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II Peter 3:10-13 and the Day of the Lord

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Introduction

II Peter 3:10-13, with its prediction of the heavens and earth dissolving in a conflagration, stands as one of the major texts relied upon by futurists as proof that Christ's second coming has not occurred. In this article, we look at this passage and decide that it refers to the overthrow of world powers in the first century, as Christ assumed the government of the world and put all enemies beneath his feet.

The Day of the Lord - Historical Examples

"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. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of person 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? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." II Pet. 3:10-13

One of the first issues that presents itself in interpreting this passage is the "day of the Lord." For those unversed in the Old Testament prophets, the assumption typically is that this phrase is unique to New Testament eschatology, and describes a coming time when the earth will be destroyed. However, this is wrong. There are numerous occurrences of this phrase

in the Old Testament, where they describe times of divine judgment and wrath. Concerning God's judgment by the Babylonians, Zephaniah thus says:

"I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the Lord. I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumbling-blocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the Lord. I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarims, with the priests; and them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship and that swear by the Lord and that swear by Malcham; and them that are turned back from the Lord; and those that have not sought the Lord, nor inquired for him. Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord God: for the day of the Lord is at hand: for the Lord hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests....The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers." Zeph. 1:2-7, 14-16

We have quoted the prophet at length so the historical context may be established and it may be seen that this prophecy describes a time of judgment upon the ancient Jews. Baal worship, Malcham, worship of celestial bodies, the levitical priesthood, fenced cities, defensive towers, the watchman's trumpet, all assign this "day of the Lord" to the far distant past. In following verses, the prophet widens the scope of divine wrath, adding the Philistines, Moab, Ethiopia, and Assyria (Zeph. 2:4-12). Like Baal worship, fenced cities, and the watchman's trumpet, most of these nations no longer exist, and confirm our conclusion that this prophecy belongs to the ancient past. As an aside, we note that Zephaniah represents this "day of the Lord" as universal:

"Therefore, wait ye upon me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy." Zeph. 3:8

Commentators are agreed that the time of judgment Zephaniah describes was the Assyrio-Babylonian invasions, when God swept the earth with a "besom (broom) of destruction," cleansing the world of iniquity and sin. The prophet Isaiah, who wrote earlier than

Zephaniah, gave identical warning of God's impending wrath upon the world. The nations and cities Isaiah mentioned by name include Moab (Isa. 15, 16), Syria and Damascus (Isa. 17), Ethiopia (Isa. 18), Egypt (Isa. 19, 20), Seir and Dumah (Isa. 21), Arabia (Isa. 21), Judah and Jerusalem (Isa. 22), and Tyre (Isa. 23). In language similar to Zephaniah, Isaiah describes the time of judgment as emptying the earth:

"Behold, the Lord maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof." Isa. 24:1

Isaiah and Zephaniah describe the same time of judgment God was bringing upon the ancient world. The Assyrio-Babylonia invasions were like a great flood that rose up and spread across the world, sweeping away all before it (cf. Isa. 8:7, 8).



Nebuchadnezzar burns Jerusalem

The "day of the Lord" by the Assyrio-Babylonia invasions was not a unique or isolated event. The wrath, which *started* with the Assyrio-Babylonian invasions, *continued* off and on under the following of world empires, including Mede-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Isaiah thus describes a "day of the Lord" in which God would punish Babylon and the world through the instrument of the Mede-Persian Empire:

"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 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 arrogancy to 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. 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." Isa. 13:9-13

This "day of the Lord" was almost 50 years later than that described by Zephaniah. Nebuchadnezzar burned Jerusalem in 586 BC. Cyrus the Great, commanding an army of Medes and Persians, took Babylon in 539 BC. A last example and we will move along. Obadiah prophesied a coming time of wrath upon Edom, which is widely understood to have been fulfilled in the days of the Babylonians:

"The vision of Obadiah. Thus saith the Lord concerning Edom...thy mighty men, O Teman, shall be dismayed, to the end that every one of the mount of Esau may be cut off by slaughter. For they violence against thy brother Jacob shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off for ever...For the day of the Lord is near upon all the heathen: as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head." Obadiah 1, 9, 10, 15

Edom no longer exists. The historical context of the passage describes Edom's violence to Judah during the Assyrio-Babylonian invasions. God would requite Edom for its violence to Judah when the armies of Babylon and succeeding empire of the Medes and Persians overwhelmed the earth. Clearly, there is nothing in the passage that would allow us to apply it to our day or beyond.

These few examples show that the "day of the Lord" is not unique to New Testament eschatology. The phrase has established historical usage in describing times of divine wrath, and in no sense implied an end to the world.

Day of the Lord - World Wide Wrath?

A question worth pausing to consider is whether "day of the Lord" can describe a time of judgment upon a particular people or nation? The examples we have looked at were world wide. The parallel examples in Isaiah and Zephaniah, which described the Assyrio-Babylonian invasions were both world-wide in scope. Isa. 13:11, which describes the Mede-Persian conquests, states that God would punish the "world," showing that this time of wrath would expand beyond Babylon itself and take in the rest of the world. Many commentators and critics note that the Hebrew *ha-arets*, rendered "the land" in verses 5 and 9 may be better rendered "the earth." (See the Pulpit Commentary *in loc.*) Anyone who has read Herodotus and his description of the Mede-Persian conquests knows that their empire subdued the whole Mediterranean world, including Elam in the east to Egypt in the West and Cyprus in the north. Thus, the prophet Daniel describes the Mede-Persia Empire as a bear, which is told to "devour much flesh" (Dan. 7:5). Based upon the examples viewed thus far, the phrase

does not describe isolated incidents of wrath upon a single nation, but seems to be describe wrath world-wide in its sweep.



The Mede-Persian Empire was the largest the world had seen until that time

The Day of the Lord - Messianic

We have seen that the "day of the Lord" was used by the prophets to describe times of divine wrath and judgment fulfilled in ancient history. However, there was a "day" coming associated with the Messiah, which is the subject of New Testament prophecy. Peter twice uses the phrase "day of the Lord," once in Acts and once in his second epistle. Both describe the same "day." Peter's sermon in Acts, given at outpouring of the Holy Ghost on the first Pentecost after Christ's resurrection, quotes the prophet Joel:

"But this is that which was spoke by the prophet Joel: And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath: blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Acts 2:16-21.

Like the other examples we have seen, the "day of the Lord" spoken of Peter and Joel would be a time of divine judgment upon the world by war, famine, and pestilence, overthrowing thrones and kingdoms, not the end of the cosmos itself. The two signs that a day of judgment was fast approaching were the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and outbreaks of war and civil disorder, bringing blood and fire and smoke, blackening the sun and turning the moon to blood. Jesus said similar signs would precede the fall of Jerusalem:

"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 falling them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers heaven shall be shaken... Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled." Lk. 21:25-32

Note the poetic and figurative use of language, which puts the roaring sea for civil commotions among earth's nations, and the heavenly bodies for the ruling powers, which would be shaken from their places and fall from power. Notice, also, that the time for fulfillment of these things was fixed by the Lord to his own generation. This prediction was made in Jesus' Olivet Discourse after retiring from Jerusalem with his disciples. Immediately preceding his Olivet Discourse, Jesus made the identical predictions in his Great Denunciation against Jerusalem:

"Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is let unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till you shall say Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." Matt. 23:36-39

In saying the Jews would not see him until they should say "blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord," Jesus signifies his return to the Father, and his coming again in wrath upon the nation, in which the Jews would "see" him coming upon the clouds of heaven. Hence, when asked by the high priest if he was the Son of God, Jesus declared:

"Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." Matt. 26:64

At this saying, the high priest rent his clothes and the Sanhedrin gave its voice for Jesus' death: They recognized his saying as an allusion to Daniel 7: 13, 14 and the heavenly coronation of the Messiah:

"I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And thee was given him dominion and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."

Fulfillment of this prophecy was given by Peter in his sermon on Pentecost, where he said Jesus had sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven, henceforth waiting till his enemies be made a footstool for his feet (Acts 2:32, 33; Heb. 10:12, 13). And that the time of judgment would overtake his own generation is expressly affirmed by Peter, tying the prophecy of Joel to the Lord's prediction of Jerusalem's fall. For Peter warned his fellow countrymen, saying, "Save yourselves from this untoward generation" (Acts 2:40). Thus, Joel's "day of the Lord" must be understood in reference to the destruction of the nation in AD 70 by Rome. One needs only to read the prophet Joel to see that this is true:

"Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand. A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations...The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining: and the Lord shall utter his voice before his army: for his camp is very great: for he is strong that executeth this word: for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?" Joel 2:1-3, 10-11.

Joel's mention of the watchman's trumpet sets the historical context of the prophecy, placing its fulfillment in the ancient world. He also mentions horses, horsemen, chariots, swords, walled cities, levitical priests, national fasting, and the temple and its offerings: all indicia that this prophecy belonged to another time, and not our own. And that the time of judgment was wider than just the Jews is shown by Joel himself:

"I will gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there...Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about" (Joel 3:2).

Day of the Lord - Fall of Jerusalem & Year of Four Emperors

Gathering the nations to the valley of Jehoshaphat refers to God's overthrow of the Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites, who had united forces against Jerusalem, but were overthrown by God. All Jehoshaphat and Judah had to do was strip the slain and gather the spoils (II Chron. 20). The reference in Joel

is to the persecution under Nero and God's salvation by his judgment upon the Jews and Romans. The imagery thus answers the battle of Gog and Magog, which also depicts the Neronean persecution and God's wrath upon the persecutors (Ezek. 38, 39; Rev. 20:7-11). Historical fulfillment came in the fall of Jerusalem and the "year of four emperors." The "year of four emperors" describes the series of civil wars that overtook the Roman Empire upon the death of Nero. In the space of one year and 22 days, five men were claimants to the imperial throne (beginning with Nero and ending with Vespasian), and the empire suffered devastation by the competing factions and armies. At the same time Titus was besieging Jerusalem, the forces of his father, Vespasian, were besieging Rome and ravishing Italy. The same year thus saw the destruction of the two greatest temples in the world: The temple in Jerusalem and the temple Jupiter Capitalinus in Rome. This is the "day of the Lord" prophesied by Joel and the prophets. Zechariah, who preached during the return of the captivity and the building the second temple, thus foretold the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome:

"Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue shall not be cut off from the city." Zech. 14:1, 2

Josephus reports that over 97,000 survivors of the siege were sold into slavery into the Egyptian mines; those that were not cut off from the city perished by famine during the siege, to the number 1.1 million (*Wars VI*,

ix, 3). The prophecy of Zechariah is mirrored by Malachi, who foretold that "Elijah" the prophet would come before the day of the Lord:

"Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." Mal. 4:4-6

Joel wrote about the "great and terrible day of the Lord" (Joel 2:31). Malachi wrote about the "great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal. 4:5). But where Joel said the gifts of the Holy Ghost were a sign proceeding that day (Joel 2:28-30), Malachi said that "Elijah" (John the Baptist) would proceed it (Mal. 4:5; cf. Matt. 11:14). Peter warned that the day would overtake his own generation (Acts 2:40). John the Baptist said "now also the axe is laid to the root of the trees," (Matt. 3:10). Malachi said the "day of the Lord" would burn those that did wickedly up "root and branch" (Mal. 4:1); John the Baptist said the "trees" (men) falling under God's judgment would be cast into fire and the chaff burned up with unquenchable fire (Matt. 3:10, 12). Peter said the heavens and earth being on fire would dissolve, and the elements melt with fervent heat (II Pet. 3:10, 11). Clearly, the "day of the Lord" in Zechariah, Malachi, Joel, Peter, John the Baptist, and Christ are the same, and speak to the events which witnessed the fall of Jerusalem and God's terrible wrath upon the Roman Empire for murder of Christ and persecution of his church.

The Day of the Lord upon the Jews and Nations

Zechariah	Malachi	Joel	Peter	John	Christ
Day of the Lord	Day of the Lord	Day of the Lord	Day of the Lord		
Wrath upon Jews	Wrath upon Jews	Wrath upon Jews / Nations	Wrath upon Jews	Wrath upon Jews	Wrath upon Jews / Nations
Destruction of Jerusalem		Destruction of Jerusalem			Destruction of Jerusalem
	Elijah the prophet appear before	Gifts of Holy Ghost appear before	Outpouring of Holy Ghost	John was Elijah	
Wrath upon generation of those that murdered Christ		Wrath upon generation that witnessed gifts of Holy Ghost	"This generation"	"Now also the axe is laid to the trees"	"This generation"
	Fire consume	Blood, fire, smoke	Fire consume	Fire consume	

Symbolism of the Language

No explanation of II Peter 3:10-13 would be complete without addressing the language. All the examples we have consulted of "days of the Lord" evoked imagery of a "collapsing universe" in which the heavens and earth are shaken, stars fall from the courses, and the sun and moon are darkened or turned to blood. In the case of II Peter 3:10-13, the apostles says "*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.*" Probably the most similar example to Peter's language is in the book of Isaiah, where the prophet describes God's wrath upon Edom and Idumea:

"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. 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...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." Isa. 34:1-4; 9-10

This passage describes a time of world wrath and judgment upon the nations, and Edom in particular. Most commentators are agreed that this was fulfilled in the time of the Babylonians, and thus treats of the same "day of the Lord" upon the heathen as the books of Joel and Obadiah. Indeed, since Edom no longer exists, we must acknowledge that this prophecy belongs to the distant past. Hence, we are forced to concede that the language is purely hyperbolic. Its similarity to II Peter 3:10-13 counsels us to acknowledge that Peter's language is hyperbolic too.

A last example and we will conclude, this time from the prophet Micah:

"The Word of the Lord that came to Micah the Morasthite in the days of Jothan, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. 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." Micah. 1:1-5

This particular prophecy is very insightful, as it specifically names its objects as Jerusalem and Samaria, capitals of the two divided kingdoms. Although in this case the phrase "day of the Lord" does not appear, yet all the other elements are present: God descends from heaven, bringing judgment and wrath; the earth melts and the mountains become molten before him. Is not his language identical with II Pet. 3:10-13 in every material part? The best explanation of this symbolism we have encountered is by Sir Isaac Newton:

"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, 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." (Observations on the Prophecies of Daniel, Part i. chap. ii)

New Heavens and New Earth

Whatever else may be said about II Pet. 3:10-13, this much is sure: our interpretation *must be* governed by the promised new heavens and earth. Does Peter intend us to understand a literal conflagration is to destroy the physical earth and cosmos, only to be replaced by a material, new creation? Of course he doesn't. It is one of the most fundamental teachings of the New Testament that the Christian's eternal habitation is in heaven above, not upon a new earth.

Putting off our bodies in death and being caught away to heaven is the very hope that sustains us. Since heaven is the Christian's hope, the notion of a material new creation must strike us as incongruous indeed. What then is the prophet's intent? Given the symbolic nature of the "heavens and earth" and their reference to kingdoms and governments of earth, it is easy to see that Peter has in view a reordering of earth's government beneath the reigning Christ. This is the over-arching theme of Revelation and all eschatological prophecy: The world, which had been under dominion to enemy powers from the time of the fall, would come under the dominion of Christ and his saints, making a new heavens and earth ruled in righteousness.

The promised new heavens and earth take their source from the prophet Isaiah, who uses them to describe the blessed estate of God's faithful remnant over against the destruction of their persecutors.

"For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered nor come to mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy....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. And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord. And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me:

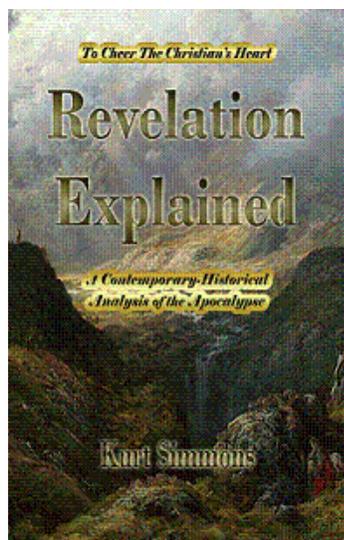
for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh." Isa. 65:17; 66:22-24

"The men that have transgressed against me" has specific reference to the Jews who failed to listen to the words of Prophet, whom Moses said the Lord would rise up from among them. For as Peter warned, *"every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people"* (Acts 3:23). "All flesh" worshipping before the Lord is equal to "every creature" and "all nations" of the Great Commission, and signifies the Gentiles' conversion to Christ who worship the Lord in the new Jerusalem, the church. These would witness the awesome judgment of God upon the Jews and Romans, whose carcasses strewed the landscape where they were devoured by fire and worms.

Conclusion

II Peter 3:10-13 describes God's wrath upon the Jews and Romans in symbolic terms identical with Old Testament usage portraying times of divine judgment upon the world. The world, long under the dominion of Gentile powers, would come under dominion of the risen Christ, who now rules the nations with a rod of iron, in righteous and truth.

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Letter of the Emperor Claudius to the Alexandrians Regarding the Riots of the Jews

“Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, Emperor, Pontifex Maximus, Holder of the Tribunician Power, Consul Designate, to the City of the Alexandrians, greeting.

Tiberius Claudius Barbillus, Apollonius son of Artemidorus, Chaeremon son of Leonidas, Marcus Julius Asklepiades, Gaius Julius Dionysios, Tiberius Claudius Phantias, Pasion son of Potamon, Dionysios son of Sabbion, Tiberius Claudius Archibius, Apollonius son of Ariston, Gaius Julius Apollonius, Hermaiskos son of Apollonius, your ambassadors, having delivered to me the decree, discoursed at length concerning the city, directing my attention to your goodwill towards us, which, from long ago, you may be sure, had been stored up to your advantage in my memory; for you are by nature reverent towards the Augusti, as I know from many proofs, and in particular have taken a warm interest in my house, warmly reciprocated, of which fact (to mention the last instance, passing over the others) the supreme witness is my brother Germanicus addressing you in words more clearly stamped as his own.

Wherefore, I gladly accepted the honors given to me by you, though I have no weakness for such things. And first I permit you to keep my birthday as a dies Augustus as you have yourselves proposed; and I agree to the erection in their several places of the statues of myself and my family; for I see that you were anxious to establish on every side memorials of your reverence for my house. Of the two golden statues, the one made to represent the Pas Augusta Claudiana, as my most honored Barbillus suggested and entreated when I wished to refuse, for fear of being thought too offensive, shall be erected at Rome; and the other according to your request shall be carried in procession on the eponymous days in your city, and it shall be accompanied by a throne adorned with whatever trappings you choose.

It would perhaps be foolish, while accepting such great honors, to refuse the institution of a Claudian Tribe and the establishment of groves after the manner of Egypt. And so I grant you these requests as well, and if you wish you may also erect the equestrian statues given by Vitrasius Pollio my procurator. As for the erection of those in four-horse

chariots which you wish to set up to me at the entrances into the country, I consent to let one be placed at Taposiris, the Libyan town of that name, another at Pharos in Alexandria, and a third at Pelusium in Egypt. But I deprecate the appointment of a high priest to me and the building of temples, for I do not wish to be offensive to my contemporaries, and my opinion is that temples and such forms of honor have by all ages been granted as a prerogative to the gods alone.

Concerning the requests which you have been anxious to obtain from me, I decide as follows. All those who have become epheboi up to the time of my Principate I confirm and maintain in the possession of the Alexandrian citizenship with all the privileges and indulgences enjoyed by the city, excepting those who have contrived to become epheboi by beguiling you, though born of servile mothers. And it is equally my will that all the other favors shall be confirmed which were granted to you by former princes and kings and prefects, as the Deified Augustus also confirmed them. It is my will that the neokoroi of the Temple of the Deified Augustus in Alexandria shall be chosen by lot in the same way as those of the Deified Augustus in Canopus are chosen by lot. With regard to the civic magistracies being made triennial, your proposal seems to me to be very good; for through fear of being called to account for any abuse of power your magistrates will behave with greater circumspection during their term of office. Concerning the Boule, what your custom may have been under the ancient kings I have no means of saying, but that you had no senate under the earlier Augusti, you are well aware. As this is the first broaching of a novel project, whose utility to the city and to my government is not evident, I have written to Aemilius Rectus to hold an inquiry and inform me whether in the first place it is right that a Boule should be constituted, and, if it should be right to create one, in what matter this is to be done.

As for the question, which party was responsible for the riots and feud (or rather, if the truth be told, the war) with the Jews, although in confrontation with their opponents your ambassadors, and particularly Dionysios the son of Theon, contended with great zeal, nevertheless I was unwilling to make a strict inquiry, though guarding within me a store of immutable indignation against whichever party

renews the conflict. And I tell you once and for all that unless you put a stop to this ruinous and obstinate enmity against each other, I shall be driven to show what a benevolent Prince can be when turned to righteous indignation. Wherefore, once again I conjure you that, on the one hand, the Alexandrians show themselves forbearing and kindly towards the Jews who for many years have dwelt in the same city, and dishonor none of the rites observed by them in the worship of their god, but allow them to observe their customs as in the time of the Deified Augustus, which customs I also, after hearing both sides, have sanctioned; and on the other hand, I explicitly order the Jews not to agitate for more privileges than they formerly possessed, and not in the future to send out a separate embassy as though they lived in a separate city (a thing unprecedented), and not to force their way into gymnasium or cosmetic games, while enjoying their own privileges and sharing a great abundance of advantages in a city not their own, and not to bring in or admit Jews who come down the river from Egypt or from Syria, a proceeding which will compel me to conceive serious suspicions. Otherwise I will by all means take vengeance on them as fomenters of which is a general plague infecting the whole world. If, desisting from these courses, you consent to live with mutual forbearance and kindness, I on my side will exercise a solicitude of very long standing for the city, as one which is bound to us by traditional friendship. I bear witness to my friend Barbillus of the solicitude which he has always shown for you in my presence and of the extreme zeal with which he has now advocated your cause; and likewise to my friend Tiberius Claudius Archibius. Farewell.”

Dom Touttee's St. Cyril

(1790)

From the church historians, and his works collected by Dom Touttee in his edition of them at Paris, in 1790.

Julian the Apostate

St. Chrysostom shows that the destruction of Jerusalem is to be ascribed, not to the power of the Romans, for God had often delivered it from no less dangers; but to a special providence which was pleased to put it out of the power of human perversity

to delay or respite the extinction of those ceremonial observances.”

**SAINT CYRIL, CONFESSOR,
ARCHBISHOP OF JERUSALEM — 315-386 A.D.**

Cyril was born at or near the city of Jerusalem, about the year 315. So perfectly was he versed in the holy scriptures, that many of his discourses, and some of these pronounced extempore, are only passages of the sacred writings connected and interwoven with each other. He had read diligently both the fathers and the pagan philosophers. Maximus, bishop of Jerusalem, ordained him priest about the year 345, and soon after appointed him his preacher to the people, likewise his catechist to instruct and prepare the catechumens for baptism; thus committing to his care the two principal functions of his own pastoral charge. St. Cyril mentions his sermons to the faithful every Sunday. Catechumens ordinarily remained two years in the course of instruction and prayer, and were not admitted to baptism till they had given proof of their morals and conduct, as well as of their constancy in the faith. This office St. Cyril performed for several years; but we have only the course of his catechetical sermons for the year, 348 or 347. Perhaps the others were never committed to writing. He succeeded Maximus in the see of Jerusalem about the end of the year 350.

The beginning of his episcopacy was remarkable for a prodigy by which God was pleased to honor the instrument of our redemption. It is related by Socrates, Philostorgius, the chronicle of Alexandria, &c. St. Cyril, an eye-witness wrote immediately to the emperor Constantius, an exact account of this miraculous phenomenon: and his letter is quoted as a voucher for it by Sozomen, Theophanes, Eutychius, John of Nice, Glycas, and others. Dr. Cave has inserted it at length in his life of St. Cyril. The relation he there gives of the miracle is as follows: "On the nones (or 7th) of May, about the third hour, (or nine in the morning,) a vast luminous body, in the form of a cross, appeared in the heavens, just over the holy mount of Olivet, (that is, almost two English miles in length,) seen not by one or two persons, but clearly and evidently by the whole city. This was not, as may be thought, a momentary transient phenomenon: for it continued several hours together visible to our eyes, and brighter than the sun; the light of which would have eclipsed it, had not this been stronger. The whole city, struck with a reverential fear, tempered with joy, ran immediately to the church, young and

old, Christians and heathens, citizens and strangers, all with one voice giving praise to our Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, the worker of miracles; finding by experience the truth of the Christian doctrine, to which the heavens bear witness." He concludes his letter with wishes that the emperor may always glorify the holy and consubstantial Trinity. Philostorgius and the Alexandrian chronicle affirm, that this cross of light was encircled with a large rainbow." The Greek church commemorates this miracle on the 7th of May.

Some time after this memorable event, a difference happened between our saint and Acacius, archbishop of Caesarea, first a warm Semi-Arian, afterwards a thorough Arian. It began on the subject of metropolitical jurisdiction, which Acacius unjustly claimed over the Church of Jerusalem; and what widened the breach between them was their difference of sentiments with regard to the consubstantiality of the Son, which St. Cyril had always most zealously asserted. This was sufficient to render him odious in the eyes of Acacius, who in a council of Arian bishops convened by him, declared St. Cyril deposed for not appearing, after two years' warning, to answer to the crimes alleged against him. One of them was that he had lavished away the goods of the Church, and had applied its sacred ornaments to profane uses. The ground of the accusation was, that, in time of a great famine at Jerusalem, he had sold some of the Church plate, and precious stuffs, to relieve the wants of the poor. St. Cyril, not looking upon the members of the council as qualified judges, appealed to higher powers, but yielding to violence withdrew to Antioch, and thence removed to Tarsus, where he was honorably entertained by the bishop Sylvanus, and had in great respect, notwithstanding the sentence of Acacius and his council against him. Here living in communion with Sylvanus, Eustathius of Sebaste, Basil of Ancyra and others, who soon after appeared at the head of the Semi-Arian faction, this gave rise to the calumny that St. Cyril himself had espoused it. But nothing could be more falsely alleged against him, he having always maintained the Catholic faith. He had accordingly, in 349, together with his predecessor Maximus, received the decrees of the council of Sardica, and consequently those of Nice. And we have already seen, in his letter to Constantius, that he made an undaunted profession of the Consubstantial Trinity. To which we may add, that in the council of Constantinople, in 381, he joined with the other bishops in condemning the Semi-Arians and Macedonians. And the orthodox bishops assembled in the same city in 382, writing to pope Damasus and to the western bishops, gave a most ample testimony to his faith, declaring, "That

the most reverend and beloved of God, Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem, had been canonically elected by the bishops of the province, and had suffered many persecutions for the faith." [11] Upon the death of Constantius, in 361, Julian the apostate, partly, out of aversion to his uncle, and partly in hopes to see the Christian sects. and the orthodox more at variance, suffered all the banished bishops to return. to their churches. Thus did God make use of the malice of his enemy to restore St. Cyril to his see. He shortly after made him an eye-witness to the miraculous manifestation of his power, by which he covered his blaspheming enemies with confusion. The following most authentic history of that remarkable event is gathered from the original records, and vindicated against the exceptions of certain skeptics by Tillemont, and by our most learned Mr. Warburton, in his Julian.

In vain had the most furious tyrants exerted the utmost cruelty, and bent the whole power which the empire of the world put into their hands, to extirpate, if it had been possible, the Christian name. The faith. increased under axes, and the blood of martyrs was a fruitful seed, which multiplied the Church over all nations. The experience how weak and ineffectual a means brute force was to this purpose, moved the emperor Julian, the most implacable, the most crafty, and the most dangerous instrument which the devil ever employed in that design, to shift his ground, and change his artillery and manner of assault. He affected a show of great moderation, and in words disclaimed open persecution; but he sought by every foul and indirect means to undermine the faith, and sap the foundations of the Christian religion. For this purpose he had recourse to every base art of falsehood and dissimulation, in which he was the most complete master. He had played off the round of his machines to no purpose, and seemed reduced to this last expedient of the pacific kind, the discrediting the Christian religion by bringing the scandal of imposture upon its divine author. This he attempted to do by a project of rebuilding the Jewish temple. which, if he could have compassed, it would have sufficiently answered his wicked design; Christ and the prophet Daniel having in express terms foretold not only its destruction, which was effected by the Romans under Titus, but its final ruin and desolation.

The religious Jewish religion was a temporary dispensation, intended by its divine author, God himself, to prefigure one more complete and perfect, and prepare men to embrace it. It not only essentially required bloody sacrifices, hut enjoined a fixed and

certain place for them to be performed in; this was the temple at Jerusalem. Hence the final destruction of this temple was the abolition of the sacrifices, which annihilated the whole system of this religious institution. Whence St. Chrysostom shows that the destruction of Jerusalem is to be ascribed, not to the power of the Romans, for God had often delivered it from no less dangers; but to a special providence which was pleased to put it out of the power of human perversity to delay or respite the extinction of those ceremonial observances. "As a physician," says that father, "by breaking the cup, prevents his patient from indulging his appetite in a noxious draught; so God withheld the Jews from their sacrifices by destroying the whole city itself, and making the place inaccessible to all of them." St. Gregory Nazianzen, Socrates, Theodoret, and other Christian writers, are unanimous in what they say of Julian's motive, ascribing to him the intention already mentioned, of falsifying the scripture prophecies, those of Daniel and Christ, which his actions sufficiently evidence. His historian, indeed, says, that he undertook this work out of a desire of rendering the glory of his reign immortal by so great an achievement: but this was only an after-thought or secondary motive; and Sozomen in particular assures us that not only Julian, but that the idolaters who assisted in it, pushed it forward upon that very motive, and for the sake thereof suspended their aversion to the Jewish nation. Julian himself wrote a letter to the body or community of the Jews, extant among his works, mentioned by Sozomen, and translated by Dr. Cave, in his life of St. Cyril. In it he declares them free from all exactions and taxes, and orders Julius or Illus, (probably Hillel,) their most reverend patriarch, to abolish the apostoli, or gatherers of the said taxes; begs their prayers, (such was his hypocrisy,) and promises, after his Persian expedition, when their temple should be rebuilt, to make Jerusalem his residence, and to offer up his joint prayers together with them.

After this he assembled the chief among the Jews, and asked them why they offered no bloody sacrifices, since they were prescribed by their law. They replied, that they could not offer any but in the temple, which then lay in ruins. Whereupon he commanded them to repair to Jerusalem, rebuild their temple, and re-establish their ancient worship, promising them his concurrence towards carrying on the work. The Jews received the warrant with inexpressible joy, and were so elated with it, that, flocking from all parts to Jerusalem, they began insolently to scorn and triumph over the Christians, threatening to make them feel as fatal effects of their severity, as they themselves had heretofore from the

Roman powers. The news was, no sooner spread abroad than contributions came in from all hands. The Jewish women stripped themselves of their most costly ornaments to contribute towards the expense of the building. The emperor also, who was no less impatient to see it finished, in order to encourage them in the undertaking, told them he had found in their mysterious sacred books that this was the time in which they were to return to their country, and that their temple and legal observances were to be restored. He gave orders to his treasurers to furnish money and every thing necessary for the building, which would require immense sums: he drew together the most able workmen from all quarters, and appointed for overseers persons of the highest rank, placing at their head his intimate friend Alypius, who had formerly been Pro-prefect of Britain; charging him to make them labor in this great work without ceasing, and to spare no expense. All things were in readiness, workmen were assembled from all quarters; stone, brick, timber, and other materials, in immense quantities, were laid in. The Jews of both sexes and of all degrees bore a share in the labor; the very women helping to dig the ground and carry out the rubbish in their aprons and skirts of their gowns. It is even said that the Jews appointed some pickaxes, spades, and baskets to be made of silver for the honor of the work. But the good bishop St. Cyril, lately returned from exile, beheld all these mighty preparations without any concern, relying on the infallible truth of the scripture prophecies: as, that the desolation of the Jewish temple should last till the end; and that one stone should not be left on another; and being full of the spirit of God, he foretold, with the greatest confidence, that the Jews, so far from being able to rebuild their ruined temple, would be the instruments whereby that prophecy of Christ would be still more fully accomplished than it had been hitherto, and that they would not be able to put one stone upon another, and the event justified the prediction.

Till then the foundations and some ruins of the walls of the temple subsisted, as appears from St. Cyril: and Eusebius says, the inhabitants still carried away the stones for their private buildings. These ruins the Jews first demolished with their own hands, thus concurring to the accomplishment of our Saviour's prediction. Then they began to dig the new foundation, in which work many thousands were employed. But what they had thrown up in the day was, by repeated earthquakes, the night following cast back again into the trench. "And when Alypius the next day earnestly pressed on the work, with the assistance of the governor of the province, there issued," says Ammianus, "such horrible balls of fire

out of the earth near the foundations,' which rendered the place, from time to time, inaccessible to the scorched and blasted workmen. And the victorious element continuing in this manner obstinately and resolutely bent as it were to drive them to a distance, Alypius thought proper to give over the enterprise."

This is also recorded by the Christian authors, who, besides the earthquake and fiery eruption, mention storms, tempests, and whirlwinds, lightning, crosses impressed on the bodies and garments of the assistants, and a flaming cross in the heavens, surrounded with a luminous circle. The order whereof seems to have been as follows. This judgment of the Almighty was ushered in by storms and whirlwinds, by which prodigious heaps of lime and sand and other loose materials were carried away. After these followed lightning, the usual consequence of collision of clouds in tempests. Its effects were, first the destroying the more solid materials, and melting down the iron instruments; and secondly, the impressing shining crosses on the bodies and garments of the assistants without distinction, in which there was something that in art and elegance exceeded all painting or embroidery; which when the infidels perceived, they endeavored, but in vain, to wash them out. In the third place came the earthquake which cast out the stones of the old foundations, and shook the earth into the trench or cavity dug for the new; besides overthrowing the adjoining buildings and porticoes wherein were lodged great numbers of Jews designed for the work, who were all either crushed to death, or at least maimed or wounded. The number of the killed or hurt was increased by the fiery eruption in the fourth place, attended both with storms and tempests above, and with an earthquake below. From this eruption, many fled to a neighboring church for shelter, but could not obtain entrance; whether on account of its being closed by a secret invisible hand, as the fathers state the case, or at least by a special providence, through the entrance into the oratory being choked up by a frightened crowd, all pressing to be foremost. "This, however," says St. Gregory Nazianzen, "is invariably affirmed and believed by all, that as they strove to force their way in by violence, the <Fire>, which burst from the foundations of the temple, met and stopped them, and one part it burnt and destroyed, and another it desperately maimed, leaving them a living monument of God's commination and wrath against sinners." This eruption was frequently renewed till it overcame the rashness of the most obdurate, to use the words of Socrates; for it continued to be repeated as often as the projectors ventured to renew their attempt, till it had fairly tired them out. Lastly, on the same

evening, there appeared over Jerusalem a lucid cross, shining very bright, as large as that in the reign of Constantine, encompassed with a circle of light. "And what could be so proper to close this tremendous scene, or to celebrate this decisive victory, as the Cross triumphant, encircled with the Heroic symbol of conquest?"

This miraculous event, with all its circumstances, is related by the writers of that age; by St. Gregory Nazianzen in the year immediately following it; by St. Chrysostom, in several parts of his works, who says that it happened not twenty years before, appeals to eye-witnesses still living and young, and to the present condition of those foundations, "of which," says he, "we are all witnesses;" by St. Ambrose in his fortieth epistle written in 388; Rufinus, who had long lived upon the spot; Theodoret, who lived in the neighborhood in Syria; Philostorgius, the Arian; Sozomen, who says many were alive when he wrote who had it from eye-witnesses, and mentions the visible marks still subsisting; Socrates, &c. The testimony of the heathens corroborates this evidence; as that of Ammianus Marcellinus above quoted, a nobleman of the first rank, who then lived in the court of Julian at Antioch and in an office of distinction, and who probably wrote his account from the letter of Alypius to his master at the time when the miracle happened. Libanius, another pagan friend and admirer of Julian, both in the history of his own life, and in his funeral oration on Julian's death, mentions these earthquakes in Palestine, but with a shyness which discovers the disgrace of his hero and superstition. Julian himself speaks of this event in the same covert manner. Socrates testifies, that at the sight of the miracles, the Jews at first cried out that Christ is God; yet returned home as hardened as ever. St. Gregory Nazianzen says, that many Gentiles were converted upon it, and went over to the Church. Theodoret and Sozomen say many were converted; but as to the Jews, they evidently mean a sudden flash of conviction, not a real and lasting conversion. The incredulous blinded themselves by various presences: but the evidence of the miracle leaves no room for the least cavil or suspicion. The Christian writers of that age are unanimous in relating it with its complicated circumstances, yet with a diversity which shows their agreement, though perfect, could not have been concerted. The same is confirmed by the testimony of the most obstinate adversaries. They who, when the temple at Daphne was consumed about the same time, by lightning, pretended that it was set on fire by Christians, were not able to suspect any possibility of contrivance in this case: nor could the event have been natural. Every such suspicion is removed by the conformity of the event with the

prophecies: the importance of the occasion, the extreme eagerness of Jews and Gentiles in the enterprise, the attention of the whole empire fixed on it, and the circumstances of the fact. The eruption, contrary to its usual nature, was confined to one small spot; it obstinately broke out by fits, and ceased with the project, and this in such a manner, that Ammianus himself ascribes it to an intelligent cause. The phenomena of the cross in the air, and on the garments, were admirably fitted, as moral emblems, to proclaim the triumph of Christ over Julian, who had taken the cross out of the military ensigns, which Constantine had put there to be a lasting memorial of that cross which he had seen in the air that presaged his victories. The same was again erected in the heavens to confound the vanity of its impotent persecutor. The earthquake was undoubtedly miraculous; and though its effects were mostly such as might naturally follow, they were directed by a special supernatural providence, as the burning of Sodom by fire from heaven. Whence Mr. Warburton concludes his dissertation on this subject with the following corollary. "New light continually springing up from each circumstance as it passes in review, by such time as the whole event is considered, this illustrious miracle comes out in one full blaze of evidence." Even Jewish Rabbins, who do not copy from Christian writers, relate this event in the same manner with the fathers from their own traditions and records. This great event happened in the beginning of the year 363. St. Chrysostom admires the wonderful conduct of divine providence in this prodigy, and observes, that had not the Jews set about to rebuild their temple, they might have pretended they could have done it: therefore did God permit them thrice to attempt it; once under Adrian, when they brought a greater desolation upon themselves; a second time under Constantine the Great, who dispersed them, cut off their ears, and branded their bodies with the marks of rebellion. He then relates this third attempt, "in our own time," as he says, "not above twenty years ago, in which God himself visibly baffled their endeavors, to show that no human power could reverse his decree; and this at a time when our religion was oppressed, lay under the axes, and had not the liberty even to speak; that impudence itself might not have the least shadow of presence."

St. Cyril adored the divine power in this miracle, of which he had ocular demonstration. Orosius says that Julian had destined him to slaughter after his Persian expedition, but the death of the tyrant prevented his martyrdom. He was again driven from his see by the Arian emperor, Valens, in 367, but recovered it in 378, when Gratian, mounting the throne, commanded the churches to be restored to those who were in

communion with pope Damasus. He found his flock miserably divided by heresies and schisms under the late wolves to whom they had fallen a prey; but he continued his labors and tears among them. In 381 he assisted at the general council of Constantinople, in which he condemned the Semi-Arians and Macedonians whose heresy he had always opposed, though he had sometimes joined their prelates against the Arians St. before their separation from the church, as we have seen above; and as St. Hilary, St. Meletius, and many others had done. He had governed his church eight years in peace from the death of Valens, when, in 386, he passed to a glorious immortality, in the seventieth year of his age. He is honored by the Greeks and Latins on this day, which was that of his death.

Questions from our Readers

Q: Hi Kurt, Guy from NJ here. Very interesting newsletter. I can't say I'm a "full Preterist" , but I do think many things in the Bible are misinterpreted and do in fact allude to the events of 70AD.

Also wanted to say that the more "political" articles were right on target. I belong to a number of liberty-minded organizations such as The John Birch Society - if you are not familiar with their online magazine "The New American" I think you would like it alot. Question: Do you believe that Preterism lends itself to believing in liberty, our Constitution, limited government, etc - or does that just happen to be your individual outlook?

A: Actually, I was John Bircher from way back! I still retain most of my political convictions I learned from them, but have not been a member for about 10 years. I do believe Preterism is more consistent with liberty and the constitution than futurism, which tends to take a pessimistic view of the future, and people just sort of "check out." I have been writing a weekly column for the local paper and the political oriented stuff is what appears there. I use it in the newsletter figuring "why not?"

Q: Hello and thanks for sending back to me about my inquiry into your article. I'm in agreement with the verses you mention and I won't comment too much as I'm still analyzing the info in the debate on the internet between you and Don k Preston. I think it's amazing that these things can be discussed and I also saw or read the debate between Walt Hibbard

and someone. He has or had a website and I also see Don K Preston as well as others have spots on Youtube. I always believed the new covenant was put into effect when the Passover lamb, that is, Jesus as the "testator" gave His life up on the cross. (Hebrews 9:16, 17) and I see some of the points you are making in your note to me. They did at that time have forgiveness of sins which was the purpose of His sacrifice and the new covenant and is still that purpose today.

If we see 1st Timothy 2:6 it says, "who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." Which indicates a progression in God's plan. In other words, everything didn't happen immediately at the cross. He had to be raised from the grave 3 days later and then exalted to heaven where He presented the value of His sacrifice and appeared in the presence of God. –Hebrews 9:24

Yes, I see the verses you point out and that they had redemption and were redeemed (past tense) which is true, but it's also put in the future (their future) as in Ephesians 4:30. ("the day of redemption")

But the question is, was the Law covenant still in effect or valid until 70AD and if we look at Romans 10:4 it says "Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes." Notice "everyone who believes". – so is it possible that those Jews who didn't believe into Christ were still bound by the Law covenant, the ministry of death. In other words, a Jew living from 33AD to 70AD was either a believer or unbeliever, was either under the new covenant or under the law covenant, but not both at the same time.

There's an interesting passage in Galatians 4:25-26 where he says the "Mount Sinai" law covenant corresponds to the Jerusalem which now is (referring to Jerusalem during Paul's time). So this seems to indicate the law was still in effect, until "heaven and earth" passed away which seems to agree with Jesus words, "For assuredly, I say to you till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" –Matt 5:18. I'm not trying to be argumentative but just pointing out some scriptures for your consideration.

A: The "redemption of the purchased possession" in Eph. 1:14 and the "day of redemption" in 4:30 do not refer to redemption from sin, but receipt of eternal life. Jesus paid for our salvation at Calvary; he purchased immortality and eternal life for us. It is "on hold" for us while we continue in the flesh, but when

we put off these bodies in physical death, we redeem (receive) the purchased possession.

Imagine purchasing a piece of furniture at a store, then returning home to get a truck to bring it home. You return to the store with the receipt and redeem the purchased possession to take home in the truck. That is the way redemption is used here. Jesus purchased eternal life for us, and we are sealed with the Holy Spirit until the day we redeem our immortality in heaven. See Rom. 8:15-23, where redemption of our body means receipt of our immortal bodies in heaven.

"Till heaven and earth pass away" is a parabolic saying similar to saying "till hell freezes over". It is a way of saying something will never happen. "Not one jot or tittle of the law will fail till hell freezes over." This example makes plain that there is no "mystical" meaning to hell freezing over; I am merely showing that it is impossible for the law to fail by comparing that eventuality with the possibility of hell freezing over, which will never happen. Likewise in Jesus' statement from Matt. 5:17-19: There is no "mystical" meaning to the heavens and earth: Jesus is merely saying that it is easier for heaven and earth to vanish away than for God's law to fail to be fulfilled. See Luke 16:17 for the parallel saying. And, as Jesus clearly stated, he came to fulfill the law and prophets by his death upon the cross (Matt. 5:17). Thus, there is no question but that the law terminated at Calvary.

Q: Mr. Simmons... if the charismatic gifts are no longer exercised in the church, how do we account for the instructions that Paul gave to the Church at Corinth concerning the proper use of tongues (apparently the most desired and visible) in worship and his final word to the Church on that issue, "forbid not to speak with tongues"? Are there any explicit scriptures that would indicate that these gifts have been terminated?

Do you believe there is no gift of the "word of knowledge, word of wisdom, gifts of healing (received), faith (extraordinary to seek God to intervene according to His will in a particular need for His Glory), and discerning of spirits all for the edification of the Body? Can't these gifts be working in an unspectacular way in the Body of Christ (local assembly) not necessarily assigned permanently to any particular believer.

A: Sorry to be delayed responding to your inquiry.

I do not believe the Bible teaches miraculous gifts of the Spirit exist today. I have witnessed many examples of those claiming to speak in tongues, affect healings, etc., and they bear no similarity to what we see in the New Testament. I Cor. 13:8 expressly states that "tongues sh Like the question which death was destroyed in AD 70 (Ans: Hadean), the proper interpretation of the symbolism behind use of "heavens and earth" in prophetic imagery is becoming more and more important to Preterism. In this article, we show that the prophets consistently use the imagery of the heavens and earth as symbols of thrones and dominions, and peoples and nations, and never in reference to the Old or New Testament.

Can the Christian so sin as to fall from grace?

The Reformation brought many needed reforms to Christendom, but it also brought many astonishing errors. Among these, the idea that the Christian "once saved is always saved" would have to rank very high.

In the centuries leading up to the Reformation, many distortions to the simple and primitive faith grew up. One of the ideas that found its way into people's thinking was that forgiveness of sins was obtained by various works, such as penances and pilgrimages to distant lands or shrines. Penance is defined as an act or punishment undertaken or imposed as a condition for absolution from sin.

It was with the idea of penance in mind that in 1511 Martin Luther climbed the "Scala Sancta" in Rome (the steps Jesus purportedly ascended to Pilate – forgive my skepticism for doubting the authenticity of the steps). Luther climbed on his knees, kissing each of the 28 steps, and uttering a separate prayer on each.

The experience had the opposite effect on Luther than intended. Instead of impressing him with a sense of grace and atonement, Luther left convicted of the vanity of self-imposed mortifications and penances to obtain divine grace. Unfortunately, Luther overcorrected. Luther taught that man is saved by faith alone. Works being irrelevant (per Luther), nothing man does can deprive him of salvation. Luther is famously quoted with saying:

"If you are a preacher of grace, then preach a true and not a fictitious grace; if grace is true, you must bear a true and not a fictitious sin. God does not save people who are only fictitious sinners. Be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly, for he is victorious over sin, death, and the world...No sin will separate us from the Lamb, even though we commit fornication and murder a thousand times a day."

Sin boldly? Luther sounds more like an apostle of irreligion than a reformer restoring the word of God! Thus, was born the equal and opposite error of "once saved, always saved," the "impossibility of apostasy," the "perseverance of the saints," and similar unbiblical expressions. Luther's error lay in his definition of faith, which divorces it from "best effort" obedience. We say "best effort" because it is clear we can never completely overcome our inherent "fallenness" and carnality. But where we do our very best to obey and give God his full due, grace will make up the difference. To put it still in other terms, we cannot practice sin or neglect our Christian duty and claim to have faith in Christ. But that the Christian can so sin as to lose salvation is attested by many express statements of scripture; here are but a few:

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:7, 8).

"For if we sin wilfully after that we receive the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries" (Heb. 10:26, 27).

"But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 10:33).

"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth" (Rev. 3:15, 16).

Examples like these could be greatly multiplied, all of which expressly warn that our salvation is a thing we can lose by practicing sin, growing tepid in faith, or becoming enmeshed in false systems of faith or practice.

Symbolism of Heavens and Earth: National & Political, or Covenantal?

Preterist Misconceptions

The probable majority of Preterists interpret the “heavens and earth” of New Testament prophecy as symbolic references to Jerusalem, the temple, and the Mosaic law. This interpretation reflects apologetic attempts to harmonize passages like II Peter 3 with predictions tying Christ’s return to the fall of Jerusalem. The apostles sat upon the Mount of Olives and asked Jesus about the sign of his coming and the end of the world; he answered by describing events largely confined to the fall of Jerusalem. Add to this passages like Heb. 12:27, which describes a shaking of the heavens and earth in connection with the removal of the old law, and the conclusion seems inescapable: The heavens and earth of New Testament prophecy should be understood as metaphors for Jerusalem and the old law.

This view has had notable proponents over the centuries. Names like John Owen, John Lightfoot, Jonathan Edwards, and Charles Spurgeon can be marshaled in at least partial defense of this position. Given the prominence the fall of Jerusalem and the temple receive in scripture, we feel it is natural – perhaps even unavoidable - for students to reach this conclusion early in their studies. Indeed, this was our view for almost 25 years. More recently, however, we have come to reject it as scripturally indefensible.

Established Usage

Consistent use of “heavens and earth” by the prophets shows that it was always used nationally and politically, never locally or “covenantally.” There is not a single occurrence in the Old Testament where “heavens and earth” are used as symbols or metaphors for the law of Moses, temple service, or priesthood. Not one. All instances are strictly confined to instances of world-wide judgment upon men and nations.

Isa. 13:9-11 - 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 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 arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.

This is a classic Preterist proof text; it has been used innumerable times to show that there have been many comings and days of the Lord, and that the language of a collapsing universe is purely figurative. We call to your attention two additional points, generally overlooked:

1) There is no covenantal aspect to this prophecy. God’s wrath is based exclusively upon his moral judgments against the wickedness of man, not the Mosaic law. The especial object of judgment in this passage is Babylon, which was never in covenant relation with God. The figure of the heavens and earth in this passage is therefore easily seen to be national and political; it describes the overthrow of thrones and dominions, not the temple or its service.

2) This prophecy reflects a time of world-wide judgment. Isaiah specifically states that the fall of Babylon was merely part of a larger time of world-wrath at the hands of the Medes and Persians. The Mede-Persian Empire was like a great whirlwind of destruction that ranged from Elam in the North to Egypt in the West, and Arabia in the south to Europe in the north. No nation escaped; all felt the rod of God’s chastisement by their hand.

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. 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.

Here is another classic Preterist proof text. Its power and testimony to the figurative nature of prophetic

imagery and language is unequalled. It corresponds perfectly with Matthew twenty-four, II Peter 3, and the imagery of Revelation. Despite the language of collapsing universe, the specific object of wrath named in this passage is Edom. However, in our haste to prove the figurative nature of prophetic language, we have overlooked several things:

- 1) The passage expressly describes a time of world-wrath by the Babylonian Empire; Edom would fall in the course of God's judgment upon the nations.
- 2) Its language is clearly national and political, not covenantal. The judgments described had no connection to the Old Testament law.

Of course, there are passages identical to these, which describe judgment upon Old Testament Judea by the Babylonians; events that occurred within the very sweep of the prophecy concerning the fall of Edom, above. For example, Zephaniah describes God's judgment upon Judah in similar language. However, the same book also describes simultaneous judgment upon numerous other cities and nations, including Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, the Cherethites, Canaan, the Philistines, Moab, Ammon, and the Ethiopians! Although judgment upon Judah necessarily involved the nation's violation of the old law, the fact that identical language is used to describe judgment upon nations to whom the law did not apply proves that it is national and political, not covenantal; the fall of stars from the heavens and the dissolution of the earth describe the overthrow of thrones and dominions, and have no reference to the Old Testament at all.

Planting the Heavens & Founding the Earth

Isaiah fifty-one is another favorite text, supposedly affirming that "heavens and earth" carry a covenantal connotation. However, an objective reading of the text will show this is wrong:

"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....Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: and they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away...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." Isa. 51:3, 11, 14-16.

Reference to the sea is correctly identified with God's parting the Red Sea for Israel at the exodus. This is then typically coupled with the language about "planting the heavens," and "laying the foundations of the earth" as evidence that "heavens and earth" here refers to establishing the covenant at Sinai. However, this is really very bad exegesis, and belies a fundamental lack of comprehension. The context of the passage is plainly to the Babylonian captivity and God's promise to bring a remnant back to the land. Notice that reference to dividing the Red Sea is in the past tense, indicative mood. Note also that reference to "planting the heavens" and laying the "foundations of the earth" is in the future tense, subjunctive mood ("that I may"). This shows that these two events are not connected in time; God is evoking the example of the Red Sea crossing from the past example as a demonstration of his ability to redeem his people out of captivity in the future. "Planting the heavens" is a poetic reference to repopulating the land by sowing it with the seed of men; "laying the foundations of the earth" describes the rebuilding of the waste and desolate places; the cities left uninhabited when their peoples were taken into captivity. This is easily seen by a simple comparison of similar passages. (Cf. Jer. 31:27; Ezek. 36:33, 36; Hos. 2:23)

Hebrews: Shaking the Heavens & Earth

It is true, of course, that Hebrews speaks about shaking the heavens and earth in the context of the destruction of Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22-28). This is cited by Preterists as evidence that the heavens and earth to be removed were covenantal, and referred to the Old Testament, and that the new heavens and earth refer, in turn, to the New Testament. Thus, Max King:

"The writer of the Book of Hebrews referred to this transformation as the shaking of heaven and earth, which signified the removing of the temporal Old Covenant world that was created at Mount Sinai (Hebrews 12:26-27)...The destruction of Jerusalem and the earthly temple in A.D. 70 provides the context for the passing of the old heaven and earth...He sums up the new creation in terms of the coming of the kingdom of God in power by writing, "since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God

an acceptable worship with reverence and awe” (Hebrews 12:28). Max R. King, *Israel's New Heaven and Earth*, Mar 26, 2005

However, this is plainly wrong. Shaking of the heavens and earth at the eschaton was in no wise limited to Jerusalem and the Jews. The eschaton was a time of world-wrath, reaching from Italy, Spain, Germany, and Gaul, to Armenia, Asia, Egypt, and Palestine. One would have to be ignorant of world history at the time of Jerusalem's fall not to see this. He would also have to be willing to overlook numerous passages of scripture that plainly signify the world-wide nature of the eschaton. Haggai, whom the writer of Hebrews quotes, provides its own best refutation of the “local” and “covenantal” eschaton model. Hag. 2:6, 7; 3:21, 22 – For thus saith the Lord of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts...I will shake the heavens and the earth; and I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen.”

As Preterists, we have interpreted this passage as quoted by the Hebrew writer in terms of Jerusalem's fall, but, as we see, its actual, original, and intended scope was universal – the eschaton would be a time when all nations of the greater Roman world were shaken and the throne of heathen kingdoms overthrown. We should also note that the heavens and earth in this context point to higher powers and earth's governments; they have no covenantal significance whatever.

The number of passages proving the eschaton was in no way localized to Judea and Galilee are so many it is almost tedious to read and recount them. Nevertheless, we provide here a few. Dan. 2:28-45; 7:1-28; Ps.2:8, 9;. 96:11-13; cf. 98:9; 110:5, 6; Ezek. 38, 39; Joel 3; Mic. 4:3, 11-13; Zech. 12:3; 14:12; Matt. 25:31, 32; Rom. 1:18; Rom. 2:8, 9; I Cor. 7:29, 31; II Thess. 2:8; II Tim. 4:1 Acts 17:30, 31; Revelation. It is axiomatic that if the eschaton involved the whole Roman world, then the heavens and earth dissolved at Christ's coming were much more than Judea.

Isaac Newton: Heavens & Earth National and Political

We noted above that many great names down through the centuries have interpreted the heavens

and earth of II Peter three and Hebrews twelve in reference to the fall of Jerusalem, while overlooking Christ's wrath upon the rest of the Roman world. However, with the possible exception of Lightfoot, none of those cited interpreted the heavens and earth in “covenantal” terms, so far as we are aware. And even Lightfoot interpreted only the “elements” in reference to the Mosaic law, not the “heavens and earth.” Hence, even these great commentators would agree that “heavens and earth” refer to thrones and dominions, not the Old or New Covenants per se. The following explanation by Isaac Newton we submit is the correct one.

“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, 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.” (Observations on the Prophecies, Part i. chap. ii)

If the heavens and earth put down at Christ's coming were the throne and dominions of Nero Caesar, the Sanhedrin and rulers of the Jews, together with other temporal power who rejected the gospel and persecuted the church, then the new heavens and earth are best understood as the government of Christ, ruling the nations in righteousness with an iron rod.

Covenantal Heavens & Earth: All the Rage among Universalists

It is no secret that Presence Ministries of Max R. King, who has built his writing career on the covenantal heavens and earth model, has gone over to Universalism. The number of articles and quotes that may be marshaled in support of this charge make it beyond successful refutation. Indeed, Presence Ministries feels no need to even deny the accusation by issuing a statement or disclaimer. We here provide quotes from Universalists of varying shades and colors, all of whom make happy use of the covenantal heavens and earth concept to advance their cause. The last quote is by Tim Martin; although not a Universalist, his theology nevertheless bears an obvious logical connection thereto. All the people quoted accept the basic covenantal heavens and earth model of King. Please note the progression of thought:

Tim King - "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

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

David Timm - The second Adam (Christ) reversed all the spiritual separation brought by the first Adam, not just part of it...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. 2006

David Embury- "A man was who he was according to his 'world', and for the Jews their world centred around Yahweh - they were His people and He their God, and so by covenant. Who were the first-fruit believers in Paul's eyes? None other than the 'Body of Christ'. Having been crucified, buried and raised in Christ they were thus delivered out of the body of sin and death i.e., the Old Covenant world, or what we might call the 'Body of Moses' - Paul having spoken of "the fathers" being "baptized into Moses" etc. [can you see the train of thought?] The designation "the flesh" is not one facet of man as opposed to another part of man i.e., "the spirit", but rather "the flesh" speaks of man as a whole in a given mode or realm of existence, as does likewise the spirit. So Paul's spirit/flesh language was indicative of life under covenant, either of the "flesh" as in OC or of the "spirit" as in NC - reading Gal 3 and Phil 3 bears this

out." David Embury, Planet Preterist post, Friday, December 05 @ 20:23:16 PST

Ed Burely - "In spite of the fact that I do not believe that the first chapters of Genesis have anything to do with the physical creation (but instead with a covenant creation), I still will not buy an argument that says "young earth" but not with biblical evidence. A covenantal view of the bible's beginning, along with scientific data, speaks to me that this earth, and this universe is old." Ed Burely, Planet Preterist, Tuesday, November 13 @ 10:56:06 PST

Tim Martin - "Just as the formation of Israel and giving of the Law was the metaphorical creation of "heaven and earth," so the destruction of the Judaic society, the Law, the priesthood, and temple would be the passing away of Israel's "heaven and earth." Tim Martin, *Beyond Creation Science* (unpublished manuscript version)

"Do you believe that there were any people outside of the garden at creation? If all were in the garden in God's first (what you take to be physical) creation, wouldn't that have implications for God's redemption?...As you can see, it could be that it's never been about us doing anything (right or wrong); it's always been about God redeeming his creation; not just small parts of it." Tim Martin, Planet Preterist Post, Thursday, February 21 @ 09:48, 52:05 PST

"Redeeming all of his creation" means all in the "covenantal creation" ("covenantal heavens and earth"). Thus, to avoid the Universalism inherent in placing all men in Revelation's new heavens and earth (where these are interpreted as the New Testament), Martin is forced to place other men outside of his "covenantal garden of Eden." Tim King and Kevin Beck, on the other hand, make no qualms that all mankind is redeemed in the new heavens and earth. Such is the mischief the covenantal heavens and earth model has wrought.

Conclusion

Established usage shows that "heavens and earth" were metaphors for thrones and dominions, peoples and nations. They have never had any covenantal signification in scripture. Preterists need to disabuse themselves of this erroneous idea.