INTRODUCTION

In 1983, the evangelical publishing company Baker Book House reprinted the 1887 edition of The Parousia by J. Stuart Russell. In this provocative work, Russell contends that all of biblical prophecy, including the return of Christ, was fulfilled in the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. As Russell himself concludes:

As the result of the investigation we are landing in this dilemma: either the whole group of predictions, comprehending the destruction of Jerusalem, the coming of the Lord, the resurrection of the dead, and the rewarding of the faithful, did take place before the passing away of that generation, as predicted by Christ, taught by the apostles, and expected by the whole church; or else the hope of the church was a delusion, the teaching of the apostles an error, the predictions of Jesus a dream. [1]

Actually, such an approach to prophecy was not uncommon in Russell’s day; the “preterist” school of prophetic interpretation had many adherents, including the prominent 19th century scholar Milton Terry. In his highly acclaimed Biblical Hermeneutics, Terry affirms the preterist viewpoint, concluding that “the parousia of the Son of man was to be coincident with the appalling catastrophe of Jerusalem and the Jewish polity.” [2] As Ernest Hampden-Cook bluntly put it, “The belief that the second coming of the Son of man is still future cannot be reconciled with any reasonable interpretation of the New Testament as a divinely-inspired message and record.” [3]

In view of the startling conclusions set forth by these theologians, we may well wonder how a book such as Russell’s The Parousia became a Baker reprint. Indeed, all orthodox Christians, regardless of their millennial persuasion, believe that Christ will return. The watchword of the early church is still good today; the Lord is coming, maranatha! It is a surprise, therefore, to learn that Russell's work is selling by the thousands. Walter C. Hibbard, president of a leading evangelical book service, stated in a letter to this author that The Parousia is “one of the most consistent best-sellers in our whole line!” [4]
Apparently, preterist ideas are gaining an audience among evangelicals. Indeed, such a conclusion is unavoidable in view of the fact that, in the evangelical world today, there is an entire movement underway based on preterist eschatology. M.R. King, an evangelical New Testament scholar and a specialist in prophetic studies, in 1987 published The Cross and the Parousia of Christ, a massive study devoted to developing the views of consistent preterism. [5] He boldly proclaims in the introduction, “It will be shown in this volume, with the full support of Scripture, that every facet of New Testament eschatology is applicable exclusively to the final period of the Old Testament aeon.” [6] This statement becomes even more intriguing when it is remembered that King is a strict inerrantist! In an earlier volume, he writes, “Any interpretation... that removes the coming of Christ as taught in the gospels, the epistles, and Revelation from the time and events of that generation, unwittingly denies the inspiration of God’s word, and builds a false concept of God’s eternal purpose with respect to the end-time.” [7]

King argues that all prophecy is “applicable exclusively” to the time period leading up to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. In this way, he maintains that there is no scriptural warrant for positing a future millennium, resurrection, or return of Christ. Clearly, such a conclusion is not in keeping with what historic, orthodox Christianity has always taught and believed. The preterist position teaching, however, has gone forth, and it is persuading many evangelicals that Christ’s coming is no longer something to look forward to.

Clearly, a critique of this movement is in order and for our purposes, the main problem lies in the fact that preterists such as M.R. King are denying a future return of Christ. [8] Unfortunately, a comprehensive evaluation of preterist exegesis is beyond the scope of a master’s thesis. We will raise, therefore, the following question in this study: Even if the basic interpretive framework of preterism is true, does that framework necessarily lead to a denial, as M.R. King argues, of a future return of Christ?

Before we can properly deal with this question, we must first look at the interpretive framework of preterism. Thus, in chapter one we will conduct a brief survey of preterist interpretations of key passages in the New Testament, including sections from the Gospels, Epistles, and Revelation. In conducting this survey, we will utilize the works of contemporary preterist writers, [9] such as M.R. King, as well as the works of 19th century authors. The essential goal of this first chapter is to discern the major tenets of preterist interpretation. How do preterists find application, in terms of fulfillment, for every New Testament prophecy in A.D. 70? [10]

In the second chapter, we will look at that aspect of M.R. King’s brand of preterism that we find objectionable, namely, his insistence that prophecy cannot refer to future historical events beyond A.D. 70; in his view, it was all exhaustively fulfilled in the first century. [11] Furthermore, we will seek to determine what in King’s system leads him to this radical conclusion. Why does he deny a future return of Christ?

In our final chapter, we will critically examine M.R. King's claim that prophecy is “applicable exclusively” to the events of the first century. For the sake of argument,
however, we will develop this critique by assuming that the interpretive framework of preterism that we will look at in chapter one is correct, or at least substantially plausible. For example, according to preterist though the entire Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24, Mark 13, Luke 21) has application in terms of fulfillment in the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. M.R. King goes one step further: He argues that the Olivet Discourse was fulfilled exclusively in A.D.70; it cannot apply to the future. Now in our critique, we could very well call into question the view that the entire Olivet Discourse is actually fulfilled in A.D. 7-0, but for strategic reasons, we will refrain from such a thoroughgoing, critical approach. Our’s will be a more modest approach, with a restricted critical scope. We will assume, for the sake or argument, that it may well be entirely applicable to the first century. Our response, therefore, is meant to focus more narrowly upon what emerges as the most substantive problem, namely, King’s denial of any future advent beyond A.D. 70. In other words, we will attempt to show that, even allowing for the possible correctness of the general preterist perspective, King’s unorthodox conclusion need not follow. Thus, in at least one sense, the theological focus of this study intends to serve an ienic function by challenging King’s unorthodox conclusions precisely in terms of King’s own premises.

In sum, if we are able to disprove King without in any way departing from the interpretative framework of preterism, then we will have proven that there is no necessary correlation between preterist eschatology and King’s arguments for exclusive fulfillment in the first century.

The advantage of this methodological approach is clear. It will allow us to see if a New Testament prophecy can have application in terms of fulfillment both in the first century and in historical events in the future. Furthermore, it will allow us to see if a person can embrace the substantial elements of preterism without denying what the historic church has always taught and affirmed, namely, a future return of Christ. In short, we will see if preterism is compatible with evangelicalism.

CHAPTER ONE: THE INTERPRETATIVE FRAMEWORK OF PRETERISM

When first confronted with the view of consistent preterism, many evangelicals are shocked and appalled. How could anyone who believes the Bible argue that the second coming of Christ has already taken place? How could the resurrection be fulfilled in the first century? What about the millennium? It is clear that preterist eschatology differs radically from what we evangelicals are used to believing. Nevertheless, as hard as it may be it is essential for us to “feel the force” of preterist argumentation. Why are sincere, Bible-believing Christians denying a future return of Christ? There must be some reasons; it is not right for us to simply dismiss preterism without examining it. Why is it having influence?

In order to answer these questions, we must give preterist eschatology a chance. Thus, this first chapter is designed simply to understand preterism on its own terms. We will briefly look at preterist interpretations of key passages from the Gospels, Epistles, and
Revelation. How do preterists find first century fulfillments for these passages? In short, what is the interpretative framework of preterism?

Before we begin, we must clarify how we are using the word “preterist” in this chapter. In some cases, we may look at a preterist interpretation of an author who is not a “preterist” in the strict sense. For example, an author might argue that the “abomination of desolation” in Matt. 24:15 was fulfilled in some sense in the Jewish Wars prior to A.D. 70. Furthermore, we might find the interpretation of this author helpful in clarifying the overall preterist thesis. Yet, this same author might depart from the preterist thesis later on in Matt. 24, arguing for example, that the “Son of Man coming on the clouds” (Matt. 24:30) was not fulfilled in the first century. Even though this author is not a “preterist” in a strict sense, we might still find occasion to look at his interpretation of the “abomination of desolation” which is in keeping with preterism.

For the sake of clarity we will divide the rest of this chapter into three subheadings: The Gospels, Epistles, and Revelation.

THE GOSPELS

We will begin our brief survey of preterist interpretation with the Olivet Discourse. Indeed, there are some verses in Matt. 24 which play an important (if not essential) role in the interpretative framework of preterism. The Chapter begins:

And Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. And He answered and said to them, “Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down (Matt. 24:1-2).

It is generally recognized, even by Hal Lindsey and company, that Jesus is here referring to the destruction of the temple by the Roman armies in A.D.70. In this context, the disciples question Jesus in verse 3:

Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age (Matt. 24:3)?

The disciples understand the destruction of the temple (verses 1-2) to be linked with the coming of Christ and the end of the age (verse 3), according to the preterists.

Building on this observation, the preterists cite verse 34, which they see as the interpretive key of the entire chapter. Jesus states:

Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place (Matt. 24:34).

The verse is understood to mean that all of the events recorded in the discourse, including Christ’s parousia and the end of the age, would take place within the lifetime
of the disciples. [14] At this point, though we will elaborate more on the issue later, we need to understand exactly what the preterists mean when they argue that Christ returned in A.D. 70. How is this so? How did Jesus regard the fall of Jerusalem as the end of the age?

These two events, the return of Christ and the end of the age, are inseparably connected, according to M.R. King. To begin, King points out that the end of the aeon (sometimes translated world) in Scripture never means the end of the physical world, but the end of the age characterized by fleshly Israel and the old covenant. King explains:

The world marked for destruction in prophecy, the end of which involved the second coming of Christ, and resulted in the redemption of true Israel, was the Jewish world. Therefore, it is the end of the Jewish world, not this material earth, that fits into the timetable of prophecy, and brings harmony of thought and purpose into God’s scheme of redemption. [15]

With the cessation of temple sacrifices and the total destruction of Israel’s holy city in A.D. 70, Old Testament Judaism, for all practical purposes was over, according to King. [16] As J. Lambrecht states, “… Israel’s history ends with the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70!” [17] The End of the age, therefore, transpired with the destruction of Jerusalem, according to the preterist view.

The return of Christ is understood in a similar manner. First of all, King contends that Scripture does not refer to Christ’s coming in terms of a physical return, but rather a spiritual presence. He explains:

Those who insist on a literal, bodily return of Christ miss the true meaning and import of these prophetical predictions concerning the return of Christ. It is his coming in power, glory, and victory over his enemies. This coming or appearing, (epiphany) was not the reshowing of a physical form, but rather a visible manifestation of a hidden divinity by the deed and power of fleshly Israel’s devastation. [18]

In keeping with the spiritual, supra-historical nature of the new covenant, the parousia of /christ is not observable to the senses, according to King. He elaborates:

Biblical eschatology was so structured that the demise of the old, outward, observable aeon would be a testimony of the arrival of the new spiritual aeon…. And in this sense, Christ’s parousia (His arrival or presence), which is the coming in of the New Covenant aeon, was not an historical, that is, an observable phenomena outwardly. But on the negative side of His parousia, namely, the outward demise of the old aeon, we do have an event that occurred within history, and to that extent the parousia of Christ was an historical event. [19]
Of course, the visible event King is referring to here is the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish temple. According to King then, Christ returns in judgment against apostate Israel in A.D. 70, bringing to a close the Jewish world of the old aeon (old covenant). [20]

Returning to the text, the preterists go on, citing references from Josephus, to show that false Christs (vs. 5), wars and rumors of wars (vs. 6), famines and earthquakes (vs. 7), tribulation (vs. 9), apostasy (vs. 10), false prophets (vs. 11), and lawlessness (vs. 12) were all predominant during the Jewish Wars, which begin in A.D. 66. Verse 14, however, would appear to be problematic:

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come (Matt. 24:14).

The preterists cite several verses from Paul to provide evidence that the gospel was indeed being preached to the whole world during this time period:

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world (Rom. 1:8).

... the gospel, which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing (Col. 1:5-6) ...

After the gospel is preached to the whole world (whatever is meant by world), Jesus says that “then the end shall come.” The end in view here is understood by the preterists to mean the end of the Jewish age.

Jesus’ reference to the Abomination of Desolation begins the next section in the discourse, and Luke 21:20 is cited as evidence for its fulfillment during the Jewish Wars: [21]

But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is at hand. Then let those who are in Judea fall to the mountains, and let those who are in the midst of the city depart (Luke 21:20-21)...

The verses that follow then (Matt. 4:16-26), are understood as warnings directed to Christians in and around Jerusalem prior to its invasion by the Roman armies in A.D. 70.

In Matt. 24:27, there is a reference to the “the coming of the son of Man,” [22] which as we have seen, the preterists understand in terms of the coming of the new aeon and the demise of the old aeon, events which corresponded with the destruction of the Jewish economy in A.D. 70. Verse 29, however, reads:

But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken (Matt. 24:29)...
The preterists point out that this kind of apocalyptic language was commonly used in the Old Testament to describe judgment on nations such as Babylon, Egypt, and Israel. As James B. Jordan explains:

The astral bodies are signs of the rulers of the world, for they themselves are said to “govern” day and night (Gen. 1:16, 18). Moreover, since the astral bodies are also clocks, they symbolize the times of the nations. The fall of stars, the darkening of sun and moon, can be and often are a sign of the collapse of a given nation. [23]

Some examples include

For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash for their light; The sun will be dark when it rises, and the moon will not shed its light (Isa. 13:10).

And when I extinguish you, I will cover the heavens, and darken their stars; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon will not give its light (Ezek. 32:7).

The preterists reason that if God used this kind of “end of the world” language to signify judgment to the nations in the Old Testament, how much more would such figurative imagery be appropriate to signify judgment on his covenant people before destroying their once holy city. Verse 30 goes on:

... and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.

Again, the preterists cite passages in the Old Testament which speak of the Lord coming in the clouds [24] in judgment against, for example, Egypt:

The oracle concerning Egypt. Behold, the Lord is riding on a swift cloud, and is about to come to Egypt; the idols of Egypt will tremble at His presence, and the heart of the Egyptians will tremble at His presence, and the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them (Isa. 19:1).
In this context, there was no visible, physical coming of the Lord. Why then, ask the preterists, should such a physical coming be expected when this same kind of language is employed by the New Testament? Milton Terry sums up preterist thinking on this matter:

We might fill volumes with extracts showing how exegetes and writers on New Testament doctrine assume as a principle not to be questioned that such highly wrought language as Matt. 24:29-31; I Thess. 4:16; and II Peter 3:10, 12, taken almost verbatim from Old Testament prophecies of judgement on nations and kingdoms which long ago perished, must be literally understood. Too little study of Old Testament ideas of judgment, and apocalyptic language and style, would seem to be the main reason for this one sided exegesis. It will require more than assertion to convince thoughtful men that the figurative language of Isaiah and Daniel, admitted on all hands to be such in those ancient prophets, is to be literally interpreted when used by Jesus and Paul. [25]

Verse 31, then, is likewise understood as figurative language by the preterists. That verse reads:

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

According to King, the point of this passage “... is that all of God’s elect (both the firstfruit saints and historical Israel) would be gathered as one new creation in Christ in the final end of the old dispensation.” [**]

Verses 34–35 include the time reference [88] and an allusion to heaven and earth passing away:

Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away (Matt. 24:34–35).

We have seen how the preterists use the time reference to buttress their view, but how did heaven and earth pass away? King explains:

The new and greater things to come in Israel’s new heaven and earth were set forth in God’s promise of a New Covenant (Jer. 31). The new
world and the New Covenant go hand-in-hand in prophecy, and, consequently, in fulfillment. Christ made it clear that the consummation of the aeon of law was the eschatology passing of the old heaven and earth. He said, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophetic: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I saw unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matt. 5:17,18). If the aeon of the law and the prophets has been fulfilled, then the heaven and earth of biblical eschatology has passed away. The cross was the decisive event, the fall of Jerusalem was the consummating event. [**] The outmoded heaven and earth in view here signifies, not the material heaven and earth, but the Jewish world of the old temple, old Jerusalem, old covenant, etc., according to King. [**]

What we contend for, is the unity and continuity of the whole discourse. From the beginning of the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew to the close of the twenty-fifth, it is one and indivisible. The theme is the approaching consummation of the age, with its attendant and concomitant events; the woes which were to overtake that “wicked generation,” comprehending the invasion of the Roman armies, the siege and capture of Jerusalem, the total destruction of the temple, the frightful calamities of the people. Along with this we find the true Parousia, or the coming of the Son of man, the judicial infliction of divine wrath upon the impenitent, and the deliverance and recompense of the faithful. From beginning to end, these two chapters form one continuous, consecutive, and homogeneous discourse. So it must have been regarded by the disciples, to whom it was addressed and so, in the absence of any hint of indication to the contrary in the record, we feel bound to regard it. [**]

The destruction of the old Jerusalem, Christ's coming, and the end of the age are all understood as being tied together in one event in Matt. 24. [*]

Before leaving the gospels, we will note some other texts important for the preterists. They include:

But whenever they persecute you in this city, flee to the next, for truly I say to you, you shall not finish going through the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man comes (Matt. 10:23).
Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom (Matt. 16:28)

Again the high priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, “Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” And Jesus said, “I am; and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:62).

These texts are understood as meaning that the kingdom of God, along with the second Coming of Christ, were events to be fully realized during that generation. As Frederic W. Farrar states, “It is strange that these distinct limitations should not be regarded as a decisive proof that the Fall of Jerusalem was, in the fullest sense, the Second Advent of the Son which was primarily contemplated by the earliest voices of prophecy.”

THE EPISTLES

We saw in the previous section how preterists associate the fall of Jerusalem with the parousia of Christ, the end of the Jewish aeon (or world), and the definitive inauguration of the Christian aeon. This theory will become clearer when we understand that according to the preterists, the forty year time span following Pentecost and preceding the fall of Jerusalem, represented a crucial time of covenantal transition. The old covenant, co-existing with the new, was fading away, while the new covenant, coexisting with the old, was on the threshold of appearing in all its glory. In this process, the cross was the decisive event while the A.D. 70 parousia was the consummating event.

To defend this theory, the preterists cite Paul’s allegory in Galatians. The passage reads:

For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman through the promise. This is allegorically speaking: for these woman [sic] are two covenants, one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is [sic] slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. For it is written, “Rejoice, Barren woman who does to brea; break forth and shout, you who are not in labor; for more are the children of the desolate than of the one who has a husband.” And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. (Gal. 4:22-28)
Paul contrasts two women: The bondwoman (Mount Sinai, Ishmael, flesh, old covenant, present Jerusalem) and the free woman (Mount Zion, Isaac, Spirit, new covenant, Jerusalem above). He contends that Christians are children of the latter, while implying that unbelieving Jews are children of the former. He concludes:

But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also. But what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the Bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman.” So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of a free woman. (Gal. 4:29-31)

The bondwoman and her son are cast out so the children of the free woman may receive the inheritance. The preterists reason that if the bondwoman corresponds to the present Jerusalem (vs. 25), and if the present Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70, then A.D. 70 is the time when the bondwoman is cast out (old covenant) and the children of the woman receive the inheritance (new covenant). [**]

According to the preterists, the New Testament writers expected Christ to return within their own lifetimes to usher in the new age, and to judge the church’s enemies, thereby bringing to a close this period of covenantal transition. To take one example, Paul write in the Epistle to the Romans:

... for now salvation is nearer to us than we [sic] believed. The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand (Rom. 13:11-12).

The night that is “almost gone” is the old covenant based on temple sacrifices, while the day that is “at hand” is the new day of the kingdom of God, the new covenant, according to the preterists. [**]

The important thing to remember in all this is that the old and new covenants are understood by the preterists as coexisting from Pentecost to A.D. 70. The Christians, therefore, lived in a tension between the already and the not yet, [**] anticipating Christ’s parousia to complete the covenantal change of the aeons begun at the cross.

A corollary to this conclusion is that the “last days” are confined to this forty year time span which began at Pentecost. At that time, Peter declares:

“And it shall be in the last days,” God declares, “That I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all mankind.... “And I will grant wonders in the sky above, and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and glorious day of the Lord shall come. And it shall be, that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Acts 17:19-20)

Peter associates the last days with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, which would culminate with the imminent coming of the Day of the Lord. [**] The imminence
passages, scattered throughout the New Testament, are cited in support of this claim. In I Cor., Paul states that “the time has been shortened (I Cor. 7:29)” and that “the form of this world is passing away (I Cor. 7:29).” They were the generation “upon whom the ends of the ages have come (I Cor. 10:11).” The author of Hebrews, writing in “these last days” (Heb. 1:2) states... “now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Heb. 9:26).” He told his readers they would “see the day drawing near.... For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay (Heb. 10:25, 37).” James writes that “the coming of the Lord is at hand” and “the Judge is standing right at the door (Jas. 5:8-9).” Peter contends that “The end of all things is at hand (1 Pet. 4:7)...” John affirms that “it is the last hour (I John 2:17-18),” and Jude refers to the evil ones in his epistle as the mockers of the “last time (Jude 18).”

With these passages in view, the preterists conclude that the time period between Pentecost and the A.D. 70 parousia answers to the “last days” in Scripture.

Before leaving this section, there are two passages in Pauline literature which deserve special consideration. The first is Rom. 11 and the second is 1 Cor. 15. Indeed, these chapters appear very problematic to the preterist thesis. How are they explained? Fortunately, M.R. King, in his recent book, deals with each of these sections in considerable detail. We will look at his analysis, starting with Rom. 11.

To begin, we cite a comment made by King several times in his book which is very significant to the present discussion. He states, “... the only legitimate preaching of the end time is the preaching of Jesus as the meaning and fulfillment of Israel’s Old Testament history. [**] In this way, King fully agrees with the premillennialists in seeing the second coming of Christ as the focal point of Israel’s promised future.

King divides Rom. 11 into three sections: the remnant theme (1–10), the salvation of the gentiles (11–24), and the restoration of “all Israel” (25–32). We are primarily concerned with the latter section since the meaning of the restoration of Israel is the main point of contention here. How was “all Israel” saved in A.D. 70?

In the first section, King contends that the preserving remnant “refers specifically to Jewish Christians in contrast to hardened Israel.” [**] This remnant played a very important role. As King explains:

The destiny of historical Israel was bound up in the remnant and their response to the Christ-event. Through the remnant’s participation in the transforming events of Christ’s death and resurrection, a new creation was formed in fulfillment of God’s promise to Israel. [**]
The Jewish Christians, by dying to their mode of life under the Old Covenant, were the means by which the covenantal transformation was taking place. [*] King concludes, “This election of God consisted of a transformation of His rejected people, a transformation that was anchored in the Christ-event. The remnant Jew was the manifestation of this transformation, but they were not the sum total of it, as Paul proceeded to show next.” [*]

Though Israel rejected Christ (making salvation possible for the Gentiles), they would be restored by God. Indeed, the Gentiles needed to acknowledge that the promise of the new covenant was made to Israel, and would not be fully realized apart from Israel. As King explains, “Paul’s basic problem with the Gentiles was that of affirming their completeness in Christ while showing a need of waiting for its full realization in conjunction with Israel through whom the covenantal consummation comes.” [*]

The Gentiles, however, played a very important role. The “the fullness of the Gentiles,” along with Israel’s continued hardening would lead ultimately to Israel’s restoration. Paul states:

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel will be saved (Rom. 11:25-26).

According to King, “Paul’s purpose was to show that Israel would be saved through their hardening (whatever this brings at the end), and through a Gentile fullness.” [*] This fullness is understood as the Gentiles’ “increase or spiritual upbuilding in Christ (Eph. 4:15, 16).” [*] The passage from the old to the new covenant (from Pentecost to A.D. 70) “occurred through the death and resurrection of Christ, not instantaneously, but by means of a transformation that was accomplished through the body of Christ.” [*] This transformation process then, corresponds with the fullness of the Gentiles [*] and Israel’s continued hardening.

The A.D. 70 consummation was the critical time of fulfillment, according to King. On the one hand, Israel’s hardening led to their “complete earthly demise” [*] as demonstrated by the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. But on the other hand, “not open to history, was the restoration of Israel and the coming of the new Jerusalem.” [*] As King points out:

The fall of Jerusalem was an outward, observable, historical event, but the coming of the new Jerusalem was a spiritual, supra-historical event, in keeping with the supra-historical nature of the New Covenant age... The outward, earthly destruction of Jerusalem must not overshadow the arrival or presence of the spiritual, heavenly Jerusalem. [*]

In A.D. 70 the earthly shadows are replaced by their spiritual realities in the realm of faith, according to King. At this time, historical Israel is delivered “from the bondage of corruption into the glorious state of the New Covenant creation in Christ...” [*] The “all
Israel” that is saved then, [**] is the nation of Israel as it is corporately resurrection from sin-death in A.D. 70.

We will now briefly look at King’s analysis of I Cor. 15. We say briefly because King devotes well over 200 pages to this chapter in The Cross and the Parousia of Christ. A detailed survey of his discussion then, is beyond the scope of this chapter.

To begin, King contends that the resurrection of the dead being denied in Corinth was not biological resurrection. He cites verse 13 for proof of this assertion:

But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised. (I Cor. 15:13).

King reasons as follows: If Paul were trying to prove the truth of bodily resurrection, then he would in effect be arguing, “If there is no bodily resurrection, then Christ has not been bodily raised.” This would be quite superfluous, according to King. [**] Indeed, King maintains that “there is no indication that those who denied the resurrection of the dead ever denied the resurrection of Christ.” [**] He concludes, therefore, that the resurrection the Corinthians were denying was something other than bodily (physical) resurrection.

What then, was this resurrection that was being denied? First of all, King argues that Paul was writing against “Gentiles who had overreacted to a Judaistic anti-Paulinism to the point of maintaining that Israel as a whole had become so hardened, and so set against the law-free gospel, that they were beyond the scope of salvation.” [**] Thus, the “future resurrection that was being disputed by some in I Cor. 15,” King argues, “is ... the hope and promise of Israel’s restoration to soteriological life...” [44]

Paul seeks to combat this error, King maintains, by demonstrating that Christ’s resurrection is inseparably related to God’s promises to Israel. For the Gentiles to deny the resurrection of the dead (Israel), therefore, is concomitant to them denying their own resurrection. Why? Because they themselves could not be raised from sin-death apart from “being brought in and made partakers of Israel’s cross-determined New Covenant mode of life.” [**] King explains:

Since bodily life is for Paul covenantal life, that is, life as determined by one’s covenantal-world, it follows that the bodily life of the Gentiles could not be entered in advance of the consummated change which specifically was grounded in Israel, a change involving two covenants or the two aeons. Therefore, Israel’s end-of-the-age rebirth (resurrection) was “life from the dead” for the Gentiles, for they had no other basis for bodily life except that which came to them through Israel, in conjunction with Israel. Their link to Israel through Israel’s Messiah was so inseparable that for certain ones to deny the resurrection of the dead (of Israel) meant, according to Paul, the invalidation of their own gospel faith (I Cor. 15). [**]
With this basic thesis in mind, King argues that physical resurrection is neither being explicitly affirmed by Paul nor denied by the Corinthians in I Cor. 15. Rather, bodily resurrection and the defeat of sin and death are understood throughout I Cor. 15 in terms of the believer’s death and resurrection with Christ (Rom. 6:5-6), and his entrance into the new aeon. [**]

Revelation

No study of preterism would be complete without first examining its basic stance towards the eschatological book par excellence of the Bible, the Revelation of John. This is not to suggest that there is a preterist consensus regarding the book as a whole. As Milton Terry observes, “no portion of the Holy Scriptures has been the subject of so much controversy and of so many varying interpretations as the Apocalypse of John.” [**] In this section, however, we will look at one general approach to Revelation that has been set forth by a good number of preterist scholars. We will pay special attention to the sections which have traditionally received the most attention in mainstream scholarship, including the harlot city of Rev. 17 & 18, and the infamous one thousand years of Rev. 20.

To begin, the imminent time references in the Apocalypse are cited by the preterists as proof that its complete fulfillment was to take place within the time frame of its original readers. [**]

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to Him to show His bond-servants, the things which must shortly take place.... Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it, for the time is near... and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show his bond-servants the things which must shortly take place. “And behold, I am coming quickly.... And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near... Behold, I am coming quickly.... “Yes, I am coming quickly.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus (Rev. 1:1, 3; 22:6-7, 10, 12, 20).

The reader will not be surprised to learn that most preterists opt for a pre-A.D. 70 dating of the Apocalypse. [**] These time references, therefore, refer to the imminent destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

In the previous section of this study, we saw how M.R. King points out how the new or heavenly Jerusalem is used in contrast to the old Jerusalem by Paul and the author of Hebrews (Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22). The preterists contend that this motif forms the focal point of the entire Book of Revelation.

According to the preterists, the drama of the Apocalypse revolves around the two cities, the evil harlot city and the holy virgin city. [**] The ensuing conflict is followed by the destruction of the harlot and the climactic arrival of the virgin, the bride of the lamb. John describes the glorious debut of the virgin city, the new Jerusalem:
And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev. 21:1-2).

The description of this “new Jerusalem” is generally recognized by scholars as the climax of the Book of Revelation (Rev. 21 & 22). According to the preterists, if the new city is identified with the new Jerusalem. As we have seen over and over, the preterists argue that the old Jerusalem was destroyed and cast out of God’s redemptive plan in A.D. 70. The Book of Revelation, therefore, is understood in terms of God’s covenant lawsuit against apostate Israel before its destruction. On the other side of the coin, the book served to “buoy the faith of the saints in Asia in time of severe trial by revealing the hidden realities of that which already was ad which was about to be consummated in the climactic event of Christ’s parousia.

The polemic against unbelieving Israel runs throughout the Apocalypse, according to the preterists. John recognizes “the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan (Rev. 2:9).” In Rev. 11:8, John identifies the great city with “Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.” The heathen cities Sodom and Egypt are compared to Jerusalem, the preterists contend, because Jerusalem had become a heathen city; this is the great and tragic ironic reversal.

This ironic reversal reaches its climax in Rev. 17 and 18, where the great harlot city (“Babylon the Great”) is described. This heathen city, as we have seen, is identified by the preterists as none other than Jerusalem itself, the only proper antithesis to the new Jerusalem.

The preterists point out that the harlot theme is reminiscent of a plethora of Old Testament prophecies aimed against the covenant people. Referring to Jerusalem, Isaiah states, “How the faithful city has become a harlot (Isa. 1:21).” Ezek. 16 describes this harlotry in painstaking detail. The preterists also compare Jeremiah’s condemnation of the harlot with John’s in Rev. Jeremiah states:

And you, O desolate one, what will you do? Although you dress in scarlet, although you decorate yourself with ornaments of gold, although you enlarge your eyes with pain, in vain you make yourself beautiful; you lovers despise you; they seek you life (Jeremiah 4:30).

The parallel with John’s account is striking:

And the woman was clothed in purpose and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality (Rev. 17:4) ...
But why is the Great City in Rev. described as a harlot? The preterists answer by explaining that in the Old Testament, Israel was God’s bride. As Israel transgresses the covenant, however, she is repeatedly referred to as a harlot, guilty of adultery. Thus, if the covenant makes Israel God’s bride, it follows that breaking the covenant makes Israel a false bride, a harlot. According to the preterists then, the symbolism of the harlot rules out the traditional interpretation of identifying the harlot city with Rome. Russell explains:

Rome was a heathen city, and consequently incapable of that great and damning sin which was possible, and, alas, actual, for Jerusalem. Rome was not capable of violating the covenant of her God, of being false to her divine Husband, for she never was the married wife of Jehovah. This was the crowning guilt of Jerusalem alone among all the nations of the earth, and it is the sin for which all through her history she is arraigned and condemned. [**]

While many more lines of evidence are cited by the preterists, [**] it is enough for us to quote Cornelis Vanderwaal, “Revelation and 17 and 18 are not talking about a heathen city or empire; they are talking about Israel, the covenant people who killed the prophets...” [**]

It is our purpose now to look at some preterist interpretations of the most controversial passage in the Apocalypse, and for the preterist thesis, the most problematic, i.e. the infamous millennium. It is precisely at this point, however, that many preterist commentators shy away from applying their thesis consistently to all of Rev. [**] Even Russell expresses some hesitation. [**] M.R. King, however, does not disappoint us. Nor does the Roman Catholic scholar Eugenio Corsini, in his recent preterist commentary The Apocalypse: The Perennial Revelation of Jesus Christ. We will briefly examine the analysis of both these theologians.

We have already seen that according to King, the new heavens and earth were ushered in with the demise of fleshly Israel in A.D. 70. In keeping with the Jewish expectation of an “intermediate Messianic reign” that would precede the end of the age, [**] King contends that the one thousand years are symbolic of the forty year time span from Pentecost to A.D. 70. King writes:

The millennium is a reign of Christ (shared by His saints) for the purpose of subjugating His enemies and accomplishing the restoration of all things spoken by the prophets.
This millennial objective blends into the age ending, pre-parousia reign of Christ from Pentecost to A.D. 70... by the power of His reign the full end of the old aeon of sin and death was accomplished in the A.D. 70 demise of outward, fleshly Israel. [**]

The death and resurrection of Christ then, is “the focal point for the decisive binding of Satan...” [**] King cites the binding of the strong man in Matt. 12:29 in support of this theory, as well as John 12:31-32,”... now the ruler of this world shall be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” Through the power of the gospel, the nations would be deceived no more.

We have already seen the significance King attaches to the forty year time span, from Pentecost to A.D. 70, in terms of the “transformation that was accomplished through the body of Christ.” [**] The passage from the old to the new was taking place through the actions of the firstfruit Christians (through their dying and rising with Christ). According to King then, the resurrected souls reigning with Christ are “the millennial saints, the believers in Christ from the cross to the end of the old aeon of salvation-history. They are the “pre-end-of-the-age” saints who came to life in advance of the end of history (the Jewish age).” [**]

This process then, answers to the first resurrection, and it had the culminating effect of “bringing to life the rest of the dead (i.e. the faithful members of the Old Covenant community),” [**] which answers to the second resurrection. As we saw in Rom. 11 and I Cor. 15, King stresses the solidarity between the pre-A.D. 70 millennial saints (the firstfruits) and the rest of the dead (the harvest). [**]

In conclusion, the loosing of Satan corresponds to the great tribulation (Matt. 24) which preceded the end of the age, according to King. The nations that were deceived by Satan constituted “all nations who stood in opposition to what was revealed through Christ.” [**] The Christians were persecuted both the Romans (under Nero) and especially the Jews. King concludes, “Just as Gog and Magog are symbols of the “last hour” of the enemies of the church, the “camp of the saints” and the “beloved city” are terms borrowed from Jewish history to symbolize the new people of God on the face of the earth.” [**]

As we already pointed out, Rev. 20 has traditionally been a stumbling block in preterist eschatology. It is with some surprise, therefore, to find the Roman Catholic scholar Eugenio Corsini, professor of Ancient Christian Literature at the University of Turin, providing us with one of the most original and profound preterist treatments of Rev. 20 to date. His commentary on the Apocalypse, however, has been generally neglected in recent preterist scholarship. [**] Nonetheless, we will briefly examine his analysis of Rev. 20 before drawing this chapter to a close.

To begin, Corsini’s commentary is somewhat unique to that, for the most part, he argues Rev. is dealing not with the events which surround Christ’s second coming, but His first coming. While the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 does enter into Corsini’s analysis, he contends that a major theme (if not the major theme) of the Apocalypse is “the two
stages of the working out of the divine plan for salvation, that which took place in the Old Economy, imperfect, partial and provisional, and that which took place in a full and definitive way in the coming of Christ.”

This principle is illustrated beautifully in Corsini’s treatment of the millennium. To begin, Corsini draws a distinction between two levels of Satan’s defeat and Christ’s reign in Rev. 20. On the one hand, Satan is thrown into the bottomless pit and is bound for a thousand years (while Christ reigns for a thousand years). But on the other hand, after being released from the pit for a short time, Satan is thrown into the lake of fire forever (followed by Christ’s eternal reign). Corsini observes:

... the two series are antithetically related to one another in so far as one is provisional and the other definitive, one is temporal and the other eternal, one is limited the other universal. It is the type of contrast... which exists between the Old and the New Economy, between the new and the old covenant.

With this observation in mind, Corsini goes on to argue that “John is using the thousand years as a symbol to represent the Old Economy.” Thus, Satan is bound in a limited sense in the old covenant (he is thrown into a pit for one thousand years), but with the death and resurrection of Christ in the new covenant, he is bound in a definitive sense (he is cast into the lake of fire forever), according to Corsini. In a similar way, salvation was possible in a limited, typological way in the old covenant, Corsini argues, but with the advent of Christ, the plan of salvation reaches its climax (especially with Christ’s death and resurrection).

It is precisely with the advent of Christ then, that Satan is released from his prison, for the limited victory of the old covenant (the thousand years) looked forward to and was itself grounded in the Christ event. The first victory “must be subordinated to the historical working out of the sacrifice of Christ.” Corsini explains:

While before the coming of Christ his agents limited themselves to the persecution and slaying of the witnesses to the word of God and to Jesus, when the divinity intervenes directly in the person of Jesus Christ, Satan himself is forced to rise from his place in the bottomless pit, as his whole plan for dominion over mankind is threatened. In order to attain the opposite goal, the liberation of mankind, God disposes that Satan be freed and come forth from his prison.

The cross then, is the means by which Satan is decisively defeated, according to Corsini; this defeat is graphically represented in Rev. 20:10, where he is thrown into the lake of fire forever and ever.

But what about the first and second resurrection? Corsini argues that the millennial saints described in 20:4 refer to the martyred saints of the old covenant. Sacrificing their own lives for the testimony of Jesus and the word of God, these Old Testament saints “are welcomed in paradise immediately after their death, without
having to wait for the opening of all doors which happened with the death and resurrection of Christ.” [**] This then, is the meaning of the first resurrection. As Corsini state, “The rule of a thousand years, therefore, means that certain people, under certain conditions, are given eternal life already in the period of the Old Economy, before the redemptive act of Christ.” [**]

The rest of the dead who come to life when the thousand years are complete (Rev. 20:5), Corsini contends, refer to those who died during Old Testament times, but who were not martyred. He explains, “the exception made for the witness–martyrs is not made for them. Their destiny must wait, to be finally resolved... when the second resurrection and the second judgment will take place. This happens in the death of Christ.” [**]

In sum, Corsini understands the thousand years in a figurative sense: They signify the Old Testament economy where Satan was bound but not defeated and where salvation was available only in a limited, provisional sense. With the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ, however, Satan is bound forever and salvation is available in a definitive sense. It is the difference between the old and new covenants.

Summary

We began this chapter by looking at the preterist analysis of Matt. 24. We saw how the time reference in verse 34, that “this generation will not pass away until all these things take place,” is the interpretative key for the preterists throughout the chapter. All of the events described there are understood as referring to the time frame beginning with the Jewish Wars in A.D. 66, and culminating with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70. This latter event is understood as the time when Christ returns in judgment, bringing to a close the Jewish aeon (old covenant), and inaugurating in all its glory the new aeon (new covenant).

In the second section, we saw that the forty year time span following Pentecost and preceding the fall of Jerusalem is understood by the preterists as the time of covenantal transformation. Paul’s allegory in Gal. 4 is one text cited in support of this theory. The preterists argue that the bondwoman (old covenant) was cast out in A.D. 70, when the “present Jerusalem” was destroyed; on the other side of the coin, the new covenant was ushered in. Thus, the fall of the Jerusalem temple is understood as possessing cosmic significance: At this time the old covenant types were fully replaced by their new covenant realities. The preterists also cite many imminent time references that occur throughout the Epistles to prove that the covenantal transformation was to occur in “that
generation.” Furthermore, both the restoration of Israel (Rom. 11) and the resurrection of the dead (I Cor. 15) are understood by King in terms of the corporate resurrection of historical Israel from sin-death at the A.D. 70 consummation.

Finally, we looked at one basic preterist interpretation of the Book of Revelation. In this view, both the Christians and “those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan” claimed to be the rightful heirs of the God’s kingdom. The Apocalypse describes the ongoing struggle between those two contrasting Israels, temples, Jerusalems, etc. In the end, however, the old harlot city passes away (A.D. 70), and the new virgin city is revealed as the true Jerusalem of God. In conclusion, we examined two recent, preterist treatments of Rev. 20:1-10: M.R. King understands the millennium in terms of Christ’s pre-parousia reign from Pentecost to A.D. 70, while Eugenio Corsini sees the 1,000 years as symbolizing the provisional Old Testament economy.

The task of our first chapter then, is complete. We have looked at the interpretive framework of preterism, and have found that the preterists argue that all prophecy has application in terms of fulfillment in the first century. The fall of the Jerusalem temple in A.D. 70 is understood as the focal point for the fulfillment of most New Testament prophecy. We should note that at no time in this chapter did we examine any preterist arguments for exclusive fulfillment in the first century. We simply recognized how they understand all New Testament prophecy to have application in terms of fulfillment in the first century. We will now turn our attention specifically to M.R. King and see how he departs from this basic thesis.

Chapter Two
M.R. King’s Hermeneutical Supplement

Our survey of preterist thought is not quite complete. In the previous chapter, we saw how preterists such as M.R. King argue that all prophecy has application in terms of fulfillment in A.D. 70. Now this is in no way a novel idea. In different ways, theologians throughout church history have affirmed the importance of A.D. 70 in prophetic studies. Two aspects of King’s argumentation, however, are unique.

First of all, he has systematized preterist ideas in a way hitherto unknown. With ruthless abandon, King has taken the preterist thesis and worked out its implications (in terms of fulfillment in A.D. 70) for virtually every major prophecy in the Bible. This is a unique and monumental achievement. Now we might take issue with King on a number of his interpretations. But for the most part, much to our evangelical surprise, King has made an impressive case, and we commend him for his efforts. [DWW editorial note: I don’t. I don’t commend anyone attempting to make a case for vile, disgusting, abominable heresy. But hey, that’s just me. I am funny like that.]

Now if this were all King were arguing, then we might well conclude this study right now. After all, there is nothing inherently objectionable from an evangelical perspective is
applying prophetic passages to A.D. 70. To one degree or another, most evangelicals do see some prophecy being fulfilled in the first century. But as we stated above, there is a second thing which sets King’s analysis apart from traditional scholarship.

The Departure from Orthodoxy

King is not simply satisfied with concluding that all prophecy if provisionally applicable in terms of fulfillment to the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. On the contrary, he moves beyond those argumentative grounds and conclude that all prophecy is “applicable exclusively to the final period of the Old Testament aeon.” In this way, King denies that prophecy, in any way, is applicable to future historical events. As he bluntly states, “The application of prophecies to historical events beyond the end of Judaism is an abuse of the word of God.”

Of course, all forms of orthodox Christianity have always taught and affirmed a future return of Christ. As the Nicene Creed clearly states, Christ “shall come again, with glory, to judge both the living and the dead.” King, however, would have us believe that the historic, orthodox doctrine of the second coming of Christ is no-where to be found in Scripture; in fact, it is a denial of Scripture. Flying in the face of nearly two thousand years of ecumenical-exegetical consensus, King boldly throws down the gauntlet to those of us who insist on affirming a future parousia of Christ as taught in the gospels, the epistles, and Revelation from the time and events of that generation, unwittingly denies the inspiration of God’s word... According to King then, to affirm the historic creeds of the Christian faith is to unwittingly deny the inspiration of the Bible.

In short, a “futurism concerning the last things tied to Christ’s parousia,” writes King, “cannot exegetically be extended beyond the consummation of the Jewish age.” At the risk of being redundant, we quote King one last time to drive the point home. He comments:

... the tragic error in Biblical exegesis is making after his ascension into heaven, two comings of Christ out of one, and separating them by two thousand years or more. And there is no exegetical basis for it, except to support and advance a traditional concept of God’s scheme of redemption that exists only in the mind of mind and not in scripture.

We see plainly then, King’s attitude towards the traditional concept of a future coming of Christ. It “exists only in the mind of men and not in scripture.”

We want the reader to understand the ramifications of what King is saying here. In finding the alleged application of all prophecy in A.D. 70, King believes that he has thereby proven that prophecy cannot have application beyond A.D. 70. For now, it is our purpose simply to determine exactly what it is in King’s analysis that leads him to this conclusion. In King’s view, why does fulfillment in A.D. 70 necessarily rule out any future fulfillment?
Time and History

After considerable reflection on King’s position, we have concluded that the essential issue is his notion of the biblical view of time and history. King states his basis thesis, “Christ’s cross and parousia... are the two foci of one complete, indivisible eschaton (end time) that pertain to the fulfillment of all redemptive history and prophecy within the closing period (“the last days”) of the Old Testament soon (age).” [**] It is important that we understand what King is saying here; thus, we will spend some time unpacking this statement.

The traditional evangelical approach is to see the old covenant as being consummated within the cross/Pentecost time frame. The Christian age follows, and Christ returns in order to usher in either the millennium or the new age at the consummation of history (depending on one’s millennial view). The “this age” in Scripture, therefore, is taken to mean the time span between the creation and termination of the material world, whereas the “age to come” is understood as the heavenly or consummated age that follows this material world.

King argues that this traditional approach errs in several ways. To begin, it fails to recognize that the old aeon is carried over past the cross/pentecost time frame, albeit for a short period of forty years. Sacrifices are offered in the temple until the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. At this time then, and not merely at the cross, is the old aeon brought to a close. The traditional approach, therefore, erroneously applies biblical prophecy to the end of the Christian age, and not to the end of the old age in A.D. 70, according to King. We summarizes the problem:

It is unfortunate that the coming of “that which is perfect” (I Cor. 13:10), the new heaven and earth (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1-3), the world or age to come (Heb. 6:5), the receiving of the promise (Heb. 10:36, 37) and the hope of righteousness (Gal. 5:5) have not been seen as things pertaining to the consummation of the cross-determined New Covenant at Christ’s age-consuming parousia. As a result of restricting covenantal change to the time frame of the cross, all that is written in the New Testament concerning change or transition is made the meaning of the New Covenant aeon rather than the meaning of the period of time pertaining to covenantal change. [**]

The root of the problem King argues, is that the traditional approach fails to recognize the true meaning of redemptive history. King contends that it is not natural or profane history that the biblical writers had in view, but covenantal history. He explains:

The difference between the two covenants (“this age” and “the age to come”) is the difference between promise and fulfillment. Christ was the telos of Old Testament redemptive history. His mission was the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise, not a continuation of it by another interval of redemptive
history. Redemptive history is the time between the promise (Abraham) and the fulfillment (Christ).

The interval separating the cross and the parousia, therefore, is not an extension of redemptive history but the very consummation of redemptive history, according to King. [**]

He sums the matter up in this important passage:

... the cross belongs to the end-time period of redemptive history, rather than the middle of it. It is the decisive beginning of the eschaton which is shortly consummated in Christ's parousia. This short span of time is both cross time and parousia time. There is an interrelationship of these two events that gives this eschaton the character and meaning of consummation in relation to redemptive history (from a backward look) and in relation to "the age to come" (from a forward look). Consummation, as it take place in the cross/parousia eschaton has a twofold meaning and direction. On the one hand, it is the completion (the ending) of the old aeon. On the other hand, it is the completion (the arrival) of the new aeon. [**]

According to King, Christ’s A.D. 70 parousia consummates both the old and new age. This is readily apparent with regard to the old age; it actually ends in A.D. 70. but what about the new age?

In King’s view, the new age, in keeping with the eternalness of the new covenant, is both singular and everlasting. As he states, “In Scripture, without a single exception, whatever follows the return of Christ is “for ever and ever” never for a limited period of time...” [**] Now if the new age is never-ending, and Christ ushers in the new age in A.D. 70, then A.D. 70 is by necessity the exclusive point of consummation.

According to King then, no prophecy can apply to events beyond A.D. 70, simply because there are no more ages beyond the one that is ushered in at A.D. 70. King explains, “Concerning His eternal purpose, God, through Christ, has spoken and acted. There is nothing more to be written and nothing more to be fulfilled. God's work through Christ is finished. It is full, complete and everlasting.” [**]

The basic hermeneutical presupposition underlying King’s analysis, therefore, is that the new age in Scripture is both singular and everlasting. And since we are in that new age, there is nothing left to be fulfilled. To look for future eschatological events then, is to misunderstand the New Testament. It is to apply mistakenly biblical prophecy to the end of the Christian age (which is impossible since the Christian age never ends) rather than the end of the old age in A.D. 70. “It has the effect,” King contends, “of making the New covenant temporal, inadequate, and an age of more promise.... Hence, Christ returns to bring to an end the age that He died to establish, a concept that depreciates the salvific efficacy of the cross,” [**] according to King.
Summary

Our overview of preterist thought is now complete. In the first chapter, we saw how King and the preterists apply all prophetic passages with eschatological meaning to the events of the first century, especially the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. In this chapter, we have seen that King goes beyond this basis thesis by arguing for exclusive fulfillment in A.D. 70.

But on what basis does he reach this conclusion? First of all, King’s theory that the cross and the parousia are “the two foci of one complete, indivisible eschaton...” was seen to be crucial. King argues, against the traditional approach, that the time of covenantal transition extends beyond the cross/Pentecost time frame. In this way, the time span between the cross and the parousia is understood, not as an extension of redemptive history, but as the consummation. Indeed, King argues that redemptive history (the “this age” in Scripture) is brought to a close with the parousia of Christ in A.D. 70. The underlying assumption in this theory is that the new age is eternal, and incapable of division. Thus, there is nothing left to be fulfilled because there is nothing in the future which prophecy could refer to. In short, King’s conclusion is a universal negation of any prophetic fulfillment after A.D. 70.

The sweeping nature of King’s conclusion needs to be underscored here. For there is a great difference between positive and negative statements in logic. An analogy may suffice: the statement, “There is no gold in Florida,” is a universal negation. In order for me to prove this assertion, I would have to dig up every square inch of Florida and prove that not only have I not found gold, but that all my technology is adequate. Are my tools capable of discerning a single gold dust particle? What are the territorial rights of Florida? How deep do I have to dig? On the other hand, if I saw, “There is gold in Florida,” then all I have to do is take one step on to Florida soil and find a nugget. In the former case, one faces a Herculean task similar to King’s. Whereas in the latter instance, one’s chore is drastically reduced to a manageable minimum.

M.R. King and the preterists have made an interesting case, worthy of consideration: They have argued that virtually every single prophecy in the Bible has an application in terms of fulfillment in A.D. 70. But then M.R. King makes a universal negation: There are no other fulfillments possible after A.D. 70. As he writes, “Nothing was ever said or affirmed about the future which extended beyond the time restrictions of that generation.” Now that is a different argument all together. He is moving off the first set of grounds to an entirely different set of argumentative grounds. Now he is going to have to establish precisely what new age history is; he has to prove that there are no ages that people pass through in the new age. Furthermore, he has to show that for every single New Testament prophecy, there is only one possible level of fulfillment. He has to prove that a literal, historical fulfillment in the first century precludes the possibility of any future fulfillment.

To disprove King’s argument, all we have to do is find one gold nugget, i.e. one passage which shows that there are a sequence of successive ages in the new age, or one
example from the New Testament which demonstrates that there are varying levels of New Testament prophetic fulfillment. Is there such a nugget to be found? We suggest that there is an entire gold mine at our disposal. Or to swap analogies, we will now locate and take actual aim at King’s Achilles’ heel, and then advance on to critique his defective conclusion. This will be attempted by isolating, first and foremost, the one premise in King’s argument that is largely responsible for the defective element in his overall perspective.

Chapter Three
A Critical Response

In our first chapter, we saw how preterists find application for every prophecy, in terms of fulfillment, in the events of the first century. In our second chapter, we saw how M.R. King moves beyond these argumentative grounds and argues that prophecy was exhaustively and exclusively fulfilled in the first century. This latter conclusion poisons preterism so to speak, making it unacceptable for evangelical consumption. In this final chapter, we will see where this poison really comes from. Is it a necessary part of the preterist menu, or has M.R. King spiked the punch?

To put it another way is there a discrepancy between what King has proven (fulfillment of prophecy in A.D. 70), and some of the actual conclusions he draws (exhaustive fulfillment in A.D. 70)? Even if the interpretive framework of preterism we looked at in chapter one of this study is true, does it necessarily lead to the arguments of King we looked at in chapter two? Is it possible for a prophecy to have application, in terms of fulfillment, to both the first century and to historical events in the future? Is there anything intrinsic to preterist eschatology that would lead someone to deny the traditional doctrine of the second coming of Christ?

In answering these questions, we will examine three key concepts in this chapter: The problem of time, multiple fulfillment of prophecy, and the meaning of the temple. We will also develop the idea of recapitulation, a primary motif throughout our analysis. However, as we pointed out in our introduction, we will critique King assuming that the interpretive framework of preterism is correct, or at least plausible. In other words, we will not critique King’s exegesis, but his hermeneutic. For the sake of argument, we will allow to stand for the present the hypothesis that all prophecy was fulfilled in a provisional way in A.D. 70. But does this imply exhaustive and exclusive fulfillment in A.D. 70, as King argues?

The Problem of Time

At the heart of M.R. King’s approach, as we saw in chapter two, is the conviction that there is “nothing more to be fulfilled.” [**] This stems essentially from the fact that we are in the new age, and since the new age is everlasting, there is nothing left for prophecy to refer to. This theory assumes that the only conception of new age history in the Bible is that of a single, never-ending period of time which cannot be divided. King explains, “the age to come... had a beginning that coincided with the
eschatological ending of ‘this age,’ but it does not have an end (Eph. 3:21) In this sense it is eternal; meaning unending in time.” [**]

We have no argument against the claim that the new age is everlasting; this seems clear from Scripture. However, there is one scenario that King has apparently not considered. What if new age history itself could be divided into various ages? What if, within the one new age, there were a plurality of successive and progressive ages? What if Scripture actually taught such an idea? The is, the Apostle Paul quite naturally refers to the ages to come in Eph. 25:7: [**]

But God... seated us with with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:4-7).

By referring to the “ages to come,” Paul appears to anticipate a plurality of successive ages to be manifested in the new age. As John Macpherson writes, “It is simply and broadly ‘future ages,’ whether in this world or in the next.” [**]

Paul also refers to the old age in the plural. After pointing out some illustrations from the history of Israel, he concludes in 1 Cor. 10:11:

Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. [**]

This passage appears to indicate that within the one old age, there were a “series of ages.” [**]

Despite Paul's clear reference to the “ages to come” in Eph. 2:7, [**] King argues over and over that the only conception of the future “age to come” in Scripture is a single age that is everlasting and incapable of division, an age which began with Christ’s parousia in A.D. 70. Thus, in his view, any future fulfillment of prophecy would necessarily “undermine the saving efficacy of the cross” asking “temporal what is declared to be everlasting - the New Covenant Age (Heb. 13:20). [**] In short, King makes the assumption that a future parousia must “mean either (1) the consummation of the Old Covenant age that continued beyond the cross till the parousia, or (2) the consummation of the New Covenant age that continued redemptive history beyond the cross.” [**] In this way, King sets up a false dilemma; he continues:

If (1) is chosen, then the cross was not a decisive event for ending the Old Covenant age apart from Christ’s parousia. If (2) is chosen, then the New Covenant age that was established through the cross is brought to an end by the parousia of Christ, hence Christ’s personal parousia is set against the purpose of His death. That is, Christ returns to end the age that He died to establish... [**]
The underlying assumption in this argument is that there are only two possible ages that Christ could return to consummate in the future, the old age or the new age. However, we differ with King on this point.

First of all, we agree with him that the old age was brought to a close with the fall of Jerusalem. Second we think the view that the new age was established in A.D. 70 is at least plausible. If the new age consists of a sequence of ages, however, as Paul suggests in Eph. 2:7, then it follows that at some point(s) in time you move from one age to the next (all within the new age). Now once you make this transition, the age you move away from becomes the old age. A future parousia of Christ, therefore, far from rendering the new age temporal, as King argues, is what we would expect when we move from one age to another in the new age. Prophecy, therefore, can have application in terms of fulfillment to a future provisional age without denigrating the salvific efficacy of the one, everlasting new covenant age.

King’s inability then, to account for Paul’s “ages to come” calls into question his overarching, monolithic interpretation of the Christian era. In short, his exclusive emphasis on the new age as a whole leads him to miss altogether the new age in its parts.

Before moving on, it is worth noting that King has in fact offered an interpretation of Eph. 2:7. He comments, “The ‘coming’ of the ages (the culmination of the their designs in Christ) resulted in the display of God’s grace through Christ (Eph. 2:7)” [**] In other words, according to King, “the ages to come” really means the “culmination” of the ages. This, however, is not even exegetically plausible. First, we again quote the text, “But God... raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace...” We should note, at least in passing, that (the ages to come) is universally recognized by commentators and exegetes as having some kind of reference to the future. Indeed, there is nothing in the text to suggest otherwise. God is going to show the riches of his grace in the “ages to come,” not in the ages which have culminated in Christ.

Recapitulation and Typology

We have seen then, that both the old and new covenant age consists of successive ages. The significance of this idea will become clearer in this section, as we examine the nature of biblical history. In particular, we will focus our attention on the important concept of typology, the key we believe, for a proper understanding of prophetic fulfillment.

To begin, we must recognize that biblical history is characterized by a profound pattern of recapitulation. Old covenant history, for example, consisted of a recurring pattern of creation, fall, and redemption. It is, as Robert Brinsmead puts it, “the biblical principle of the recapitulating history of events” [**] that we are are referring to. Brinsmead elaborates:
The Old Testament presents a recurring pattern of captivity and restoration.... Israel’s captivity and bondage to Pharaoh recapitulate Adam’s captivity in Eden. Israel’s rescue through the Red Sea recapitulates Noah’s rescue from the waters of the Floor. Likewise, the captivity of the Jews in Babylon for seventy years recapitulates the Egyptian bondage. God’s act in delivering His people from Babylon recapitulates the Exodus. The prophets depict this coming deliverance from Babylon (and sometimes from Assyria) as the Exodus redivivus... [**]

The point is that Scripture is full of prophetic themes which are continually repeated and fulfilled on higher levels as redemptive history passes through successive eras or ages. [**] “This concept of recapitulation is,” Kenneth J. Woollcombe write, “... entrenched in the Old Testament eschatological prophecies.” [**]

The notion of recapitulating history gains support from the work of a number of scholars who define typology precisely in terms of the repetition of the acts of God. Francis Foulkes, for example, argues that “history is itself prophetic... in the sense that all history... teaches us the principles on which God rules and will rule as Lord of history.” [**] Thus, typology is understood primarily as the “interpretation of the divine action in history...” [**]

Following this train of thought, R.T. France describes typology as “essentially the expression of a conviction of the unchanging principles of the working of God, and of the continuity between his acts in the past and in the present.” [**] This is also the position defended by Geoffrey W.H. Lampe, who emphasizes the “recurring rhythm of the divine activity” [**] in typology. As Woollcombe states, “Again, just as the recapitulative nature of the saving acts of God in Christ is at the heart of the fulfillment of prophecy, so it is at the heart of typology.” [**]

Many writers, recognizing this repetitive pattern, understand typology as primarily “a form of applying and showing significance to some of the patterns in God’s salvific over the ages.” [**] Thus, types are understood as “modern illustrations rather than divine predictions.” [**] In this way, the historical meaning of the passage becomes the only meaning, and the “typical sense” is eliminated from exegesis.
While we do admit that typology is retrospective in the sense that it is often not explicitly recognized until the coming of the antitype, it is also prospective. Typology does possess, like prophecy, a genuine predictive element. As Charles Fritsch states, “Typology differs from prophecy in the strict sense of the term only in the means of prediction. Prophecy predicts mainly by means of the word, whereas typology predicts by institution, act or person.” If typology is predictive, however, then it is part of the original meaning of a passage. Thus, it is a legitimate aspect of biblical exegesis, even though it is not always explicitly “intended” by the author.

We are suggesting, therefore, that discerning the “typical sense” is a vital step in the exegetical process. The “typical sense” cannot be understood, however, until the literal-historical sense is first understood; the typical is grounded in the historical. St. Thomas Aquinas’ important distinction between the words of Scripture and the things signified by the words helps clarify the matter. He writes:

That God is the author of holy Scripture should be acknowledged, and he has the power, not only of adapting words to convey meanings (which men also can do), but also of adapting things themselves. In every branch of knowledge words have meaning, but what is special here is that the things meant by the words also themselves mean something. That first meaning whereby the words signify things belong to the sense first-mentioned, namely the historical or literal. That meaning, however, whereby the things signified by the words in their turn also signify other things is called the spiritual sense which is based upon the literal and presupposes it.

Finding the meaning of the words of Scripture through grammatico-historical methods is only the first step, albeit the most important step, of biblical exegesis. We must not neglect, however, the spiritual or typical sense, i.e. the meaning of the things signified by the words of Scripture.

Thus, if the words of the New Testament prophecies, as M.R. King argues, signify the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, what does the destruction of the Jerusalem temple itself signify?
In sum, when typology is recognized as a legitimate aspect of exegesis, then the idea of multiple fulfillment of prophecy becomes clearer. Certain prophecies ordained by God are historically fulfilled at one level, but are recapitulated at even higher levels as they move towards their final, climactic fulfillments. Now we can determine the initial, historical meaning of prophecy through the normal methods of grammar, syntax, etc. This is not always the case, however, with the typological meaning; it is not “intended” by the author in the strict sense. Yet, it is as much a part of the meaning of a given passage as the literal-historical sense.

Unfortunately, M.R. King’s exclusive emphasis on the initial historical fulfillment in A.D. 70 leads him to miss altogether the spiritual or typological meaning of New Testament prophecy. In short, King interprets prophecy in a literal-historical vacuum.

Before moving on, we want to emphasize the fact that in many respects, as we have noted, prophecy is similar to typology. As Jean Danielou puts it, “prophecy is the typological interpretation of history.” [**] H.D. Hummel adds, “... there is an internal connection between prophecy-fulfillment forms of expression and the eschatology implicit in genuine biblical typology.” [**] Lampe even describes the prophet as a “typologist.” He explains:

The prophet looks in faith to the future; but the basis of his faith is in the history of the past, present and future linked in a series of correspondences which reflect the steadfast consistency of the living God. [**]

Thus, prophecy is not primarily a matter of predicting specific details about future events; [**] in fact, such predications are the exception, and not the norm. More than foretelling, the prophets were forthtelling, i.e. carrying the covenant lawsuit against the people. The prophets has faith in the consistent acts of God, and knew, for example, that blessings and curses would follow either obedience or disobedience. It would be surprising, therefore, if they did not intend prophecies to have various secondary applications beyond their initial, literal-historical fulfillments. In short, we believe that typology is a regular theme with regard to prophetic fulfillment.

Recapitulation and Multiple Fulfillment
In the previous section, we saw how it is possible for prophecies to have more than one fulfillment. They are historically fulfilled at one level, and spiritually or typologically fulfilled at a higher level. Are there any examples in the Bible, however, of prophecies with varying levels of fulfillment? Were any of the New Testament authors themselves cognizant of multiple fulfillment of prophecy? If such a precedent existed in Scripture, it would reinforce our case. Indeed, if our theory is correct, then we should expect to find both evidence for and examples of multiple fulfillment; it is to this task that we now turn.

Matthew 2:15

The use of Hosea 11:1 in Matt. 2:15 has been vigorously debated by New Testament scholars. The passage is one of Matthew’s famous “formula citations,” a group of eleven quotations all introduced by fulfillment formulas and diverging from the Septuagint in form. The passage reads:

And he arose and took the child and His mother by night, and departed for Egypt; and was there until the death of Herod, that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, “Out of Egypt did I call My Son” (Matt. 2:14–15).

Due to the scope of this study, we cannot examine the numerous hermeneutical questions raised by this passage in any detail. For our purposes, it is enough to recognize with Robert Gundry “that the preservation in and the return from Egypt of the representative Israelite (i.e. Jesus Christ – R.W.) were divinely designed to recapitulate the same experience of the whole nation.” The literal–historical reference of Hos. 11:1 is the exodus of historical Israel from Egypt. This exodus, however, was itself ordained by God to point to something even greater, i.e. the exodus of Jesus Christ from Egypt. Irrespective of whether you call this an example of prophecy, or typology, or even a sensus plenior, it is clear that Hos. 11:1 refers, at one and the same time, to the exodus from Egypt of historical Israel, and in a deeper sense, to Jesus Christ.

Matthew 2:17–18
It might be argued that since Matthew is not quoting a direct prophecy in 2:15 (i.e. Hos. 11:1), it cannot be cited as an example of multiple fulfillment. Perhaps Matt. 2:17–18, a “formula citation” which quotes Jer. 31:15, is a clearer example of one prophecy having various levels of application. After alluding to the slaughtering of the male children in 2:16, Matthew concludes:

Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying, “A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more” (Matt. 2:17–18).

The weeping of Rachel in Jer. 31:15 has at least a twofold application in terms of fulfillment. First of all, the prophet depicts “Rachel, the ancestress of the tribes of the Northern Kingdom, weeping over her exiled children at Ramah...” Thus, the literal–historical fulfillment of Jer. 31:15 is the exile of the Northern tribe in 722 B.C. It is clear, however, that Matthew sees this text as being fulfilled at an even higher level with the slaughtering of the male children (Matt. 2:17–18). Both of these incidents then, fulfill Jer. 31:15.

Matthew 13:14–15

This is probably the best example of Matthew’s awareness of multiple fulfillment. After referring to the hard-hearted Jews who could not understand the parables, Matthew quotes Isa. 6:9–10:

And in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, “You will keep hearing, but you will not understand; and you will keep on seeing but will not perceive; for the heart of this people has become dull, and with their ears they scarcely hear, with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I should heal them” (Matt. 13:14–15).

The distinctive thing about this text is the introductory formula itself. Gundry explains:

Matthew gives us one clear indication that he did distinguish between levels of prophecy. The introductory formula which introduces Is 6:9–10 in Mt 13:14 uses “to fulfill completely,” or perhaps even, “to fulfill again.”
Thereby is displayed a consciousness that the Old Testament text had a meaning for Isaiah’s day and a further meaning for New Testament times. [**]

This becomes even clearer when we examine the Old Testament context. Isa. 6:9–10 was a prophecy finding its historical fulfillment with the tribe of Judah, “a people of unclean lips” (vs. 5), who defied the prophets and disobeyed God. In Matt. 13 this same prophecy is fulfilled again, on a higher level, when the hard-hearted Jews defy Jesus, refusing to understand His parables. [**] Simply put, Isa. 6:9-10 is a classic example of multiple fulfillment of prophecy.

The Abomination of Desolation

The abomination of desolation is found in the gospels in Matt. 24:15, Mark 13:15, and Luke 21:20, and is clearly taken from the Book of Daniel. [**] Numerous commentators have argued for a pre-Christian fulfillment of this text. France, for example, state, “The phrase ... is a description of the desecration of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 BC, when he erected in the temple both an image of Zeus Olympia ... and an altar for his worship.” [**]

Yet, in the Olivet Discourse, this same phrase is used by Jesus in reference to the impending fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, and was probably fulfilled in that catastrophe. [**] Our point is simple: The “abomination of desolation” is yet another prophecy that has application in terms of fulfillment in more than one place.

Summary

We began this section by briefly examining two of Matthew’s well known “formula citations.” In each instance, we found that the Old Testament quotation in view was an example of a prophetic theme having an historical fulfillment in the Old Testament and an even greater, typological fulfillment in New Testament times. Apparently, Matthew quite regularly builds on Christological fulfillments that assume recapitulation. Furthermore, we found that Matt. 13:14-15 demonstrates that Matthew, as Gundry put it, “distinguished between levels of prophecy.” We also identified the “abomination of desolation” as a prophecy with multiple fulfillments.

Why is it significant, however, that we found in Scripture examples of multiple fulfillment of prophecy? It is significant because we suggested earlier in this chapter the possibility that some New Testament prophecies may apply both to A.D. 70 and to historical events in the future. Now such a theory would be questionable if there were no examples in Scripture of prophecies having application in terms of fulfillment in more than one place. In fact, M.R. King’s system is built upon a supposition that multiple fulfillment is not a regular theme or pattern with regard to prophetic fulfillment. But the fact is, there are
innumerable examples of multiple fulfillments. [**] Far from it being absent in Scripture, it is commonplace:

It is interesting that M.R. King himself, in at least one instance, actually defends multiple fulfillment; the passage is worth quoting in full:

Peter said, in anticipation the imminent end of all things (the coming of Christ and end of the then existing heaven and earth (I Pet. 4:7), “nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Pet. 3:13). This promise of a new heaven and earth is taken from Isa. 65:17-19 and 66:22-24, and had a limited fulfillment in Israel’s return from Babylonian captivity. But beyond the limited restoration, this prophecy (as many other prophecies) was understood as having an ultimate, final meaning and fulfillment through Christ in “the age to come.” The city of Jerusalem was the focus of this new heaven and earth, not only in its limited fulfillment in Israel’s return from Babylon (Isa. 65:18, 19), but also in its fulfillment in Christ in the New Covenant aeon, as seen in chapters 21 and 22 of Revelation. [**]

King recognizes the recapitulative element in Isaiah’s prophecy of a new heaven and a new earth, and makes the distinction between a “limited fulfillment” and an “ultimate, final meaning and fulfillment.” [**] For King, this ultimate fulfillment is realized with the coming of the new age in A.D. 70. But if, we we have seen, there are a sequence of ages in the new age (Eph. 2:7), why cannot this pattern of multiple fulfillment continue into the future? Indeed, in this section, we have shown the strong precedent in Scripture set for just such multiple fulfillments.

Recapitulation and the Temple

The destruction of the Jerusalem temple in A.D. 70 is the prophetic focal point, as we saw in chapter one, for M.R. King’s system of eschatology. It marked the “consummated ending” of the new age. [**] Not only does King see all New Testament prophecy being fulfilled at this time, but as we saw in chapter two, he sees it as being fulfilled exclusively. The task of this section is to examine a little more closely the meaning of the temple in terms of its implications for the fulfillment of prophecy. We will raise the questions: Does the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in A.D. 70 exhaust all of the prophetic meaning of temple judgment in Scripture?

The meaning of the Temple

It is immediately evident that the temple is understood in many different ways in Scripture. [**] At one and the same time Christ’s body is a temple (John 2:19-21), the historical temple in Jerusalem is a temple (Matt. 24:1), our individual bodies are temples (I Cor. 6:19), the local church is a temple (I Cor. 3:16-17), the universal church is a temple (Eph. 2:21), and the literal heavens and earth are a temple (Isa. 66:1). [**] Christ, however, is the reality, the archetypical temple of which all the other temples are recapitulative models. [**]
Now there is a pattern that is common to each one of these temples. They all must undergo a destruction and a resurrection similar to the destruction and resurrection that Christ, the archetypical temple, undergoes. As we have seen, M.R. King emphasizes this idea, and we think correctly, with regard to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in A.D. 70. We believe, however, that King has erred by not recognizing that prophecy has application in terms of fulfillment to these other temples which, like the Jerusalem temple must also undergo destruction.

First of all, this is true, to take one example, at the individual level. In I Cor. 3:12-13, Paul addresses each individual Corinthian in terms of their own moral works which will be “revealed with fire” in “the day” (vs. 13). Paul writes:

Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work (I Cor. 3:12-13).

King would argue that “the day” in verse 13 refers to the corporate, historical judgment of unbelieving Israel and the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in A.D. 70.

Even if we grant that I Cor. 3:12-15 is fulfilled in this way, that hardly implies exhaustive fulfillment. For no matter whether the Corinthian lives to A.D. 70, A.D. 80, or A.D. 90, “each man’s work will become evident” when he dies and is judged. In other words, each person’s temple is destroyed at the point of death. If his temple is wood, hay, and stubble, he will be burned up, with no resurrection glory. But if his moral, covenantal temple is made of gold, silver, and precious stones, refined as through fire, he becomes a resurrected temple like Christ.

In saying this, we are not denying the cosmic significance, in terms of corporate judgment, of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. We are merely recognizing that the Jerusalem temple does not exhaust the prophetic meaning of temple judgment in Scripture. Our bodily temples are withering away just like the old order of Israel withered away. We should expect, therefore, that what happened to Israel’s temple in A.D. 70 will also happen to our individual temples. As we have seen, the biblical writers were cognizant of this type of recapitulation.

We will now apply this idea to the most important prophetic theme in the New Testament, the parousia of Christ. We have seen how King argues for a literal, historical fulfillment of Christ’s parousia in A.D. 70. If, however, the corporate body of national Israel experiences a parousia of christ with the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, it naturally follows that each of our individual bodies will also experience a parousia of Christ with the destruction of our own temples at death. The Lord will come to us in judgment, and His epiphany will bring either blessing or curse, the same as it did for Israel.
On the basis of Rev. 2, we see how this parousia of Christ happens at a higher recapitulative level with local churches. Christ threatens to come in judgment to the churches of Ephesus (Rev. 2:5) and Pergamum (Rev. 2:16) because of their disobedience. Thus, what is experienced by each individual at the point of death, is also experienced when various local churches are judged and destroyed physically and spiritually.

Once we see this recapitulative pattern extending beyond A.D. 70 for the individual temple and for the local church temple, what the historic church has always taught would seem to naturally follow. That is, the universal church temple and the cosmological temple (the literal heavens and earth) will also undergo this pattern of judgment and destruction in Christ’s final parousia. The historic doctrine of the second coming of Christ, **[** therefore, is firmly rooted in Scripture.

All of this will become clearer if we keep in mind the cosmic symbolism of the Jerusalem temple, a symbolism embedded in the Hebrew mind-set. Raphael Patai, a leading specialist in the anthropology of Ancient Israel, tells us, “the Temple was regarded as a miniature picture of the world...” **[** Likewise, R.E. Clements observes, “the essential claim that the temple and its furnishings did possess a cosmic, or naturalistic, symbolism must be upheld.... The underlying idea was that the temple was a microcosm of the macrocosm...” **[** What happens to the microcosm also happens to the macrocosm. If the microcosm undergoes a destruction and experiences a parousia of Christ in A.D. 70, the pattern is set. We should expect the same thing, at an even higher recapitulative level, to happen to the macrocosm, and, that is what the historic, orthodox church has always affirmed. The destruction of the Jerusalem temple in A.D. 70, therefore, was a graphic demonstration of what happens to a temple when it becomes defiled. Far from exhausting New Testament prophecy, it set the stage for further fulfillments.

It is ironic that the cosmic symbolism of the Jerusalem temple, in one sense, is the very thing that keeps King from affirming future application of prophecy. King reasons that since the Jerusalem temple symbolizes the old heavens and earth, its destruction exhaustively fulfills those prophecies in the New Testament which speak of the cosmos passing away (e.g. Matt. 5:18, 24:35; I. Cor. 7:31; I John 2:17; Rev. 20:11) As we have seen, the “heavens and earth” do, in a very real sense, refer to the geospatial Jerusalem temple and the Old Testament economy it represents. We commend King for recognizing this fact, **[** and for pointing out its implication for the fulfillment of certain prophecies in A.D. 70. However, it does not do away with the fact that there is an even clearer reference to the “heavens and earth” in precisely the heavens and the earth. If the heavens and the earth are said to pass away, and this prophecy is fulfilled in some sense with the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, why does that rule out the possibility of a future fulfillment at the cosmological level? Indeed, the fact that the temple which is destroyed symbolizes the heavens and earth naturally leads to the conclusion that the same will occur to the heavens and earth themselves. What happened to the symbol points to what will happen to that which is symbolized.
In the final analysis, individual Christians, the church (local and universal), and the cosmos are all still temples that can undergo destruction after A.D. 70. Once it is demonstrated that the recapitulative pattern extends beyond A.D. 70 at any one of these points (individually, corporately, or cosmologically), it is evident that New Testament prophecy is not applicable exclusively to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple.

Summary

We began this chapter by examining M.R. King’s view of new age history. We pointed out that the Apostle Paul’s reference to the “ages to come” in Eph. 2:7 indicates that in the one new covenant age, there are a plurality of successive ages. We suggested, therefore, that prophecy could have application in terms of fulfillment both to the consummation of the old age in A.D. 70 and to provisional ages in the future. We also pointed out King’s failure to account for these provisional ages in his view of new age history.

Secondly, we observed that biblical history is characterized by a profound pattern of recapitulation, or typology. In the Old Testament, the acts of God are repeated and transcended as history passes through successive ages. We suggested that this recapitulative pattern we see going through the ages of the old covenant implies further application in the sequence of the new age. Furthermore, we noted that typology is a valid aspect of exegesis, an aspect which King himself ignores in his interpretation of New Testament prophecy.

Third, we looked at some examples of prophecies with varying levels of fulfillment. Included in our brief analysis were two of Matthew’s “formula citations” (Matt. 2:15 and Matt. 2:17-18, Matt. 13:14-15, and the “abomination of desolation.” These texts are all examples of prophetic themes having application in terms of fulfillment in more than one place; they are historically fulfilled at one level in the Old Testament, and fulfilled at even deeper levels in New Testament times. We pointed out that such a precedent implies that New Testament prophecies too exhibit this pattern of multiple fulfillment.

In our section, we examined the meaning of the temple, and at once found it to be a very profound and complex theme throughout the Bible. We observed that Christ is the “archetypal temple” of which all the other temples (the Jerusalem temple, our individual body temples, the local church temple, the universal church temple, and the cosmic temple) are “recapitulative models.” We observed that what happened to the temple of Christ’s body (death and resurrection) also happens to all of these other temples. The Jerusalem temple, therefore, does not exhaust, as King argues, the prophetic meaning of temple judgment in Scripture. We applied this idea to the coming of Christ, and concluded that as the Jerusalem temple experiences a parousia, so Christ will visit our individual temples at the point of death, and so His epiphany will bring either blessing or
curse to the universal church at His final parousia. We emphasized the idea, defended by a plethora of scholars, that the Jerusalem temple was a miniature replica of the world, and noted that what happened to the symbol in A.D. 70 will happen to that which is symbolized (the cosmos). We concluded this section by pointing out that since the recapitulative pattern extends beyond A.D. 70 for the individual, church, and cosmic temples, prophecy does not apply only to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, as King maintains.

Conclusion

Our theological pilgrimage through consistent preterism is just about over. But before ending our journey, we will recall where we have been. Perhaps we can put together a map for future travelers, and suggest some strategic points of departure.

Our journey began with a brief survey of the interpretive framework of preterism. We saw how preterists find application, in terms of fulfillment, for all New Testament prophecy in the first century. In particular, we observed that the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in A.D. 70 is especially significant in this regard; it marks the end of the old covenant economy, and the definitive inauguration the new covenant economy, according to preterist thought.

In chapter two, we observed that M.R. King adds an additional ingredient to the preterist pie. He argues that New Testament prophecy was exhaustively and exclusively fulfilled in the events of the first century. We saw that this conclusion stems from his view that the new age, inaugurated in A.D. 70, is both everlasting and incapable of division. Thus, there is no age for prophecy to refer to after A.D. 70.

In our final chapter, we responded to King. First, we identified a deficiency in his view of new age history. That is, King’s exclusive emphasis on the new age as a whole leaves him oblivious to the new age in its various parts. Apparently, there are a series of ages in the one new age (Eph. 2:7). Second, we noted the existence of a profound historical pattern in biblical history, which is the main theme behind typology. Typology is retrospective in the sense that it is often not explicitly recognized until the arrival of the antitype. Yet, because it is prospective, it is an essential part of exegesis. Unfortunately, King falls to incorporate typology into his interpretation of New Testament prophecy. Third, we saw that multiple fulfillment of prophecy is commonplace in Scripture. Prophetic themes are fulfilled on higher levels as history unfolds, and there is no reason why this pattern should mysteriously cease after A.D. 70. Finally, we observed that the Jerusalem temples is itself a recapitulating symbol. What happens to the Jerusalem temple in A.D. 70, therefore, also happens to our individual body temples, the church temple, and the cosmic temple.

In our introduction, we raised the question, “Even if the basic interpretive framework of preterism is true, does that framework necessarily lead to a denial, as M.R. King argues, of a future return of Christ? We answer now with an unequivocal no. M.R. King has made a sweeping claim that “Nothing was ever said or affirmed about the future
which extended beyond the time restrictions of that generation.” [**] This claim rests on a view of new age history which we have shown to be inadequate. Furthermore, we have provided positive evidence, even allowing for the possible correctness of the general preterist thesis, that a future parousia of Christ is firmly rooted in Scripture. We have shown that, even if a prophecy is fulfilled in some way in the first century, it is necessarily limited in its application to that initial, historical fulfillment. We have not advocated preterist ideas in this thesis, but we have shown that those ideas do not necessarily lead to a denial of a future return of Christ (beyond A.D. 70).

As a result, we can now turn off the theological fire alarm we sounded in our introduction. The preterist fire has been put out. And as we suspected from the beginning, M.R. King started it with the hermeneutical match of exclusive, first century fulfillment. But when the smoke clears, what do we evangelicals do with this view called preterism?

First, we must recognize that eschatology is an area in theology, probably more than any other, where evangelicals have failed to reach any kind of meaningful consensus. There is a good reason for this: Eschatology presents some profound problems that are not easily solved. We should be open, therefore, to alternative approaches other than our own. For example, suppose an evangelical scholar wrote a massive book on eschatology. And suppose that in this book, he painstakingly defends the inerrancy of Scripture against the claims of liberal critics.

Furthermore, suppose that this scholar’s number one goal is to discern the literal-historical meaning of the biblical texts. Do we need to go on? The fact is, M.R. King is such a scholar and he has written such a book. Even if his approach is different from what we are used to, he deserves both our respect and attention. In short, evangelicals should recognize preterism as a legitimate approach, albeit an approach with many potential problems, to eschatology. Given the increasing influence preterist ideas are having in the evangelical world today, [**] such recognition is essential.

Second, as we saw in chapter one, the preterists have formulated some very interesting exegetical hypotheses regarding prophetic fulfillment in A.D. 70. Due to the scope and methodology of this thesis, we have been unable to evaluate these theories. Nevertheless, we suggest that further study in this area would yield fruitful results. It may well be that evangelicals have underestimated the importance of the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Given what the preterists are saying about this awesome event, it at least deserves a closer look.

In drawing this study to a close, we offer these final comments. First of all, we hope that those readers who embrace preterist eschatology do not deny a future coming of Christ because of their convictions. Indeed, this whole study is designed to show that preterist ideas do not lead to the unorthodox conclusions of M.R. King. But let there be no mistake. If you deny a future return of Christ, then you are denying both the clear teaching of Scripture and what all forms of historic, orthodox Christianity have always affirmed. Such an ecumenical-exegetical consensus, a consensus which has lasted for
nearly two thousand years, is not to be taken lightly. Is it really true, as M.R. King implies, that all of the greatest theologians throughout the history of Christianity have all been wrong on this point? King makes this comment:

It is obvious that what is needed today is not a mammoth reconstruction program to recover what Christ actually (i.e. originally) said, for this was accurately reported by them that heard Him through the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven (I Pet. 1:12; Heb. 2:3-4). Rather, the need is an open, honest, extensive interpretations...” [**]

Such an observation is commendable, and we are all in favor of examining traditional interpretations. There are, however, certain parameters, and to move beyond them, as King has, is not acceptable.

King writes in another passage, “The cross and the end time need to be reunited within the closing period of salvation-history and let the chips fall where they may in an eschatologically divided and confused Christendom.” [**] It may well be true that confusion reigns in modern day prophetic studies, and this writer readily welcomes any insights from the preterist camp. Yet, it is clear that King has made a serious mistake by denying a future parousia of Christ (beyond A.D. 70). We hope that our thesis, therefore, has helped clear a path between the positive qualities of preterism and M.R. King’s unorthodox conclusions. At the very least, we have seen that such a path is possible.