

2 Peter 3

Burning of the Planet or Judgement of Old Covenant Israel?

Holger Neubauer

Long held beliefs and traditions are difficult to overcome. My mother was a Jehovah's Witness and my father was Lutheran. Through patient study my Mother was converted three years after my baptism and my father some 12 years after I obeyed the gospel. Beliefs are not true because we believe them to be true. God has given us two great attestations to the truth: (1) Scripture, and (2) an honest heart in which to consider the argument before us. Both are absolutely necessary to overcoming long held traditions that have their basis in the minds of men and not in the mind of God. Just as we in churches of Christ expect denominational traditions to be given up for the truth of God's word, we should expect the same of ourselves. The Scripture is before us, but will we honestly reason? Let us pray that we will.

The long-held tradition that 2 Peter 3 is about the end of the geo-physical planet is clung to by every major denomination, including the Jehovah's Witnesses. The view presented in this paper distances us from the Jehovah's Witnesses far more than the traditional view does. When Jesus said, "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" in Matthew 4:17 we take our key from the time indicator. Whatever else we would later discover about the nature of the kingdom we know it was near when Jesus spoke those words. The time indicator is the key to understanding what the Savior was speaking about. The same is true in 2 Peter 3. The time indicators in the text are the keys to understanding this challenging and difficult passage of Scripture. Please note that Peter affirms that Paul also spoke of "these things; in which somethings, hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest as they do the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." Peter affirms that what he just wrote was a part of those "hard things." So, let us not run hastily to ill-informed conclusions. God expects us to be "learned" in these matters and stable as well. So, let us steady the ship and delve into the deep.

We learn from 2 Peter 3:1 that the apostle is reminding his audience of what he had previously told them. Peter was stirring up their minds "by way of remembrance." But what had he told them previously? Peter boldly proclaimed "But the end of all things is at hand" (1 Peter 4:7). In that very text, Peter says that God was "ready to judge the quick and the dead (1 Peter 4:5). Peter is now expanding upon the end of "all things" which were "at hand" when Peter wrote. Peter was affirming what Jesus, during his earthly ministry, said concerning Jerusalem's fall, "For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled" (Luke 21:22). Jesus' mention of "all things written" and Peter's "all things" are in fact the same things. They point to the one great end that all of scripture pointed toward. 2 Peter 3 is simply the reiteration of 1 Peter 4:7. But 1 Peter 4:7 is the reiteration of Jesus words in Luke 21:22. Therefore, 2 Peter 3 is the reiteration of Luke 21:22. Things equal to the same things are not only equal to each other but are indeed referring to the exact same things.

In 2 Peter 1:14, Peter speaks of putting off his tabernacle "shortly." The word translated "shortly" is the Greek "takein." Peter obviously meant he would die in a short time. The same word is used by Peter 8 verses later in 2 Peter 2:1. The false teaches would receive "swift" destruction. That is, their destruction was soon to take place. 2 Peter 2:3 says, "whose judgment of a long time lingereth not." The judgment was no longer "lingering." John Henry Thayer quotes from Sophocles here and translates the phrase, "whose punishment has long been impending and will shortly fall" (p. 72). Peter goes on to say that their "judgment of a long time slumbereth not." This same word is found in the parable of the virgins who "slumbered and

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slept” (Matthew 25:5). The virgins were nodding in and out of sleep, but the Judgment of God was no longer “sleeping” nor was it even “nodding.” God’s fury was about to be unleashed upon the Jewish world as the “wine of his wrath is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation” (Revelation 14:10). Please remember the words of Jesus, “fill ye up the measure of your fathers” (Matthew 23:32) which was to be meted out in that generation (Matthew 23:37).

2 Peter 3:12 tells us the day was “hasting.” This is the same Greek word used in Acts 20:16 as Paul “hasted” to arrive at Jerusalem before Pentecost. Paul was hurrying because the day of the feast was approaching. Peter, too, was affirming that the day of the Lord was imminent and fast approaching. This is the same day that the Hebrew writer saw approaching (literally “at hand”) and would take place in “a very little while” (Hebrews 10:25,37). In Luke 19:5,6 Zacchaeus was told “to make haste” by Jesus. Zacchaeus “made haste and came down.” This word “haste” is the very word (speudo) Peter used when telling his audience that the day was “hasting” then. The day that Peter said was hastening then, can no more be hastening still today, than can Zacchaeus still be in the tree where he was peering at Jesus. How could Moses predict the end of Israel which was 1600 years in their future (Deuteronomy 32:20) and be for a “long time” and the day of Judgment still be in our future (though the day was hastening then) when we’ve been waiting 2000 years? One preacher affirmed the Judgment could take place in millions of years and yet that day is still “hasting.” This denies the time indicators of the text and removes exegesis from the initial audience that was being addressed.

Consider Isaiah 13 and the fall of Babylon. Isaiah informed his audience the day of the Lord was “at hand” (Isaiah 13:6). Here the day would be near when the Medes marched upon them (Isaiah 13:17). The day of Judgment on their nation is depicted as a day in which “the stars of heaven and the constellations shall not give their light” (Isaiah 13:10). Later in the text Isaiah said, “I will punish the world for their evil” and “I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place” (Isaiah 13:13). Their “heavens-stars” and their “earth-world” was about to come to an end. The language is exceedingly Jewish. Hebraic judgment language is symbolic and full of meaning. The Babylonian world or “age” was coming to an end. This hyperbole might seem extravagant to the cold prosaic thought patterns of Western communication, but to those of the East, familiar with Jewish symbols, they portray the reality of God’s judgment bringing known worlds or nations to an end. All of the New Testament writers are Jewish writers and they employ the same imagery that the prophets did. Peter writes his epistle from the “church that was at Babylon” (1 Peter 5:13). Physical Babylon fell in 539 B.C. and was uninhabitable by the time the New Testament was written (Isaiah 13:20). Peter was writing from Jerusalem which was in fact the “Babylon the Great” of the Revelation and was shortly to be destroyed (Matthew 23:34-39; Revelation 18:20-24). Peter was employing Jewish judgment language and was using the exact language of the prophets when a nation was about to be judged.

In 2 Peter 3:2, Peter reminds his audience of what was said before by the “holy prophets” and of the “apostles.” The apostles had announced what the prophets had predicted. What the prophets had declared for a long time had now arrived and was “at hand” as Peter wrote (1 Peter 4:7). The holy prophets are the same prophets mentioned in 2 Peter 1:20 who were “moved by the Holy Spirit” in revealing the Old Testament scriptures. Peter affirmed that “all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, “have likewise foretold of these days” (Acts 3:24). The context of the Acts passage is the return of Christ. Acts 3:20,21 says, “And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.” Moses spoke of the “latter days” of Israel (Deuteronomy 31:29), in which they would be called a “froward generation” and announce their “end” (Deuteronomy 32:20). The day that Moses had predicted had now arrived, as Peter spoke to the “untoward generation” on Pentecost (Acts 2:40). This is the same generation that Jesus said, “that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, for the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zechariah son Berechiah, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, all these things shall come upon this generation” (Matthew 23:35, 36). That last generation had arrived. Peter speaks of this generation as he now confirms

that he is speaking about the last days of Old Covenant Israel. Peter also affirmed that “salvation was ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:5). John said, “it is the last hour” (1 John 2:18).

2 Peter 3:3 mentions the scoffers walking in their own lusts. Peter is now referring to the “mockers” of Isaiah 28:22 in which there would be a “consumption, even determined upon the whole earth.” This language depicts the last days of Israel. Isaiah 24-28 is sometimes called the “little apocalypse.” In these chapters, Isaiah predicts his nation's fall as the “defensed city shall be desolate” and a “great trumpet shall be blown” (Isaiah 27:10,13). The last days point to the last days of Israel in which the temple would be destroyed and would have the trumpet blow. This mirrors the seventh trump of Revelation 11:15 which is blown after Jerusalem falls (Revelation 11:1-8). This is the last trump for there are only seven in Revelation. If there is another trumpet after the seventh trumpet (which is what the traditional position avers), it would be the eighth, which in Hebrew reckoning would be the first (John 20:26). That idea ruins the picture of the last trump. The last days refer to the forty-year period in which Israel would corrupt themselves and in which God would establish His true house. Old Covenant Israel would have her judgment in the last days (Deuteronomy 32:20-36). In James 5:3 the text says, “Ye have heaped together treasure for the last days.” James is referring to the unrighteous rich Jews who held back wages. Their punishment was the “last days.” If the last days refers to the Christian age, then their punishment was the Christian age! This is untenable. James was referring to the last days of Old Covenant Israel in which the land would be “clean dissolved” (Isaiah 24:19). Isaiah also affirmed that “in the last days the mountain of Lord's house would be established in the top of mountains” (Isaiah 2:2). Again, if the “last days” has reference to the Christian age, then Isaiah is predicting that the Christian age would be established in the Christian age. This is a tautology: a needless repetition of words. Isaiah is predicting that the church would be established in the last days of Old Covenant Israel.

2 Peter 3:4 speaks of the false teachers who denied what Peter affirmed. They asked “where is the promise of his coming.” Peter had affirmed the “end of all things is at hand” (1 Peter 4:7). These Jewish false teachers denied the very thing that Peter affirmed; that the Jewish age was coming to an abrupt end. The coming of Jesus would put an end to their temple and law. The Hebrew writer said that the coming of Christ would be in a “very little while” (Hebrews 10:37). James, another New Testament prophet living in Jerusalem at that time said, “the coming of the Lord draweth nigh” (James 5:8). These false Jewish teachers would not accept that their temple, nation, and commonwealth were coming to one great inglorious end; they would not accept Peter's clear teaching that, “the end of all things was at hand.” The false teachers among the Jews argued, “since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning.” Again, this was a Jewish argument. The “fathers” refers to the Jewish fathers or the patriarchs as we sometimes call them. This is a reference to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Jews argued that since the creation of their Old Covenant world all things continued in the same way. Isaiah depicts Old Covenant Israel as a “heavens and earth.” Notice, please, “But I am the Lord thy God, that divided the Sea (the Red Sea), whose waves roared: The Lord of hosts is his name. And I have put my words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the HEAVENS, and the lay the foundations of the EARTH, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people (Is 51:15, 16)” The heavens and earth (relationship with God above and man beneath) was a reference to Old Covenant Israel that was formed out of Egypt when they traveled through the Red Sea (1 Corinthians 10:1,2). Moses uses the same language to refer to Old Covenant Israel in Deuteronomy 32:1.

2 Peter 3:5 tells us of the false teachers and their willing ignorance of the flood. Surely all can see that even the most uninformed of Jewish school children would have been aware of the flood. But what these Jewish false teachers were unwilling to consider was that the Judgment that God brought upon the Gentile world could also be brought upon His own covenant people. So, they said, “all things continue from the beginning of the creation.” Peter now introduces the first of THREE sets of HEAVENS and EARTH; take note that not one of them has reference to cumulus clouds or the physical earth. Peter speaks of the “heavens” that were of old. These were the old heavens that were before the “now” heavens in verse 7. There was not a new a set of clouds after the flood, so it cannot be that the heavens of verse 7 refers to

physical clouds and atmosphere. Sometimes it is argued that Peter cannot have Jerusalem in mind because the flood was universal and this judgment must be universal in its scope as well. Peter references the entire Jewish world in 2 Peter 3 just as the entire Gentile world was judged by the flood. But, with the judgment of Jerusalem the gospel became the standard of judgment for all men. The gospel had to be preached into all the world before all men could be judged by its message, which is why the gospel had to be preached to all the world before the “end” would come (Matthew 24:14). During the transition period, the world became amenable to the gospel as it was being revealed. So, if a ninety-year-old Jew living in the tribe of Dan in Northern Palestine one day after Pentecost could not make the trip and died the next day, he would have been judged under the Old law. This is how Cornelius' prayer was heard as a “memorial” before Cornelius was baptized (Acts 10:4). The futurist position has the entire Gentile world sent to eternal punishment before it was ever revealed to them. This is patently false. Both Jew and Gentile became amenable to the gospel as it was being revealed.

2 Peter 3:6 now mentions the “world that then was perished.” Obviously, the planet did not perish at the flood, but nevertheless their “world perished.” This referred to the “heavens” and the “earth” that were of old, or before the present Jewish system that was in place when Peter was writing. Noah's world that had grown exceedingly wicked perished and the righteous were delivered. 2 Peter 2:5 says, “bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly.” The world is used in the sense of the people and their heavens and earth referred to the world of their day. 2 Peter 3:5 tells us the “earth standing out the water and in the water.” The earth is the world and the world perished. But the planet did not perish! Therefore, the earth refers to the subjects on the earth and they were the ones who were standing “out of the water” (Noah and his family) and “in the water” (the rest of the world that perished).

2 Peter 3:7 speaks of the “heavens and the earth which are now.” The first “heavens and earth” did not refer to cumulus clouds and physical earth and neither do the future heavens and earth of 3:13. Why, then, would the “heavens and earth which are now” be physical? They are not! Peter is employing Jewish apocalyptic language as all the prophets used. Isaiah 51:15,16 has already been cited and is proof that the “heavens and earth” are a reference to a relationship with God above and men beneath and a specific reference to the old covenant world. The day of judgment in this passage references back to 2:3 of this epistle and refers to the judgment of the Jewish world. This is the same day of Hebrews 10:25 which was fast approaching and could be seen. The Hebrew writer said, “as ye see the day approaching.”

2 Peter 3:8 may be the most misused passage in all of the Bible when speaking about eschatology. A thousand years is as a day and a day is as a thousand years. From this text, many extrapolate that time is relative when it comes to Bible prophecy. If this is true, then all the “at hand” statements that are in the Bible are completely irrelevant. But of course, the “at hand” statements in the Bible are indeed relevant. Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and all the prophets spoke of the last days of Israel. The false teachers who said, “all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” disregarded the prophets' warnings. Peter, however, was affirming that whether it be one day or a thousand years, that God would keep His word, and that the day had arrived! Can God tell time? Were it truly far off, God would have said so as He has done so many times before. As it stands, however, God through Peter said, “the end of all things is at hand” (1 Peter 4:7).

2 Peter 3:9 informs us that God is “not slack concerning his promise.” This statement refers back to the promise of His coming (3:3). Jesus promised to return and vindicate all the righteous martyrs. Jesus stated, “Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes; and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogue, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from righteous Abel unto the blood of Zechariah son of Berechiah, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, all these things shall come upon this generation” (Matthew 23:34,35). Jesus was speaking to persecutors in this passage. Earlier he spoke to those persecuted, “But when they persecute you in this city flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.” Notice the “city to city” phrase in both texts. Jesus promised in the midst of their persecution he

would return. The “fiery trial” of Peter's day (1 Peter 4:12) was in fact that terrible time of persecution that Jesus referenced in Matthew 24:21 when he said, “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.” If God did not come in that generation He would have been slack, but He was not! Ecclesiastes 8:11 says, “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.” If God waited for 2000 years and counting, He violated His own principle laid down here. He most certainly did not!

2 Peter 3:10 has Peter returning to a familiar phrase. The day was coming as a “thief.” Jesus himself referenced the day approaching as a thief (Matthew 24:42). The futurist view is that Jesus' coming in Jerusalem was with signs and his final coming will be without signs or as a thief. This argument is simply false. The book of Revelation is the most sign filled book in the New Testament, yet in the heart of the book Jesus said, “Behold I come as a THIEF” (Revelation 16:15). Jesus was coming as a thief to those who would not accept the signs, but not to those who looked for him. Jesus said it would be like the days of “Noah” (Matthew 24:37). The very text that the futurists quote to teach that Jesus' final coming will be without signs mentions Noah who built an ARK! Matthew 24:38 says, “and knew not till Noah entered into the ark.” Was not the ark a fairly good sized sign?

The word “earth” in 2 Peter 3:10 is the Greek “ge” and simply means “land.” You can look up the word in Luke 21:23 and Jude 5 and see its use. The “heavens and earth” passing are symbols of the Jewish age passing away. When the Romans came through Palestine they burned the land like Sherman with the South in the Civil War between the States. The “elements” refer to the Jewish “elements” of Galatians 4:3 and 9. The works are the old Jewish system of works under the law system. In fact, the Greek word “stoichieon” consistently means elementary principles and it was these principles that were needed to bring the message of Christ to the world. The law was this schoolmaster that taught the elementary principles (Galatians 3:24). The elements being burned conveys Jewish judgment language. Zephaniah 3:8, 9 makes reference to same event, “for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy. For then I will turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent.” The pure language is a reference to the gospel language of speaking where the scripture speaks. This comes after the burning of the earth. The theme is the same. Old Covenant is judged, taken out of the way, in order that the true picture of the sons of God could be seen in the world. Zechariah 14:9 mirrors this same sentiment, “And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day there shall be one Lord and His name one.” This, too, takes place after Jerusalem is destroyed by armies (14:1,2), and the Lord comes with his saints (14:5), in a day only the Lord knows (14:7). It all fits beautifully together.

2 Peter 3:11 uses the word “dissolved” from the Greek “luo” which means “to loose.” The Old Covenant world was being loosed and New world was becoming manifest as the revelation of God was completed. Hear again Isaiah, “The earth is utterly broken down, the earth is clean dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly” (Isaiah 24:19). In that same context, Isaiah 24:23 says, “Then the moon shall be confounded and the sun ashamed when the Lord shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously.” Isaiah references the “earth” in verse 19 and the “heavens” in verse 23. This is the passing of “heavens and earth.”

2 Peter 3:12 tells us the day was hastening as earlier referenced. It was hastening then, but the traditional position has the Lord hastening for two thousand years and counting! The language is unmistakable if we will take our futurist glasses off and see the beautiful harmony of the word of God.

2 Peter 3:13 now refers to the “new heavens and new earth.” If the previous “earth” was a physical planet, will God create a new “planet?” Will God create for himself a new Heaven to live in? This cannot be the idea of the text. Peter is now referencing what Isaiah had predicted, “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth” (Isaiah 65:17). Since Isaiah predicted the new heavens and new earth under the law, and Paul calls Isaiah the law in 1 Corinthians 14:21, and Jesus said, “one jot or one tittle shall pass from the law, till all be fulfilled,” Isaiah 65:17 must have come to pass or we are still under the law. But of course, we are no longer under the law, so Isaiah 65:17 must have come to pass, and it has! The “new heavens and

new earth” are mentioned in Revelation 21:1 as it came down from heaven. In Revelation 21:2 the “new heavens and the new earth” is called the “new Jerusalem.” But, the new Jerusalem is clearly called the church as the Hebrew writer said, “But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to a numerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect” (Hebrews 12:22,23). This spiritual language describes the church which is attached now to Heaven. Peter refers to the same thing. Things equal to the same things are equal to each other. These are equal to each other and Peter is using the same language as all the Jewish prophets did. The church in its infancy could now be viewed as a full-grown body!

Peter warns that these things are “hard to be understood” (2 Peter 3:16). They are sometimes hard, but not impossible. The answer to understanding all of the difficult things of God is placed in this same epistle and in this same chapter. The apostle Peter wrote, “But grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever” (2 Peter 3:18). May we all learn to do what God wills for us to do. May God bless honest study of His Word. But before we sweep out the dusty and murky physical concepts that have their birth in denominational dogmas we first have to open the door of our minds. [HN]

Blessed are the Peacemakers

Daniel Rogers

“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (Matthew 5:9). The New Covenant Kingdom is one of peace. In order for the multitudes that were listening to Jesus during His ministry to enter into the foretold heavenly kingdom, they would have to be peacemakers and not rabble rousers. Once they met this qualification, and all of the others listed here in the Beatitudes, they would have the appropriate mindset to receive the teachings of Jesus during His and His apostles’ ministries, and, thereby, be translated into the kingdom of God.

“And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Isaiah 2:4).

“Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence” (John 18:36).

“And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace” (James 3:18).

The benefit of being a peacemaker (again, in addition to the other requirements) is that the individual will become a child of God.

“Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures” (James 1:18).

“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:29).

Jesus was the “firstborn” among many brethren, and the Christians in the first century were considered the “first fruits.” Paul speaks of the attitude that these peacemakers had when he was writing.

“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (19) For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. (20) For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, (21) Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. (22) For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. (23) And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:18-23; It would do you well to read II Corinthians 3).

Jesus promised the right to be called the children of God to the peacemakers. They obtained the right to that inheritance through obeying the gospel (Galatians 3:26-29). The Spirit was sent as an earnest, or a guarantee, of that inheritance (Ephesians 1:14). The revealing of the Sons of God, which would take place when the inheritance would be distributed, was ready to be revealed when Peter wrote his first epistle, *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, (4) To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, (5) Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (I Peter 1:3-5; see I John 2:18).*

It was revealed, and the earnest expectation of those peacemakers was fulfilled when the kingdom of God was fully received and the “sons of the kingdom” who killed the prophets and persecuted the ones that were sent to them were destroyed (Hebrews 12:28; Luke 21:31-32; Matthew 8:10-12; Matthew 21:33-46).

Isn't it a wonderful thing to be called a child of God? What an honor! What a privilege! But it is one that people reject day after day. It is a privilege that countless have given up for the things of the world.

“He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful” (Matthew 13:22).

Since we are children of God, we are kings and priests (Revelation 1:6). The kingdom is ours to enjoy, but it is also ours to share! It is through us that the riches of God's grace are shown to the world throughout all ages.

“Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) (6) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:5-6). [DR]

He Shall Appear a Second Time – Pt 1

Guest Article

Has the Old Testament been completed? To ask the same question in a slightly different way, have the Law and the Prophets been accomplished? Jesus said in Mt 5:17-18, “17 "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. 18 "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished.” Thus, Jesus unequivocally affirmed that heaven and earth (i.e. the old covenant) were not going anywhere until it has all been accomplished. So, then, the question comes to us once again: have the Law and the Prophets been completed?

When asked the question, many will affirm “yes” and state that the Law was nailed to the cross, as per Col 2:14: “having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” This answer, however, has a number of fundamental flaws, two of which will be discussed here.

The first problem is that the not only were Law and Prophets not fulfilled at the cross, but they could not have been fulfilled. Why not? There are a number of prophecies contained in the old covenant that all non-preterists will recognize as not fulfilled at the cross. Here is a short list. At the cross, the kingdom of God had not manifested itself on the earth, nor had it yet filled the earth (Dan 2); the Spirit of God had not been poured out on all mankind (Joel 2-3); Gentiles had not been brought into the kingdom (Is 65-66). Do you see the problem? Either the old covenant has been fulfilled (accomplished) or it has not. Jesus said that until it is fulfilled, the old covenant was not going anywhere. Thus, if the old covenant still has unfulfilled prophecies, we are still under the old covenant. Thus, the cross could not have been the terminus of the Law since things were yet to be fulfilled.

The second problem that will be addressed comes from the book of Hebrews. The book of Hebrews demonstrates, in no uncertain terms, that the old covenant is still present (which coincides/agrees with what was previously established). Notice some of these Hebrews passages:

Heb 8:7

7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second.

Heb 8:13

When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.

Heb 9:8-9

The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed, while the outer tabernacle is still standing, 9 which is a symbol for the present time.

Heb 9:26

Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

Heb 9:28

so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.

Heb 10:8-9

After saying above, "Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast not desired, nor hast Thou taken pleasure in them" (which are offered according to the Law), 9 then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Thy will." He takes away the first in order to establish the second.

Heb 10:37

For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay.

Chapter 8 discusses the problems with the first covenant and the new covenant that God promised to make (which, by the way, comes from Jeremiah [31], a book belonging to the old covenant). The writer then goes on to comment that though the first is obsolete, it is "growing old and ready to disappear." Catch that: it has not grown old and vanished away (past tense). Rather, it is **READY** to disappear (not yet completed).

Notice what he says in chapter 9 about the temple. While it still stands, the way into heaven is not yet disclosed (interesting note, see what John says happens when Babylon falls in Rev 11 and 15). Also take note in verse 9 that it stands as a symbol for the present time. What time is that? Is the temple a symbol for

the Christian time? By no means! Jesus said that it was going to be thrown down (Mt 24), but of His kingdom there shall be no end (Is 9:7, Lk 1:33). If the old covenant was ready to disappear, and the temple was still standing and was a symbol of the present time, then we must conclude that the old covenant had not yet been fulfilled by the time of the writing of the book of Hebrews.

Chapter 9 also brings us to the crux of the matter, and the title of the article. Here we find that Jesus shall appear a second time, and the context suggests something much different than what has been taught in our pulpits. First of all, notice that the second appearing is tied directly to the consummation of the ages (28, 26). "Consummation of the age" is the correct rendering of the Greek phrase, "συντελεια των αιωνων" This phrase also appears in Mt 24:3 when Jesus tells the disciples that the temple will be torn down. Upon hearing this news, the disciples then ask, "when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming, and the συντελεια του αιωνος," which is incorrectly rendered "end of the world" in most major translations. Notice the parallels in Mt 24:1-3 and Heb 8-9. 1) The old covenant, and the temple, was still in place; 2) the coming of Jesus; and 3) the consummation of the age. Thus, in both passages, the coming of Jesus is tied directly to the consummation of the age, which is defined in Mt 24 as the destruction of the temple. (In Mt 24:3 the word for coming is "Parousia" and is next used in verse 27, which is indisputably in the context of the destruction of Jerusalem.)

Secondly, notice what happens at the appearing. Chapter 8 already established the need for the second covenant and that the first was not completely gone, so look in chapter 10 and you find the same ideas. The first covenant cannot save because the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin (10:1-4). The Hebrews writer then goes on to quote from Ps 40, saying that one is coming to do the will of God. What is the will of God? "He comes to take away the first, in order to establish the second." Thus, when Jesus appears a second time, He will come to do the will of God, which is to take away the first covenant and establish the second. When will all this take place? Jesus said in Mt 24:34 it would be in that generation and the Hebrews writer quotes Hab 2 and says it will be in a very, very little while.

Before we conclude the matter, consider Heb 12. We have not come to Sinai, but to Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem (18-24 [compare Gal 4:24-31; Rev 21:1-2]). As the earth shook at Sinai (Ex 19:18-25), it was about to shake again: but this time, the heavens also would be shook (Heb 12:26; Hag 2:6 [compare with Mt 24, especially verses 7 and 29-31]). Finally, Heb 12:28 is better rendered, we are receiving a kingdom, and it would be established when He appears the second time (Lk 21:31) which also happens to be when Jesus said all things which were written would be fulfilled (Lk 21:22). [B]