



THE TWILIGHT OF POSTMILLENNIALISM

FATAL ERRORS IN THE TEACHINGS
OF KEITH A. MATHISON,
KENNETH L. GENTRY, JR. ET AL.

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Preface

...postmillennialism teaches that the “Thousand years” of Revelation 20 occurs prior to the Second Coming. . . . An essential doctrine of postmillennialism is that prior to the Second Coming, the messianic kingdom will grow until it has filled the whole earth.¹

—Keith A. Mathison

The Twilight of Postmillennialism was authored by two preterists. We use the term *preterist* to refer to one who believes that the second coming of Christ, resurrection of the dead and judgment came to complete fulfillment in the year A.D. 70. In other words, all Bible prophecy has been fulfilled.² In 2004, Keith Mathison served as editor of a multi-authored critique of our position entitled *Men Shall These Things Be?* (*WSTTB*).³ *The Twilight of Postmillennialism* is more than just a response to Mathison and his coauthors, i.e., a defense of preterism; it is a forceful expose of postmillennialism and its close cousin, amillennialism.⁴ Three articles in the appendices provide supplementary evidence precluding *all* eschatological systems

¹ Keith A. Mathison, *Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1999) 10, 191.

² Kenneth L. Gentry believes that most of the book of Revelation has been fulfilled and declares that he is a preterist “in the historic and orthodox sense of the term” (*WSTTB*, 3). Since he believes that some prophecy remains unfulfilled, he finds it necessary to refer to people like Kurt Simmons and me as “hyper-preterists.” But how someone still waiting for the second coming, resurrection of the dead and judgment can think that those of his persuasion have exclusive rights to a term which essentially means *already past* is a mystery to me. So, I reject Gentry’s use of the term *preterist* and claim it for those who believe that all Bible prophecy has been fulfilled. In the present book, *full-preterist* is occasionally used for clarity. Postmillennialists are referred to *futurists*.

³ Keith A. Mathison, *Men Shall These Things Be?* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2004).

⁴ For this discussion, postmillennialism and amillennialism will be considered essentially the same. On Richard L. Pratt’s website, amillennialism is explained as follows: “Amillennialism affirms that Jesus is already reigning as king over the kingdom of God/heaven, that he inaugurated this kingdom during his earthly ministry, and that his current reign is the millennial reign described in Revelation 20. According to this view, the entire period of Jesus’ millennial reign, spanning the time between his first and second advents, is the ‘end days.’ Amillennialism takes its name

systems promoting a future return of Jesus Christ.

Michael A. Fenemore, Editor

(it means 'no millennium') from its denial that the thousand years spoken of in Revelation 20 are to be interpreted literally. Rather, we believe that 'thousand' is a symbolic number, especially given the highly metaphoric context of Revelation in general and of chapter 20 in particular. We cannot *know* when Jesus will return in the future, but we do know that he will return. When he does, the final judgment of all mankind will take place" (Third Millennium Ministries, <http://thirdmill.org/rapture-millennium-wrath>). The reader will not be alone in wondering how "no millennium" can be described as "Jesus' millennial reign."

1: The Eschatological Time Texts of the New Testament

Michael A. Fenemore vs. Keith A. Matheson & Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr.

Keith Mathison introduces his chapter in (*WSTTB*) by stating his purpose:

The question we seek to answer in this chapter, then, is whether or not the New Testament teaches that the second coming of Christ was definitely to occur during the first century. (156)

As Mathison proceeds, it becomes evident that he has an aversion to acknowledging clear biblical references to the resurrection and judgment when they are associated with the destruction of the Jewish nation in the first century, and it seems no interpretation of a time text is too outrageous if it will allow him to avoid conceding that the New Testament predicts a first-century second coming. He says full-preterists believe in a “much different religion” (*WSTTB*, 213). However, his argumentation is so contradictory, and he is so often unwilling to commit to any firm position, we might wonder how he can be sure of what his own religion is.

...the hyper-preterist thesis is based on a shallow exegesis of Scripture. (*WSTTB*, 213)

—Keith A. Mathison

We shall see whose eschatological system is based on a “shallow exegesis of Scripture.”

Although Mathison’s chapter heading indicates he is dealing with time texts from the New Testament only, he refers to the book of Daniel, so our response begins there.

“Time, times, and half a time” (Daniel 12:7)

...there shall be a time of trouble,
Such as never was since there was a nation,
Even to that time. (Dan. 12:1a, NKJV throughout unless otherwise noted.)

The prophet, Daniel, asked, “How long shall the fulfillment of these wonders be?” (v. 6). He received this answer:

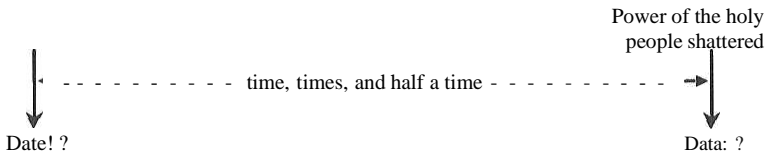
... it shall be for a time, times, and half a time; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished. (v. 7)

The precise meaning of a “time” is crucial to understanding Daniel 12. *The correct interpretation renders all futurist eschatological positions invalid.* So it comes as no surprise to us that Mathison is some-what less than precise:

The specific meaning of “a time, times, and half a time” is not clear. A time may be a year. It may be a less specific time frame. (*WSTTB*, 164)

If a “time” is one year, and “times” represents two years, then “a time, times, and half a time” equals $1 + 2 + \frac{1}{2} = 3 \frac{1}{2}$ years. This is a *very* common interpretation,¹ but Mathison says it is “not clear.” Daniel reveals the following:

Fig. 1



¹ Earl D. Radmacher, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), Dan. 12:7; Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Mole Bible*, (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994), Dan. 12:5-13; Edward E. Hindson & Woodrow Michael Kroll, *KJV Bible Commentary*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1994), Dan. 12:5- 7; William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), Dan. 12:5-10; *NIV Study Bible*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House), Rev. 12:14; John F. MacArthur, be *MacArthur Study Bible*, NJKV ed. (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1997), Dan. 12:7; Lawrence O. Richards, *The Bible Reader's Companion* (Wheaton: SP Publications, 1991), 522.

² It was clear enough to first-century Jews. Nebuchadnezzar was condemned to eating grass like oxen until “seven times” passed over him (Dan. 4:16-32). Josephus writes, “he had lived in this manner in the desert for seven years” (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 10.10.6.216; Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus*, [Peabody: Hendrickson, Inc., 1996, c1987], 281). In Whiston's note, he writes, “Since Josephus here explains the seven prophetic times which were to pass over Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:16) to be seven years, ye thence learn how he most probably must have understood those other parallel phrases, of ‘a time, times, and a half.’” This seems to indicate Whiston too, believed a time represents one year.

Based on Daniel 12 alone, we can't know where to place "time, times, and half a time" on a timeline. However, this much is clear: Daniel foresaw a great "time of trouble" that would end when the power of the holy people had been "completely shattered." So if the almost universally accepted interpretation of "a time, times, and half a time" is correct, we should be looking for a 3 ½-year period of upheaval that ended in disaster for the Jews.

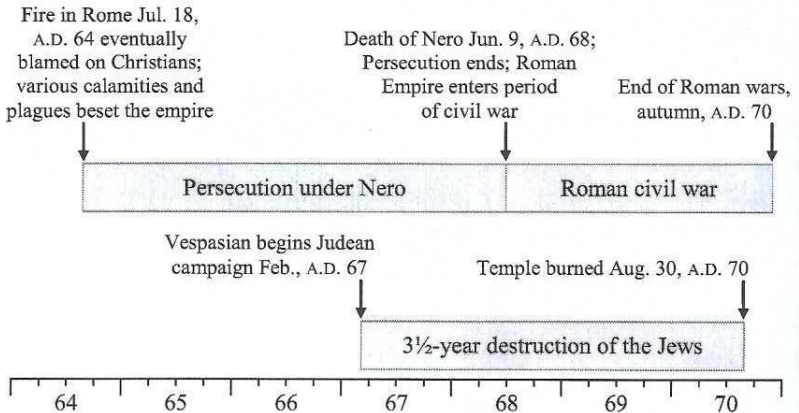
Preterists believe that Daniel's prophecy can refer to nothing else but the horrific first-century period of tribulation on the Roman Empire which culminated in the 3 ½-year Jewish War leading to the complete destruction of Herod's temple in A.D. 70.³

Fig. 2

Daniel's "Time of Trouble" – The Great Tribulation

"...the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth." (Rev. 3:10);

A.D. 64 – 70



Josephus describes the conflict:

...the war which the Jews made with the Romans hath been the greatest

³ Paul L. Maier, *Josephus: The Essential Works* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1994), 371 (Author's insertion 'the tenth of Lous [August 30]' in be Jewish Mar 6.4.5.250).

of all those, not only that have been in our times, but, in a manner, of those that ever were heard of; both of those wherein cities have fought against cities, or nations against nations...the multitude of those that therein perished exceeded all the destructions that either men or God ever brought upon the world⁴

The *most* profoundly significant event of this period was the razing of the temple at Jerusalem. In the words of Richard Horsley, the temple “wasn’t just a religious shrine, it was the center of the whole country.”⁵ The destruction of the temple put an end to Jewish sacrificial worship:

Judaism was never the same after the fall of Jerusalem. By destroying most of the city and, more important, by burning the Temple, the Romans brought to an end some of the age-old Jewish rituals. No longer would millions of Jews from the Diaspora make their yearly trek to the hallowed place of worship. Nor would they observe the Temple’s animal sacrifices, a ritual for more than 1,000 years.⁶

It was the greatest national disaster in the history of ancient Israel. Previously, the High Priest had always sprinkled the blood of sacrificed animals on the mercy seat to atone for the nation’s sins (Lev. 16; 23:26-32; Num. 29:7-11; Heb. 9:7). However, this ritual has not been observed since A.D. 69. By now, this period of cessation has covered more time than *the entire history of ancient Israel* all the way back to the time of Abraham. Under the terms of the Old Covenant, no sin *has been forgiven for over 1,900 years!* Of course, with the death of Christ, forgiveness comes only through faith in *his* sacrifice. But without a temple, those Jews who rejected Jesus could no longer even *hope* to obtain forgiveness; and without forgiveness, access to God is not possible (Isa. 59:2). What greater tragedy could there be? The “power of the holy people” was “completely shattered.”

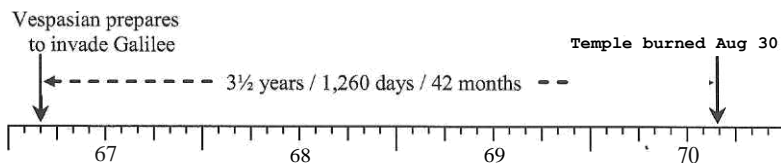
The “fulfillment of these wonders” covered 3 years beginning with the Roman invasion of Galilee led by Vespasian:

⁴ Josephus, *The War of the Jews*, Whiston ed., Preface 1.1; 6.9.4.429.

⁵ Richard Horsley, *66 A.D. The Last Revolt*, video (New York: A&E Television Networks, 1999).

⁶ *After Jesus: The Triumph of Christianity* (Pleasantville: Reader’s Digest Association, Inc., 1992), 107.

Fig. 3



Vespasian was commissioned in early February of 67⁷ and invaded Galilee soon after to begin a 3 ½-year savage response to the Jewish revolt. Preterists conclude — in the company of numerous scholars including ancient Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus—that a “time” must equal a year, and “a time, times, and half a time” must add up to 3 ½-years.⁹

Revelation’s 42 Months

The 3 ½ -year war in Daniel 12 corresponds perfectly to the 42-month (3 ½-year) destruction of “the holy city” mentioned in Rev. 11:2. Gentry connects the 42-month prophecy to the Jewish War in *Before Jerusalem Fell (BJF)*:

Here stands a specifically defined era during which the “holy city” (i.e., Jerusalem, the historical capital and geographical center of Israel) will be down-trodden. This periodic statement is followed up by its equivalent in the next verse, which speaks of 1260 days (42 months x 30 days each = 1260 days)...this time-frame must somehow comport with the Jewish War.. .ii took almost exactly forty-two months for Rome to get into a position to destroy the Temple in the Jewish War of A.D. 67-70...Surely this figure cannot be dismissed as sheer historical accident. (emphasis

⁷ James M. Macdonald, *Life and Writings of John* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1877), 212. Cf. Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, Whiston ed., 877 (Footnote for 6.2.1.94). Whiston’s note contains an obvious error. A simple calculation reveals he intended A.D 67, not 66.

⁸ F.F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 380-1; Maier, 302 (Margin note for The Jewish War 3.2.4.29).

⁹ Even Mathison’s coauthor, Simon J. Kistemaker, says, “the three time measurements [in Revelation] —1,260 days, forty-two months, and time, times, and half a time—are all of the same duration” (*WSTTB*, 225).

mine, maf)¹⁰

Mathison agrees. In *Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of hope* (PAEOH), he says the 42-month period in Revelation “apparently refers to the time from the declaration of war by Rome until the fall of Jerusalem.”¹¹

We now pose two questions:

1. Why is Mathison so unsure about the meaning of a time? If the information provided in Daniel 12 was not clear enough, surely, a comparison to Revelation 11 would be sufficient to conclude ‘time, times, and half a time’ must refer to the 3 ½-year Jewish War.
2. In *BJF*, Gentry proves Revelation is all about the fall of Jerusalem including the destruction of the temple. The evidence strongly suggests Daniel 12 covers the same events. So why, in over 350 pages, does he never connect the 3 ½-year period in Revelation 11 to the one in Daniel 12?”

Futurism “Completely Showered”

Daniel 12 presents an enormous and embarrassing problem for Mathison, Gentry and all other futurists because Daniel associates the resurrection and judgment with the shattering of the holy people’s “power”:

¹...at that time your people shall be delivered, (or rescued [NASB, NLT])

¹⁰ Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell* (Atlanta; American Vision. 1998), 250, 253.

¹¹ Keith A. Mathison, *Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Company, 1999), 151.

¹² Our comments regarding such omissions assume the Scripture Index provided at the back of the book in question is accurate and complete. We have diligently searched through printed books, and in some cases, electronic (PDF) versions, to determine the true positions taken by all authors, and we have taken great care to accurately present their views. Gentry makes a brief reference to Dan. 12:2 in *The Greatness of the Great Commission*. “...there is but one resurrection and one judgment, which occur simultaneously at the end of history, see: Daniel 12:2; Matthey [25]:31-32” (Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission* [Tyler: Institute for Christian Economics, 1993], 142.) We have been unable to find “the end of history” in any of the Bibles we have consulted.

Every one who is found written in the book.

²And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake,
Some to everlasting life,
Some to shame and everlasting contempt.

³Those who are rise shall shine
Like the brightness of the firmament,
And those who turn many to righteousness
Like the stars forever and ever.

⁴But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end... (vv. 1-4)

⁷...it shall be for a time, times, and half a time; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, *all these things shall be finished...* (v. 7)

¹³But you, go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days. (v. 13)

Without a doubt, Daniel has linked the resurrection and judgment to the shattering of the holy people's power, the event we suggest is the destruction of the temple which ended the Jews' ability to make sacrifices. In *WSTTB*, Mathison doesn't deny this, he simply ignores it. In *PAEOH*, he barely mentions Daniel 12. Introducing his section on Daniel, he writes, "Within this small book, we find some of the most important eschatological passages in the Bible" (92). Yet he writes not a single word explaining anything in Daniel 12.¹⁰ Why does such an important chapter concerning "the time of the end" (v. 4) receive virtually no attention in a book which is presumably intended to be an in-depth presentation of Mathison's eschatological system? How can one write a book on eschatology and fail to mention 'the most explicit statement of the resurrection hope in the whole of the Old Testament?'¹⁴ Is this not one of the "most important eschatological passages in the Bible?" Not a single reference to Daniel 12 can be found in either of Gentry's *BJF* or *The Beast of Revelation*.

¹⁰ On page 113, Mathison writes, "...the language Jesus uses is common prophetic language referring to judgment (see Ex. 11:6; Ezek. 5:9; Dan. 9:12; 12:1; Joel 2:2)." This is the only reference to Daniel 12 in *PAEOH*.

¹⁴ F.F. Bruce, *Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988) 41.

He Shall Have Dominion (HSHD) contains brief references, but none connecting the “time, times, and half a time” of Daniel 12 to the 42 months of Revelation 11. Within the pages of *WSTTB*, Daniel 12 is rarely mentioned by any of the authors. When it is, we find nothing of substance, and the vital issue of the resurrection and judgment being tied to the shattering of the holy people’s power is never addressed. All Mathison has to say is the meaning of “a time, times, and half a time” is “not clear.” But one thing is *very* clear: Daniel solidly binds the resurrection and judgment to the catastrophic destruction of something very important to the Jews.

It may seem unfair to criticize authors for things they didn’t say, but surely, books presented as comprehensive eschatological works must include meaningful references to Daniel 12 or be deemed seriously deficient.

We shall have difficulty determining Mathison’s position on the resurrection predictions in Daniel 12; however, consider this excerpt from his commentary on Matthew 24 in *PAEOH*.

The Abomination of Desolation and the Flight of Christians (24:15-20). A simple comparison with the parallel passage in Luke 21:20 reveals that the “abomination of desolation” is the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies (113)

Mathison knows this was fulfilled in A.D. 70. He calls it the “abomination of desolation.” However, this is not exactly the way Jesus referred to it. In Matt. 24:15, *he* called it “the ‘abomination of desolation,’ *spoken of by Daniel the prophet.*” Christ was predicting “great tribulation” (v. 21) and tying it to the abomination of desolation prediction in Dan. 12:11. Now, if *that* prediction from Daniel 12 has been fulfilled, then *everything* in Daniel 12 must have been fulfilled because it was all supposed to occur during the same period: “at that time”; at “the time of the end”; when the holy people’s power would be “completely shattered” and “*all* these things shall be finished.” So why isn’t Mathison teaching that the resurrection and judgment mentioned in verses 2 and 3 have been fulfilled as well?

An unfulfilled resurrection presents numerous problems. When Daniel died, he had to “sleep in the dust of the earth.” He would not “awake” to experience the resurrection until “the end.” However, most Christians believe that they will go to heaven at death to be with Jesus while they wait for the end and the resurrection. Do *they* enter

heaven ahead of Daniel? Is that believably? David had to wait for the resurrection: "As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness" (Ps. 17:15). Is David still waiting to "awake" while centuries of departed Christians have preceded him into the presence of God?

Furthermore, an unfulfilled resurrection spawns a doctrine that denies bodies to departed Christians." This introduces more difficulties:

1. Paul said that lie and the other first-century Christians *groaned* and *earnestly desired* to be clothed with their bodies from heaven, and he guaranteed the Corinthians they would not be "found naked" when their mortal bodies were "swallowed up by life" (2 Cor.5:1-5). However, the popular teaching implies millions of Christians are floating around God's throne *stark naked*, still groaning and earnestly desiring to be "clothed"; "eagerly waiting" for the redemption of their bodies (Rom. 8:23).
2. Paul said, "this corruptible *must* put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:53). Not only was this "change" (v. 51) a "must," Paul never mentioned any enormous gap between the two states.

In fact, nowhere in the New Testament can such a teaching be found. It exists only in the minds of theologians who place the resurrection in the future, and thus, feel compelled to invent this bizarre doctrine.

Aside from the scriptural considerations, the popular concept simply doesn't make sense. There is no reason to withhold bodies. What would be the point? Jesus completed his work of redemption a longtime ago, and Old Covenant temple worship has been destroyed. The "power of the holy people" was "completely shattered" at "the time of the end": A.D. 70. Beyond that point, God had no reason to continue

¹⁵ "...The souls of the righteous, being then being made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory. writing for the full redemption of their bodies" (*The Westminster Confession of Faith* [1646], XXXII.I). This statement is rendered invalid by 1 John 3:2. Evidently, departed Christians enjoy the same glory as their elder brother Jesus, "the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29).

withholding Daniel's reward. Nor is there any reason to withhold new bodies from Christians who die today.¹⁶

Paul wrote, "in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming" (1 Cor. 15:22b-23). So clearly, all the Old Testament saints, including Daniel and David, were to be "made alive" at the second coming. We all agree Christ has been resurrected and is now in heaven. However, there is no allowance for anyone else to be "made alive" before the second coming. So, if Jesus has not returned, *none* of God's people could be in heaven with Christ. *Only full-preterism offers an interpretation allowing for Christians to be "alive" after death!"*

Christians enduring severe trials would be tremendously encouraged if they could confidently anticipate their eventual *transfer* into the spirit realm at death where their redemption will be *complete* upon receipt of their new incorruptible bodies. Friends and relatives left to grieve might be greatly comforted by such clarity. Instead, some Christians picture themselves and their loved ones lying unconscious in the cold ground — possibly for centuries — waiting for the second coming. Others are confident they will go to heaven when they die, but wonder what it might be like to be there with no body and what difference it will make when they finally get one, which also, might not occur for centuries. Surely, these confusing, contradictory, uninspiring and sometimes bizarre beliefs must weaken the faith of some. But despite solid evidence in Daniel 12 pointing to a first-century fulfillment of the resurrection, the only words Keith Mathison has to offer are "not clear." Daniel answers, "the wise shall understand" (v. 10). *Somebody* was supposed to understand this!

¹⁶ Contrary to the common teaching, the literal raising *or physical* bodies is unnecessary. However, this subject is beyond the scope of the present chapter.

¹⁷ In Matt. 27:52, we see some unnamed saints being resurrected with Jesus. In 1 Cor. 15:23, Paul ignores this group, perhaps, because it was considered an exception. Evidently, Daniel was not included in this resurrection because he was not scheduled to awake until "the end of the days" (Dan. 12:2, 13).

“That all things which are written may be fulfilled” (Luke 21:22)

For these are the days of vengeance, that *all things* which are written may be fulfilled. (Luke 21:22)

Mathison thinks preterists exaggerate when they claim that Luke 21:22 predicts the final fulfillment of everything in the Old Testament. He says, “all things” means only things pertaining to the destruction of Jerusalem (*WSTTB*, 172). This proposal solves nothing for Mathison because included in “all things” would be the resurrection of the dead which was associated with the 3 1/2-year Jewish War predicted by Daniel. Even if Mathison rejects our interpretation of Daniel 12, he cannot avoid the resurrection here. A few verses down, Jesus links the resurrection and rapture to Jerusalem’s destruction: “Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because *your redemption draws near*” (v. 28).¹ If this is not the resurrection/rapture, then what is it? Can any futurist answer this? How was the “redemption” of Christians made complete at the destruction of Jerusalem? There is no great mystery here. Jesus is simply reaffirming Daniel’s prediction of a resurrection inextricably linked to the cataclysmic close of Old Covenant temple worship. It was the “salvation” Christ’s servants were waiting for (Heb. 9:28). It might be argued that the redemption mentioned here is simply physical protection from God’s wrath on the disobedient Jews, not the second coming and arrival of the kingdom of God. But Luke continues, “when *you* see these things happening, how *that the kingdom of God is near*” (v. 31). Mathison says the kingdom of God was “inaugurated” at Christ’s first advent and will be “consummated” at a future resurrection to occur at the end of an enormous millennium which has now spanned over 1,900 years (*PAEOH*, 190-1, 194). However, according to Luke, the kingdom of God arrived in its fulness about the time of the temple’s destruction in A.D. 70. That is when the first-century church experienced its “redemption.”

¹ Some may object to the use of *rapture* since it is not found in English translations. It is from the Latin *raptus* in the Vulgate for the Greek *ἁρπάζω* (*harpazo*) translated *caught up* in most English translations of 1 Thess. 4:17. We have no problem with *rapture*. It is preferable to referring to that precious moment as the *caught-up event*.

In *WSTTB*, verse 28 is mentioned only once by Mathison, but no explanation of the redemption issue is offered. It is completely absent from his other two books on eschatology.” Despite its staggering implications, verse 31 — *the arrival of the kingdom of God* — is never mentioned in any of these books. The term *glaring omission* barely describes such an oversight.

James said, “the coming of the Lord is at hand...the Judge is standing at the door!” (Jas. 5:8-9). Peter said, “the end of *all things* is at hand” (1 Pet. 4:7). These statements harmonize perfectly with Luke’s gospel. Christ’s *judgment* on Jerusalem was the sign the fulfillment of “*all things* which are written” was taking place. This included the resurrection and “rescue” predictions in Daniel 12 as Jesus clearly affirmed in Luke 21:28. This “day of redemption”²⁰ for God’s people was inseparable from the “day of vengeance” on the first-century Jews:

¹The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me,
Because the Low has anointed Me...
To proclaim *liberty* to the captives...

²...And the day of *vengeance* of our God (Isa. 61:1-2)

For the day of *vengeance* was in my heart, and my year of *redemption* had come. (Isa. 63:4, ESV)

“Some standing here who shall not taste death” (Matthew 16:28)

Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. (Matt. 16:28)

Most futurist expositors claim that “the Son of Man coming in His kingdom” refers to the transfiguration described in Matthew 17. This interpretation is rejected by preterists.²¹ Neither is it Mathison’s preference. However, his postmillennialism will not allow for this

¹⁹ *PAEOH: Dispensationalism: Rightly Dividing the People of God?* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Company, 1995).

²⁰ Eph. 4:30. Cf Rom. 8:23; “...eagerly waiting for the adoption, the *redemption* of our body” ἀπολύτρωσις [*apolutrosis*] in Luke 21:28, Rom. 8:23 and Eph. :30).

²¹ See Appendix 2: Did the Transfiguration Fulfill Matt. 16:28?

coming” to be the *second* coming, so he makes this suggestion:

When Jesus used the words “the coming of the Son of Man,” he seems to have been alluding to Daniel 7:13-14, a text in which the “coming” in question is *a coming to the Ancient of Days in heaven, not a coming from heaven to earth...* the One like the Son of Man *comes up to* the Ancient of Days *{not down to earth}*. The...“coming of the Son of Man” in the context of Daniel 7 is *the coming of the Son of Man up to the throne of God to receive his kingdom...* the possibility must be kept open that Jesus wasn’t referring to his second advent at all when he used this language. *He may have been referring instead to his ascension to the throne of God, his receiving of his kingdom, and the judgment on Jerusalem...* In other words, it is possible that Jesus did say (in Matthew 10:23, 16:27 - 28, and 24:34) that the coming of the Son of Man would occur within the lifetime of those who heard him speak, but that it *does not refer to his second coming from heaven to earth.* (WSTTB, 181-2, emphasis mine, maf)

Here is what Daniel saw:

⁹...the Ancient of Days was seated...His throne was a fiery flame. . . (Dan. 7:9);

¹³...And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him.

¹⁴Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him... (vv. 13-14)

Mathison is suggesting that Christ’s *ascension* (traditionally understood as *leaving Earth*) was actually his *coming* (traditionally understood as *coming back to Earth*). Jesus was *going* to the Father, but according to Mathison, it should really be described as coming to the Father. Granted, the words in Daniel 7 are “Coining” and “came,” but this is easily explained.

Daniel was experiencing a vision. Where was he situated? He was literally “on his bed” (v. 1); however, we must remember that visions are supernatural, and for this vision, Daniel was in heaven. How else could he have seen “the Ancient of Days” seated on his throne? Rising up to heaven is not unusual for someone receiving a vision:

He stretched out the form of a hand, and took me by a lock of my hair; and *the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven*, and brought me in

visions of God to Jerusalem (Ezek. 8:3)

...*he was caught up into Paradise* and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. (2 Cor. 12:4)

¹“*Come up here*, and I will show you things which must take place after this.” ²Immediately I was in the Spirit; and *behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.* (Rev. 4:1b-2)

Daniel Was In heaven with the Ancient of Days seated on his throne. Then he saw “the Son of Man...Coming.” Jesus was coming from the earth to heaven where Daniel was. Is this what Jesus was describing in Matt. 16:28? The question is easily answered by including verses 26 and 27:

²⁶For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses *his own soul*? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? ²⁷For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then *He will reward each according to his works.* ²⁸Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.²²

This “coming of the Son of Man” includes the judgment. Notice the reference to a man who “loses his own soul” In verse 26. The accounts in Mark and Luke mention people of whom Jesus would be “ashamed” (Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26). So, Matt. 16:28 cannot be referring to the ascension in A.D. 30 because the judgment of the people Christ was ashamed of did not take place at that time.²³

Why would Jesus say, “there are some standing here who shall not taste death” regarding the ascension which occurred only a short time later? Not only were *some* of them still alive, *all* of them were (except Judas). Christ’s wording suggests his coming would occur near the

²² The NKJV inserts a new topic heading at verse 27: “*The Prophecy of the Second Coming.*” However, this interprets the flow from verse 26 which is obviously connected to the subject of the judgment in verses 27 and 28. There is no paragraphbreak at verse 27 in the Nestle-A1 and 27th edition of The Greek New Testament. Neither should there be a break at verse 28 as in the NASB. The ESV and NLT correctly include verses 26 to 28 in one paragraph.

²³ We acknowledge the debate over the correct year of Christ’s crucifixion and are not necessarily promoting A.D. 30 over any other year. We use it because it is widely accepted. The exact year has no bearing on the present discussion.

end of their lives. According to J. S. Russell, this would place the event closer to A.D. 70:

The very form of the expression shows that the event spoken of could not lie within the space of a few months, or even a few years: it is a mode of speech which suggests that not *all* present will live to see the event spoken of; that not many will do so; but some will. It is exactly such a way of speaking as would suit an interval of thirty or forty years, when the majority of the persons then present would have passed away, but some would survive and witness the event referred to.²⁴

Christ's prediction is reminiscent of the promise made to Simeon "that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ" (Luke 2:26). By the time Simeon finally laid eyes on Jesus, he was old and ready to "depart in peace" (v. 29). In *The Last Days According to Jesus*, Sproul, Sr. concurs with Our assessment:

The time-frame indicated by the reference to some surviving death strongly suggests that there would be an interlude of several years between the prophecy and its fulfillment. ..If the Olivet Discourse refers primarily to events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem...then it is possible, if not probable, that Jesus' reference to his coming in Matthew 16:28 refers to the same events, not two...close-at-hand events.²⁵

It is far more natural to associate "the Son of Man coming in His kingdom" in Matt. 16:28 with A.D. 70. This is consistent with the message we find Paul teaching decades after the ascension: some will have died, but some will still be alive:

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we *who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord...* (1 Thess. 4:15); *We shall not all sleep* (1 Cor. 15:51)

To accommodate his postmillennial presupposition, Mathison must find a way to neutralize Matt. 16:28. However, the more he tries to explain his proposal, the more unbelievable it becomes:

The "coming" of the Son of Man is *His coming in judgment upon Jeru-*

²⁴ James Stuart Russell, the *Parousia* (Bradford: International Preterist Assoc., 1996), 31.

²⁵ R.C. Sproul, Sr., *The Last Days According To Jesus*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 55.

salem (see [Matt. 24] vv. 23-28), which is intimately connected with *His* ascension to the right hand of God (cf Dan. 7:13-14). {PAEOH, 114)

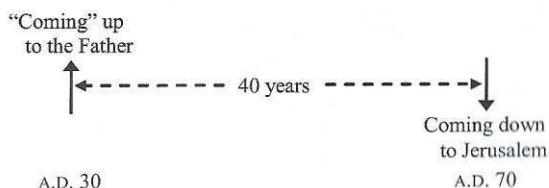
[Jesus] may have been referring instead to his ascension to the throne of God, his receiving of his kingdom, *and the judgment on Jerusalem* that would prove he had received the kingdom and was who he claimed to be, (WSTTB, 182, emphasis mine, maf)

According to Mathison, the ascension in A.D. 30 was included in “the coming of the Son of Man,” *and* the judgment on Jerusalem in 70 was too. Of course, for Mathison, neither *of* these events can be the second coming, and even though he has acknowledged an A.D. 70 aspect to this coming, true to form, he has ignored the resurrection and judgment mentioned in Matt. 16:26-27. He doesn’t believe that they occurred in A.D. 30, nor does he place them at A.D. 70. So where are they? We don’t know, but we do see a pattern emerging: Keith Mathison consistently refusing to acknowledge that the resurrection and judgment are associated with first-century events.

To summarize, Mathison thinks the ascension in A.D. 30 (Jesus *going up*) was “the Son of Man coming in His kingdom,” *and* he says the judgment on Jerusalem (Jesus *coming down*) was too. According to Mathison, Jesus was referring to *both* events in Matt. 16:28 even *though the two events were 40 years apart, and Jesus was going in opposite directions!*

Fig. 4

Mathison’s “Son of Man coming in his kingdom” (Matt: 16:28)



Missing: The resurrection and judgment (vv. 26-27)

From the disciples’ perspective (on Earth), the ascension was not a *coming* at all; it was a *going*. Jesus was going to the Father. Christ said some would see him “coming” in his kingdom, not *going* to receive it, or “coming” to receive it as Mathison has suggested.

The ascension hypothesis suffers from yet another serious weakness. Matthew writes that some would see “the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” However, both Mark and Luke state it differently: some standing there would live to see “the kingdom of God” (Mark 9 I; Luke 9:27). There is no problem here for preterists; “the Son of Man coming in His kingdom” is the same event as the arrival of the kingdom of God.” However, consider the implication for the ascension interpretation: Mathison must now be prepared to argue the disciples were actually *seeing the kingdom of God* at the ascension even though Jesus had not yet ascended to heaven to receive it. Of course, this position is preposterous, and we have not noticed Mathison wasting any space trying to defend it. The disciples would not see the kingdom of God until some 40 years later at the destruction of Jerusalem (Luke 21:31).

So, what is Mathison left with? His ascension idea is a failure; and if, in desperation, he turns to the transfiguration interpretation, he is faced with a mountain of evidence against that (see Appendix 2). Ultimately, he has only one viable option: the literal interpretation of Matt. 16:28, i.e., the “coming of the Son of Man” refers to the second coming, not the ascension, transfiguration or anything else.

Finally, since Sproul, Sr. has agreed “the Son of Man coming in His kingdom” probably refers to the time of Jerusalem’s destruction in A.D. 70, perhaps he might be willing to publish some commentary on the reference to the resurrection and judgment in verses 26 add 27 which must have been fulfilled at the same time.²⁶

The Olivet Prophecy (Mathew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21)

Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till *all these things* take place. (Matt. 24:34)

Mathison thought the meaning of a time in Daniel 12 was “not clear.” He said **Matt.** 16:28 “may” refer to the ascension. He takes the

²⁶ At the Covenant Eschatology Symposium in Orlando, Florida in 1993, Sproul, Sr. admitted that he had not yet “settled on an eschatological position.” He said, “I honestly don’t know.” However, in the Foreword to *WSTTB*, Sproul, Jr. was so confident of his position he referred to full-preterists as Christ’s “enemies” (x).

same irresolute approach to Matthew 24 saying, “several possible interpretations have been offered” (*WSTTB*, 179). He claims that neither double nor partial fulfillment can be “ruled out” (180). Actually, both can *easily* be ruled out.

Double Fulfillment?

Mathison quotes Robert H. Gundry:

Gundry argues instead that the time texts in Matthew should be understood in terms of double fulfillment. *These events were fulfilled in the first century to a certain degree, but their ultimate fulfillment is still to come.* (*WSTTB*, 179, emphasis mine, maf)

A quick verse-by-verse analysis exposes the double-fulfillment theory as absurd. We might wonder whether Mathison or others who promote this idea ever took the time to test it by reading over the text even once. How could this be fulfilled twice?

...this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come. (v. 14)

Mathison believes that verse 14 was fulfilled by the gospel going to the Roman Empire in the first century (*PAEOH*, 113). We agree.²⁷ But is he suggesting a second, future commission to the Roman Empire? What Roman Empire? It no longer exists. Does “the end” come twice? If it does, then the first one wasn’t the end!

A modern second fulfillment is usually presented as a worldwide catastrophe, but notice verse 20: “...pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath.” What relevance would this have today? Outside modern-day Israel, relatively few people in the world keep the Sabbath. And what if they do? In ancient times, the gates of Jerusalem were shut on the Sabbath preventing escape (Neh. 13:19, 22; Jer. 17:21, 24). However, this is not a problem for anyone today. Most Christians probably live out their *entire lives* without *ever* praying their “flight” will not take place on the Sabbath. Mark’s account adds this: “...watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues” (Mark 13:9).

²⁷ See Appendix 3: Was the Gospel Preached to the Whole World?

How could this be fulfilled worldwide in our time? Today's Sanhedrin has no jurisdiction outside Israel. There are likely very few Christians in the world, if any, who worry about being "beaten in the synagogues."

Will there be two "great" tribulations? "For there will be greater anguish than at any time since the world began. And it will never be so great again" (Matt. 24:21, NLT). Since this anguish would "never be so great again," how could it occur twice? Some might protest that such language is hyperbolic, common in the Old Testament; it was not intended to be taken literally. Perhaps this is true. But then, the same people should be able to understand that the rest of Matthew 24 is laced with the same Old Testament-style hyperbole. They should not require a second fulfillment just because some events did not occur exactly as Jesus described them.

Will the "elect" be gathered twice? "He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (v. 31). This is referring to the "last trumpet" of 1 Cor. 15:51-52; the resurrection and the moment when the living Christians would be "caught up" and "changed."²⁸ If Matthew 24 was to be fulfilled twice, then clearly, the resurrection and rapture must have occurred during the first fulfillment within the lifetime of Christ's listeners. But if all God's people in Hades were resurrected in the first century, and now Christians go straight to heaven at death, how could any saints be resurrected from Hades in the future?

Jesus never said Matthew 24 would be fulfilled twice, and there's no rule anywhere in the Bible saying prophecy should be interpreted this way. The double-fulfillment concept is simply an untenable fabrication created in desperation, probably deemed necessary because its adherents expect literal fulfillments of the highly figurative, cosmic predictions in Matthew 24 and other places, which of course, have never occurred (and never will). In some cases we find types and anti-types in Scripture. For instance, Israelite worship under the Old Covenant was a type or "shadow" of things to come under

²⁸ In the next section, we will see that Mathison offers a very different interpretation of Matt. 24:31.

the New Covenant (Col. 2:16-17). However, *the New Covenant does not create more shadows* for greater fulfillments later. Here is another example of biblical typology:

Old Testament types:	Sodom, Egypt, Babylon
New Testament antitype:	Jerusalem

Sodom, Egypt and Babylon were probably the three most detestable place names from Israel's past. To this day, Sodom symbolizes sexual perversion (sodomy). Egypt and Babylon were symbolic of sin and captivity. However, by the first century, the sins of God's own people, the Jews, had become so repugnant that in Revelation, he called Jerusalem by all three names: "...the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified" (Rev. 11:8); "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH" (Rev. 17:5).²⁹ It's possible, if not probable, that Jesus intended to draw the Babylon parallel when he described Jerusalem's destruction in Matthew 24:

...the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light (v. 29)

The same pronouncement was made against Old Testament Babylon:

The sun will be darkened in its going forth, And the moon will not cause its light to shine. (Isa. 13:10)³⁰

Jerusalem had become the antitype of Babylon. Jerusalem's destruction would be the antitype of Babylon's destruction.

It's all fulfilled. There is no *third* fulfillment. The destruction in Matthew 24 is not a type of something in the future; it's the *antitype* of something from the past. The New Testament does not create new types requiring future antitypes. Types and antitypes might be con-

²⁹ "How the faithful city has become a harlot" (Isa. 1:21).

³⁰ We say, "possible" because although Jesus seems to be quoting Isa. 13:10, similar predictions are made elsewhere that do not apply to Babylon. Ezekiel used the same language in a prophecy against Egypt (Ezek. 32:7-8). Other prophets referred to "all nations" (Joel 3:9, 15), "Zion" (Joel 2:1-2, 10, 31) and "Israel" (Amos 7:15; 8:9). Darkness is commonly associated with God's judgments.

sidered double fulfillments by some, but if a double-fulfillment rule should be applied to all biblical predictions without exception, we should expect two Messiahs, two crucifixions, two judgments, two kingdoms, *etc.* It gets ridiculous.

Evidently, many influential Bible teachers spend little time testing the double-fulfillment idea before teaching it to trusting Christians. They routinely predict events which actually occurred long ago. For instance, some prophecies require a Roman Empire, but since it no longer exists — and hasn't for over 1,500 years — they predict a “revived” one. However, if they would give up their literal-fulfillment requirements (stars falling from heaven, *etc.*) and fully accept the first and only fulfillments of New Testament prophecies, there would be no need for any such flimsy double-fulfillment theories, and credulous Christians could be spared a lot of useless speculation.

Partial Fulfillment?

Why Mathison entitled his book *When Shall These Things Be?* is somewhat puzzling since the answer is one he and full-preterists would essentially agree on. Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple, and his disciples wanted to know when it would take place:

And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, *when shall these things be?* and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of *the end of the world?* (Matt. 24:3, KJV)

Mark put it this way:

Tell us, when will *these things* be? And what will be the sign when *all these things* will be fulfilled? (Mark 13:4)

Christ answered:

Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till *all these things* take place. (Matt. 24:34; *cf.* Mark 13:30)

And which generation was that? Mathison answers:

We know the phrase “This generation” refers to the generation of Jews to whom Jesus was speaking (*PAEOH*, 111)

We agree. Notice, the disciples expected “all these things” — including the destruction of the temple — to be fulfilled at “the end of the world” or *age* (Gr. αἰών [*aion*]). Naturally, they wanted to know

when the end of the age would be. Jesus saw no need to correct their assumption that the destruction of the temple would occur at the end of the age and said, “all these things” would be fulfilled within their generation. After the prediction in verse 34, he continued describing conditions that would be present at the time of his coming.

Clearly, the second coming of Christ at the end of the age was to occur within their generation. This is what Matthew 24 and 25 are all about. Any unbiased reader would understand the text this way. The problem is unbiased readers are hard to find. For instance, Mathison presupposes an unfulfilled second coming, so the natural meaning of the text creates a major problem for him. He most certainly realizes that if ml/ of Matthew 24 was fulfilled in the first century, then his postmillennialism is in very serious trouble. He thinks he has found a solution:

Some commentators. . .maintain that Jesus distinguished between *the* events that were to occur within the lifetime of many of his disciples and the events that were to occur many centuries in the future. R. T. France, for example, argues that Matthew 24:34 should be seen as a transitional verse. According to France, Jesus said that everything mentioned prior to verse 34 would occur within the lifetime of some of those listening to him. *The things mentioned after verse 34, on the other hand, are yet to be fulfilled...*According to this view, Jesus utilized the *prophetic technique of telescoping two distant events into one prophecy* without much contextual indication of a change in subject. . .*The possibility that “all these things” does not include “the coming of the Son of Man ” cannot be automatically ruled out.* (WSTTB, 180, emphasis mine, maf)

In his book *Dispensationalism. ' Rightly Dividing the People of God? (DRDPG)*, Mathison makes his position regarding verse 34 absolutely clear:

Jesus is saying in this verse that everything He has previously prophesied (vv. 4-33) will take place before the generation to whom He is speaking passes away. . .All that He predicted in this passage did occur within forty years...everything *after verse 34 is not a prophecy about “this generation.”* (139-40, 143, emphasis mine, maf)

So, for Mathison, “all these things” means all the things before verse 34, but everything after verse 34 is “yet to be fulfilled.” Incidentally, this is the same man who just said **double** fulfillment of Matthew 24 cannot be “ruled out,” but here he is, effectively, ruling it

out by choosing *partial* fulfillment.

It doesn't take long to detect problems with the partial-fulfillment proposal. Mathison says, "The possibility that 'all these things' does not include 'the coming of the son of Man' cannot be automatically ruled out." However, earlier, we saw him arguing, "the coming of the Son of Man" refers to Christ's ascension which of course, was fulfilled in the first century. Moreover, we find "the coming of the Son of Man" in verse 27, well before verse 34 in the section Mathison clearly agrees has been fulfilled. That it's found in the portion *after* verse 34 (v. 37) might appear to support his theory. However, it really just makes matters worse because it requires one to believe that 'the coming of the Son of Man' in verse 27 is Stilled, but the one in verse 37 is not.

Most futurists justify the partial-fulfillment theory by separating the disciples' original questions. In Matthew 24, we find Jesus and his disciples sitting on the Mount of Olives directly across from the temple complex. They were intensely focused on its coming destruction:

²And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

³Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, 'tell us, when will *these things* be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?' (vv. 2-3)

It is commonly argued that since the disciples asked two questions, they were actually inquiring about two widely separated eras. They were supposedly asking Jesus about events in the first century *and* events to occur as much as 2,000 years later. If this is true, *they* were certainly not aware of it." They *did* ask two questions, but they were asking about what they considered to be one set of events; something like asking for a person's name and age. Nobody would interpret that as referring to two different people. The questions in verse 3 are a direct response to Christ's prediction regarding the destruction of the temple in verse 2. Nothing in these verses or the preceding chapter would have caused the disciples to be thinking about

³¹ Some would argue that the addition of "and of the end of the age" constitutes a third question. Ultimately, it makes no difference as we shall demonstrate.

two distinct catastrophes separated by thousands of years. There is no sign of such a scenario in Mark or Luke either:

Tell us, when will *these things* be? And what will be the sign when *all these things* will be fulfilled? (Mark 13:4); ...when will *these things* be? And what sign will *there* be when *these things* are about to take place? (Luke 21:7)

Clearly, the disciples did not see two widely separated eras within Christ's prediction. They expected the destruction of the temple to occur within their generation at "the end of the age." The popular view says their assumption was a serious delusion: the end of the age would actually be *thousands of years after* the temple's destruction. Supposedly, Jesus quietly took advantage of their confusion and allowed them to continue thinking this way as a means of instilling in them a sense of urgency. Preterists flatly reject this portrayal. It was Christ's custom to share "everything" with his disciples:

To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables (Mark 4:11); ...privately to his own disciples he explained everything. (Mark 4:34, ESV)

If the disciples so seriously misunderstood this issue, we should find Jesus correcting them. For Christ to actually want his disciples to be deluded would have been completely out of character, not to mention, extremely counterproductive. If he allowed them to be convinced his return would occur within the first century, when, in fact, it might not take place for thousands of years, he would have been setting them up to make false predictions throughout their upcoming ministries. Such a flawed strategy would have made *them* the very false prophets he warned them about in Matt. 24:11. It's unbelievable he would have allowed this to happen. The popular portrayal is simply not the Jesus we find in Scripture. Only a few days later, he said

No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for *all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.* (John 15:15)

Jesus was not hiding *anything* from his "friends."

Nevertheless, Mathison prefers the partial-fulfillment theory, severing Matthew 24 at verse 34. Notice Gentry's attempt to justify this:

operation:

[Jesus] employs the near demonstrative for the fulfillment of verses 2-34: these events will come upon "*this* generation." He uses the far demonstrative in 24:36 to point to the Second Advent: "*that* day." The coming "tribulation" (24:21; cf. Rev. 1:9) was to come upon "this generation" (23-36; 24:34; cf. 1 Thess. 2:16) and was to be foreshadowed by certain signs (24:4-8). But the Second Advent was to be at "that" far day and hour (*HSHD* 1st ed., 162-3; 2^{od} ed., 168, emphasis his, klg)

Gentry is saying that since Jesus used the word "this" in verse 34, he was speaking of something near, but his use of "that" in verse 36 places the second advent thousands of years into the future. This suggestion is beyond ludicrous. That a man of Gentry's credentials would resort to such a pathetic and deceptive argument indicates how desperate postmillennialists are to divide Matthew 24. If you had a book in your hand, you would probably refer to it as *this* book. However, if you were referring to a book out of your reach, you would likely say *that* book. One is near, the other is farther away. The question is how far? You could be referring to a book on the other side of the globe or one on a shelf only a few feet away. The far demonstrative allows for both extremes and everything in between. It does not necessarily imply an enormous distance or period of time. But notice Gentry's subtle use of "'that' far day." This appears to be an attempt to coax us into believing that the far demonstrative demands a second coming way out beyond the first century. However, "that day" could just as easily be referring to an event in A.D. 70. What else could Jesus have called it, *this* day? Of course not. The only way he could have referred to his second advent as *this* day would be if it was to occur on the very day he was predicting it, which of course, is absurd. Even if he thought it might occur only a week later he would have said *that* day. To paraphrase, Jesus simply said, "*That* day will occur before this generation passes." The generation was already present, but *the day at the end of the generation* had not yet arrived. This is not complicated. But Gentry must find a way to jam thousands of years into this simple statement. Why? Because without such an enormous gap, *postmillennialism would collapse!* This is a classic case of eisegesis; Gentry is clearly reading a multi-millennium gap into the text to support his postmillennial presupposition. To do it, he must warp the definition of a simple pronoun. As might be expected, Mathison relies on the same feeble argument. He says, "There is a distinct contrast between what is

near in verse 34 and far in verse 36—‘this generation’ versus ‘that day’” (DRDPG, 143). This so-called “distinct contrast” exists only in the imaginations of postmillennialists desperate to make a case for dividing Matthew 24.

Mathison continues with another idea: “Before verse 34, the plural ‘days’ is used. After verse 34, the singular ‘day’ is used” (DRDPG, 143). This too is irrelevant. It doesn’t prove anything. Before verse 34 Jesus is talking about the “days” leading up to his second coming, but in verse 36 he is referring to the actual “day” of his arrival, so he uses the singular form. There is nothing remarkable about this. Actually, Mathison’s argument is worse than just irrelevant; it can be absolutely disproved by comparing Matthew to Luke. Notice Matt. 24:17: “Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house.” This is from Mathison’s fulfilled section (vv. 4-33). According to him, the singular form day could not possibly refer to this “housetop” reference. Here is Luke’s version of the same item: “In that *day*, he who is on the housetop, and his goods are in the house, let him not come down to take them away” (Luke 17:31). Luke doesn’t seem to know anything about a distinction between *days* and *day*. Furthermore, here we have an occurrence of the far demonstrative (“*that day*”) applied to an item both Mathison and Gentry believe is fulfilled, putting another nail into the coffin of the previous suggestion. In Matt. 24:27, Jesus associated “lightning” with his coming. This is in the section Mathison agrees is fulfilled. Luke described it using the word “*day*”: “For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His *day*” (Luke 17:24). Then in Matthew 24:37, Jesus associated ‘Noah’ with his coming, an item which is supposedly unfulfilled. This time Luke uses “*days*”: “And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man” (Luke 17:26). Obviously, Mathison’s suggestion is just another careless and desperate attempt to create an unnatural division of Matthew 24.

Even if we disregard all of the above, the partial-fulfillment theory can easily be declared invalid. A comparison of Matthew 24 to Luke 17 reveals that Luke mixed some events from Matthew’s fulfilled section with items from the alleged unfulfilled section. 77iisñ *a disaster for the proponents of partial fulfillment*. In the following presentation, Mathison’s fulfilled portion of Matthew 24 is referred to as section A,

and references are highlighted with black. The supposed unfulfilled portion after verse 34 is referred to as section B, and relevant items are highlighted with gray:

Matthew 24	v. 17	housetop	section A
	27	lightning	
	28	eagles	
	37-39	Noah	section B
	40-41	one taken, the other left	
Luke 17	v. 24	lightning	
	26, 37	Noah	
	31	housetop	
	35-36	one taken, the other left	
	37	eagles	

Luke interweaves items from both sections with complete disregard for Matthew's version. Evidently, Luke did not see Matthew's order as having any relevance whatsoever; and this is from the gospel writer who claimed that he had "investigated everything carefully from the beginning" and written it out "in consecutive order" (Luke 1:3, NASB). He seems oblivious to the concept of two eras separated by millennia. We have no choice but to conclude *all* the events were fulfilled during the same era. Otherwise, the two accounts would be contradictory. If some of the events were fulfilled, then *all* of them were.

Now let us consider the placement of "the coming (Gr. παρουσία [*parousia*]) of the Son of Man" throughout Matthew 24. In verse 3, the disciples asked, "what will be the sign of Your [*Parousia*]?" In verse 27, Jesus mentions "the [*parousia*] of the Son of Man" and associates it with "lightning." This is from section A, which partial-fulfillment proponents agree was fulfilled in the first century. Then he mentions "the [*parousia*] of the Son of Man" again when he refers to Noah; but this time it's well into section B (v. 37). This *parousia* is

supposedly unfulfilled:

Matthew 24 v. 27	parousia associated with lightning
37	parousia associated with Noah

It is unbelievable Jesus would have been talking about two entirely different *parousias* separated by thousands of years within just a few sentences, but for those not yet convinced, this notion is exposed as absolutely impossible when we consider Luke’s version:

Luke 17 vv. 26-27	Noah	from section B
31	housetop	from section A
37	eagles	from section A

If the *parousia* associated with Noah is not fulfilled, why is it followed by fulfilled items? The only way to make sense of this is to accept the undeniable fact that Jesus was always referring to only *one parousia*: his second coming. It’s *all* fulfilled!

The partial-fulfillment proposal faces a multitude of devastating problems. Here is another one Mathison struggles to deal with. Verse 31 is in section A of Matthew 24:

And He will send His angels with a great *sound of a trumpet*, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Most Christians would associate this with the resurrection and rapture:

...in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the *last trumpet*. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. (1 **Cor. 15:52**); ¹⁶For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the *voice of an archangel*, and with the *trumpet of God*. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. (1 Thess. 4:16-17)

Of course, Mathison must disagree. He cannot have the resurrection flaring up within his fulfilled section, so he tries to smother it with this interpretation of Matt. 24:31:

The word translated “angels” in this verse is the same word that means human “messengers” elsewhere (e.g., Matt. 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:24; 9:52), and there is no reason to assume that it cannot mean human messengers here. *This prophecy was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost when Christ sent His messengers to Jews and to Gentiles in all parts of the world with the goal of gathering His elect* (PAEOH, 114, emphasis mine)

Mathison claims that the gathering of the elect is not the resurrection and rapture at all. Instead, it refers to the preaching of the gospel to the world, *i.e.*, Christians “gathering” converts. There are numerous difficulties with this proposal:

1. Preaching the gospel to the world was already covered in verse 14, long before the gathering of the elect in verse 31. Mathison knows verse 14 began its fulfillment on the Day of Pentecost in A.D. 30, and he agrees it was completely fulfilled before A.D. 70 (PAEOH, 112-3).³² Now he is placing the gathering of the elect at A.D. 30. He says, “This prophecy was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost” (PAEOH, 114). However, Jesus placed it “*after* the tribulation” (Matt. 24:29) which Mathison agrees occurred in A.D. 70 (PAEOH, 115). So, he has the gathering of the elect taking place 40 years too early.
2. It’s difficult to believe that the “messengers” (Gr. ἀγγέλους [*aggelos*]) in verse 31 refer to humans when only five verses later, the same Greek word is used for “the angels of heaven”(v. 36).
3. The Greek word Matthew used for “gather” is ἐπισυνάξουσιν (*episunago*). It is never associated with preaching the gospel anywhere else in the New Testament.
4. Nowhere else in the New Testament is a trumpet associated with preaching the gospel.

Mathison has, evidently, failed to notice that the order in Matthew 24 matches the order in Daniel 12, the chapter he and his colleagues like to ignore:

³² Actually, A.D. 57, the approximate date of Paul’s letter to the Romans, which Mathison quotes as proof the gospel had gone to the whole world by A.D. 70. See Rom. 10:18.

Table 1

	Daniel 12	Matthew 24
Tribulation	...there shall be a time of trouble, Such as never was since there was a nation, Even to that time. (v. 1)	...there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time (v. 21)
Resurrection	¹ ...And at that time your people shall be delivered (rescued [NASB, NLT]), Every one who is found written in the book. ² And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life... (vv. 1b-2)	Immediately after the tribulation of those days... (v. 29); ...He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. (v. 31)

Mathison also fails to notice the more detailed description of this event found in Matthew 13:

⁴¹*The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness,*
⁴⁰*and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father (vv. 41-43)*

Are the angels (Gr. *aggelos*) in this passage just human “messengers” sent forth to preach the gospel? Absolutely not! We see both the judgment and resurrection here. These are *real* angels! This passage refers to the same gathering mentioned in Matt. 24:31, and Mathison believes that everything up to verse 34 has been fulfilled. Obviously, Matt. 13:41-43 and 24:31 refer to the resurrection and judgment, not preaching the gospel.

Matt. 24:31 and surrounding verses are simply restating the resurrection/judgment prediction associated with Christ's coming in chapter 16:27-28. Notice the similarities:

Table 2

	Matthew 16	Matthew 24
Coming in glory	For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father... (v. 27)	...the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (v. 30)
With angels	...with His angels... (v. 27)	...He will send His angels... (v.31)
Resurrection and judgment	...He will reward each according to his works. (v. 27)	...they will gather together His elect... (v. 31)
Within the disciple's lifetime	...some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. (v. 28)	...this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place... (v. 34)

Chapters 13, 16 and 24 are all referring to the same thing: the second coming of Christ with angels to reward the righteous and judge the wicked *within the lifetime of his disciples*. Mathison misses these parallels because he thinks the passage in Matthew 16 refers to the ascension and the one in Matthew 24 to preaching the gospel. The only one he *does* acknowledge as referring to eternal judgment is Matt. 13:41-42 (*PAEOH*, 164); and it's easy to see why: it's the only one that doesn't specify the timing, so he doesn't need to distort it.

Gentry too, claims that Matt. 24:31 refers to human messengers going out into the world to preach the gospel only he places this "gathering" effort *after the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70*. He disagrees with Mathison who placed the gathering of the elect at A.D. 30:

Matthew 24:31 portrays the ultimate Jubilee of salvation, decorated with imagery from Leviticus 25. *Following upon the collapse of the Temple order*, Christ's "messengers" will go forth powerfully trumpeting the gospel of salvific liberation (Luke 4:16-21; Isa. 61:1-3; cf. Lev. 25:9-10). Through gospel preaching the elect are *gathered* into the kingdom Of God from the four comers of the world, from horizon to horizon. (*HSHD* 1st ed., 349; 2nd ed., 362, emphasis mine, maf)

Gentry's attempt to link Matt. 24:31 to the trumpet of Jubilee is far from convincing. His colorful description "trumpeting the gospel of salvific liberation" may sound inspiring, but it's not supported by Scripture. Nowhere does the New Testament "decorate" the preaching of the gospel with trumpet "imagery from Leviticus." Trumpets are associated with events surrounding the second coming, not preaching the gospel (1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16; Rev. 1:10; 4:1; 8:2, 6, 13; 9:14). Even if Gentry *could* prove a clear connection, it would be irrelevant because, as we have seen, the gathering of the elect simply **cannot be** referring to preaching the gospel. Gentry is just pulling another fantasy out of the air to avoid acknowledging a reference to the resurrection within his fulfilled section. The great commission (Matt. 24:14; 28:19-20) was fulfilled before A.D. 70." Gentry has it *beginning* several years after it *ended*.

In Matthew 25, the postmillennialists encounter another obstacle. Immediately after predicting the destruction of Judea, Jerusalem and the temple in Matthew 24, Jesus begins describing his return with wedding imagery:

Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. (v. 1); And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' (v. 6); ...and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. (v. 10b)

This is perfectly consistent with the parable Jesus had related to his disciples earlier that day:

⁷...the King...sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and *burned up their city*. ⁸Then he said to his servants, '*The wedding is ready...*' (Matt. 22:7-8)

The wedding was ready immediately after the king had "burned up their city." Dividing Matthew 24, *i.e.*, inserting thousands of years between the destruction of Jerusalem and the wedding, grossly distorts the picture Jesus painted in the parable. We find the same story line in Revelation 19. As Mathison correctly states, "Revelation 19:1-6 is a glorious vision of rejoicing in heaven over the judgment of God upon

³³ See Appendix 3: Was the Gospel Preached to the Whole World?

Jerusalem" (*PAEOH*, 154). However, verse 7 says, "the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." This creates a major emergency for Mathison. He absolutely cannot have the wedding occurring at this point. It would imply all eschatological events have been fulfilled. So, what can he possibly do to rescue post-millennialism? Solution: *revise Scripture!* He says, "In verses 7-9, John reveals that even as the harlot is being judged, the bride of Christ is *preparing* herself for the wedding feast" (emphasis mine, maf). So the bride is just "*preparing*" for the wedding. And how much time might she need to prepare? Thousands of years perhaps? That would suit Mathison, but unfortunately for him, verse 7 doesn't allow for it. Notice, he just can't bring himself to confess the very Word of God right before his eyes: "the marriage of the Lamb has *come*, and His wife *has made herself ready*." The time for "preparing" was over. The wedding was ready and the bride was ready. It's plain enough for any honest reader: the first-century church married Jesus Christ immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem. This requires the resurrection and rapture. But once again, Mathison has chosen postmillennialism over Scripture, only this time, he has not only *misinterpreted* Scripture, he has actually deleted inspired words from the text and replaced them with an impotent lie; like a Pharisee who nullifies the word of God by clinging to his crusty old worn-out tradition (Matt. 15:6). Jesus says, "if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life" (Rev. 22:19). But then, perhaps Mathison has substitutes for these words as well.³⁴

Only a few days later, Jesus continued the Jewish-wedding typology.³⁵

³⁴ Gentry describes Benjamin B. Garfield as a postmillennialist based in part on this quotation: "[T]he 'golden age' of the church is *the adorning of the bride for her husband*, and is *the preparation for his coming*" (*HSHD*, 1st ed., 68; 2nd ed., 69-70 [emphasis mine, maf]). This reference to Garfield's belief is the closest thing we could find to a definitive statement by Gentry regarding Rev. 19:7. He never refers to it in *HSHD*. However, it is clear that he and all other postmillennialists must distort this verse to make their system work. We hereby challenge Gentry to make a statement regarding his position on Rev. 19:7. Was the bride "ready" after the destruction of Jerusalem or not, Dr. Gentry? (If he answers, "no," he grossly distorts the verse just as Mathison has done. If he says, "yes," he destroys postmillennialism.)

In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 'And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; *that where I am, there you may be also.* (John 14:2-3)³⁶

According to Mathison's scheme, the bridegroom never returned to "receive" his bride. He never took her back to his "Father's house" (in heaven) where between A.D. 30 and 70 he had prepared a place for her. Describing first-century Jewish weddings, Bishop writes, "A big part of the ceremony was *the* solemn welcome of the *bridegroom* to his bride at the door of his new home."³⁷ But Mathison has the bride still waiting back at *her* house (on Earth) eagerly anticipating the arrival of her new husband to take her home and consummate the marriage. Mathison's postmillennialism forces him to suspend the story at this point even though *the bride has been "ready" for almost 2,000 years!* What normal man postpones consummating his marriage knowing that his bride is "ready?" Unbelievable! Jesus died for the right to marry his bride and longed to take her to heaven

³⁵ "...a period of time elapsed between the betrothal and the marriage ceremony. During this time the young man prepared a place in his father's house for his Bride, while the bride prepared herself for married life." (Ronald F. Youngblood, "Marriage: Marriage Customs" in Nelson's *New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995]). "The 'house' is modeled on 1st-century villas, which had many rooms constructed around an open garden area. The 1st-century home held the extended family; adult children and their spouses lived as members of the father's household" (Richards, 691).

³⁶ Jewish wedding customs were far from just local observances and were remarkably similar to those of the Romans. Describing a Roman ceremony, Vos mentions this noteworthy item: "The ceremonies began at the house of the bride, where, among other things, the couple gave their formal consent. Joining their right hands and repeating the formula, '*where you are, I shall be,*' they went on to participate in prayers, sacrifices, and a banquet. After that, wedding guests made a torchlight parade (even in the daytime) through the streets to the house of the groom, singing wedding songs as they went." (Howard F. Vos, "Rome and Italy in the Career of Paul: Family Life: Marriage" in Nelson's *New Illustrated Bible Manners & Customs*, [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999], 627 [emphasis mine, maf]). The words "Where you are, I shall be" bear a striking resemblance to "That where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:3). Evidently, Jesus was alluding to a popular wedding custom.

³⁷ Jim Bishop, *be Day Christ Was Born* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 30.

heaven so where *he* was, *she* would be. This love story of Christ and his church was supposed to be exciting and delightfully romantic. Keith Mathison's edited version is decidedly *unromantic*.

Partial fulfillment of the Olivet Prophecy is essential to the survival of postmillennialism, and Drs. Mathison and Gentry seem willing to defend it no matter what the cost, which, in Mathison's case, means rewriting Scripture to be more postmillennialism-friendly. Some of their arguments may seem impressive at first, but upon minimal investigation they are exposed as poorly researched and fatally flawed giving new meaning to Mathison's term "shallow exegesis."

The first one to plead his cause seems right, Until his neighbor comes and examines him. (Prov. 18:17)

So much for Mathison's "prophetic technique of telescoping two distant events into one prophecy." It seems incredible that after more than 1,900 years of New Testament scholarship, anyone could still be teaching partial fulfillment of the Olivet Prophecy. No doubt, in the year 3000, somebody will be promoting it as a fresh approach to understanding Matthew 24. Dividing the chapter at verse 34 solves no-thing for Mathison. He is still faced with the *parousia* in verse 27 and the resurrection and judgment in verse 31 notwithstanding the preposterous explanations he and Gentry have dreamed up to obfuscate them.

We have presented *undeniable* proof that Matthew 24 cannot be divided. On this basis alone, postmillennialism must be rejected. However, in the following, Mathison takes one last desperate swing at preterism, but inadvertently delivers yet another knockout punch to his own system.

"We who are alive and remain" (1 Thessalonians 4:17)

"...the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then *we who are alive and remain* shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air... (1 Thess. 4:16b-17)

Preterists would argue that Paul expected the second coming to occur within what could reasonably be expected to be his lifetime barring a premature death. They see no room for an extended delay

spanning more than 1,900 years. Mathison, of course, cannot agree. He explains:

Some have argued, on the basis of his use of the word "we" in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 and 17, that Paul expected to be among those who would be changed without experiencing death. In other words, Paul expected the events described in 1 Thessalonians 4 to occur within his lifetime. The problem with this interpretation is that in several other epistles Paul talks as though he could die soon (e.g., Rom. 14:8; Phil. 1:20-26; 2 Tim. 4:6-7). So, it is best to understand that in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 and 17, Paul is simply using the pronoun "we" in a general way to mean "we Christians." *As far as Paul knew, Christ could have returned in his life-time.* but there was nothing that demanded he do so. (WSTTB, 194, emphasis mine, maf)

Mathison has made an astounding admission here. He writes, "As far as Paul knew, Christ could have returned in his lifetime." What is Mathison thinking? Since Paul thought Jesus could have returned within his lifetime, there is no way he could have believed in the post-millennialism Mathison promotes:

...postmillennialism teaches that the "thousand years" of Revelation 20 occurs *prior to the Second Coming*. (PAEOH, 10); An essential doctrine of postmillennialism is that *prior to the Second Coming, the messianic kingdom will grow until it has filled the whole earth*. (PAEOH, 191); When the word "thousand" is used in Scripture, it refers to a literal thousand or to an indefinite, but very large, number. (WSTTB, 209, emphasis mine, maf)

If Paul was a Mathison-style postmillennialist, *he would not have expected the second coming for at least a thousand years!* However, since he thought Jesus "could have returned within his lifetime," then obviously, he did not foresee the "very large number" of years required to fill "the whole earth" with the messianic kingdom.

Considering Mathison's recurring chronological difficulties, we must wonder whether he has ever tried plotting postmillennialism on a timeline. That's what most prophecy teachers do; they make charts to see if it all works. Earlier, Mathison misplaced the gathering of the elect by 40 years, then he postponed the marriage consummation by *thousands* of years, and now, *amazingly*, he has evidently forgotten to leave room for his millennium. He knows the millennium must be

complete before the second coming, but concedes Paul thought the second coming could have taken place within His lifetime. So, he must believe that Paul considered it possible for the *entire millennium* to be fulfilled in the first century. That would make Paul a full-preterist, not a Mathison-style postmillennialist. Mathison complains that preterists compress the 1,000 years down to 40 (*WSTTB*, 209), but now he has Paul doing it too. We are in good company!

Mathison calls our attention to the word “we,” and once again, we notice his penchant for distorting the meanings of simple words. Normal use of the pronoun *we* would include the following:

1. The one writing the letter (Paul);
2. The recipients of the letter (the Thessalonians);
3. In this context, it would have included other Christians alive at the time.

However, Mathison’s postmillennialism demands that Paul’s “we” must exclude all these people. Instead, it must refer *exclusively* to Christians thousands of years in the future.

Scripture must be interpreted in the normal grammatical sense.
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Keith A. Mathison (*PAEOH*, 6)

Paul taught first-century Christians that some of them would experience the second coming while they were still alive:

We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed (1 Cor. 15:51b); ...we ourselves groan within ourselves, *eagerly waiting* for the adoption, the *redemption of our body*, (Rom. 8:23b);²⁰...we also *eagerly wait for the Savior*, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who will *transform our lowly body* that it may be conformed to His glorious body (Phil. 3:20b-21)

The Thessalonians had been taught this same gospel. They were not worried about *their* fate because they assumed most of them would live until the end. However, apparently, some in Thessalonica had trouble believing in the resurrection of the dead just as some in Corinth (1 Cor. 15:12). So, Paul clarified, clearly indicating some would still be alive:

¹³...I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. ¹⁴For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with

Him those who sleep in Jesus... (1 Thess. 4:13-14); ¹⁶...the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then *we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.* (vv. 16b- 17)

It is inconceivable Paul would have written this way if over a thousand years had to pass first. Mathison's postmillennialism would dictate Paul should have said, "*You are all going to be dead* when Christ comes in the distant future." But we never see anything like this. The people included in Paul's "we" were "eagerly" expecting to see their Savior *soon*, waiting for him to "transform" their *living* bodies. Paul wrote that Christians should be "looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Tit. 2:13) and "eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:7). Why would he tell first-century Christians to look for Christ's appearing if he knew thousands of years had to elapse first? Paul acknowledged the possibility of his own death because he didn't know which ones would live until Christ's return, but he knew *some* would, and he *knew* the second coming was not far off. Consider his advice to the Corinthians:

...Do not seek a wife. (1 Cor. 7:27b); ²⁹...the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, those who weep as though they did not weep, ³⁰those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, " ...For the form of this world (Gr. κόσμος [kosmos]) is passing away. (vv. 29-31)

Here, we find Paul so confident the remaining time was "short," he was advising Christians to forget all about getting married. Why? Because "the form of [that] *kosmos* [was] passing away!" Paul was encouraging them to start detaching themselves from the cares of this life to the point of foregoing normal activities and relationships common to mortals. He was discouraging them from getting too attached to material things: "those who buy" should treat a purchase "as though they did not possess." Why? *Because the time was "short!"* All of this is clearly time restricted and much more definite than Mathison's assessment, "As far as Paul knew, Christ *could* have returned in his lifetime." Are we to believe that Paul was advising people to make such significant, long-term decisions based on only speculation Jesus *could* come soon? Does Mathison discourage Christians from getting married because Jesus could come soon?

Not likely. Paul was preparing these people for a different “world”; one where even marriage would be irrelevant (see Matt. 22:30). Paul taught that Christ would “rescue” his people from ‘his present evil age’ (Gal. 1:4, NASB).³⁸ He was clearly preparing the first-century church to leave the old world order and move on to the new order *in heaven*. Paul knew that some of those alive in the first century would “see the kingdom of God” (Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27).”

If Mathison’s postmillennial interpretation of prophecy is correct, then Paul was *grossly* wrong on the timing here and offering extremely bad advice. We must ask ourselves how *we* would feel if *we* had

³⁸ Or “deliver” in the NKJV and some other translations (Gr. ἐξαίρω [exaireo]). This is not the same as “delivered” in Col. 1:13: “[the Father] has *delivered* us from the power of darkness” (Gr. ῥύομαι [rhōmai]). The NKJV translates *exaireo* as “pluck it out” in Matt. 5:29 and 18:19: “If your right eye causes you to sin, *pluck it out...*” (5:29); “tear it out” (NASB); “gouge it out” (NLT). Obviously, the word can convey considerably more force than *deliver* or even *rescue*. Paul may have been referring to the rapture here, *i.e.*, Christians expecting to be *plucked out* of the dying Old Covenant era (Heb. 8:13) about to culminate in the devastation of Judea and the end of Torah-based sacrificial worship. If so, it seems unbelievable he would have spoken this way had he foreseen a multi-millennium gap before anyone might be rescued.

³⁹ We believe that all this about giving up normal earthly endeavors, being “rescued,” eagerly looting for the “glorious appearing” of Jesus and having bodies “transformed” proves Paul expected the first-century church to be literally captured off the earth much in the same way most Christians envision a future rapture at a supposed future coming of Christ. Our position is this: Paul predicted it; therefore, it happened. In *WSTTB*, Charles Hill describes the literal first-century rapture teaching as “bizarre” (92). We would suggest that the unnatural insertion of Mathison’s bloated millennium into Paul’s eschatological framework constitutes a far more bizarre position. If rising into the clouds and vanishing into the spirit realm is to be considered bizarre, then so must Christ’s ascension. What else should we consider bizarre? The six days of creation? The parting of the Red Sea? Elisha’s floating axe head? The resurrection of Christ? What about a great fish swallowing Jonah and coughing him up alive after three days and nights? *All* these miraculous events were bizarre. Nevertheless, for people of faith, they are historical fact. In *WSTTB*, Hill provides scant evidence to support his position that the rapture could not have taken place in A.D. 70. Unfortunately, a longer defense of the first-century-rapture position is not possible in this small volume. We are focusing here on the predicted *timing* of eschatological events, not their nature. See “Was Thera a First-Century Rapture?” at <https://www.amazon.com/Expectations-Demand-First-Century-Rapture/dp/B000BZ4RLC>.

canceled marriage plans, turned down business opportunities and essentially given up on life in this world only to discover later that Paul's predictions had failed. This is the same man who was hand-picked by Jesus Christ to take the gospel to the Gentiles, the man who was so confident of his message he could thunder, "even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8). Paul's gospel was preached "in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction" (1 Thess. 1:5b, NASB). How could he have had so much confidence in his message? He answers, "I received it by direct revelation from Jesus Christ" (Gal.1:12b, NLT). Mathison's postmillennial theory and all other futurist interpretations make Paul look like a deluded fool and a classic false prophet as defined in Deut. 18:20-22:

20'...the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak...*that prophet shall die.*' ²¹And if you say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' — ²² when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, *if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the WORD has not spoken*; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

Zechariah strongly condemned false prophets: "...his own father and mother will tell him, '*You must die*, for you have prophesied lies in the name of the LORD.' And as he prophesies, *his own father and mother will stab him*" (Zech. 13:3b, NLT). Jeremiah reaffirmed the criterion by which a prophet should be validated: "Only when his predictions come true can we know that he is really from the LORD" (Jer. 28:9b, NLT). Hananiah was killed by God for uttering a time-restricted false prophecy (Jer. 28:1-17). If the New Testament's clear, time-restricted predictions were not fulfilled in the first century, then the authors should have been condemned to death because they *all* taught with the same urgency:

Paul:

Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom *the ends of the ages* have come. (1 Cor. 10:11); ¹¹...*it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep...* "*The night is almost gone, and the day is near.* (Rom. 13:11b; 12a, NASB)

Peter:

...the end of all things is at hand [1 Pet. 4:7]

James:

⁸...the coming of the Lord is at hand. ...Behold, the judge is standing at the door! (Jas. 5:8b, 9b)

The author of Hebrews:

...exhorting one another, and so much the more in you see the Day approaching. (Heb. 10:25b)

John:

... It is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. (1 John 2:18, NASB); Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. (Rev. 22:10b)

With one voice, *all* the New Testament writers proclaimed they were living in ‘be last days’ and interpreted Christ’s timing references to mean the resurrection, rapture, judgment and arrival of the kingdom of God would take place during their lifetime. Even though Jesus said that *no one known* the “day and hour” of his return (Matt. 24:36), both Paul and John were so confident the end was imminent, they were willing to proclaim, *“the last hour.”*

Mathison’s coauthor, Richard Pratt, acknowledges that “hyper-preterists have collected an impressive number of passages which at least appear to indicate that New Testament writers predicted that Jesus was returning within one generation...,” but, he continues, “Even if the New Testament does predict an imminent return of Christ, *intervening historical contingencies* make it unnecessary that an imminent return take place” (WSTTB, 148-9, emphasis mine, maf). So when Jesus said, “*assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes*” (Matt. 10:23), “*Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom*” (Matt. 16:28), “*Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation*” (Matt. 23:36), and “*Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place*” (Matt. 24:34), he actually meant *maybe!* “Assuredly” should be interpreted not necessarily. Pratt explains what he means by “historical contingencies” postponing Christ’s return despite the

foregoing emphatic predictions:

...the imminent return of Christ was offered as a benefit of repentance...The lack of repentance within the covenant community caused an indefinite delay of Christ's return.

Absolutely untrue! When Jesus said, "this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place," the "things" to which he was referring were elements of great tribulation to be poured out upon the Jews; the very "things to come" Moses predicted way back in Deut. 32:35; the "evil" he said would "befall" them "in the latter days" (ch. 31:29); the utter destruction of the *unrepentant* "covenant community." Jesus was not fantasizing about some joyous homecoming to a humble and repentant Jewish community ready to receive him with open arms; he *knew* they would not repent; their fate was sealed. There simply wasn't going to be any repentance beyond a small "remnant." It was all preprogrammed; a sure thing; guaranteed! Far from Christ's return being dependent upon the Jews' repentance, the "lack of repentance within the covenant community" *was the very reason for Christ's return*. It was time to fulfill Moses' prophecy; to take *vengeance* upon the covenant people; *to destroy* them; *the exact opposite of Pratt's interpretation!* And as we have shown, the redemption of the disciples' bodies (Rom. 8:23) and the arrival of the kingdom of God coincided with the Jews' destruction (Luke 21:22, 28, 31). Pratt says, "the hope and prayer of every true believer is that through their repentance and faithful living the return of Christ may be hastened." That is postmillennialism in a nutshell: Jesus can return only after mass repentance; the *diametric opposite* of Christ's teaching. The second coming had nothing at all to do with "repentance within the covenant community." It was dependent solely upon Christ's unequivocal prediction "all these things" would take place to punish the Jews before his generation had passed, and if the predicted eschaton failed to take place *completely*, then according to explicit instructions in Deut. 18:20, the first-century Jews were *duty bound* to slaughter any false prophets predicting such a lie.

Paul was not a Mathison/Gentry/Pratt-style postmillennialist. Paul cried, "Maranatha" (I Cor.16:22, NASB) and confidently taught that Jesus would arrive within the lifetime of his readers, not after thousands of years. Mathison concedes only that Paul considered a first-

century second coming a *possibility*. However, even that limited admission *obliterates* postmillennialism!

Conclusion

Recall Mathison's purpose:

The question we seek to answer in this chapter, then, is whether or not the New Testament teaches that the second coming of Christ was definitely to occur during the first century. (*WSTTB*, 156)

He arrives at this conclusion:

...the hyper-preterist thesis is based on a shallow exegesis of Scripture. The New Testament not *only* does not demand hyper-preterism, as its proponents insist, but does not even suggest hyper-preterism. In fact, the only way to reach the hyper-preterist conclusion is by rejecting the teaching of Jesus and the apostles. (*WSTTB*, 213)

Mathison has utterly failed to demonstrate any of this. On the contrary, we have shown that Daniel, Jesus and all the "holy apostles" (Eph. 3:5) most certainly did predict first-century fulfillments of the second coming, resurrection, rapture and judgment. Mathison desperately and shamelessly distorts the plain meaning of Scripture to avoid this conclusion. However, not one of his specious arguments presents a serious challenge to full-preterism. The rebuttal we have presented invalidates *all* futurist systems, including Mathison's hopelessly inconsistent postmillennial fantasy which allows for a first-century return of Christ, while at the same time, requires thousands of years and a worldwide conversion to take place first.

Closing Comment

Sproul, Jr. warns, "Eschatologies have consequences" (*WSTTB*, ix). What are the consequences of slinging to postmillennialism? For Mathison, it means blindness to the natural meaning of numerous biblical timing indicators and resorting to absurd argumentation to explain them away. There is, however, much more at stake here than just the survival of postmillennialism. Ultimately, it's the credibility of Jesus Christ that hangs in the balance. Can Jesus be trusted† Can we believe the apostles he trained? Jesus promised the apostles the Holy Spirit would inspire them (John 14:26; 16:13). Rejecting their

message is tantamount to denying the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Remember Paul's warning:

...even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. (Gal. 1:8); For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but *it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ*. (v. 12)

Through the revelation of Jesus Christ and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul and all the other apostles preached a gospel placing the second coming, resurrection, rapture and judgment in the first century. Those preaching a different gospel — one that postpones eschatological events by thousands of years — portray Jesus and his apostles as classic false prophets deserving execution.

Were the apostles deluded? Was the promise of an imminent return just a psychological ploy designed to maintain a sense of urgency in Christians; a proverbial carrot always just beyond their noses? This seems to be the reasoning behind the following comment by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, authors of the *Left Behind* series:

History shows that whenever the church has lived as though her Lord could return at any moment, her members have tended to live for God and to energetically evangelize the lost.⁴⁰

So according to LaHaye and Jenkins, the truth, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the promise of spending eternity with God are not enough to stimulate energetic evangelism; Christians must be energized by a lie! MacArthur says the reason for the “language of imminency” was that Jesus “desired to keep His people on the very tiptoe of expectation, continually looking for him... [and that is why] first-century believers were just as truly interested in the appearing of the Savior as the believers now living in the twentieth-century.”⁴¹ But what about Old Testament saints like Abel, Enoch, Abraham *et al.*? They didn't have any “imminent” coming of Christ to look forward to. How did *they* manage to stay “interested?”

⁴⁰ Tim LaHaye, Jerry B. Jenkins, *Are We Living in the End Times?* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1999), 22.

⁴¹ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Second Coming* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1999), 206-7.

C. S. Lewis, arguably the most highly esteemed Christian author of the 20th century, explained the apostles' apparent delusion another way. Although a futurist, Lewis could not deny that Jesus predicted first-century second coming. However, being unwilling to question futurism, he was left with only one option: he was forced to conclude *Jesus himself was delusional* when he promised to return within his own generation in Matt 24:34:

He shared, and indeed created, their delusion...He clearly knew no more about the end of the world than anyone else...It is certainly the most embarrassing verse in the Bible.⁴²

Embarrassed by the words of Jesus Christ? Is this the best explanation Christendom has to offer thinking people? Such a "testimony" is utterly useless as an evangelization tool. Why would anyone trust a false prophet for salvation? And if we can't trust the words of Jesus, then we can't believe God the Father either because he was telling Jesus what to say (John 3:34; 12:49; 14:10, 24; 17:8). Clearly, futurism forces Christians into a pitiful position; one that has not escaped the notice of detractors like *Jews for Judaism*. They see through the sham and delight in being handed an opportunity to attack Christianity:

No amount of Christian theological acrobatics will ever solve the problems engendered by the historical reality that a promised imminent fulfillment made two thousand years ago did not occur as expected by the New Testament. Simply stated, Jesus is never coming back, not then, not now, not ever.⁴³

Futurists like Mathison, Gentry, Pratt, LaHaye, MacArthur and countless others *totally agree* with the "historical reality" presented above. They all teach that Christ's second coming "did not occur." Consequently, they have no hope of offering a rebuttal to this stinging accusation against Jesus and must stand by helpless as they are ridiculed for following a false prophet. Critics allege that when entering a church, Christians are required to "check their brains at the door."

⁴² C. S. Lewis, *The World's Last Night and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1973), 98.

⁴³ See "Jews Reject Christian Futurism" at <http://www.preterism.info>.

Unbelievable explanations for the New Testament time texts can only amplify this charge. Sproul, Sr. warns us of the chronic crisis people like Mathison, Gentry *et al.* are perpetuating:

...skeptical criticism of the Bible has become almost universal in the world, and people have attacked the credibility of Jesus. Maybe some church fathers made a mistake. Maybe our favorite theologians have made mistakes. I can abide with that. I can't abide with Jesus being a false prophet, because if I am to understand that Jesus is a false prophet, my faith is in vain.⁴⁴

And that, dear reader, is the point: if *the* predictions of a first-century second coming made by Jesus, His "holy apostles," the Holy Spirit and Holy Scripture failed to occur on time, then Jesus was a fraud, and we have no hope — no salvation — no heaven — no eternal life. Fortunately, one eschatological system is able to restore the integrity of the inspired sources listed above. Jesus was not a fraud. That is the comforting, reassuring message *only full-preterists* can teach with any credibility.

²⁴This is what the Lord says..."I am the Lord... ²⁵I expose the false prophets as liars...I cause the wise to give bad advice, thus proving them to be fools. ²⁶*But I carry out the predictions of my prophets!"* (Isa. 44:24-26, NLT)

Amen!