

The Sword & The Plow

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Why I am a Preterist: Part Three

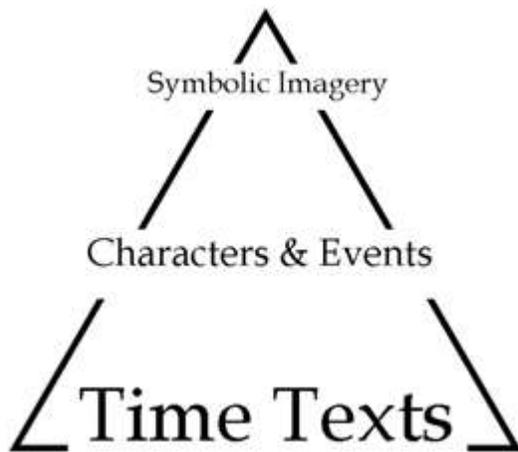
Kurt Simmons

In this article we conclude our series "*Why I am a Preterist.*"

As noted in a previous article, the corpus or body of writings devoted to the study of "last things" may be divided into three categories which together make up a pyramid of interpretation. The first level of the pyramid and very foundation of Preterism are the many *Times Texts* in the Bible placing Jesus' second coming in the first century. In our first article in this series, we looked at 37 times texts which unanimously place the return of Christ within the first disciples' lives. Here are but a few of the many passages we examined:

- *Matt. 10:23* - "*But when they persecute you in one city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.*"
- *Matt. 16:27, 28* - "*For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.*"
- *Matt. 24:30, 34* - "*And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great*

glory... Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled."



The second level of the pyramid consists in historical *Characters and Events* that were to mark Christ's kingdom and coming. Here we saw that from Genesis to Revelation, the latter days were tied to Biblical Israel and Rome, and that Rome would destroy the Jewish nation in divine judgment for its murder of Christ and its persecution of Christians:

- *"A voice of noise from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice of the Lord that rendereth recompense to his enemies...for behold the Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire." Isa. 66:3-6, 15*

This prophecy was quoted by Stephen at his trial for saying Christ would return and destroy the city and change the customs Moses delivered to the people (Acts 6:14, 15; 7:48, 49; cf. Isa. 66:1, 2), and accords completely with Jesus' prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (Matt. 23-25). The first and second levels of the pyramid, therefore, corroborate each other and establish the return of Christ as a *past event*.

It is from scripture that we learn there was to be a "second coming." The scriptures are inerrant and immutable. Therefore we believe in the second coming as an indisputable fact and article of the Christian faith. But the same scriptures that speak of a second coming also tell us that it would occur within the first disciples' lifetimes. Shouldn't we receive the *when* of the second coming in the same spirit of faith we

receive the *fact* of the second coming? How can we receive scripture's testimony regarding one, but not receive scripture's testimony regarding the other? Yet, that is precisely what most of Christendom does. Most of Christendom believes that Jesus' return is still future. Christians are taught that Christ's coming will be *bodily and visible* and that a fiery conflagration will *end the physical cosmos* (according to some), or that Christ will introduce a *millennial kingdom* (according to others). However, these scenarios create hopeless contradiction between the "what" of the second coming, and the "when." Can the majority of Christendom just be plain wrong? If so, what is it that has led so many into error? To answer these questions we need to turn to the language of the prophets, and thus come at last to the top level of our pyramid.

The Usus Loquendi of the Prophets

The chief reason so many Christians have fallen into error regarding the past fulfillment of Christ's second coming is a prevailing lack of familiarity with the *usus loquendi* of the prophets. "*Usus loquendi*" is a Latin phrase that describes the *established use or custom of speaking* employed by the prophets. The language of the prophets was poetic and figurative. The word pictures they painted are among the most beautiful and powerful in the world. They are also among the most terrifying. When God visited judgment upon the world, bringing war, famine, and pestilence upon the nations, the language employed was highly exaggerated to emphasize the severity of the coming judgment and to lead the nations to repentance. The prophets described the Lord as coming in wrath, riding upon the clouds as upon a chariot; the earth melts at his presence; the isles flee from before him; mountains and hills are dissolved by the blood of the multitudes slain; the land is turned into burning pitch; rivers of brimstone go before him, consuming the wicked from off the earth; the sun is darkened; the moon turned to blood; stars fall from their courses, and men seek to hide themselves in the holes and caves of the earth from heaven's appointed wrath. This language of a "collapsing universe" occurs over and over again in the Old Testament to describe heaven's judgment upon men and nations, not the destruction of the cosmos itself. Sir Isaac Newton explains the imagery of the prophets this way:

"The figurative language of the prophets is taken from the analogy between the world

natural and an empire or kingdom considered as a world politic. Accordingly, the world natural, consisting of heaven and earth, signifies the whole world politic, consisting of thrones and people, or so much of it as is considered in prophecy; and the things in that world signify the analogous things in this. For the heavens and the things therein signify thrones and dignities, and those who enjoy them: and the earth, with the things thereon, the inferior people; and the lowest parts of the earth, called Hades or Hell, the lowest or most miserable part of them. Great earthquakes, and the shaking of heaven and earth, are put for the shaking of kingdoms, so as to distract and overthrow them; the creating of a new heaven and earth, and the passing of an old one; or the beginning and end of a world, for the rise and ruin of a body politic signified thereby. The sun [stands], for the whole species and race of kings, in the kingdoms of the world politic; the moon, for the body of common people considered as the king's wife; the stars, for subordinate princes and great men; or for bishops and rulers of the people of God, when the sun is Christ. Setting of the sun, moon, and stars; darkening the sun, turning the moon into blood, and falling of the stars, for the ceasing of a kingdom."¹

What was true of the Old Testament is true of the New Testament. The New Testament was not spoken in a vacuum. Jesus and his disciples were Jews and spoke to Jews. All Jews belonged to the local synagogue and grew up hearing the Old Testament prophets read aloud every Sabbath. Most Jews were literate, and any male might be called upon to read from the prophets in the synagogue (Lk. 4:16-29; Acts 15:21). At such times, the Jews would have heard Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the "Minor Prophets" pronounce divine wrath and judgment upon their ancestors for apostasy, idolatry, and sin. Equally important, they would have heard historical narratives describing fulfillment of these prophecies, and how the nation was destroyed in judgment upon its sin. *The language of prophecy and*

its historical fulfillment would therefore have been known and familiar to the Jews of Jesus' day.

We know by comparing Jesus' pronouncements against Jerusalem that he used language identical to the prophets; we can even identify language and images appropriated from Old Testament sources in his predictions. Jews of Jesus' day would have recognized Jesus' teaching as a continuation of the prophetic tradition, and known how to interpret the things he taught and said. However, this familiarity would not have existed among the Gentiles. Early on, while the apostles were still alive, Gentiles became the dominate people of the faith. Lacking familiarity with the Old Testament, Gentiles would not have been able to readily compare Jesus' and the apostles' teaching with that of the prophets, or to recognize its historical fulfillment. Newton's very reasonable and learned comments above should be compared with those of Lactantius (A.D. 260-330):

About this same time also the prince of the devils, who is the contriver of all evil, shall be bound with chains, and shall be imprisoned during the thousand years of the heavenly rule in which righteousness shall reign in the world, so that he may contrive no evil against the people of God. After His coming the righteous shall be collected from all the earth, and the judgment being completed, the sacred city shall be planted in the middle of the earth, in which God Himself the builder may dwell together with the righteous bearing rule in it...the earth will open its fruitfulness, and bring forth most abundant fruits of its own accord; the rocky mountains shall drop with honey; streams of wine shall run down, and rivers flow with milk: in short, the world itself shall rejoice, and all nature exult, being rescued and set free from the dominion of evil and impiety, and guilt and error. Throughout this time beasts shall not be nourished by blood, nor birds by prey; but all things shall be peaceful and tranquil. Lions and calves shall stand together at the manger, and the wolf shall not carry off the sheep, the hound

¹ Sir Isaac Newton, *Observations on the Prophecies of Daniel*, Part i. chap. ii

*shall not hunt for prey; hawks and eagles shall not injure; the infant shall play with serpents.*²

For Lactantius, the prophets do not communicate spiritual truths in poetic and figurative language, but spoke literally, so that men are taught to look for rivers to flow with actual wine! With these sorts of expectations about the second coming, it is no wonder men are still looking for Christ's return. This situation has more or less continued until today. Christians lack sufficient grounding in the Old Testament to intelligently interpret Biblical eschatology. In the balance of this article, we will survey many passages from the prophets to see how they used language and how this same language is used in the New Testament.

Day of the Lord

This phrase occurs in its complete form only twice in the New Testament (Acts 2:20; II Pet.3:10), although the abbreviated form "day" occurs with some frequency. It is widely assumed that it refers to the end of the world, but this is incorrect. The phrase occurs numerous times throughout the Old Testament where it describes times of divine judgment upon the world. Typically, it is accompanied by figurative language of preternatural phenomena in which the Lord comes in wrath upon the nations. Isaiah's description of the fall of Babylon first to the Assyria (Isa. 13) then to the Medes and Persians (Isa. 34) provides a good case study. We will compare Isaiah with New Testament passages.

First, Isaiah describes the Lord's coming in the armies of the nations. Notice that the Lord's coming is not bodily and visible, but spiritual and providential:

- *Isa. 13:1, 4, 6 - "The burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see...The noise of a multitude in the mountains, like as of a great people; a tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations gathered together: the LORD of hosts mustereth the host of the battle. They come from a far country, from the end of heaven, even the LORD, and the*

weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole land.

This may be compared with Matthew:

- *Matt. 24:30 - And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*

Birth Pangs

Next, Isaiah describes the terror and destruction brought upon the world by the Assyrian armies in the day of the Lord. Isaiah evokes imagery of a woman in travail, a theme familiar to New Testament eschatology, describing a time of national and world calamity:

- *Isa. 13:6-8 - "Howl ye; for the day of the LORD is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty. Therefore shall all hands be faint, and every man's heart shall melt: And they shall be afraid: pangs and sorrows shall take hold of them; they shall be in pain as a woman that travaileth: they shall be amazed one at another; their faces shall be as flames."*

This may be compared with these New Testament passages:

- *Mark 13:8 - For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles: these are the beginning of sorrows [birth pangs].*
- *I Thess. 5:3 - For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.*

Collapsing Universe

Isaiah then describes heaven's wrath upon sinners in terms of celestial phenomena in which the heavens themselves refuse to shine upon the world of men:

- *Isa. 13:9-12 - "Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon*

² Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, VII, xxiv; Ante Nicene Fathers Vol. 7, p. 219

shall not cause her light to shine. And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir."

This should be compared with Luke:

- *Luke 21:25, 26 - And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.*

Shaking of Heaven & Earth

Next, the very heavens and earth *shake* at the coming of the Lord and the destruction wrought by the armies of the Assyrians and Medes, symbolic of the overthrow and unsettling of world powers:

- *Isa. 13:13, 14 - Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger. And it shall be as the chased roe, and as a sheep that no man taketh up: they shall every man turn to his own people, and flee every one into his own land.*

Compare Hebrews:

- *Heb. 12:26, 27 - Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.*

Thus, all of the apocalyptic language usually associated with the "end of the world" in the New Testament has an established usage in the Old Testament associated with times of judgment upon earth's nations. The language is poetic and figurative, not literal. Here is another "day of the Lord;" this time upon Edom.

Mountains Melted with Blood

First, Isaiah describes a time world-wrath as the armies of Babylon spread over the earth, leaving destruction in

their wake. Notice in particular how the mountains melt with the blood of the slain:

- *Isa. 34:1-4 - Come near, ye nations, to hear; and hearken, ye people: let the earth hear, and all that is therein; the world, and all things that come forth of it. For the indignation of the LORD is upon all nations, and his fury upon all their armies: he hath utterly destroyed them, he hath delivered them to the slaughter. Their slain also shall be cast out, and their stink shall come up out of their carcasses, and the mountains shall be melted with their blood.*

Dissolution of the Heavens

Next, Isaiah describes the very heavens themselves as being dissolved in language identical with the second epistle of Peter. If the language of Isaiah is figurative, as surely it is, what rule of interpretation makes Peter's imagery literal?

- *Isa.. 34:4 - And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree.*

Compare with Peter:

- *II Pet. 3:10 - But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.*

Land Soaked with Blood

Isaiah does not leave us in doubt about what nation is under heaven's wrath, but names Idumea (Edom), saying their land would be soaked with blood.

- *Isa. 34:5-7 - For my sword shall be bathed in heaven: behold, it shall come down upon Idumea, and upon the people of my curse, to judgment. The sword of the LORD is filled with blood, it is made fat with fatness, and with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams: for the LORD hath a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Idumea. And the unicorns shall come down with them, and the bullocks with the bulls; and their land shall be soaked with blood, and their dust made fat with fatness.*

Earth turned to Brimstone & Ceaseless Burning

Isaiah next describes the land as burning pitch and brimstone whose smoke ascends forever and ever. This language compares with Peter and Revelation:

- *Isa. 34:8-10 - For it is the day of the LORD's vengeance, and the year of recompense for the controversy of Zion. And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever: from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever*

Compare with New Testament passages:

- *II Pet. 3:11, 12 - Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?*
- *Rev. 14:10, 11 - The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.*

Coming on Clouds

Another familiar image of the second coming is Christ coming on clouds of glory. Most assume this is literal, but Old Testament prophets employed this imagery rather frequently to times of national and world judgment.

- *Isa. 19:1 - The burden of Egypt. Behold, the LORD rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt: and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it.*
- *Ezek. 30:13-18 - Thus saith the Lord God...I will put a fear in the land of Egypt. And I will make Pathros desolate, and will set fire in Zoan, and will execute judgment in No...And I will set fire in Egypt...and the*

pomp of her strength shall cease in her: as for her, a cloud shall cover her, and her daughters shall go into captivity.

- *Ezek. 32:7,8 - And when I shall put thee out, I will cover the heaven, and make the stars thereof dark; I will cover the sun with cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over thee, and set darkness upon they land, saith the Lord God.*

Earth Melting at the Presence of the Lord

Most expect at the second coming that Christ will descend from heaven with a shout and that the earth will melt before him. This imagery is fairly common in the Old Testament; the prophet Micah's description of judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem is among the best in this tradition:

- *Mic. 1:2-5 - Hear, all ye people; hearken, O earth, and all that therein is: and let the Lord GOD be witness against you, the LORD from his holy temple. For, behold, the LORD cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, and as the waters that are poured down a steep place. For the transgression of Jacob is all this, and for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the transgression of Jacob? is it not Samaria? and what are the high places of Judah? are they not Jerusalem?*

What about Second Peter 3?

Some may object that, although many of the passages cited above have the look and feel of hyperbolic speech, the second epistle of Peter sounds much more "matter of fact," and does not seem to be of the same poetic genre as the prophets. There is some truth to this observation. Peter's statements about the elements melting with fervent heat appear in the midst of a plain-speaking epistle, not in the course of a long poetic book or passage. Might not Peter be speaking of a nuclear holocaust at the world's end? No. Peter's reference to the promised "new heavens and earth" toward the end of his epistle make this impossible (II Pet. 3:13). This promise is from the book of Isaiah, where it clearly refers to the altered condition of world

political affairs following Christ's judgment upon the Jews and Romans.

- *Isa. 66:5-22 - Hear the word of the LORD, ye that tremble at his word; Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the LORD be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed. A voice of noise from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice of the LORD that rendereth recompence to his enemies...For, behold, the LORD will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by his sword will the LORD plead with all flesh: and the slain of the LORD shall be many...For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain.*

The socio-political environment of the world had been oppressive to God's people down through the long centuries, culminating in the persecution by Nero and the Jews. But, with the ascension of Christ and his rule over the nations, dominion has come to the saints; who now find themselves in world-wide ascendancy as Daniel the prophet foretold:

- *Dan. 7:27 - And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.*

Origen and the Figurative Use of Language

Before closing, it will be worth our while to cite one of the earliest and most learned of the early Patristic Writers, Origen. Origen (A.D. 185-254) writings were voluminous. His friend and patron, Ambrosius, bore the expense of seven amanuenses and an equal number of transcribers, as well as girls practiced in calligraphy, to make copies for publication of the works dictated by Origen. Jerome says that he wrote more than any individual could read. Epiphanius related that his works amounted to 6,000 writings. His *magnum opus* was the Hexapala, a critical edition of the Greek and Hebrew scriptures set in six columns, including versions of the 1) Hebrew, 2) Hebrew transliterated into Greek, 3) Aquila of Sinope, 4) Symmachus the

• Ebionite, 5) a recension of the Septuagint, and 6) Theodotion. His works published in the Ante-Nicene Fathers include *De Principiis*, *A Letter to Africanus about the History of Susanna*, *A Letter to Gregory*, and *Contra Celsus*. In *Contra Celsus*, Origen defended the idea of God “coming down” to earth, affirming that scriptural usage shows that this language is figurative:

*“And if the voices of the prophets say that God ‘comes down,’ who has said, ‘Do I not fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord,’ the term is used in a **figurative** sense. For God ‘comes down’ from His own height and greatness when He arranges the affairs of men, and especially those of the wicked.”³*

Furthermore, the bodily descent of God is also accommodative language, not to be taken literally:

*“And as custom leads men to say that teachers ‘condescend’ to children, and wise men to those youths who have just betaken themselves to philosophy, not by ‘descending in a **bodily** manner; so, if God is said anywhere in the holy Scriptures to ‘come down, it is understood as spoken in conformity with the usage which so employs the word, and in like manner also with the expression, ‘go up.’”⁴*

But if the “coming down” of God is figurative, and is not literal or bodily, Origen also affirms that the fire of Christ’s conflagration is merely figurative:

“But it is in mockery that Celsus says we speak of ‘God coming down like a torturer bearing fire,’ and thus compels us unseasonably to investigate words of deeper meaning, we shall make a few remarks, sufficient to enable our hearers to form an idea of the defense which disposes of the ridicule of Celsus against us, and then we shall turn to what follows. The divine word says that our God is ‘a consuming fire,’ and that ‘He draws rivers of fire before Him;’ nay, that he even entereth in as ‘a refiner’s fire, and as a fuller’s herb,’ to purify

³ *Contra Celsus*, IV, xiii; Ante-Nicene Father, Vol IV, pg. 501, 2

⁴ *Contra Celsus*, IV, xii; Ante-Nicene Father, Vol. IV, pg. 502

*His own people. But when He is said to be a 'consuming fire,' we inquire what are the things which are appropriate to be consumed by God. And we assert that they are wickedness, and the works which result from it, and which, being **figuratively** called 'wood, hay, stubble,' God consumes as a fire. The wicked man, accordingly, is said to build upon the previously-laid foundation of reason, 'wood, and hay, and stubble.' If, then, anyone can show that these words were differently understood by the writer, and can prove that the wicked man **literally** builds up 'wood, or hay, or stubble,' it is evident that the fire must be understood to be material, and an object of sense. But if, on the contrary, the works of the wicked man are spoken of **figuratively**, under the names of 'wood, or hay, or stubble,' why does it not once occur (to inquire) in what sense the word 'fire' is to be taken, so that 'wood' of such a kind should be consumed? For (the scripture) says: "The fire will try each man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work be burned, he shall suffer loss."⁵*

Here we have Origen's answer to Celsus' mock that God comes down as a "torturer bearing fire." First, the *coming down* is figurative; second, the *bodily form* is merely accommodative, not literal; third, the *fire* of Christ's wrath is also figurative.

In connection with this last, a survey of the texts quoted by Origen shows all are traditional "second coming" passages:

- Heb. 12:26-29 - "Our God is a consuming fire."
- Dan. 7:9, 10 - "His throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him."
- Mal. 3:2, 3 - "But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he

appeareth? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap."

- II Cor. 3:13 - "Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is."

These "second coming" passages, coupled with Origen's figurative understanding of prophetic language, show that Origen viewed the second coming in terms precisely as Preterists do today. Moreover, this view did not originate with Origen; he merely defended what appears to have been the consensus of the day, as surely it would have to have been to come to the attention of an outsider and unbeliever like Celsus and make its way into his book.

Conclusion

The three level pyramid of interpretation of Time Texts, Characters and Events, and Symbolic Language weave into a threefold cord that cannot be broken. We hope you will embrace Preterism as the only credible and defensible interpretive school of eschatology.

The Ascension of the Reigning Christ



⁵ *Contra Celsus*, IV, xiii; Ante-Nicene Fathers IV, pg. 502.

The Marriage of the Lamb

Kurt Simmons

The marriage of the Lamb is an eschatological theme, tied to the second coming of Christ (Matt. 25: 1-13). What is the significance of this imagery and when was it fulfilled?

Marriage Imagery in the Old Testament - Covenant with Israel

In the Old Testament, the imagery of marriage was a symbol for the law of Moses and covenant with Israel. God espoused (betrothed) Israel to himself in the exodus from Egypt.

"I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown" (Jer. 2:2).

God "married" Israel when he entered into a covenant with her:

"Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swear unto thee and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine" (Ezek. 16:8).

The language of "spreading his skirt" over Israel (consummating the marriage) should probably be interpreted as Moses setting up the tabernacle and the "glory cloud" filling it (Ex. 40:17-38), representing God dwelling with his people and cohabitating with his bride. Marriage requires faithfulness in the spouses; adultery and fornication are causes for divorce. As Israel and Judah proved unfaithful to the Old Covenant, God divorced the nation. This occurred in the Assyrio-Babylonian exile, when God "put away" his wife for her adulteries:

"Wherefore, O harlot, hear the word of the Lord: Thus saith the Lord God; Because thy filthiness was poured out, and thy nakedness discovered through thy whoredoms with thy lovers, and with all the idols of thy abominations, and by the blood of thy children, which

thou did give unto them: Behold, therefore I will gather all thy lovers, with whom thou hast taken pleasure, and all them that thou hast loved, with all them that thou hast hated; I will even gather them around about against thee, and will discover thy nakedness unto them, that they may see all thy nakedness And I will judge thee, as women that break wedlock and shed blood are judged; and I will give thee blood in fury and jealousy" (Ezek. 16:35-38).

Although Israel and Judah were faithless, God's purpose to redeem mankind required that the Jews not be cast off forever just yet. Christ had to be born in Bethlehem and die upon a Roman cross. Therefore, God "remarried" Israel by bringing back the nation out of captivity, returning them to the land. In the following passage, widowhood refers to divorce; the law deemed a divorced woman "dead" to the law of her ex-husband:

Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord. Enlarge the place of thy tents, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left: and thy see shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited. Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more. For thy Maker is thine husband; and Lord of host is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; the God of the whole earth shall he be called. For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer" (Isa. 54:1-8)

This passage, typical of many Old Testament prophecies, looks beyond the restoration of Israel to Palestine following the Assyrio-Babylonian exile, and anticipates the salvation of Christ. The "married" woman refers to Israel before the captivity; the "desolate" woman refers to Israel during the captivity. The reproach of Israel's widowhood (divorce) would be forgotten in the kindness God showed by returning her to the land, and bringing Christ into the world. The children of the "desolate" would be more than the children of pre-captivity Israel: Christ would come, the gospel would be proclaimed among the Gentiles, and the ranks of the faithful would break forth on every side. This leads us to the New Testament.

Marriage Imagery in the New Testament

John the Baptist was the first to make reference to marriage imagery in the New Testament:

"He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled" (Jn. 3:29).

Christ is the bridegroom; John is his forerunner and friend; the bride is spiritual Israel. That Jesus is the bridegroom identifies him as divine, for it is God who marries Israel. Moreover, that he is called the bridegroom, and not husband, shows that his appearance heralds the coming of a new covenant wherein he will become husband to his new bride. In the mosaic economy, God had married national Israel, but in the New Testament economy, the covenant people consist of men of every race and language who respond to the gospel call. Some call this "replacement theology" whereby the church replaces national, ethnic Jews; we call it basic, gospel instruction:

"For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed" (Rom. 9:6-8).

In terms of chronology, the marriage of Christ to the bride shapes up this way:

- Death on Calvary (AD 33): Legal termination of the Old Testament, first marriage terminated; Christ espoused to new bride.
- Pentecost thru Second Coming (AD 33-70): Betrothal period; bride washed and purified by

the blood of Christ, looking to the consummation.

- Second Coming: Marriage consummated (AD 70); Christ cohabits with wife in the New Jerusalem (church).

Let us survey the scripture where these lessons are found.

Calvary: Legal Termination of Old Testament, Espousal of Christ to Bride

There are few things clearer than the fact that the Old Testament legally terminated at the cross. Unbelieving Jews may have tried to keep the temple ritual and law alive, but there is no contradicting the fact that Jesus' death on Calvary fulfilled the law's demand of blood sacrifice, ending the legal efficacy of the Mosaic law. Daniel makes this perfectly clear when he said "in the midst of the week" Messiah would cause the "sacrifice and oblation" to legally cease (Dan. 9:27). "Midst of the week" points to the middle of the final prophetic week, and was fulfilled by Jesus' death at the end of his 3 1/2 year ministry. This is fully confirmed over and over again by Paul, but nowhere more clearly than in Romans seven:

"Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be marriage to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God" (Rom. 7:14)

This passage teaches us that the law of the first husband (Old Testament) ended at the death of Christ. Jesus was national Israel's husband, the God of the Old Testament clothed upon with humanity. When he died on Calvary, national Israel was widowed and husbandless, and the Old Testament was annulled. Israel was "loosed from the law," made "free from the law," and "dead to the law," so they could enter a new covenant and new marriage under the gospel of the resurrected Christ. Those who respond to the gospel call were espoused to Christ and become the church and bride. Thus, national, ethnic Israel and the law of

Moses were left behind at Calvary, and spiritual Israel and the gospel of Christ began.

Pentecost to AD 70: Betrothal Period

During the period from the cross until the second coming, the church was in a state of "betrothal" or "engagement." Paul thus says,

"I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (I Cor. 11:2; cf. Eph. 5:24-27).

In Jewish law, the betrothal period was equal in law to marriage and a woman who took another man during this period was just as guilty of adultery as a woman who was in a consummated marriage (Deut. 22:12-21; Matt. 1:18, 19). We sometimes hear it said that the couple lived together during the betrothal period, without consummating the marriage, but the Bible nowhere bears this out. Although betrothed, Joseph and Mary were not living together when she conceived by the Holy Ghost, for she went and lived with her kinswoman, Elizabeth, for three months (Lk.1: 39, 56). When she returned home and it was found that she was pregnant (for she now began to show), the angel instructed Joseph not to fear "to take unto thee Mary thy wife" and "Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord has bidden him, and took unto him his wife" (Matt. 1:23, 24). Thus, although deemed man and wife in contemplation of law during the betrothal period, the husband and wife lived apart. This is confirmed by the parable of the ten virgins which places the marriage ceremony and consummation at Christ's second coming, after going into a "far country to receive a kingdom and return" (Matt. 25:1-13; Lk. 19:12).

Washed and Justified from Sin:

Destruction of Jerusalem AD 70, or Calvary AD 33?

There is an error current among Preterists that says the old law was still valid, and that the church was not justified, but continued under the debt of sin until AD 70. Yet, Paul's whole analogy in Rom. 7:1-4 turns upon the hinge of the Old Testament's end at Calvary, terminating the law of the first husband, so that believers could enter a new covenant with a new husband in Christ. If it is true that the Old Testament was still valid after the cross, then the church was an adulteress in taking a new husband in Christ. Such is the quandary created by those teaching "covenant eschatology," keeping the Mosaic law and ritual alive beyond the cross of Christ.

Let God be true though every man a liar: The church was not an adulteress, the law had ended, and she was free to take a new husband under the gospel of the risen Savior. What about justification from sin? Would Christ consummate a marriage at his return with a bride soiled with sin? Of course he wouldn't. Thus, the bride was washed and justified during the betrothal so Christ could receive her chaste and pure at his return.

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25,-27).

Brides are fastidious about their adornment on their wedding day. Everything must be perfect, "without spot or wrinkle." So, Christ washed and cleansed his bride from sin at Calvary so that she might be glorious at his coming to consummate the marriage. We see this picture in Revelation, where the bride is robed in white raiment in preparation for the marriage, at the end of Christ's eschatological coming⁶:

"Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints" (Rev. 19:7, 8).

Thus, from AD 33 until the second coming, the church was in a state of purity and sanctification, washed by Christ's blood, waiting to consummate the marriage. She was clothed in fine linen, clean and white, showing that she was justified from sin. There is nothing to the error that the law was valid and the church continued under the debt of sin until AD 70.

AD 70: The Consummation of Lamb's Marriage with the Bride

The second coming was the point at which the Lord came to dwell with his bride and cohabit with her, symbolically enjoying the intimacy of sexual union. We see this in Rev. 21:2, 3 where the new Jerusalem comes down to earth:

⁶ We say "end of Christ's eschatological coming" for it is clear that the coming stretched at least over AD 66-70, the duration of war with Rome, but the marriage occurred only at this period's end.

And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God...And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God" (Rev. 21:2, 3, 9, 10).

That she is called the "new Jerusalem" shows that she has replaced the old, earthly Jerusalem, which turned harlot and was destroyed (cf. Rev. 11:8; 16:19; 18:21). The imagery of the new Jerusalem descending out of heaven does not mean the bride was formerly in heaven and is now come down. It is not the bride that is descending, but the habitation of God. The city above and the church below are made one, God inhabiting both. The woman, driven from Jerusalem into the wilderness in the persecution over Stephen (Acts 8:1; Rev. 12:6, 12), is no longer a homeless exile; she becomes the earthly seat of Christ's kingdom and throne: the new Jerusalem. The marriage now consummated, she is adorned and attired with gold and precious jewels, for she is heaven's queen:

"Thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of host is his name...O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stone with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy boarders of pleasant stones" (Isa. 54:5, 11, 12; cf Rev. 21:18-21).

Time of Fulfillment

Since consummation of the marriage of the Lamb is an important proof that the book of Revelation is fulfilled and the second coming a past event, it is worth pausing to provide proof of its timing.

We have already noted that the term "new Jerusalem" implies that it replaced "old Jerusalem" and serves to date the fulfillment of the book. Revelation makes numerous specific references to the destruction of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the "great city," the spiritual

"Sodom and Egypt where also our Lord was crucified" (Rev. 11:8). The temple is portrayed as still standing, and the city to be given into the power of the Gentiles to tread it under foot for forty-two months, or three and a half years (Rev. 11:1, 2; Lk. 21:24). Jerusalem and Jewry are "Babylon, the Mother of Harlots," drunk with the blood of the saints. She is portrayed driving a scarlet colored "beast," which devours the saints (Rev. 17:1-6; 11:7). The beast bears the number of a man - 666 - whose equivalent in Hebrew characters adds up to Nero Caesar (NRWN QSR) (Rev. 13:1-10, 18). Identification of Nero with the beast is corroborated by John in chapter seventeen. The beast has seven heads which are the empire's kings: five were already fallen (Julius, Augustus, Tiberius, Caius, Claudius), one still reigns (Nero), and another was yet to come, who would continue only a short space (Galba, ruled 7 months). Finally, in Babylon the Harlot was found all the blood of prophets and saints, and all those slain upon the earth (Rev. 18:24). This echoes exactly Jesus' saying about Jerusalem:

"Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: that upon you may come all the righteous blood upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation" (Matt. 23:34-36).

There are many more proofs tying the events described in Revelation to the time of Nero's persecution and the destruction of Jerusalem, but they are beyond the scope of this present study. Suffice it to say, the consummation of the Lamb's marriage is clearly tied to the time when the Jewish nation was taken away for its sins, and the Roman Empire experienced the "year of four emperors" following the death of Nero.

Conclusion

What was the marriage of the Lamb? The marriage was the point at which the Lord returned from heaven to dwell with his bride, and the church was clothed with the new Jerusalem: the capital city and earthly seat of Christ's throne.

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Mosaic Law Ended at the Cross

Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ (Rom. 7:4)

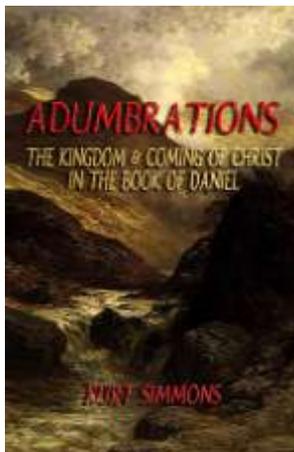
Editor's Note: The following chart presents items of the Mosaic law on the left; the right presents scripture where they are specifically said to be abrogated at the cross and by gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Law	Ended at the Cross
<p style="text-align: center;">Circumcision</p> <p><i>(Circumcision was the very essence of the Old Testament; it was the sign and seal of the Old Covenant; the land promises and all participation in the Jewish commonwealth stood upon this foundation. If circumcision was no longer valid, then none of the Old Testament law and ritual was valid.)</i></p>	<p>"But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek was compelled to be circumcised: and that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you" (Gal. 2:3-5).</p> <p>"Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing...Christ is become of no effect unto you...ye are fallen from grace" (Gal. 5:1-4).</p> <p>"Beware of the concision [<i>e.g. Jews teaching that the law was still valid</i>]. For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 2:2, 3).</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Levitical Priesthood</p> <p><i>(The priesthood served merely in types and shadows, looking ahead to the intermediary work of Christ.)</i></p>	<p>"For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law...for it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood" (Heb. 7:12, 14).</p> <p>"And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement" (Rom. 5:11).</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Temple Service & Blood Sacrifices</p> <p><i>(The temple ritual and sacrifices stood as a grand object lesson, pointing ahead to the atoning sacrifice of Christ. Once Jesus' had purchased our redemption, the temple ritual lost its efficacy and shadow was set aside, giving place to the body and substance, which was Christ.)</i></p>	<p>"Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary" (Heb. 9:1). [Note: the writer places these in the <i>past tense</i>.]</p> <p>"Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation. But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come...neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place having obtained eternal redemption for us" (Heb. 9:9-12).</p> <p>"Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second...For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:8-14)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Separation of Gentiles in Temple Service</p> <p><i>(The temple service segregated Jew and Gentile to prevent pagan customs from creeping into the national worship. The Gentiles worshipped in a separate court, marked off by a wall. On this wall were warnings that if any uncircumcised male crossed, he would suffer immediate death. The legal termination of the temple ritual in the sacrifice of Christ is clearly shown by Paul, when he says that the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles was done away, and that the church was the new temple to the Lord. The fact the temple of the church was still being built in no way changes the fact that the old law was abolished in Christ's flesh.)</i></p>	<p>"For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace...Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom all the building fitly frame together growth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 2:14-22).</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Jewish Festival Days</p> <p><i>(These laws were object lessons; they were types and shadows pointing to God's plan of salvation and the redemptive work of Christ, and thus passed when Jesus finished his atoning sacrifice.)</i></p>	<p>"But now that ye have known God...how turn ye again to...bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years" (Gal. 4:9, 10).</p> <p>"Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of any holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days" (Col. 2:16).</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Dietary Laws</p> <p><i>(These laws were given primarily to separate the Jews from the pagan nations around them, preventing them from having close (table) fellowship, by not being able to dine with Gentiles. Their abrogation shows the Old Testament was past.)</i></p>	<p>"What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common" (Acts 10:9-16).</p> <p>"I now, and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself...for the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:14-17).</p> <p>"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils...commanding to abstain</p>

	from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and now the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer" (I Tim. 4:1-5).
<p>Prohibition Against Associating with Gentiles</p> <p><i>(The law of Moses had forbidden Jews to eat or associate with Gentiles, in order to prevent them from intermingling with Gentiles and from acquiring pagan customs. The abolition of the laws against associating with Gentiles shows that the Old Testament had been taken out of the way.)</i></p>	<p>"Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not all any man common or unclean...God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Act. 10:28, 34, 35)</p> <p>"Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts...put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts. 15:7-11).</p>
<p>Righteousness by Works of Merit versus Obedience of Faith</p> <p><i>(The essence of the Old Testament was to show man the impossibility of salvific perfection by human effort. Salvation can only come by the grace of God through faith in Christ. Faith having come, the law was abolished.)</i></p>	<p>"But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut upon unto the faith which should afterward be revealed. Wherefore the law was our school master to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster" (Gal. 3:23, 24).</p> <p>"For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth" (Rom. 10:4).</p>

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