

A CRITIQUE OF THE PRETERIST VIEW OF THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

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IN RECENT YEARS an increasing number of people have accepted the belief that many of the prophecies in the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24–25 were fulfilled in the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The word “preterism,” which describes this view and related views concerning the Book of Revelation, comes from two Latin words *praeter*, “beyond,” and *ire*, “to go.” Preterism looks at certain biblical predictions as having already been fulfilled. This article discusses and critiques the views of preterists on the Olivet Discourse.

As Ice writes, “It would be an overstatement to characterize the popularity of preterism as even approaching the dominance of futurism within American evangelicalism at the close of the twentieth century. On the other hand, preterism has seen significant growth from hundreds of advocates to thousands.”¹ He describes three forms of preterism—mild, moderate, and extreme.² He states, “Mild preterism holds that the Tribulation was fulfilled within the first three hundred years of Christianity as God judged two enemies: the Jews in A.D. 70 and Rome by A.D. 313; but adherents still look for a future Second Coming.”³ They see the Book of Revelation fulfilled in the downfall of Israel as a nation and the overthrow of pagan Rome.

“Extreme or consistent (as they like to call themselves) preterism believes that the Second Coming, and thus the resurrection of believers, is all past. For all practical purposes all Bible prophecy has been fulfilled, and we are beyond the millennium and even now in the new heaven and new earth. They believe that if there is an end of current

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¹ Thomas Ice and Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *The Great Tribulation: Past or Future?* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 7.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

history it is not recorded in the Bible.”⁴ 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 live eternally with spiritual bodies. This viewpoint denies the future second coming of Christ and the future bodily resurrection of believers and unbelievers.

“Moderate preterism sees the Tribulation and the bulk of Bible prophecy as fulfilled in events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70; but they still hold to a future Second Coming, a physical resurrection of the dead, an end to temporal history, and the establishing of the consummate new heaven and new earth.”⁵ This third form of preterism has seen a strong revival in the Reconstructionist movement; it is essentially the view of reconstructionist postmillennialism. Of course not all preterists are reconstructionists or postmillennialists.

A SUMMARY OF THE PRETERIST INTERPRETATION OF THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

Like dispensationalists, preterists emphasize the significance of the context of the Olivet Discourse. They believe that Christ rejected the nation Israel when He said, “Your house is being left to you desolate” (Matt. 23:38). This desolation was accomplished in the destruction of the temple predicted in 24:1–3. Because verse 34 says, “This generation will not pass away until all these things take place,” they hold that the predictions in verses 4–14 regarding famines, earthquakes, false messiahs, wars, and so forth were all fulfilled in the days just before 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, that is, He came in judgment on Jerusalem.

Moderate preterists differ in their view of verse 36, “But of that day and hour no one knows.” Some, including Gentry, say that the demonstrative pronoun “that” points to a change of time from the pronoun “this” in “this generation” of verse 34.⁶ He says the word “that” refers to a time in the distant future when the Second Advent will occur. However, DeMar disputes this. He believes the words “that day” also refer

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., “Dispensationalism as a Non-Prophet Movement,” *Dispensationalism in Transition* 5 (1992): 5.

to the destruction of Jerusalem.⁷ He says all of Matthew 24:36–25:30 looks ahead to A.D. 70. The return of the Master, he argues, 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. DeMar also believes that 25:31–46, on the judgment of the nations, is a continuing process in history. "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). . . . 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)."⁸ Concerning God's kingdom described in Daniel 2, DeMar asserts, "This same kingdom rolls over all earthly kingdoms that oppose the only legitimate Kingdom, the Kingdom of God in history (Psalm 2; Matthew 25:32–33)."⁹ More moderate preterists, however, disagree with DeMar on this interpretation of Matthew 24:36–25:46.

Preterists agree with dispensationalists in saying that the context of the Olivet Discourse is 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 normally hold to a high view of the Scriptures and thankfully do not regard the dispensational approach as unorthodox.¹⁰

PROBLEMS WITH THE PRETERIST APPROACH

Quite obviously dispensationalists and others who take a futurist viewpoint of the Olivet Discourse differ from preterists on how that discourse is to be interpreted. The following are areas where they differ.

VERSES ON CHRIST'S COMING

Matthew 23:39. "For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

This writer found little discussion on this verse in preterist literature. The verse is quoted in connection with verse 38, but it is not dis-

⁷ Gary DeMar, "Matthew 24 and 25: How Many Comings?" *Newsletter of Evangelist John L. Bray* (Lakeland, FL), February 13, 1995, 1.

⁸ *Ibid.* (italics his).

⁹ Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness* (Atlanta: American Vision, 1994), 262.

¹⁰ Gary DeMar, "Are We Living in the Last Days? An Exposition of Matthew 24:1–34 and Daniel 9:24–27" (n.p.: n.d., photocopy), lecture one, 8. Cf Gentry's remarks in *The Great Tribulation: Past or Future?* 12.

cussed. Verse 38 describes Israel's house being left desolate, which preterists say occurred when Christ left the temple. But nothing is said about Israel's repentance and the Lord's return! This is significant especially in light of the fact that verse 39 seems to be a "time-element" verse.¹¹ It should be considered along with other temporal elements in this section of Matthew, especially because it deals with the time when Israel will see their Messiah again.

Verse 39 begins with $\gamma\alpha\upsilon\rho$, which introduces the reason for 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. That the Lord is dogmatic about this is seen in the Greek construction of $\omicron\upsilon\ \mu\eta\upsilon$ with the aorist subjunctive verb for "see." By no means would they see the Lord until Israel makes the grand pronouncement of Psalm 118:26, the very exclamation the crowds had made earlier in Jesus' triumphal entry (Matt. 21:9; Mark 11:9; Luke 19:38).

The Greek term $\omicron\ \epsilon\ \rho\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\mu\epsilon\ \nu\omicron$ ("the Coming One") is also significant because it is messianic.¹² This is especially true because of its association with the phrase "in the name of the Lord."¹³ 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 refers to Israel.¹⁴

This $\upsilon\ \mu\iota\ \prime\ \nu$ ("you") in verse 39 must be the same as the $\upsilon\ \mu\iota\ \prime\ \nu$ ("you") in verse 38. While verse 38 does refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, that event cannot be in view in verse 39. Jews would hardly call the horrible decimation of life in the destruction

¹¹ Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 27–31, 283–96 (cf. 111). Cf. idem, "Are We Living in the Last Days?" lecture one, 10–17. DeMar lists many "time" texts in the New Testament, but he does not mention Matthew 23:39. The same is true of other preterists.

¹² Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d ed., rev. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 310. Cf. Johannes Schneider, " $\epsilon\ \rho\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\mu\epsilon\ \nu\omicron$," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 670.

¹³ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 523.

¹⁴ DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 43–44; idem, "Are We Living in the Last Days?" lecture two, 2; Ice and Gentry, *The Great Tribulation: Past or Future?* 23; Gentry, "Context! Context! Context!" *Dispensationalism in Transition* 4 (May 1991): 4; and Greg L. Bahnsen and Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *House Divided* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), 266.

of their capital city a *blessed* coming of the Messiah. Rather, verse 39 describes Israel's future repentance when they will mourn because of their great sin (Zech. 12:10).

Matthew 23:39 clearly indicates that Israel's repentance will *precede* His coming. Certainly there was no repentance on the part of Israel before A.D. 70. Interestingly preterists describe in detail the apostasy and false teachers that were present in Jerusalem before A.D. 70. But the Lord's point is obvious: Israel had rejected her Messiah; therefore judgment was to come. Israel would be left without the presence of her Messiah "from that time" (αἰπὴ ἀρτί) "until" (ἐῶν αἰν) with the subjunctive to indicate an indefinite future time) she would welcome the Lord Jesus. When Israel repents, then the kingdom will come.¹⁵

Preterists say Israel saw the Lord in His coming when Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70. However, the Lord Jesus said Israel would not see Him again until that nation affirmed that He is the Messiah. His return with joy and blessing would come to Israel. Their seeing the Lord Jesus can hardly have occurred in the judgment of A.D. 70.

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

Preterists observe that God's appearance was as terrifying as lightning. DeMar writes, "In the Bible, lightning often signifies the presence of the Lord or His coming in judgment (Exod. 19:16; 20:18; Job 36:30; Ezek. 21:15, 28; Zech. 9:14)."¹⁶ DeMar also asserts, "Matthew 24:27 seems to imply that Jesus is somehow participating in Jerusalem's destruction."¹⁷ "Jesus came 'like lightning' to set Jerusalem 'afire all around.'"¹⁸ Gentry elaborates on this point in this way.

Yet there was to be a "coming" of Christ in that day. . . . 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

¹⁵ For a defense of the contingency of the coming kingdom see Stanley D. Toussaint, "The Contingency of the Coming of the Kingdom," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, ed. Charles H. Dyer and Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 222–37.

¹⁶ DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 119; cf. idem, "Are We Living in the Last Days?" lecture five, 1.

¹⁷ DeMar, "Are We Living in the Last Days?" lecture five, 1.

¹⁸ DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 120.

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 called for His blood to be upon them and their children (Matt. 27:25).¹⁹

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 in Ezekiel and Zechariah. But the question is, What does the context of Matthew 24 say about the analogy of lightning and the "coming" (*parousiva*) of the Lord Jesus? And what is meant by the "coming" of Christ?

Most agree that the Olivet Discourse relates to (a) Israel's rejection of Christ, (b) Christ's rejection of Israel, and (c) the disciples' questions in Matthew 24:3. Some dispensationalists believe the disciples asked two questions here: "When will these things be, that is, when will the destruction of Jerusalem take place? And, What will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?"

It seems better, however, to say that all three questions of the disciples—When will these things happen? What will be the sign of the Lord's coming? What sign will point to the end of the age—focus on one event. To them the destruction of Jerusalem, the coming of the Messiah, and the end of the age composed one complex series of events. Their basis for this doctrine was well founded, for this is taught in Zechariah 14:1–11, which 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 against 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 (Matt. 23:38), of His coming (v. 39), and of the destruction of the temple (24:2), they logically would remember Zechariah 14, for those elements are all brought together in that Old Testament prophecy.

Significantly Christ did not say their theology was incorrect. A

¹⁹ Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., "Lightning, Eagles and Jerusalem," *Dispensationalism in Transition* 5 (January 1992): 1; cf. Bahnsen and Gentry, *House Divided*, 173–74; DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 119–21; and Ice and Gentry, *The Great Tribulation: Past or Future?* 53–55.

similar situation is found in Acts 1 when the disciples associated the promise of the Holy Spirit's coming with the restoration of Israel's kingdom. Their doctrine was not incorrect, but their timing of the coming of Israel's kingdom was uninformed. So here the Lord warned the disciples not to be misled by false messiahs and wars; they would not mark the end (Matt. 24:1–6). Even the destruction of Jerusalem did not necessarily preface the coming of the Messiah. It should be noted that all three records of the Olivet Discourse begin with the Lord's warning to the disciples not to be misled by false teachers and wars (24:4–6; Mark 13:5–7; Luke 21:8–9). In summary the Lord did not deny the prophetic sequence of Zechariah 14; He simply warned 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 God's program (Matt. 24:6; Mark 13:7; Luke 21:9).

The context of the Olivet Discourse rests in the setting 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" (*parousiva*) mean? This noun occurs only four times in the Gospels, and all four occurrences are in Matthew 24. The first occurrence is in the disciples' question. And interestingly the remaining three are in the identical phrase "the coming of the Son of Man" in verses 27, 37, and 39.

As already noted, moderate preterists believe a change in chronology is marked by the words "that day" in verse 36, which they say refers 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 distinguished His eschatological coming by denying signs."²⁰

The problem with this interpretation is the meaning of *parousiva* before verse 36 and after. Since the coming of the Son of Man in verses 37 and 39 is the Second Advent, one would expect *the identical words* ("the coming [*parousiva*] of the Son of Man") in verse 27

²⁰ Gentry, "Dispensationalism as a Non-Prophet Movement," 5. Cf. Bahnsen and Gentry, *House Divided*, 267, 274, 291–92. Evidently in 1988 DeMar had not yet come to the position that all of Matthew 24:1–25:30 refers to the destruction of Jerusalem. In *Debate over Christian Reconstruction* (Fort Worth: Dominion, 1988), 173, 222, 227, he seems ambivalent on this point. See also DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 43. In 1995 he took the viewpoint of consistent preterism (see n. 7).

to refer to the same event. The word would also have the same meaning in verse 3. In each case the Second Advent must be in view.

Furthermore the word *parousiva* in the New Testament is always used of an actual presence.²¹ In 1 Corinthians 16:17; 2 Corinthians 7:6–7; 10:10; Philippians 1:26; 2:12; and 2 Thessalonians 2:9 *parousiva* refers to a person's *bodily* presence. In all the other cases *parousiva* is used of the Lord's presence at His second coming (1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1, 8; James 5:7–8; 2 Pet. 1:16; 3:4, 12; 1 John 2:28).²² Since the only occurrences of *parousiva* in the Gospels are in Matthew 24, it would seem that they too refer to a yet-future coming of Christ.

What then was Jesus saying in Matthew 24:27? He was simply stating that people should not be misled by false teachers or counterfeit messiahs, who make their deceptive claims in some wilderness or inner sanctum (v. 26) and who may even seek to verify their pretensions by fantastic miracles (v. 24). The reason the Lord's followers should not be led astray is that 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 *w{sp̄er . . . ou{tw}* ("as . . . so") in verse 27. His second coming, He said, will be as obvious as a brilliant sky-spanning bolt of lightning.

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."²³ Then he says that the verse is like Old Testament references that depict riding on a cloud (Ps. 104:3; Isa. 19:1).

²¹ In the Septuagint the term occurs only four times in the Apocrypha (*Judith* 10:18; 2 Macc. 8:12; 15:21; 3 Macc. 3:17) and once in Nehemiah 2:6. In the Septuagint *parousiva* is never employed of the Lord's presence, and in each case it refers to someone's actual physical presence.

²² Preterists agree that most of these references point to the future coming of Christ. DeMar believes *parousiva* has two ideas in 2 Thessalonians 2. He says that in verse 1 it looks at the blessing of God's presence with true Israel (the church) and in verse 8 it refers to God's presence in judgment (*Last Days Madness*, 313–18). And he says James 5:7 refers to the presence of the Lord in the destruction of Jerusalem (*Last Days Madness*, 314, 316; cf. *idem*, *Debate over Christian Reconstruction*, 119, 122, 224, 237, 241–43). He includes an appendix by James B. Jordan, who presents the idea that the prophecy of the abomination of desolation was fulfilled in A.D. 70 (*ibid.*, 237–43).

²³ DeMar, *Debate over Christian Reconstruction*, 138.

Furthermore, he says, the word *ou[rano]* ("sky") also means heaven; so the sign that appears in heaven is the Son having taken His place at the right hand of the Father, not the Son coming in the clouds to the earth.²⁴ Gentry takes a similar view.

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—served as the sign that the Son of Man was at God's right hand. Smoke serves as a sign for Israel's armies in the Old Testament . . . (Judges 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; 20:40; Psa. 37:20; Isa. 14:31; 34:10; Rev. 14:11; 18:9).²⁵

In Matthew 26:64 Christ told the Sanhedrin that they would see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of God and coming on clouds of heaven. Gentry writes, "In the smoky destruction of Jerusalem, these Jewish leaders should see the Son of Man's position of power in His cloud-judgment."²⁶ This sign, he says, may be in heaven or it may be like smoke in the sky.

DeMar then relates this coming of the Son of Man on the clouds of the sky to Daniel 7:13–14, but he says this took place in heaven. "The coming of the Son of Man is not *down* but *up* 'with the clouds of heaven' to 'the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him.'"²⁷ According to the preterists this is what the Sanhedrin saw in the destruction of Jerusalem, and this is when the tribes in the land of Israel mourned.²⁸

Granted, the first part of Matthew 24:30 looks back to Zechariah 12:10. However, it is important to notice that the mourning in Zechariah 12:10 is explained by the verses that follow. It is a repentant lamentation by Israel that will result in the purification of the nation (13:1). Rather than prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem, Zechariah was 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"

²⁴ Ibid., 138–39; cf. idem, *Last Days Madness*, 158–59.

²⁵ Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., "Then Shall Appear the Sign," *Dispensationalism in Transition* 5 (March 1992): 3; cf. Ice and Gentry, *The Great Tribulation*, 57–59.

²⁶ Gentry, "Then Shall Appear the Sign," 3; cf. Ice and Gentry, *The Great Tribulation: Past or Future?* 59.

²⁷ DeMar, *Debate over Christian Reconstruction*, 140 (italics his); and idem, *Last Days Madness*, 155, 158.

²⁸ Ice and Gentry, *The Great Tribulation: Past or Future?* 60.

(12:9). Zechariah 12:1–8 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 for Israel, not of judgment. “In that day” is mentioned ten times in Zechariah 12–13 (12:3–4, 6, 8 [twice], 9, 11; 13:1–2, 4). Clearly Zechariah spoke of a mourning that will result in Israel’s cleansing and deliverance. The sign of the Son of Man will result in Israel’s national repentance. This parallels perfectly with what Paul wrote in Romans 11:25–27. This explanation of Matthew 24:30a sets the stage for understanding the second half of the verse.

In Daniel 7:13 the New American Standard Bible says the Son of Man “*came up* to the Ancient of Days” to receive authority to rule. However, the Aramaic verb *h f ; m]* does not suggest direction; it simply means “to arrive” or “to reach.” This verb is used eight times in the Old Testament and only in Daniel. In 4:20 it refers to Nebuchadnezzar’s greatness “reaching” to the sky, and in 6:24 the verb is used of Daniel’s detractors not “reaching” the bottom of the den before the lions overpowered them. In 7:13 the Son of Man “approached” (NIV) the Ancient of Days, God the Father, who bestowed authority on Jesus Christ. As Keil explains, this judgment could not have taken place in heaven.

In this very chapter before us 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 expressed, since the coming with the clouds of heaven in opposition to the rising up of the beasts 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 against His enemies; cf. Ps. xviii. 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. 30, xxvi. 64; Mark xiii. 26; Rev. i. 7, xiv. 14.²⁹

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 the earth.

²⁹ C. F. Keil, *The Book of Daniel*, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 235–36.

VERSES ON 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 point out that in the days before 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 prophecies in Matthew 24:4–14. They also say that the prophecy of the abomination of desolation in verse 15 (also in Mark 13:14) was fulfilled either before or during the fall of Jerusalem.

Preterists suggest that the abomination of desolation was one of four possible events.³⁰ First, they say it could have been the occupation of the temple courts by murderous zealots. These zealots even invaded the holy of holies, placed an imposter in office as high priest, and ordained unqualified misfits to the priesthood. Josephus referred to this in *The Jewish Wars*.³¹ Second, preterists say the abomination of desolation may have been the intrusion into Jerusalem by Idu-means (at the invitation and aid of the zealots), who slaughtered many people, including the chief priest Annas. (This polluted the temple courts with blood and took place before A.D. 70, probably in A.D. 68.)³² Third, preterists say it is possible that the abomination of desolation refers to the capture and burning of the temple by the Romans. Torch-ing the temple, the Romans soldiers set up their standards opposite the eastern gate and offered sacrifices.³³ DeMar says, “The Roman abomination hypothesis is the most popular since it parallels the actions of Antiochus Epiphanes.”³⁴ Although DeMar feels any or all of the preceding views are possible, he prefers a fourth explanation of the abomination of desolation. He believes it describes the corruption of the temple by the abominations and defilements of apostate Israel.³⁵

Because Christ specifically related the prophecy of the abomina-

³⁰ DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 85–93.

³¹ Josephus, *The Jewish Wars* 4.3.6–9; 4.5.4.

³² *Ibid.*, 4.4.5–4.5.5.

³³ *Ibid.*, 6.6.1; cf. Bahnsen and Gentry, *House Divided*, 271–73.

³⁴ DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 91. Gentry, on the other hand, holds that both the first and third views constitute the abomination of desolation (Ice and Gentry, *The Great Tribulation: Past or Future?* 47–48).

³⁵ DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 91–93; and *idem*, *Debate over Christian Reconstruction*, 237–43.

tion of desolation to Daniel's prophecy, it seems preferable to see some correspondence between the abomination of desolation committed by Antiochus Epiphanes and that predicted by Christ. This would include not only defilement of the altar by sacrifices offered with impure hearts, but also the worship of another god, with the temple being used as the place for such a dastardly act. Preterists who agree with this say that the "worship" was 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 because the Romans would have already taken the city.

If the abomination of desolation in Daniel 9:27 and 12:11 is foreshadowed by Antiochus Epiphanes (11:31), then it will be a desecration carried out by a person who will use the temple sacrilegiously to promote the worship of a god other than Yahweh. This is what is anticipated in 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4.

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 will."

Preterists say that the words "nor ever will" are a figure of speech.³⁶ Preterists defend this point by referring to 1 Kings 3:12, which says there was no king like Solomon before or after him. Similar statements are made of Hezekiah in 2 Kings 18:5 and Josiah (2 Kings 23:25),³⁷ but then Christ surpasses even Solomon (Matt. 12:42). The same Old Testament idea of "never will be" is employed of judgments that have already occurred, such as locusts in Egypt (Exod. 10:14; cf. Joel 1:1–4), a cry in Egypt (Exod. 11:6), and judgment on Israel (Ezek. 5:9; Joel 2:2).³⁸ The point the preterists make is that the expression "never has been nor ever will be" is a Semiticism meaning "very great" or "very much." The Lord would then be saying that a very great tribulation would occur, and that 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. "Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short." This verse must be considered along with verse 21.

³⁶ Ice and Gentry, *The Great Tribulation: Past or Future?* 52–53.

³⁷ DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 103–4; cf. idem, *Debate over Christian Reconstruction*, 133; and idem, "Are We Living in the Last Days?" lecture four, 16.

³⁸ DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 104–7; and idem, "Are We Living in the Last Days?" lecture four, 16–17. Cf. Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., "The Greatness of the Great Tribulation," *Dispensationalism in Transition* 4 (November 1991), 11.

What is meant by “life” (savrx) in the clause “no life would have been saved”? DeMar says this refers to “life in the land of Israel.”³⁹ However, the Greek construction is pa'sa savrx, “all flesh,” a technical term referring to all humanity that occurs ten times in the New Testament (Matt. 24:22; Mark 13:20; Luke 3:6; John 17:2; Acts 2:17; Rom. 3:20; 1 Cor. 1:29; 15:39; Gal. 2:16; 1 Pet. 1:24). In every case except 1 Corinthians 15:39 the expression describes all humans. In that passage Paul was discussing the nature of the resurrection body: “All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts.” Here he used the phrase in an even broader sense to designate all human and animal life.

In the Septuagint pa'sa savrx translates the Hebrew rc;B;AlK;, “all flesh.” Gesenius says this Hebrew construction means “all living creatures . . . especially *all men*, the whole human race.”⁴⁰ 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 all human life will stand in jeopardy on planet earth. Though the decimation of life in Judea in A.D. 70 was horrible, Jesus was speaking of something much worse.

TWO VERSES IN THE OLIVET DISCOURSE THAT PRETERISTS AVOID

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!’ ”

As already discussed, preterists contend that the word “you” in this verse refers to the generation of Jews who heard Christ speak these words.⁴¹ However, the question remains, 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”? Preterists avoid dealing with this question.

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 states, “This word of comfort is given by [Luke] alone. . . . The disciples present are regarded as rep-

³⁹ DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 117; cf. Ice and Gentry, *The Great Tribulation: Past or Future?* 191.

⁴⁰ Gesenius' *Hebrew and Chaldea Lexicon*, trans. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 146 (italics his).

⁴¹ DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 43–44; and idem, “Are We Living in the Last Days?” lecture two, 6.

representatives of believers generally. Only those who witness the signs can actually fulfil this injunction . . . at the Second Advent."⁴² Geldenhuys writes the following about this verse and its yet-future fulfillment.

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. 3) had already died the death of martyrs. Also Andrew 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).⁴³

After reviewing and rejecting the preterist view Marshall notes, "In fact the clear temporal sense (Mark 13:24, 26) suggests that an event *after* the fall of Jerusalem is in mind."⁴⁴

Clearly, then, the return of the Messiah and the deliverance of Israel will occur together, based on Zechariah 14:3–11 (cf. Isa. 64:1–2; Acts 3:20–21).

PRETERIST OBJECTIONS TO THE FUTURIST AND DISPENSATIONAL APPROACH

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

"THIS GENERATION" IN MATTHEW 24:34

Jesus' words, "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away

⁴² Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Luke*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: Clark, 1922), 484–85.

⁴³ Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 540–41.

⁴⁴ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 777 (italics his). See also Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1679–80.

until all these things take place,” are the chief cornerstone in the preterists’ defense of their system. R. C. Sproul, a moderate or partial preterist, states, “The most critical portion of this text is Jesus’ declaration that ‘this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.’”⁴⁵ Preterists point out that in all the other instances in the Gospels “this generation” refers to the then-present generation (Matt. 11:16; 12:41–42, 45; 23:36; 24:34; Mark 8:12 [twice], 38; 13:30; Luke 7:31; 11:29–32, 50–51; 17:25; 21:32).⁴⁶

Preterists also assert that Christ was warning people who were living then. 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).⁴⁷ Dispensationalists agree that 24:34 refers to the Lord’s contemporaries. To make the saying even more emphatic, οὐ μὴ with the aorist subjunctive occurs in all three Synoptic references (Matt. 24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32). The verse may be rendered, “By no means will this generation pass away.”

How then is this verse to be explained? Actually it is difficult for any theological position, including that held by moderate preterists. (They struggle to interpret “all these things,” which clearly implies the coming of Christ in glory described in verses 27–31 and 37–41.) A number of explanations of verse 34 have been proposed. First is the interpretation of the preterists, who 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. However, this view can be held only by overlooking the meaning of several verses in the discourse, including Matthew 23:39; 24:22, 27, 30, and the meaning of παροῦσι.⁴⁸

A second interpretation, held by a number of futurists, affirms that the noun γένεα means race, that is, the Jewish race.⁴⁹ Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich give “clan” as a primary meaning, but they list only Luke 16:8 as an illustration in the New Testament.⁵⁰ It is difficult for dispen-

⁴⁵ R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days according to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 16.

⁴⁶ DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 42–43; idem, “Are We Living in the Last Days?” lecture two, 4–5; and idem, *Debate over Christian Reconstruction*, 116.

⁴⁷ Bahnsen and Gentry, *House Divided*, 266.

⁴⁸ See Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1985), 227.

⁴⁹ William Hendrikson, *Exposition of the Gospel according to Matthew*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 867–69; E. Schuyler English, *Studies in the Gospel according to Matthew* (New York: Our Hope, 1935), 179; A. C. Gaebelein, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Wheaton, IL: Van Kampen, n.d.), 2:214–15; and Kenneth S. Wuest, *Mark in the Greek New Testament for the English Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 252–53.

⁵⁰ Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and*

sational premillennialists to take this view because this would imply 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." But Israel must continue after the Second Advent into the millennium in order to fulfill the promises God made to that nation.

A third interpretation, common among dispensationalists, is that "this generation" refers to the future generation of Jews who will be alive when the Lord Jesus returns.⁵¹ For example 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 the actual beginning of those eschatological events (vv. 14–23). The assurance is that the end-time crisis will not be of indefinite duration."⁵²

The near demonstrative pronoun may have the meaning of a near concept (cf. "this bread," 1 Cor. 11:26). But the problem remains that in the New Testament "this generation" normally refers to the generation contemporaneous with the speaker or writer. As Carson affirms, "'This generation' . . . can only with the greatest difficulty be made to mean anything other than the generation living when Jesus spoke."⁵³

A fourth interpretation says this is an illustration of multiple fulfillment. As Mounce asserts, "Biblical prophecy is capable of multiple fulfillments."⁵⁴ He comments as follows on Matthew 24:32–35.

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 in 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. Gundry is right in his observations 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.⁵⁵

Other Early Christian Literature, 153.

⁵¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Meet Your King* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1980), 178; and D. Edmond Hiebert, *Mark: A Portrait of a Servant* (Chicago: Moody, 1974), 331.

⁵² Hiebert, *Mark: A Portrait of a Servant*, 331.

⁵³ D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 507.

⁵⁴ Mounce, *Matthew*, 228.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

A number of commentators agree with this explanation.⁵⁶

Another question for all interpreters 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 will these things [the destruction of the temple] happen?” (Matt. 24:3; Mark 13:4; Luke 21:7). But there are difficulties with this explanation. First, 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. Second, when the Lord said “all these things,” He undoubtedly was looking at more than the destruction of the temple. “All these things” must include His glorious return to reign, as the immediate context clearly implies.

A fifth interpretation seems best. It takes the verb *gevnhtai* as an ingressive aorist. The same verb is found in all three Synoptics and is translated “takes place” (Matt. 24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32). As an ingressive aorist it emphasizes the beginning of the action with the meaning “begin to take place.” All those things would begin in that generation and find their ultimate completion at the Second Advent. This fits with the idea of not being deceived by the events mentioned in Matthew 24:4–8. The Lord specifically referred to these as “the beginning of birth pangs” (v. 8). Interestingly, although Mounce does not accept this interpretation, he suggests it as a possibility and gives no refutation of it.⁵⁷

PREDICTION OF THE DESTRUCTION OF THE SECOND TEMPLE

The Lord prophesied that the temple standing then in Jerusalem would be destroyed. How then can this be made to refer to a future yet-to-be-rebuilt temple? As preterists ask, Why is it necessary to have a rebuilt temple?⁵⁸

First, dispensationalists do not deny that the Lord was predicting the destruction of the temple by the Romans in A.D. 70. This is recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels. Second, and more importantly, Haggai followed what may be called a principle of continuity in speaking of the history of the temple. The house of the Lord could be razed

⁵⁶ For example John A. Broadus, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Philadelphia: American Baptist, 1886), 491; Joseph Addison Alexander, *The Gospel according to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker, n.d.), 363; and W. Graham Scroggie, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), 231–35.

⁵⁷ Mounce, *Matthew*, 228.

⁵⁸ DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 37–38; idem, *Debate over Christian Reconstruction*, 121–22; idem, “Are We Living in the Last Days?” lecture two, 2–3; Gentry, “Context! Context! Context!” 4; and Bahnsen and Gentry, *House Divided*, 266–67.

to the ground and rebuilt and still be considered the same temple.⁵⁹ At the time of the rebuilding of the temple after the first temple had been destroyed, Haggai asked, “Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory?” (Hag. 2:3). And in verse 9 he wrote, “‘The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘and in this place I will give peace,’ declares the LORD of hosts.’” The near demonstrative “this house” is found in both the Hebrew and the Septuagint. “The prophet regards the house they are building as the continuation of Solomon’s Temple.”⁶⁰

Thus the rebuilt temple posited by futurists can be referred to as “this” house and be in the train of the two preceding temples. It is certainly plausible then to see the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 as a presage of what will occur in the future with regard to a rebuilt temple.

USE OF A HIATUS IN INTERPRETING DANIEL 9:24–27

DeMar refers to the dispensational approach to Daniel 9:24–27 as a “gap theory.”⁶¹ By that term, of course, he refers to an intercalation between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of Daniel’s prophecy. An extended defense of such a gap in verses 24–27 is beyond the province of this article; such an apologetic is found in other works such as those by Culver, McClain, and Pentecost.⁶² A simple list of reasons must suffice here. First, gaps are found elsewhere in prophecy. In Malachi 3:1 Malachi predicted the coming of the Messiah’s forerunner, John the Baptist. This is immediately followed by a description of the Lord’s second advent. This is Jesus’ second coming because it is described as a time of judgment, thereby prompting Malachi to ask, “Who can endure the day of His coming?” (v. 2). A gap of more than two thousand years has already existed between John the Baptist and the Lord’s next coming.

Isaiah wrote, “For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us.” And then he predicted, “And the government will rest on His shoulders” (Isa. 9:6). The second fact—His reigning on the earth—is still future.

A similar phenomenon is seen in Zechariah 9:9–10. In verse 9 the

⁵⁹ Carl Friedrich Keil, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 2:194–95.

⁶⁰ A. Cohen, *The Twelve Prophets* (New York: Soncino, 1974), 260.

⁶¹ DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 369.

⁶² Robert D. Culver, *Daniel and the Latter Days* (Chicago: Moody, 1954), 135–60; Alva J. McClain, *Daniel’s Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969), 31–45; and J. Dwight Pentecost, “Daniel,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1985), 1361–65.

King comes humbly on a donkey colt, but in verse 10 God says, “And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem; and the bow of war will be cut off.” A parenthesis must exist between verses 9 and 10. In discussing Daniel 9:24 Baldwin writes, “If the historical work of Christ and His second coming are telescoped this is not unusual, even in the New Testament.”⁶³

Second, according to Daniel 9:26 the Messiah will be cut off *after* the sixty-ninth week, not *in* the seventieth 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 seven-year covenant with Israel. The chronology of the passage is sequential.

Third, the events in Daniel 9:24 have never been fulfilled for Israel. These blessings are specifically said to be for Israel and Jerusalem.

Fourth, when the Lord spoke, He Himself said the abomination of desolation Daniel wrote about was yet future (Matt. 24:15). Unprecedented tribulation will take place and will be followed immediately by the Lord’s second coming. The sequence is clear—the abomination of desolation and then Great Tribulation followed *immediately* by the return of Christ. This makes a parenthesis between Daniel’s sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks a necessity.

USE OF 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. “So, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door.” Preterists 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 conclude?”⁶⁴

However, as noted earlier, the second-person plural may be employed of those who are not contemporaries. Illustrations of this are found in the immediate context. In Matthew 23:35 the Lord Jesus, re-

⁶³ Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1978), 169.

⁶⁴ DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 43.

ferring to the death of Zechariah, used the words “whom you murdered.” Obviously Zechariah was killed centuries before Christ. And Jesus said, “You will not see Me until you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’” (v. 39). This speaks of a future generation of Israel that will yet make that grand confession. The pronoun “you” may look backward or forward.

PREDICTION THAT SOME IN THAT GENERATION
WOULD SEE 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. One of these is Matthew 16:28. “Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” Parallels are in Mark 9:1 and Luke 9:27. DeMar says the following about Matthew 16:28.

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.⁶⁵

True, dispensationalists believe Jesus was referring to the Transfiguration, which was a demonstration of Christ’s coming in the glory of His Father (as 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 Transfiguration. Furthermore Peter made 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, as DeMar does, that the prediction of Matthew 16:28

⁶⁵ Ibid., 34–35 (italics his).

means that most of those who heard it, except Peter, James, and John, must be dead within seven to ten days reads more into the text than Jesus said. The Lord was 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 preterists refer to is Matthew 26:64 (cf. 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 that those who believe it describes a time nearly two thousand years into the future are guilty of "the epitome of 'Scripture twisting.'"⁶⁶ He adds, "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."⁶⁷

DeMar also stated, "Those who would witness Jerusalem's destruction would see the sign of Jesus' enthronement when they saw Jerusalem's destruction."⁶⁸ He makes this assertion to relate Matthew 24:30 to 26:64.

However, the Lord did not say *when* those religious authorities would see Him in authority. However, one day "hereafter" they will acknowledge who Christ is when He manifests Himself to them in future judgment.

CONCLUSION

Obviously this article cannot cover every detail of the subject; much more could be said. But this writer has attempted to present the preterist viewpoint accurately and to deal with the evidence honestly. The preterist approach to the Olivet Discourse, although it has some weighty evidence, is not correct. Still plausible is the view that sees a partial fulfillment in A.D. 70 but that the ultimate fulfillment of events Jesus predicted in the Olivet Discourse will occur in the future.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 29.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 158.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 159.