



The Sword & The Plow

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Why I am a Preterist Part III

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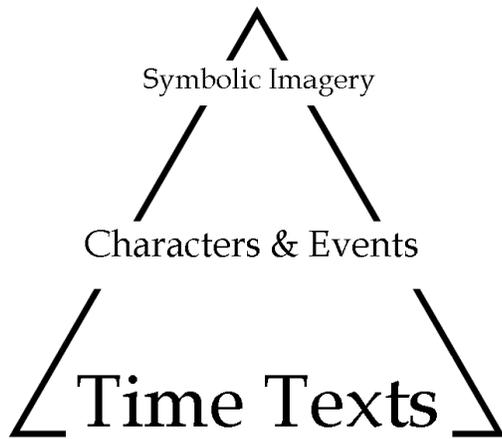
Introduction

In this article we conclude our series "*Why I am a Preterist.*"

As noted in a previous article, the corpus or body of writings devoted to the study of "last things" may be divided into three categories, which together make up a "pyramid" of interpretation. The first story of the pyramid and very foundation of Preterism are the many *Times Texts* in the Bible placing Jesus' second coming in the first century. In our first article in this series, we looked at 37 times texts, which unanimously place the return of Christ within the first disciples' lives. Here are but a few of the many passages we examined:

- *Matt. 10:23 - "But when they persecute you in one 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."*

- *Matt. 16:27, 28 - "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom."*
- *Matt. 24:30, 34 - "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory... Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled."*



The second story of the pyramid consists in historical *characters and events* that were to mark Christ's kingdom and coming. Here we saw that from Genesis to Revelation, the latter days were tied to Biblical Israel and Rome, and that Rome would destroy the Jewish nation in divine judgment for its murder of Christ and persecution of Christians:

"A voice of noise from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice of the Lord that rendereth recompense to his enemies...for behold the Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire." Isa. 66:3-6, 15

The first and second stories of the pyramid, therefore, corroborate each other, placing Christ's return in the first generation of believers. We learn from scripture that there was to be a "second coming." The scripture are inerrant and immutable. Therefore we believe in the second coming as an indisputable fact and article of the Christian faith. But the same scriptures that speak of a second coming also tell us that it would occur within the first disciples' lifetimes. Shouldn't we receive the *when* of the second coming in the same spirit of faith we receive the *fact* of the second coming? How can we receive scripture's testimony regarding one, but not receive scripture's testimony regarding the other? Yet, that is precisely what most of Christendom does. Most of Christendom believes that Jesus' return is still future. Christians are taught that Christ's coming will be *bodily and visible* and that a fiery conflagration will *end the physical cosmos* (according to some), or that Christ will introduce a *millennial kingdom* (according to others). However, these scenarios create hopeless contradiction between the "what" of the second coming, and the "when." Can the majority of Christendom just be plain wrong? If so, what is it that has led so many into error? To answer these questions

we need to turn to the language of the prophets, and thus come at last to the third story of our pyramid.

The Usus Loquendi of the Prophets.

The chief reason so many Christians have fallen into error regarding the past fulfillment of Christ's second coming is a prevailing lack of familiarity with the *usus loquendi* of the prophets. "*Usus loquendi*" is a Latin phrase that describes the *established use or custom of speaking* employed by the prophets. The language of the prophets was poetic and figurative. The word pictures they painted are among the most beautiful and powerful of the world's literature. They are also among the most terrifying. When God visited judgment upon the world, bringing war, famine, and pestilence upon the nations, the language employed was highly exaggerated, to emphasize the severity of the coming judgment and to lead the nations to repentance. The prophets described the Lord as coming in wrath, riding upon the clouds as upon a chariot; the earth melts at his presence; the isles flee from before him; mountains and hills are dissolved by the blood of the multitudes slain; the land is turned into burning pitch; rivers of brimstone go before him, consuming the wicked from off the earth; the sun is darkened; the moon turned to blood; stars fall from their courses, and men seek to hide themselves in the holes and caves of the earth from heaven's appointed wrath. This language of a "collapsing universe" occurs over and over again in the Old Testament to describe heaven's judgment upon men and nations, not the destruction of the cosmos itself. Sir Isaac Newton explains the imagery of the prophets this way:

"The figurative language of the prophets is taken from the analogy between the world natural and an empire or kingdom considered as a world politic. Accordingly, the world natural, consisting of heaven and earth, signifies the whole world politic, consisting of thrones and people, or so much of it as is considered in prophecy; and the things in that world signify the analogous things in this. For the heavens and the things therein signify thrones and dignities, and those who enjoy them: and the earth, with the things thereon, the inferior people; and the lowest parts of the earth, called Hades or Hell, the lowest or most miserable part of them. Great earthquakes, and the shaking of heaven and earth, are put for the shaking of kingdoms, so as to distract and overthrow them; the creating of a new heaven and earth, and the passing of an old one; or the beginning and end of a world, for the rise and ruin of a body politic signified thereby. The sun [stands], for

the whole species and race of kings, in the kingdoms of the world politic; the moon, for the body of common people considered as the king's wife; the stars, for subordinate princes and great men; or for bishops and rulers of the people of God, when the sun is Christ. Setting of the sun, moon, and stars; darkening the sun, turning the moon into blood, and falling of the stars, for the ceasing of a kingdom."¹

What was true of the Old Testament is true of the New Testament. The New Testament was not spoken in a vacuum. Jesus and his disciples were Jews and spoke to Jews. All Jews belonged to the local synagogue, and grew up hearing the Old Testament prophets read aloud every Sabbath. Most Jews were literate, and any male might be called upon to read from the prophets in the synagogue (Lk. 4:16-20; Acts 15:21). At such times, the Jews would have heard Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the "minor prophets" pronounced divine wrath and judgment upon their ancestors for apostasy, idolatry, and sin. Equally important, they would have heard historical narratives describing fulfillment of these prophecies, and how the nation was destroyed in judgment upon their sin. *The language of prophecy and its historical fulfillment would therefore have been known and familiar to the Jews of Jesus' day.*

We know by comparing Jesus' pronouncements against Jerusalem that he used language identical to the prophets; we can even identify language and images appropriated from Old Testament sources in his predictions. Jews of Jesus' day would have recognized Jesus' teaching as a continuation of the prophetic tradition, and known how to interpret the things he taught and said. However, this familiarity would not have existed among the Gentiles. Early on, while the apostles were still alive, Gentiles became the dominate people of the faith. Lacking familiarity with the Old Testament, Gentiles would not have been able to readily compare Jesus' and the apostles' teaching with that of the prophets, or to recognize its historical fulfillment. Newton's very reasonable and learned comments above should be compared with those of the Gentile Lactantius (A.D. 260-330):

About this same time also the prince of the devils, who is the contriver of all evil, shall be bound with chains, and shall be imprisoned

¹ Sir Isaac Newton, *Observations on the Prophecies of Daniel*, Part i. chap. ii

during the thousand years of the heavenly rule in which righteousness shall reign in the world, so that he may contrive no evil against the people of God. After His coming the righteous shall be collected from all the earth, and the judgment being completed, the sacred city shall be planted in the middle of the earth, in which God Himself the builder may dwell together with the righteous bearing rule in it...the earth will open its fruitfulness, and bring forth most abundant fruits of its own accord; the rocky mountains shall drop with honey; streams of wine shall run down, and rivers flow with milk: in short, the world itself shall rejoice, and all nature exult, being rescued and set free from the dominion of evil and impiety, and guilt and error. Throughout this time beasts shall not be nourished by blood, nor birds by prey; but all things shall be peaceful and tranquil. Lions and calves shall stand together at the manger, and the wolf shall not carry off the sheep, the hound shall not hunt for prey; hawks and eagles shall not injure; the infant shall play with serpents."²

For Lactantius, the prophets do not communicate spiritual truths in poetic and figurative language, but spoke literally, so that men are taught to look for rivers to flow with actual wine! With these sorts of expectations about the second coming, it is no wonder men are still looking for Christ's return. This situation has more or less continued until today. Christians lack sufficient grounding in the Old Testament to intelligently interpret Biblical eschatology. In the balance of this article, we will survey many passages from the prophets to see how they used language and how this same language is used in the New Testament.

Day of the Lord

This phrase occurs in its complete form twice in the New Testament (Acts 2:20; II Pet. 3:10), though the abbreviated form "day" occurs with some frequency. It is widely assumed that it refers to the end of the world, but this is incorrect. The phrase occurs numerous times throughout the Old Testament, where it describes times of divine judgment upon the world. Typically, it is accompanied by figurative language of preternatural phenomena in which the Lord comes in wrath upon the nations. Isaiah's description of the fall of Babylon to

² Lactantius

s, Divine Institutes, VII, xxiv; Ante Nicene Fathers Vol. 7, p. 219.

the Medes and Persians provides a good case study. We will compare Isaiah with New Testament passages.

First, Isaiah describes the Lord's coming in the armies of the nations. Notice that the Lord's coming is not bodily and visible, but spiritual and providential:

- *Isa. 13:1, 4, 6 - "The burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see...The noise of a multitude in the mountains, like as of a great people; a tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations gathered together: the LORD of hosts mustereth the host of the battle. They come from a far country, from the end of heaven, even the LORD, and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole land."*

This may be compared with Matthew:

- *Matt. 24:30 - And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*

Birth Pangs

Next, Isaiah describes the terror and destruction brought upon the world by the Mede-Persian armies in the day of the Lord. Isaiah evokes imagery of a woman in travail, a theme familiar to New Testament eschatology, describing a time of national and world calamity:

- *Isa. 13:6-8 - "Howl ye; for the day of the LORD is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty. Therefore shall all hands be faint, and every man's heart shall melt: And they shall be afraid: pangs and sorrows shall take hold of them; they shall be in pain as a woman that travaileth: they shall be amazed one at another; their faces shall be as flames."*

This may be compared with these New Testament passages:

- *Mk. 13:8 - For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles: these are the beginning of sorrows [birth pangs].*

- *I Thess. 5:3 -For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.*

Collapsing Universe

Isaiah then describes heaven's wrath upon sinners in terms of celestial phenomena, in which the heavens themselves refuse to shine upon the world of men:

- *Isa. 13:9-12 - "Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine. And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir."*

This should be compared with Luke:

- *Lk. 21:25, 26 - And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.*

Shaking of Heaven & Earth

Next, the very heavens and earth *shake* at the coming of the Lord and the destruction wrought by the armies of the Medes and Persian, symbolic of the overthrow and unsettling of world powers:

- *Isa. 13: 13, 14 - Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger. And it shall be as the chased roe, and as a sheep that no man taketh up: they shall every man turn to his own people, and flee every one into his own land.*

Compare Hebrews:

- *Heb. 12:26, 27 - Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.*

Thus, all of the apocalyptic language usually associated with the "end of the world" in the New Testament has an established usage in the Old Testament associated with times of judgment upon earth's nations. The language is poetic and figurative, not literal. Here is another "day of the Lord;" this time upon Edom.

Mountains Melted with Blood

First, Isaiah describes a time world-wrath as the armies of Babylon spread over the earth, leaving destruction in their wake. Notice in particular how the mountains melt with the blood of the slain:

- *Isa. 34:1-3 - Come near, ye nations, to hear; and hearken, ye people: let the earth hear, and all that is therein; the world, and all things that come forth of it. For the indignation of the LORD is upon all nations, and his fury upon all their armies: he hath utterly destroyed them, he hath delivered them to the slaughter. Their slain also shall be cast out, and their stink shall come up out of their carcasses, and the mountains shall be melted with their blood.*

Dissolution of the Heavens

Next, Isaiah describes the very heavens themselves as being dissolved in language identical with the second epistle of Peter. If the language of Isaiah is figurative, as surely it is, what rule of interpretation makes Peter's imagery literal?

- *Isa. 34:4 - And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree.*

Compare with Peter:

- *II Pet. 3:10 - But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.*

Land Soaked with Blood

Isaiah does not leave us in doubt about what nation is under heaven's wrath, but names Idumea (Edom), saying their land would be soaked with blood.

- *Isa. 34: 5-7 - For my sword shall be bathed in heaven: behold, it shall come down upon Idumea, and upon the people of my curse, to judgment. The sword of the LORD is filled with blood, it is made fat with fatness, and with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams: for the LORD hath a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Idumea. And the unicorns shall come down with them, and the bullocks with the bulls; and their land shall be soaked with blood, and their dust made fat with fatness.*

Earth turned to Brimstone & Ceaseless Burning

Isaiah next describes the land as burning pitch and brimstone, whose smoke ascends forever and ever. This language compares with Peter and Revelation:

- *Isa. 34:8-10 - For it is the day of the LORD's vengeance, and the year of recompence for the controversy of Zion. And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever: from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever*

Compare with New Testament passages:

II Pet. 3:11, 12 - Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

Rev. 14:10-11 - The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.

Coming on Clouds

Another familiar image of the second coming is Christ coming on clouds of glory. Most assume this is literal, but Old Testament prophets employed this imagery rather frequently to times of national and world judgment.

- *Isa. 19:1 - The burden of Egypt. Behold, the LORD rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt: and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it.*
- *Ezek. 30:13-18 - Thus saith the Lord God...I will put a fear in the land of Egypt. And I will make Pathros desolate, and will set fire in Zoan, and will execute judgment in No...And I will set fire in Egypt...and the pomp of her strength shall cease in her: as for her, a cloud shall cover her, and her daughters shall go into captivity.*
- *Ezek. 32:7-8 - And when I shall put thee out, I will cover the heaven, and make the stars thereof dark; I will cover the sun with cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over thee, and set darkness upon thy land, saith the Lord God.*

Earth Melting at the Presence of the Lord

Most expect at the second coming that Christ will descend from heaven with a shout and that the earth will melt before him. This imagery is fairly common in the Old Testament; the prophet Micah's description of judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem is among the best in this tradition:

- *Mic. 1:2-5 - Hear, all ye people; hearken, O earth, and all that therein is: and let the Lord GOD be witness against you, the LORD from his holy temple. For, behold, the LORD cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, and as the waters that are poured down a steep place. For the transgression of Jacob is all this, and for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the transgression of Jacob? is it not Samaria? and what are the high places of Judah? are they not Jerusalem?*

What about Second Peter 3?

Some may object that, although many of the passages cited above have the look and feel of hyperbolic speech, the second epistle of Peter sounds much more "matter of fact," and does not seem to be of the same poetic genre as the prophets. There is some truth to this observation. Peter's statements about the elements melting with fervent heat appear in the midst of a plain-speaking epistle, not in the course of a long poetic book or passage. Might not Peter be speaking of a nuclear holocaust at the world's end? No. Peter's reference to the promised "new heavens and earth" toward the end of his epistle make this impossible (II Pet. 3:13). This promise is from the book of Isaiah, where it clearly refers to the altered condition of world political affairs following Christ's judgment upon the Jews and Romans.

- *Isa. 66:5-22 - Hear the word of the LORD, ye that tremble at his word; Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the LORD be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed. A voice of noise from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice of the LORD that rendereth recompence to his enemies...For, behold, the LORD will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by his sword will the LORD plead with all flesh: and the slain of the LORD shall be many...For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain.*

The socio-political environment of the world had been oppressive to God's people down through the long centuries, culminating in the persecution of Nero and the Jews. But, with the ascension of Christ and his rule over the nations, dominion has come to the saints, who now find themselves in world-wide ascendancy as Daniel the prophet foretold:

- *Dan. 7:27 - And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.*

Origen and the Figurative Use of Language

Before closing, it will be worth our while to cite one of the earliest and most learned of the early Patristic

Writers, Origen. Origen (A.D. 185-254) writings were voluminous. His friend and patron, Ambrosius, bore the expense of seven amanuenses and an equal number of transcribers, as well as girls practiced in calligraphy, to make copies for publication of the works dictated by Origen. Jerome says that he wrote more than any individual could read. Epiphanius related that his works amounted to 6,000 writings. His *magnum opus* was the Hexapala, a critical edition of the Greek and Hebrew scriptures set in six columns, including versions of the 1) Hebrew, 2) Hebrew transliterated into Greek, 3) Aquila of Sinope, 4) Symmachus the Ebionite, 5) a recension of the Septuagint, 6) Theodotion. His works published in the Ante-Nicene Fathers include *De Principiis*, *A Letter to Africanus about the History of Susanna*, *A Letter to Gregory*, and *Contra Celsus*. In *Contra Celsus*, Origen defended the idea of God “coming down” to earth, affirming that scriptural usage shows that this language is *figurative*:

*“And if the voices of the prophets say that God ‘comes down,’ who has said, ‘Do I not fill heaven and earth?’ saith the Lord,’ the term is used in a **figurative** sense. For God ‘comes down’ from His own height and greatness when He arranges the affairs of men, and especially those of the wicked.”³*

Furthermore, the bodily descent of God is also accommodative language, not to be taken literally:

*“And as custom leads men to say that teachers ‘condescend’ to children, and wise men to those youths who have just betaken themselves to philosophy, not by ‘descending in a **bodily** manner; so, if God is said anywhere in the holy Scriptures to ‘come down, it is understood as spoken in conformity with the usage which so employs the word, and in like manner also with the expression, ‘go up.’⁴*

But if the “coming down” of God is figurative and is not literal or bodily, Origen also affirms that the *fire* of Christ’s conflagration is merely figurative:

“But it is in mockery that Celsus says we speak of ‘God coming down like a torturer bearing fire,’ and thus compels us unseasonably to investigate words of deeper meaning, we shall make a few remarks, sufficient to enable our hearers to form an

³ *Contra Celsus*, IV, xiii; Ante-Nicene Father, Vol IV, pg. 501, 2

⁴ *Contra Celsus*, IV, xii; Ante-Nicene Father, Vol. IV, pg. 502

*idea of the defense which disposes of the ridicule of Celsus against us, and then we shall turn to what follows. The divine word says that our God is ‘a consuming fire,’ and that ‘He draws rivers of fire before Him;’ nay, that he even entereth in as ‘a refiner’s fire, and as a fuller’s herb,’ to purify His own people. But when He is said to be a ‘consuming fire,” we inquire what are the things which are appropriate to be consumed by God. And we assert that they are wickedness, and the works which result from it, and which, being **figuratively** called ‘wood, hay, stubble,’ God consumes as a fire. The wicked man, accordingly, is said to build upon the previously-laid foundation of reason, ‘wood, and hay, and stubble.’ If, then, any one can show that these words were differently understood by the writer, and can prove that the wicked man **literally** builds up ‘wood, or hay, or stubble,’ it is evident that the fire must be understood to be material, and an object of sense. But if, on the contrary, the works of the wicked man are spoken of **figuratively**, under the names of ‘wood, or hay, or stubble,” why does it not once occur (to inquire) in what sense the word ‘fire’ is to be taken, so that ‘wood’ of such a kind should be consumed? For (the scripture) says: “The fire will try each man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work be burned, he shall suffer loss.”⁵*

Here we have Origen’s answer to Celsus’ mock that God comes down as a “torturer bearing fire.” First, the *coming down* is figurative; second, the *bodily form* is merely accommodative, not literal; third, the *fire* of Christ’s wrath is also figurative.

In connection with this last, a survey of the texts quoted by Origen shows all are traditional “second coming” passages:

[Heb. 12:26-29](#) - “Our God is a consuming fire.”

[Dan. 7:9, 10](#) - “His throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him.”

⁵ *Contra Celsus*, IV, xiii; Ante-Nicene Fathers IV, pg. 502.

[Mal. 3:2, 3](#) – “But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner’s fire, and like fuller’s soap.”

I Cor. 3:13 - “Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is.”

These “second coming” passages, coupled with Origen’s figurative understanding of prophetic language, show that Origen viewed the second coming in terms precisely as Preterists do today, and *prima facie* prove Origen was firmly in the Preterist camp. We may therefore have every confidence that

our three story interpretative pyramid is correct and that the Time Texts, Historical Characters & Events, Symbolic Language of prophecy witness to the Preterist interpretation of eschatology.

Conclusion

The three story pyramid of interpretation of Time Texts, Characters and Events, and Symbolic Language weave into a threefold cord that cannot be broken. We hope you will embrace Preterism as the only credible and defensible interpretive school of eschatology.



“There Shall Be Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth” (Matt. 25:30)

Questions & Answers

Q: Hi Kurt,

I have been contemplating your article about the kingdom in the current issue of "Fulfilled Magazine". With that article in mind, I have a question that I sincerely hope that you will answer for me. Some day in the future, the body of the man that we know as Kurt Simmons will be placed in a casket and buried or possibly the body may be incinerated and the ashes placed in an urn - in either case - here is my question for you: when that body is disposed of, where will Kurt Simmons be?

A: How are things in your home state? Are you enjoying the Republican Primaries? We are encouraged Ron Paul is doing as well as he is. It is a sign Americans are beginning to see the writing on the wall about where the nation is headed. One can only hope that one day they will find the courage and wisdom to break with the status quo and actually reduce the size, power, and cost of the federal leviathan!

To answer your question, assuming a person dies "saved," I believe that he now goes directly to heaven at the time of physical death. I do not believe that we are detained any longer in the interim abode of Hades, or that Hades even still exists.

Hope that answers your question. My article about the "kingdom" was focused not upon the heaven part, but upon the earthly part; viz., Christ's dominion over earth's people and nations. That is the kingdom that was coming in power while the apostles were still alive and the kingdom prophesied by Daniel.

Blessings,

Q: Kurt,

Things are great here in my home state. Thanks for asking. I agree with your comments in the Ron Paul" section. It would truly be great if Americans could /would finally wake up to reality.

A few more questions:

1. As a preterist, do you believe that you have totally fulfilled salvation here on earth?
2. Do you believe that you are currently living in the resurrection - a thought common among preterists?

It would appear from your response below that your answers to the above questions would be NO. (However, appearances can be deceiving.)

I await your response.
Blessing in the new year

A: Thanks for writing back.

1) I guess I would need to know your definition of "totally fulfilled salvation." I believe the cross is complete and that the atonement has been made, but I do believe in the possibility of apostasy and that a Christian can so sin as to lose his salvation. I do not see eschatology as affecting this aspect of soteriology, like some who claim we were in "heaven now."

2) No. Resurrection is from physical death. The spiritualized resurrection of Eph. 2:1, 6 happens at conversion, and has nothing to do with eschatology or the second coming.

Q: Greetings in Christ,

I recently discovered your website and found it to be a great source of blessing and teaching. I'm a former Anglican bishop, technically retired, though laboring with a Lutheran synod. Your website and other books and resources are literally turning my eschatological views "right-side up".

I'd appreciate if you would send me your Newsletter.
Sincerely in Christ,

A: Thank you for your interest in our newsletter. How encouraging to get your interest and support. I grew up in the Episcopal Church, so we have some common roots. Now we have common eschatology!

I have attached our latest newsletters (our Christmas edition addresses the date of Christ's birth) and added you to our list for future editions. Please write anytime with questions or comments. If you will send me your mailing address, I'll see you get a complimentary copy of *Revelation Explained* and my commentary on Daniel.

Welcome on board!

Q: Dear bro in Christ,

Greetings to you in the wonderful name of our Christ.
Bro would you please explain Briefly this Heb 6:1-2?

Bangalore, India

A: The Greek word here is "stoikia" (στοικια). It means "elements" or "rudiments." It occurs with some frequency in the New Testament. Its basic meaning here in Heb. 6:1, 2 might be similar to "baby stuff" of the faith, like we learn in "elementary" school. As I read the passage, the writer is urging his readers to move beyond the baby stuff of the Christian faith; viz., baptism, laying on of hands, repentance, resurrection of the dead, etc. I find no reference to the law of Moses in this passage, though some do. Some seize upon the word "stoikia" here and its occurrence in Gal. 4:3, 9, which seems to refer to the Mosaic law, and assume that Heb. 6:1, 2 also refers to the law. However, context must control our interpretation, not the mere occurrence of the same word. Heb. 6:1, 2 specifically refers to the "first things" of the doctrine of Christ, not the law, and names the Christian doctrines of repentance, faith, baptisms, laying on of hands, and resurrection of the dead. These are not doctrines of the Old Law, so far as I can see, but seem to belong to the Christian faith. If so, the writer is imply urging his readers to "grow up" and leave behind the "baby stuff" of the faith, and move on to more mature topics, which he then proceeds to do by discussing the shadows of the law. How can "stoikia" refer here to the Mosaic law, if he is urging them to leave those questions behind, and then goes on to talk about them? If "stoikia" is talking about the law, then the writer most certainly did not leave its discussion behind!

In other places "stoikia" seems to refer to all sorts of false instruction that belonged to the world. In Colossians 2:8, 20, "stoikia" clearly involves false Greco-Roman philosophical and ascetic practices enjoining abstinence from various foods. Paul calls these things the "rudiments of the world," which is all the same as to say "childish stuff of worldly men and sects." Jewish teaching clinging to the law is included among these "childish things" of the world, all of which Paul warns his readers against.

In II Peter 3:10, 12, "stoikia" is used of the basic stuff the world is made of. The passage alludes to the physical and chemical "elements" of creation, but these are used as metaphors for other things. Many Preterists believe that "elements" here refers to the Old Law, but I do not find this persuasive. The law was taken away at the cross. Not a single verse can be produced showing the law was still "binding, valid, and obligatory" after the cross. Nor is the fall of Jerusalem in view *per se*. Paul is writing to Gentiles living in the area of the Black Sea who are facing persecution. The fall of Jerusalem 1000 miles away would not make much difference to these Christians suffering persecution. My view is that "stoikia" here refers to the *socio-political* elements of the world; viz., thrones and

governments that were persecuting Christians and resisting the faith. These were all taken away by Christ at his coming. Jesus put all enemies beneath his feet (rules the nations with a rod of iron), and thus issued in a "new heavens and earth" in which his righteous government is paramount. This is also the meaning of the new heavens and earth in Rev. 21, 22: viz., Christ sits a governor of the world and rules all things in righteousness.

Hope that helps.

Q: Greetings Mr. Simmons.

I appreciated reviewing your website today and wish to receive your newsletter. Does this come by email? BTW I was also reviewing Clark Pinnock's essay on annihilationism today and in examining Mtt. 24:46. I note the contrasting parallelism between eternal punishment and eternal life. It begs the question does it not, "What is the punishment?" If on the one side of the parallelism the reward is "life" in contrast the punishment must be "death" or eternal destruction. Or one might also say, if the first side of the parallelism is "punishment" then the other side would be "reward". I then referenced to Paul's statement to the Thessalonian Christians where he said in 2 Thess 1:9, 'They will be punished with everlasting destruction...' Seems plain and straightforward.

As the question of "What is the punishment?" is present in Matt. 24:46 it needs to be answered from the clear and plain of the numerous other statements that clearly state it is death, destruction, cessation. Once something is destroyed it is gone.

I realize that you are not interested in this subject other than what I read on your site but as it was fresh on my mind today as I study both full preterism and conditional immortality and annihilationism, and that you concluded as I have that Matt. 24:46 seems to be the single passage they most often cite (apart from the figurative and apocalyptic language of revelation), I thought I would mention my support.

Thanks much for your very informative website and the hard work you have done. And please contact me about how to receive the newsletter.

A: Thank you for your interest in our newsletter. I am attaching last month's edition and have added you to the list for future ones.

I agree that the case for "eternal conscience torment" is very tenuous. The couple was warned that death was the punishment/consequence for sin in the garden, not eternal torment. There are only one or two verses that

really seem to teach eternal torment, Rev. 20:10 being the strongest proof text. Given that this is really the only text that appears to directly teach eternal torment and it occurs in a book of symbols and about a symbolic character "the dragon/Leviathan", it is building on a weak foundation to argue for eternal torment. I always look at Matt. 10:28, which says God will destroy both body and soul in Gehenna. If the soul is destroyed together with the body, I cannot see what is left to suffer for all eternity. Even so, I try to avoid dogmatizing either way upon the subject.

Q: Hi Kurt,

Chuck Swindoll mentioned this event in his sermon on Sunday. He said he went to Dr. Dwight Pentecost (aged 95 and still teaching at DTS) who said he hadn't a clue as to the meaning of this.

Matt 27:52 - The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.

Must have been OT saints at this point. Were they resurrected or resuscitated?

Matt. 27:53 - and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many.

For what purpose? Any ideas?

Thanks

A: Thanks for writing.

My take on this incident is that it compressed events that happened at the death of Jesus upon the cross with those that occurred at his resurrection the third day afterward.

The earthquake, and rocks and tombs being rent open, and the veil in the temple being rent in twain, happened at Jesus' death. But the bodies (physical) did not come out until Jesus' resurrection on Sunday morning. These were raised for evidentiary purposes to give testimony to Jesus' resurrection. These would have been contemporary saints who had died recently, perhaps within the last few weeks or so, whose family members would recognize them. Otherwise, if they were ancient saints who no one personally knew or could recognize, there would be no one who could actually attest that they had died, and the point of the miracle would be lost. This resurrection of physical bodies meant that these saints had to physically die a second time.

Hope that helps.

Q: How are you sir?

I have a question. I have heard and read others stating, "How can you have a church with no gifts?"

If someone is a cessationist, how would they take this assessment? This of course is from charismatics.

In other words, some are affirming that there can really be no local assembly without spiritual gifts...how do you feel about this?

A: Great to hear from you.

There are two kinds of gifts God has given the church to equip it for its work and worship. The first, that urged by Charismatics, is the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost. The second, are gifts of teaching, administration, charity, etc.

The prophetic or charismatic gifts were limited to the era of the apostles and, so far as may authoritatively be shown, were communicated *only by the laying of the apostles' hands*. We see this in Acts 8, where John and Peter traveled to Samaria to communicate the Holy Ghost to believers there. Although they had been baptized, and although Phillip had prophetic gifts and powers, only the apostles could communicate the Holy Ghost to others. Similarly, in Acts 19, Paul baptized the Ephesians, but until he laid hands on them, they did not speak with tongues or prophesy.

The only exception to this was the household of Cornelius, where God gave the gifts of tongues without laying on of hands to testify that Gentiles were acceptable without circumcision (showing also that the old law was no longer binding or valid, but was replaced by the New Testament).

The other gifts, teaching, administration, charity, etc., are all still very much a part of the church and are necessary to its work and worship. But the miraculous gifts are all clearly gone. "But now abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three" (I Cor. 13:13).

Hope that helps,

Write us with your questions or comments.
We are always happy to answer your questions.

preterist@pvt.net

On the Symbolism of Prophecy

With special reference to the Predictions of the Parousia

by

J. Stuart Russell

(Editor's Note: The following article was written by the late J. Stuart Russell and was appended as a note to his book entitled The Parousia, published in 1887.)

The slightest attention to the language of Old Testament prophecy must convince any sober-minded man that it is not to be understood according to the letter. First of all, the utterances of the prophets are poetry; and, secondly, they are Oriental poetry. They may be called the hieroglyphic pictures representing historical events in highly metaphorical imagery. It is inevitable, therefore, that hyperbole, or that which to us appears such, should enter largely into the descriptions of the prophets. To the cold prosaic imagination of the West, the glowing and vivid style of the prophets of the East may seem turgid and extravagant; but there is always a substratum of reality underlying the figures and symbols, which, the more they are studied, commend themselves the more to the judgment of the reader. Social and political revolutions, moral and spiritual changes, are shadowed forth by physical convulsions and catastrophes; and if these natural phenomena affect the imagination more powerfully still, they are not inappropriate figures when the real importance of the events which they represent is apprehended. The earth convulsed with earthquakes, burning mountains cast into the sea, the stars falling like leaves, the heavens on fire, the sun clothed in sackcloth, the moon turned into blood, representations of great civil commotions, - the overturning of thrones and dynasties, the desolations of war, the abolition of ancient systems, and great moral and spiritual revolutions. In prophecy, as in poetry, the material is regarded as the type of the spiritual, the passions and emotions of humanity find expression in corresponding signs and symptoms in the inanimate creation. Does the prophet come with glad tidings? He calls the forest to clap their hands. Is his message one of lamentation and woe? The heavens are draped in mourning, and the sun is darkened in his going down. No one, however anxious to keep by the bare letter of the word, would think of insisting that such metaphors should be literally interpreted, or must have literal fulfillment. The utmost that we are entitled to require is, that there should be such historical events specified as may worthily correspond with such phenomena; great moral

and social movements capable of producing such emotions as these physical phenomena seem to imply.

It may be useful to select some of the most remarkable of these prophetic symbols as found in the Old Testament, that we may note the occasions on which they were employed, and discover the sense in which they are to be understood.

In Isaiah xiii we have a very remarkable prediction of the destruction of ancient Babylon. It is conceived in the highest style of poetry. The Lord of hosts mustereth host of the battle; the tumultuous rush of the nations is heard; the day of the Lord is proclaimed to be at hand; the stars of heaven and the constellations withhold their light; the sun is darkened in his going forth; the moon ceases to shine; the heavens are shaken, and the earth removed out of its place. All this imagery, if literally fulfilled would involve the wreck of the whole material creation, is employed to set forth the destruction of Babylon by the Medes.

Again, in Isaiah xxiv, we have a prediction of judgments about to come upon the land of Israel; and among other representations of the woes which are impending we find the following: "The windows from on high are open; the foundations of the earth do shake. The earth is utterly broken down; the earth is clean dissolved; the earth shall fall, and not rise again," etc. All this is symbolical of the civil and social convulsion about to take place in the land of Israel.

In Isaiah xxxiv, the prophet denounces judgments on the enemies of Israel, particularly Edom, or Idumea. The imagery which he employs is of the most sublime and awful description: "The mountains shall be dissolved; the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll, and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig-tree." "The streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever; from generation to generation it shall be waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever."

It is not necessary to ask, Have these predictions been fulfilled? We know they have been; and the accomplishment of them stands in history as a perpetual monument of the truth of Revelation. Babylon, Edom, Tyre, the oppressors or enemies of the people of God, have been made to drink the cup of the Lord's indignation. The Lord has let none of the words of His servants the prophets fall to the ground. But on one will pretend to say that the symbols and figures which depicted their overthrow were literally verified. These emblems are the drapery of the picture, and are used simply to heighten the effect and to give vividness and grandeur to the scene.

In like manner the prophet Ezekiel uses imagery of a very similar kind in predicting the calamities which were coming upon Egypt: "And when I shall put them out, I will cover the heaven, and make the stars thereof dark. I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over them, and set darkness upon the land, saith the Lord God": (Ezek. xxxii.7,8)

Similarly the prophets Micah, Nahum, Joel, and Habakkuk describe the presence and interposition of the Most High in the affairs of nations as accompanied by stupendous natural phenomena: "Behold, the Lord cometh forth out of his place and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth, and the mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft as wax before the fire, and as the waters that are poured down a steep place" (Micah i.3,4).

"The Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebuketh the sea and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers. The mountains quake at him and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence: yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him" (Nahum i.3-6).

These example may suffice to show, what indeed is self-evident, that in prophetic language the most sublime and terrible natural phenomena are employed to represent national and social convulsions and revolutions. Imagery, which if literally verified would involve the total dissolution of the fabric of the globe and the destruction of the material universe, really may mean no more than the downfall of a dynasty, the capture of a city, of the overthrow of a nation.

The following are the views expressed by Sir Isaac Newton on this subject, which are substantially just, though perhaps carried somewhat too far in supposing

an equivalent in fact for every figure employed in the prophecy: -

"The figurative language of the prophets is taken from the analogy between the world natural and an empire or kingdom considered as world politic. accordingly, the world natural, consisting of heaven and earth, signifies the whole world politic, distract and overthrow them; the creating of a new heaven and earth, and the passing of an old one; or the beginning and end of a world, for the rise and ruin of a body politic signified thereby. The sun, for the whole species and race of kings, in the kingdoms of the world politic; the moon, for the body of the common people considered as the king's wife; the stars, for subordinate princes and great men; or for bishops and rulers of the people of God, when the sun is Christ. Setting of the sun, moon, and stars; darkening the sun, turning the moon into blood, and falling of the stars, - for the ceasing of a kingdom." (Sir Isaac Newton, Observations on the Prophets, Part I, Chpt. 2)

We will only quote in addition the excellent remarks of a judicious expositor - Dr. John Brown of Edinburgh: -

"'Heaven and earth passing away,' understood literally, is the dissolution of the present system of the universe; and the period when that is to take place is called 'the end of the world.' But a person at all familiar with the phraseology of the Old Testament scriptures knows that the dissolution of the Mosaic economy and the establishment of the Christian, is often spoken of as the removing of the old earth and heavens, and the creation of a new earth and new heavens. For example, 'Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.' 'For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain' (Isa. lxv.17; lxvi.22) The period of the close of the one dispensation and the commencement of the other is spoken of as 'last days,' and 'the end of the world,' and is described as such a shaking of the earth and heavens as should lead to the removal of the things which were shaken. (Hagg. ii.6; Heb. xiv.26,27)" (Discourses and Sayings of our Lord, Vol. I, pp.199,200)

It appears, then, that if Scripture be the best interpreter of Scripture, we have in the Old Testament a key to the interpretation of the prophecies in the New. The same symbolism is found in both, and the imagery of Isaiah, Ezekiel and the other prophets helps us to understand the imagery of St. Matthew, St. Peter, and St. John. AS the dissolution of the material world is not necessary to the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, neither is it necessary to the accomplishment of the predictions of

the New Testament. But though symbols are metaphorical expressions, they are not unmeaning. It is not necessary to allegorize them, and find a corresponding equivalent for every trope; it is sufficient to regard the imagery as employed to heighten the sublimity of the prediction and to clothe it with impressiveness and grandeur. There are, at the same time, as true propriety and an underlying reality in the symbols of prophecy. The moral and spiritual facts which they represent, the social and ecumenical changes which they typify, could not be adequately set forth by language less majestic and sublime. There is reason for believing that an inadequate apprehension of the real grandeur and significance of such events as the destruction of Jerusalem and the abrogation of the Jewish economy lies at the root of that system of interpretation which maintains that nothing answering to the symbols of New testament prophecy has ever taken place. Hence the uncritical and unscriptural figments of double senses and double, triple, and multiple fulfillments of prophecy. That physical disturbances in nature and extraordinary phenomena in the heavens and in the earth may have accompanied the expiring throes of the Jewish dispensation we are not prepared to deny. It seems to us highly probable that such things were. But the literal fulfillment of the symbols is not essential to the verification of the prophecy, which is abundantly proved to be true by the recorded facts of history.

National Geographic's and Nature Magazine's Agenda to Promote False Science

The following letter from the Curator of Birds at the National Museum of Natural History, criticizes National Geographic magazine for having an agenda to foist evolution upon the public without scientific support for its assertions. Too bad millions of American school children never get to hear the other side.

“The hype about feathered dinosaurs in the exhibit currently on display at the National Geographic Society is even worse, and makes the spurious claim that there is strong evidence that a wide variety of carnivorous dinosaurs had feathers. A model of the undisputed dinosaur Deinonychus and illustrations of baby tyrannosaurs are shown clad in feathers, all of which is simply imaginary and has *no place outside of science fiction*.

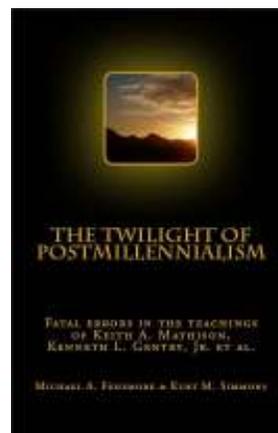
“The idea of feathered dinosaurs and the theropod origin of birds is being actively promulgated by a cadre of zealous scientists acting in concert with certain editors at Nature and National Geographic who themselves have become outspoken and highly biased proselytizers of the faith. *Truth and careful scientific weighing of evidence have been among the first casualties in their program*, which is now fast becoming one of the grander scientific hoaxes of our age---the paleontological equivalent of cold fusion. If Sloan's article is not the crescendo of this fantasia, it is difficult to imagine to what heights it can next be taken. But it is certain that when the folly has run its course and has been fully exposed, National Geographic will unfortunately play a prominent but unenviable role in the book that summarizes the whole sorry episode.”

Sincerely,

Storrs L. Olson
Curator of Birds
National Museum of Natural History

<http://www.bible.ca/tracks/archaeoraptor-fraud-piltdown-bird.htm>

The Reason Why Ken Gentry and Keith Mathison have not Sleeping Nights....



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Reader Calls Max Kingism a Cult, Simmons Challenges Preston to Debate

Editor's Note: I received the following email from a reader who expresses concern for Don Preston's teaching and says that Max Kingism is a cult. My response and challenge to Don to debate when the Old Testament ended and justification from sin entered in follows.

Just finished "The Twilight Of Postmillennialism." OUTSTANDING!!! I wish you were able to do more publishing...

Also have read your debate with Don Preston re the end of the Torah. I find myself in agreement with you on that one too. I've read a number of Don's books, and while I do find some useful material in them, a lot of red flags go up for me.

I'm having trouble accepting the idea that someone who believes his sins were dealt with at the destruction of Jerusalem is a fellow believer. At this point I honestly don't know. I suspect that if one dies earnestly believing such a thing that their final stop will be everlasting destruction.

I mean, if I met someone singing hymns like "At the ruins, at the ruins, where I first saw the light; and the burden of my heart rolled away," OR "to the old rugged ruins I will ever be true..." the first thing I would be inclined to do is to preach salvation to them!

I'm inclined to think Max Kingism truly IS a cult.

BTW, I also like the stance you've taken on Genesis 1, and 6-9. We're pretty much on the same page there too my friend.

Just wanted you to know that, in spite of a few disagreements here and there, I deeply appreciate your ministry. I hope that if and when I can crawl out of the financial hole I've been in I might be able to contribute to one of your upcoming publications.

In Christ!

[Here follows my response]

Thanks for the kind, encouraging words. They help in times of burn-out when zeal flags to remind us that there is a work to be done and not to grow luke-warm or tepid. I appreciate your comments about Don

Preston and the Max King paradigm. There is no question that "Covenant Eschatology" is horribly and dangerously false. The notion that the law was still in force and effect and that men continued under the debt of sin until AD 70 completely undermines the cross. It is telling that in our debate Don was unwilling to say anything arrived at the cross: not salvation, not justification, not atonement, not even redemption. According to Don, nothing accrued to our benefit at the cross; all was put off until AD 70. This is Max Kingism, and you are correct that it is cultish.

King taught that the "state and power of death" was the mosaic law, and that mankind was under the debt of sin in the "grave of Judaism" until AD 70 when the resurrection occurred. By spiritualizing the resurrection and making it equal with justification from sin, King and Don overthrow the cross and shift all focus to the fall of Jerusalem. AD 70 thus becomes the focus of our salvation, not Calvary. In the church where Don was preacher, they even had a picture of the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus as you entered the sanctuary. Where other churches have Gethsemane or Calvary, they had the fall of Jerusalem. Very sad, indeed!

I have since attempted to get Don to debate the proposition that the Old Testament Law, including the priesthood, feasts, and temple service, legally terminated at the cross (my affirmative, his negative), but he will not do it. His unwillingness to debate is a sure admission that he cannot defend his position and he knows it, but wants to save face publicly. Still, Don is a beloved brother and we can hope that one day he will find the courage to publicly renounce Covenant Eschatology, or the conviction to defend it. I stand ready to debate anytime Don finds the courage to defend his position.

Thanks again for writing,

RESOLVED: The AD 70 fall of Jerusalem contributed nothing to man's redemption and justification. The Old Testament Law of Moses legally terminated, atonement was complete, and justification from sin was full and free, from and after the Cross (death, burial, resurrection) of Christ.

AFFIRMED: Kurt Simmons

DENIED: Don Preston????