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Review of John Noe's “Unraveling the End”

In this article, I review John Noe's most recent book *“Unraveling the End, A balanced scholarly synthesis of four competing and conflicting end time views.”*

John approached me with an invitation to debate his book, but as I had not read it, I was hardly in a position to agree to debate it, so I offered instead to read it and write a review. For those who are not familiar with John, John has been in the Preterist movement for many years. He authored several very influential books, including “Beyond the End Times,” “Shattering the Left Behind Delusion,” and “Dead in Their Tracks.” John has also been a prominent speaker in Preterist circles and was by all accounts a leader in the movement. However, John's following has waned in recent years by making public his view that the charismata (gifts of the Holy Spirit) are still extant, and more recently and especially by his public announcement that he is a Universalist. With

publication of his newest book, it looked like John was getting his publishing career back on target. Unfortunately, this book fell short and missed the mark.

“Unraveling the End” does an excellent and unparalleled job presenting the Preterist view of eschatology, and the conflicts and contradictions inherent in futurist paradigms. If John had chosen to merely make the case for Preterism, his work would have been very valuable. However, John does not stop there, but goes on to argue for a Preterist/Idealist synthesis based upon his “many comings/never left” material and his arguments that the terms “second coming” and “return” of the Lord are unscriptural. In

my estimation, this utterly derailed John's argument and spoiled the book. Not wanting to make an overly critical or unbalance review of John's work, please keep in mind that while much of what follows is critical, calling attention to points of disagreement or error, the first half of *"Unraveling the End"* was very, very good.

New International Version

John uses the New International Version. This is not a version used by serious scholars. It is an "easy to read" paraphrastic version that ignores verb moods to fit doctrinal slants of its editorial board. For example, Jn. 3:16 in the Greek uses the subjunctive mood to express desire, chance, or possibility:

King James Version	New International Version
"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life."	"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Where the Greek uses the subjunctive mood ("should not perish") The NIV drops this and substitutes the indicative mood ("shall not perish"). This is scholastically dishonest and reflects the theological bent of the editorial committee and its willingness to corrupt the word of God. It also fails to translate the Greek word "monogenes" ("only begotten"), substituting "one and only Son." This sort of paraphrastic translation means that the reader sometimes gets more of a commentary reflecting the dogmatic views of the translators, than the uncorrupted word of God. Hence, it has never gained currency among scholarly writers.

The NIV also uses a Westcott-Hort type text. For those who are unfamiliar with Westcott and Hort, they are the editors responsible for the Revised Version (1881), published in America as in 1901 as the American Standard Version. This text changed the Received Text in about 6000 places, impugning many authentic pieces of scripture, including the last twelve verses of Mark (Mk. 16:9-20), the woman taken in adultery (Jn. 8:1-11), and Acts 8:37. The NIV takes "God" out of I Tim. 3:16, substituting "he", despite the fact that a whole book has been written demonstrating the authenticity of the word "God" in the passage. The methodology of Westcott and Hort has been widely criticized as attaching too much importance to the three oldest

manuscripts in our possession: The Sinaiticus, the Alexandrian, and the Vaticanus manuscripts. Yet, these three manuscripts disagree between themselves more often than they agree, and only survived as long as they have precisely because they were known to be unreliable and therefore were not used, but left upon the self as curiosities. In fact, Sinaiticus was rescued by Tischendorf from a rubbish pile at St. Catharine's Monastery where it was set aside to be burned, so little was the esteem it held with the monks of that monastery.¹

I would not normally call attention to the use of the NIV this way, but truth requires precision. The NIV is not a precise translation and is used by no serious scholars that I am aware of. John's use of the NIV was a "red flag" to me to be on the look-out for questionable argument and conclusion in balance of the book. After all, if someone is undiscerning enough to settle for a notoriously dishonest translation, how reliable can their treatment of scripture be in other areas? If the foundation is rotten, how can the building be sound?

Failed Synthesis of Four Dominate Views

The stated goal and subtitle of John's book is to synthesize the four competing and conflicting end-time views of Dispensational Premillennialism, Amillennialism, Postmillennialism, and Preterism. "I now believe the whole divisive area of eschatological views can be fully synthesized, harmonized, reconciled, and unified."² Yet, so far as I am able to identify, John never actually synthesized any part of Premillennialism, Amillennialism, or Postmillennialism with Preterism. Rather, John discards Amillennialism and Premillennialism entirely, retains one part of Postmillennialism, and adds Idealsim. In his own words: "Today, however, I have further evolved into what I am calling a P.I.P.S. That's an acronym for Preterist Idealist/Postmillennial Synthesis."³ But even here, John does not synthesize Postmillennialism with Preterism.

Postmillennialism holds that Christ returns *after* the millennium; that the world in the meanwhile will grow better and better, culminating in a material new

¹ For a full examination into Westcot and Hort's Revised Version, which serves as the basis for the NIV, see Dean John W. Burgeon's *"The Revision Revised"* (1883, 5th Edition published 1983 by A.G. Hobbs Publications, Fort Worth, TX).

² Noe, p. 123

³ Noe, p. 111

creation at Christ's return. Virtually all Preterists believe Christ returned following the millennia. This is not because they obtained that view from Postmillennialism. If Postmillennialism never existed, Preterists would still have this belief. To synthesize is to combine separate elements to fashion something new. Thus, for there to be a synthesis, Postmillennialism must add to or change Preterism making it new or different in some essential way. However, since Preterists already believe the second coming occurs after the millennia, John's retaining this aspect of Postmillennialism hardly represents a synthesis. John's synthesis consists in his assessing some of the alleged strengths of the other eschatological views and encouraging incorporating these as part of Preterism. For example, John lists the following items as strengths of Premillennialism:

- Strong interest in end-time prophecy.
- Emphasis on the dynamic role of Christ in the present and future affairs of humankind.
- Recognizes that eschatology is connected to Israel and pertains to the end of the Jewish age.
- Realization that at least one coming of Christ is not visible.⁴

But merely pointing out these alleged "strengths" in Premillennialism hardly equates with synthesizing them with Preterism. Preterism already has a strong interest in end-time prophecy; already recognizes its connection with Israel and the end of the Jewish age; recognizes the role of Christ in the world today; and it has always argued for the invisible coming of Christ. So, where is the synthesis in this? Preterism already incorporates all these things! And this is true of all the "strengths" of the other schools proposed by John for adoption. In fact, so far as I can tell, their strengths are *measured by* a Preterist view of scripture, and if they are inconsistent with Preterism, John does not recommend them. Thus, if anything, it is Preterism that John is urging upon the other schools and nothing from them upon Preterism! Hence, if the success of John's book lies in synthesizing the four main views of end-times, then it does not appear to me that he has succeeded. *No synthesis occurs.*

John's Presentation of the Conflicts and Contradictions of the Four Main Views

In order to justify and demonstrate the need for synthesizing the four interpretative schools, John lays before the reader a critical assessment of their

⁴ Noe, p. 419

weaknesses. John does a masterful job here, providing abundant quotes critiquing the three main futurist paradigms. John has done his homework and this is certainly one of the strong parts of the book. But, in order to justify synthesizing Preterism, John must show that, like the futurist models discussed, it too is somehow deficient or fatally flawed. Here, John does not come off presenting a convincing case at all. The very fact that all of the points John recommends as strengths in the other views are measured by their consistency with Preterism proves *there is no intrinsic element of Preterism that is in error*. If Preterism is the rule against which the other models are measured, how can John genuinely fault it? Thus, there is a contradiction here. The faults John assigns to Preterism justifying its need for synthesis are:

- A spiritualizing tendency vis-à-vis the kingdom and resurrection (Max Kingism/Corporate Body View)
- Does not account for many past comings of Jesus
- Does not allow for future comings of Jesus (Jesus came in finality in AD 70)

According to John:

"The insistence by some leading preterists that A.D. 70 was the final coming of Christ—he came 'in finality'—creates a *terminus ad quem*, or finality paradigm and another dichotomizing hermeneutic. Hence, Christ's involvement in human affairs is largely viewed as being fulfilled and over. Scriptures and post-A.D. 70 reality are then read through this mindset. Likewise terminated (depending on which preterist you talk to) are intrinsic elements of Christ's kingdom, such as: the functioning of charismatic gifts, the activity of angels, demons, and Satan, water baptism, the Lord's Supper, and even the Church itself."⁵

I share John's concern about several of the items appearing in this list. However, I do not share his assessment that these result from the view that Jesus came in finality in A.D. 70. First of all, the number of "leading Preterists" that teach Jesus came in finality in A.D. 70 is very few, probably one: Ed Stevens. Ed Stevens and Don Preston debated two Amillennialists in 2006, in which the proposition was "Did Jesus come in finality in A.D. 70?" "Finality" here can mean different things to different people. If one means that Jesus came in *prophetic* finality in A.D. 70, then, Yes! Of course this would be true. There are no more specific comings prophesied in scripture beyond

⁵ Noe, p. 184

Christ's A.D. 66-70 coming (John admits this). On the other hand, if one means that there are no more *providential* comings or times of divine judgment visited upon men and nations, then, No; this would be incorrect. But, I know of no Preterists that take this position.

I corresponded with Ed Stevens about this issue as a result of reading John's book, and Ed does believe Jesus came in finality in A.D. 70, but he does not deny that God still governs the world or that there are times of judgment and divine visitation upon nations. Whether Ed would characterize these visitations as "comings" I cannot say. But this is merely a question of semantics; the substance is the same, so that whether one calls it a "coming," a "visitation" or a time of "divine judgment" really does not matter very much. But even if it were true that Ed believes Jesus came in complete finality in A.D., he would be the only one I know holding this opinion. Clearly, this is not a sufficient basis to fault all of Preterism or to subject it to synthesis for correction!

Second, not everything listed by John are "intrinsic elements" of Christ's kingdom. Most people reject the idea that charismatic gifts still exist; John is in a tiny minority (fringe) here. If Preterism is to be faulted for believing the charismata ceased millennia ago, then so must the majority of Christians and churches. The activity (to say nothing of the existence) of demons and Satan is certainly not an "intrinsic element" of Christ's kingdom. Belief in demons and a supernatural being called Satan is not intrinsic to the faith either. There are many views about these and no one view can claim to be correct to the exclusion of all others. As long as reasonable minds can differ, there is no place for dogmatizing about this issue and it certainly cannot justify synthesizing Preterism.

As to the activity of angels, I would be surprised if twenty people could be produced who deny angels exist or are active in the world today. I have been a Preterist for 32 years and have not so much as heard this before; if it exists at all, it can hardly be representative of more than a tiny, tiny percentage of Preterists.

I have read one article arguing that the church belonged only to the transitional period between Pentecost and A.D. 70, but this view, like the view that baptism belonged only to the transitional period, is an aberration, and reflects the view of only one or two vocal personalities within the movement, and is not representative of Preterism in overall. Most Preterists reject these ideas entirely.

I agree that the King/Preston Corporate Body View's spiritualizing method is bad; very bad. This view equates the eschatological resurrection with justification from sin. It holds that the church, the body of Christ, remained under bondage to sin and death by the Mosaic Law until A.D. 70; that it was in the "grave of Judaism" until the fall of Jerusalem, when it was raised by removal of the law. This spiritualizing method has proven to be a virtual fountain of error, and has treated us to the most absurd notions over the years, including that we are in "heaven now," that believers have their "resurrection bodies now," that "sin no longer exists" (because the Mosaic Law is removed), etc. In fact, the idea that baptism belonged only to the transition period between A.D. 33-70 rises from this quarter. Virtually, all the errors present in Preterism do. But this has nothing to do with Preterism, but a distorted, spiritualizing hermeneutic used by some of its members. Preterism can no more be faulted for this than it can because some of its members are Universalists or believe in the charismata. These are appendages superadded to Preterism, not essential elements of it, and therefore cannot justify synthesizing Preterism with Idealism or anything else.

Discontinuance of the Lord's Supper is, however, a question that frequently arises; this must be admitted. But this is because of Paul's comments in I Cor. 11:26, and has nothing to do with belief that Jesus came in "finality" in A.D. 70, nor will John's "many comings" view (see below) prevent this question from rising, nor correct mistaken views about it. In fact, none of the items John mentions will be corrected by his "many comings" view, for the simple fact that most Preterists already believe in many past comings of the Lord and that he still comes providentially today. Thus, John's whole argument for the need to synthesize Preterism is, for me, a complete wash.

World Without End

One of John's arguments against futurist paradigms calling for the end of the world, the end of time, and the cessation of life as we know it on earth, is the notion that the world will *never* end. John originally floated this idea in his book "Beyond the End Times." I remember when I read this argument all those years ago thinking that this was a clever retort to quickly stop the mouths of futurists. But its main attraction is that it made it easy for Preterists to dispense quickly with passages that seemed to teach the end of the world or the destruction of the cosmos at Christ's coming (II Pet. 3:10-13). Rather than needing to provide full and adequate explanations of these passages, we could simply dismiss objections that Christ had not returned by citing scriptures that seem to say the world or earth will last forever. Wholla! Although I used this

argument myself for some years, I no longer do. I do *not* believe the Bible teaches the earth is without end. Before looking at why I no longer believe the earth or world is endless or eternal, let's look briefly at John's arguments.

End of the World versus End of the Age

According to John,

"The original King James Version of the Bible mistranslates the Greek word *aion* as "world" rather than 'age' in the phrase 'the end of the world (age)' in Jesus' longest prophecy (see Matt. 12:32; 13:22, 39, 40, 49; 24:3; 28:20, for instance. Most modern Bible translations, including the New King James Version, clear up this confusion and render it properly as 'age'."⁶

The problem with this argument is that almost all words have multiple meanings depending upon their context, and the Greek word *aion* does sometimes mean "world" as defined by *life beneath the sun*. For example, in Matt. 13:22, one of the passages John cites, Jesus says in the Parable of the Sower

"He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful."

Clearly, the phrase "the cares of the *aion* (world)" here describes the things of *this life* that distract us and draw us away from God, rendering the word of the gospel unfruitful. There is nothing in *aion* in this passage that would justify limiting its meaning to the pre-Messianic world or age. Its use in this case is equal to the word "cosmos" which appears in I John 2:15-17:

"Love not the world (cosmos), neither the things that are in the world (cosmos). If any man love the world (cosmos) the love of the Father is not in him."

I think we can all see that "the care of the world" and "the deceitfulness of riches" in Matt. 13:22 are equal to "love of the world" in I Jn. 2:15. Both are describing things pertaining to the flesh and their ability to draw us away from God or render his word unfruitful in our lives. There are many passages like this where *aion* must be understood as speaking to the world as defined by life beneath the sun and can be used interchangeably with *cosmos*. See for example I Cor. 1:20, 21; 2:6, 13; 3:18,19 where Paul alternates between *aion* and *cosmos*, using the terms interchangeably to describe

things pertaining to fleshly life beneath the sun. By the same token, there are times when the English word "world" must be understood as speaking to an epoch or age. In the phrase "pre-Messianic world or age" which we used above, we see that "age" and "world" carry the same meaning, and describe *conditions belonging to a time or epoch of history*. This is the correct meaning underlying the phrase "end of the world" in Matt. 24:3 – the conditions of the world marking the pre-Messianic reign were going to end, and a new world order ensue in which Christ rules the nations with a rod of iron and guides all things to the advancement of his gospel.

All this to say that simply translating the word "aion" as "age" solves nothing alone. Admittedly, for those who use English the phrase "end of the world" carries connotations larger than "end of the age," but even here the phrase is sufficiently elastic to allow futurists to still understand it in terms of the "end of the earth." Futurists who use new translations have not abandoned notions about the "end of the world" merely because their translations now render *aion* "age." Moreover, the church fathers thought and spoke in Greek and they uniformly understood the word in the sense of "world" and looked for a cataclysmic end of earth. Thus, the problem has more to do with the *baggage* we bring to the phrase than whether it is rendered "world" or "age."

A Look at Ephesians 3:9, 21

Although John faults the King James Version for translating *aion* "world," he readily uses it when it fits his purpose. John quotes Eph. 3:9, 21 from the King James to prove that the world is without end:

"The biblical truth about the proverbial 'end of the world' is contained within the biblical phrase 'world without end, Amen.' The Bible says that the world had a beginning, but is without end. 'From the beginning of the world...throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.' (Eph. 3:9, 21, KJV).

I could not help but smile when I read this, because the very word John says must be rendered "age" he here wants rendered "world" to prove that life on earth will continue forever! So, apparently, "aion" means "world" when John needs it to. The fact of the matter is the Bible is not here teaching the eternity of the earth or cosmos as John affirms. What the Greek actually says is:

"To him be glory in the church in Christ Jesus, to all the generations of the age of the ages. Amen"

⁶ Noe, pp. 148, 149

In other words, God the Father is to receive glory through Christ and his church throughout all generations of the “ages of the ages.” What is the “age of the ages”? One interpretation is that it is the Messianic or Christian age; the world marked by the reign of Christ over earth. The Messianic or Christian age is the “dispensation of the fullness of times” (Eph. 1:10); it is the “consummation of the ages” (Heb. 9:26) in which all redemptive promises, and all races of men, are “gathered together in one in Christ” (Eph. 1:10). As long as the Messianic age endures, God will receive glory through Christ and the church for our redemption by the work of the Cross. Another interpretation is that the Greek idiomatic phrase “age of the ages” carries the idea of “forever and ever,” so that rather than pointing to the Messianic age per se, it means that God will receive eternal glory (in the eternity of heaven and the next life) in those whom he has saved through Jesus. That is all Eph. 3:9, 21 teach. They do not affirm the eternity of the earth (“world”) as John would have us believe.

Other Passages thought to affirm the Eternality of the Earth

Several other passages are relied upon as teaching that the earth will never end:

Eccles. 1:4 – One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth forever.

Psalms 78:69 – And he built his sanctuary like high palaces, like the earth which he hath established forever.

Psalms 104:5 – Who has laid the foundations of the earth that it should not be removed forever (cf. 93:1; 96:10; 119:90).

Verses John cites for the proposition that the cosmos is eternal include:

Psalms 89:36, 37 – His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as faithful witness in heaven. Se-lah.

Psalms 148:3-6 – Praise him sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light. Praise him, heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the Lord: for he commanded, and they were created. He hath also established them forever, and ever: he hath made a decree which shall not pass.

We should notice at the outset that, with the exception of Ecclesiastes, all of these statements come from the

Psalms, which are books of poetry. And even Eccl. 1:4 is in a poetic part of the book, whose purpose is to set forth the vanity and brevity of mortal life beneath the sun. None of these statements are intended to make scientific statements about the eternity of the material cosmos or earth, any more than statements about the sun “rising” (Josh. 10:12, 13; Eccl. 1:5; Isa. 45:6) are intended to make statements about a geocentric universe. During the Renaissance, the Catholic Church forbade teaching Copernicus’ theory of a heliocentric universe in which the earth and planets orbit the sun. When Galileo invented the telescope and was able to prove Copernicus’ theory that ours is a heliocentric (sun centered) cosmos, not geocentric (earth centered), Catholic authorities tried Galileo for heresy. They relied upon the sort of statements John relies upon to prove the earth is eternal. But since none of these verses are uttered with the intention of making scientific statements, it is wrong to take them that way. Certainly John will not argue that the sun, moon, and stars can “praise” God, as the Psalmist proclaims. Clearly, all can see that these are poetic expressions. The “forever” in all of these passages must be taken relatively, in comparison to mortal existence, and as expressions of the greatness of God, whose ordinances are immutable and cannot be overthrown.

The Earth is not Eternal

There are statements in the Bible that teach that the earth is not eternal, but will some day cease to exist.

Gen. 8:22 – While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.

God made this promise after the flood, ensuring Noah and mankind that he would not cause the cataclysmic destruction of the world as he had done. While earth remains, the normal cycles and patterns of life will endure. The phrase “while earth remains” qualifies God’s promise. Earth itself will not remain forever. God, who is a spirit (Jn. 4:24), called the material realm and universe into existence, and will one day vanish them into nothing again. That is what the Psalmist says:

Psalms 102:25, 26 – “Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment: as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed.”

Here is a passage that expressly declares that the heavens and earth “shall perish.” The Psalmist likens them to a garment that grows old and is discarded, and

something new put in their place. John says that God is eternal and so is creation: "Eternalness is not only an attribute ascribed to God and his glory, it's also an attribute ascribe to his creation."⁷ But in the passage before us the eternity of God is compared with the temporal nature of the heavens and earth. God is greater than his creation: he will endure forever, the heavens and earth will not.

Matt. 24:35 – "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

This passage is similar to that of the Psalm 102:25, 26, above. There, the eternity of God is compared to his creation. God will endure forever and ever, but the physical creation will not. Here, Jesus contrasts his divine word and prophetic utterance with the physical creation. Heaven and earth will pass away (fail), but his predictions will not fail. Jesus appeals to the heaven and earth as the most enduring and reliable thing of all physical creation: The ordinances of the sun, moon, stars, and seasons are fixed and irrevocable; they cannot be broken or changed; they are inalterable and permanent. Yet, for all that, they are still matter and not spirit; they last only so long as God ordains. The very heavens and earth themselves therefore are less reliable than the certainty of Jesus' divine word: they depend upon God's word for continuance; his predictions *are* God's word. This passage is therefore equal in meaning to Luke 16:17: "And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail." Here we see that the "passing" of the one is compared with the "failing" of the other. We must imagine that it would be a very hard thing for heaven and earth to pass away. Yet, hard as that seems, it is easier that should happen than God's law fail; what he has decreed, will stand.

I Jn. 2:17 – "The word passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."

The Greek term rendered "world" here is *cosmos*. The *cosmos* passes away, but those that do God's will abide forever. This verse thus becomes like the preceding ones, where the physical creation is declared to be temporal and passing; but God, his word, and those that obey his word are said to abide forever.

Covenantal Heaven and Earth?

John attempts to dismiss the plain meaning of passages declaring that the physical creation is not eternal, by saying that they refer to the Old Testament system. Thus, the "old" heavens and earth refer to the Old

Testament, the "new" heavens and earth refer to the New Testament. This error has a fairly strong showing among Preterists, so let's address it briefly here.

This model was first invented by Max King as a way of explaining the prophecy of Isa. 65:17 and 66:22, which is mentioned by Peter in his second general epistle (II Pet. 3:10-13) and the Revelation of St. John (Rev. 21:1). According to King, the heavens and earth are symbols for a covenantal system. A.D. 70 saw one covenantal system removed and a new covenantal system put in its place. But this is precisely the error that led Max King and his ministry into Universalism. According to Tim King, Max's son:

"Simply stated, man is changed because his world changed. Man is reconciled to God because he no longer lives under the rule of sin and death as determined by the Mosaic world. Through the gift of Christ he dwells in a world of righteousness and life. The issue is cosmic and corporate, not individual and limited." Tim King, *Comprehensive Grace*, 2005

Hear also Kevin Beck, president of King's Presence Ministries:

"There's no sin and no sin-related death in a world that has the New Jerusalem in it's midst." Kevin Beck, *he Creation of Jerusalem*, Feb, 08

And last, hear David Timm in a piece posted on the Presence Ministries web site:

"In the new world people are reconciled to God without any say in the matter. God loves all those that He has made in His image equally." David Timm, *Grace Upon All*, Oct. 06

Thus, King's covenantal heaven and earth model is inexorably bound up in his Universalism. John has recently come out as a Universalist; his endorsement of King's hermeneutic perhaps should not surprise us. The error that the heavens and earth are metaphors for the Old and New Testaments is easily dispelled. In the new heaven and earth, the saved are in the city the new Jerusalem, the bride, the covenantal habitation of the saints. The lost (damned) are outside the city; the gates are open for them to come in by obedience to the gospel, but so long as they remain without the city, they are damned.

"Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie." Rev. 22:14, 15; cf. 21:8.

⁷ Noe, 151

This one passage totally dispels the covenantal heaven and earth model (to say nothing of Universalism). The wicked and damned are in the new heaven and earth, outside the city! Thus, the new heavens and earth cannot represent the New Testament, for only those in the city are in a covenantal relationship with Christ; they alone are his bride; those outside the city, though in the new heaven and earth, are damned!

Verses evoked to support the covenantal heaven and earth model include the following:

Deut. 32:1 – “Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.”

According to John, Don Preston, and others who follow Max King’s interpretation, heaven and earth here refer to the elders of the Jews. But all that is happening here is that Moses appeals to the *inhabitants* of heaven and earth as witnesses of his prophecy against the Jews (cf. Isa. 1:2). Moses is not evoking the Jews as witnesses of his prophecy against themselves! We bring third parties in as witnesses of our oaths; parties to an oath cannot serve as witnesses for themselves. Thus, when Jacob made a covenant with Laban that neither would pass over to the other for harm, he gathered a heap of stones and erected a pillar and said “God is witness betwixt me and thee...This heap be witness, and this pillar be witness, that I will not pass over this heap to thee, and that thou shalt not pass over this heap and this pillar until me, for harm” (Gen. 31:50, 52). Likewise, when Moses or God (Isa. 1:2) evokes the heaven and earth as witness, they are appealing to third parties to give witness to the violation of the covenant by the Jews. The heaven and earth (their inhabitants) are the *witnesses* of the covenant, not the covenant itself.

What about Isaiah 51:13-16?

This passage is probably the most relied upon by Preterists in support of the idea that the heavens and earth refer to the Old Covenant, so we will look at it separately under its own heading.

Isa. 51:11-16 - “And forgettest the Lord thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor? The captive exile hasteneth that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor that his bread should fail. But I am the Lord thy God, that divided the sea, whose waves roared: The Lord of hosts is his name. And I have put my words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand,

that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people.”

Reference to the Red Sea crossing leads some to suppose that “planting the heavens” and “laying the foundations of the earth” contemplate giving of the Old Testament. But this is mistaken. A review of the chapter will show that the overall theme is God’s coming salvation, first, in the return of the Babylonian captivity, second, by the reign of the Messiah in the new heavens and earth.

v. 3 – “For the Lord shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving and the voice of melody.”

This verse speaks to the return of the captivity: “comforting Zion’s waste and desert places” describes the rebuilding of villages and towns left desolate by the Assyrio-Babylonian invasions. These would be rebuilt by the return of the captivity beginning 536 B.C. (cf. v. 11). When God brought the armies of Nebuchadnezzar upon the world and the Jews, he described the desolation of the world in terms of its “de-creation,” as though it reverted to the chaos before God ordered creation.

“I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form, and void, and the heavens, and they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. I held, and, lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. I beheld, and lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the Lord and by his fierce anger.” Jer. 4:23-26

Thus, “planting the heavens” and “laying the foundations of the earth” speak to the return of the captivity and the repopulation of the land, reclaiming it from desolation, destruction, and chaos, not the giving of the law at Sinai. Reference to the Red Sea crossing points to the return from Babylon: As God led Israel out of Egypt, so he would lead the captives back to Palestine (cf. Isa. 27:12, 13). Proof of this is seen a preceding chapter in Isaiah:

“Thus saith the Lord...I have helped thee, and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages.” Isa. 49:8

Here we see that “establishing the earth” means “to inherit the desolate cities” left without inhabitant by the captivity in Babylon. However, passages describing the return of the captivity often telescope ahead to the

coming of the Messiah, practically treating them as one and the same event. Isaiah thus continues (Isa. 51:4, 5):

v. 4, 5 - "Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation: for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light of the people. My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the people; the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust."

Here we find plain reference to the gospel of Jesus Christ: the law that would bring light to the peoples; the salvation that would proceed from the Lord (cf. Isa. 2:1-4). Thus, the context is looking ahead to Christ following the return of the captivity, not back to the Exodus. The prophet continues:

v. 6 - "Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be forever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished."

Although heaven and earth will pass away, God's salvation in Christ will endure forever. In the new heavens and earth, God's people will rejoice forever in the salvation of the gospel and the reign of Christ over the nations, saving them from the hand of their enemies and oppressors. There is nothing in Isa. 51:13-16 that equates the Old Testament with the heavens and earth.

Matthew 5:17, 18

A last passage relied upon by John and many Preterists in support the idea of a covenantal heavens and earth is Matt. 5:17, 18:

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."

When I first became a Preterist 32 years ago I thought this passage carried some mystical meaning teaching that the "heavens and earth" were equal to the law, and that these mystical heavens and earth had to pass at Christ's second coming before the Old Testament law would end. However, this is a complete misreading of the text. First, Jesus said he had come to fulfill the law during his *first* coming and earthly ministry, not his second coming. He did this when he died on the cross for men's sins. The law was a shadow; a shadow ends where the body begins. The body (substance) of the law is Christ and him crucified (Col. 2:17; Heb. 10:1). Therefore, the Old Testament ended at the cross, not

A.D. 70. This is corroborated numerous places in scripture showing that that the law was no longer valid, including the abrogation of circumcision, the dietary restrictions, table fellowship with Gentiles, the animal sacrifices, the feasts, the priesthood, and the Sabbath days. Second, in saying "till heaven and earth pass" Jesus uses a figure of speech comparable to the modern saying something will not happen "until Hades freezes over." Since Hades will never freeze over, the implication is that the contingency will never occur. In the present case, "one jot or tittle of the law will not fail until heaven and earth pass away," which is the same as to say, the law will never fail to be fulfilled. This is clear from the parallel passage in Luke 16:17:

"And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail."

Thus, Jesus is not making some mystical allusion to the Old Testament when he says "till the heavens and earth pass." He evokes them parabolically as things abiding and unmovable, but which are easier to pass than for God's law fail to be fulfilled. There is nothing to the covenantal heavens and earth model but error, Universalism, and more error. We urge Preterists to keep far away from it.

God's Divinely Determined Timeline

Chapter ten of John's book is entitled "God's Divinely Determined Timeline." John does an excellent job here laying out the case that all scripture focus eschatological fulfillment in the first century A.D. John begins his discussion with Daniel's seventy prophetic weeks, and shows that this prophecy concludes, not with the end of the world, but the destruction of Jerusalem. However, I did not agree with John's starting point for the seventy prophetic weeks. John places this at 457 B.C. The prophecy states that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem until the Messiah there would be "seven weeks" and "three score and two weeks" or sixty-nine weeks total, which equals four hundred and eighty-three years (Dan. 9:24, 25). John correctly identifies the fulfillment of this part of the prophecy with Christ's baptism and the beginning of his earthly ministry. However, by causing the starting point of the seventy prophetic weeks to begin in 457 B.C., John is forced to place Jesus' baptism in A.D. 27, which would mean he was born in 4 B.C. and that he died in A.D. 30. Yet, Luke is absolutely clear that Jesus was on the threshold of his thirtieth birthday when baptized in the 15th year of Tiberius Caesar (Luke 3:1). The 15th regnal year of Tiberius would have been the calendar year A.D. 29, making the date of Jesus' birth 2 B.C. So Finegan:

“Since Roman historians of the time (Tacitus, Suetonius,) generally date the first regnal year of a ruler from Jan 1 of the year following the date of accession (i.e., the accession-year system) we judge that Luke would do likewise. So Tiberius’s fifteenth factual year was from Aug 19, A.D. 28 to Aug 18, A.D. 29, but his fifteenth regnal year counted a Julian calendar years according to the accession-year system was Jan 1 to Dec 31, A.D. 29.”⁸

Thus, the correct starting point for Daniel’s seventy prophetic weeks is 454 B.C., placing Jesus’ death in the “midst” of the final week in A.D. 33, and not A.D. 30 as John has incorrectly supposes. (See generally, Archbishop James Ussher’s *Annals of the World* at 454 B.C. for full corroboration and details). This is not a major failing in John’s work by any means, but because his scheme contradicts Luke, it is too obvious an error not to correct.

This aside, John’s work in the balance of this chapter is superior. I was especially satisfied with John’s treatment of Daniel’s “Time of the End” prophecy and his identification of the “taking away of the daily sacrifice” (Dan. 12:11) in reference to the cessation of the twice daily sacrifice for Caesar that the Jews stopped in A.D. 66. This is often confused with the cessation of the sacrifice in the final weeks of the Jewish war with Rome, which results only in bewilderment and confusion. The “setting up of abomination of desolation” 1290 days (Dan. 12:11) from stopping the sacrifice for Caesar brings us to the marshalling of Titus’ troops in Caesarea in the late winter/early spring of A.D. 70. The 1335 days that follow 45 days later (Dan. 12:12) is best understood as the point at which Titus’ legions appeared at Jerusalem on the day of Passover and the five month siege and investment of the city began. The prophecy, including the resurrection from Hades, culminates with the “scattering of the power of the holy people” (Dan. 12:7), which was marked the destruction of the city and end of the Jewish state.

In the following chapter, John does a superb job presenting the Preterist case, based upon the time restrictive passages in the gospels placing the eschaton in the lives of the first disciples. John then surveys what he calls “intensification of nearness language” in the epistles, showing that as it grew closer to the end of the generation, the language of nearness intensifies. The force and momentum of the book at this point becomes almost irresistible. But then out of nowhere John brings in his many comings/no second

coming/never left material and the momentum runs into smack into a wall.

Many Comings/No Second Coming/Never Left

John argues that the terms “second coming” and “return” of Christ are “unscriptural” because there have been “many comings” of Jesus down through the ages. According to John “Scripture clearly proves that the expressions of ‘second coming’ and ‘return’ of Christ are biblically and historically inappropriate.” “We’ve been hamstrung by ‘second coming’ and ‘return’ terminology for too long. Not only is this misleading and debilitating language non-scriptural and unscriptural, but it’s a non-event.”⁹ John asserts “‘Second coming’ and ‘Return’ terminology makes no textual, historical, logical, grammatical, or biblical sense...Neither expression is a valid scriptural term or concept.”¹⁰

We will look at John’s definition of a “coming” briefly, but let’s first note that the terms “second” and “return” are both used in the context of Christ’s “coming again” in wrath after “going away” to heaven to receive the throne and kingdom of his father David. In Luke 19:12-27, Jesus told a parable “because he was nigh to Jerusalem and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear” (v. 11). In verse twelve, Jesus specifically uses the term “return”: “A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return.” John admits this word is translated correctly and does refer to Jesus departure and coming again, but hides this admission in a footnote! Yes, in a footnote! Tsk, tsk, tsk! By definition the phrase “coming again” means to “return.” So, even if the term “return” did not occur in scripture, the concept plainly does. John’s attempts to persuade us against use of this term are totally unavailing. “Second” is also used in reference to Jesus departure and coming again:

“But now once at the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.” Heb. 9:26-28

Here, the term “once” is applied to Christ’s first appearance: “once he hath appeared.” This is followed by the term “second” to describe his coming again”:

⁸ Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (Hendrickson, 1998 ed.), p. 338.

⁹ Noe, pp. 259, 261

¹⁰ Noe, p. 280

“he shall appear a second time.” The term “appearance” is often used interchangeably with “coming” and “revelation” in the New Testament (I Cor. 1:7; I Tim. 6:14; II Tim. 1:10; 4:1, 8; I Pet. 1:7, 13). Thus, “appear a second time” in Heb. 9:27 is equal to “come a second time” or “second coming.” Christ would appear a second time to save his persecuted church from their oppressors. Thus, despite John’s protestations to the contrary, the terms “return” and “second coming” are both perfectly scriptural in use and concept.

John’s objection to the term “second coming” stems from his material about the “many comings” of Jesus. John’s definition of a “coming” is:

“My working definition for ‘a coming of Jesus’ is this – It’s a personal and bodily intervention and/or manifestation of Jesus into the life of an individual, a group, a church, or a nation on this earth. There are many different types of comings for different purposes, and they occur at different times and places. Some are visible appearances; some are invisible interventions. Some are physical (seen, heard, felt); some are spiritual (an internal illumination or revelation); and some are combinations.”¹¹

Needless to say, this definition is exceedingly broad and includes such things as a personal revelation or illumination. John argues further, that because “no man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (Jn. 1:18), therefore, all Old Testament theophanies or divine manifestations were Jesus. Thus, it was Jesus who appear to Abraham (Gen. 17:1, 2); it was Jesus who appeared to Moses in the burning bush (Ex. 3:2-5); Jesus was the rock Moses struck (a major misreading of I Cor. 10:6 here!); it was Jesus who appeared to Gideon (Jud. 6:11-26), etc.

The principle objection to John’s argument is its complete lack of relevancy. How does the fact it was Jesus who talked with Adam or appeared to Gideon help us understand eschatology or the nature of Christ’s coming in A.D. 66-70? The only comings that are helpful and relevant here are “day-of-the-Lord” type comings. There are many “days of the Lord” recorded in the Old Testament, in which the Lord came in wrath and judgment upon the world and its peoples. Understanding these is useful because that information can help us understand the day of the Lord predicted in the New Testament. One becomes the basis for understanding and interpreting the other. But whether it was Christ who appeared to Moses in the burning bush

is irrelevant to a discussion about the nature of Christ’s coming against the Romans and Jews at the end of pre-Messianic age. John’s whole discussion here is therefore “off topic.” He is comparing apples with oranges. Both are fruit, but different kinds, and therefore cannot shed light on the topic.

Jesus always describes his second coming by the phrase “Son of man”: “Ye shall not have gone over all the cities of Israel before the Son of man be come” (Matt. 10:23); or “For the Son of man shall come” (Matt. 16:27), or “they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven” (Matt. 24:31; cf. 26:64). This is highly relevant. The “Son of man” did not appear to Gideon in the Old Testament; the “Son of man” did not appear to Moses in the burning bush. Christ’s second coming applies ONLY to the Son of man. The Son of man appeared “once” to put away sins by the sacrifice of himself; the Son of man would appear a “second time” to save his people from their persecutors. Scripturally speaking, there are therefore only the two comings of the Son of man.

John’s “never left” material is equally without merit. John argues that because Jesus said he would be “with” the disciples until the end, or because he said where two or three are gathered in his name he would be in their midst, or because he is depicted as standing among the candlesticks (the churches) in Revelation, that therefore he never left. This is very poor reasoning. We all know that God is omnipresent and can be in many places in different forms all at the same time: God can be in heaven governing the universe at the same time that he appears in a burning bush to Moses, or condescends to be born to a virgin in Bethlehem. We all know this. The Psalmist wrote about it: “Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or wither shall I flee from thy presence?” (Ps. 139:7). The fact that Christ would be “with” the disciples providentially, helping them by miracles and providentially guiding their work (Matt. 28:Mk. 16:20), or that his spirit and blessing is upon those that assemble in his name, does not detract from the fact that the Son of man “went away” to heaven to receive a kingdom and “to return” in wrath to vanquish his enemies. John’s material about the omnipresence of Christ is marvelously “off topic” and is completely unhelpful in understanding the eschatological coming of Christ. In my estimation, John’s many comings/never left material can only confuse and perplex readers, and spoils his book.

John’s Idealism in the Book of Revelation

Another area we will look at is John’s argument that Preterism should be wed with Idealism. I should say at the outset that I believe Jesus governs the nations today and that he visits wrath upon them as his divine

¹¹ Noe, 252

judgment determines. However, these visitations are not prophetic comings, which scripture foretells. We cannot say that a given war or national or world disaster today fulfills any prophecy of scripture. All prophetic comings of Christ have been fully and finally fulfilled.

I believe Christ still governs the nations this way because this is what scripture teaches (Psalm 2:8-12; 110; Dan. 7:27; Rev, 11:15). I believe this because Jesus is “the same yesterday, and today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8). We may therefore expect that as God visited the nations providentially in judgment in the Old Testament, he will continue to do so for all futurity (Rom. 15:4). I believe most Preterists would agree with these statements. John’s charge that the majority of Preterists deny Christ’s continuing involvement in history is without basis; there is no reason to wed “idealism” as a corrective to Preterism. That said, let’s look at John’s argument that Revelation requires we adopt some form of “idealism.”

John affirms that all New Testament prophecies, including Revelation, are fulfilled in toto:

“There are no double fulfillments, double sense, partial fulfillments, near/far perspectives, or types and antitypes regarding the fulfillment of the plan of redemption and any end-time prophecy.”¹²

However, John believes that Rev. 10:10, 11 has a “*plenior sensus*,” which lends Revelation a “timeless relevance” and “universal application”:

“And I took the little book out of the angel’s hand, and ate it up: and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter. And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.”

“*Plenior sensus*” is Latin for “fuller meaning”:

“The *sensus plenior* is that additional, deeper meaning, intended by God but not clearly intended by the human author, which is seen to exist in the words of a biblical text (or group of texts, or even a whole book), when they are studied in the light of further revelation or development in the understanding of revelation.”¹³

¹² Noe, 209

¹³ Raymond E. Brown, *The Sensus Plenior of Sacred Scripture* (Baltimore: St. Mary’s University, 1955), p. 92

The most common examples of *plenior sensus* are prophecies, usually if not always Messianic, that have an immediate historical context, but whose language indicates a further application and fulfillment is intended or to be looked for. Isaiah’s prophecy of the virgin birth of Christ is a good example of a text that had an immediate historical fulfillment that gave it relevance to king Ahaz, but which was imbedded with a *plenior sensus* that looked ahead to Christ. The historical context of the prophecy was fulfilled in the defeat of Samaria and Damascus who allied together to capture Judah (Isa. 7:4-6). God gave a sign to Ahaz that a child that would be born in token that the conspiracy would fail: before the child was old enough to know good from evil, the two kings Ahaz feared would be destroyed (Isa. 7:14-16). In its original context, the child that would be born was almost certainly the prophet Isaiah’s son by his wife, herself a prophetess (Isa. 7:14-16; 8:1-3, 8, 18). This short term historical fulfillment did not exhaust the prophecy’s intended meaning, however. The prophecy’s ultimate meaning—its *plenior sensus*—looked ahead to the birth of Christ (Matt. 1:23).

There are virtually dozens of prophecies like this. The *plenior sensus* of virtually all such prophecies were fulfilled in Christ. There are no prophecies of which there is a *plenior sensus* to be fulfilled today. Daniel’s 490 prophetic years, which terminated in A.D. 70, expressly state that all vision and prophecy would be “sealed up” once the 490 years were fulfilled (Dan. 9:24). Therefore, John’s plea that Revelation has a *plenior sensus* must be rejected. He cannot claim there are “no double fulfillments, double sense, partial fulfillments” and that the “contemporary and historical setting was Revelation’s one and only fulfillment”¹⁴ (his words) and in the next breath argue for a *plenior sensus* in Revelation. All prophecies impressed with a *plenior sensus* have a *specific event* that they look to, and then are forever fulfilled. Nobody would claim that the prophecy of Christ’s virgin birth will be repeated, etc. In reality, the vague “continuing relevance” or “universal application” that John urges is not a *plenior sensus* at all. All scripture has this sort of continuing relevance and universal application, because it instructs and enlightens. This is affirmed by Paul in Romans: “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). Revelation is no different. John says “the historically defensible interpretation has the greatest authority.”¹⁵ Thus, the historically defensible

¹⁴ Noe, 354

¹⁵ Noe, 209

interpretation of Rev. 10:11 is the most authoritative. What is the historically defensible interpretation? John would be released from confinement on Patmos and proclaim the reigning Christ to the world amidst much resistance. No “idealism” is involved at all. John’s Preterist-Idealist paradigm is built of straw and ends up offering nothing.

What Happened to Rome and Nero?

In John’s whole book I could not find a single reference to Nero Caesar or God’s wrath upon the Roman Empire. This inexplicable omission is a huge defect in John’s eschatology. Most Christians realize that the second coming is not a local event confined to Palestine. Christians in Thessalonica, Pontus, Galatia, Bithynia, Cappodicia, Asia, Rome, Corinth and many other places understood that events associated with the end time would impact them directly; many would suffer martyrdom and be called upon to lay down their lives in testimony of their faith in Christ. The persecution under Nero is among the leading themes of Revelation and the book of Daniel. Judgment upon Rome is the topic of Daniel chapters two and seven; it also figures prominently in Revelation. Yet, John does not so much as even mention it! This unbalanced approach, which focuses exclusively upon Jerusalem and ignores Rome, belies a fundamental shortcoming in John’s eschatology, and hurts the credibility of his

scholarship. How can some of the most momentous events in history have escaped John’s notice? John’s localized eschaton confined to Palestine is unscriptural and has led to many of the erroneous doctrines circulating among Preterists. If John wants to synthesize Preterism with something, I would recommend he synthesize it with some Roman history!

Conclusion

John’s book could have been a fantastic teaching tool, setting forth the Preterist interpretation of eschatology. Unfortunately, John tried to synthesize Preterism with other interpretative schools and ruined what could have been a great work. His arguments for the eternality of the world and cosmos, his “many comings/never left” material, and his mislabeled continuing relevance of Revelation (we say nothing of the complete silence about the persecution under Nero and Christ’s wrath upon the Roman world in the “year of four emperors – A.D. 69-70) combine to make this a work that that serious students of the Bible need not take time to read. My hope is that John will rework the material, confining himself to arguing for Preterism. That would be a work that is truly blessed.

Why men do not believe in Christ

All Christians have experienced friends and loved ones who do not believe in Jesus Christ. Why do some men come to faith and others do not?

There are two views on this: The minority view is that the human will has been captured by sin and suffers “total depravity” such that it is unable to come to faith or repentance apart from a supervening act of divine grace. This grace is purportedly “irresistible;” the subject has no choice but must respond and obey.

Moreover, this grace is not distributed equally, nor is it freely available to all. God predestinates certain individuals for salvation; all others are predestinated to hell. There is nothing the one predestinated to damnation can do to forestall their fate or obtain God’s grace. God’s will is immutable and irresistible. By the

same token, there is nothing those predestinated to salvation can do to forestall God’s grace: It is impossible that they fall from grace or fail to be saved.

Needless to say, most Christians (to say nothing of everyone else) probably find this view more than a little shocking. This does not at all sound like the God who “so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son” (Jn. 3:16). And it’s not. It is the God of Calvinism, the God of the Puritans, Separatists, and pilgrims who first landed at Plymouth Rock. Little wonder they were so severe when their conception of God was so distorted.

Neither will it do to say that “God is sovereign” and can do as he likes. Abraham said “shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25). God’s

sovereignty cannot justify inequity; if an earthly sovereign behaved this way, we would call him a tyrant. Certainly we disparage the character of God to portray him as so arbitrary and unjust.

The Bible teaches that God is unwilling that any perish but “will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (I Tim. 2:4; cf. I Tim. 4:10). Thus, the idea that God predestinates certain individuals for damnation and others for salvation must be rejected. God’s saving grace is freely available to all. We must search for another explanation why men do not come to faith and repentance.

We start with the fact that God commands all men to repent of sin and believe the gospel of Christ (Mk. 1:15; Acts 17:30). This commandment is like so many others: Thou shalt not steal; Thou shalt not kill; Thou shalt not commit adultery; Thou shalt not covet. Man is not an automaton; he has free will. Men disobey God’s moral injunctions all the time. It is precisely because men have free will that God judges the moral quality of their acts. Without free will there would be no moral dimension to men’s acts and he could not be held responsible for what he does. Infants and madmen are incapable of criminal intent. Therefore we conclude men do not obey the gospel and come to faith by moral choice: They choose to disbelieve. And it is because disbelief is a moral choice that it is condemned by God.

To put it still in other terms, men reject Christ because they are morally disposed to evil. Jesus put it this way: “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (Jn. 3:19).

The Bible teaches that natural man in his fallen, unregenerate state is at enmity with God (Rom. 8:7). The word “enmity” means we are enemies of God. “And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works” (Col. 1:21). “For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the

flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Gal. 5:17).

Man can see right from wrong: God has given him reason and a conscience. Our conscience bears witness against each of us, that we are sinners. If our own conscience accuses us, can God do less? Thus, all men stand accused; all stand condemned. Yet, our moral corruption is such that we can hardly be brought to admit our sinful estate, and would rather persevere in obstinate defiance of God, than turn from sin and be healed.

We have to put a good face on things. Since we could not live with ourselves if we were honest about our moral corruption and sin, we deny its existence or excuse it by comparing ourselves with others. Moreover, since we are unwilling to subject ourselves to God or allow his governance of our lives, we invent various devices to “vanish” God’s existence. This is what “evolution” is really all about: It provides cover for men who are unwilling to confess the existence of God.

“For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse...and even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, etc.” (Rom. 1:20, 28, 29).

And so it stands: Man is estranged from and at enmity with God. Yet, God loves man and seeks his reclamation, redemption, and reconciliation. It was, therefore, to bridge the gap between God and man that Jesus was born on Christmas day and died upon a Roman cross. The love God has shown to us in Jesus Christ should soften even the hardest of heart. Christ stands at the door and knocks. Won’t you let him in?

Eusebius on the Destruction of Jerusalem

Excerpts from Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History,

Bk. III, Chpt. V-VIII

Chapter V. The Last Siege of the Jews After Christ.

1 After Nero had held the power thirteen years, and Galba and Otho had ruled a year and six months, Vespasian, who had become distinguished in the campaigns against the Jews, was proclaimed sovereign in Judea and received the title of Emperor from the armies there. Setting out immediately, therefore, for Rome, he entrusted the conduct of the war against the Jews to his son Titus.

2 For the Jews after the ascension of our Saviour, in addition to their crime against him, had been devising as many plots as they could against his apostles. First Stephen was stoned to death by them, and after him James, the son of Zebedee and the brother of John, was beheaded, and finally James, the first that had obtained the episcopal seat in Jerusalem after the ascension of our Saviour, died in the manner already described. But the rest of the apostles, who had been incessantly plotted against with a view to their destruction, and had been driven out of the land of Judea, went unto all nations to preach the Gospel, relying upon the power of Christ, who had said to them, "Go ye and make disciples of all the nations in my name."

3 But the people of the church in Jerusalem had been commanded by a revelation, vouchsafed to approved men there before the war, to leave the city and to dwell in a certain town of Perea called Pella. And when those that believed in Christ had come thither from Jerusalem, then, as if the royal city of the Jews and the whole land of Judea were entirely destitute of holy men, the judgment of God at length overtook those who had committed such outrages against Christ and his apostles, and totally destroyed that generation of impious men.

4 But the number of calamities which everywhere fell upon the nation at that time; the extreme misfortunes to which the inhabitants of Judea were especially subjected, the thousands of men, as well as women and children, that perished by the sword, by famine, and by other forms of death innumerable,-all these things, as well as the many great sieges which were carried on

against the cities of Judea, and the excessive sufferings endured by those that fled to Jerusalem itself, as to a city of perfect safety, and finally the general course of the whole war, as well as its particular occurrences in detail, and how at last the abomination of desolation, proclaimed by the prophets, stood in the very temple of God, so celebrated of old, the temple which was now awaiting its total and final destruction by fire,- all these things any one that wishes may find accurately described in the history written by Josephus.

5 But it is necessary to state that this writer records that the multitude of those who were assembled from all Judea at the time of the Passover, to the number of three million souls, were shut up in Jerusalem "as in a prison," to use his own words.

6 For it was right that in the very days in which they had inflicted suffering upon the Saviour and the Benefactor of all, the Christ of God, that in those days, shut up "as in a prison," they should meet with destruction at the hands of divine justice.

7 But passing by the particular calamities which they suffered from the attempts made upon them by the sword and by other means, I think it necessary to relate only the misfortunes which the famine caused, that those who read this work may have some means of knowing that God was not long in executing vengeance upon them for their wickedness against the Christ of God.

Chapter VI. The Famine Which Oppressed Them.

1 Taking the fifth book of the History of Josephus again in our hands, let us go through the tragedy of events which then occurred.

2 "For the wealthy," he says, "it was equally dangerous to remain. For under pretense that they were going to desert men were put to death for their wealth. The madness of the seditions increased with the famine and both the miseries were inflamed more and more day by day.

3 Nowhere was food to be seen; but, bursting into the houses men searched them thoroughly, and whenever they found anything to eat they tormented the owners on the ground that they had denied that they had anything; but if they found nothing, they tortured them on the ground that they had more carefully concealed it.

4 The proof of their having or not having food was found in the bodies of the poor wretches. Those of them who were still in good condition they assumed were well supplied with food, while those who were already wasted away they passed by, for it seemed absurd to slay those who were on the point of perishing for want.

5 Many, indeed, secretly sold their possessions for one measure of wheat, if they belonged to the wealthier class, of barley if they were poorer. Then shutting themselves up in the innermost parts of their houses, some ate the grain uncooked on account of their terrible want, while others baked it according as necessity and fear dictated.

6 Nowhere were tables set, but, snatching the yet uncooked food from the fire, they tore it in pieces. Wretched was the fare, and a lamentable spectacle it was to see the more powerful secure an abundance while the weaker mourned.

7 Of all evils, indeed, famine is the worst, and it destroys nothing so effectively as shame. For that which under other circumstances is worthy of respect, in the midst of famine is despised. Thus women snatched the food from the very mouths of their husbands and children, from their fathers, and what was most pitiable of all, mothers from their babes, And while their dearest ones were wasting away in their arms, they Were not ashamed to take away froth them the last drops that supported life.

8 And even while they were eating thus they did not remain undiscovered. But everywhere the rioters appeared, to rob them even of these portions of food. For whenever they saw a house shut up, they regarded it as a sign that those inside were taking food. And immediately bursting open the doors they rushed in and seized what they were eating, almost forcing it out of their very throats.

9 Old men who clung to their food were beaten, and if the women concealed it in their hands, their hair was torn for so doing. There was pity neither for gray hairs nor for infants, but, taking up the babes that clung to their morsels of food, they dashed them to the ground. But to those that anticipated their entrance and

swallowed what they were about to seize, they were still more cruel, just as if they had been wronged by them.

10 And they, devised the most terrible modes of torture to discover food, stopping up the privy passages of the poor wretches with bitter herbs, and piercing their seats with sharp rods. And men suffered things horrible even to hear of, for the sake of compelling them to confess to the possession of one loaf of bread, or in order that they might be made to disclose a single drachm of barley which they had concealed. But the tormentors themselves did not suffer hunger.

11 Their conduct might indeed have seemed less barbarous if they had been driven to it by necessity; but they did it for the sake of exercising their madness and of providing sustenance for themselves for days to come.

12 And when any one crept out of the city by night as far as the outposts of the Romans to collect wild herbs and grass, they went to meet him; and when he thought he had already escaped the enemy, they seized what he had brought with him, and even though oftentimes the man would entreat them, and, calling upon the most awful name of God, adjure them to give him a portion of what he had obtained at the risk of his life, they would give him nothing back. Indeed, it was fortunate if the one that was plundered was not also slain."

13 To this account Josephus, after relating other things, adds the following: "The possibility of going out of the city being brought to an end, all hope of safety for the Jews was cut off. And the famine increased and devoured the people by houses and families. And the rooms were filled with dead women and children, the lanes of the city with the corpses of old men.

14 Children and youths, swollen with the famine, wandered about the market-places like shadows, and fell down wherever the death agony overtook them. The sick were not strong enough to bury even their own relatives, and those who had the strength hesitated because of the multitude of the dead and the uncertainty as to their own fate. Many, indeed, died while they were burying others, and many betook themselves to their graves before death came upon them.

15 There was neither weeping nor lamentation under these misfortunes; but the famine stifled the natural affections. Those that were dying a lingering death looked with dry eyes upon those that had gone to their rest before them. Deep silence and death-laden night encircled the city.

16 But the robbers were more terrible than these miseries; for they broke open the houses, which were now mere sepulchers, robbed the dead and stripped the covering from their bodies, and went away with a laugh. They tried the points of their swords in the dead bodies, and some that were lying on the ground still alive they thrust through in order to test their weapons. But those that prayed that they would use their right hand and their sword upon them, they contemptuously left to be destroyed by the famine. Every one of these died with eyes fixed upon the temple; and they left the seditious alive.

17 These at first gave orders that the dead should be buried out of the public treasury, for they could not endure the stench. But afterward, when they were not able to do this, they threw the bodies from the walls into the trenches.

18 And as Titus went around and saw the trenches filled with the dead, and the thick blood oozing out of the putrid bodies, he groaned aloud, and, raising his hands, called God to witness that this was not his doing."

19 After speaking of some other things, Josephus proceeds as follows: "I cannot hesitate to declare what my feelings compel me to. I suppose, if the Romans had longer delayed in coming against these guilty wretches, the city would have been swallowed up by a chasm, or overwhelmed with a flood, or struck with such thunderbolts as destroyed Sodom. For it had brought forth a generation of men much more godless than were those that suffered such punishment. By their madness indeed was the whole people brought to destruction."

20 And in the sixth book he writes as follows: "Of those that perished by famine in the city the number was countless, and the miseries they underwent unspeakable. For if so much as the shadow of food appeared in any house, there was war, and the dearest friends engaged in hand-to-hand conflict with one another, and snatched from each other the most wretched supports of life.

21 Nor would they believe that even the dying were without food; but the robbers would search them while they were expiring, lest any one should feign death while concealing food in his bosom. With mouths gaping for want of food, they stumbled and staggered along like mad dogs, and beat the doors as if they were drunk, and in their impotence they would rush into the same houses twice or thrice in one hour.

22 Necessity compelled them to eat anything they could find, and they gathered and devoured things that were not fit even for the filthiest of irrational beasts. Finally they did not abstain even from their girdles and shoes, and they stripped the hides off their shields and devoured them. Some used even wisps of old hay for food, and others gathered stubble and sold the smallest weight of it for four Attic drachmae.

23 "But why should I speak of the shamelessness which was displayed during the famine toward inanimate things? For I am going to relate a fact such as is recorded neither by Greeks nor Barbarians; horrible to relate, incredible to hear. And indeed I should gladly have omitted this calamity, that I might not seem to posterity to be a teller of fabulous tales, if I had not innumerable witnesses to it in my own age. And besides, I should render my country poor service if I suppressed the account of the sufferings which she endured.

24 "There was a certain woman named Mary that dwelt beyond Jordan, whose father was Eleazer, of the village of Bathezor (which signifies the *house of hyssop*). She was distinguished for her family and her wealth, and had fled with the rest of the multitude to Jerusalem and was shut up there with them during the siege.

25 The tyrants had robbed her of the rest of the property which she had brought with her into the city from Perea. And the remnants of her possessions and whatever food was to be seen the guards rushed in daily and snatched away from her. This made the woman terribly angry, and by her frequent reproaches and imprecations she aroused the anger of the rapacious villains against herself.

26 But no one either through anger or pity would slay her; and she grew weary of finding food for others to eat. The search, too, was already become everywhere difficult, and the famine was piercing her bowels and marrow, and resentment was raging more violently than famine. Taking, therefore, anger and necessity as her counsellors, she proceeded to do a most unnatural thing.

27 Seizing her child, a boy which was sucking at her breast, she said, Oh, wretched child, in war, in famine, in sedition, for what do I preserve thee? Slaves among the Romans we shall be even if we are allowed to live by them. But even slavery is anticipated by the famine, and the rioters are more cruel than both. Come, be food for me, a fury for these rioters, and a byword to the world, for this is all that is wanting to complete the calamities of the Jews.

28 And when she had said this she slew her son; and having roasted him, she ate one half herself, and covering up the remainder, she kept it. Very soon the rioters appeared on the scene, and, smelling the nefarious odor, they threatened to slay her immediately unless she should show them what she had prepared. She replied that she had saved an excellent portion for them, and with that she uncovered the remains of the child.

29 They were immediately seized with horror and amazement and stood transfixed at the sight. But she said This is my own son, and the deed is mine. Eat for I too have eaten. Be not more merciful than a woman, nor more compassionate than a mother. But if you are too pious and shrink from my sacrifice, I have already eaten of it; let the rest also remain for me.

30 At these words the men went out trembling, in this one case being affrighted; yet with difficulty did they yield that food to the mother. Forthwith the whole city was filled with the awful crime, and as all pictured the terrible deed before their own eyes, they trembled as if they had done it themselves.

31 Those that were suffering from the famine now longed for death; and blessed were they that had died before hearing and seeing miseries like these."

32 Such was the reward which the Jews received for their wickedness and impiety, against the Christ of God.

Chapter VII. The Predictions of Christ.

1 It is fitting to add to these accounts the true prediction of our Saviour in which he foretold these very events.

2 His words are as follows: "Woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day; For there shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be."

3 The historian, reckoning the whole number of the slain, says that eleven hundred thousand persons perished by famine and sword, and that the rest of the rioters and robbers, being betrayed by each other after the taking of the city, were slain. But the tallest of the youths and those that were distinguished for beauty were preserved for the triumph. Of the rest of the multitude, those that were over seventeen years of age were sent as prisoners to labor in the works of Egypt,

while still more were scattered through the provinces to meet their death in the theaters by the sword and by beasts. Those under seventeen years of age were carried away to be sold as slaves, and of these alone the number reached ninety thousand.

4 These things took place in this manner in the second year of the reign of Vespasian, in accordance with the prophecies of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who by divine power saw them beforehand as if they were already present, and wept and mourned according to the statement of the holy evangelists, who give the very words which he uttered, when, as if addressing Jerusalem herself, he said:

5 "If thou hadst known, even thou, in this day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a rampart about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee and thy children even with the ground."

6 And then, as if speaking concerning the people, he says," For there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." And again:" When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh."

7 If any one compares the words of our Saviour with the other accounts of the historian concerning the whole war, how can one fail to wonder, and to admit that the foreknowledge and the prophecy of our Saviour were truly divine and marvellously strange.

8 Concerning those calamities, then, that befell the whole Jewish nation after the Saviour's passion and after the words which the multitude of the Jews uttered, when they begged the release of the robber and murderer, but besought that the Prince of Life should be taken from their midst, it is not necessary to add anything to the 9 account of the historian.

9 But it may be proper to mention also those events which exhibited the graciousness of that all-good Providence which held back their destruction full forty years after their crime against Christ,-during which time many of the apostles and disciples, and James himself the first bishop there, the one who is called the brother of the Lord, were still alive, and dwelling in Jerusalem itself, remained the surest bulwark of the place. Divine Providence thus still proved itself long-

suffering toward them in order to see whether by repentance for what they had done they might obtain pardon and salvation; and in addition to such long-suffering, Providence also furnished wonderful signs of the things which were about to happen to them if they did not repent.

10 Since these matters have been thought worthy of mention by the historian already cited, we cannot do better than to recount them for the benefit of the readers of this work.

Chapter VIII. The Signs Which Preceded the War.

1 Taking, then, the work of this author, read what he records in the sixth book of his History. His words are as follows: "Thus were the miserable people won over at this time by the impostors and false prophets; but they did not heed nor give credit to the visions and signs that foretold the approaching desolation. On the contrary, as if struck by lightning, and as if possessing neither eyes nor understanding, they slighted the proclamations of God.

2 At one time a star, in form like a sword, stood over the city, and a comet, which lasted for a whole year; and again before the revolt and before the disturbances that led to the war, when the people were gathered for the feast of unleavened bread, on the eighth of the month Xanthicus, at the ninth hour of the night, so great a light shone about the altar and the temple that it seemed to be bright day; and this continued for half an hour. This seemed to the unskillful a good sign, but was interpreted by the sacred scribes as portending those events which very soon took place.

3 And at the same feast a cow, led by the high priest to be sacrificed, brought forth a lamb in the midst of the temple.

4 And the eastern gate of the inner temple, which was of bronze and very massive, and which at evening was closed with difficulty by twenty men, and rested upon iron-bound beams, and had bars sunk deep in the ground, was seen at the sixth hour of the night to open of itself.

5 And not many days after the feast, on the twenty-first of the month Artemisium, a certain marvelous vision was seen which passes belief. The prodigy might seem fabulous were it not related by those who saw it, and were not the calamities which followed deserving of such signs. For before the setting of the sun chariots and armed troops were seen throughout the whole region in mid-air, wheeling through the clouds and encircling the cities.

6 And at the feast which is called Pentecost, when the priests entered the temple at night, as was their custom, to perform the services, they said that at first they perceived a movement and a noise, and afterward a voice as of a great multitude, saying, 'Let us go hence.'

7 But what follows is still more7 terrible; for a certain Jesus, the son of Ananias, a common countryman, four years before the war, when the city was particularly prosperous and peaceful, came to the feast, at which it was customary for all to make tents at the temple to the honor of God, and suddenly began to cry out: 'A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds, a voice against Jerusalem and the temple, a voice against bridegrooms and brides, a voice against all the people.' Day and night he went 8 through all the alleys crying thus.

8 But certain of the more distinguished citizens, vexed at the ominous cry, seized the man and beat him with many stripes. But without uttering a word in his own behalf, or saying anything in particular to those that were present, he continued to cry out in the same words as before.

9 And the rulers, thinking, as was true, that the man was moved by a higher power, brought him before the Roman governor. And then, though he was scourged to the bone, he neither made supplication nor shed tears, but, changing his voice to the most lamentable tone possible, he answered each stroke with the words, "Woe, woe unto Jerusalem."

10 The same historian records another fact still more wonderful than this. He says that a certain oracle was found in their sacred writings which declared that at that time a certain person should go forth from their country to rule the world. He himself understood 11 that this was fulfilled in Vespasian.

11 But Vespasian did not rule the whole world, but only that part of it which was subject to the Romans. With better right could it be applied to Christ; to whom it was said by the Father, "Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the ends of the earth for thy possession." At that very time, indeed, the voice of his holy apostles "went throughout all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.
