

More Responses

Cecil, There is a new book out this month which is the first I know of that deals with origins of the first and second century eschatology. "Misplaced Hope" by Sam Frost can be ordered from Living Presence @ www.livingpresence.org/books/pages222.shtml.

The home page for Living Presence is www.livingpresence.org. I'm sure your readers will enjoy this website and the books in their library. Grace and peace to you, in Christ Jesus. Your brother, Jack W. Brown <JACKIEWAYNEBROWN@cs.com>

"Charlie & Kathleen McCoy" <realmc@cbt.net>

Thanks for your willingness to "take the heat" in order to introduce a "strange" teaching to some of us that think we already know it all. It really does make a lot of sense....

Cecil, this is in response to some of the questions people asked you about the preterist" belief. The bible is not about "the history of mankind," but is about God's redemptive plan for the salvation of mankind.

In my opinion, the first and most basic thing to understand is that "death" and "resurrection" are not physical things that are being discussed. As you know, Adam & Eve were told that if they ate of the fruit from the center of the garden, they would surely die. Did they die a physical death at that point? No, they were "separated" from God by being removed from the garden. So, if the word in this context, "death" is "separation," then "resurrection" is the opposite of death, that is, to be brought back into a right relation with God; restored to the presence of God.

This makes it easier for me to be able to see that, prior to the parousia, believers that left this physical world had to have a place to go, awaiting the parousia (restoration). This place was where the rich man and Lazarus were. Both separated from God because God's redemptive plan had not yet been fully implemented. The last thing was the "parousia." This event removed the need for a "holding place." When Christ returned, the "saved" believers were "restored" to the presence of God and the others, to eternal destruction. From that point on, when new believers were "added to His number," they were immediately restored to the presence of God (resurrection), thereby eliminating the need for a "holding place." If you are never "added to His number," you do not have to wait for the parousia to get your final judgment when your body physically dies.

Remember Christians, "when you sin, you die." This was the "bond" that was nailed to the cross with Jesus. Now Christians, "when you sin, you don't die." Isn't this good news. Not that we want to promote sin, but to finally realize that Jesus paid the price for our sins. Past sins, present sins and future sins. It's a done deal. What we need to do is to

encourage each other to "try" to improve our way of life to be more like the person He cleaned us up to be (in Colosians 2), just because He did. That's how much He loves us. Knowing we will sin, God sees us as "sinless" because, when He looks at us, He sees Jesus.

Another thing to remember, is that if Christ has not returned to bring salvation, we should live like we are still under the first covenant. WE DON'T HAVE SALVATION UNTIL HE RETURNS TO BRING IT... "nothing will be changed until all prophesies fulfilled"

Note: this helped me, maybe it will help others. -Charlie McCoy <realmc@cbt.net>

Cecil, I've been reading your last few newsletters, in which you have discussed, and shared others' comments about, the preterist view of A.D. 70. I'll start out by saying that I don't agree with your view of it, but appreciate your stating that it's not a salvation issue -- I DO agree with that.

In your latest newsletter, you state: "I do not interpret any passages of Scripture as indicating an "end of time" (an impossible concept negating eternity) or dissolution of this universe." Does the "end of time" negate eternity? Yes, if you view eternity as the continuum of time which is as eternal as God Himself. However, there is another way to look at it, and it's based on the principles of Einstein's General Theory of Relativity. To summarize the view, "eternity" is that vast continuum which shares its span and breadth with God. Time, however, is something that is contained within eternity.

I wish I had a good reference to point you at on this, but I don't; it's based on things I learned in physics classes in college and conversations with other Christians who love science and mathematics. But basically, it's like this; Einstein hypothesized (and I believe rightly) that in order to go the speed of light, a particle (or a person) would gain infinite mass, and it would take infinite energy to do so! So if they have infinite mass, they are everywhere, and all of the energy everywhere to get them there. (Pardon me for leaving out the details of Einstein's trail of thought, but it's a long trail, fraught with mathematical perils!) The only being who is everywhere is God, and He is omnipotent, wielding all power. (This makes me ask very large, unanswerable questions about the relationship between God's state of existence and that of light, but that's almost another topic!)

However, we cannot perceive God through scientific means. We can't observe Him in matter, or measure His energy. In His eternal state, he must exist beyond matter and energy -- and the measure of energy ultimately gets down to the movement of particles over a set duration of time. To measure time is to perceive change; change in location, change in intensity, change in temperature, etc. We calibrate clocks by the vibration of certain kinds atoms, saying that so many vibrations equals one second. So if God is beyond our perception of energy, He is beyond our perception of time. And, I would suggest, beyond time itself.

The Bible itself tells us that "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day." (2 Peter 3:8, NIV) That suggests more to me than that the passage of time means nothing to God; rather, it indicates to me that God is beyond time, and eternity, where God exists, is also beyond time. It would seem to me that "time" is something God created, as well. What can be beyond the end of time? Why, the rest of eternity, of course!

You also asked, "If the universe, including the heavens and the earth, were consumed literally, where would we, God, those already in heaven, angels, and any other spirits be?" The universe is the total expanse of what we can perceive. Eternity, I would further state, is beyond even that. Time and space are both limitless in our view. But I believe that God is beyond even that. Where will we be when the universe is gone? In eternity, with God.

It seems clear that God is spirit -- but more than just spirit. Angels are spirit beings, as are the devil and his minions. How they exist, and what their operation is, I don't want to get into; again, those aren't salvation issues either! Some part of each human is spirit; I'm starting to wonder if spirit is not some invisible thing within us as it is the over-arching state of our existence, and the physical realm is a subset of that! It's not too hard to believe that spiritual beings are beyond time and space. We just need to think a little farther to get the idea that time and space aren't eternal. Infinite, maybe, but not eternal.

It's a semantic problem, I know. We've equated infinity and eternity in our language. I'd suggest that infinite means "limitlessness within which humans can perceive things" and eternal means "limitlessness which is beyond perception." Infinity is four-dimensional (time + three dimensions of space/matter); eternity lies beyond the borders of infinity.

Perhaps that's not very philosophically sound. It's hard to prove from scripture, too. But then, the word of God is meant to tell us how to live our lives while we're here on earth, not to tell us everything about every moment of time, or every facet of God's existence. None of this makes any difference in how we live lives of faithfulness to a God who brings salvation to His people because of His great love!

It does make for interesting conversation over pie and coffee, though! Blessings! -
Tim Castle <eltsac@mac.com>

These email notes were all in response to the last mailout concerning the lack of confirmation by the “church fathers” of the coming of Christ in the events surrounding AD 70. Some different evaluations and questions are offered in good spirit and honesty. For those who would care to do extensive research on the matter, URLs are given to other websites where much more information is available. I just wish that I had the time and mental concentration to explore them all. I will offer a few comments relating to the notes later.

“Cecil, I have been studying fulfilled prophecy for about two years now. Like you, I am convinced it makes the most sense of scripture but I still have a lot details to work out. One of the most comprehensive sources I have found is *The Preterist Archive* at <http://www.preteristarchive.com> . You will find a host of quotes from the early church fathers. As far as I can tell no single one of them makes the full case for preterism, but taken as a whole they speak the message loud and clear. The site is very balanced in it's approach. Common objections are posted by those who raised them and biblical responses are provided. There is a lifetime of reading here. BTW - ‘*Beyond the End Times*’ is still available today from amazon.com and *The International Preterist Association* (<http://www.preterist.org/booklist.htm>).” -Jim Wade

“Cecil: Regarding your most recent *Freedom's Ring* email, there is a KILLER web site with tons of the Early Church Fathers' writings free online. Go to <http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/> I even found the complete text of Athanasius', ‘*On the Incarnation of the Word.*’” -Joe Lochamy

Then Joe adds: “Cecil: I downloaded Athanasius', ‘*Incarnation of the Word*’ from the URL site I sent you. After reading it, I must confess that, (although I agree with your explanation of the *Parousia*), I can not agree that Athanasius was commenting that the fall of Jerusalem had anything to do with the *Parousia*. Section 40 (there are 57 sections in the ‘*Incarnation*’ is where he discusses the material you quoted from Mr. Noe's book. It COULD mean what Mr. Noe says OR it could be referring only to Christ's original presence on earth up to his death/resurrection. Since it is unclear in Section 40 exactly to what he is referring, I looked further in the document for more confirmation.

“In the title to section 56, he encourages the reader to ‘Search Then, the Scriptures, If You Can and So Fill Up This Sketch. Learn to Look for the Second Advent and Judgment.’ In the comments under that section, he says, ‘And you will learn about His second glorious ... appearing to us, when .. He is to come’ I have greatly abbreviated that section, but he clearly uses future terminology when referring to the ‘second advent / coming.’ This would have been the PERFECT place to say that Christ had already come the second time, but instead, he casts it as ‘is to come.’ Thus, I must conclude that his comments in Section 40 do not refer to the *Parousia*, but, instead, refer to the ‘first’ coming.

“I still wish there were some kind of clear statement from the early post-AD-70 writers to support the *Parousia* having occurred at that point.” -Joe Lochamy

Jay quotes and comments: “Athanasius (A. D. 296- 373) did not live in the first century but he did say some incredibly ‘unorthodox’ (preterist) things about A.D. 70, the Resurrection of the dead, Christ's return and the completion of God's revelation: ‘For now that He has come to our realm, and taken up His abode in one body among His peers, henceforth the whole conspiracy of the enemy against mankind is checked, and **THE CORRUPTION OF DEATH WHICH BEFORE WAS PREVAILING AGAINST THEM IS DONE AWAY.** For the race of men had gone to ruin, had not the Lord and Saviour of all, the Son of God, come among us to meet **THE END OF DEATH.**’ (Athanasius' *On the Incarnation of the Word*, Section 9 Verse 4; cf. I Cor. 15:21-26)

"Perhaps with regard to the other (prophecies) [the Jews] may be able even to find excuses and to put off what is written to a future time. But what can they say to [Daniel's 70 weeks], or can they face it at all? Where not only is the Christ referred to, but He that is to be anointed is declared to be not man simply, but Holy of Holies; and Jerusalem **IS TO STAND TILL HIS COMING, AND THENCEFORTH, PROPHET AND VISION CEASE IN ISRAEL.**’ (Athanasius' *On The Incarnation of the Word*, Section 39 Verse 3; cf. Dan. 9:24ff)

"And this was why Jerusalem stood till then - namely, that there they might be exercised in the types as a preparation for the reality. ...**FROM THAT TIME FORTH ALL PROPHECY IS SEALED** and the city and temple taken. ...Why are [the Jews] so irreligious and so perverse as to see what has happened, and yet to deny Christ, Who has brought it all to pass? ...***WHAT THEN HAS NOT COME TO PASS, THAT THE CHRIST MUST DO? WHAT IS LEFT UNFULFILLED***, that the Jews should now disbelieve with impunity?" (Athanasius' *On the Incarnation of the Word*, Section 40 Verses 1-8)

"...**THE DEVIL, THAT TYRANT AGAINST THE WHOLE WORLD IS SLAIN. ...NO MORE DOES DEATH REIGN;** but instead of death henceforth is life, since our Lord said, 'I am the life'; so that everything is filled with joy and gladness; as it is written, ‘The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice.’ (Athanasius' *The Festal Letters*, Letter IV. No. 3,4)

"For He raised up the falling, healed the sick, satisfied those who were hungry, and filled the poor, and, what is more wonderful, **RAISED US ALL FROM THE DEAD;** having **ABOLISHED DEATH,** He has brought us from affliction and sighing to the rest and gladness of this feast, a joy which reaches even to HeavenHow must all its hosts joy and exult, as they ... look on sinners while they repent! ... and finally on the enemy who lies weakened, lifeless, bound hand and foot, so that **WE MAY MOCK AT HIM;** **'WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY, O DEATH? Where is your sting, O Grave?'** Let us then sing unto the Lord a song of victory! ..Wherefore let us not celebrate the feast after an earthly manner, but as **KEEPING FESTIVAL IN HEAVEN WITH THE ANGELS.**’ (Athanasius' *The Festal Letters*, Letter VI. No.9-12)” -- Jay Dicken.

The next two inquiries relate to our present time. “Cecil, I have long believed that the events of AD 70 fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament and the book of *Revelation*. My question to you is what happens in the future? Does life as we now know it just continue forever? Do we experience a future literal resurrection of the body to be reunited with the soul? Or when we die, does our soul go back to God and there will be no physical existence? Would they be in heaven?” -Mike

“Having just read your newsletter, I have an additional question to the one that you answered. If Jesus’ second coming has already occurred, then what Scriptural period are we in? What prophecies talk about us?” -Terry in PA.

Who wants to volunteer to answer those questions for me?! I will offer some suggestions which I may be ready to withdraw next week. :-)

I do not interpret any passages of Scripture as indicating an “end of time” (an impossible concept negating eternity) or dissolution of this universe. It is true that there are statements about heaven and earth passing away, the elements being dissolved with fire, and the earth being burned up at the coming of the Lord (2 Peter 3:1-13). Peter’s predictions seem very literal, yet we must remember that Hebrew writers in both the OT and NT Scriptures employed descriptions of cosmic change and upheaval to depict change and upheaval of political, religious, and social orders. We must consider all the context in determining if such descriptions are literal or figurative.

In this context, we must observe that these happenings were imminent, for Peter’s readers were to be “waiting for and hastening (earnestly desiring) the coming of the day of the Lord” when those things would happen (v. 12, 14). If those occurrences were to be literal, then they have waited many centuries. But the great upheaval and change for their political-religious system came only a few years after Peter wrote them.

A little reasoning might be acceptable also. If the universe, including the heavens and the earth, were consumed literally, where would we, God, those already in heaven, angels, and any other spirits be? If all is consumed, what is left except a vacuum of space, which would be nothingness. Can God “*uncreate*” his universe out of existence? The laws of physics are unchanging truth, the eternal laws of God governing the universe. It is hardly conceivable that he would reverse (make untrue) his own laws/truth.

As to our own present and future: we are in the “eternal kingdom” (2 Peter 1:11), having received at his “*parousia*” the “kingdom that cannot be shaken” (Heb. 12:28; Rev. 21:16). God has already given us eternal life, that is, life which will continue unendingly. Jesus declared, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me **has eternal life; he does not come into judgment**, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24) It is spiritual rather than physical.

Christ has opened the way into heaven so that we will not have to sleep in death awaiting resurrection as the ancients did. When we leave this body of earthly elements, our immortality will be confirmed without delay. There will be no judgment for us because Christ has already stood in judgment for us, as perhaps is the depiction in *Revelation* 10:11-15. We can trust that other believers have experienced, and we will also, this individual transition from the physical into the totally spiritual environment when we each respond to his trumpet call.

As for a “period” in which to classify us, can we not say we enjoy the inclusion in the new covenant and in the dispensation of grace, an unending relationship with God in Christ (see Rev. 21:1-4)? We are the new Jerusalem, the new heaven and earth joining all those who were redeemed at the “*parousia*.” Please read *Revelation* 21 and 22 again thinking of those things as having transpired at Jesus’ second coming and still prevailing today. It may give you an exciting new view of the new heaven and the new earth. Those events were to soon take place (22:6-7, 20) at the time of John’s writing. In previous issues, I have dealt with various points touched upon in this essay.

Finally, Shannon, of Houston, wrote: “I guess my question is: What difference does all this make in the light of eternal salvation?” From the outset I have explained that understanding these things is not a salvation issue. They may become a damnation issue if we try to bind our “pro-or-con” opinions on others making them conditions of fellowship. If these discussions disturb you, pass them by; if a non-essential food gives you indigestion, don’t eat it.

Yet I might ask if gaining a college degree, being able to locate Nigeria on the map, remembering your mother’s birthday, knowing who won the World Series, and knowing the multiplication tables are necessary to be successful and happy? The answer is “no,” but most of us find added meaning to our lives by such things.

(Cecil Hook, November 2001)