

# Critique of The Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse

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## INTRODUCTION

Preterist comes from the two Latin words -- *praeter*, beyond, and *ire*, to go, and therefore comes to look at a past action or state. Webster defines preterist as "n. 1. one whose chief interest and pleasure is in the past, 2. in theology, one who believes that the prophecies of the Apocalypse have already been fulfilled." Of course preterism is not confined to the Apocalypse; it also places a major emphasis on the Olivet discourse, particularly as it is recorded in Matthew 24-25.

Thomas Ice sees three categories of preterists -- mild, moderate and extreme. He states, "Mild preterism, unlike the other two forms, does not see prophecy concluding with the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70." Essentially it sees the Apocalypse fulfilled in the downfall of Israel as a nation and the overthrow of pagan Rome. Extreme preterists "... view themselves as 'consistent preterists.'" This "consistency" leads to the conclusion that the second coming occurred in A. D. 70. Therefore there will be no bodily resurrection; believers have already been spiritually resurrected and at death will go on to live eternally with spiritual bodies. Moderate preterism believes large blocks of New Testament prophecy were fulfilled in the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70, but they also hold to a future literal return of Christ with a bodily resurrection of believers and unbelievers. This preterism has seen a strong revival with the Reconstructionist movement; it is essentially the view of reconstructionist postmillennialism. Of course, as in most classifications, these are not categorical. As will be seen, it is possible to hold to a "consistent preterism" in the Olivet discourse and also believe in the Second Advent of Christ.

## A SUMMARY OF THE PRETERIST INTERPRETATION OF THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

Like dispensationalism, preterists lay a great emphasis on the context of the discourse. They see Christ rejecting Israel in Matthew 23 with the climactic sentence, "Your house is being left to you desolate" (Matt 23:28). This desolation is accomplished in the destruction of the Temple predicted in Matthew 24:1-3. Because Matthew 23:34 says, "This generation will not pass away until all these things take place," they hold that the predictions of Matthew 24:4-14 regarding famines, earthquakes, false messiahs, wars, etc. were all fulfilled in the days preceding A. D. 70. The abomination of desolation was accomplished in the taking of Jerusalem; also at that time the sign of the Son of Man appeared. The coming of Christ was accomplished by His coming in judgment on Jerusalem.

Moderate preterists split company at Matthew 24:36, "But of the day and hour no one knows." Some, as Gentry, say that the demonstrative pronoun *that* points to a change

of time from the pronoun this in "this generation" of verse 34. The *that* refers to a time in the distant future when the Second Advent occurs. However, DeMar disputes this. He believes the *that* also refers to the destruction of Jerusalem. He goes so far as to say the whole passage of Matthew 24:36 to 25:30 looks ahead to A. D. 70. He argues the return of the Master occurred within the lifetime of the faithful and unfaithful slaves, and during the lives of the servants with the talents. Therefore, while the time may have appeared long, it was within forty years of Christ's ascension. He also says the concluding section in Matthew 25:31-46 dealing with the judgment of the nations is a continuing process in history. He says, "There is no indication that Matthew 25:31-46 describes a single event. Rather the passage describes a process of judgment, related to Jesus' dominion as an 'everlasting dominion' (Daniel 7:14)." He goes on to write, "The King of glory is continually judging and reigning among the nations, and He will not cease from this 'work' until 'He has abolished all rule and authority and power' (1 Cor. 15:24)." More moderate preterists would disagree with DeMar on this interpretation of Matthew 24:36--25:46.

### **SOME PROBLEMS WITH THE PRETERIST APPROACH**

The preterist approach to the Olivet discourse has much to commend it. There background studies essentially agree with dispensationalists in seeing the context of Israel's stubborn rejection of their Messiah. Dispensationalists and preterists agree that the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70 was God's judgment on Israel. Preterists who also are reconstructionists hold to a high view of the Scriptures and thankfully do not regard the dispensationalist approach as one that will threaten one's orthodoxy. Quite obviously dispensationalists and other who take a futurist viewpoint of the Olivet Discourse differ markedly from preterists on how that discourse is to be interpreted. Futurists have problems and questions in connection with the exposition of preterist. Some are listed here.

### **PASSAGES DEALING WITH CHRIST'S COMING**

Matthew 23:39. *"For I say to you, from now on you shall not see Me until you say, 'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!'"*

This writer found little on this passage in preterist literature. The verse was quoted in connection with verse 38 but it was discussed but little. This seems to be significant especially in light of the fact it appears to be a "time element" passage. It really should be considered along with other temporal elements in this section of Matthew, especially because it deals with the time when Israel would see their Messiah again.

The verse is introduced with *gar* which helps to explain the desolation of Israel's house in verse 38. In some way the abandonment of Israel's house is related to the absence of the Lord Jesus. Preterists would agree with this assertion. The problem for preterists is the last half of the verse, "You shall not see me until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

That the Lord is dogmatic about this is seen in the Greek construction of *ou me* with the aorist subjunctive. By no means would they see the Lord until Israel makes the

grand pronouncement of Psalm 118:26, the very exclamation the crowds who had come to Jerusalem with Christ had made in the so-called "Triumphal Entry" (Matt. 21:9; Mark 11:9; Luke 19:38).

The Greek term *ho erchomenos*, the Coming One, is also significant because it is messianic. This would be especially true when it is associated with "in the name of the Lord." In other words, this coming is to be identified with the triumph of the Second Advent as portrayed in Psalm 118.

Furthermore and most significantly, Matthew 23:39 looks ahead to Israel's repentance. Preterists agree with dispensationalists that the second person plural you in this context looks at Israel. This *humin* in verse 39 must be the same as in verse 38. While verse 38 does refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70, it cannot be the same event as verse 39. Jews would hardly call the horrible decimation of life at that cataclysmic event a *blessed* coming of the Messiah. Rather verse 39 describes Israel's future repentance when as Zechariah 12:10 say they shall mourn for their great sin.

This becomes important because the clear deduction is Israel's repentance precedes His coming. Certainly there was no repentance on the part of Israel before A. D. 70. The preterists describe in detail the apostasy and false teachers that were present in Jerusalem preceding A. D. 70. The Lord's point is obvious: Israel had rejected its Messiah; therefore, judgement was to come. Israel would be left without the presence of its Messiah from that time (*ap' arti*) until (*heos an* with the subjunctive to indicate an indefinite future time) it would welcome the Lord Jesus. When Israel repents the kingdom will come; that is what Christ is saying here.

Preterists say Israel saw the Lord in His coming in the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70. However, the Lord Jesus said Israel would not see Him again until that nation affirmed that He was the Messiah. This then would look at His return with joy and blessings for Israel. The next seeing of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 23:39 can hardly be what the preterists assert when they say Israel saw Christ in the Judgment of AD 70.

*Matthew 24:27 "For just as the lightning comes from the east, and flashes even to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be."*

The preterist responds to this passage by saying God's appearance was as terrifying as lightning. "In the Bible, lightning often signifies the presence of the Lord or His coming in judgment (Ex. 19:16; 20:18; Job 36:30; Ezek. 21:15, 28; Zech. 9:14)." He also asserts, "Matthew 24:27 seems to imply that Jesus is somehow participating in Jerusalem's destruction. This is exactly the point." "Jesus came 'like lightning' to set Jerusalem 'afame all around.'"

Gentry states the viewpoint very clearly:

Yet there was to be a "coming" of Christ in that day: "For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matt. 24:27). This, however, is a spiritual judgment-coming rather than a bodily coming.

Such a judgment-coming was to be witnessed by the Sanhedrin who abused Him during the ecclesiastical trials leading up to His crucifixion. Notice what Christ says to His abusers: "The high priest answered and said to Him, 'I adjure you by the living God that You tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God.' Jesus said to him, 'it is as you

said, Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 26:63-64)

Here the high priest and the other members of the Sanhedrin present were told that they would see His coming. The coming to be witnessed by the Sanhedrin is of the sort attributed to Jehovah in Isaiah's prophecy against Egypt: "The burden against Egypt. Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud, and will come into Egypt" (Isa. 19:1). The Lord did not physically ride on a cloud down into Egypt! Neither was the "coming of the Son of Man" that the Sanhedrin would see a physical coming. Nor is the "coming as lightning" mentioned in Matthew 24:27 a physical coming. It is manifestly a judgment-coming against those who call for His blood to be upon them and their children (Matt. 27:25).

There is no doubt that in the Old Testament God's presence is evidenced by lightning as in Exodus and Deuteronomy and His judgment is likened to lightning as in Ezekiel and Zechariah. But the question is, what does the context say about the analogy of lightning and the *parousia* of the Lord Jesus? Furthermore, one must ask, what is meant by the *parousia* of Christ?

Most agree the context of the Olivet discourse is located contextually in (1) Israel's rejection of Christ, (2) Christ's rejection of Israel and (3) the disciples' questions in Matthew 24:3. Some dispensationalists believe two questions are being asked here -- first, when will these things be, that is, when will the destruction of Jerusalem take place? and second, what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?

It seems better to say all three questions in the disciples' minds revolved around one event. To them the destruction of Jerusalem, the coming of the Messiah, and the end of the age comprised one complex series of events. Their theological basis for this doctrine was well founded for this is taught in Zechariah 14:1-11. This passage says in part:

I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished . . . . Then the Lord will go forth and fight those nations as when He fights on a day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives . . . . Then the Lord will come, and all the holy ones with him!

When the disciples heard the Lord Jesus speak of their house being left desolate (23:38), of His coming (23:39), and of the destruction of the Temple, they very logically would call to remembrance Zechariah 14 for those elements are all brought together in that Old Testament prophecy.

Significantly, Christ does not say their theology was incorrect. A similar situation is found in Acts 1 when the disciples associate the promise of the Holy Spirit's coming with the restoration of Israel's kingdom. Their doctrine was not incorrect; their timing of the coming of Israel's kingdom was uninformed. So here the Lord warned them not to be misled by false messiahs and wars; that was not the end (24:1-6). Even the destruction of Jerusalem did not necessarily preface the coming of the Messiah. It should be noted all three records of the Olivet discourse begin with the Lord's warning to the disciples not to be confused by false teachers and wars (cf. Matt. 24:4-6; Mark 13:5-7; Luke 21:8-9). In summary, the Lord does not deny the prophetic sequence of Zechariah 14; He simply warns the disciples not to be confused by events that were about to happen and by the

wars and rumors of wars that characterize this age. Wars and false teachers are necessary (*dei*) in this fallen world and in the program of God (Matt. 24:6; Mark 13:7; Luke 21:9).

The context of the discourse rests in the sitting of the Lord's second coming according to the prophecy of Zechariah 14. However, as important as this is, the primary question is found in the disciples' inquiry, "What will be the sign of your coming?" (Matt. 24:3). What does "coming" (*parousia*) mean? That term is filled with significance. This noun occurs four times in the Olivet discourse (the only times Matthew uses *parousia* and the only occurrence in the Gospels). The first occurrence is in the question asked by the disciples. Very interestingly, the remaining three are in identical clauses, "thus, shall be the coming of the Son of Man" (*houtos estai he parousia tow huiou tou anthropou* (Matthew 24:27, 37, 39).

Moderate preterists believe there is a change in chronology at Matthew 24:36 marked by the pronoun that which they take to be a reference to the Second Advent. Gentry writes:

With these words the Lord turns to look beyond the signs just given for "this generation" (near demonstrative, Matt. 24:34) to "that day" (far demonstrative) (24:36). Thus, the Lord's attention turns to His Second Advent at the end of history. Although He gave signs regarding the events coming upon His own "generation," He carefully distinguishes His eschatological coming by denying signs."

The problem with this interpretation is the meaning of *parousia* before verse 36 and after. If the coming of the Son of Man in Matthew 24:37, 39 is the Second Advent, one would expect *the identical clause* in 24:27 to refer to the same event. The word would also have the same meaning in 24:3. It must be the Second Advent in each case.

Furthermore, the word *parousia* as found in the New Testament is always used of an actual presence. It may be employed of the presence of persons as in 1 Corinthians 16:17; 2 Corinthians 7:6-7; 10:10; Philippians 1:26; 2:12 and 2 Thessalonians 2:9. In each of these above cases the person is *bodily* present. In all the other cases *parousia* is used of the Lord's presence at His second coming, cf. 1 Corinthians 15:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 8; James 5:7, 9; 2 Peter 1:16; 3:4, 12; 1 John 2:28. The only occurrences in the Gospel of *parousia* are in Matthew 24. It would seem that they, too, refer to a yet future coming of Christ.

What then is Matthew 24:27 saying? It is simply saying people should not be misled by false teachers or counterfeit messiahs who make their deceptive claims in some wilderness or inner sanctum (24:26). They may even fortify their pretensions by fantastic miracles (24:24). The reason the Lord's followers should not be drawn aside is because the coming of the Lord Jesus will be so spectacular no one will miss seeing it. It will be like a bolt of lightning that streaks from one horizon to the other. This is why the Lord used the correlatives *hosper. . . houtos*; He is simply using an analogy or comparison. His Second Advent will be as obvious as a brilliant sky-spanning bolt of lightning. So will be the unmistakable and actual presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in His second coming to earth.

Matthew 24:30. "*And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory.*"

DeMar introduces his discussion of this verse with these telling words: "This single verse is one of the most difficult to interpret in light of an A. D. 70 fulfillment, especially as translated in the New American Standard Version." DeMar explains the verse as saying God in the Old Testament was said to ride on a cloud (Isa. 19:1; Psa. 104:3). Furthermore, the word translated "sky," *ouranos*, also means heaven. The sign then that appears in heaven is the Son having taken His place at the right hand of the Father. Gentry, who takes a similar view, adds:

The idea of Matthew 24:30 is parallel in some respects to that of Acts 2:19: "I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: blood and fire and vapor of smoke." that which was left after the total collapse of Jerusalem -- blood, fire, and smoke -- serve as the sign that the Son of Man was at God's right hand.

Some serves as a sign for Israel's armies in the Old Testament . . . (Juds. 20:38). In prophetic literature smoke indicates the destruction of a city . . . (Joel 2:30; quoted in Acts 2:19). In Scripture the billowing of smoke clouds from a scene of judgment often serves as evidence of that judgment (Gen. 19:28; Josh. 18:20; Psa. 37:20; Isa. 14:31; 34:10; Rev. 14:11; 18:9).

In the same context he explains Matthew 26:64 where the Sanhedrin were told by Christ that they would see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of God and coming on clouds of heaven in these words: "In the smoky destruction of Jerusalem, these Jewish leaders should see the Son of Man's position of power in His cloud-judgment . . . " Gentry goes on to say the sign may be in heaven, as DeMar says, or it may be in the sky in the sense of smoke.

DeMar then relates the coming of the Son of Man on the clouds of the sky to Daniel 7:13-14. All agree on this point. However, DeMar says this takes place in heaven. He says, "The coming of the Son of Man is not *down* but *up*! Jesus comes *up* 'with the clouds of heaven' *to* 'the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him.'" According to this preterists this is what the Sanhedrin saw in the destruction of Jerusalem; this is when the tribes in the land of Israel mourned.

It will be conceded by all that the first part of Matthew 24:30 looks back to Zechariah 12:10. However, it is important to notice that in Zechariah the mourning of 12:10 is explained by the verses that follow. It is a repentant lamentation by Israel because it results in the purification of the nation (Zech. 13:1). The context of Zechariah 12:10 is most significant. Rather than prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem, it is predicting the opposite. "And it will come about in that day that I will set about to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem" (Zech. 12:9). This is the tenor of Zechariah 12:1-8. It looks ahead to God's future deliverance of Israel when Jerusalem will again be surrounded by enemies. "In that day" is prophetic of a time of deliverance of Israel, not judgment. (Note the constant repetition of "in that day" [12:3, 4, 6, 8 (2x), 9, 11; 13:1, 2, 4]). It is clear that the context of Zechariah is a mourning that results in cleansing and deliverance for Israel. Whatever the sign of the Son of Man is, it results in the national repentance of Israel. This parallels perfectly what Paul says in Romans 11:25- 27. This explanation of Matthew 24:30a sets the stage for the understanding of the last half of the verse.

It is true that in the vision of Daniel 7:13 as it is translated in the NASB the Son of Man came up to the Ancient of Days to receive the dominion to rule. However, the Hebrew verb has no idea of direction; it simply means to arrive or to reach. This specific

verb is only used in Daniel where it may refer to something reaching up as Nebuchadnezzar's greatness did in 4:22, or it may describe something going down as in 6:24 where the detractors of Daniel were thrown into the lion's den. It has no intrinsic sense of direction. Nor does the following preposition indicate direction in itself. The construction simply means the Son of Man approached the Ancient of Days. But even if it describes the Son of Man coming up to the Ancient of Days, it only looks at the bestowment of authority. The question is where is the authority expressed? Keil says it well when he writes:

In this very chapter before use there is no expression or any intimation whatever that the judgment is held in heaven. No place is named. It is only said that judgment was held over the power of the fourth beast, which came to a head in the horn speaking blasphemies, and that the beast was slain and his body burned. If he who appears as the son of man with the clouds of heaven comes before the Ancient of days executing the judgment on the earth, it is manifest that he could only come from heaven to earth. If the reverse is to be understood, then it ought to have been so expressed, since the coming with clouds of heave in opposition to the rising up of the beast out of the sea very distinctly indicates a coming down from heaven. The clouds are the veil or the "chariot" on which God comes from heaven to execute judgment again His enemies; cf. Ps. xvii; 10f., xcvi 2-4, civ. 3, Isa. xix 1, Nah. i. 3. This passage forms the foundation for the declaration of Christ regarding His future coming, which is described after Dan. vii. 13 as a coming of the Son of man with, in, on the clouds of heaven; Matt. xxiv. 20, xxvi. 64; Mark xiii. 26; Rev. 1.7, xiv. 14.

In summary, Matthew 24:30 describes a visible appearance of the sign of the Son of Man, the repentance of Israel and the triumphant return of Christ to reign on planet earth.

### **PASSAGES DEALING WITH THE GREAT TRIBULATION**

*Matthew 24:15: "Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet standing in the holy place (let the reader understand)."*

Preterists with great skill point out that in the days preceding A. D. 70 there were false messiahs, wars and rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, many martyrs, false prophets, increasing wickedness and the proclamation of the gospel throughout the Roman world, all in fulfillment of the Lord's prophecies of Matthew 24:4-14. They also see the fulfillment of Matthew 24:15 (Mark 13:14) in either the time preceding the fall of Jerusalem or in its fall.

They explain the abomination of desolation as being any one of four possible events. First, they say it could have been the occupation of the Temple Courts by murderous zealots. These zealots even invaded the Holy of Holies and placed an imposter in office as high priest, as well as ordaining unqualified misfits to the priesthood. Josephus refers to this in his work, THE JEWISH WAR. Second, they feel it may be explained as the intrusion into Jerusalem by Idumeans at the invitation and aid of the zealots. They in turn slaughtered many people including the chief priest, Ananus. This polluted the Temple courts with blood and took place before A. D. 70, probably in A. D. 68. Third, preterists say it is possible this refers to the capture and burning of the Temple by the Romans. In the process of torching the Temple the Roman soldiers set up their standards opposite the eastern gate and offered sacrifices to them. DeMar says, "The

Roman abomination hypothesis is the most popular since it parallels the actions of Antiochus Epiphanes." Although DeMar feels any or all of the preceding are legitimate, he prefers a fourth explanation or the abomination of desolation. He believes the best is to say it describes the corruption of the Temple by the abominations and defilements of apostate Israel.

Because Christ specifically related the prophecy of the abomination of desolation to Daniel's prophecy, it seems best to see some correspondence between the abomination of desolation committed by Antiochus Epiphanes and that predicted by Christ. If this is so it would entail not only defilement on the altar by sacrifices offered with impure hearts, but also an actual worship of another god using the Temple as a means for such a dastardly act. Those preterists who agree with this take it to be the worship of the Roman standards in the Temple precincts. However, if this interpretation is taken, Matthew 24:16-20 is difficult if not impossible to explain. By then it would be too late for the followers of the Lord Jesus to escape; the Romans had already taken the city by this time. If the abomination of desolation spoken by Daniel 9:27 and 12:11 is foreshadowed by Antiochus Epiphanes (11:31), it would be best to say it is a desecration carried out by a person who sacrilegiously uses the Temple to promote the worship of a god other than Jehovah. This is what is anticipated in 2 Thessalonians 2.

Matthew 24:21: *"For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall."*

Preterists respond to this passage very neatly by saying this is a figure of speech in Old Testament literature. They defend this by referring to 1 Kings 3:12 where it was said there was no king like Solomon before or after him. Similar statements are made in 2 Kings 18:5 of Hezekiah and in 2 Kings 23:25 of Josiah. Of course, Christ surpasses even Solomon (Matt. 12:42). The same Old Testament idea of "never will be" is employed of judgments that have already been fulfilled such as locusts in Egypt (Ex. 10:12; cf. Joel 1:1-4), a cry in Egypt (Ex. 11:6), and judgment on Israel (Ez. 5:9; Joel 2:2). The point then is the expression "never has been nor ever will be" is a semitism meaning very great or very much. The Lord would then be saying there would be a very great tribulation. The preterists then go on to say this terrible time of tribulation was fulfilled in A. D. 70.

However, the tribulation referred to in Matthew 24:21 is explained further in verse 22. "And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short." This verse must be considered along with verse 21. What is meant by "life" in the clause "no life would have been saved"? DeMar explains this as referring "to life in the land of Israel." The noun translated "life" is *sarx*. It should be noted, however, that the Greek construction is *pasa sarx* or all flesh, a technical term which refers to all humanity. The following are all the occurrences of "all flesh" in the Greek New Testament text -- Matthew 24:22; Mark 13:20; Luke 3:6; John 17:2; Acts 2:17; Romans 3:20; 1 Corinthians 1:29; 15:39; Galatians 2:16; 1 Peter 1:24. In every case except 1 Corinthians 15:39 the expression describes all humans. In the passage Paul is discussing the nature of the resurrection body, "All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another of beasts . . ." Here he is using it in an even broader sense, all human and animal life.



BAG take *pasa sarx* to mean *every person, everyone*. With the negative they take it to mean *no person, nobody* and list Matthew 24:22 and Mark 13:20 as instances of this meaning. The expression *pasa sarx* comes from the Septuagint which in turn looks at the Hebraism *kol basar* "all flesh." Gesenius says this Hebrew construction means "all living creatures . . . especially *all men*, the whole human race . . ." Therefore, to interpret "all flesh" in Matthew 24:22 and Mark 13:20 as referring to Jews living in Judea in A. D. 70 is too limiting. "All flesh" describes all humanity. In other words, the tribulation described in Matthew 24:21 is of such huge proportions that human life stands in jeopardy on planet earth. This could not be said in A. D. 70 as horrible as the decimation of life was in Judea at that time. Matthew 24:21-22 must look beyond the past destruction of Jerusalem.

### **PASSAGES REGARDING THE OLIVET DISCOURSE AVOIDED BY PRETERISTS**

Matthew 23:39 *"For I say to you, from now on you shall not see Me until you say, 'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!'"*

A discussion of this passage has already been presented. Preterists contend "you" means the generation who heard Christ speak these words. The question remains, however, when in the siege and destruction of Jerusalem did Israel look to the Lord Jesus and say, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord?"

Luke 21:28 *"But when these things begin to take place straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."*

Concerning this verse Plummer simply states, "This word of comfort is give by LK. alone . . . The disciples present are regarded as representatives of believers generally. Only those who witness the signs can actually fulfil this injunction . . . At the Second Advent . . ." Geldenhuys explains by stating:

It is not permissible to apply these words to the events before the destruction of Jerusalem (as Lightfoot and others do), and to make "redemption" refer to the deliverance of the disciples from the power of their Jewish persecutors. From the context here, as also in Mark xiii (cf. especially Mark xiii. 32, where the use of "that day" and "that hour" expressly refer to the second coming), it is evident that the words refer to the deliverance of the faithful from distress (through persecution and other misery on earth) at His second advent. Of course these words in verse 28 have, in a secondary sense, a meaning also for all other times of oppression that the faithful are called upon to pass through. History also has proved that Jesus did not here mean the downfall of the Jewish state and the deliverance of the disciples from the oppression of Jewish persecutions, for even before the fall of Jerusalem, e.g., at least two (Peter and James) of the four apostles (cf. Mark xiii. 2) had already died the death of martyrs. Also Andre and all the other apostles (except John) first died as martyrs after the fall of Jerusalem. In addition, the church after the downfall of the Jewish state through the power of the Romans often endured terrible times of persecution (far worse than under the Jews before A. D. 70).

Marshall reviews the preterist view, rejects it and then states, "in fact the clear temporal sense (Mk. 13:24, 26) suggest that an event after the fall of Jerusalem is in mind."

In the disciples' minds the return of the Messiah and the deliverance of Israel went together. This would be based on such a passage as Zechariah 14:3-11 (cf. Isa. 64:1-2; Acts 3:20-21).

## **OBJECTIONS TO THE FUTURIST AND DISPENSATIONAL APPROACH**

Obviously, the preterists have reasons for holding to their position and these in turn become points which oppose the futurist position, especially dispensationalism. Some of the major ones are given here.

The Reference to "this generation" in Matthew 24:34 (cf. Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32). *"Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place."*

This verse is the most significant passage in the defense of the preterist system. Confessedly, it is a difficult objection for futurists to answer. The preterists point out that in every other instance in the Gospel "this generation" refers to the then present generation. They further assert that Christ is speaking to the people then living. For instance, in the same general context the Lord said, "Truly I say to you, all these things shall come upon this generation" (Matt. 23:36). Dispensationalists agree this refers to the Lord's contemporaries. To make the saying even more emphatic the Lord uses *ou me* with the aorist subjunctive in all three Synoptics, "By no means will this generation pass away . . ."

How then is this passage to be explained? Actually, this verse is difficult for any theological position including that held by the preterist. (They struggle to interpret "all these things.") A number of explanations of this verse have been posited. There is first the interpretation of the preterists which say all the predictions of Matthew 24:4-33; Mark 13:5-29 and Luke 21:8-31 were fulfilled in the siege and destruction of Jerusalem. Regarding this view Mounce simply asserts, "This answer can be held only by overlooking the rather obvious meaning of a number of verses in the discourse." Evidently Mounce is referring to such verses as Matthew 23:39; 24:22, 27, 30 and the meaning of *parousia*.

A second interpretation is held by a number of futurist which affirms the noun *genea* means race, usually referring it to the Jewish race. However, "race" is not the normal meaning of *genea*. BAG does give "clan" as a primary meaning but only lists Luke 16:8 as an illustration in the N.T. It is difficult for a dispensational premillennialist to take this view because he would then be implying that Israel would cease to exist as a nation after the Lord's return. "This race of Israel will not pass away until the second advent" is suggested by such an interpretation. But Israel must continue after the Second Advent into the millennium to fulfill the promises God made to that nation.

A third interpretation is to say "this" generation refers to the future generation that will be alive when the Lord Jesus returns. Hiebert says:

It seems best to preserve the natural meaning of generation as denoting the people alive at a given time and accept the view that the reference is to that future, turbulent, wicked generation that will see that actual beginning of those eschatological events (vv. 14-23). The assurance is that the end-time crisis will not be of indefinite duration.

The near demonstrative many have this meaning of a near concept (cf. "this bread," 1 Cor. 11:26). The problem with this is the use of "the generation" in the N. T. It normally refers to the generation contemporaneous with the speaker.

A fourth interpretation would say this is an illustration of multiple fulfillment. Mounce asserts, "biblical prophecy is capable of multiple fulfillment." In commenting on Matthew 24:32-35 he explains:

In the immediate context, the "abomination of desolation" (v. 15) builds on the defilement of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes, is repeated when the sacred temple of Jerusalem is destroyed by the Roman army in A. D. 70, and has yet a more complete fulfillment when the eschatological Antichrist exalts himself by taking his seat in the "temple of God" proclaiming himself to be God (2 Thess. 2:3-4). In a similar way, the events of the immediate period leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem portend a greater and more universal catastrophe when Christ returns in judgment at the end of time. Cundry is right in his observation that double fulfillment (I would say "multiple fulfillment") involves an ambiguity that needs to be accepted as fact rather than objected to on literary grounds.

A number of commentaries agree with this explanation.

A question still remains for all interpreters and that is the meaning of "all these things" in Matthew 24:34 and Mark 13:30 (Luke 21:32 has "all things"). It is possible that the "these things" looks back to the question of the disciples when they asked, "When shall these things (the destruction of the Temple) be?" (Cf. Matt. 24:3; Mark: 13:4; Luke 21:7). This founders on two problems. (1) The question of the disciples is so far removed from the Lord's statement in Matthew 24:34; Mark 13:30 and Luke 21:32 that it makes such an interpretation improbable. (2) When the Lord said, "all these things" He probably was looking at more than the destruction of the Temple. Certainly the immediate context implies this.

Probably the best explanation is to take the verb *geneta* as an ingressive aorist. The same verb is found in all three Synoptics and is translated "take place" (Matt. 24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32). It would then emphasize the beginning of the action and take the meaning "begin to take place." All those things would begin in that generation and find their ultimate completion at the Second Advent. Ellis finds some support for a prolonged time period in the Dead Sea Scrolls in saying, "More decisive, in the Qumran writings the term "last generation" (1QpHab 2:7; 7:2) apparently included several lifetimes. Their usage indicates that in the New Testament 'the (last) generation', like 'last hour' (1 John. 2:18) or 'today' means only the last phases in the history of redemption."

## **THE PREDICTION OF THE DESTRUCTION OF THE SECOND TEMPLE**

The Lord prophesied the Temple then standing would be destroyed; how then can this be made to refer to a future yet to be rebuilt Temple? He said, "Do you not see all these (*tauta*) things?" The preterist asks, Why is it necessary to have a rebuilt Temple?

First, dispensationalists do not deny the Lord was predicting the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in A. D. 70. This is seen in all three Synoptic Gospels. Second, and more importantly, Haggai uses what may be called a principle of continuity in the history of the Temple. The house of the Lord could be razed to the ground and rebuilt and still be considered to be the same Temple. Haggai 2:3 says at the time of the rebuilding of

the Temple after the first Temple had been destroyed, "Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory?" Verse 9 says, "The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts, 'and in this place I shall give peace,' declares the LORD of hosts." The near demonstrative is in both the Hebrew and LXX. The Jewish commentator, Cohen, explains, "The prophet regards the house they are building as the continuation of Solomon's Temple . . . ."

The rebuilt Temple posited by futurists can be referred to as "this" house and be in the train of the two preceding Temples according to this usage in Haggai. It is very plausible then to see the destruction of the Temple in A. D. 70 as a presage of what is yet to be with regards to a rebuilt Temple.

### **THE USE OF A HIATUS IN INTERPRETING DANIEL 9:24-27**

DeMar refers to the dispensational approach to Daniel 9:24-27 as "gap theology." By that term, of course, he refers to the doctrine of an intercalation between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of Daniel's prophecy. An extended defense of such a gap in Daniel 9:24-27 is beyond the province of this paper; such an apologetic is found in other works such as those by Alva J. McClain and Robert D. Culver. A simple list of reasons must suffice here.

(1) Gaps are found elsewhere in prophecy. In Malachi 3:1 Malachi predicts the coming of the Messiah's forerunner, who, of course, is John the Baptist. This is immediately followed by a description of the Lord's Second Advent. It quite clearly is the second coming because it is described as a time of judgment, prompting Malachi to ask, "Who can endure the day of His coming?" (3:2). A gap of some 2000 years and counting exists between John the Baptist and the Lord's next coming.

Isaiah 9:6 says, "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us," and then predicts, "And the government will rest on His shoulders." The second is yet to be. A similar phenomenon is found in Zechariah 9:9-10. In verse 9 the king comes humbly on a donkey colt, but in verse 10 God says, "And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the house from Jerusalem; and the bow of war will be cut off." A parenthesis must exist between Zechariah 9:9 and 9:10. Baldwin recognizes such a phenomenon in Scripture when in discussing Daniel 9:24 she writes, "If the historical work of Christ and His second coming are telescoped this is not unusual, even in the New Testament . . ."

(2) According to Daniel 9:26 the Messiah will be cut off *after* the sixty-ninth week. Also *after* the sixty-ninth week the Romans would destroy the city of Jerusalem and the Temple; this was accomplished in A. D. 70. *Then*, in 9:27 the prince who is to come will make a one-week covenant with Israel. The chronology of the passage is sequential.

(3) The events of Daniel 9:24 have never been fulfilled for Israel. These blessings are specifically said to be for Israel and Jerusalem.

(4) The Lord Himself said the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel was still future (Matt. 24:15). Then unprecedented tribulation would take place, immediately followed by the Lord's second coming. The sequence is very clear -- the abomination of desolation, great tribulation immediately followed by the return of Christ. This makes a parenthesis between Daniel's sixty-ninth and seventieth week a necessity.

## **THE USE OF THE SECOND PERSON PLURAL TO REFER TO A FUTURE GENERATION**

Dispensationalists often take the "you" in the Olivet discourse to refer to a generation that will be alive at the time of the Second Advent. For instance, in Matthew 24:33 the "you" is for those who will be following Christ in the coming Great Tribulation. "Even so you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door." Preterist strongly disagree with this approach. DeMar states:

. . . notice how many times Jesus uses the word you (second person plural) in Matthew 24 and in the parallel passages in Mark 13 and Luke 21 . . . Now, if you heard Jesus say that all these things would happen to "this generation" and in every other instance of its use "this generation" meant the present generation, and you also heard Him speak of when "you" see these things, what would you have concluded?

Once again the second person plural may be employed of those who are not contemporaries. Illustrations are found in the immediate context. In Matthew 23:35 the Lord Jesus referred to the death of Zechariah and says, "whom you murdered." Obviously Zechariah was killed centuries before Christ. In Matthew 23:39 Christ Jesus said, "You shall not see me until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'" This looks at a future generation of Israel that yet will make that grand confession. The pronoun "you" may look back or forward.

## **THE PREDICTIONS OF SOME N THAT GENERATION SEEING CHRIST'S GLORY**

The passages involved here are not in the Olivet discourse but they relate to it because preterists say these passages were fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem. Matthew 16:28 says: "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." Parallels are found in Mark 9:1 and Luke 9:27. Concerning Matthew 16:28 DeMar comments:

If we maintain that the event Jesus is describing in these verses is still in our future, then how should we interpret Jesus' statement that some of those with whom He was speaking would still be alive when He did in fact "come in the glory of His Father with His angels" ? Some claim that the "coming" Jesus had in mind was the Transfiguration. But the Transfiguration cannot be its fulfillment since Jesus indicated that some who were standing with Him would still be alive when He came but most would be dead. If we adopt the view that the Transfiguration is the fulfillment of Matthew 16:27-28, we must conclude that most of the people with whom Jesus spoke were dead within seven to ten days (Matthew 17:1)! Hardly possible.

It is true, dispensationalists take this as referring to the transfiguration which in turn is a proof that Christ will one day come in the glory of His Father as Matthew 16:27, the preceding verse, says. It is not without significance that all three Synoptics follow this prediction with the account of the transfiguration; there must be some connection in the minds of the Gospel writers between the Lord's words and the glory of the transfiguration. Furthermore, Peter makes the same assertion in 2 Peter 1:16-18: "For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming

of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty; for when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory: ' this is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased' -- and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain."

To say that the prediction of Matthew 16:28 means all of the disciples except Peter, James and John would be dead within seven to ten days reads more into the text than is being said. The Lord is simply asserting the fact that it would not be a long time before some of them saw Christ coming in His Kingdom, which occurred in the Transfiguration.

Another passage that is used to imply dispensationalists fail to see the preterist viewpoint is Matthew 26:64 (cd. Mark 14:62). "Jesus said to him, "You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN." DeMar uses this verse (along with others) to say those who say it described a time nearly two thousand years in the future are guilty of "the epitome of 'Scripture twisting . . . ." In commenting on Matthew 26:64 he states:

Those people to whom Jesus spoke did "see the Son of Man." The event had to take place before all of them died. Before that generation passed away they must have seen the "Son of Man coming in His kingdom" and "sitting at the right hand of power." If we deny that this happened, then we are asserting that the Bible is in error.

He goes on to state, "Those who would witness Jerusalem's destruction would see the sign of Jesus' enthronement when they saw Jerusalem' destruction." He makes this assertion relative to Matthew 24:30 to 26:64.

The Lord does not say when those religious authorities would see the Lord Jesus in authority. However, one day they will acknowledge who Christ is when He manifests Himself to them in future judgment!

## **CONCLUSION**

Obviously, this paper could not cover ever detail of the subject; much more will and needs to be discussed. In any case this writer has attempted to present the preterist viewpoint accurately and to deal with the evidence honestly. As a result of this study it is the humble conviction of this writer that the preterist approach to the Olivet discourse, although it has presented some weighty evidence, is not the correct one. He still holds to the doctrine which sees a partial fulfillment in A. D. 70 but the ultimate fulfillment is yet to be.