Topics of Concern Regarding Preterism

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Topics of Concern Regarding Preterism

Full-preterism, that doctrine which teaches that the Lord Jesus Christ returned in 70 A.D. and that all of prophetic scripture has already been fulfilled, has been gaining an increasing acceptance among some over the past few years. The full-preterist, or simply "preterist" as he shall be called here, likes to assert that his doctrinal position is the result of being consistent in his interpretive methodology of the Bible.

It is true that the preterist is more logically consistent than the partial preterist. However, generally the preterist does not acknowledge the price it has cost him to achieve this consistency. He has been forced to embrace doctrines which contradict reality, doctrines which are specifically stated by Scripture to identify its proponents as unsaved, and doctrines which can destroy a person's personal relationship with God.

It is not necessary for one to be forced into logical inconsistency or to develop heretical doctrines in order to be honest in his interpretation of Scripture. Properly interpreted, the Bible naturally leads to dispensational teaching. An Appendix is included which will demonstrate how dispensationalism is the natural result of consistent Biblical interpretation.

Ward Fenley is a leading preterist. He has written a book, The Second Coming of Jesus Christ Already Happened (abbreviated SCOJCAH), which is a major document defining the preterist position. Mr. Fenley has an internet web site, is active on preterist-oriented e-mail lists, and has written numerous other articles on preterism. In this article we will use Mr. Fenley's documents as representative of the preterist position.


The basic premise of preterism may be summarized as follows: Jesus said to His disciples that He would return shortly after His resurrection in order to set up His Kingdom. Therefore, He came back within the lifetime of at least some of the disciples.

Of course, it is obvious even to the most casual observer that Jesus has not been physically present, ruling for the past 2,000 years from a visible throne in Jerusalem. This gives an apparent paradox: Jesus has supposedly been ruling over the world in fulfillment of those prophecies predicting and teaching these things, yet the world is going on as if He were not here. There is no visible throne; ungodly men are still ruling over ungodly citizens; and sickness, death, pain, and suffering have not ceased. The preterist claims that the resolution of the paradox is found by restricting the fulfillment of the prophecies about the return of Christ to the spiritual realm.

There are several Scriptural problems to the basic, fundamental tenant of preterism. In the course of this study, we will examine them in fairly great detail. However, for now we will mention three of them briefly and elaborate on them later.
First, Scripture discloses that God desires His servants to expect Christ's return at any time. The first three-fourths of the Olivet discourse in Matthew 24 discusses various events related to the second coming. The final one-fourth makes clear with emphasis that NO ONE, not even the angels in heaven, know when the return will be (see verses 36, 42, 44). God wants us to have the attitude that Jesus could return at any time, as shown by the phrase "Watch, therefore ..." in verse 42 and the phrase "Therefore you also be ready..." in verse 44. In other words, to summarize these passages, God says that no one knows when the coming will be, but-- even from the beginning-- He wants everyone to have an attitude of expectancy. He goes on to describe in verse 48 the behavior of the evil servant who in his heart does not expect the Lord to return.

So, we see two things at work in the passages involving the time of the Lord's return: First, very explicit statements that no one knows when the time of the return will actually be, and second, that God wants us to have an attitude of expectancy that it could be at any time. The wording of the New Testament time passages regarding the second coming merely implements these principles. God wanted the early church to expect that Jesus could have come back within their lifetimes-- this was for their own spiritual benefit. He likewise wants every generation since then to continue to have this same expectation, as indeed the godly of each generation have had and still do. But, He also made it very clear that no one actually knew when the time would be. The passages of Scripture have been worded the way they have in order to accomplish this Biblically stated purpose.

God has given us two more principles to keep in mind, lest we overreact if the first generation did not actually see the return of Christ.

One of these is that in the Old Testament, as a rule without exception, extensive periods of time lapsed between the prophetic promises about the first coming of the Messiah and their fulfillment by Jesus. It was 1,500 years between Moses' recording of God's promise to Adam that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent until Jesus defeated Satan at the cross. There were literally hundreds of specific, literal prophecies given in the Old Testament between 750 and 1,000 years before they were fulfilled by His first coming. So, it should not be thought unusual if now in the New Testament period we see many generations of men come and go between the giving of the new prophecies and their fulfillment,. This would simply be following the pattern God had already established in the Old Testament.

The other of these is that there are Old Testament references to the "Day of the Lord" which were written some 600 to 900 years before the Resurrection of Jesus, which were still unfilled during the lifetime of Jesus. Yet, these passages were stated as being "at hand" or "near" in their fulfillment at the time they were written. The passages are Joel 1:15 and 2:1, Isaiah 13:6, and Zephaniah 1:14; these will be specifically analyzed in Chapter 10. In other words, the Bible itself used the terms "at hand" and "near" in the Old Testament to refer to events which were at least 600 to 900 years future when they were written. This would amount to about 15 to 25 generations. So, the Bible itself
clearly establishes that when God uses phrases such as "at hand" or "near" concerning Messianic prophecy, the standard of comparison is His timeframe and not man's.

These three items in themselves are sufficient to invalidate the foundational premise of preterism.

2. Biblical Proof Modern-day Preterism is False

II Thessalonians 2:1-8 specifically identifies as false the teaching that Jesus has already come back, if it is made before certain very specific events have taken place historically:

Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.

1. Paul here identifies as a deceiver anyone whose doctrine claims that Jesus has come back before the man of sin, the one who sits in the temple at Jerusalem and claims to be God, is destroyed.

2. God says we are to take special care not to let these people deceive us: "Let no one deceive you by any means...."

This passage was not fulfilled in 70 A.D. or at any time within past church history. It is yet future, even to us. Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D. by the Roman General Titus. Titus was not the fulfillment of this passage. He did not "exalt himself above all ... that is worshipped." He was only a general--he did not even exalt himself above Caesar, let alone God. In fact, any attempt by Titus to exalt himself "above all" would have been a capital, treasonable offense, for he would have been setting himself above Caesar. This, Titus did not do.

Furthermore, Titus was not destroyed in 70 A.D. by the "return of Christ". In fact, about a decade later, Titus himself became Caesar. The details of this passage simply contradict too much of recorded history to have any relevance to what took place in 70 A.D.
Actually, Revelation 19 tells how that at the time when Christ DOES physically return to the earth, that the beast (i.e., the antichrist) will gather the kings of the earth and their armies together to fight against Christ at His return. The response of Christ will be capture him and then cast him alive directly into the Lake of Fire. At that time the Antichrist will be completely, totally, and absolutely stripped of even the slightest degree of power or authority. The beast and the false prophet are unique in that they appear to bypass the Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20. Apparently, God hates them so much that they are cast directly into Hell at the time when Jesus comes back to rule as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The Lake of Fire is also called the second death.

Even with lots of twisting, one simply cannot honestly match the prophecies of these passages to what happened in 70 A.D. or at any point in history up to our own time. The prophecies are still future. A primary purpose of the book of 2 Thessalonians is to declare that those who teach that Jesus has already come back, but before the man of sin has not only been revealed but has been explicitly destroyed by Jesus at His coming, are false teachers.

It should be clear in reading 2 Thessalonians 2 that Paul is referring to a specific individual as the man of sin, not just a symbolic one. God has very specifically and with emphasis given this passage as a test. If the events surrounding the man of sin's rise and fall cannot be identified, then we are NOT BY ANY MEANS TO BE DECEIVED by those who claim that the Day of Christ has come.

If Jesus came back at 70 A.D., then the man of sin had to be in power then, and Jesus had to destroy him at that time. There are two candidates for the man of sin. Flavius was emperor at the time. However, Flavius was in Rome during this time, not Jerusalem. Titus was the general who destroyed Jerusalem, including the temple. Flavius continued as emperor until 79 A.D. That doesn't sound like he was destroyed in 70 A.D. Then, Titus became emperor after Flavius died. That doesn't sound like much of a destruction, either. So, this passage remains yet unfulfilled, and any doctrine such as preterism that claims Jesus has already come back is specifically identified as false.

I believe the writings of Josephus concerning the destruction of the temple are extremely relevant. Basically, he records that Titus was given the responsibility to squelch a rebellion by the Jews in Jerusalem. Eventually the rebels retreated to the temple, and finally to the Holy of Holies in the temple. Titus did all in his power to get the Jews to surrender and wanted to preserve the temple as an honor to the Jew's God. When his soldiers saw the ready availability of all the gold in the temple, they went wild. By the time they were brought back under control, the temple had been completely destroyed. At no time did Titus do anything even remotely resembling what 2 Thessalonians 2 describes, hence, he is not its fulfillment. A.D. 70 is not the time of its fulfillment, and it cannot be fulfilled until some yet future date after a new temple has been built in Jerusalem. This passage is yet future.
My challenge to the preterist is this: God has specifically told us not to be deceived by any means if someone claims that the resurrection is already past and yet they are unable to identify the man of sin. So, the challenge is this: 1). tell me who the man of sin is; or 2). Explain to me why I am not to consider you to be the deceiver God specifically warned me about when He said, "Let no one deceive you by any means..."

3. The Spirit Not of God. Not all professions of faith lead to salvation.

1 Corinthians 15:2 talks about a belief which is "in vain", meaning "without success". By context this references a belief which was not effective in bringing about a person's salvation. In order to be saved a person must properly understand who Jesus is - - the unique God-man Savior who is fully man and fully God, he must understand the elements of the gospel - - justification by grace through faith apart from works, and he must believe or "rely on" these things in a spirit of repentance. Failing in any of these areas, either through ignorance, misunderstanding, or rejection by one's heart, results in a false conversion. A Biblical example of just such an instance is given in the person of Simon the Magician. In Acts 8:13 we read: "Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done." Yet, Simon's actions were not consistent with his profession of faith. Ultimately, Peter said to him in Acts 8:21-23,

21 "You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God.
22 "Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.
23 "For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."

Applying Simon's case, Peter's comment that he had "no part nor portion in this matter" seems to be a strong indication that he was unsaved.

In 2 Corinthians 13:5 Paul explicitly encourages the Corinthians to test themselves, to confirm to themselves that they truly have been saved:

"Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?-- unless indeed you are disqualified."

One of the saddest things that can happen is for a person to blindly assume he had been saved when his salvation experience was deficient in some manner and he actually was continuing without salvation, having never truly been saved. But, just how is one to test himself, to see if he is truly in the faith? There is at least one such test provided in the Bible.

In 1 John chapter 4, God provides a specific test for us to use in determining whether a spirit is from God; a few verses down this test is extrapolated to people as well. This test is particularly important to this discussion, because it applies directly to certain tenants of preterism:

1. Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.
By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God,
and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.  

I John 4:1-3

It is very easy for us to misunderstand this verse, because a key part gets lost in translation. Specifically, the phrase "has come" is in the perfect tense.

I have in my possession three Greek grammars, two at the intermediate level and one advanced. All of them are in agreement with the following discussion.

The Greek verb has different emphases than the English verb. In English, we are very concerned about the time sequence relationships as designated by tenses. In Greek, quality of time is the main focus of interest. Sequential relationships tend to be implied by context.

The following are the main Greek verb tenses and their significance; the explanation of the perfect tense is what primarily concerns us here:

**Present:** Continual Action, normally in the present time, sometimes the future. Best translated by the present participle "He is running."

**Imperfect:** Continual action in the past time. Best translated by the past participle, "He was running."

**Future:** Continual Action in the future. "He will be running."

**Aorist:** An action which took place at a point in time. The aorist normally represents past action, although occasionally it can be used for present or future activity. A typical example of the aorist tense might be translated "He ran up the stairs."

**Perfect:** This is a compound tense. It involves the combination of point-wise activity in the past and which continues to persist into the present time. This is totally unrelated to the English perfect tense. Thus, a phrase reading "He has run" should more accurately be translated "he started running and still continues to run."

**Past Perfect:** Similar to the perfect, except the action only continued for a while and has now stopped. This is totally unrelated to the English past perfect tense. Thus, a phrase reading "He had run" should more accurately be translated "he started running, and ran for a while."

Again, these definitions or their equivalent are standard and quite easy to verify from a Greek grammar of any level.
These things are mentioned because verb tense is a significant component of the test given above for evaluating the spirits. A more proper translation of the passage would be as follows:

"Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ came in the flesh and still continues in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh and still continues in the flesh is not of God."

In other words, the perfect tense of the passage indicates that Jesus is still in the flesh. After making this statement, the passage proceeds to state that if one rejects this teaching, then he does not belong to God.

When one examines this verse in the larger context of all of Scripture, this is the significance of the passage. In John 12:31 John said that Isaiah saw the glory of the Messiah (the King, the Christ). This refers to Isaiah 6; it was at this time that Isaiah saw the preincarnate Jesus on the throne. In Philippians 2, we read about how Jesus emptied Himself and took on the form of a servant. This took place when Jesus was born of a virgin, becoming the unique God-man. This was the King, the One sitting on the throne of Isaiah 6, coming in the flesh. After Jesus had died for our sins, He rose from the dead. The significance of 1 John 4:2-3 is that it teaches that Jesus not only came in the flesh, but that He continues in the flesh. Hence, His resurrection was of a fleshly body and when He returns He will still have a fleshly body. The implications of this verse are straight forward: when Jesus comes back to set up His kingdom, it will not be in some secret, invisible manner hidden from the world. Jesus is not coming to set up a kingdom limited to the spiritual realm. He is coming back in the flesh to set up a kingdom in this physical world.

God elaborates on the significance of this doctrine a little bit more. Continuing down to verse 6 we read, "We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error."

This verse indicates that there will be people who will not get these verses right. They will be in error in their understanding and will not respond appropriately when corrected. I.e., they will not hear one who tells them the truth in this area. This doctrine is so important that God says that we are to consider such a person as not belonging to Him (verse 3) and that the person has a spirit of error (verse 6).

I am not aware of any other doctrine in the Bible stating this issue so strongly. It says specifically that if a person will not respond to efforts of correction in this doctrine, then he does not belong to God. Such a person indeed, then, fails the test.

Also, we read in I John 5:10
"He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son."
God has testified that Jesus has come and still is in the flesh. God says that if a person does not believe this, then that person makes God into a liar because the person did not believe what God said about Him. **God is not interested in a person's reasons for improper belief. Either you get this right or you make God into a liar and do not belong to Him.** End of discussion, there is nothing more to say. If a person rejects these things, his argument is with God and not man.

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This is heavy stuff. These verses indicate that when Jesus rose from the dead, it was indeed a physical, fleshly resurrection and that this was to be a continuing condition. In order to explain away the invisibility of Jesus from Jerusalem for the past 2,000 years, the preterist claims that the resurrection of Jesus was merely spiritual, not physical, and that His kingdom is only spiritual, not physical. Hence, 1 John 4 cuts right into the heart of preterist doctrine and exposes it as **severe** heresy. The passage goes on very clearly to teach that a person who will not respond to correction in these things does not belong to God and makes Him out to be a liar. This is the only doctrine in the Bible containing such a serious warning. This passage should strike terror in the heart of anyone tempted by the preterist train of logic.

It is true that a significant portion of the verse gets lost in translation, i.e. that of the continuing aspects of Jesus being in the flesh. However, for a person willing to do the study, material is readily available for confirmation. Also, the passage simply teaches that the person who doesn't respond to correction is condemned. God is not interested in His reasons for getting it wrong; he needs to get it right.

A similar passage to this one is found in II John 1:7

For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

In this passage, the word "coming" is a present participle. According to the Greek grammars, a present participle is a descriptive noun-verb which describes continuing action which takes place at the time of the main verb. Thus, the significance of this verse is that it teaches that a person is a deceiver and an antichrist who does not confess that Jesus is continuing in the flesh even as of the time during which the confession is being made. When John wrote the passage, he was obviously referring to people who were denying the fleshly, physical body of the Lord Jesus Christ in a time which was after the resurrection and ascension. The preterist is guilty of the same thing. He is forced into this heresy in order to explain away the lack of the visible presence of Christ in Jerusalem for the past 2,000 years. Hence, according to this verse, the preterist is a deceiver and an antichrist.

This passage confirms our interpretation and understanding of 1 John 4.
4. Satan the source of preterist doctrine

Preterism is not a new doctrine. Even the early church was plagued with its own brand of preterists. We read in 2 Timothy 2:16-18

"16 But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. 17 And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, 18 who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some."

Hymenaeus and Philetus were preaching that the resurrection was already past, even though it wasn't. This is indeed the same as the preterist is doing today. We may look at them as being the preterists of the early church. The Bible has some interesting comments to say about them and those like them whom they represented:

1. God views their arguments as profane and idle babblings. He is not at all impressed with what they have to say. This does not mean that they had no case to present. Indeed, they may well have had a train of logic which appeared convincing, otherwise the doctrine would not have spread. But, God Himself viewed the arguments with such contempt that He judged their teachings to be nothing more than profane and idle babblings.

2. The doctrine may spread, but this is not an indication of God's blessing--rather God viewed the spread of preterism in the early church as being analogous to cancer spreading in a human body.

3. God says that those taking this position have strayed from the truth. Our analysis of 1 John 4:2 and 2 John 1:7 already showed us how the doctrine leads one into heresy.

4. The doctrine will have the effect of overthrowing the faith of some. From my own background and experience I can speculate on at least two ways this could happen. The first concerns a person who initially believed sound doctrine, but having become convinced by the preterist's false logic, departed from the truth and latched onto error. Thus, the doctrine has the effect of overthrowing an initially sound faith. A second is when there is a person who has at one time latched onto preterism and then later come to realize that it is false. However, he had become so poisoned against the truth that he continued to reject it even after leaving preterism. Feeling that he had no place acceptable to turn, he just walked away from everything. So, two possible effects of preterism on a person would be either to lead him into further and deeper heresy or to get him to abandon his faith altogether. These things are not the mark of godly doctrine.

I personally would be terrified, reluctant, and very cautious about involvement with any doctrine given this evaluation by God at any stage of the church's history.
Yet, this is not all. The chapter ends with the following statement:

23 But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. 24 And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, 25 in humility correcting those who are in opposition, so that they may know the truth, 26 and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will. 2 Timothy 2:23-26

The charge to avoid foolish and ignorant disputes we just read seems a rewording of the profane and idle babblings mentioned in the early part of the chapter. The evaluation given here in this portion for such people is not very favorable. It states that those promoting these false disputes have lost their senses and have been taken captive by the devil to do his will.

This is a heavy statement. One is using strong words whenever he says about anyone that they have been taken captive by the devil and their actions are now actually accomplishing the devil's will. Yet, the context surrounding the passage leads us to apply this to the preterist in particular, as it was apparently meant for the preterists plaguing the early church in Paul's day. However, to those who may think this is a rather strong statement, does it not really provide the only reasonable explanation for a person hanging onto a doctrine with the characteristics discussed in the next section?

5. The Blasphemy of the Preterist Argument

On page 26 of SCOJCAH, Mr. Fenley makes the following statement:

In order for the apostles and Jesus to be telling the truth, and in order for the Bible to be fully inspired by God, the signs in Matthew 24 would have had to have taken place for the integrity of the apostles and Scripture to be upheld.

It is difficult to imagine a person having the audacity to speak this arrogantly. The statement is made that if a certain personal interpretation of Scripture is not true, then the apostles were liars, Jesus was a liar, and Scripture is not inspired. This is NOT godly reasoning led by Holy Spirit.

I frequently take part in discussions involving the Biblical basis for many different doctrinal positions. Issues such as speaking in tongues, eternal salvation, mode of baptism, and Calvinism versus Armenianism are just a few of these. Normally, people pretty much limit their discussions to what they understand the Bible to teach or to what they believe common sense dictates. Arguments for one side or the other may become heated, and a person may question the spirituality or intellect or any number of things about a person who disagrees with him. However, the argumentation typically is pretty much limited to these things.
However, there is one exception and that is the modern full-preterists in their presentation of their doctrines. They seem barely to begin their case when they start claiming that if their interpretation is not right, then God lied to them. They make themselves the judge of God. They establish standards of behavior they require from God before they will serve Him or have anything to do with Him. This entire approach is forbidden by Scripture. (The approach parallels things discussed in Romans 9:14, 20 and 1 Corinthians 12:3). It is blasphemous to God's character and is a practical rejection of His sovereignty.

In all honesty, there are some statements which my spirit finds so offensive that I do not like to quote them even in order to deal with them. Yet, in Ephesians 5:11-12, we are told to expose the works of darkness, so we will have at least a limited discussion of these things.

In his book *SCOJCAH*, on page 23 Mr. Fenley makes the following statements:

There is one of three possibilities: Either Paul was misled, thus, the Holy Spirit lied and did not lead him and the rest of the apostles in all truth; the apostles were liars and deceived thousands of church members; or they were telling the truth and Jesus Christ did return when He and the apostles said He would. Using the thousand-years-as-a-day argument to interpret time statements in Scripture is vanity and makes God out to be a liar. God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar!

The passage quoted above allows for only 3 possibilities: 1. The apostle Paul was misled by the Holy Spirit or 2. all of the apostles were liars or 3. the preterist interpretation of the passages is the correct one. Then the frosting on the cake comes with the next sentence. "Using the thousand-years-as-a-day argument to interpret time statements in Scripture is vanity and makes God out to be a liar." We have already established and will later confirm with more detail that the Bible can use phrases such as "at hand" and "near" to mean dozens of generations. In Chapter 12 we will examine in detail 2 Peter 3:8, which discusses the thousand years as a day passage just mentioned. During the analysis, we will show that God has actually supplied this argument as the proper response to the preterist position. If the Bible teaches a certain truth and Mr. Fenley claims that anyone who teaches that truth is making God out to be a liar, then it is really Mr. Fenley who is calling God the liar. This is blasphemy.

The blasphemy quoted above is not unique. It is actually the foundational rhetoric used for the entire preterist argument. It is repeated over and over. In fact, much of the rhetoric used I find so offensive that I do not even like to read the material.

Are the arguments for preterism so weak that they cannot stand on their own merit? Is the blasphemy added to them in the attempt to give the argument a weight which is simply not there without it? To me, this appears to be the case.

I could fill several pages with quotes for *SCOJCAH* where the only alternatives given are that preterism is right or God has lied. However, I do not believe that dwelling on this
theme is spiritually edifying and will leave this discussion at this point. Hopefully, those who are sensitive to the Lord will not need more of this discussion for the point to be made.


   The Bible is capable of many different interpretive approaches. One approach is dogmatic. Organizations such as the Roman Catholic Church, the Mormon Church, and the Watchtower Society take this approach. A passage in the Bible means whatever they say it does. They assert that their reasons are irrelevant, beyond the capacity of the lay person to understand. All interpretive authority resides in them, and their statements are final. Another approach is the allegorical approach, such as taken by the Christian Scientists. In this approach, the physical content is simply a tool to communicate higher, philosophical truths and otherwise has no significance. Then there is the higher critical approach of the modernists. Their position is that the Bible is simply a record of how people used to think about God; they claim the Bible has no innate supernatural validity within itself.

   What is the correct approach? Does the Bible itself explain to us how it should be interpreted? Yes, the Bible itself provides the standard of interpretation - - not explicitly, but by example. The Bible was written over a period of time spanning approximately 2,000 years. Much of the Bible comments on passages which were written during earlier times. A study of how the Bible interprets itself leads one into the literal, historical, grammatical hermeneutic which in turn leads to dispensationalism.

   In particular, the prophecies concerning the first coming of Jesus Christ were filled literally:

   Micah 5:2  Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Matthew 2 records how this was properly understood even by the unbelieving priests, who told Herod and the wise men how that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem and quoted Micah 5:2. Matthew 2 then proceeds to record that Jesus was indeed born there. There was a literal physical event associated with the fulfillment of this prophecy.

   Isaiah 53 predicts the offering of Jesus' soul for our sins, the resurrection, and many other specific details, some almost trivial, about the crucifixion of Jesus. These were all fulfilled literally.

   There are 200 to 300 Old Testament prophecies which were specifically fulfilled by Jesus at his first coming. These were all fulfilled by physical events taking place within our world system. The passages relating to the first coming of Jesus were fulfilled by a literal, historical man, descending from His throne in heaven and taking on the form of human flesh. He was fully man, even while being fully God.
Many of the Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ seem to jump from his first coming to His second coming. If that portion pertaining to the first coming was fulfilled literally, that would seem to confirm that we should expect the second coming should also be fulfilled literally.

The basis of the literal interpretation is the analysis of Scripture itself.

Even if there are things hard to understand, it still remains improper to discard Biblical principles of interpretation. Indeed, 2 Peter 3:16 teaches that untaught and unstable people can twist Scripture to their own destruction. We need to study the Bible to discover a Biblical methodology of interpretation, then apply this methodology with honesty to the Bible itself. Indeed, this is the approach which leads to the literal, grammatical, historical interpretation of Scripture, which in turn leads to dispensationalism.

7. The Disappearance of Pain and Death.

The Bible very clearly teaches that in the new heavens and earth, there will be no death, sorrow, nor weeping. It then goes on specifically to state that there will be no more pain. From the perspective of the new heavens and the new earth, these will all be "former things":

"And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Revelation 21:4

This passage very clearly states without qualification that death, sorrow, crying, and pain will NOT exist in either the new heavens or in the new earth. They will have passed away; that is, they will have ceased to exist. Whether one's focus is in heaven or on earth, the view will be the same: no more death, no more sorrow, no more crying, no more pain. Hence, if one can see any of these things, he is not in either of the new heavens or the new earth.

The reality is that there is still death in the world today. There is still sorrow. And there is most definitely still pain. When a late-stage cancer patient is pleading for more morphine to deaden a pain which seems unbearable, all the philosophical rhetoric in the world is useless to soothe him. He is experiencing pain and pain so great he cannot bear it. He is not interested in philosophical discussions about whether pain still exists or not. He is overwhelmed by his pain. He knows he himself is not yet in a world in which there is no longer any pain.

A parent who has just had a lovely child molested and permanently scarred for life by a perverted criminal will be overwhelmed by sorrow and weeping. This sorrow is real and the weeping is real. Criminal statistics indicate that this is all too common an occurrence.
A Saudi Arabian Moslem who converts to Jesus Christ as Savior and then has both of his hands cut off as a judgment against his conversion will experience sorrow and pain.

The promise of Scripture is that God will someday create a new heavens and a new earth, and in them death, sorrow, weeping, and pain will no longer exist. The preterist claims that these promises have been fulfilled. Yet, a person living in reality can see that these things are still in the world today. It does God a very real disservice to claim that what we are in today represents His fulfillment of verses promising a time when these things will no longer exist. The preterist may attempt to designate these verses as valid in a spiritual realm only, but to a person who is suffering intensely and in need of relief, this is not satisfying.

This verse alone should be sufficient to demonstrate to the preterist that he has misunderstood something somewhere along the line. His doctrine is inconsistent with reality.

Before proceeding along this train of thought, we need to lay a scriptural foundation for the subsequent discussion. There are two separate items to consider. The first is a situation associated with the death and resuscitation of Lazarus. The second involves God's evaluation of His physical creation. With this foundation laid, we will then look in *SCOJCAH* and examine certain attitudes proclaimed within it.

First. Sometimes young children like to brag and quote that they know the shortest verse in the Bible, John 11:35, "Jesus wept." Jesus wept because He was moved by the grief and sorrow of Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus, who had died several days earlier. What impresses me most about this passage is how Jesus was moved with grief to the point of weeping alongside Martha and Mary, even though He knew that in a few minutes they would have Lazarus back with them and would be rejoicing. Jesus is moved by our sorrow, even though He can see the bigger picture in which that sorrow will only be temporary.

Second. All that God made was good. God made the physical universe and it was good. Indeed, as God was making the world during the six days of creation, he paused regularly and commented that the work was good: "... And God saw that it was good." Genesis, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25

Finally, after it was all completed, including the creation of man, God commented that it was very good: "Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good." Genesis 1:31

Because of Adam's sin, even the ground is cursed at the present time (Genesis 3). However, this is only a temporary situation. In Romans we read about how even though the creation is in bondage to corruption at the present time, it will be delivered from it:
18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. 19 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; 21 because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. 23 Not only that, but we also who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

Romans 8:18-23

Hence, it is strongly implied that it the creation will someday again be "very good." The bondage to decay and sin which is so evident when we look out into the world will someday end.

Now, to continue our discussion. While reading through *SCOJCAH*, I came across the following statement on page 18:

There was no deluded hope. There were no hopes in physical realities, only a certain hope that every aspect of God’s promises of a spiritual everlasting kingdom was about to be fulfilled.

In this statement Mr. Fenley confirms that the preterist limits the domain of Messianic prophecy to the spiritual realm and that it has nothing to do with the physical realm. Of course he is forced into this position since it is so obvious that what we see taking place in the physical realm is not even remotely a reasonable fulfillment of such promises as there being no more pain or suffering.

Mr. Fenley then expands this on the next page, page 19:

The modern “evangelical” world has insisted upon taking God’s precise time declarations and distorting them to fit a fleshly hope (“Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.” (Philippians 3:19). Most professing Christians are so engrossed in an eschatological outlook that will take them out of their miserable world that they misunderstand the nature of the kingdom of God. They are so consumed with a world that will give them perfect physical peace and health, that they totally disregard not only the abundance of Scripture that explains the nature of the kingdom but also the very clear time references that pertain to the imminence of the kingdom of God. Consequently, for many, their only hope is in a physically realized future kingdom and god and not in the present riches of the glory of Christ.

This passage reveals how Mr. Fenley's assumptions are forcing him into unscriptural positions. He is now condemning those who look to a physical fulfillment of God's promises, calling them fleshly. He implies that their end is destruction, that their God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame. They are chastised for looking forward to a world which will give them physical peace and health.
Yet, Jesus was moved by compassion at the suffering of Martha and Mary, even though He knew that in a matter of minutes he would remedy the cause of their concern and they would be weeping. Jesus did not condemn Martha and Mary for their sorrow. He wept along with them.

By contrast, since SCOJCAH is claiming that we are already in fulfillment of the promises of Scripture about there being no more pain or sorrow, its doctrine forces it become calloused to those who still experience it. The preterist has no hope for the person who is in pain or suffering. all he can say is that God's promises of spiritual blessings should be adequate and that a person should not concern himself with his physical condition. So, the preterist not only lives in a world disassociated from reality, but it destroys his compassion for those who are suffering and in need.

Also by contrast, whereas God has called his physical creation "very good," in SCOJCAH a person who looks forward to the redemption of the physical universe from its curse is considered to have a "fleshly hope". SCOJCAH further elaborates that those with such a fleshly hope are ones “Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.” In other words, instead of believing the promises of God and looking forward to the physical fulfillment they describe, the preterist condemns those who believe them.

The awesome component of the incarnation of Christ is that the King sitting on the throne in Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1 gave up the outward expression of His glory in order to take on human flesh, and has done so as a permanent condition. If God the Son is willing to be identified with the physical world on a permanent basis, Mr. Fenley is starting to skate on thin ice when he condemns those believe in the physical fulfillment of prophecy.

Perhaps these things can best be summarized in Isaiah 5:20-21:

20 Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! 21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!


I enjoy reading missionary stories. Missionaries are often in situations so awkward that their only hope of survival and for an effective ministry is the intervention of God into their daily affairs. The one who needs to depend upon God for his survival and effective service soon learns that a pure life is the starting point. Sin has a deadening effect upon a person's prayer life and ability to feed upon the Word of God. Just as Hebrews 11 represents a list of the spiritual "giants" of the Old Testament, I personally suspect that if God were to give such a list for the church, missionaries would occupy a significant portion of the list. What I find interesting is to hear how many of the missionaries whose stories I have read have sincerely hoped and expected that Jesus would have come back within their lifetime. Yet, their attitudes were not ones of demand, just anticipation.
They recognized God's sovereignty, of His right to bring Jesus back whenever He chooses. I have never detected in any of them even a hint of disrespect towards God for the possibility that He might choose yet to delay a little longer.

A vivid hope of the soon return of Jesus Christ is an effective motivator toward godly living. Indeed, frequently in my own life I find that this hope helps me keep a proper perspective on priorities. The world can be very attractive. I am not necessarily talking about the openly sinful attractions of the world, but simply issues like jobs and recreation. These are things which are legitimate to some degree, but the world can twist them into having an importance which becomes idolatrous, or at least inappropriate, distracting one from his service to the Lord. It is the hope of the soon return of the Lord that helps me personally to keep the proper perspective.

I believe this principle is Scriptural, being inferred by the following passages.

2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. 3 And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. 1 John 3:2-3

Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. 2 Timothy 4:8

God, in His wisdom, knows that having an eagerness to see the revelation of Jesus Christ will have a purifying effect on the life of a believer. So, Scripture has been written in such a way as to give each generation the hope that Jesus will come in that generation's lifetime. This is the simplest explanation of the time statements and is adequate.

By illustration, there is a value in attaching imminence to impending judgment. To what extent does a person stop at a stop sign? In a small city which enforces traffic laws vigorously, people may very well come to a complete stop. In a bigger city in which traffic law enforcement is not so rigid, the word stop may mean anything less than 4 miles an hour. Yet, even in the big city, when a person is aware of being immediately followed by a policeman, he will have a tendency to come to an exaggerated stop at a stop sign. What is the difference? It is the expectation of the degree of accountability that determines behavior. The person in the small town expects to be caught and fined if he bends the law even just a little. The person in the bigger city expects to get away with fairly sloppy stops—except, of course, when he is aware of being watched by a policeman, in which case a sloppy stop isn't worth the risk even in a big city. It is the expectation of just how imminent judgment is that determines how we act.

So, by comparison just how effective would it be for a prophet to say, "Repent, for in 180 years God will punish those who don't!" Such a cry to repentance would go completely unheeded, people would say, "That doesn't apply to me so I can ignore it."

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Toward the end of Matthew 24 and the beginning of 25, there is something unique. There are 4 parables given, all with a common theme: Be diligent to watch for Jesus' coming, because we do not know when it will be. The emphasis is that we do not know at all when it will be and for that reason need to be diligent that we do not become careless.

The first parable concerns the men in the field and the women grinding, where one each is taken. The parable concludes with this admonition: "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. (Matt 24:42)

The next parable concerns the man whose house was broken into by a thief. The suddenness and unexpectedness is compared to what many will find it like when Jesus returns. The parable concludes with this admonition: "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. (Matt 24:44)

The next parable contrasts the good servant and the evil servant. The evil servant is the one who has convinced himself that he does not need to worry about his master's return, for whatever reason. The parable then concludes with these words:

48But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,'
49and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards,
50the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him
and at an hour that he is not aware of, 51and will cut him in two and appoint him
his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
(Matthew 24:48-51)

This parable is similar to the description of stop sign responses given above. When a person convinces himself that repercussions are distant, it becomes difficult for him to resist temptation.

The final parable concerns the wise virgins and the foolish virgins, and concludes with the following admonition: "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming." (Matthew 25:13)

Four parables in a row and they all have the same basic message! You do not know when Jesus will return. Watch and be careful, otherwise He will come at an hour you do not expect and there will be repercussions.

There is nothing in these passages restricting them to any particular generation or group of people. In fact the first generation did not need these admonitions any more or any less than any of us throughout church history have. They address a universal situation. Hence, what we see are a series of parables, the intent of which is to admonish all of us to be watchful, to be prepared for the return of our Lord. These parables supplement the verses mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.
God wants holy lives. He wants purity in living. He wants repentance. Because of the nature of man's mindset, this can best be accomplished by a person expecting that accountability is imminent. Hence, passages discussing the Day of The Lord in both the Old Testament and the New Testament are written so as to produce a sense of urgency and expectancy within the hearer. This is not a matter of God being dishonest. It is a matter of recognizing a legitimate need we have because of the condition of our hearts and writing in such a manner as to address that need.

The New Testament merely continued the Old Testament idea that the coming of Christ and the day of the Lord are imminent when looked at from the perspective of God's overall timetable. Neither Jesus nor the apostles seemed to be worried about *at hand, near, and quickly* as used in the Old Testament referring to extended lengths of time (see Chapter 11). Neither should we. Likewise, we should not worry about this same practice when it has been carried over to the New Testament.

Mr. Fenley gives many, many examples of passages that talk about Christ returning shortly, *iterated in one form or another*. These are intended as proofs that Jesus then had to have come back within the first generation. However, if God sees a value for every generation to know the cleansing effect of anticipating a soon return of the Lord and if He so pleases as to write Scripture in such a way as to produce this hope, then I certainly have no right to find fault, as does the preterist. I am not God's judge, unlike the preterist. Rather, I myself have this hope, even as I believe God wants me to. And, I am ready to give reasons why I think the hope is valid for me, yet also recognizing that God has the right to delay matters yet further if He so chooses.

At the end of the book of Revelation, the Apostle John records the following words of encouragement given him by Jesus:

> He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly."
> Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! (Rev 22:20)

John's heart cry was that Jesus would indeed come quickly. It is mine, too. Is it yours? God wants it to be.

### 9. Ten reasons to shun preterism:

The following ten reasons to shun preterism summarize the above discussion:

1. Scripturally, the preterist is a *deceiver*, being one who teaches that Jesus has come back before the man of sin has been revealed. (pp. 5-7).
2. It forces one into doctrines which God says identify those who do not belong to him. (pp. 9-10).
3. It is called *profane and idle babblings* by God. (p. 11).
4. God calls its spread a cancer. (p. 11).
5. God says that those espousing it have strayed from the truth. (p. 12).
6. God says that those espousing it have lost their senses. (p. 12).
7. God says that those espousing it have been taken captive by the devil. (p. 12).
8. It teaches a person to blaspheme the character of God. (pp. 13-14).
9. It teaches a person to make himself the judge of God, thus denying God's sovereignty. (p. 13).
10. It is not consistent with reality. (p. 16).

A person should be terrified of having anything to do with this doctrine.

We will next study some of the time passages themselves.

We saw that in 2 Timothy 2:16 God called the arguments of the early-church preterists *foolish and idle babblings*. We saw from 2 Thessalonians 2 that if the modern-day preterist cannot identify the man of sin, that he should then be counted a deceiver, even as those of the early church were. So, if the modern-day preterist is simply continuing the same errors as Hymenaeus and Philetus did in the early church, we should expect that their arguments will likewise be *foolish and idle babblings*. In other words, when examined carefully, their arguments will be found to have no substance.

The Bible says that Satan is the source of early-church preterism. By observation we see that Satan's rhetoric typically consists of slander, ridicule, twisting passages, and outright misstatement of fact. In examining the rhetoric used in *SCOJCAH* to establish modern-day preterism, we will see that it follows this same pattern. This would seem to confirm that the modern-day preterist has likewise been taken captive by Satan to do his will.
10. **At Hand, Quickly, and Near** in the Old Testament

One of the major arguments presented in *SCOJCAH* for the preterist position is the abundance of certain "time phrases" which imply that Jesus is going to return soon. There are primarily three of these: *shortly*, *near*, and *at hand*. Many verses in the New Testament use these phrases in reference to when Jesus will return. For practical purposes these words may be considered synonyms. *SCOJCAH* goes to great length in an effort to prove that the total impact of these passages requires Jesus to have returned during the "first generation", while at least some of those hearing Him speak were still alive.

However, all of this rhetoric is rendered meaningless by one simple fact: Phrases such as *at hand*, *quickly*, and *near* are also used in the Old Testament concerning the time of the approaching Day of the Lord. These passages were typically written between 600 and 800 years before the crucifixion and resurrection. Yet, they still had not taken place by then. God was able to have Isaiah say that the Day of the Lord was *at hand*, yet have it still be pending at least some 800 years later. Instead of *at hand* referring to something which must take place within the lifetime of its hearers, it rather appears to refer to something which will definitely happen at some point in time, something which God wants the hearer to apply to himself, something that could be but is not required to be at any moment, and something for which only God knows the exact timing of its occurrence. Whether the elapsed time between the prophecy and fulfillment is a single generation or dozens of generations is not the issue. Rather, the issue is the repentance and faithfulness that God desires from the expectancy of imminency. If the preterist were willing to understand and accept this principle, he could have avoided backing himself into all of the heresy we discussed earlier.

This chapter will be devoted to studying the Old Testament *at hand* and similar passages.

The phrase **The Day of the Lord** examined.

The Bible teaches that someday the entire world is going to endure a severe judgment. In describing this judgment, Jesus said it was a time of when "there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened." (Matthew 24:21:22). This is a time of judgment yet future to the days of Jesus which is unique in its severity. In fact, in discussing this period the Book of Revelation has passage after passage talking about how here a quarter of the world died (Revelation 6:8), there a third died (Revelation 9:18), and unstated numbers elsewhere (Revelation 8:10, 19:19-21). By the time all of the plagues are finished only a small percentage of the world's population will remain alive compared to the number at the beginning of the period. Worse than this is the terror experienced by those who don't die; they desire death and yet it is taken from them (Revelation 9:6.) Indeed, the Book of Revelation itself refers to these events as "the great tribulation" (Revelation 7:14). These things are still yet future to us; a world-wide judgment of this severity has yet to take place.
Jesus mentioned some interesting things about this time. There will be severe disturbances in the heavens. Indeed, He says, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (Matthew 24:29).

The doctrine of a coming day of severe judgment did not originate with Jesus or the New Testament. It was taught by many of the Old Testament prophets. From the Old Testament perspective, the primary focus of the judgment was towards Israel, even though some of the prophecies include the whole world in their scope. The term commonly used for this time of severe judgment is the "Day of the Lord.".

In His wisdom and sovereignty God frequently has chosen to cloak prophecies which have a long-term future fulfillment within those which are more immediate. Thus, in Matthew 1:22-23 the New Testament explicitly states that Isaiah 7:14 refers to the birth of Jesus Christ. Yet, certain portions of the passage seem to apply more appropriately to the birth of Isaiah's son, described in Isaiah 8 and representing a more immediate fulfillment. Likewise, in Daniel 11:31 the abomination of desolation ties in with the desecration of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes on December 15, 167 B.C.; a good Study Bible can identify from secular history every personal reference in Daniel 11 up to the time of Antiochus. Yet, Jesus in Matthew 24:15 describes the abomination of desolation as something yet future to him, taking place during tribulation period. Indeed, it is when the Jews see the abomination of desolation that they are to flee to the mountains. Incidentally, the abomination of desolation is the same event as the man of sin proclaiming himself as God in the temple, described in 2 Thessalonians 2 and which we discussed earlier. These examples are not unique; they provide a Biblical pattern repeated many times over. (As a parenthesis, using this model to address certain preterist claims, the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. was no more the long-term fulfillment of Luke 21:20-21 than Isaiah's wife giving birth to a son was the long-term fulfillment of the virgin birth of Christ.)

The significance of this is that many of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Day of the Lord follow this same pattern. Sometimes the phrase may refer to a relatively near fulfillment, other times an end-time fulfillment. Frequently the two are merged, with portions of a passage referring to one and other portions another.

A. Isaiah 13:1-22 The first Old Testament passage we will examine is Isaiah 13:1-22. From its style and its placement in the book, it is believed that this prophecy was given relatively early in Isaiah's ministry, perhaps around 710 B.C. The key verses are highlighted for convenience.

1The burden against Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw.
2"Lift up a banner on the high mountain, raise your voice to them; wave your hand, that they may enter the gates of the nobles.
3I have commanded My sanctified ones; I have also called My mighty ones for My anger-- those who rejoice in My exaltation."
4The noise of a multitude in the mountains, like that of many people! A tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations gathered together! The LORD of hosts musters the army for battle.
5They come from a far country, from the end of heaven-- the LORD and His weapons of indignation, to destroy the whole land.
6**Wail, for the day of the LORD is at hand!** It will come as destruction from the Almighty.
7Therefore all hands will be limp, every man's heart will melt,
8And they will be afraid. Pangs and sorrows will take hold of them; they will be in pain as a woman in childbirth; they will be amazed at one another; their faces will be like flames.
9**Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it.**
10**For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine.**
11**"I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.**
12I will make a mortal more rare than fine gold, a man more than the golden wedge of Ophir.
13Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will move out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts and in the day of His fierce anger.
14It shall be as the hunted gazelle, and as a sheep that no man takes up; every man will turn to his own people, and everyone will flee to his own land.
15Everyone who is found will be thrust through, and everyone who is captured will fall by the sword.
16Their children also will be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses will be plundered and their wives ravished.
17**Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, who will not regard silver; and as for gold, they will not delight in it.**
18Also their bows will dash the young men to pieces, and they will have no pity on the fruit of the womb; their eye will not spare children.
19**And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.**
20It will never be inhabited, nor will it be settled from generation to generation; nor will the Arabian pitch tents there, nor will the shepherds make their sheepfolds there.
21But wild beasts of the desert will lie there, and their houses will be full of owls; Ostriches will dwell there, and wild goats will caper there.
22The hyenas will howl in their citadels, and jackals in their pleasant palaces. Her time is near to come, and her days will not be prolonged."

This passage mixes both a near-term fulfillment and a long-term. The early part of the passage parallels things Jesus and the New Testament say apply to the tribulation period. The latter part refers to the destruction of Babylon by the Medes and Persians in 539 B.C.

These are the things that refer to the tribulation period:

7Therefore all hands will be limp, every man's heart will melt, 8And they will be afraid.

This is paralleled in the Book of Revelation with:

And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! "For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (Revelation 6:15-17)

In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them. (Revelation 9:6)

Continuing in verse 8 of Isaiah, we read

...they will be in pain as a woman in childbirth;

And it is Jesus Himself who uses this phraseology for the early tribulation period:

"All these are the beginning of birth pangs." (Matthew 4:8)

Then, in verse 9 we read,

"Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it.

A few lines previously, we quoted Revelation 6:17 which describes the tribulation in Revelation as a time of wrath and great anger. Indeed, the entire content of Revelation 6 through 19 describes the destruction of sinners, a period unique in its terror and cruelty, and a time of God outpouring His wrath on the world.

Next, Isaiah talked about cosmic disturbances:
For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine.

Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will move out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts and in the day of His fierce anger.

There is something really important concerning these cosmic disturbances. Jesus indicated that the future tribulation would be marked by them. Various Old Testament prophets refer to them. Significantly, the only place in the Bible that discusses their fulfillment is in the Book of Revelation (6:11-14, 8:12-13, 16:8-9). If there were any such disturbances during the near-term Old Testament fulfillments, Scripture does not record them, nor does secular history. If one limits himself to things written and not to empty speculation, then he is led to the natural conclusion that the Old Testament passages referring to cosmic disturbances during the Day of the Lord are referring to the tribulation period. This becomes important as a hermeneutic tool to help us decipher which is near-term and which is long-term in its fulfillment.

Now, having laid this background, we are ready for a really interesting study. In verse 6 of the above passage, Isaiah says that the Day of the Lord, is at hand. I.e., it is imminent. It will take place shortly. This is the same phraseology that the preterist uses as foundational to his doctrine. The question becomes, how is at hand in the Old Testament used? The answer to this question completely destroys the basis of the preterist argument.

The quoted passage from Isaiah has two fulfillments, a tribulation-period portion discussed right after the at hand comment is made and a nearer-term portion concluding the passage; the nearer-term portion referring to the destruction of Babylon by the Medes and the Persians in 539 B.C.

For the sake of argument, without conceding the point, suppose that at hand in verse 6 really refers only to the nearer-term fulfillment. We can then provide a precise statement of the length of time the phrase encompassed.

In about 710 B.C. Isaiah gives the prophecy, saying the Day of the Lord is at hand. 100 years later in 610 B.C. Babylon conquers Assyria. This is not the fulfillment. 124 years later, in 586 B.C., Babylon conquers Jerusalem. This is not the fulfillment. 180 years later, in 539 B.C., the Medes and Persians conquer Babylon. This, at last, is a fulfillment of the nearer-term of the passage.

So, at the very shortest, at hand in this passage represents about 180 years, almost 5 generations. Certainly, no one who was alive at the time the prophecy was initially delivered, no matter how young, would have remained alive until its fulfillment. It is likely that none of their children would have, either. Perhaps a few of their grandchildren might have seen the fulfillment. Hence, it is obvious that when God uses at hand to refer
to the coming Day of the Lord, He has in mind periods of time involving many
generations. This has extremely serious implications which cast doubt on the entire
foundation of preterist logic and interpretation.

Beyond, this, other Old Testament passages refer to the events of the Day of the Lord as
being at hand even when they specifically refer to a tribulation period fulfillment.
Hence, there is no Scriptural reason to assert that at hand in verse 6 does not actually
refer to the later period fulfillment. In this case, if one assumes that the preterist position
is true and the fulfillment of the later-period portions of Isaiah 13 took place in 70 A.D.,
then the time between 710 B.C. and 70 A.D. is 780 years. In this case at hand would
represent a period much closer to 1,000 years than it does to a span within a single
generation. However, if one takes the position that these events of Isaiah 13 are still
future even to us now, then at hand refers to a period of time approaching 3,000 years.
Hence, no matter how one interprets the passage, at hand refers to a period of time short
from the perspective of an eternal God discussing major events in the flow of eternity,
even though they are long to us from a human perspective. One does well to remember
that from God's perspective, we are as grass, here today and gone tomorrow, barely
reaching our glory before we wither. (Compare James 1:11, 1 Peter 1:24.)

B. Joel 1:15-2:32

Joel was another Old Testament prophet discussing the day of the Lord. His book is
thought to have been written in approximately 800 BC, which would be almost one
hundred years earlier even than Isaiah. The occasion of Joel's writing was an invasion of
locusts which was currently underway, devastating the land. Joel presents this as an
outworking of God's judgment and calls the people to repentance. He then uses the
locust plague as a metaphor to introduce the events of the Day of the Lord associated
with the tribulation period, which comprises the material of chapter 2. Notice how in
chapter 2 verses 2 - 5 the word like appears 8 times. Joel is no longer referring to
specific, observed events, he is using near events as a figurative comparison of the future
day which is so terrible. We again have cosmic disturbances presented:

10The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble; the sun and moon
grow dark, and the stars diminish their brightness. Joel 2:10

30And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood and fire
and pillars of smoke. 31The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the
moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the
LORD. Joel 2:30-31.

so this is actually tribulation period fulfillment.

What is the timing of this horrible judgment to come upon Israel if she does not repent?
It is at hand. God can bring it about at any time and people need to be aware that it is
pending and imminent. However, it happens that its actual, complete fulfillment would
be future to Peter, who quoted portions of it in Acts 2 and it is still future to us today.
For the sake of convenience, most of Joel 1 and 2 is quoted below:

3 Tell your children about it, let your children tell their children, and their children another generation. 4 What the chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten; what the swarming locust left, the crawling locust has eaten; and what the crawling locust left, the consuming locust has eaten. 5 Awake, you drunkards, and weep; and wail, all you drinkers of wine, because of the new wine, for it has been cut off from your mouth.

... 15 Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is at hand; it shall come as destruction from the Almighty. 19 Is not the food cut off before our eyes, joy and gladness from the house of our God? 17 The seed shrivels under the clods, storehouses are in shambles; Barns are broken down, for the grain has withered. 18 How the animals groan! The herds of cattle are restless, because they have no pasture; even the flocks of sheep suffer punishment. 20 The beasts of the field also cry out to You, for the water brooks are dried up, and fire has devoured the open pastures.

CHAPTER 2

1 Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the LORD is coming, for it is at hand: 2 A day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, like the morning clouds spread over the mountains. A people come, great and strong, the like of whom has never been; nor will there ever be any such after them, even for many successive generations. 3 A fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns; the land is like the Garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; surely nothing shall escape them. 4 Their appearance is like the appearance of horses; and like swift steeds, so they run. 5 With a noise like chariots over mountaintops they leap, like the noise of a flaming fire that devours the stubble, like a strong people set in battle array. 6 Before them the people writhe in pain; all faces are drained of color. 7 They run like mighty men, they climb the wall like men of war; every one marches in formation, and they do not break ranks.
They do not push one another; every one marches in his own column. Though they lunge between the weapons, they are not cut down.

They run to and fro in the city, they run on the wall; they climb into the houses, they enter at the windows like a thief.

The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble; the sun and moon grow dark, and the stars diminish their brightness.

The LORD gives voice before His army, for His camp is very great; for strong is the One who executes His word. For the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; who can endure it?

Now, therefore," says the LORD, "Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning."

So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm.

Who knows if He will turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him--a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God?

Blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and nursing babes; let the bridegroom go out from his chamber, and the bride from her dressing room.

Let the priests, who minister to the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar; let them say, "Spare Your people, O LORD, and do not give Your heritage to reproach, that the nations should rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"

Then the LORD will be zealous for His land, and pity His people.

The LORD will answer and say to His people, "Behold, I will send you grain and new wine and oil, and you will be satisfied by them; I will no longer make you a reproach among the nations.

But I will remove far from you the northern army, and will drive him away into a barren and desolate land, with his face toward the eastern sea and his back toward the western sea; his stench will come up, and his foul odor will rise, because he has done monstrous things."

Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice, for the LORD has done marvelous things!

Do not be afraid, you beasts of the field; for the open pastures are springing up, and the tree bears its fruit; the fig tree and the vine yield their strength.

Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God; for He has given you the former rain faithfully, and He will cause the rain to come down for you--the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month.

The threshing floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil.

So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust, my great army which I sent among you.
You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you; and My people shall never be put to shame.

Then you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel: I am the LORD your God and there is no other. My people shall never be put to shame.

And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions.

And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood and fire and pillars of smoke.

The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.

And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the remnant whom the LORD calls.

Of course, Peter in Acts 2:17-21 quoted verses 28-32 above. Peter commented that the speaking in foreign languages observed by the people in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost was what Joel was talking about, i.e., it was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the last days. The last days started with the beginning of the church age and continues until the return of Christ to set up His Millenial kingdom. We are now in this period. However, the Day of Pentecost was only a partial, nearer-term fulfillment than the complete passage encompasses. The cosmic disturbances and other portions of the passage which were not fulfilled on Pentecost will match things to happen during the tribulation period, which is also contained within the terminology of last days.

Finally, near the end of the third and last chapter of Joel, the day of the LORD is stated to be imminent, although this time the term near is used instead of at hand. This passage is a very clear prophecy for the tribulation period, not only because of the reference to the cosmic disturbances contained within it, but also because of the Millenial kingdom blessings said to immediately follow it:

Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will diminish their brightness. The LORD also will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; the heavens and earth will shake; but the LORD will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel. So you shall know that I am the LORD your God, dwelling in Zion My holy mountain. Then Jerusalem shall be holy, and no aliens shall ever pass through her again. And it will come to pass in that day that the mountains shall drip with new wine, the hills shall flow with milk, and all the brooks of Judah shall be flooded with water; a
fountain shall flow from the house of the LORD and water the Valley of
Acacias. (Joel 3:14-18).

No Jew living in Jerusalem today and looking at the Dome of the Rock every time he
passes through the city would deny that this passage has not been fulfilled so far.
Jerusalem is still trodden down by the gentiles. Aliens still dwell in it. Furthermore, the
Millenial blessings spoken of in verse 18, which are to happen in that day, are still yet
future. Hence, that day is still future. The Day of the LORD referred to in verse 14 is
still future after a delay of almost 3,000 years. Yet, when God gave the prophecy to Joel,
He said the time was NEAR.

From these passages in Isaiah and Joel, it should be obvious that God does indeed use
phrases like near and at hand to refer to periods of time that seem long to us but short to
Him. It seems that it would be more productive if the preterist were to acknowledge this
and see what implied message God has in this usage of words, than in trying to use
elaborate logic to deny it. This is particularly the case when the denial leads to all of the
problems we have discussed earlier.

Incidentally, Joel shows that the inclusion of Millenial blessings within the terminology
of the Day of the Lord, which is commonly done in the New Testament, has an Old
Testament basis. The significance of this is that now the O.T. Day of the Lord passages
can legitimately be associated with the events related to the second coming of Christ.
Thus, when the New Testament uses time phrases such as at hand and near to mean long
periods of time humanly speaking in order to refer to the timing of the second coming, it
truly is only carrying on a tradition established by the Old Testament. Relative terms
which imply imminence can actually refer to extensive periods of time from a human
perspective.

C. Zephaniah 1:1-18, 3:8-9

Zephaniah is believed to have delivered his prophecy in about 630 B.C., during the reign
of Josiah.

14 The great day of the LORD is near; it is near and hastens quickly.
The noise of the day of the LORD is bitter; there the mighty men shall cry
out. 15 That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of
devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of
clouds and thick darkness, 16 A day of trumpet and alarm against the
fortified cities and against the high towers. 17 I will bring distress upon
men, and they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against
the LORD; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like
refuse." 18 Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them
in the day of the LORD'S wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by
the fire of His jealousy, for He will make speedy riddance of all those who
dwell in the land. (Zephaniah 1:14-18)
"Therefore wait for Me," says the LORD, "Until the day I rise up for plunder; my determination is to gather the nations to My assembly of kingdoms, to pour on them My indignation, all my fierce anger; all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy. For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, that they all may call on the name of the LORD, to serve Him with one accord. (Zephaniah 3:8-9)

Zephaniah here in 1:14 refers to the "GREAT day of the Lord;" the implication is that this is the tribulation period, not a minor precursor. Furthermore, the phrase in verse 1:15, "A day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness," is the exact wording quoted in Joel 2:2 above for a description of the tribulation period. Hence, this passage most definitely has tribulation aspects in view.

Furthermore, in verse 3:8 God specifically indicates that He views a day in which He will pour out his fierce anger and indignation on all of the earth. Then, in verse 3:9, He states that at that time He will then bring about a restoration, a restoration which we associate with the Millenial blessings.

So, what is the timing that God uses for Zephaniah's prophecy about the GREAT Day of the Lord? It is said to be near and hastens quickly (verse 1:14). Yet, it is still future to us today.

D. Obadiah 15 Obadiah was written perhaps around 850 B.C., although the date is not clear. In verse 15 we read the following:

"For the day of the LORD upon all the nations is near; as you have done, it shall be done to you; your reprisal shall return upon your own head.

The day of the LORD upon all the nations refers to the tribulation period. Yet, Obadiah says it is near.

Words such as near and quickly and phrases such as at hand are by their very nature extremely ambiguous. For instance, if a man tells his wife that he is down the street at the grocery store and is coming home soon, she would probably expect him to be home in less than an hour. If a volcano has a history of erupting once every one hundred and fifty years or so, and if it has been 160 years since the last major eruption, one may say that he expects the volcano to erupt soon and soon may mean somewhere within the next several years. At hand, shortly, and soon are all relative words; they only have meaning when their reference of comparison is understood. In God's overall timetable for eternity, even thousands of years is a short time period. Hence, when God says that the day of the Lord is at hand, meaning that it will soon appear, His reference period is apparently time from His perspective, not from ours. As sovereign God, He has a right to state it from this perspective if He so chooses.
Our analysis should have made it fairly obvious that God's frame of reference for interpreting Old Testament time passages is from His perspective and not man's. Thus, the significance of 2 Peter 3:8 is that it explicitly states that this same frame of reference applies to the New Testament as well. We have seen that the concept of using time passages referenced against God's eternal nature is not new to the New Testament, it is simply a continuation of what had already clearly been established in the Old Testament. So, 2 Peter 3:8 does not stand alone as a tool for interpreting time passages, it merely confirms a scope already established by the Old Testament.

One should always keep in mind that the New Testament time statements were worded so as to give a certain expectancy to every generation that they might be the ones to see the Messiah. The manner in which they were written has effectively accomplished this purpose. The preterist has completely missed the point concerning why God used them the way He did. God has been gracious enough to give us the Old Testament examples so that we can see how He intended these phrases to be understood. Hence, we should not allow ourselves to get carried away with improper logic, twisting the New Testament time phrases into things God never intended.

12. Analysis of Some Additional Time Statements

A. This generation.

On page 37 Mr. Fenley quotes Matthew 24:32-34

Now learn a parable of the fig tree;
When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves,
ye know that summer is nigh: 33 So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. 34 Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.

and then comments:
... Therefore, Jesus was teaching that the generation to whom He was speaking would experience His parousia.

Mr. Fenley concludes that the generation of Jesus' audience would be the generation in which his return would be fulfilled. However, the grammar of the Greek text discounts this conclusion, although in all fairness to Mr. Fenley the English Bible mistranslates it. Specifically, the words "when you shall see" need to be more carefully analyzed. The word "when" has the Greek suffix "an" added to it. This indicates that an action is merely possible, not certain. Likewise, the verb shall see is actually in the subjunctive mood, which indicates possibility, not certainty. It should more properly be translated might see.

Remember our earlier discussion that God desires each generation to anticipate our Lord's coming to be within his own lifetime? The wording of this passage is consistent with this
perspective. A more accurate rendering of the passage would be: "So likewise you, if you happen to see all of these things, then whenever you do know that it is near..."

Notice, the passage does NOT promise that the specific generation to whom Jesus was directly speaking would see these things, only that it MIGHT be the one to do so. Indeed, whenever these things are seen, in whatever generation that might be, then that generation will be the one to "experience His parousia." So, the wording of this passage is completely consistent with what we would expect from Scripture in accordance with God's stated purposes and objectives: The first generation could legitimately hope that the Lord Jesus Christ might come during his lifetime, but had no specific assurances of when it would be.

Technically speaking, the things that Jesus says will preceed His appearing are things associated with the tribulation period. We know that the tribulation period totals seven years in length. Notice that the Matthew passage does teach that once the signs of the tribulation period have been seen, then generation will not pass away until Jesus has returned. Since there will be less than seven years from the time that the signs are seen until the return, Jesus statement will certainly be fulfilled.

This passage does not justify the preterist position.

**B. Last of All** On page 43 Mr. Fenley makes a big "to-do" about the phrase "last of all" when Jesus is talking to the Pharisees in Matthew 21:33-35. We will not read or discuss the entire passage. Mr. Fenley makes the following statement in his analysis of the passage:

> The Householder (the Father) sent the Son last of all. Why would He wait two thousand years to destroy the murderers of His Son? Last of all should be clear evidence that the Jews had filled up the measure of their fathers.

I believe this argument has completely missed the point of the passage. The phrase "last of all" simply means "last in sequence". God the Father sent a string of prophets, then He sent His Son. Once He sent His Son, He did not go back to sending prophets again. I have no problems personally with taking this parable at face value. Any effort to read a time statement into the passage is imaginative and without foundation. Indeed, this is consistent with things taught in Hebrews 1:1 to 3:6, which the reader might profitably examine but which we are beyond the scope of this study.

This passage does not justify the preterist position.

**C. The High Priest.** In *SCOJCAH* we see another example of a time statement, one which is yet again based on misunderstanding the passage presented:

> When Jesus appeared before the high priest prior to His crucifixion, He spoke to the high priest in a manner that would unmistakably bring the priest to a certain conclusion:

> Matthew 26:63-65 But Jesus held his peace. And the
high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy.

Was the high priest thinking, “Oh, He is referring to a distant judgment two thousand years from now”? Or, was the high priest clearly understanding Christ Jesus, and thus concluding, “This Man just told me hereafter He is going to come in judgment.” At this point, it is worth considering the word hereafter. Even though there was no time limit specified, there was certainly an implication that Jesus was going to get vengeance upon this man within his lifetime; for Jesus said, “Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.” If we try to comprehend the frame of mind of the high priest, it will help us understand how he interpreted the words of Jesus.

First of all, even the quotation from SCOJCAH freely admits that there is no time limit specified in this passage. The argument should have stopped there and talked about other things. However, an effort was then made to read a time element into a passage which does not have one. In doing so, we see that the key point of the passage had been misunderstood.

In the passage the high priest has specifically commanded Jesus to answer if He were the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Jesus affirmed that He was and then quoted a portion of an Old Testament Messianic passage and applied it to Himself. The phrase "One like the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven" is a part of Daniel 7:13, which is an extensive Messianic passage. Jesus was really saying to the chief priest, "I am the fulfillment of Daniel 7:13-14." This is the primary significance of Jesus' statement. There is no mention of time to the passage; that was the farthest thing from high priest's mind. Indeed, after Jesus made His statement, the chief priest did not turn the conversation to the issue of what timeframe Jesus had in mind. Rather, he had just had Jesus confirm with His own lips that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. This is what the priest was after, this was the entire focus of his attention. The priest now proclaimed that Jesus had with His own lips committed such blasphemy as to justify His condemnation; no further testimony would be needed-- It was now time to bring on the crucifixion. The time issue Mr. Fenley is trying so diligently to bring out of the passage is simply irrelevant to its purpose and intent.

In SCOJCAH we read the statement, "If we try to comprehend the frame of mind of the high priest, it will help us understand how he interpreted the words of Jesus.” Well, the high priest was looking for evidence to condemn Jesus. He did not believe Jesus was the Messiah, did not believe that Jesus would actually ever have any power over him, and most certainly did not have any interest in an implied time value to
Jesus' statements. All he wanted to do was crucify and get rid of the Lord. The 
SCOJCAH statement is without warrant.

This passage does not justify the preterist position.

D. Be Ready On page 47, Mr. Fenley says,

"Jesus said “Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.” It is very dangerous to say that Jesus would emphasize His two-thousand-year future coming just to keep first-century Jews on their best behavior. Some might argue that Jesus was referring to all throughout history. This is incongruous with the obvious audience reference, especially in light of the many statements of imminence already cited...

We have already established that God desires the believers in every generation to anticipate that they might be the ones to see Jesus in Him coming. This is not something of value or relevant to first-century Jews only.

If God, in His wisdom, knows that having an eagerness to see the revelation of Jesus Christ will have a purifying effect on the life of a believer, then He certainly has the right for Scripture to be written in such a way as to give each generation the hope that Jesus will come in that generation's lifetime. God has the right to do this if He wants.

This passage does not justify the preterist position.

E. The Transfiguration Experience.

We have already looked at a number of the "time statements" and found that so far none of them justify the Preterist position. We will look at one final time statement. As we look at it, we will point out how the rhetoric used truly is nothing more than slander, ridicule, twisting passages, and outright misstatement of fact. It was God Himself who called the rhetoric of the early-church preterists idle babblings and proceeded to claim that they were being held captive by Satan to do his will. We believe that modern-day preterism is simply a reemergence of this same heresy. If this is the case, then we would expect the rhetoric of the modern-day preterist to more closely resemble idle babblings than solid, sound spiritual reasoning. We suggest that the following discussion does indeed confirm our expectations.

In SCOJCAH Mr. Fenley makes the following statement:

"Matthew 16:27-28 For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

"There is not a rational Christian alive, upholding futurism, who would say they have never had trouble with this passage."
Here is a subtle form of ridicule and slander. It implies that if you have never had problems with this passage, then you are not rational. Whether or not I am rational is not for me to judge, but I uphold futurism and do not have any problems with this passage at all and do not remember ever having any.

"What could be clearer?"
"Jesus again, speaking to His disciples, does not mislead them or lie to them."

My blood boils when I read statements like this. If mine does, that of Jesus, who is absolute in His holiness, must do so even more. Cannot Mr. Fenley argue His case without blaspheming the character of Jesus? Mr. Fenley constantly implies that if his personal interpretation is not correct, then it is because Jesus lied to him or misled him, not because he misunderstands something. This is blasphemy. It is totally inappropriate. Jesus cannot lie, and just because things are difficult for Mr. Fenley to understand does not give him the right to blaspheme the character of Jesus. To mention the word "lie" and "Jesus" in the same sentence and present this as the only alternative to a certain personal interpretation being correct is absolutely and totally inappropriate.

"Instead, He makes utterly clear the fact that there were some of His disciples who would be alive when He returned."

Here is where the twisting starts. Where does verse 28 say anything about Jesus returning? It simply says He would be coming in His kingdom, a phrase which can apply to the transfiguration experience recounted in the verses immediately following the statement. I believe the choice of words was very deliberate by the Holy Spirit to allow the transfiguration to be the fulfillment of the passage without it necessarily referring to the second coming. By contrast, Mr. Fenley's twist precludes this possibility.

... Some interpret the passage in Matthew sixteen as referring to the transfiguration.

Yes, I myself believe that this is the correct approach.

This, however, would make no contextual sense.

This is a false statement. It is boldly made without any supporting justification. Notice, though, that the transfiguration experience immediately follows the verse under discussion. By definition of "context", a verse adjacent to a passage is in the context of that passage. The transfiguration experience truly is in the context of the verse.

Why would Jesus say, “eight days from now some of you will not taste death until you see Me come in My kingdom”? Would it be so amazing that some of His disciples would still be alive after eight days?
This is another twisted statement. There is nothing about amazement stated or implied in the passage. Rather, Jesus simply made a statement that something would happen before a certain event took place and it did. Nothing in Jesus' statement gives any indication of the length of time between the two events, just their sequence. This is no proof at all.

Jesus said in Matthew 16:28, “Verily I say unto you...” The word *verily* or *truly* is certainly a testimony to the validity of Christ’s promise, especially when considering what He would perform when He came. Those who say that vs.27 refers to a different event than vs.28 must contend with a grammatical pattern used by Jesus in the N.T. *Wherever Jesus uses the phrase, verily, verily it never introduces a new subject or idea. It always is continuing the same theme. Therefore, vs.28 could not be referring to the transfiguration.*

Here is another bold, false statement. I do not know the basis for Mr. Fenley's comment that "verily" never introduces a new subject, but his statement is false. Truly, *verily* can indeed introduce new matter as we see in the following passage:

1There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.  
2This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."  
3Jesus answered and said to him, "Verily, verily, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." John 3:1-3

Jesus abruptly changes the subject introduced by Nicodemus - - the nature of the relationship between God and Jesus - - and uses the word "Verily" to introduce new material, the issue of the requirement for Nicodemus to be born again. *Verily* is simply a word used to emphasize the truth of the statement to follow. There is nothing innate in it implying anything about continuity of subject. *SCOJCAH* is using erroneous, twisted logic in an effort to build a case which does not exist.

(To understand the purpose of the transfiguration, examine 2 Peter 1:16-19. This passage explains that the transfiguration was merely a proof that what Jesus said in Matthew 16:27,28 was going to take place, despite the scoffers of their day [cf. 2 Peter 3:3,4]). In fact, the whole purpose of the transfiguration of Jesus was to prove to the disciples that He was not lying. He would come back before some of them would taste of death (Matthew 16:28).

Here is another twisted passage. There are numerous problems with this statement.

First of all, invents a significance for the transfiguration at the expense of that stated within Scripture. In Luke 9:31, which is one of the Bible's transfiguration accounts, we read the actual reason for the transfiguration: Moses and Elijah came to discuss with Jesus the impending crucifixion. During this time the disciples were placed into a deep sleep and hence would have been unable to hear this, the main conversation. Hence, the
passage indicates that the transfiguration was primarily for the benefit of Jesus and only secondarily for that of His disciples. The conversation lasted long enough for the disciples to have entered a deep sleep, and the wording implies that they only gradually came out of it (i.e., "It was only after the disciples had become fully awakened" that they even realized that Moses and Elijah were there.) This implies that the conversation Jesus had with Moses and Elijah was not brief, although we do not know its length. Apparently, it would not have been appropriate for the disciples to have heard what was said. The impending death and crucifixion of Jesus was something they did not understand and did not want to believe, judging from other passages of Scripture. So, they were made to sleep through the main event. Then, once the purpose of the meeting had been finished, the disciples were gradually let out of their sleep. 

SCOJCAH ignored the purpose as stated in the Scripture, giving preference to conjecture and fabrication.

Before examining a second problem with Mr. Fenley's statement above, which has to do with the handling in SCOJCAH of 2 Peter 1:16-19, let's look at the passage:

16 For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. 17 For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." 18 And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. 19 And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts;

This passage is very clearly talking about something that had already taken place. Peter says that they were eyewitness of His majesty, not that they will be eyewitness. He says that when they spoke (i.e. made known), they were not talking about cleverly devised fables, but things they had witnessed. We should also note that the word translated "coming" is actually a noun in the Greek, not a participle, and could more accurately be translated "presence." Hence, His power and presence are the stated objects of what Peter and the others had witnessed. Everything in this passage refers to things that had already happened. The passage makes no mention whatsoever regarding future events. Then in case there is any confusion at all, Peter says in verse 18 that he is talking about the time "when we were with Him on the holy mountain."

Verse 19 is ambiguous and is translated differently in several translations. In the New King James, we read, "And so we have the prophetic word confirmed..." Apparently, this rendering or its equivalent is the basis for Mr. Fenley's argument, in that he claims that this verse shows that the transfiguration only confirmed that there would be a future fulfillment. However, even with this rendering of the verse, it means nothing more than saying that the prophecy given in Matthew 16:28 was confirmed by its fulfillment on the holy mountain at the transfiguration.
However, I would like to address two issues concerning the transfiguration. First, is whether or not the transfiguration truly is an appropriate fulfillment of verse 28, and the second concerns the significance of the comment in 2 Peter 1 about the transfiguration. We shall now discuss both of these issues.

1. Concerning the promise of Jesus' coming in His kingdom: Matthew, Mark, and Luke all three recount the transfiguration. In every case, the verse immediately preceding the transfiguration account is the statement about some of the disciples seeing the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. But, to be fair, all three also have the same story about taking up the cross immediately preceding the "kingdom" verse as well. Hence, on a theoretical basis, one could reasonably associate the "kingdom" verse with the preceding material, as is the case in *SCOJCAH*, or with the transfiguration, which is what I believe to be more appropriate. Here are these three verses themselves:

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

   And He said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power." Mark 9:1

   "But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the kingdom of God." Luke 9:27

The real issue is whether or not the transfiguration could be an adequate fulfillment of these promises. I believe it is.

First, though we need to understand the meaning of the Greek word translated as *kingdom* in the above passages. The word is *basileia*, Strong's dictionary reference number 932. Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words defines *basileia* as "primarily an abstract noun, denoting 'sovereignty, royal power, dominion,' e. g. ..."

John 12 teaches that Isaiah saw Jesus in glory as Jehovah. This is described in Isaiah 6, which refers to the one sitting on the throne as both the King and as Jehovah. Jesus was ruling as King on a throne in heaven long before He emptied Himself and took on the human form of a servant, per Philippians 2. In Ezekiel 1, Ezekiel sees one like a Son of Man sitting on a throne in heaven; to a Christian this is also a clear reference to Christ. Christ had a kingdom whose scope encompassed the entire universe long before His incarnation. He has ruled over seraphim, and angels, and cherubim from this throne for ages. Even when He appeared in the form of a servant when He came to earth, this did not undo His real person. Then, during the transfiguration, God exchanged Jesus' form from that of a servant to the majesty of the King. The disciples saw the King in some degree of His innate glory, speaking with two of His key subjects, Moses and Elijah, who themselves were in glorified appearance. The uniqueness of the transfiguration was that the Son, indeed He was so addressed by the Father during the
event, had now **come** to earth in His innate glory and majesty as King and not in emptied form as a servant. This was something totally unexpected, it is a major event (at least in the angelic realm if not to most of humankind). It would also not be out of place for something so stupendous to be given prophetic announcement before it happened. The transfiguration is certainly a reasonable fulfillment of the promise that some of the disciples would see the Kingdom of God in power. Jesus was NOT just a future king. He has been KING over creation since its beginning. In the transfiguration, The three disciples got to see the majesty of this One they were following. It is important to realize that the English word "Kingdom" has a narrower definition than the Greek *basileia*. The events of the transfiguration satisfy the definition of *basileia*, for the king had come to earth in His majesty.

Concerning 2 Peter chapter 1, we read the following:

16 For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and **coming** of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. 17 For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." 18 And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. 19 And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; 20 knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, 21 for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:16-21

Paraphrased, Peter says that when he told people about seeing Jesus come in His majesty, he was talking about real events which had taken place historically and were not merely cleverly devised fables. He and others were eyewitnesses of the majesty of the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, they got to see Him in His glory as King, indeed the very King before whom Isaiah fell on his face and cried out, "Woe is me, for I am undone...for I have seen the King, Jehovah of hosts. Indeed, the One who sat on the throne of God, per Isaiah 6 and John 12, had come to earth, displayed His majestic glory as the King, and had with Him two of His key subjects, the Old Testament prophets Moses and Elijah. This event satisfied all the elements of the prophecies of Matthew 16:28, Mark 9:1, and Luke 9:27. The sovereign King had come in His glory. The kingdom of God had come to earth, for however brief a time. The promise Jesus had given His disciples had indeed just been filled. It makes sense to associate Matthew 16:28, Mark 9:1, and Luke 9:27 with the transfiguration.

So, what is the nature of the proof given in *SCOJCAH* for the preterist treatment of the passage? As we read through Mr. Fenley's argument, we broke it into a series of 8 sequential items of discussion. This is the nature of arguments used in these items:
1. ridicule and slander (claims any Christian not having certain problems is not rational).
2. blasphemy (claims if his personal interpretation is not correct, then Jesus lied).
3. twisting Scripture (Exchanges return for coming, when this precludes the correct interpretation).
4. false statement (misrepresents issues of context)
5. twisted statement (reads time elements into a passage which only states sequence)
6. false statement (claims Jesus never uses verily to introduce new material)
7. twisting Scripture (ignores stated purpose of the transfiguration and invents his own)
8. twisting Scripture (puts events into the future which Scripture puts in the past).

It is not my desire to be harsh, but a doctrine with problems as serious as this cannot be treated lightly. It was God Himself who applied the term babblings to the arguments of the early-church preterists. Does not this appear to apply here as well?

Where is the substance of the preterist argument? The entire train of thought consists of innuendoes, false statements, and twisted quotations. Is it any wonder that God commands us not by any means to be deceived by preterist exegesis?

A person now has a choice. He can associate Matthew 16:28 with the preceding verses, as does the preterist, and end up forced into doctrines that God has told us to avoid, or he can associate it with the transfiguration, still be honest intellectually, and have doctrine which pleases God. One is not being arbitrary or whimsical in his methodology when he uses an interpretive methodology which leads to conclusions which please God and rejects that which is condemned by God.

This passage does not justify the preterist position.
13. 2 Peter 3:8 in Ward Fenley's *SCOJCAH*

We have now worked our way through many of the time statements in *SCOJCAH*. So far, we have not found anything of substance in the preterist argument. 2 Peter 3:8 is the passage which most obviously and most directly deals with these statements in the New Testament. Mr. Fenley himself acknowledges that even he himself did this before he became a preterist. However, he now rejects 2 Peter 3:8 as having any applicability to these statements.

Therefore, I am particularly interested in seeing the reasons Mr. Fenley gives us in *SCOJCAH* to discard 2 Peter 3:8 as an appropriate response to the time statements. The question becomes whether the rhetoric used will be solid, Biblical, based upon clear exposition of Scripture or whether it will also appear to be nothing more than babblings, the evaluation God gave to the early-church preterist.

The following passage is taken from page 21 of Mr. Fenley's book. It is here that Mr. Fenley discusses 2 Peter 3:8 and explains why it does not apply to the time passages.

We first see the phrase *at hand* in the ministry of John the Baptist. It is very interesting to note that the first proclamation of any warning or salvation message that John preached was, “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2). The phrase used here for *at hand* is the Greek word *eggiken* (angiken) and has the essential meaning of drawing near. (In the chapters on fulfillment, we will study the person of John the Baptist, his prophetic significance, and why he said the kingdom of God was approaching, or drawing near).

The futurist, of course, would argue from 2 Peter 3:8:  
*But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.*

That is, God’s timing is not our timing, therefore, it could mean millions of years. Inspite of this, many futurists affirm that we are in the last days. They make this claim based upon their analysis of certain events that are taking place throughout the world. Consequently, predictions are made to convince people that Jesus is about to come. A question that should be asked is: if one interprets the rest of the time statements with the *thousand-year-as-a-day* hermeneutic, why not use this hermeneutic with the phrase “last days” as it appears in Scripture? The reason: it would take away all the excitement of wild-eyed predictions of men like Hal Linsdey, Harold Camping, and hundreds of other false prophets. Yet, they tell us we are wrong for interpreting the time statements literally. This amounts to picking and choosing when they want to apply a literal hermeneutic with the time statements. Therefore, they neglect Scriptures they are unable to defend, especially when confronted with other Scriptures that support the same idea.

Now, the analysis:
"That is, God’s timing is not our timing, therefore, it could mean millions of years."

Mr. Fenley is correct in this. I personally teach, and all of the pastors under whom I personally have sat under do likewise teach, that we do not know when Christ will return, even though we are hopeful it will be soon. The Father has appointed a specific time for Christ to come. I do not know when that will be, no man does. (Acts 1:7). Now, there are signs that seem to indicate we might be close. Yet, it could easily be another 2,000 years if the Father so desires. The one thing I do believe dogmatically is that in the Father's appointed time, which has already been set, the Lord Jesus Christ will indeed return and set up a physical kingdom on this earth, and that there is nothing that any human or angelic being can do to alter this time by speeding it up or slowing it down by any degree whatsoever. God the Father has decreed its timing and that will be its timing, whenever He has willed it to be.

In the Old Testament, there were many prophecies about Jesus Christ given; some relate to His first coming and others His second. There were almost 2,000 years from the time Job spoke of a Redeemer until Jesus died to redeem us. There were almost 1,500 years from the time Moses recorded God's promise to Adam that the seed of the woman would crush Satan's head until Jesus defeated Satan at the cross. As one gets closer to the time of Christ's birth, ministry, death, and resurrection, many more prophecies were given. Most of the prophecies involving his first coming were given about 800 to 1,000 years before He actually came. Despite these seemingly long gaps of time between the promises of His coming and His first coming, eventually, in God's appointed time, He did come. The clearest proof I have that Jesus will physically come the second time is that He physically came the first time. His first physical coming ratifies the second physical coming; the literal fulfillment of the verses regarding the first coming confirm the literal fulfillment of the verses for the second coming. On the scale of time between prophecies concerning the first coming of the Messiah and their fulfillment, one to two thousand years of time were not at all unusual. Hence, it would merely be following this Biblical precedent if the time segments for the second coming were to be a few thousand years instead of a few decades.

The length of time between the resurrection of Jesus and us today is on the order of the amount of delay between the Old Testament prophecies and the first coming of Jesus. Hence, it is not really unusual. Yet, when Mr. Fenley starts talking about our the literal interpretation allowing it to go millions of years he is simply using ridicule in order to slant the argument in his direction.

"Inspite of this, many futurists affirm that we are in the last days."

So?

I personally understand that the entire church period may properly be considered to be within the "last days". So, in effect, I do apply it even as Mr. Fenley suggests. This position is not unique with me, it is one I have been taught. The last days started with the ascension of Christ in heaven, include the entire dispensation of grace, will continue
through the tribulation period, and persist until the Millenial kingdom. A particular New Testament reference to "last days" may properly refer to any portion of this period, for it is all contained within the meaning of the phrase. In looking for a preterist defense to the 2 Peter 3:8 rebuttal, so far I have seen nothing of substance.

They make this claim based upon their analysis of certain events that are taking place throughout the world. Consequently, predictions are made to convince people that Jesus is about to come.

We need to be careful here. It is very appropriate indeed to examine current events and indicate that they seem to be approaching conformity to conditions matching those of the tribulation period. However, in my preaching, I also make it clear that we do not know if this is really the time. God controls the ages in accordance with His sovereign will. Even though it seems we are getting close to the events described to occur during the tribulation period, God could easily suddenly set the world situation off in other directions. He is sovereign, He will do as He pleases. He wants me to have the expectancy of a soon return of Christ and this is easy to have in the current world situation. But, I understand that there are no guarantees that the time is truly now and will certainly not take offense if in His wisdom He chooses to extend the church age for a longer time. He is sovereign, He can do what He wants, and I respect this in Him.

It is true that some people, indeed some very well known people, are trying to convince people that the return of Christ will definitely be any minute. There is a difference between preaching that the rapture COULD be soon and that it WILL be soon. However, these things have nothing to do with proper Biblical exegesis. For instance, I would hate for a person to point to the behavior of Judas and claim it as an example of how God expects a disciple to behave. The problems of Judas did not invalidate the greatness of Jesus' person and work. Likewise, the excesses of some people who might go overboard in their preaching have nothing to do with the actual validity or lack thereof for a particular Biblical doctrine.

A question that should be asked is: if one interprets the rest of the time statements with the thousand-year-as-a-day hermeneutic, why not use this hermeneutic with the phrase “last days” as it appears in Scripture?

The reason: it would take away all the excitement of wild-eyed predictions of men like Hal Lindsey, Harold Camping, and hundreds of other false prophets.

In the flow of thought in the material above, I had hoped to find an explanation of why the futurist is wrong when he uses 2 Peter 3:8 as a rebuttal to preterism. Instead, there is only ridicule and slander. There was no evidence for the preterist position at all, merely slander of certain individuals. The slander appears to be nothing more than a diversion to cover the fact that the preterist actually has no valid argument against this passage.

Yet, they tell us we are wrong for interpreting the time statements literally.

Here is yet another twist. The time statements he refers to are not specific periods of time, such as a 1,000 year millennium. Rather, they are relative terms and need a
reference point in order to have specific meaning. The Old Testament demonstrates that in these passages, the reference is time from God's perspective, not man's; they refer to times that are long from a human perspective but short from God's (see Chapter 10 for discussion). 2 Peter 3:8 merely has the effect of confirming that this methodology applies to the New Testament as well.

God Himself has given 2 Peter 3:8 as the reference for interpreting these passages. This is important, because if this indeed is the case, then any effort to establish a different meaning is futile. No matter how logical or how compelling to our brain it might be, it is still wrong.

Notice, if I am consistent in applying a Bible-derived hermeneutic, I can rationally interpret and explain the time passages and have none of the problems associated with preterism. 2 Peter 3:8 is one of the tools God has provided for me to do this. It is not the only one, but it does confirm that God uses the same frame of reference for the time statements in the New Testament that He had already done in the Old. It is most certainly proper Biblical hermeneutics to pick one interpretation over its alternatives when the one picked provides for consistency in doctrine and the one rejected leads to a whole list of errors God warns us to avoid.

This amounts to picking and choosing when they want to apply a literal hermeneutic with the time statements.

This is a false charge, even as I have just discussed. Indeed, I will unashamedly and deliberately reject an interpretive option which forces me into doctrines which the Bible identifies as heretical and God commands me to avoid. There is nothing arbitrary to this approach at all.

Therefore, they neglect Scriptures they are unable to defend, especially when confronted with other Scriptures that support the same idea.

In light of the above discussion, Mr. Fenley might have made a valid observation. However, I believe he applied it to the wrong side of the argument.

Lest I seem harsh in the evaluation of the rhetoric used in SCOJCAH in the analysis of the time passages, let not the reader forget the seriousness of the charges Scripture itself brought against the preterists of the early church.
14. Summary

We have now finished a reasonably complete Biblical analysis of preterist doctrine.

We have seen that the preterist claims that the "time verses" of Scripture demand that Jesus already have returned to set up His kingdom.

God has given a test for the church to know if a person prematurely teaches that the resurrection has occurred (i.e., that Jesus has come back). That test is whether or not the man of sin has seated himself in the temple, proclaimed himself to be God, and then been destroyed by Jesus at His coming. If this has not yet happened, then such a teacher is specifically labeled by Scripture as a deceiver and we are commanded not to be deceived by him. The preterist cannot identify this person. This places an almost insurmountable burden of proof on him for him to avoid the evaluation that he, too, is such a deceiver in God's eyes. Indeed, the preterist needs to recognize that until he can pass this test, God has commanded others in the church to view him as a deceiver and that a person is NOT BY ANY MEANS to allow himself to be deceived by his argument. This is not an enviable position in which the preterist finds himself.

A person of common sense who knows anything of Scripture will balk at the claim that Jesus has already returned to set up His kingdom. The changes specified to take place at His return simply have not happened. The preterist attempts to rationalize this contradiction by asserting that the Kingdom of God is only spiritual in nature. However, this forces one into doctrines which God says mark those who do not belong to Him.

We have seen that the early church had teachers who claimed that Jesus had already come back within their time, even though He actually had not. Concerning these teachers, the Bible had a string of uncomplimentary evaluations: they needed to return to their senses, they had been taken captive by Satan to do His will, God viewed their arguments as mere babblings, the church was specifically commanded not to be deceived by their arguments. God likened the spread of their arguments to the spread of cancer.

The preterist likes to claim that all of the above train of thought is forced upon him because of the time statements. He claims that if he is to be honest in interpreting the time statements, he is forced into his position. Often, he prides himself in being the only one honest enough to face the time statements "head on."

Yet, when we examined the SCOJCAH analysis of the time statements, we found false statements, twisted interpretations, unsubstantiated conclusions, and unjustified ridicule and slander—but nothing of substance.

At least some preterists have become so bold as to say that if their personal interpretation of Scripture is not correct, then Scripture is not inspired and ... (and they proceed to blaspheme God and the Holy Spirit -- which itself this seems to confirm that they are under bondage to Satan, confirming God's evaluation of them).
It is not my desire to be contentious. It would be far simpler for my personal life if my dispute with the preterist could be treated as a minor issue. Yet, if I am to be faithful to Scripture, I find no choice but to take the position developed in this paper. It is God Himself who has already discussed this doctrine and provided its evaluation within His Word. His desire is for us to be faithful in those things He has presented in Scripture. To this end, Scripture teaches that preterism is a doctrine to be shunned, to be avoided, and to be turned from if one has been caught up in it. May God grant the reader the grace to do these things if they are needful and appropriate to his situation.

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I once met a man named Rev. Dick Baer. Rev. Baer headed a mission which primarily directed its efforts towards Mormons. A large part of his ministry dealt with ministering to ex-Mormons.

He called his ministry *Knothole Ministries*. He said it was named this because when a person comes out of a cult such as Mormonism, they can feel like they are being strained through a knot hole in a board. Most people who come out of the cults have been so poisoned against the truth that they find it difficult to embrace it. They begin to feel that they have nowhere to go and turn away from everything. They are embarrassed in front of family and friends and confused doctrinally. It becomes far easier for them to fall away from all forms of religion than to embrace that which they have hated and ridiculed for so long. Rev. Baer's ministry was designed to help such people through their struggle.

My concern is that the preterist who reads these things and recognizes that he has made a mistake will still find it very difficult to go back to orthodox doctrine such as dispensationalism. Instead, he would rather just forget about God altogether. The entire reason for discussing dispensationalism in this pamphlet is in an attempt to show that it is possible to have an honest, consistent system of Biblical interpretation, and that dispensationalism is that system. The desire is that this would provide a stable and solid framework for the ex-preterist to restructure his Christian life.

Hopefully, by bringing these things out in the open, it will make the ex-preterist aware of the possible problems he may experience when he leaves preterism; thus, he can be aware of them and be better prepared in how to deal with them. The ex-preterist should be aware that he may well find that he has his own knothole experience to go through.

Yet, Jesus is adequate. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23). This fruit is produced naturally within the believer who is walking in the Spirit. The full experience of these qualities in a person's life should be sufficient to motivate him to continue to seek God. God is gracious. He will help a person in his time of need. This includes the child of God who is trying to find life after preterism.
Appendix. The Biblical Basis of Dispensationalism

The following material represents a partial first draft of a pamphlet I am writing on dispensationalism. Although the pamphlet has not been completed, what is now available should be adequate to present a valid, Biblical case for dispensationalism as an alternative to preterism.

Part I. Rule Changes in God's Plan

“I am God, and there is no other; I am God and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure.’”

(Isaiah 46:9-10)

In this passage God asserts that He has a plan for the ages (= His counsel). The purpose of the passage is to induce awe within us over the greatness of His Being. He is the only God; there is no other God like Him. He alone has a plan for the ages, one that He has revealed from the beginning and one which He is able to implement as He pleases.

This passage is also significant in that it discusses that God reveals that plan. Obviously, every step of the plan cannot be revealed—all the books in the world would be inadequate to contain such detail. However, He has revealed major portions of it. He has revealed the end even from the beginning. Moreover, it turns out that understanding the basic structure of the plan is essential for properly understanding, applying, and interpreting the Bible. Not understanding it can quickly lead to all sorts of misunderstandings of God's Word.

The Scriptural Basis of the Dispensations

I have had certain unsaved friends point out to me what they thought were contradictions in the Bible. I do not know whether they had observed these themselves or simply read about them from others. However, not only are their comments interesting, but actually they bring up issues which provide a first step towards properly deciphering God’s plan.

Specifically, they commented about diet. There are four different places where the Bible discusses foods authorized for man to eat and they all differ:
1. Genesis 1:29 reads, “And God said, ‘See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food.’” So, God expected men to be vegetarians.

2. Genesis 9:2 reads (concerning the beasts of the earth, birds of the air, and fish of the sea), ”Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you, even as the green herbs.” Here, God said that people can eat meat, in fact, they can eat any kind of meat they want.

3. Deuteronomy 14: 6-7 reads, ”And you may eat every animal with cloven hooves, having the hoof split into two parts, and that chews the cud among the animals. Nevertheless, of those that chew the cud or have cloven hooves, you shall not eat, such as these: the camel, the hare, and the rock hyrax; for they chew the cud but do not have cloven hooves; they are unclean for you. Also, the swine is unclean for you, because it has cloven hooves but does not chew the cud; you shall not eat their flesh...” Here, God said that people can eat the meat of only certain animals.

4. In Acts 10:9-16 we read about how Peter had a vision in which there were various animals which did not qualify as food in accordance with the above standard from Deuteronomy. God then told Peter that He had cleansed the animals and said to him, "What God has cleansed you must not call common."

In other words, it was acceptable to eat animals without worrying about whether they were clean or unclean.

Now, if a person wants to obey and please God, what is proper for him to eat? Can he eat only vegetarian cuisine, no meat allowed? Can he eat any kind of meat he desires? Or is he only allowed to eat certain kinds of meat and not others? These passages present different standards from each other. So, how does one explain them?

The first thing to notice is that the rules were not all given to the same people and at the same time. Rather, there was a progression of events, and at certain times God changed the rules of diet from what they had previously been. We see a parallel situation when a city council changes the speed limit on a city street. As circumstances changes, the rules or laws change to reflect the new circumstances. If a city council can change its rules in accordance with its will, then certainly the sovereign Lord and God, Creator of the Universe, can change His rules if He so desires. The significance of the above passages is that the Bible records that God has indeed changed various rules for men at various points in time.

The implications of this are obvious. If God occasionally changes the rules governing the behavior of man, then we need to account for this in our interpretation of Scripture. Otherwise, we run the risk of submitting to a rule that was intended for someone else, living in a different time. In the process, we could overlook and completely misunderstand what God expects of us in our own time. In fact, this mistake
is made today by the Seventh Day Adventists and results in their peculiar theology which differs so greatly from that of the New Testament.

This raises an important question, the answer to which will completely color how we interpret the Bible. The question is, how extensive are these rule changes, and what is their significance when they do occur? For example, a reasonable question would be whether the changes in diet were incidental, occurring as isolated, individual changes, or whether they were associated with other changes, much greater in significance and scope? So, having been alerted to the fact that God does change His rules, it is worth reading through the Bible and seeing what other changes have been recorded besides those of diet, if any.

In reading through the Bible, we find that there appear to be seven discrete stages to God’s plan for mankind within the current heaven and earth. That there are seven stages instead of some other number is merely the implicit result of observation and analysis. Most of these stages are separated by rather dramatic events. As each new stage begins, God seems to have a new set of rules for the behavior of that stage. It turns out the changes of diet that first caught our attention are not isolated incidents, but rather they coincide with these larger changes in the rules. Not all of the different stages change diet over the previous stage, but all changes of diet occur at the beginning of a new stage and are part of the rules for that stage.

From observation, we see that all of the stages share the following characteristics:
1. God has a certain set of rules defining his relationship with man for that stage.
2. God gave the rules for a certain stage to a specific individual, who in turn distributed them.
3. Each stage ends in failure.
4. Boundaries between stages are marked by major events in human history from a spiritual perspective.

Notice, these are simply patterns we observe. They are not explicitly stated and do not have the force they would have if they had been. Nonetheless, being aware of the patterns provides tools for helping us to sort our way through Biblical events and better understand what God appears to be doing.

These stages may be listed as follows:

1. **Innocence.** This stage is in Genesis chapters 1 and 2. It concerns Adam and Eve before they ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, i.e. before the fall. Adam and Eve initially had an entirely different relationship with God than we do today. They could observe Him face-to-face and talk with Him freely. God gave them one rule to obey, not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They were vegetarians. The stage of Innocence ended in failure when they ate the forbidden fruit. The rules were given to Adam.

2. **Conscience.** This stage is in Genesis chapters 3 to 7. Adam and Eve could no
longer endure to be directly in the presence of God and fled when He approached them. An entirely new relationship between God and man came into existence. They now had an active conscience. Adam and Eve tried to cover their sin with fig leaves, the work of their own hands. A hint of Jesus’ death on the cross is given by God’s rejection of the fig leaves and His personal provision for them of animal skins. The skins came from a dead animal. The implication is that man cannot cover his sin with his own works, rather, a blood sacrifice is required. God apparently gave Adam instruction concerning sacrifice because in chapter four we see that Cain and Able, Adam's sons, both seemed to understand that a proper sacrifice required the death of an animal. Able tended clean animals, apparently for clothing and sacrifice, but not for food, since this was not allowed at that time. Although Cain rejected the doctrine of a blood sacrifice, it was made quite clear to him as to what the standard was. There are not very many verses describing this stage. The assumption is that at this time, every one offered his own personal sacrifices, as shown by both Cain and Able offering their own sacrifices while Adam was still alive. During this time men are still vegetarians. Among the rules of this stage were that men were not allowed to take their own vengeance, but were to live by their own conscience.

Eventually, after about 1,600 years, this stage ended in failure. God became so grieved over the violence and immorality of man that He sent a flood to destroy the earth. Only Noah, his three sons, and their wives survived the flood. Every other person on the earth was killed in judgment.

3. Government. This stage is in Genesis 8 to 11. After the flood, God gave Noah a new set of rules. He could eat animals as well as plants. If a man killed someone, then by man he should himself be killed. In Romans 13 we read how civil government is an institution which God established for the sake of punishing those who do evil and rewarding those who do good. Government first shows up in Scripture right after God told Noah to establish capital punishment. Civil government was intended by God to be an orderly means of establishing justice, even though man habitually corrupts and abuses it.

Shortly after the flood, the whole earth seemed to be engaged in idolatry and the knowledge of God was quickly being forgotten. The world had known God, it had seen His power in the flood, and had decided that, even so, it did not want to retain its knowledge of Him. The stage of civil government ended in failure.

4. Covenants. Next, in Genesis 12 to 25, God chooses to limit His dealings with mankind through one man, Abraham, and his offspring after him. The significance of this is that God gave up on the rest of the word and chose to let them go their own way and live in the darkness they wanted. God established a number of eternal covenants with Abraham, including that the land of Palestine will belong to His seed forever (i.e., forever = to the ages, which would be until the new heavens and earth are created.). Also, it would be through Abraham and his seed that the gentiles would be blessed. Circumcision is established between God and Abraham as a sign of the covenant between man and God. Subsequently, Abraham's seed are likewise to practice circumcision as a sign of the covenant.
God picked Isaac and Jacob as the heirs of Abraham through whom the blessings will be established and through whom the seed of blessing He promised will come. The nation Israel developed as Abraham's seed and as God's chosen people.

Israel also failed in her service to God. In Exodus 18 she boldly claimed that she would do all that God said for her to do. Apparently, this was a frivolous claim. In the earlier chapters of Exodus we read how the nation had rebelled against God ever since leaving Egypt, not acting in faith one time without being forced to do so. When Israel made the claim of obedience, apparently God saw that it was an empty claim, because He became very angry over her response. In fact, the laws of Moses were given to prove to the nation Israel that she was under bondage to sin. (This is the significance of the New Testament comment that the law was a tutor intended to lead us to Christ.)

5. The law. The nation Israel, God's chosen people to be His representatives on earth, seemed to have no understanding of their sin. God gave Moses the 10 commandments in order to prove to them that they were sinners. As a matter of fact, before Moses could bring the commandments to the people and present them, the nation entered into extremely wicked idolatry and immorality. This was in direct disobedience to God and confirmed the insincerity of the promise of obedience in Exodus 18. Eventually, though, God did establish the ten commandments as a covenant between Himself and the nation Israel.

Numerous dietary restrictions were placed on the Jews during this stage.

The stage of law failed when the Jews crucified their promised King, Jesus.

6. The church. The church was established after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. This stage centers around grace and how it is can provide a foundation for principles of Christian living by which a believer will be judged. Within this stage all foods are considered clean and suitable for food.

Ephesians 3:10-11 reveals that God is using the church to teach angels His multi-faceted wisdom:

\[\begin{align*}
10 \text{...to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,} \\
11 \text{according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord...}
\end{align*}\]

So, we can see that at least some of God's reasons for the differences between the stages involve the education of angels. There are evidently things that the church, living under a house law of grace, can teach angels that Israel, living under a house law of Law, could not. Otherwise, there would have been no reason for the church. This is quickly
entering the realm of the secret things. We simply need to accept at face value that God has His reasons for the differences and accept them; we also need to study to make sure we account for the distinctions they represent in our interpretation of Scripture.

This stage will also end in failure. Various passages also indicate that the end of the age is to be marked by apostasy and lukewarmness.

7. Kingdom. This stage represents the fulfillment of both Old and New Testament prophecies of a personal rule of King Jesus from a physical throne in Jerusalem. This will be a time of blessing on the earth approaching that of the Garden of Eden. Yet, this too will end in failure. Satan is to be bound throughout this stage, being unable to energize people to sin. At the end of the stage, Satan will be released from bondage and lead the unsaved within the kingdom into an immediate rebellion against the King. This is despite the blessings they had enjoyed under His personal rule. One of the possible reasons for this age: to squelch claims that people sin because of the environment. Socialists today like to claim that man sins only because of his environment, but that if you give him a perfect environment he wouldn’t sin. Man will have had essentially a perfect environment during the Millenial years. Yet, he will still readily join with Satan in a new rebellion against God when given the opportunity.

With the end of the seventh stage, God’s purposes for life for man on this earth as we know it will have been completed. The great white throne judgment will then take place, God will destroy the current heavens and earth, and will create a new heavens and earth.

The new heavens and earth will be radically different than the one we live in today. It will not be in bondage to decay (Romans 8). God says in Romans 8 that the whole universe is in travail, is in bondage to decay, because of sin. There is a law of physics which shows that decay is a natural, inherent quality of our current universe. This is called the second law of thermodynamics. This law is considered by most if not all scientists to be the most fundamental and most established in all of science. Yet, apparently, it will not be operative in the new heavens and the new earth. In Romans 8:21 we read, “because the creation itself will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.” Thus, the new heavens and the new earth will be freed from bondage to the “second law” and will be governed by different physical laws than our current universe. Personally, as a degreed physicist (B.S. in physics from UCLA, 1968), I cannot comprehend a universe in which the second law of thermodynamics does not apply. It is going to be interesting to me to see just how God will structure a universe without it. But, I believe He can do it and am anxiously awaiting the day it happens to see just what it will be like.

It was stated the stages are separated by extremely significant events from a spiritual perspective. Notice just how significant:

1. The boundary between Innocence and Conscience is marked by the fall of man and the entrance of sin into the world. Adam's sin has had a greater impact on the
quality of everyday living than any other single event in human history. Every pain, grief, and sorrow experienced by each individual person is the direct result of Adam's sin and the end of Innocence.

2. The boundary between Conscience and Civil Government is marked by the Flood of Noah, which saw God destroy in judgment every man, woman, and child living on the face of the earth, except for Noah and his family, 8 people in total. There could have easily been over 10 million people killed by the flood, with only 8 surviving.

3. The boundary between Civil Government and the Covenants does not appear dramatic from the world's perspective. God simply called Abraham. However, since the moment that God called Abraham, God essentially wrote off the rest of the world spiritually. The significance of God's calling Abraham was His promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:2 that in him the gentiles would be blessed. From then on, the gentiles would be required to go through Abraham or his seed in order to come to God. From a spiritual viewpoint, this is as significant as the flood. The people chose idolatry over God while having a knowledge of God. God willed to allow them to go their own way in their rejection of him, but this also meant that they would all be lost, damned for eternity, unless they came to Him through Abraham. From a spiritual standpoint, this is one of the most significant events in human history.

4. The giving of the laws of Moses, of which the 10 commandments are a part, was another major event in human spiritual history. There were many, many new rules that those who were placed under the law suddenly were compelled to obey; indeed, it takes several hundred pages of the Bible just to write them down. If legislation were capable of producing a perfect society, Israel under Moses would have been it.

5. The boundary between law and grace is marked by the single most significant event in the course of the creation, the crucifixion. Jesus, the Son of God who was none other than God in the flesh and Who Himself was that member of the trinity who spoke the universe into existence, was crucified for the sins of man.

6. The boundary between the Church and the Millenial Kingdom is marked by the physical return of the Lord Jesus Christ, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and His setting up His physical kingdom on the earth. 

So, we see that changes in dietary law were not isolated events unrelated to bigger issues. Rather, there were extremely significant events and changes which marked different stages in God's dealing with mankind. The dietary changes were sometimes a part of those changes, but actually were only a relative minor part of the changes. The scope of these changes is so great that a person must account for their existence in order properly to interpret the Bible.
Masters, Stewards, and House Law

Before continuing our discussion, a digression will be made to study certain customs which were common throughout various nations in ancient times. It turns out this serves as a pattern for God's dealing with men. Therefore, it will help us to understand better how God has implemented His plan if we understand these ancient customs.

In ancient days, when slavery was common, slaves were not only used to do hard, physical labor, but also for many skills that today would be considered to be "professional" in nature. Accountants, property managers, and investment advisors could all be slaves to a more wealthy master. In fact, sometimes kings would give a slave power and authority almost equal to that of the king himself. The king would set forth the general policy or direction for the slave to manage. The slave was then expected to be faithful in carrying the policies out. If the slave became too ambitious personally, skimming too much off the top for himself, or was not industrious enough to please the master, or merely was relatively unsuccessful, the king could at will change managers and imprison or terminate the life of the unprofitable slave. So, the king was the ultimate authority, even though he used the slave to implement his policies.

We see examples of this throughout Scripture. When Joseph was a slave in Egypt, he first managed Potiphar's household. Later, he managed the royal prison while he was himself still a prisoner. Finally, he was elevated in authority next to that of Pharaoh himself. Although Joseph exerted tremendous authority, he was always only representing a higher master who had delegated that authority to him and had chosen to work through him for the time being.

We see similar examples with Daniel in Babylon (see the Book of Daniel) and with Mordecai in Persia (see the Book of Ruth).

In the New Testament, the Bible has a word for a slave who is given managerial authority over a master's affairs. He is called a "steward." The actual Greek word for steward is oikonomos. Oiko means house, nomo means law, and the os ending means "man who ..." So, the translation of the components of oikonomos mean "house law man." In other words, there is a master who has authority over his own house. The master establishes certain rules, his "house law", which he expects the household to carry out. He then chooses a master, the "house law man," who gives the rules to the members of the household. It is also worthy of notice that sometimes a man's own son would act as steward instead of a slave.

There is a similar Greek word used in the same context, oikonomia. There are actually two definitions to this word. The word itself means, "house law," referring to the rules used to govern a house. That is still one of its primary meanings. However, in all languages, it seems that over periods of time words sometimes shift in meaning.
Eventually, *oikonomia* was also used to refer to the "office" of steward, the person who carried out the house law. One needs to look at the context in order to determine if a particular instance of *oikonomia* refers to the office of the steward, or to the "house law" implemented by the steward.

These items are important in understanding how God has chosen to work out His stages. In the above discussion we noticed how in each stage God has chosen to establish certain rules for that stage. This would correspond to His "house law" for that stage. We also noticed how God chose a particular man through whom the rules for that stage were given, such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, etc. These men correspond to stewards of the house law given to them. These principles will help us to understand some key passages in the New Testament.

In Hebrews 3 we see parallels between Moses service to God and the office of a steward. We read,

4 For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God.

5 And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward,

6 but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.

The passage compares the stewardship of Moses with that of Jesus. Moses' leadership over the House of God was as a slave. However, when Jesus comes, His stewardship will be as a Son. Although the word stewardship is not actually used in this passage, the picture of a Master, the Master's house, and a slave steward versus son steward is very clearly painted in the passage.

In Ephesians 1:10 we read, ...that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth-- in Him.

The key word in this passage is *dispensation*. This is an old English word not used much today. However, it dates back to the 1400s, when it commonly referred to the rules governing a body. Indeed, Webster's Collegiate Dictionary gives the following information in its entry on *dispensation*:

Function: noun
Date: 14th century
1 a : a general state or ordering of things; specifically : a system of revealed commands and promises regulating human affairs.

Dispensation is the English word the King James Bible uses to translate *oikonomia*, "house law." An English word which refers to *a system of revealed commands and promises regulating human affairs* is the word the King James Translators believed best matched the Greek word *oikonomia* used in Ephesians 1:10.
So, not only can we determine from observation that the rules change at various times, but the Bible also states it. It uses a word, dispensation, which specifically refers to the commands and promises in effect at a particular time. Many people today think of a dispensation as a period of time. Technically speaking, that is not true. By definition a dispensation is simply the "house law" or the commands and promises which are in effect in a particular set of circumstances.

Which of the seven dispensations is referred to in the above verse by the phrase, fullness of times? Since this is the only passage using this wording, we cannot cross reference with others to gain more insight. However, the Greek word translated fullness (Gr. pleroma) refers to completion. Hence, the passage apparently refers to the "house law" to be in effect when Jesus returns personally to rule in power during the Millenial Kingdom, when God's plan for the current heavens and earth will be completed. All of the preceding dispensations merely lead up to the one in which the Son Himself, not a slave, is the steward; one in which God's plan for the current heavens and earth will be completed. In other words, when Jesus returns He will set up new laws and will have new promises, ones which are different from the ones God has provided for us today. The Bible refers to the laws which will be in effect at that time as the dispensation of the fullness of times.

We see that in this passage, the terminology the Holy Spirit uses to describe God's plan uses the well-known model of a master, the master's house, the house rules for the house, and the man to carry out the rules of the house, although in the final dispensation it will be the Son and not a slave who functions as the steward.

A few chapters later in Ephesians 3:1-2, we read,

1...for this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles-- 2if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you,...

Here we find a different dispensation or house law is referred to, that of the grace of God. The church has a unique relationship with God, based on grace. There is a major change in goals, standards, and promises between the dispensation of law and that of grace. The dispensation of the grace of God is the one which was in effect when Paul was alive and is still in effect to this day.

An extremely important revelation is given by Paul in this passage. He states that the house law was given to him. In effect, Paul is claiming that he is the steward of the current house law, just as Moses was for the dispensation of law and Jesus Himself directly will be for the millennium.

Indeed, in Colossians 1:25, Paul directly claims that he has been given a stewardship:

of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, ...
And, again the same claim is made in 1 Corinthians 9:17:
For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship.

There were other prophets during the law, but God gave the House Law, the rules for the law, to Moses. The church age has many apostles and authors of New Testament Scripture, but God gives the dispensation, the House Law, to Paul. It is Paul to whom God reveals the actual theological significance of the gospel and of the principles of Christian living. The other apostles and prophets might give supplementary information, but the basic skeleton is provided by Paul.

The significance of this in establishing doctrine is important. One should start with the writings of Paul to establish the basic theology of the church; he then looks to the other New Testament writings as a means of supplementing what he understands from Paul's writings. More will be discussed about this later.

Paul's stewardship over the church is confirmed a number of ways. Paul wrote most of the New Testament. Paul explicitly states that the Gospel he preaches was revealed to him directly by God (Galatians 1:12). He seems to be the first to understand the significance of the gentiles not being under the law, although Peter and the elders in Jerusalem agreed with him once he explained his position to them. Peter acknowledges Paul's authority in his own writings. Paul is not really concerned about Peter's authority (Galatians 2:6-9). Furthermore, we see that within Scripture it is Paul that discusses the theology of the Gospel and it is Paul that discusses the theology of Christian living.

Paul is the one to whom God revealed that the Christian rule of life is to walk in the spirit, and that if you are led by the spirit, you are not under the law (Galatians 5:16-18). These are the basic elements of living under grace. After Paul presented these things to the church leaders in Jerusalem (Acts 15), they acknowledged that it was not necessary for the gentiles to be circumcised or to keep the law. Just from reading the account of the incident as recorded in Acts, it seems that the apostles and elders in Jerusalem were themselves still having a hard time understanding the proper relationship between law and grace. God gave the understanding of the relationship between the two to Paul. Once Paul explained these things to them, they acknowledged that his doctrine, as offensive as it was to the Jewish mind and as controversial as it was to those in the Jewish community, was indeed of God. Hence, Paul is the steward of the dispensation of the Grace of God, even as specifically declared by Scripture.

Incidentally, this also indicates that the Roman Catholic Church completely missed the mark when it proclaimed Peter to be the first Pope. If their claim were to have any Biblical basis, the first Pope should have been Paul. In fact, Paul was in Rome for several years, ministering and preaching the Gospel (Acts 28). Hence, it would have been easy for them to proclaim him the first Pope if they understood these things and if there were any legitimacy to the doctrine of popery. Paul is our steward.
Why do we say there are seven dispensations? Simply by observation from reading Scripture. We see that all seven clearly fit the above pattern and nothing else does so even remotely. God, as Master of His house, can have as many sets of house law as He chooses. He is bound only by what He decides to bind Himself by. However, from what Scripture has recorded, there appear to be seven. Certainly all seven of those listed have enough distinctiveness properly to be treated separately. Some might consider the Tribulation Period, which exists between the rapture of the church and the return of Christ to set up the Millenial Kingdom as a separate dispensation. However, for certain specific reasons it is more fitting to count the tribulation as a reversion back to law for a limited period of time.

...

The above represents a portion of a work in progress. The next section of the work will show how the various stages mentioned above correspond to the dispensations. However, even though the above portion is not the entire work and thus is not complete in its development, there should have been enough presented to provide a solid basis for recognizing the validity of the dispensation framework of Scripture.

If one allows later passages of Scripture to interpret earlier ones, he will come up with a literal hermeneutic. This does not mean symbols and figures of speech are not contained in the Bible, for it is full of them. However, the rules for how to understand them can be derived from the Bible itself. Prophecy is of literal, future historical events. Dispensationalism is the natural outworking of a Biblically-derived hermeneutic.