of something being true. Belief in the existence of God, for example, is to acquiesce to a proposition that is thought to be so completely or irresistibly probable that any psychological doubt is removed, although not a logical omission of argumentation. According to this understanding of objective truth, Christian belief is not knowledge but it is not lacking evidence (“in the teeth of evidence,” as C. S. Lewis would have said). An abductive argument, therefore, allows one merely to discern available information and postulate a rationalization.

The second chapter, “ethics and private life,” is based on an understanding of abductive reasoning. In regards to any political scandal (Baggini exampled the sex scandal of Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky), certain questions must be asked. “First, there is a privacy issue: do the parties involved have a right to have their private affairs kept private or is the public entitled to know about them? Then there is an issue of accountability: do the parties involved have a right to behave as they wish in their personal lives, without that affecting their right to hold office or remain employed?” (p. 53). Baggini provided some general principles of ethics and the private life in both personal and social contexts (pp. 80-82).

The other chapters were written to illustrate the relationship between philosophy and everyday life. One minor problem with the work is Baggini’s *Argumentum ad Verecundiam* regarding the morality of war (pp. 115-41) since philosophy is without any foundation to formulate an opinion. The strength of Baggini’s approach is the conceptual and logical method for responding to the headlines. The value of this work in particular is to relate philosophy and current events in a manner that helps one make sense of current events in the world and to challenge them in relation to one’s own beliefs. This work is written for the general reader and is helpful for learning to apply philosophy to everyday life.

Ron J. Bigalke Jr.


Kenneth Newport, Reader in Christian Thought at Liverpool Hope University College, was stimulated by the 1993 fiery climax of the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas, for the need to assemble an account primarily of the various interpretations of the Book of Revelation throughout the past 300 years. His book examines in detail the Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, and Roman Catholic interpretations of Revelation from 1600-1800, followed by broader discussions
of British Methodism, nineteenth century Millerism, and Seventh-Day Adventist interpretations from 1800 to David Koresh and the “Waco Apocalypse.” Newport argued, “far from being a random sequence of bizarre statements, millennial schemes (including the setting of dates for the second coming of Christ) are more often characterised by highly complex and internally consistent interpretations of scripture” (backcover). Koresh’s interpretation of Scripture, for instance, “did not lack system or context, and to see him in that light is to begin to understand why his message had appeal, particularly to those of the Seventh-day Adventist tradition” (p. i).

Chapters include: 1) Introduction: texts, eisegesis and millennial expectation; 2) Hanserd Knollys, Benjamin Keach and the book of Revelation: a study in Baptist eisegesis; 3) Revelation 13 and the papal Antichrist in eighteenth-century England; 4) Catholic Apocalypse: the book of Revelation in Roman Catholicism from c. 1600 to 1800; 5) Methodists and the millennium: eschatological belief in early British Methodism; 6) Charles Wesley: prophetic interpreter; 7) William Miller, the book of Daniel, and the end of the world; 8) ‘A Lamb-like Beast’: Revelation 13:11-18 in the Seventh-day Adventist tradition; and 9) Waco Apocalypse: the book of Revelation in the Branch Davidian Tradition. With the exception of the introduction, each of the chapters closes with an excerpt (appendix) from one of the individuals discussed in the chapter. The last chapter closes with an audio transcription of Revelation 13 taught by David Koresh in 1987. With the exception of the chapter concerning the Catholic Apocalypse, the proponents of the various eschatologies are demonstrated to have adopted historicist interpretations.

Newport cited several Catholic interpreters, who historically have affirmed an idealist view in regard to prophetic timing. The author adopted the typical historicist argument that preterism arose with Luis de Alcazar (pp. 71-74), and futurism arose through the efforts of Francisco Ribera (pp. 75-76) and Robert Bellarmine (p. 76). The author did identify few adherents of “counter historicism” from c. 1600 to 1800, who were willing to identify the Antichrist as “a great prince of the Mahometan Empire” (p. 82) or even Martin Luther (pp. 84-88). Newport concluded accurately, “The overriding concern of Catholic commentators on Revelation during this period was to disarm the standard Protestant view that Pope and/or the Roman Catholic Church was the Antichrist” (p. 88).

Essentially, the work is a chronicle—beginning in seventeenth century England—of eisegesis of Revelation (and Daniel secondarily) to explain the context for the eschatological teachings of Koresh. Much of the eisegesis was the result of interpretations “that suited their own ends” and “illustrate the power of the eisegetical mind” (p. 22). The focus is primarily on historicist views, and even the eschatology of the Roman Catholic Church from c. 1600 to 1800 is witnessed as a reaction to the historicism of the Protestant Reformers.
Whereas much of this work will disappoint the casual reader, the astute scholar will be indebted to much of this research. This work is strongly recommended for understanding the damaging effects of historicist eisegesis and setting of dates, and for understanding historicism primarily in relation to postmillennialism (and some premillennial interpretations).

Ron J. Bigalke Jr.


*Essays and Reviews* is a collection of seven essays by seven “Broad Church” divines, published in 1860. This first critical edition, edited by Victor Shea and William Whitla, who teach in the Division of Humanities at York University, Toronto, provides extensive annotation about this particular text and indicated the impact of this work about Victorian society. As the preface of this work explains, it indicated, “shifts in allegiances, transitions in thought and action—in fields as diverse as theology, religious and ecclesiastical history, biblical studies, education, law, science, politics, and literary criticism” (p. ix). The most significant essay is Benjamin Jowett’s “On the Interpretation of Scripture.” Jowett argued that the interpretive task was to read the Bible like any other book and to recover the original meaning of the biblical authors, but not to assume that the creation accounts of Genesis would conform to Newtonian astronomy. Indeed, he welcomed the work of higher criticism and sought confirmation of biblical history by means of independent sources, thereby questioning biblical accuracy. The essayists were “a loose affiliation of liberals who wanted changes in doctrine and reform in institutions based on the advances in new fields of knowledge, including modern biblical hermeneutics” (p. 7).

When it first appeared, the publication was regarded as offensive and the essayists were called “The Seven Against Christ.” The fact that it was published a year after Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* is significant, as it reflected the ongoing hostility of higher criticism to biblical history from scientists laboring in the recently established fields of biology and geology. As a result of the controversy raised by *Essays and Reviews*, Darwin’s work received less attention in the press. When “The Seven Against Christ” was pursued for heresy, a private petition was drafted in their defense. Darwin added his signature to the petition and praised the essayists’ efforts “to establish religious teaching on a firmer and broader foundation.” The collection of essays was a commercial success, and led to three high interest heresy trials.
Unfortunately this work has largely been the concern of historians and literary critics, and unavailable to modern readers. This critical edition identifies “the volume in its complex social context and supply commentary, background materials, composition and publishing history, textual notes, and a broad range of new supporting documents, including material from the trials, manifestos, satires, and contemporary illustrations” (front flap). The work includes three parts and appendixes. The first part is an introduction to the work in the form of five chapters. These chapters include respectively: (1) a cultural explanation of Essays and Reviews; (2) an explanation of the origin and publication of the essays; (3) a discussion of the reception and response; (4) introductions to each essayist and his essay; and, (5) an essay on the “Broach Church” compromise. The second part consists of the essays, which is almost 500 pages due to the arduous annotations. The third part is documentation, which includes a chronology, prefaces to the American editions, various material concerning the heresies, satires by Lewis Carroll and others, the heretical influence of Bishop Colenso’s “Great Scandal,” and a chronicle of the Exeter Controversy. The appendixes include: publisher’s records, outlines of each essay, a finding list of letters and diaries of Essays and Reviews, and a bibliography of responses to the work. Another hundred pages provide a list of works cited and an index of biblical passages, persons, and subjects. The work obviously demonstrates how much has been forgotten about the nineteenth century. The introductions and annotations are essential reading for students of Victorian culture. Nonetheless, the extensive history and annotations within this critical edition are of momentous value to students of creation science and hermeneutics. Every academic library should have this volume available.

Ron J. Bigalke Jr.
News and Announcements

APOLOGETICS CONFERENCE
20-21 October 2007
Clearwater Christian College
Clearwater, Florida
Hosted by Eternal Ministries and the Society of Dispensational Theology, this fifth annual southeast regional meeting will focus upon affirming and living absolute truth. Speakers include: Ron J. Bigalke Jr., David Burggraff, Robert Delnay, and Jonathan Henry.
Web: www.tyndale.edu

MEETING OF THE EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY
14-16 November 2007
Town and Country Resort and Convention Center
San Diego, California
The theme of the fifty-ninth annual meeting is “Teaching Them to Obey.” Over 500 papers will be presented. Program Chair and Acting President is Dr. Hassell Bullock.
Web: http://www.etsjets.org/?q=meetings

THE HERITAGE LECTURES SERIES
30 November—1 December 2007
Fort Worth Learning Center
This intensive will be an overview of Israelology as taught by Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, founder of Ariel Ministries, and author of Israelology and The Footsteps of Messiah.
Web: www.tyndale.edu

SIXTEENTH ANNUAL PRE-TRIB STUDY GROUP
10-12 December 2007
Sheraton Grand Hotel
Dallas/Ft. Worth
This conference will focus upon “The Book of Revelation.” The study group will host a special debate on the dating of the Book of Revelation. The debaters include: Dr. Mark Hitchcock, pastor of Faith Bible Church in Edmond, Oklahoma, who will argue for the traditional late date; arguing for an early date will be Hank Hanegraaff, president of the Christian Research Institute and host of the national radio show The Bible Answer Man. Various papers relating to the conference theme include the following presenters: Ron J. Bigalke Jr., Robert Congdon, Robert Dean, Arnold Fruchtenbaum, Gregory Harris, David Hocking, David Larsen, John Niemelä, John Whitcomb, and Andy Woods.
Web: www.pre-trib.org/registration