

Judgment & Destruction

Realized Eschatology & N.T. Teaching on the Final Judgment

Gary C. Kerr

Synopsis: Realized Eschatologists believe that passages like 2 Peter 3 and Matthew 25 refer to God's judgment upon and destruction of the Jews rather than a final destruction of the earth and judgment of all. This lesson will look at these and other relevant passages and examine these claims.

Introduction:

- I. *Realized Eschatology* is so complex in its approach to prophecy and the Scriptures in general that it is impossible to cover even a few of its essential elements in one short presentation.
- II. The tenants of ***Realized Eschatology*** are often difficult to pin down precisely.
 - A. Advocates differ on almost every major point.
 - B. Preterists have changed their positions on various points as the theology has evolved in recent years.
 - C. A new preterism has evolved in recent years – we will refer to it in this outline as “*Radical*” or “*hyper*” preterism.
- III. Biblical teaching on *Judgment and Destruction*.
 - A. Does the N.T. teach that Jesus is coming *bodily* and *personally* at some unknown time in the future?
 - B. If so, does it also teach that this *coming* will result in the literal destruction of all physical creation, and the subsequent judgment of all human beings – both good and evil – who have ever lived?
- IV. In this lesson we want to do 4 things:
 - A. Examine some of the N.T. passages that play an important role in the determination of these questions;
 - B. Briefly discuss why we believe these passages **must** be looking to a final destruction of the earth and a universal judgment.
 - C. Comment on the understanding of the *Apostolic Fathers* on the meaning of these passages.
 - D. A brief look at the preterist teaching on the subject of *hell*.

A LOOK AT SOME OF THE RELEVANT PASSAGES:

- I. The final judgment and the destruction of the world are the last major events connected to the second coming of Christ.

- A. When Jesus returns, the resurrection of the physical body will occur and the whole human race will appear before the judgment seat of Christ.
- B. These doctrines have always been maintained by followers of Christ from the earliest known times.
 - 1. They were affirmed by Christians in the post apostolic period (e.g., the Apostles Creed [c. A.D. 170], and the Nicene Creed [A.D. 325]).
 - 2. They have continued to be universally maintained, even as the religious world divided into various denominations.
- C. To preterists, however, the time-honored interpretation of judgment and destruction at Christ's second coming are not what they seem to be at first glance.
- D. As with most interpretative systems, preterists are not in agreement about what the Bible says about these events.
 - 1. Preterism consists primarily of both "full" (i.e., "radical") and "partial" preterists.
 - 2. Partial preterists actually consider much of what "full" preterists teach to be heretical.
 - 3. All preterists insist that Jesus returned in A.D. 70.
 - a. Little or nothing in the Bible is left to take place in the future.
 - b. We are currently in the "*New Heavens and New Earth*" and Satan is already bound.
 - 4. Most partial preterists believe in a future *Second Coming* and the resurrection of believers, although there is much disagreement about whether or not this will include the destruction of the material universe and the annihilation of the wicked.
- E. In the discussion below, we will be primarily focusing on how these passages are interpreted from the "radical (full) preterist" point of view.

II. **Hebrews 9:27.**

- A. "*And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment.*"
 - 1. Radical preterists often use this passage as a proof text for their assertion that the final judgment has already taken place (in A.D. 70) and that each person enters into the judgment immediately at death.
 - 2. In other words, the N.T. teaches not a future *universal* judgment but merely individual personal judgments at death.
- B. This view is erroneous for a number of reasons.
 - 1. Commentators have consistently interpreted this passage in opposition to current preterist teaching.
 - a. Some say the author of Hebrews is pointing out the fact that judgment invariably follows the death of the body.

- b. Others argue that in contrast to the judgment of the last day, which is universal and public, this judgment is hidden and private.
 - (1) One's immediate state after death is a declaration concerning the eternal condition of the deceased.
 - (2) Those who are not in Christ immediately receive a condemnatory sentence.
- 2. "This is not to say that the judgment *immediately* follows death, for other passages reveal that the judgment for all will take place on an appointed day (*cf.* Acts 17:31; Matt. 10:15; Rom. 2:5; 2 Tim. 4:8). It simply means that judgment is the next significant thing that happens after death." (McClister, 329)
- 3. "The idea that there will be a final judgment for all mankind is a commonly despised teaching, yet few truths are more plainly spelled out in the Bible (Jn. 5:28,29; 12:48; Acts 17:30,31; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:11-15)." (Pace, 370)
- C. Also, the radical preterist interpretation of this passage is contradicted by many other clear portions of Scripture (see below).

III. Acts 1:9-11.

- A. This passage describes Jesus' second bodily coming as something very different than His coming in judgment upon Jerusalem.
- B. The phrase "*in the same way*" ("in like manner," NKJV) means literally "in what manner" or "in that manner in which." (Moule, 132)
 - 1. In other words "*in the same way*" means "in the same manner."
 - 2. Note that "*in the same way*" and "*as you have watched Him go*" are essentially expressions of the same idea twice.
 - 3. "The fact of his [bodily] second coming and the manner of it are also described by this emphatic repetition." (Robertson, 3:12)
- C. Compare the description of the second coming in Acts 1:9-11 with the coming in judgment that occurred in A.D. 70.
 - 1. The account in Acts teaches that Christ will return bodily.
 - a. He left in the same body in which He lived, was crucified, buried and resurrected.
 - b. He ascended in His glorified body and He will descend in the same body.
 - c. Did Jesus return in His glorified physical body in A.D. 70? – **No!**
 - 2. In Matthew 24 we are specifically told that the judgment upon Jerusalem is "*in heaven the sign of the Son of Man.*" (v. 30, ESV)
 - a. In other words, Christ judges Jerusalem from His throne in heaven.

- b. There is no bodily descent.
 - c. The “*coming on the clouds*” terminology of Matthew 24:30 is taken from Daniel 7:13 which describes our Lord’s ascension up into heaven to the right hand of power and is consistent with the poetic metaphor language of the O.T. prophets (e.g., Isaiah 19:1; Nahum 1:3).
 - d. In the O.T. God did not literally come upon heathen nations riding on the clouds.
 - e. Acts 1:9-11 teaches that just like the apostles, people will be able see Jesus’ body when He comes back.
 - f. The account in Acts emphasizes the fact that our Lord’s ascension was visible, and His return will be just as visible.
3. In the judgment on Jerusalem Christ was invisible, because He was at the right hand of God in heaven.
- a. When Matthew 24:30 says that all the tribes of the land “*will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven*” it is speaking of the fact that that generation will witness the judgment of Christ personally, not that they will literally see Jesus’ descending body.
 - b. Acts 1:9-11 and Matthew 24:27 are describing two completely separate and different events.
 - (1) In the first (Matthew 24) Christ never leaves Heaven but judges apostate Israel from there – His coming is figurative.
 - (2) In the second (Acts 1), Jesus literally descends in His glorified and spiritual body to earth.

IV. **John 5:28-29.**

- A. “*Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.*”
- B. There are a number of reasons why this passage cannot refer to the events of judgment in A.D. 70.
 - 1. Jesus says “all *who are in the tombs*” – this expression is obviously meant to be taken literally.
 - 2. The preterist will sometimes appeal to the *dry bones and graves* imagery of Ezekiel 37 to interpret this passage.
 - a. God personally interprets the poetic imagery of Ezekiel and says explicitly that it refers to the revival and restoration of Israel to their land after the captivity.
 - b. In John’s gospel Jesus’ statement is not poetic metaphor and is left without interpretation because it is meant to be taken at face value.

3. The phrase “*all who are in the tombs*” cannot refer only to people who are spiritually dead because it is applied by Christ to both the saved and the lost.
4. Jesus speaks of a resurrection with two opposite results – one results in life (i.e., eternal life) the other in condemnation.
5. Christ spoke of a single event (“*all...will come out*”), not a progressive process.
6. Jesus uses the word “*all*” and emphasizes that all (both saved and lost) will arise at His command.

V. **Matthew 10:28.**

1. “*And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*”
2. Jesus tells the disciples not to fear their persecutors who only have power to cause physical death, who can only do harm to our physical bodies but cannot harm or destroy the soul (psyche).
3. However, Christians are to fear God who has the power “*to destroy both soul and body in hell.*”
 - a. The Bible teaches that there is an immaterial, invisible element to man called the soul or spirit (psyche, pneuma).
 - b. There also is a physical, material, visible aspect of man, the body (soma).
 - c. God has the authority to cast both body and soul into hell (Greek, gehenna).
 - d. This word is “generally used to describe the abode of the wicked, body and soul, after the judgment day.” (Hendriksen, 472)
 - e. “Soul and body in Gehenna’ implies the bodily resurrection of the damned.” (Lenski, 411)
 - f. “Jesus, then, is saying that there is an everlasting future for both the soul and the body. Neither will ever be annihilated. But everlasting ‘destruction’ is in store for those who reject him. The attempt to save the body so that it may continue to exist here and now for a very brief span of time, while the everlasting interests of the entire person, soul and body, are being neglected, is foolish indeed, like exchanging a minor for a major peril.” (Hendriksen, 472)
4. Has there been a point in history in which all the wicked were raised from the dead and then cast “*both soul and body*” into hell? – **No!**

VI. **Matthew 25:31-46 & Revelation 20:11-15.**

- A. The preterist interpretation of Matthew 25:31-46, the separation of the sheep and goats, appears promising at first sight.
- B. On further reflection, however, it is not strong.

1. First, the punishments and rewards of *all* the nations are eternal: punishment with weeping and gnashing of teeth, on the one hand, and eternal life on the other.
 2. Second, if the preterist scenario were true, then this judgment was against Israel alone; no other nation was judged and no one seems to have been rewarded.
 3. Although Jews often persecuted Christians during this period, the Romans did as well.
 4. Why should Israel as a nation have been judged more severely than Rome?
 5. By A.D. 70 Rome under Nero had persecuted Christians, killing many.
 6. Using the criteria of judgment found in Matthew 25 Rome herself should have been judged, yet history shows that she was the instrument of judgment on Israel and survived for many centuries.
- C. “The picture of the last judgment (Matt. 25:31-46) forms one of the most impressive and breath-taking passages of the Bible. The glorious and triumphant coming of the Lord will terminate history and inaugurate the final judgment at which all people who have dwelt upon the earth will be present.” (Kik, 108)
- D. Other passages confirm the view that the second coming will be the scene of a final and universal judgment.
1. *“Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then **each one** will receive his commendation from God.”* (1 Corinthians 4:5)
 2. *“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge **the living and the dead**, and by his appearing and his kingdom...”* (1 Timothy 4:1)
 3. *“For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay **each person** according to what he has done.”* (Matthew 16:27)
 4. In the parable of the tares (Matthew 13), the good wheat and the tares grow up together and are harvested together, and Christ clearly states that He would determine the final disposition of both at that time (v.30).
- E. In both of these passages (Matthew 25 & Revelation 20), all the dead are raised and set before the judgment seat of Christ.
- F. There is a marked contrast between the two judgments described in the Olivet Discourse.
1. In the first (Matthew 24), Jesus clearly is describing a **local** judgment, one confined to the region of Jerusalem and its environs.
 - a. The *“abomination of desolation ... standing in the holy place.”* (v.15)
 - b. The admonition to *“flee to the mountains.”* (v.16)

2. In the second (Matthew 25), the language paints a picture of something **universal** in nature taking place.
 - a. The scene includes “*all the nations ... gathered before Him.*” (v.32)
 - b. The separation takes place among “*all the nations,*” and the criteria for judgment has nothing at all to do with anything uniquely “Jewish.”
 3. “In one, the judgments are executed upon the earth; in the other, the scene is in heaven. The contrast is obvious.” (Kik, 109)
- G. The exact same points apply to the language of John’s vision (Revelation 20:11-15).
1. John sees “*the dead, small and great, standing before the throne.*” (v.12)
 2. The dead came from everywhere, including “*the sea*” and “*Hades.*”
 3. “The manner and place of their dying make no difference; it matters not whether they were drowned at sea or consumed by fire or devoured by wild beasts, or whether they succumbed through illness or old age; all are given up to judgment.” (Hughes, 219)
 4. “Here is a prophecy concerning the judgment day. Yet, the **passing away of heaven and earth** (emphasis is the author’s, GCK) occurs simultaneous with this event. These things are not in the past; they are still in the future.” (Jackson, 102)
- H. These passages (Matthew 25 & Revelation 20) present an exceptionally clear picture of a **universal judgment** that will follow immediately after the second coming and the general resurrection, with all nations are judged together in a public manner.

VII. **2 Peter 3.**

- A. “...the most comprehensive discussion of this entire matter is found in Second Peter 3.” (Jackson, 98)
1. Scholars tell us that the letter was likely written around A.D. 64-65.
 2. By preterist standards Peter should have known that things relating to prophecy were nearing the end.
 3. Yet as we read through this letter we notice that Peter does not seem startled that Jesus had not come back yet, nor does he anywhere present the notion that Jesus is about to return, or that the return is at hand.
 4. The preterist position is that Peter wrote this letter to warn Christians of the imminent coming of Jesus in the destruction of Jerusalem.
 - a. “...the purpose of Peter’s words in this chapter was to warn faithful people of his time concerning the approaching physical judgment so they could escape it.” (Dawson, 100)
 - b. “Thus, the world reserved unto fire against the Day of Judgment and perdition of ungodly men (1 Pet. 3: 7) was the Jewish world...

Fiery judgment was going to fall on Judaism.” (King, *Spirit of Prophecy*, 131)

5. Instead we find Peter assuring his readers that even though Jesus’ return is apparently not within view that it will surely someday come.
 6. We also find him discussing God’s patience, God’s timing, and long periods of time.
 7. He alludes to Psalm 90 in 3:8.
 - a. “But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.” (3:8)
 - b. “For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it passes by, or as a watch in the night.” (Psalm 90:4)
 - c. Peter uses this verse from the Psalms to remind his readers to be patient, that God is not slack (verse 9) regarding his promise to return.
 - d. In Greek the word slack is Strong’s #1019.
 - e. Thayer’s definition is: “1019 braduno {brad-oo’-no}, from 1021; AV - tarry 1, be slack 1; 1) to delay, be slow, 1a) to render slowly, retard, 1b) to be long, to tarry, loiter.”
 8. Peter understood that although almost 40 years had passed since Jesus ascended into heaven, Jesus’ promise to return was not discredited.
 9. Although he and the other hearers of Jesus’ *Olivet Discourse* had grown old and death approached, he does not expect a “soon” second coming of Jesus even at A.D. 65.
 10. This is important given that preterists insist at the time this epistle was written the second coming was only a few years away.
 - a. How could Peter not have known this?
 - b. Why does he not remind his audience that the second coming of Christ was about to occur?
 - c. Why does he not remind the believers that Jesus said he would come within their lifetimes?
 - d. Why instead does he speak of God’s patience, God’s timing, and thousands of years being as a day to the Lord?
 11. We can only conclude that as far as Peter knew Jesus’ return was not eminent even in A.D. 65.
- B. Preterist position:
1. That the heavens and earth that are to be “*destroyed by burning*” (v. 12) refers to the fall of Judaism, or the Jewish world.

2. They also use Matthew 3:12; 13:40,42 and 2 Thessalonians 1:8 to refer to the “symbolic fire in the destruction of Judaism.” (King, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, 131)

D. Response:

1. The “earth” (Greek: *ge*; 3:5,7,10 – “denotes earth as arable land.
2. The same word is used in 1 Corinthians 15:47 – “*The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven,*” where Paul is saying that the first man was made out of earthly material.
3. The Greek word “stoicheion” (elements [NASB], heavenly bodies [ESV]).
 - a. Appears 7 times in the N.T. (Galatians 4:3,9; Colossians 2:8,20; Hebrews 5:12; 2 Peter 3:10,12).
 - b. Scholars say that in classical Greek it meant a part of a series, and came to stand for the basic parts which make up something larger.
 - c. Thayer’s first definition of the word is “any first thing, from which the others belonging to some series or composite whole take their rise, an element, first principal.”
 - d. Supplementary uses of the word as shown by Thayer include the letters of the alphabet, the elements from which all things have come (the material causes of the universe), and the heavenly bodies.
 - e. Preterists often argue that when you examine the other 6 uses of the term in the N.T., you do not get the idea that the word “elements” refers to the scientific idea of the elements of matter, all the “atoms” of the universe, or the periodic table of elements.
 - (1) Looking at other N.T. uses of the word the preterist finds that they refer to the elements of Jewish religion or worldly philosophy, and conclude that it must also have that meaning in 2 Peter 3.
 - (2) This assumes, however, that other N.T. authors’ use of the word necessitates that Peter must use the word in the same way.
 - f. This argument fails to take into consideration the context in which Peter uses the word in 2 Peter 3.
 - (1) He tells us what he means by his use of this word – “*the elements* [heavenly bodies – small pieces of what will be destroyed] ... *and the earth and its works.*” (3:10)
 - (2) Since these things will be destroyed “*we are looking for new heavens and a new earth.*”
 - g. This literal destruction of all material things is perfectly in accord with the teaching of Jesus himself – “*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.*” (Mark 13:31)
 - h. How does that fit the Jewish system?

4. “*Out of water and by water*” (3:5) also points to a natural, physical intent.
 - a. The world (Greek: kosmos; 3:6) – “primarily order, arrangement, ornament, adornment, 1 Pet. 3:3...used to denote the earth in contrast to heaven, 1 Jn. 3:17...” (Vine), was “*flooded with water.*”
 - b. How does that fit the Jewish system?
 - c. Was Judaism and/or Jerusalem flooded with water?
5. “After Judaism fell, or the heaven and earth passed away, he that sat upon the throne said, ‘Behold I make all things new’ (Rev. 21:5).” (King, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, 131)
 - a. So, Jesus didn’t “make all things new” until A.D. 70, according Max King.
 - b. Paul evidently did not know about that, for he said: “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- E. The “*day of the Lord*” would “*come like a thief.*” (3:10)
 1. The destruction of Jerusalem did not come as a thief.
 2. In fact, Jesus gave specific signs so Christians could know when to flee. (cf. Matthew 24)
- F. The “*new heavens and a new earth*” that we look forward to receiving follows the destruction of the present heavens and earth.
 1. It is “*reserved in heaven.*” (1 Peter 1:4)
 2. When Jesus returns not only will all evil and sin be destroyed, but the earth as we know it now will likewise be destroyed.
 3. There will be no more disease; there will be no more death, crying and sorrow – all suffering will be removed.
 4. “There will be a glorified earth and a glorified heaven, and glorified men and women will live on such an earth and under such a heaven.” (Lloyd-Jones, 193-194)
- G. The final consummation is a world-wide (i.e., it covers the entire globe) event; it cannot be limited to Palestine or the Roman Empire in A.D. 70.
- H. We agree that “the language (i.e., of 2 Peter 3, GCK) is far too grand for that,” i.e., the preterist interpretation that this passage is “dealing with the destruction of Jerusalem.” (Jackson, 100)

VIII. **1 Corinthians 15:20-26.**

- A. In this passage Paul says that after the general resurrection Christ’s kingdom will be handed over to the Father.
- B. Since the Bible places the final judgment immediately after the second coming of Christ and general resurrection, Paul’s statement renders any concept of a progressive judgment or a final judgment in A.D. 70 impossible.
- C. The word translated “*end*” means full end.

- D. There is to be an ultimate and final consummation when death is forever eliminated and the eternal state of perfect and final victory is realized.
- E. “The end is when Christ shall deliver up his kingdom, after having subdued all his enemies; i.e., after having accomplished the work of redemption.” (Hodge, 327)
- F. Radical preterists teach that this has already occurred.

IX. Acts 17.

- A. When Paul preaches to the Athenians he declares to them that God “*has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed.*” (v.31)
- B. The Preterist interpretation of this verse is that it points to the A.D. 70 fall of Jerusalem, yet that fall would have absolutely no impact upon the Athenians who had gathered to listen to Paul.
- C. Athens to Jerusalem, “as the crow flies” approximately **800** miles!
- D. He says that they ought to repent because of this coming judgment and such a warning is nonsensical if it only refers to a local judgment against a specific race of people in a far away land.
- E. A similar argument could be made regarding Felix’s response to Paul’s preaching in Acts 24:25 – “*But as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, ‘Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you.’*”
 - 1. It is difficult to imagine why preaching about a “*judgment to come*” would cause someone in Felix’s position to “*become frightened.*”
 - 2. “Why would a Roman be ‘terrified’ with reference to the impending destruction of Judaism – when he would be on the winning side, not the losing one?” (Jackson, *The Menace of Radical Preterism*)

X. Revelation 21 & 22.

- A. Max King took more of a “partial” preterist position on this passage – he believed that the interpretation of Revelation 21:1ff is both present and future. (King, *Spirit of Prophecy*, 128)
- B. But we must ask whether the words that describe the punishment of the wicked (21:8) were in any way fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem.
- C. It doesn’t seem as if the church is now living in the conditions described in chapters 21 and 22.
 - 1. The removal of the curse (22:3) seems to be speaking of the curse on the earth (Gen 3:17).
 - 2. But the physical conditions today are the same as pre-A.D. 70.
 - 3. How then has the curse been removed?
- D. King believed that “whatever follows the return of Christ is ‘forever and ever,’ never for a limited period of time . . .” (King, *Spirit of Prophecy*, 222)
 - 1. We are today in the “forever and ever.”

2. The conditions of today—sin, death, tears, and mortality—are the condition the Earth and God’s people here on Earth will experience until the sun runs out of energy.
 3. This does not square at all with Paul’s description of death’s defeat (1 Corinthians 15) and the destruction of all evils described in Revelation 21, 22.
- XI. This section represents but a sample of the teaching in the N.T. regarding the final coming of Christ in judgment and destruction.
- A. Radical preterists, of course, have no choice but to deny the clear, literal interpretation of these passages.
 - B. “It is important to note that the A.D. 70 doctrine denies every fundamental point we have made. It claims that Christ already came, the judgment has already happened, and the heavens and the earth have already been dissolved. As this is demonstrably not true, the A.D. 70 Doctrine apologist has to deny the plain import of scripture, and seek to “spiritualize” all of these things to fit his peculiar views.” (Cox, internet article)

SOME REASONS WHY THESE AND OTHER PASSAGES MUST BE POINTING TO A FINAL DESTRUCTION OF THE EARTH AND A UNIVERSAL JUDGMENT.

- I. If hyper-preterists are correct, then there is very little in the Bible that is directly for us.
- II. Much of Paul’s writings were directed at specific problems, as were also the books of John, Peter, and Hebrews and these authors (according to the preterist position) all expected the culmination of what they wrote about in A.D. 70.
- III. We are, if that is true, very much “reading other people’s mail” (i.e., things that were not intended for us, and do not apply directly to us).
 - A. For example, for us there is no general resurrection, only a spiritual body (unconnected with our own physical body) when we die.
 - B. There is no final resurrection of the righteous and the wicked, contrary to much biblical teaching (Daniel 12:2; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15).
 - C. To the radical/full preterist, there is no end of history; it will continue as long as the sun and the planet can sustain life – evil will exist as long as the material universe exists.
- IV. A major reason for this is that preterists continue to confuse personal, historical and partial judgments in history with the final judgment at the end of history.
 - A. In the Bible there are many examples of personal and national judgments.
 1. Personal judgments.
 - a. Korah. (Numbers 16:31-32)
 - b. Ahab. (1 Kings 22)
 - c. Herod. (Acts 12:22-23)
 2. Judgments against nations.

- a. Egypt. (Exodus 14:30-31; Isaiah 19)
 - b. Babylon. (Isaiah 14; 21:1-10)
 - c. Judah. (Isaiah 1:21-31)
 - d. Edom. (Isaiah 21:11-17)
- B. The language used of these judgments is often very similar to the terminology used to describe the second bodily coming of the Lord and the final judgment.
- 1. “*The day of the LORD.*” (Isaiah 2:12; 13:6; Jeremiah 13:5; Ezekiel 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1,11,31; 3:14; Amos 5: 18,20; Zephaniah 1: 15,18)
 - 2. “*The day(s) of vengeance.*” (Proverbs 6: 34; Isaiah 34:8; 61:2; Luke 21:22)
 - 3. “*The day of visitation.*” (Isaiah 10: 3)
 - 4. “*The day of evil.*” (Jeremiah 17:17)
 - 5. “*The day of slaughter.*” (Jeremiah 12: 3)
 - 6. “*The day of indignation.*” (Ezekiel 22:24)
 - 7. “*The day of His coming.*” (Malachi 3:2)
 - 8. “*Behold, He is coming.*” (Malachi 3:1)
 - 9. “*The coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.*” (Malachi 4:5)
 - 10. The “*coming on the clouds*” phraseology. (cf. Isaiah 19:1; Nahum 1:3; Mark 14:62; Matthew 26:64)
- C. This similarity of language does not mean that Christ’s second bodily coming and final judgment occurred in A.D. 70 any more than in the days of Isaiah, Jeremiah or Joel.
- D. It does, however, teach us that all the visitations of judgment throughout human history point to the final day of wrath, when evil will be totally eradicated from the earth forever.
- V. Some additional arguments that refute the preterist views on the second coming of Christ and the end of the world:
- (*These points are taken from Jim McGuiggan’s excellent refutation of premillennialism, *The Kingdom of God and the Planet Earth*, pages 132-134.)
- A. The return of Christ will be to **judge the world**. (John 5:27-29; 2 Timothy 4:1)
 - 1. Everyone will give an account. (2 Corinthians 5:10)
 - 2. The faithful will not come into condemnation. (John 5:24)
 - 3. The final coming will bring “*salvation*” to the faithful (Hebrews 9:28) while it brings woe to those who are not forgiven (2 Thessalonians 1:5-9).
 - B. This judgment is **declarative**.
 - 1. It is not to determine who will be condemned and who won’t – that is known already. (cf. John 3:17)

2. Those who belong to Christ will be found blameless in that day. (1 Thessalonians 5:23; Jude 24)
- C. The judgment will be **universal**.
1. See, for example, Acts 17:30-31.
 2. The universality of this judgment is seen not only in the declaration that it is worldwide, but (Matthew 11:20-24; 12:41-43) that it will include nations and individuals already judged in time. (cf. Romans 14:9-12; 2 Timothy 4:1)
- D. The coming of Christ **will result in the resurrection of the dead and the glorious transformation of the righteous**. (John 5:28-29; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:20ff, 35ff, 50ff)
1. Those not forgiven will be raised as well. (Acts 24:15; John 5:28-29)
 2. The Bible doesn't speak of the nature of the body in which the unforgiven will arise.
- E. The coming of Christ **marks the end of this expression of the reign of Christ and God**. (1 Corinthians 15:20-28)
1. Jesus is now ruling with a delegated authority. (Matthew 28:18; John 13:3)
 2. The power He currently exercises is mediatorial power, due to His work as Redeemer and Mediator. (cf. Philippians 2:5ff)
 3. When the end comes He will "*deliver up*" the kingdom to the Father.
- F. The story of the future then, so far, goes something like this:
1. Christ returns, visibly, bodily, and personally.
 2. **All** of the dead arise simultaneously.
 3. The living are transformed (the saints receive glory in that transformation).
 4. The judgment takes place and everyone receives his "*reward*."
 5. Christ, then, as His last act of submission in the present arrangement, surrenders the rule given to Him.

THE TESTIMONY OF THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS:

- I. We note further that there is a glaring absence in the writings of the early "Church Fathers" connecting the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem to the Second Coming of Christ, judgment, and destruction.
- II. If a connection truly existed, then it is difficult to fathom how these men could have neglected such a watershed event as the *Second Coming* when the Jerusalem destruction would have still been fresh in their minds.
 - A. Stanley Paher, in an article in *The Examiner* (see bibliography), references preterist writer Kenneth Davies on the subject of the writings of the "fathers."

- B. According to Paher, Davies says that an explanation for this absence of material in the writings of these men might be based on the fact that “many writings have been destroyed, and the tribulation of that day may have discouraged writing down anything.”
 - C. Davies also “confesses that he does not know of any Christian writers who say specifically that the judgment which fell upon Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was the second advent of Christ.”
 - D. Paher then concludes, “Mainline preterists agree that these early writings do speak of a return of Jesus in A.D. 70 but none say that it was the final return of Christ and the establishment of His kingdom.”
- III. It is clear from a reading of the apostolic writers that ALL of them expected a future return of Jesus Christ.
- A. It would be strange indeed if every single one of the “fathers” failed to understand the fulfillment of so many of the N.T. prophecies on such a major point.
 - B. This is especially striking when we remember the promise of Revelation 1:7 – *“Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.”*
 - C. A preterist interpretation calls for this to be a reference to the “*tribes of the earth*” of Israel, even though Israel was never described in such a way elsewhere in the Bible.
 - D. But such an interpretation would demand that the Jews who suffered through the A.D. 70 event would have recognized that their sufferings were a punishment for their treatment of Jesus since the prophecy is not merely that they would mourn, but that they would mourn “*over Him.*”
 - E. Just as there is no evidence that any second, third or fourth century Christian writer ever recognized the fall of Jerusalem as the final return of Jesus, so also there is a complete absence of evidence that the Jews ever recognized the coming of Jesus in those events.
- IV. What ***did*** the “apostolic fathers” have to say about Christ’s final coming, judgment and destruction?
- A. Rather than try to list a sampling of quotations from the writings from the second through the fourth centuries – as was my original intention – I humbly ***yield*** to the mind and scholarship of Almon Williams!
 - B. In his 1985 Florida College lecture he states: “Consequently, I did a study of the Apostolic Fathers (so-called) ...” (Williams, 217)
 - C. After an analysis of his findings (217-219), Brother Williams offered the following conclusion: “...since there is not even a single extant voice among them in favor of realized eschatology, most people will find it very difficult to believe that this third generation could all be wrong about these matters, especially when some of them, for example, Polycarp, probably knew some of the apostles. That is, if the A.D. 70 doctrine were the N.T. doctrine, to believe that by A.D. 90 to A.D. 150, a complete blackout of such had taken place is very difficult to believe, if not impossible ... this degree of doubt is even increased beyond the bounds of

possible belief whenever one considers that if the pre-A.D. 70 Christians believed in an A.D. 70 eschatology, they must have made it their best kept secret because their successors of the second and third generations show absolutely no acquaintance with it.” (Williams, 219)

- D. What can we add but a loud, hearty *Amen!*

THE PRETERIST VIEW OF HELL & ETERNAL PUNISHMENT:

- I. Admittedly, *Hell* and the eternal punishment of the wicked is not an easy belief to accept.
- A. C.S. Lewis said of it, “There is no doctrine which I would more willingly remove from Christianity than this, if it lay in my power. But it has the full support of Scripture and, specially, of Our Lord’s own words; it has always been held by Christendom; and it has the support of reason.” (Lewis, 118)
 - B. According to Lewis, then, “*hell*” is a biblically supported doctrine, has been accepted by Christians throughout the centuries, and in his assessment is reasonable.
 - C. The N.T. does indeed contain numerous references to “eternal” punishment (cf. Matthew 5:29-30; 10:28; 11:23; 13:40-41; 13:49-50; 22:13; 25:31-43; Mark 9:43-48; Luke 12:5; 16:19-31).
- II. “Annihilationist” views are not new.
- A. “Annihilationism” is the belief that sinners are destroyed (or simply cease to exist), rather than tormented forever in “*hell*” (i.e., the lake of fire).
 - B. It is sometimes related to the doctrine of “conditional immortality,” the idea that a human soul is not immortal unless it is given eternal life – a view advocated by Ed Fudge, and one that is becoming more popular among preterists.
 - C. It is a view that has been accepted and promoted by a number of “evangelical” Biblical scholars in recent years, including F.F. Bruce, Michael Green, Clark H. Pinnock, W. Graham Scroggie, John R.W. Stott, N.T. Wright, and John W. Wenham
 - D. Ed Fudge wrote a book (published in 1982) in defense of annihilationism.
 - 1. Entitled *The Fire That Consumes*, it is currently in print in its third edition, “fully updated, revised and expanded.”
 - 2. There is an extensive interview with Fudge on the *Planet Preterist* web site (<http://planetpreterist.com/news-5568.html>).
 - 3. Fudge says that he is not a preterist, but his book is a popular resource among radical preterists in their efforts to defend the annihilationist position that many of them are coming to occupy.
- III. A sampling of preterist statements about hell.
- A. For a radical preterist, most if not all prophecies and parables given by Jesus or the apostles have their fulfillment in the past, in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

- B. Therefore, any arguments against eternal punishment for the unrighteous dead have generally involved the necessity of redefining and reinterpreting the meaning of words such as “Gehenna,” “eternal,” “unquenchable,” “fire,” “destruction,” etc.
- C. Preterists who contend that Jesus does **not** teach eternal punishment for the wicked have received an important “boost” in recent years from popular evangelical author N.T. Wright.
1. In his book *Surprised By Hope*, Wright contends that Jesus’ use of the word *Gehenna* was intended as a reference to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.
 2. “Gehenna was a place, not just an idea: it was the rubbish heap outside the south-west corner of the old city of Jerusalem... The point is that when Jesus was warning his hearers about Gehenna he was not, as a general rule, telling them that unless they repented in this life they would burn in the next one... Rome would turn Jerusalem into a hideous, stinking extension of its own smoldering rubbish heap. When Jesus said ‘Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish,’ that is the primary meaning he had in mind.” (Wright, 175-178)
 3. It is not at all surprising that Wright is referenced frequently in preterist articles on the subject of eternal punishment and hell.
- D. Some radical preterists have adopted the annihilationist position.
1. “I now believe that hell is the invention of Roman Catholicism; and surprisingly, most, if not all, of our popular concepts of hell can be found in the writings of Roman Catholic writers like the Italian poet Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), author of *Dante’s Inferno*.” (Dawson, 209)
 2. “From these twelve Gehenna passages, we learn that Gehenna would be the familiar valley on the southwest side of Jerusalem where an imminent fiery judgment was coming on the Jews of the generation in which Jesus was crucified. It was unquenchable fire on that generation in that generation. It was a national judgment against the Jews.” (Dawson, 238)
 3. “...we can see, if our conclusions are correct thus far, that the subject of the final destiny of the wicked was never part of Jesus’ teaching on *Gehenna* or *hell*. That connection was given to us courtesy of Roman Catholicism, just like it gave us purgatory, the sale of indulgences, *Limbo, Patrum, Limbo Infantrum, etc.*” (Emphasis is the author’s, GCK) (Dawson, 258-259)
- E. It should be noted, however, that not all radical preterists are in agreement about eternal punishment.
1. Annihilationism is not universally accepted – some preterists continue to believe in a conscious eternal punishment for the wicked.
 2. “Hades was a conscious waiting place for the biologically dead. At the A.D. 70 resurrection, souls in Hades were resurrected out of that waiting state, the righteous into the presence of Christ in His kingdom, and the wicked to eternal conscious punishment ‘outside’ the gates of heaven (Rev.

22:15). Since then, when the righteous die biologically, they immediately receive their new immortal bodies and go directly into heaven to live forever in the presence of God, while the wicked go away to eternal conscious punishment (see Matt. 25:41, 46 and Rev. 22:15). (Edward E. Stevens, <http://www.preterist.org/preteristQA.asp#question27>)

3. Stevens also has a lengthy refutation of annihilationism on the *Preterist Archive* website (http://www.preteristarchive.com/Hyper/2003_stevens_annihilation.html).

IV. A brief rejoinder.

- A. I came on this particular aspect of radical preterism late in the preparation of my manuscript and lecture, so I have not had time to devote myself to a detailed study of the question.
- B. There are no definitive N.T. passages in favor of annihilationism.
- C. On the contrary, numerous texts support the doctrine of eternal conscious punishment.
- D. A brief summary would include:
 1. The rich man and Lazarus.
 - a. Unlike parables which have no real persons in them, Jesus told the story of an actual beggar named Lazarus who went to “*Abraham’s bosom*” and of a rich man who died and went to “*Hades / torment,*” and both were conscious. (Luke 16:22-28)
 - b. The rich man then begged that his brothers be warned, “*so that they will not also come to this place of torment.*” (vs. 28)
 - c. There is no hint of annihilation in this passage; the rich man is suffering constant and conscious torment.
 2. A place of weeping and gnashing of teeth.
 - a. Jesus declared that “*the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*” (Matthew 8:12; cf. 22:13; 24:51; 25:30)
 - b. But a place of weeping is obviously a place of conscious sorrow – those who are not conscious do not weep.
 3. A place of unquenchable flames.
 - a. Jesus repeatedly described a place of unquenchable flames where the very bodies of the wicked will never die. (cf. Mark 9:43-48; Luke 12:4-5)
 - b. But it would make no sense to have everlasting flames and bodies without any souls in them to experience the torment.
 4. A place of everlasting torment.
 - a. John described hell as a place of eternal torment.

- b. He declared that “*the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.*” (Revelation 20:10)
 - c. Eternal torment indicates that the everlasting state of woe is conscious.
 - 5. A place of conscious punishment.
 - a. The fact that the wicked “*will pay the penalty of eternal destruction*” strongly implies that they must be conscious. (2 Thessalonians 1:9)
 - b. One cannot suffer punishment without existence.
 - 6. A place that is everlasting.
 - a. Hell is said to be of the same duration as heaven, “*eternal.*” (Matthew 25:41)
 - b. Jesus uses the exact same Greek word to describe “*life*” and “*punishment.*”
 - (1) Greek = $\alpha\iota\omega\text{-}\nu\iota\omicron\varsigma$.
 - (2) Thayer’s definition: “1) without beginning and end, that which always has been and always will be; 2) without beginning; 3) without end, never to cease, everlasting.”
 - c. As the saints in heaven are said to be in conscious bliss (Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Phil. 1:23), so the sinners in hell are in conscious woe (cf. Luke 16).
- V. I ran across four books that might prove helpful, at least as a beginning point, when looking for resources to use in dealing with the annihilationist position (I do not own, and have not personally examined the 2nd, 3rd and 4th of these, GCK).
- A. *Repent or Perish: With a Special Reference to the Conservative Attack on Hell* by John H. Gerstner.
 - 1. Written primarily as a “conservative” response to the Edward Fudge book *The Fire That Consumes*.
 - 2. Chapter titles include: “The Conservative Revolt Against Hell;” “Edward William Fudge’s Particular Revolt;” and “Fudge On the Old Testament.”
 - 3. No longer in print, but available via various Internet used book sites (I found prices ranging from \$6 up to \$51, GCK).
 - B. *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment* by Robert A. Peterson.
 - C. *Hell Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment*.
 - 1. Christopher W. Morgan (Editor), Robert A. Peterson (Editor), Gregory K. Beale (Contributor), Daniel I. Block (Contributor), Sinclair B. Ferguson (Contributor), R. Albert Mohler Jr. (Contributor), Douglas J. Moo (Contributor), J. I. Packer (Contributor), Robert Yarbrough (Contributor).

2. From the back cover: “The implications of the historic view of hell make the popular alternatives, annihilationism and universalism, seem extremely appealing. But the bottom line is still God’s Word. What does the Old Testament reveal about hell? What does Paul the apostle have to say, or the book of Revelation? Most important, what does Jesus, the ultimate expression of God’s love, teach us about God’s wrath? ... Hell may be under fire, but its own flames cannot be quenched by popular opinion. This book helps us gain a biblical perspective on what hell is and why we cannot afford to ignore it.”
- D. *The Gaggling of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* by D.A. Carson.
- E. There is a good bibliography of books dealing with both sides of the annihilationism question at the *Christianity Today* web site: (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/october23/2.32.html>).

CONCLUSION:

- I. If the proponents of **Realized Eschatology** are right in their interpretation of prophecy, a legitimate question to ask is: **Why did we not know before now?**
 - A. Critics of the A.D. 70 fulfillment of all prophecy are legitimately asking, “If such a doctrine is true, then why is it just now being understood?”
 - B. Their spokesmen reply by arguing from silence.
 1. “I feel confident that Biblical archaeologists have not found all the documents ... and will find some important documents from that early period,” states Ed Stevens. (Paher)
 2. Paher thinks that problems also exist because available letters and histories are not read and studied, and further shows that the major roots of the A.D. 70 position reach only to the 1600s in Germany and Britain.
 - C. Therefore, it is more than fair to insist that this view is rather new.
- II. **Realized Eschatology** is a dangerous heresy because of the consequences that result from its promotion.
 - A. “The A.D. 70 view has been somewhat of an unstabilizing force in regard to what practices are to be continued after A.D. 70, for doubt has arisen in the minds of many regarding what firmly established pre-A.D. 70 practices were to continue to be practiced by the church.” (Williams, 237)
 - B. For most of us one of our tasks as Bible students is to seek out how each Biblical passage applies to us today.
 - C. The preterist must ask, however, why **any** passage should apply at all today.
 1. If they are correct, we live in the culmination of the ages, we live in the prophesied future, in the new and eternal age.
 2. The Bible, therefore, is a record of the history of our faith, but not a guide to living today.
 - D. Various proponents of the A.D. 70 theory have questioned even such long-standing practices as the purpose and procedure of the Lord’s Supper, the place

of elders in the work of the local church, and even the necessity of baptism for the remission of sins.

- III. **Realized Eschatology** is a dangerous heresy because leads to the redefinition and perversion of many important N.T. doctrines.
- A. The bodily resurrection is rejected by a forced reinterpretation of 1 Corinthians 15 and other passages.
 - B. The literal, bodily second coming of Christ is rejected in favor of a coming in judgment upon Jerusalem.
 - C. The final, universal, public judgment is rejected in favor of a partial judgment in A.D. 70, and progressive judgments at death.
 - D. The glorification of the saints on the final day is rejected.
 - E. The wicked are not publicly condemned and cast into the lake of fire.
 - F. There is no public vindication of Christ and the persecuted saints.
 - G. There is never a time in history when the salvation achieved by Jesus (which is definitive, progressive and final) is brought to completion.
 - H. What is particularly dangerous about this heresy is that radical preterists will claim to believe in most or all of these doctrines.
 - 1. Like modernists, however, they completely redefine them.
 - 2. They end up giving them a meaning that not only violates standard procedures of interpretation, but contradicts the clear and simple understanding of these doctrines by Christians throughout history.
- IV. When it comes to what the N.T. says about judgment and destruction, we must be prepared to teach the **whole** truth as it is revealed in God's Word.
- A. The sentence uttered by Jesus on that day will be irrevocable.
 - B. The wicked will be cast "*into the furnace of fire*" where there will be "*weeping and gnashing of teeth*" and "*the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever*" (cf. Matthew 13:40-42; Revelation 14:11; 20:10).
 - C. The righteous will enter the joy of their Lord, behold the face of God, and live in blissful communion with God forever.
 - D. Once judgment is finalized there are no second chances, no reprieves or pardons.
 - 1. The time to look to Christ with the eyes of faith is now.
 - 2. The time to serve Jesus and work for His Kingdom is the present.
- V. May God bless all of us in our efforts to prepare ourselves and those with whom we have some influence to be ready for the return of Christ.
- A. "*For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, 'Peace and safety!' then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief.*" (1 Thessalonians 5:2-4)

- B. *“The day of the LORD is indeed great and very awesome, and who can endure it?”* (Joel 2:11)

Gary C. Kerr
1732 Kenilwood Way
Bowling Green, KY 42104
(270) 791-2605
gary.kerr@mightyisthelord.com
www.mightyisthelord.com

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