

Full Preterism Refuted

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Chapter 1: The Rapture of the Saints

Introduction

The doctrine of general eschatology or the final things is important to the Christian faith and should be a subject of study for every believer. It is crucial, for it tells us how the Savior's complete victory through the cross and empty tomb will result in an ultimate and final triumph in the future. It tells us how the counsel of God is finally perfectly realized—the Son will be publicly, universally glorified and His perfect salvation is brought to completion in history. On the final day, Christ will be crowned with complete victory and all His people will be fully redeemed and glorified in both body and soul. Eschatology tells us where the doctrine of salvation, in the broad sense of the term, ultimately leads. A time is coming when Jesus Christ will return literally and bodily to this earth. There will be a general (literal, *bodily*) resurrection from the dead of all people who have ever lived. Everyone will stand before the great white throne and be judged by the all-powerful Messianic King. All those who rejected Christ will be cast into the lake of fire and suffer torment forever. Believers, however, will enjoy the presence of Christ and behold the face of God in their glorified, resurrected bodies. Death, suffering, disease, anguish, tears and heartaches will be banished forever from this earth and God's people will never again have to struggle against sin. God achieved a perfect redemption through Christ and will not leave any loose ends hanging when the Savior returns bodily to this earth.

This standard, orthodox conception of the end of the world (which in its basic form has been held by every branch of Christendom from the beginning of post-apostolic church) has come under attack in the last 30 years with the spread of a new heresy (which arose in the second half of the nineteenth century) called by the orthodox: full preterism (*preter* means past), consistent preterism, hyperpreterism, pantelism (from the Greek words meaning, "all is completed") or the "Hymanean heresy." Those who hold this view simply refer to themselves as "preterists." Consequently, the orthodox believers who hold that *some* things have come to pass have distanced themselves from this dangerous teaching by calling themselves "partial preterists." Partial preterists believe that Jesus did come in judgment upon Jerusalem (A.D. 66-70) and continues to come in judgment in history, but that the great complex of events that surround the second *bodily* coming of Christ obviously has not yet occurred.

Some of the peculiar teachings of full preterism are as follows. The second coming of Christ has already taken place including the rapture, the general resurrection from the dead and the final judgment; the old heavens and earth have completely passed away; and the new heavens and earth are present. The Great Commission has already been completely fulfilled (Mt. 28:18-20). The Bridegroom has returned for His church. Both death and Hell (or Hades) have been cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:13-14).

As we study the events connected with the second bodily coming of Christ, we will see that the central propositions of full preterism are blatantly unscriptural and completely absurd. Full preterists, like all heretics, devise clever ways to twist, misrepresent and misinterpret

passages of Scripture in order to force them to fit their unbiblical presuppositions. Since they believe that *everything* that makes up the complex of events connected with the second coming of Christ has already occurred, they must *redefine* the nature of the second coming itself, the resurrection of the body, the rapture of the saints, the final judgment and the nature of the final state. These are crucial Christian doctrines and not trivial matters over which professing Christians can agree to disagree. For this reason, orthodox pastors and elders must not extend the right hand of fellowship to these heretics until they repent and stop perverting an important part of Christ's work. (Keep in mind that full preterists cannot subscribe to nor confess any of the ecumenical creeds or Protestant symbols [whether Lutheran, Episcopal, Reformed or Baptist] on the second coming of Christ.)

As we examine full preterism, we need to keep a few things in mind. First, although the general beliefs on the second coming are basically held by all full preterists, there is diversity on individual doctrines (e.g., the resurrection, the rapture, the judgment and so on) and on interpretation of key passages. The movement is relatively young and is still in flux. When it comes to getting the square peg of full preterism into the round hole of Scripture, there are a number of different approaches. It is rather tragic and sad to watch men (some of whom have PhD's and write in a scholarly manner) struggle to get passages which clearly contradict and disprove their system to harmonize with their unbiblical paradigm. It is an interesting lesson on how creative and clever the human mind can be in supporting unbiblical nonsense. Also, keep in mind that on the internet there are full preterist writers who are amateurish, unqualified, and careless; while there are others who are exceptionally bright, clever, sophisticated and cautious. Both groups, however, are equally wrong and unbiblical. In fact, the careful, scholarly writers are more dangerous because their clever use of Greek word studies makes them *appear* to be more plausible.

Second, virtually all full preterists must live their lives in a manner that is inconsistent with their theology of the second coming. Most still believe in marriage and the family. They still believe in preaching to the lost, personal witnessing, partaking of the sacraments and the institutional church even though if their false theory was true these things would no longer exist or be necessary. For example, if the Great Commission was fulfilled, then there would be no need for missions or missionaries. If we have entered into God's eternal heavenly rest, then the Christian Sabbath on the first day of the week is no longer necessary. Some full preterists attempt to circumvent these blatant inconsistencies by teaching that the completion of all things still has an abiding application throughout history. This is an evasion and a major inconsistency of their whole system.

Third, once again it is important that we distinguish between partial preterists who are orthodox Christians and full preterists who are heretics that should be excommunicated if they don't repent. All Christians are partial preterists to some degree, in that they recognize that some New Testament predictions have already taken place. Today people who are associated with partial preterism usually teach that Matthew 24, at least up to verse 34, was fulfilled when Jesus came in judgment upon Jerusalem in A.D. 66-70 and destroyed the Temple. Also, many parts of Revelation are seen as already fulfilled. Some popular modern partial preterist authors are Milton Terry, R.C. Sproul, Greg Bahnsen, Ken Gentry Jr. and Gary Demar. Although there are a number of differences among partial preterists regarding certain passages and especially how to approach the book of Revelation, all partial preterist writers are careful to make a distinction between our Lord's judgment of Israel and the final, bodily coming of Christ. Thus, the orthodox

interpretation of the second coming, general resurrection, rapture and final judgment is maintained.

Our method of refuting full preterism will be primarily positive. We will look at various passages that discuss the events associated with second coming and give a straight forward exposition of what they teach. This method alone will disprove full preterism. But to strengthen the biblical and logical case against this heresy we will interact with some of their most common arguments that attempt to circumvent the plain meaning of Scripture.

Paul's Explanation of the Rapture Explicitly Contradicts Full Preterism

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

In verse 13 Paul rather abruptly switches from the topic of the necessity of Christians to lead holy lives (4:1-12) to address a concern the Thessalonians had expressed regarding the role dead believers would have in the coming of Christ from heaven. Apparently, some of the Thessalonians had adopted the idea that believers who die before the second coming would have a serious disadvantage over those who survive and are still living. What the disadvantage is we are not specifically told. Perhaps they were concerned that dead believers would not be able to participate in the second coming itself. This concern is implied by Paul's discussion of the Parousia.

Scholars are puzzled as to why this concern was an issue with believers in Thessalonica. There is the possibility that some within the church were influenced by Jewish apocalyptic literature which taught that people who were alive at the consummation would be taken up into heaven, while people who had died would have a separate existence on earth. Another possibility is that Paul raises this whole issue simply as an antidote to excessive grief over dead loved ones who were believers. Apparently, there were some who were very sorrowful because they were not applying the great things in store for all true Christians at the second coming to those who had died. In any case, Paul answers this problem with one of the most vivid, detailed descriptions of the second coming of Christ in Scripture.

Paul begins by saying "I do not want you to be ignorant" (v. 18). Such introductory formulas are common in the epistles (cf. Rom. 1:13; 11:25; 1 Cor. 10:1; 12:1; 2 Cor. 1:8). Ignorance regarding what will happen to Christians who have died can have negative spiritual and emotional consequences. It can lead to a deep, pagan-like sorrow which flows from a heart without hope. Christians are allowed to grieve over dead Christian family members and close friends. (Indeed, Jesus wept over the death of Lazarus His friend, John 11:35.) Their grief, however, is always to be tempered by hope and joy, because to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8). Moreover, Paul will point out that the dead bodies of the saints will be resurrected, will meet Christ in the air and will fully participate, both *body* and *soul*, in Christ's final victory.

Consequently, Christians should have a completely different attitude toward death than unbelievers. The pagan Greeks had a concept of death that gave them no hope for the future. They did not believe in the bliss of heaven for the redeemed and they emphatically rejected the biblical concept of the resurrection of our physical bodies. They believed that when a person died their soul would exit their mouths or through a gaping wound. The soul would then live in a shadowy underworld called Hades. The realm of the dead was a dim, sunless place that was a serious descent from the realm of the living; the dead had a very depressing existence. Therefore, the Greeks could only approach death with fear and dread. Moreover, Paul knew of the terrifying future that awaited all those who died without Christ, that their souls would immediately be cast into hell (Lk. 16:23). Further, they would suffer even greater anguish after their bodies were resurrected; they would be judged by Christ (Rev. 20:12; Mt. 25:31-46) and then cast both *body* and soul into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14-15; cf. Rom, 1:18-20; 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9). The coming judgment of God can only produce terror, anguish and hopelessness among those who do not believe in the Savior and obey Him.

The expression “those who have fallen asleep” refers to Christians who have died physically. “The verb *koimaomai* occurs 18 times in the N. T. In 4 instances (Matt. 28:13; Luke 22:45; John 11:12; Acts 12:16) it is used in the literal sense of ‘be asleep.’ But in all other cases it is used metaphorically and euphemistically for being dead.”¹ The apostle is discussing what will happen to believers who have died physically and then been placed in a tomb or grave. This interpretation is supported by verse 16 where Paul says that the “dead in Christ will rise first.” Only a Christian can be dead and in Christ at the same time. The unregenerate are spiritually dead because they are not in Christ. Interestingly, the apostle uses the same word (*anastasis*) to describe the resurrection of Christ in verse 14 and the resurrection of dead believers in verse 16. A physical, bodily, literal resurrection is what Paul has in mind.

The use of the term “sleep” to describe physical death is common in Scripture (e.g., Gen. 47:30; 2 Sam. 7:12; 1 Ki. 2:10; Mt. 27:52; Jn. 11:11-13; Ac. 7:60; 1 Cor. 2:39; 15:6, 18; etc.) as well as pagan literature (e.g., Homer, Ill. 11:241; Sophocles, El. 509). This is understandable, in that a dead person looks as though he is sleeping. This term is especially appropriate for believers who, after death, are at rest from their suffering and labors and are waiting for their physical bodies to come to life and be transformed at the resurrection. Our word “cemetery” comes from this same Greek word (*koimaomai*) and means “a sleeping place.”

Those who attempt to form a doctrine of soul sleep from the use of this term in Scripture must ignore the many clear passages which teach that the souls of Christians immediately go to be with Christ (e.g., Lk. 23:43; Phil. 1:21-23; 2 Cor. 5:8; Rev. 6:9-11; 20:4) and the passages which prove that the souls of the wicked go straight to hell at death (e.g., Lk. 16:22-26; Rev. 20:14; 21:8).

The fact that Paul is discussing believers who are dead physically and buried poses insurmountable difficulties for full preterists, who attempt to spiritualize this passage or make it refer to something that happens on the inside of people who are alive. It cannot refer to regeneration or to a mere internal work of the Spirit because these people are physically dead and they are *already* “in Christ.” Moreover, it cannot refer to a transfer of the souls of believers who are trapped in Hades to be with Jesus in heaven because the Scripture unequivocally teaches that the souls of believers go to be with our Lord the very moment they die. We will see that only a real, literal, bodily resurrection of deceased believers does justice to this passage.

¹ Ralph Earle, *Word Meanings in the New Testament* (Peabody, MS: Hendriksen, 1974, 86), 371.

After stating the reason for this topic, in verse 14 and following Paul begins his argumentation as to why believers have no reason to grieve over dead Christian loved ones. “For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus” (v. 14). Believers can be relieved of their sorrows only by understanding the full salvific implications of our Lord’s death and resurrection. For Paul, the death and resurrection of Christ are the starting point of any discussion of salvation, even the redemption of our physical bodies at the resurrection. Paul essentially says we believe in *A* (the death and resurrection of Jesus); therefore, we should also understand and believe *B*, that all those united to Christ will be raised from the dead to accompany Him on His glorious return. The death and resurrection of Christ is the guarantee of the future resurrection of all physically dead believers. The fact that Paul says “God will bring with Him” instead of “God will raise them up” is because: a) the one assumes the other (they are intimately connected in the mind of Paul as we will see in verses 16-17); and, b) the Thessalonians were primarily concerned with the role that dead believers would play in the second coming. They wanted their dead loved ones to be with Christ on that day and share in His victory.

The full preterist who attempts to spiritualize this passage and make it speak of only a spiritual resurrection must ignore the broad context of Scripture on the effects of Jesus’ work on the elect. Union with Christ in His death and resurrection is the foundation of our regeneration and sanctification (Eph. 2:5-6; Col. 2:13-14; Rom. 6:3-11), as well as the resurrection of our physical bodies (1 Thess. 4:14; Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:20-23). Our Lord spoke of two separate and distinct resurrections for believers in John 5. The first resurrection, which is spiritual, involves a person becoming a Christian in this life and being delivered from spiritual death to everlasting life. “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My Word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come to judgment, but has passed from death into life. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live” (vs. 24-25). The first resurrection is not directly connected to dead physical bodies, but to people who need salvation.² It was occurring in the Savior’s own day (“and now is”) and is progressively accomplished in history as people believe in Christ. The second resurrection is physical in character and applies to the final day of human history when our Redeemer returns bodily to this earth. “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (vs. 28-29). This passage is very explicit: those who during their lives heard the voice of Christ and became Christians (the first resurrection) will hear His voice again calling them out of their tombs to experience both *body* and *soul* the fullness of resurrection life in the kingdom of glory (the second resurrection).

Jesus teaches that He saves the whole person, both body and soul. The full preterist spiritualizing of the final resurrection is essentially Gnostic and neo-platonic. The fact that verse

² We do not want to give the impression that the two resurrections are not connected in any way. The first resurrection which is spiritual results in the second, physical resurrection unto glory. Moreover, those who do *not* experience the first resurrection and trust in the person and work of Christ are doomed to experience a resurrection unto eternal damnation where both body and soul suffer together. The whole person (body and soul) that served sin and rejected the Savior will experience its just recompense of reward. In this section of Scripture, Jesus assumes both the highest act of authority as God and Mediator—the final judgment; as well as the highest act of power—the ability to raise the dead. The purpose of this passage was to emphasize the fact that what they do with the Savior in the present will have radical consequences for the future. It reminds us of Paul’s statement, “For since by man [Adam] came death, by Man [Christ] also came the resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor. 15:21).

29 speaks of the resurrection of both the good and the evil (in other words, this is a general or universal resurrection of men) proves that a mere spiritual resurrection is not being taught. If it was only spiritual, then Jesus would be teaching that the souls of the wicked are brought out of hell to be judged and sent right back to hell. But, our Lord emphasized in another place that what makes this judgment so terrifying for the wicked is that both *body* and soul will be cast into the abyss. “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Mt. 10:28). The apostle Paul also taught that the wicked dead would be raised and judged. “I have hope in God which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust” (Ac. 24:15). (Interestingly, the teaching of Jesus and Paul regarding the universal resurrection from the dead of all men, whether saved or unsaved, explicitly contradicted the teaching of the Pharisees [and the Talmud] which believed that only the righteous would experience a bodily resurrection.)

Paul distinguishes between dead believers and the wicked dead by the expression they “sleep in Jesus” (v. 14). Remember, the souls of believers are not asleep or dead, but only their physical bodies. The rotting corpses of Christians are not regarded by God as disposable garbage to be forever left behind in the ground, but are said to be “in Christ.” Paul is telling us that the efficacy of Jesus’ death and resurrection for believers does not stop when they die and their souls go to heaven. Rather, it continues until the physical bodies of Christians are fully redeemed at the resurrection and accompany the Redeemer in His climactic victory at the end of history. (Full preterism’s denial of a literal, bodily resurrection leads to both a defective view of spiritual death at the fall and a deficient understanding of Christ’s redemptive work.) Paul speaks to this same issue in Romans 8:11: “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.” Paul’s identification of our dead bodies as mortal bodies demonstrates very clearly that the same bodies that we have at death will be made alive at the resurrection. “The identity and continuity are intimated in the description which the apostle here adopts, identity and continuity in no way interfering with the newness of quality by which these same bodies will be fitted for the resurrection state.”³

In verse 15 Paul begins to go into detail regarding what will occur when Christ returns. “For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.” The expression, “we say to you by the word of the Lord,” is often misinterpreted by full preterists to refer to Jesus’ words in Matthew 24. This interpretation is based on their assumption that all the references to the coming of Christ in the New Testament refer to His coming in judgment upon Israel in A.D. 66-70. They support this claim by noting the similarities between these two passages, often using parallel columns. While there are some similarities, the dissimilarities between the two passages far outweigh the resemblances. That is because Matthew 24, at least up to verse 34, has absolutely nothing to do with the second bodily coming of Christ.⁴

³ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959, 65), 1:291-292.

⁴ Some of the differences between Matthew 24:1-34 and the second and final coming of Christ are as follows: (1) The coming in A.D. 66-70 was a coming in judgment, while the second coming is a literal, bodily coming (cf. Mt. 24:30; Ac. 1:9-11). (2) In the coming in judgment upon Israel Jesus is never seen by the physical eye because He remains in heaven (Mt. 24:30), while the second bodily coming will be visible to the naked eye (Ac. 1:11). (3) The coming in judgment upon Israel is near the beginning of the millennium, while the second bodily coming occurs at the end of the millennium which must last at least 1000 years (Rev. 20:7-9). (4) The judgment upon Israel is followed by a lengthy period of history called the times of the Gentiles (Lk. 21:24; Rom. 11:25-26). The second and final coming is followed by the general resurrection, final judgment and the perfect final state where there is no

Since 1 Thessalonians 4:13-15 reveals many things about the second coming of Christ that are not found in the gospels, the expression “by the word of the Lord” likely refers to the receiving of direct revelation from Christ to a prophet, one of the apostles or even to Paul himself. If Paul is discussing something that the apostles received from Jesus during His ministry on earth, then why did the evangelists omit many of the important details from the gospel accounts? It is indeed possible that Paul received a special revelation about this matter solely for the purpose of bringing hope and comfort to the Thessalonians. In any case, what Paul is about to say comes from God, is divinely inspired and should settle this issue for the church in Thessalonica. This direct appeal to divine authority is designed to strengthen the faith of the letter’s recipients in what Paul is about to say.

Before we look at all the details revealed about the second coming, we first need to discuss the issue of what Paul had in mind when he said, “we who are alive and remain” (v. 15). Full preterists point to the statement as proof that Paul believed that his generation would witness the second coming of Christ. Perhaps the best way to approach this statement is to present the three most common interpretations of this phrase and see which one makes the most sense exegetically, theologically and logically.

Excursus on a Full Preterist Equivocation

First, we will briefly examine the full preterist interpretation. They teach that the “we” must refer to Christians then living (i.e. when Paul wrote this epistle) and who will live long enough to be alive during the *Parousia*. The major problem with this view is that it *explicitly contradicts* the testimony of Scripture on the second coming, general resurrection, rapture, final judgment and the beginning of the eternal state. The full preterist (as we will see in these studies) must repeatedly go to passages where the plain meaning contradicts their paradigm and then twist Scripture, be very creative and use exegetical gymnastics to force an interpretation that harmonizes with their presuppositions. This results in eisegesis, the spiritualizing of literal events and all sorts of unfounded speculations (e.g., Steven’s secret A.D. 66 rapture; partial resurrections; a spiritual rapture; their seed analogy of the resurrection; etc). Their interpretation goes against the analogy of Scripture and the teaching in the immediate context; it is untenable and unbiblical.

A second view that is common among modernists and neo-evangelical expositors is that Paul truly believed that his generation would survive to witness these amazing events, but was *completely mistaken*. As Denny asks, “Is it not better to recognize the obvious fact that Paul was mistaken as to the nearness of the second advent than to torture his words to secure infallibility?”⁵ The problem with this view is that Paul begins this teaching with the statement

more death, disease, suffering tears, sin or temptation (1 Thess. 4:13-17; Rev. 20:7-21:8; 1 Cor. 15:23-26). It is obvious that these things have not yet occurred. The full preterist can only explain these things by spiritualizing, allegorizing and redefining the plain language of the biblical text. (5) In the period of the Jewish war, A.D. 66-70, the Christians fled to Pella and escaped the destruction by the Romans. In the second bodily coming of Christ the living saints are raptured. That is, they leave the earth to meet Christ in the air (i.e. the lower atmosphere) as He descends (1 Thess. 4:16-17). (6) In A.D. 66-70 *the enemies* of Christ and the church (i.e. the unbelieving Jews) are under siege in Jerusalem. But in Revelation 20, which describes the events near the end of the millennium, the saints of God or Christians are pictured under siege (v. 9). This is an explicit contradiction of the events of A.D. 70, for not one Christian remained in the holy city.

⁵ Denny as quoted in James Everett Frame, *A Critical and Exegetical on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979), 173.

that this doctrine comes by “the word of the Lord.” This interpretation destroys biblical inspiration and inerrancy and has the Redeemer giving Paul incorrect information. This interpretation, although common, is impossible and must not even be considered for a moment.

The third and correct interpretation is that “we” is simply generic and means “we [Christians] who are alive and remain.” This is the only interpretation that does not contradict other clear sections of Scripture. Did Paul believe that all of Christ’s enemies throughout the whole world would be subdued in his own lifetime when he wrote 1 Corinthians 15:25 around A.D. 56, only fourteen years before A.D. 70? Are there not a number of passages that imply that our Lord’s return would be in the distant and unknowable future? Jesus said, “While the bridegroom was delayed, they are slumbered and slept” (Mt. 25:5). In the parable of the talents He taught, “For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them.... After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them” (Mt. 25:14, 19). In the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven (Mt. 13:31-33) Christ indicates that His kingdom will gradually grow over time until it spreads throughout the whole earth. This teaching is consistent with postmillennialism. Did the knowledge of the Lord cover the whole earth as the waters cover the sea in A.D. 70 (see Isa. 11:9; cf. Ps. 72:8)? Did the Gentile nations come to the church to learn about God’s law so they could rule according to biblical justice (Isa. 2:3-4)? A full preterist must either completely reject postmillennialism or redefine the Savior’s victory in terms of a secret, undetectable, spiritual victory that even the church of Christ was unaware of until the nineteenth century. Moreover, did not Peter imply in 2 Peter 3:8 that it could be thousands of years before the second coming? God is not slack concerning His promises, but has elect in all nations and among all tribes of the earth that need to be saved before Christ returns (2 Pet. 3:9). Full preterists have an irresolvable dilemma with the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19. If “all nations” refers only to the nations within the Roman Empire that were evangelized before A.D. 70 (cf. Mt. 24:14) and this passage has been fulfilled, then the task of world missions has been completed. If they argue that Matthew 28:19 has not yet been fulfilled and the *second* and *final coming* of Christ occurred in A.D. 70, then Jesus did not wait until all His sheep were gathered and 2 Peter 3:9 which says that God is delaying the second coming because He is waiting for every elect person to come to repentance is wrong.

The full preterist also cannot adequately explain the description of the millennium in Revelation 20. In general, Reformed expositors explain the millennium as either a very lengthy period of time running from the resurrection of Christ to the second coming (This is the view of the partial preterist [postmillennialists] and amillennialists. Thus far the millennium has lasted almost two thousand years.); or refers to a literal one thousand year period in the future (This is the golden age described by Puritans and historic postmillennialists.). The term 1000 can be used both ways. It can be either literal or symbolic of a very *long* indefinite time. The number 10 in Scripture can denote a fullness of quantity and 1000 can be used to indicate a *very large indefinite* number. For example, God “owns the cattle on a thousand hills” (Ps. 50:10; cf. Dt. 1:11; 7:9; Ps. 68:17; 84:10; 90:4; Rev. 5:11; etc). The use of this very large number to describe the period between the two *bodily* comings of Christ demonstrates that the full preterist’s view of Jesus’ coming in judgment upon Israel as the second and final coming of Christ is impossible. Israel was destroyed approximately only 40 years after our Lord’s resurrection. The full preterist chronology explicitly contradicts Scripture; it is impossible. The 1000 years cannot be explained away. It is especially absurd when, according to the full preterist view, John gave his prophecy

about the 1000 year reign only a year or two before the millennium supposedly came to an abrupt end.

One of the early expositors of full preterism, J. Stuart Russell, was aware of the great problem of Revelation 20 for their system and consequently admitted that imminence obviously does not apply to everything within the book of Revelation:

It is evident that the prediction of what is to take place at the close of a thousand years does not come within what we have ventured to call "apocalyptic limits." These limits, as we are again and again warned in the book itself, are rigidly confined within a very narrow compass; the things shown are "shortly to come to pass." It would have been an abuse of language to say that events at the distance of a thousand years were to come to pass shortly; we are therefore compelled to regard this prediction as lying outside the apocalyptic limits altogether...

We must consequently regard this prediction of the loosing of Satan, and the events which follow, as still future, and therefore unfulfilled. We know of nothing recorded in history which can be adduced as in any way a probable fulfillment of this prophecy.⁶

After this honest, but startling admission, Russell does something very strange and arbitrary exegetically. He simply assumes with no evidence that the great white throne judgment (Rev. 20:11-15, which in the text comes immediately at the end of the millennium), took place in A.D. 66-70. He believes that Revelation 20:7-10 is a parenthesis which breaks the continuity of John's narrative. Anyone reading Revelation 20 without a paradigm that must be forced upon Scripture would conclude that Jesus returns at the end of the millennium, after which the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment occurs. This final judgment clears the scene for the *literal* establishment of the new heaven and earth from which sin, temptation, suffering, tears, disease, imperfection and death are banished forevermore.

Further, the description of what occurs at our Lord's return in Revelation 20 explicitly contradicts what occurred in A.D. 70.—the Roman armies conquer the city, slay its inhabitants and march back to Rome victorious. In Revelation 20:9 the beloved city is the encampment of the saints. In the Jewish war the city is completely abandoned by Christians who flee to Pella to escape the destruction. In A.D. 70 the city is the encampment of apostate, Christ-hating, Jewish *unbelievers*. How can Revelation 20 be harmonized with the full preterist system when it teaches almost the exact opposite of what full preterists purport? Sadly, once people become locked into a heretical paradigm, the abundant evidence to the contrary must be twisted, spiritualized and perverted with arbitrary, fanciful eisegesis to avoid paradigm collapse disorder.

Although the Bible teaches that the second *bodily* coming of Christ is in the distant future when the New Testament was written, nevertheless we must always be prepared for our Lord's coming (Mt. 25:13) and "be awake" (*gregoreo*) or "watch" as though He could come at any moment (Mt. 24:42; 25:13). Moreover, we do not know when we will die and will be standing before Christ. We are to look "for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Tit. 2:13). The participle "looking" refers to a "patient looking forward to." This would not apply to us today if full preterism were true.

One must be very careful at coming to dogmatic theological conclusions on the basis of the words, "we," "our," "us," or "you" (plural). These words are used in different ways by Paul. Sometimes the words "you" (plural), "us" or "our" refers to the elect or true believers only (e.g., Gal. 1:4; Eph. 1:3-5). There are times when "we" applies only to the apostles or Paul's

⁶ J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia: A Critical Inquiry into the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord's Second coming* (Grand Rapids: Baker [1887] 1990), 522.

immediate associates (e.g., 1 Thess. 3:1, 4; 4:1, 15; cf. Rom. 1:5). The word “our” can even refer to the whole human race (cf. Rom. 3:5). In 1 Thessalonians 4:15, 17 the “we” is immediately modified and conditioned by “who are alive and remain” indicating that only God knows who will be alive at the Parousia.

After his introductory remarks Paul begins to elaborate on precisely what will occur when Jesus returns. He says that those who are alive and are still on this earth when Jesus returns “will by no means precede those who are asleep” (v. 15). The word translated “prevent” (KJV) or “precede” (NKJV, NASB), *phthasomen*, has the sense of “doing something before someone else and so of gaining an advantage.”⁷ Paul uses the double negative to emphasize his point. The living saints will *in no way* precede those believers who have died. Those who are alive at Christ’s coming will not experience the great blessings of the advent *before* those who sleep. This statement is Paul’s central proposition which will be explained and expanded upon in the next two verses. The Thessalonians wanted comfort concerning the role of dead believing loved ones in the Parousia, so Paul gives them the emphatic assurance that they needed.

Paul’s Description of the Second Coming

In verses 16 and 17 we have one of the fullest and most vivid descriptions of the second coming in the New Testament. “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:16-17). There are a number of important things to note in this passage.

First, note that Christ Himself will descend. The verb used (*katabaino*) means literally to go down (*kata*, down, *baino*, to go). Although the verb can refer to various kinds of motion that people do on the ground such as going or walking (cf. Mk. 15:32; Ac. 24:1), here it can only mean a descent from heaven toward the earth. Jesus, we are told in verse 17, is going to meet the resurrected saints and the believers who are alive in the air (i.e. the earth’s atmosphere). Our Lord descends and the saints rise and are caught up to meet Him. Full preterist attempts to spiritualize this scene must ignore the plain meaning of the language used in order to describe only a coming in judgment.

The full preterist contention that the events described here are the same as what took place when our Lord came to judge Israel (A.D. 66-70) is easy to disprove. Although there are many problems with the full preterist view, we will consider three of the most obvious contradictions.

(1) In the book of Acts, we see that the second coming of Christ is bodily and literal, not spiritual or figurative. “Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven’” (Ac. 1:9-11). The passage plainly teaches that in *the same way* that Jesus ascended up into the earth’s atmosphere until He entered heaven, He will descend (1 Thess. 4:16) in His resurrected body to the earth.

⁷ Marshall as quoted in Charles A. Wanamaker, *Commentary on 1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 172.

The expression “in like manner” means literally “in what manner” or “in that manner in which.”⁸ “The Greek phrase (*hon trogon*) never indicates mere certainty or vague resemblance; but wherever it occurs in the New Testament, denotes identity of mode or manner.”⁹ This means that, “in like manner” in this passage could be translated, “in the same manner.” Therefore, the New American Standard Bible translates this verse: “This Jesus...will come in just the same way as you watched Him go into heaven” (Ac. 1:11b). Moreover, the angels emphasize the sameness with the statement, “...as you saw Him.” “In like manner” and “as you saw Him” are essentially expressions of the same idea twice. “The fact of his [bodily] second coming and the manner of it [are] also described by this emphatic repetition.”¹⁰ In this passage the angels who are giving the disciples information directly from God, go out of their way to make sure the disciples do not misunderstand the nature of the second coming of Christ. It will be a literal, bodily descent through the earth’s atmosphere. This is exactly what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4:16. This point is so obvious it is admitted by the full preterist scholar J. Stuart Russell: “The words, however, imply that this coming was to be visible and personal, which would exclude the interpretation which regards it as *providential*, or *spiritual*.”¹¹

That the second coming will be bodily and literal is supported by Acts 5:31-32 where Peter says that the apostles were witnesses of the exaltation of Christ. This means that the disciples saw the resurrected Savior and watched Him ascend into glory with their own eyes. They were not in the throne room when He came before the Father (Dan. 7:13-14), but saw our Lord ascend until He was taken up by a cloud (Ac. 1:9). The second coming will be visible to the naked eye. It is not just a spiritual event or a coming in judgment. (Matthew 24 at least to verse 33 describes a *non-literal, non-bodily* coming. The coming on the clouds terminology of Matthew 24:30 is taken from the poetic metaphor language of the Old Testament prophets [e.g., Isa. 19:1; Nah. 1:3]. In the Old Testament Jehovah did not literally come to judge the heathen nations riding on clouds. Acts 1:9-11, however, teaches that just like the apostles, people will be able to see Jesus’ body. Our Lord’s body was never seen in A.D. 66-70 because He did not literally return. His body was in heaven, as the next point will demonstrate.

The visible, bodily, literal nature of the second coming is also clearly taught in the epistles. Paul refers to the coming of Jesus as a revelation or a time when He is revealed. Christ will be “revealed from heaven with His mighty angels” (2 Thess. 1:7). Believers are to eagerly wait for the *revelation* of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:7). Our Lord ascended and visibly disappeared into heaven, but a time is coming when He will descend (i.e. there will be a visible movement in the opposite direction) and all believers will behold His glory which had not been visibly disclosed to them before. He will be *unveiled* at the second coming and the saints will admire and glorify Him (2 Thess. 2:10). The word “admire” (*thaumazo*) which is sometimes translated “marvel” or “wonder,” in this passage clearly contains the idea of wonder and astonishment. “Jesus’ eschatological revelation will bear the features of a strictly momentary, miraculous act...the event is catastrophic in the absolute sense, nay this very idea of suddenness and unexpectedness seems to be intimately associated with the word.”¹² Did the saints marvel at the glorious, literal, bodily presence of Jesus in A.D. 70? No, they most certainly did not. That is

⁸ See C.F.D. Moule, *An Idiom-Book of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 132.

⁹ J. A. Alexander, *Acts of the Apostles* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1857] 1963), 16.

¹⁰ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1930], n. d.), 3:12.

¹¹ J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia*, 147.

¹² Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1930] 1972), 79.

because Christ never left the throne room of heaven at that time; it was a coming in judgment. People marveled at the destruction of Jerusalem, not the bodily presence of the Redeemer.

Another passage which teaches that we will see Christ when He appears is 1 John 2:28-3:2:

And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him. Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

In verse 28, John commands believers to continue to abide in Christ and maintain proper fellowship with Him so that when He appears they will not be ashamed. The word translated “appears” (NKJV, NASB) or “shall appear” (KJV) is *phanerothe* which literally means “he shall be manifested.” Paul uses the same word to describe the second coming of Christ in Colossians 3:4: “When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.” The word “manifested” means to make visible. It can mean that something is revealed or made plain to the senses (especially sight) or is made clear to the understanding. It is used by Paul and John in a similar manner to *apokaluptesthai* (to be revealed, or unveiled, cf. 1 Cor. 1:7; 3:13; Rom. 2:5; 8:18; 2 Thess. 1:7. In fact, *phanerothe* is translated “revealed” in 1 John 3:2.). It is obvious that John is speaking about the second coming and that being ashamed before Him implies the final judgment.

In 3:2 we are not only told that Jesus will be revealed, manifested or unveiled before the saints, but that believers will see Him when He returns.¹³ The verb used here *hopsometha* (the future tense of *horao*) is almost always used of physical or of beholding with the eyes. It is “we *have seen* with our eyes...the life was manifested, and we *have seen*.” Obviously seeing with the eyes was a literal sensation. The apostles saw, heard, touched and handled the Messiah. If John were using the same verb in a non-literal manner in 1 John 3:2, then we would expect the apostle to indicate such in the immediate context; however, he does not. This is a glorious promise! At the second coming we will receive glorified bodies like Christ’s glorified body and we will behold at the glorified Savior. Believers will surround the Redeemer and admire Him. “They shall see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads” (Rev. 22:4). When Jesus is manifested we “will appear with Him in glory” (Col. 3:4). We will “meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. 4:17). Our Lord “will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body” (Phil. 3:21).

This passage (like the others we have considered) poses insurmountable exegetical difficulties for the full preterist. If “He shall be manifested” does not refer to something visible, then what does it mean? It cannot mean a coming of Christ’s Spirit, for that already occurred at Pentecost. It cannot mean regeneration, for John is writing to believers. It cannot refer to a subjective, existential experience alone for a believer’s glorification occurs when he is literally and personally gathered to Jesus and actually beholds Him. Moreover, if the word “see” is used

¹³ Some commentators believe that “see Him” in verse 2 refers to the Father and not to Christ. This is a mistake. If we ignore the chapter division (i.e. the artificial separation between 2:29 and 3:1), we see that John speaks of Christ’s coming to spur believers to personal holiness in 2:28; then he briefly turns his attention to God’s love of the saints; and, finally, in 3:2 turns his attention again to Jesus’ manifestation and personal godliness (v. 3).

in the non-literal sense of a mental seeing (i.e. a looking or comprehending with the mind only), then why is the future tense used? All Bible-believing Christians already see, or perceive, the theological portrait that Scripture sets forth of Christ. The seeing of 1 John 3:2 obviously goes far beyond a mental recognition. In addition, as our next point makes clear, living believers did not see Jesus in A.D. 66-70 because He never left heaven.

(2) In Matthew 24 we are told explicitly that the destruction of Jerusalem is not the second bodily coming where “the Lord himself will descend” (1 Thess. 4:17) and meet the resurrected and the living saints in the air (i.e. the earth’s atmosphere). The judgment of Jerusalem is the sign *not* of the second and final coming of Christ, but that Jesus has been glorified as Mediator and sits at the right hand of God in heaven. In Matthew 24:30 we read, “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 great power and great glory” (Mt. 24:30 KJV). A literal rendering of the Greek reads, “And then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in the heaven.” The sign is not Jesus appearing up in the sky, but rather is the smoking ruins of Jerusalem which indicates that the Son of Man is in heaven. The judgment of Israel is the sign to that nation that Jesus is indeed the Lord and Christ, the ruler over the nations. As the exalted Lord He is able to bring vengeance upon His enemies. Our Lord’s allusion to Daniel 7:13 in the second half of this verse makes this interpretation unavoidable: “One like the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days...” Jesus quotes a passage very familiar to the Jews where He is *not* descending to earth, but rather is *ascending* to the Father to be “given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve Him...” (Dan. 7:14). The imagery of Daniel’s vision where the Mediator comes up to God to receive universal sovereign power indicates that the destruction of Jerusalem is near the beginning of His reign and is not the conclusion of it. “The time of the temple’s destruction will also be the time when it will become clear that the Son of Man, rejected by the leaders of his people, has been vindicated and enthroned at the right hand of God, and that it is he who is now to exercise the universal kingship which is his destiny.”¹⁴ Jesus was given all power and authority at the resurrection and ascension (Mt. 28:18; Rom. 1:4; Dan. 7:14; cf. Mk. 14:62). This mediatorial Kingship *with power* was demonstrated to the Jews at Pentecost when Jesus sent His Spirit to the church (Ac. 2:2-4, 17-21) and at the destruction of Jerusalem when Christ crushed apostate Israel.

(3) We also see proof that full preterism is wrong in the simple fact that physically dead believers were not raised during the Jewish war (A.D. 66-70) and living believers did not meet Jesus in the air (i.e. the earth’s atmosphere) at that time. In Matthew 24:1-35 our Lord did not tell His disciples that dead believers would be raised and living saints would join them and Christ in the air. Instead he warned Christians to flee Jerusalem and go into hiding in the mountains to avoid the slaughter (Mt. 24:15-21). Historians tell us that that is precisely what happened. A major portion of the Christian community fled to Pella. The Jerusalem believers escaped the

¹⁴ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 924. France writes, “This saying belongs to the group of three Matthean allusions (16:28; 24:30; 26:64) which are shared with Mark (Mark 8:38; 13:26; 14:26), and which have certain significant features in common: all of them speak of a ‘coming of the Son of Man’ which is visible, which is associated with power, and which is to take place within the lifetime of those to whom he is speaking (in this case, ‘this generation’ in v. 34). We have seen at 10:23 how the imagery of Daniel’s vision requires that these passages be interpreted not of a ‘coming’ to earth at the Parousia but of a ‘coming’ to God in heaven to be given the universal dominion declared in Dan. 7:14. These are enthronement texts. In 26:64 that exegesis is now widely recognized (see comments there), not least because that pronouncement speaks explicitly of what is to be true ‘from now on,’ not at some separate time in the future” (Ibid. 923).

siege and the terrors that went with it. Moreover, if the Olivet Discourse were discussing Jesus' second bodily coming, which will be accompanied by the general resurrection and final judgment, why would our Lord be so concerned to preserve the lives of Jewish believers? The destruction by the Romans was so severe that it needed to be shortened to preserve the lives of the elect (Mt. 24:22; Mk. 13:20). If the dead would be raised out of their tombs and the living were about to receive glorified bodies to meet Jesus as He descends, this concern to preserve the church to minister and preach the gospel in the future would be completely superfluous.

Further, Luke's account clearly says that pre-consummate human history will continue after this coming. "...For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Lk. 21:23-24). This passage is devastating to the full preterist theory. Luke says that death and destruction awaited the Jews and this would lead to an indefinite period of time where the Gentiles would be the focus of God's blessing. This period has already lasted almost 2000 years. When this passage is considered in light of the more detailed prophecy of Paul in Romans 11:25-26, it is obvious that there will be a long period of history when the Gentiles are converted before the Jews *en masse* embrace their Messiah. Luke 21:24 clearly implies that the destruction of Jerusalem is near the beginning of Christ's reign and is not the end of the millennium as full preterists assert. The seasons have a time limit ordained by God. Human history as we know it has an end. The seasons will continue from the destruction of Jerusalem until the day Jesus returns bodily in glory. Because the full preterist mistakenly equates the coming of Christ to destroy Jerusalem with the second bodily coming at the end of history, he must attempt to spiritualize the resurrection of the dead saints, the rapture of living believers and the bodily descent of Christ to meet the saints in the air. These exegetical gymnastics would be amusing if they were not so damaging spiritually to the followers of full preterism.

Second, there are three audible acts that are coterminous with Christ's bodily descent. "For the Lord will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God" (v. 16). This statement tells us that the events of the second coming are awe-inspiring and *public in nature*. Although trumpet blasts can be used in a symbolic manner (e.g., a great trumpet blast attends the sending of Christ's messengers to go forth into the nations to preach the gospel and gather the elect in Mt. 24:31),¹⁵ here we have every reason to believe that

¹⁵ Gary DeMar's comments on Matthew 24:31 are very helpful. He writes, "Immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem, God began to shake down the world (Matthew 24:29). The nations began to recognize Christ as King (24:30). In context, verse 31 does not refer to the end of the world. Rather, it speaks of the spread of the gospel to the nations of the world."

The Greek word translated 'angels' is simply the common word used for 'messengers.' God's prophets, messengers, and ministers, both in the Old and New Testament, are described as His angels. In the Greek version of the Old Testament (Septuagint), the Greek word *angelos* is translated numerous times as 'messenger': 'and the LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them again and again by His messengers (*angelos*), because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place' (2 Chronicles 26:15). The people continually 'mocked the messengers (*angelos*) of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophecies, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, until there was no remedy' (26:16). These verses parallel the events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Haggai is described as 'the messenger (*angelos*) of the LORD' (Haggai 1:13). The priest in Malachi is designated a 'messenger (*angelos*) of the LORD of host' (Malachi 2:7). John the Baptist is an 'angel,' a messenger of God (Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:24, 27; cf. Malachi 3:1). Jesus 'sent messengers (angels) ahead of Him' (Luke 9:52). The spies Joshua sent to Jericho are called 'messengers' (James 2:25). Again, in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures the Greek word for 'angels' is used" (*Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church* [Atlanta: American Vision, 1994], 162-163).

these events are literal. “That this ‘voice,’ ‘shout,’ ‘sound of trumpet,’ means something more than the mere forth-putting of the *power* which is to raise the dead—that there will be *an audible and mighty sound*—has never, I believe, been questioned.”¹⁶ In Exodus 19 when Jehovah descended upon the mountain in fire the people *heard the blast* of the trumpet which sounded long and became louder and louder (v. 19). This passage refutes the dispensational secret rapture theory as well as the full preterist doctrine of a clandestine, inaudible, indiscernible second coming of Christ (i.e. In the coming in judgment in A.D. 66-70 Jesus is never seen, heard or touched. According to the full preterist it was a spiritual event that both the church and the heathen, at that time were completely unaware. In fact no professing Christian was aware of it until the nineteenth century when the full preterist heresy was invented.)

The descent of Christ from heaven begins with a shout. The word “shout” (*keleusma*), which occurs only here in the New Testament, is used to issue orders such as a military command, the shout of a chariot driver to his horses, the command of a huntsman to his dogs, or the cry of a captain to his rowers to row. A better translation would be “the Lord will descend with the shout of command.” Who is the one who first shouts out orders on that great and final day? In this context it is clearly the Lord Jesus Christ. As He begins His descent from heaven, He commands the dead to arise from their graves. Our Lord spoke of this when He said, “all who are in the graves will hear His voice” (Jn. 5:28). “The command, therefore, is definitely *his own*, proceeding from *his* lips. It is not a command to him, but an order given *by* him. Leaving heaven in his human nature, he utters his voice, and immediately the souls of the redeemed also leave, and are quickly reunited with their bodies, which, thus restored to life arise gloriously.”¹⁷ Jesus, as a victorious King, will give the word of command to gather together all the saints to His side to be with Him and admire Him in His final act of redemption when He completely triumphs over sin, death and Satan.

Accompanying this authoritative shout is “the voice of an archangel.” The only archangel mentioned by name in Scripture is Michael (see Jude 9; Rev. 12:7; Dan. 10:13). In Daniel 10:13 he is called one of the chief princes. Therefore, there are a number of archangels that serve God. Scripture indicates that there are different ranks of angels and archangels are probably the chief authorities of the angelic armies. The Bible tells us that Jesus will come with all the holy angels (Mt. 25:31). It may be that this archangel is summoning the mighty hosts of heaven to descend with the Savior. Angels ministered to Jesus during His time of humiliation (Mt. 4:11; Mk. 1:13) and have always sympathized with the salvation of sinners (Mt. 18:10), therefore it is fitting that they are present at the second coming and final judgment.

The shout of command and voice of the archangel are accompanied by the sound of God’s trumpet. The blast of the trumpet in Scripture calls to mind a number of biblical uses. The two silver trumpets blown by the priests were used to call the people of God together for worship (Num. 10:3), to sound the call for the Israelites to begin their journeys (Num. 10:5-6), to sound the alarm to go to war (Num. 10:9) and were blown over the sacrifices (Num. 10:10; 2 Chr. 29:28). Trumpets were blown to announce the year of Jubilee when land was released to the original owners and slaves were set free (Lev. 25:8-17). All of this symbolized the redemption and freedom wrought by Jesus Christ. Our Lord even said that “the favorable year of the LORD” was fulfilled in Him (Lk. 4:16-21; cf. Isa. 61:1-3).

¹⁶ David Brown, *Christ’s Coming: Will It Be Premillennial?* (Edmonton, Alberta: Still Waters Revival Books [1882], 1990), 193.

¹⁷ William Hendriksen, *Thessalonians, Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1955, 57] 1979), 116.

The sound of a “great trumpet” announced the going forth of the gospel to the world (Mt. 24:31). With the trumpet blast a great work commenced where God’s messengers went forth as an army to conquer with the sword of the Spirit. The apostles and evangelists were gathering together God’s elect into a new nation (the New Covenant church); composed of both Jews and Gentiles.

Trumpet blasts are often associated with the wrath and judgment of God (Isa. 27:13; Zech. 9:12; Rev. 8:2-11:15). The use of the trumpet is also associated with Old Testament theophanies. In Psalm 47:5 God ascends to heaven with a shout and the sound of a trumpet. Jehovah’s descent to Mount Sinai was accompanied by the sound of a trumpet that grew louder and louder and lasted quite some time (Ex. 19:16, 19; cf. Heb. 12:19).

Paul connects the trumpet blast with the resurrection of the saints and the second coming in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52: “Behold I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible...” Note that the apostle calls it the last trumpet. With the second coming, bodily resurrection and final judgment, the eternal state begins and there is no longer any use for the announcing of judgment or the calling together of God’s people.

After looking at the use of the trumpet in Scripture, we see why it is appropriate at the second coming of Christ. In fact, the second coming, more than any other event, calls to mind most of these usages. The second coming involves: judgment, the resurrection, the gathering together of the saints of God, their movement together as a gathered host and the ultimate accomplishment of redemption. Our bodies are glorified and set free and the earth itself is no longer under the bondage of the fall. The eternal Sabbath rest and Jubilee begins and the whole church is called unto worship. What a blessed trumpet blast this will be! Perhaps this is why this trumpet is specifically called the trumpet which belongs to God.

A Real, Bodily Resurrection of Dead Believers

Third, these audible sounds which accompany the descent of Christ lead immediately to the resurrection of the saints: “and the dead in Christ will rise first.” Here Paul focuses on the area in which the Thessalonians needed assurance. The Christians who are already dead when Jesus returns will rise before anything else occurs. They are not at a disadvantage over the living, for their turn will come first. Those Thessalonians who mourned excessively, or were tempted to do so, should be relieved to discover that dead believers receive the equivalent of first class accommodations at the second coming. When we think of this amazing scene we must keep in mind the teaching of Acts 1:9-11. Our Lord’s descent to earth is not instantaneous, but rather “will be characterized by a kind of majestic leisureliness... There will be time...for the souls of those who have fallen asleep to leave their heavenly abodes, to be reunited with their bodies, and then in these gloriously raised bodies to ascend to meet the Lord in the air!”¹⁸

The fact that Paul is discussing the raising up of “the dead who are in Christ” (*oi nekroi en Kristo*) rules out the full preterist idea that this account describes only a spiritual event. As noted, this cannot refer to regeneration, for these dead persons are *already saved and their souls are in heaven*. It cannot refer to a resurrection of *Christian* souls, for such a thing is impossible, unnecessary, purposeless and unscriptural. Moreover, it cannot refer to a partial resurrection, for

¹⁸ Ibid, 118.

the apostle does not qualify or restrict this resurrection of saints in any way. (In 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul focuses his attention on the resurrection of dead Christians and the glorification of believers who are alive at His coming, he writes “*all of us shall be changed*” (v. 51). This great event encompasses all believers whether alive or dead.) In addition, it cannot mean the release of Christian saints from Hades to go to heaven to be with Jesus, for this contradicts several New Testament passages (e.g., Lk. 23:43; Phil. 1:21-23; Rev. 4:10-11) and is not taught anywhere in Scripture.¹⁹ The passage must be taken literally. The context, the meaning of the words used and the analogy of Scripture demand it. This passage agrees with 1 Corinthians 15:12, 20-23, which explicitly compares the resurrection of the dead saints to the resurrection of Christ, the raising of His dead *physical* body (Lk. 24:39; Jn. 20:27). To deny the literal, bodily resurrection of dead saints is to reject Scripture.

Fourth, after speaking of the summons to the dead in Christ to rise first, Paul proceeds with a discussion of what happens to the living saints at the Savior’s return. “Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet in the Lord in the air” (v. 17). The word “then” (*epeita*) simply means “then after” and is used to introduce the second result of the Redeemer’s descent.²⁰ Full preterists have attempted to make much out of this word because *eita* is often used to indicate immediate sequence instead of *epeita*. The problem with this argument is three-fold. (1) *Epeita* can designate a very short or long period of time depending on the context. In 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 the events described *occur as the Lord descends*. Consequently, *epeita* cannot be days, years or all of history as full preterists may assert. The ascension occurred while the apostles stood and watched (Ac. 1:9-11). There is nothing about a dinner break or spending the night. (2) The living saints are caught up together to meet the resurrected believers in the air. This indicates a very rapid sequence of events. (3) If we follow the full preterist line of reasoning, we do not have one final second bodily coming of Christ, but at least two separate comings or a progressive coming throughout history. Both views are clearly unbiblical and exegetically unacceptable.

A Spiritual Subjective Experience vs. an Objective Event

As we look at this verse there are a number of questions that need to be answered. (1) What does Paul mean when he says the living saints shall be caught up to meet the resurrected saints in the air? The verb *harpagesometha* (future passive indicative of *harpazo*) means to catch, seize, carry off, or snatch. In Matthew 13:19 the word is used to describe the wicked one who “snatches away” the word sown in the hearer’s heart. The idea of removal is implied by the

¹⁹ The passage 1 Peter 3:19, “By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison,” cannot be a proof text for such a view because: a) The context makes it clear (v. 20) that Christ preached through Noah to Noah’s generation which is now in prison. b) This passage says nothing about dead saints waiting to be released from Hades to go to heaven. c) Even if there was such a release, it would have occurred immediately upon the death or resurrection of Christ and not 40 years later at the coming in judgment upon Jerusalem. d) The people described in this passage are unbelievers who rejected the gospel in the days of Noah (v. 20). Dead saints are not addressed in this passage.

²⁰ “Then (*epeita*). The next step, not the identical time (*tote*), but immediately afterwards” (Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 4:32). “The sequence of events is emphasized again by *epeita* (‘then’) at the beginning of v. 17. The living are drawn into the unfolding events only after the resurrection of the dead has occurred first (v. 16)” (Charles A. Wanamaker, *Commentary on 1 and 2 Thessalonians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 174). “*epeita...arpagesometha ktl.* ‘Then, presumably at no great interval after the resurrection...’” (James Everett Frame, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979], 175).

context. In John 10:28 Jesus says that no one will “snatch them out of My hand.” Once again a seizing to remove is stated. In Acts 8:39 the word is used to describe Philip being caught away suddenly by the Holy Spirit. Even if we do not interpret this verse in a supernatural manner, the result is that Philip was seized and removed. In 2 Corinthians Paul speaks of a man (i.e. himself) who was “caught up” to the third heaven (12:2) into paradise (12:3). Whether this rapture refers to the whole person or only the soul, the point remains that the apostle was seized and then moved to another place. In Revelation 12:5 the Christ Child is “caught up” to God to protect Him from the power of the dragon. In Jude 23 the word is used of “seizing” someone *out* of the fire. In other words, the seizing is equivalent to a rescue or removal. Given all these usages of this term and the fact that the saints are snatched away to meet Jesus in the air, off the surface of the earth, the virtually universal opinion of Greek scholars and expositors that *harpagesometha* refers to a “seizing away” or a “catching up” is fully justified. God, by an irresistible power, will seize the living saints and bring them up to meet Christ in the air. The Latin word for *harpazo* is *raptus* and this word is the basis of our English word “rapture.” The rapture is a real event that will occur, *not* at the beginning of a supposed seven year tribulation, but will take place when Christ returns bodily to this earth.

The full preterist is forced by this passage to argue either that a literal bodily rapture already occurred in A.D. 70, but this was kept a secret and the church had to be restarted by left-over hypocritical (i.e. false) Christians (this view is patently absurd and exceptionally rare); or, that the rapture of 1 Thessalonians 4:17 is some kind of spiritual event where believers did not really ascend to meet Jesus in the air or atmosphere. This is the most popular interpretation by full preterists. This view is dependent on the argument that *harpazo* strictly defined does not imply a physical movement of any kind. It also is based on the idea that “air” (*aer*) does not mean literal air or the lower atmosphere, but means man’s spirit. The rapture happens in man’s spirit they contend; it is a subjective experience rather than an objective, historical event.

Harpazo: The True Meaning

There are a number of serious problems with the standard full preterist interpretation. (1) While it is indeed true that *harpazo* does not necessarily teach a seizing plus movement, in many passages, as we have noted, it does imply movement. This point has been recognized by Greek scholars, translators, commentators and writers of lexicons for centuries. This writer could not find one reputable commentator that agreed with the full preterist position. Lexicons explicitly recognize a taking plus movement. Walter Bauer says that *harpazo* can have the following meanings: “snatch, seize, i.e., take suddenly and vehemently, or take away in the sense of 1. steal, carry off, drag away...2. snatch or take away.”²¹ He notes that it can be used of arrested

²¹ Walter Bauer, translated, revised and augmented by William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich and Fredrick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1957, 1979), 109. Joseph H. Thayer agrees with Bauer: “to seize on, claim for one’s self eagerly...to snatch out or away...to rescue...to seize and carry off speedily...to *snatch* or *catch* away” (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Baker (1901) 1977], 74-75). The foremost authorities on word meanings in classical Greek (who certainly have no axe to grind on the nature of the rapture), Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott (revised and augmented by Henry Stuart Jones), write of *harpazo*: “*snatch away, carry off...seize hastily, snatch up...seize, overpower...draw up* by means of a vacuum...*plunder*” (Oxford: Clarendon Press, [1843] 1968), 246. The full preterist idea that *harpazo* can have nothing to do with a physical removal from one point to another is patently false, both for classical Greek and Koine Greek. Full preterist efforts to overturn the plain meaning of passages which contradict their paradigm are deceitful. They are grasping after straw.

men who are *taken away*; seed *removed* from the ground; people *rescued* from fire; and winds which *transport* a person from one place to another. The Greeks used the word for *plundering* a city. The goods are seized and removed. “The verb *harpazeiv* is used in Gn. 5:24 (LXX) for the taking up of Enoch [literally, bodily] to heaven and by Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:2 and 4 to refer to his own descent into the third heaven. In these instances, as in v. 17, it implies that the ascent is brought about by a force outside the individual.”²² The usages in Greek literature, the Greek Septuagint and the New Testament all fit perfectly and totally support the traditional or orthodox interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 4:17. The living saints will be seized by God and will be removed from this earth to meet Christ in the atmosphere.

(2) If the rapture of 1 Thessalonians 4:17 is merely a spiritual event that takes place inside man, then why is it necessary for Jesus to descend *bodily* from heaven to meet them? Moreover, how could the glorified human nature of Christ meet with believers all over the world *simultaneously* in their spirits? This would be impossible unless one adopts the ancient heresy that mixes the two natures of the one Mediator. This leaves the full preterist with only the option of denying the second bodily coming altogether and opting for some type of spiritual coming of Christ. But this heresy leads to even greater problems. One problem is the saints who are resurrected from their graves to meet Christ in the air. Are they physically resurrected to meet with the Savior’s Spirit? This doesn’t make any sense. Another problem is that if the coming is only a spiritual coming, then the second coming of Christ is no different than Pentecost. Since Pentecost already happened and Jesus already had an inner, spiritual meeting with all living believers, then what is the theological and salvific meaning of the second coming? What sets it apart from the work of the Holy Spirit and Christ’s high priestly mediatorial work that *already* flows from His resurrection victory? Moreover, if one accepts the full preterist definition of the rapture as a subjective spiritual experience that occurred in A.D. 70 (and perhaps continues somehow in history), then one has adopted a completely new and unique application of salvation that every theologian in history has completely missed. In addition, what is the salvific purpose of this subjective experience? How does it improve upon Pentecost and our possession of the Spirit of Christ? A spiritual/ subjective rapture makes absolutely no sense exegetically or theologically. The old adage holds true: “One heresy leads to another.” Full preterists have obviously not carefully thought through the implications of their Scripture twisting of 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

(3) If one holds the position that the rapture is a subjective spiritual experience, then he has denied the explicit Pauline teaching that all the living saints are *gathered together* with the believers who were physically dead then raised bodily out of their graves. If the full preterist argues that such people are united spiritually or are united in Christ mystically, then once again they are simply asserting something that is true prior to the second coming. Their system forces them to redefine the second coming and our literal gathering unto Him out of existence. Tragically, they must also redefine the public, universal vindication and glory the Redeemer receives on that great day out of existence. The second coming of Christ in A.D. 70 is the greatest secret in history.

²² Wanamaker, 175.

In the Air

The full preterist's entire exegesis of 1 Thessalonians 4:17 is dependent on an exegetical fallacy. They must somehow redefine the word air (*aer*) to mean man's spirit. Consequently, they substitute the root definition of the word *aer* (*aemi*-to breathe, blow or respire) for its primary meaning, which is the air around us or the lower atmosphere. A full preterist advocate, Kelly Nelson Birks, writes,

Please note Strong's root definition followed by the primary meaning of the word that Paul uses in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. It is in reference to the "place" of respiration. The idea of the exchange of oxygen within ones immediate sphere, is what is the associative understanding. Paul is not saying that we meet the Lord in the *harpazo*, in our lungs! Understand what Paul is driving at. He is speaking of a spiritual meeting with the Lord, "within" ourselves. Within our spirits. Why did he use this particular form of explanation here? So that the Thessalonians, who could not conceive of the nature of the *harpazo* at Christ's Parousia in the least (and we don't do a very good job of it either), would begin to grasp that the meeting with the Lord was to be a personal meeting "within" the believer. Each believer was to have his or her own meeting with the Lord. If Paul had meant to communicate that this meeting was of a physical nature relative to joining the Lord in a place high above the planet surface, which Strong refers to as the place of "rarer" air (thinner air, high above the planet), then he would in all likelihood have used the Greek word "*ouranos*". This is the primary word for the sky high above. The place of rarer air. There would have been no misunderstanding whatsoever if he had used *ouranos*. "*Ouranos*": "To lift, to heave." Vines, Pg. 548. Paul chooses the more spiritually descriptive word *AER*, in order to communicate the primary defined meaning that Strong actually gives us. Christ would meet the believer within. It is an analogous to ones spirit that is within their body.²³

This exceptionally clever and convoluted method of interpreting the word *aer* merits our attention. Is it legitimate exegetically to ignore the primary meaning of a word (i.e. how the word was used in everyday speech by ancient Greeks in both the classical period and the first century) and instead substitute a root definition? No! It is illegitimate and very deceptive. For example, a number of Greek scholars believe the root of the word *uperetas* translated as "ministers" or "servants" in 1 Corinthians 4:1 ("Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ") is a "rower" (e.g., Trench, A. T. Robertson, J.B. Hofman, etc). The word, however, in Koine Greek is a synonym of *diakonos* or "servant." But if we follow Birks' method of exegesis, Paul and the New Testament evangelists were *boat rowers* for Christ. Our English word "nice" comes from the Latin root *necius*, which means "ignorant." When we say someone is nice, do we really mean they are ignorant? No, of course not! Our word "martyr" means a person who is killed for his belief in Christ. But the Greek root word behind our English word in classical Greek means a person who gives testimony in a court and in the New Testament means a person who witnesses for Christ in life and word, even in the face of persecution and possible death. Examples could be multiplied. The only reason the full preterist substitutes a completely irrelevant root word (*aemi*) for the true meaning of the word that is actually used, is the simple fact that the real meaning does not fit into their system.

What do the Greek scholars say about the word, *aer*? James Strong says it "signifies 'the atmosphere' (1) certainly in five of the seven occurrences (Acts 22:23; 1 Cor. 9:26; 14:9; Rev.

²³ Kelly Nelson Birks, *A Response to "Silence Demands a Rapture,"* Internet Article.

9:2; 16:11), and (2) almost certainly in the other two (Eph. 2:2 and 1 Th. 4:17).²⁴ G. Abbott-Smith says, “The lower air which surrounds the earth, as opp. To the purer *aither* of the higher regions; generally air.”²⁵ W.E. Vine says that it “signifies the atmosphere, certainly in five of the seven occurrences...and almost certainly in the other two.”²⁶ Marvin R. Vincent writes, “*Aer the atmosphere with the clouds*, as distinguished from *aither the pure ether*, which does not occur in N.T.”²⁷ Thayer concurs with this definition: “...*the air* (particularly the lower and denser, as distinguished from the higher and rarer [Homer II.14, 288]),...*the atmospheric region*.”²⁸ Speaking of classical Greek, Liddell and Scott write, “*mist, haze...later generally air...the open air*.”²⁹ The word *aer* can mean the air around us or the atmosphere. It, however, is *never* used as a synonym for *pneuma* (“spirit”) which is the immaterial, invisible part of man. If Paul wanted to convey to the Thessalonians the idea that Jesus was going to come and meet them in their *spirit*, then the Thessalonians would almost certainly have misunderstood the term he chose. To the Greeks *aer* meant air or atmosphere.

If we look at the biblical usage of this word, we see that every example (except possibly one) refers to the air around us or the atmosphere. “Then, as they cried out and tore off their

²⁴ James Strong, *The New Strong's Expanded Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 3:7.

²⁵ G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1937), 11. H. Merklein writes, “According to the ancient worldview the air forms the intermediate sphere between earth and heaven (ether)... In 1 Thess. 4:17 the air is the place where believers who have been caught up in the clouds meet the returning Lord, either to accompany him in his return to earth...or for reunion in heaven” (Ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, (1978-80), 1990], 1:34). Forester writes, “According to the ancient conception of the earth, the sphere of the air reaches to the moon, where the ethereal region of the stars commences. The Greeks made a distinction between the impure element of air and the purer ether.... Because of its middle position, the air in 1 Th. 4:17..., is the sphere where believers will meet Christ on his coming to set up on earth the millennial kingdom” (Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964], 1:165-166). According to Paul, Jesus returns and the kingdom is handed over to His Father and the eternal state begins (cf. 1 Cor. 15:24-28).

²⁶ W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell [1940] 1966), 45.

²⁷ Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1887] 1946), 4:43.

²⁸ Thayer, 13.

²⁹ Liddell and Scott, 30. “The *eis aera* designates the place of meeting, probably the space between the earth and the firmament of the first heaven, as in Slav. En. 3:1ff. quoted above” (Frame, 176). John Gill’s comments are interesting: “Here [in the air] Christ will stop, and be visible to all, good and bad, as the body of the sun at noon-day; as yet he will not yet descend on earth, because [it is] not [yet] fit to receive him; but when that and its works are burnt up, and it is purged by fire, and becomes a new earth, he’ll descend upon it, and dwell with his saints in it” (*An Exposition of the New Testament* [Streamwood, IL: Primitive Baptist Library, (1809) 1979], 3:238). The Greek scholar John Eadie writes, “The dead who are raised and the living along with them meet the Redeemer not in heaven as he leaves it, nor on earth, if He come down to it, but between heaven and earth in the air...” (*Commentary on the Epistles to the Thessalonians* [Grand Rapids: Baker, (1877) 1979], 170). The standard Protestant orthodox interpretation [i.e. non-dispensational and non-full preterist] of verse 17 is well stated by the Lutheran expositor R.C.H. Lenski: “The main point is the union of the dead and the living believers who form one joint host that is lifted in a divine *raptus* to meet their heavenly Lord as he descends. First Corinthians 15:51, 52 supplies the thought that the living will be changed without passing through death, in the twinkling of an eye. Glorified in body and soul like the risen dead, they will be swept up ‘into the air’ and thus rise to meet the Lord at his descent. We take this to mean that they will meet the Lord in welcome and will descend to the earth with him and all his angels for the purpose of judgment. ‘Snatched into the air’ does not mean into heaven. The Lord will descend to the earth (Job 19:25; Acts 1:11) where the judgment shall take place. It shall not take place in the air; nor shall the wicked, after being raised, be taken into the air. Revelation 21:1, 2 unites the new heaven and the new earth with the holy city; and the judgment will exclude the wicked from it. We read nowhere that the Lord will return to heaven after the Parousia, but rather that heaven and earth shall be one” (*The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, (1937) 1946], 336-337).

clothes and threw dust into the air (*aer*)” (Ac. 22:23). This refers to the air around them. In 1 Corinthians 9:26 Paul says he fights, “not as one who beats the air (*aer*).” This is also the air or space around him. Paul speaks of the devil in Ephesians 2:2 as “the prince of the power of the air (*aer*).” This is the only passage in the New Testament where there is some disagreement over the meaning of *aer*. If *aer* is to be understood literally as the air or atmosphere surrounding the earth, then obviously Paul is speaking from our perspective. When the demons moved from the demon-possessed man to the swine, from our standpoint, they moved through our air even though they exist in a spiritual dimension (Mk. 5:13). The literal position was the common view of the Jews in Paul’s day. After extensive argumentation on this matter Hendriksen concludes,

This passage, in conjunction with others (3:10, 15; 6:12), clearly teaches that God has tenanted the supermundane realm with innumerable hosts, and that in its lower region the minions of Satan are engaged in their destructive missions. Grosheide is right when in his comments on this passage he states that according to the New Testament “the atmosphere is inhabited by spirits, including evil spirits, who exert an evil influence on people” (op.cit, p. 36). Note this word “including.” The evil spirits do not have it all to themselves by any means! And as far as they and their leader are concerned, the Christian’s real comfort is found in such passages as 1:20-23; Col. 2:15; Rom. 16:20; Rev. 20:3, 10. Cf. Gen. 3:15; John 12:31, 32.³⁰

Even if Paul is speaking figuratively in this passage, he certainly is not discussing man’s soul or spirit.

In Revelation 9:2 the sun and air (*aer*) are darkened from smoke that arises from the pit. This obviously refers to our atmosphere for the smoke darkens the sun. Revelation 16:17 tells us that the seventh angel pours out his bowl of wrath into the air (*aer*). This usage also refers to the atmosphere. The objection that this is apocalyptic literature and is not meant to be taken literally is irrelevant. The picture painted by the Holy Spirit, whether literal or not, is still dependent on the ordinary use of the Greek language. Here *air* means atmosphere even if the events are symbolic.

Finally we come to 1 Thessalonians 4:17. In this passage it is obvious that *aer* means atmosphere for the following reasons. (1) Christ is said to descend from heaven (v. 16). The Jesus who descends is the same One who died and rose from the dead (v. 16). Therefore, our Lord will descend in His resurrected body (Ac. 1:9-11). This is very different than Pentecost when the glorified Redeemer poured out His Spirit upon the church (Ac. 2:2-4). Of Pentecost our Lord told the disciples, “I am coming back to you” (Jn. 14:28). But He made it very clear that the Holy Spirit was coming (Jn. 14:15; 15:26; 16:7, 13) and not His theanthropic Person.

(2) Acts 1:9-11 makes it perfectly clear that this coming involves the resurrected Redeemer, who continues to exist as God and (glorified) man in one person forever. Once again we need to point out that if the coming mentioned in Acts 1:9-11 and 1 Thessalonians 4:17 is not

³⁰ William Hendriksen, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962, 64, 67, 68), 2:111. S.D.F. Salmond writes, “The word *aer* cannot be taken as equivalent to *mundus* (Aquino.) or *ouranos* (Olsh.) or *skotos* (Kl.) or *pneuma* (Hofm.); neither can it express the *quality* of these evil powers—their incorporeal or aeriform nature (Hahn). In all its other N.T. occurrences (Acts xxii.23; 1 Cor. ix.26; xiv.9; 1 Thess. iv.17; Rev. ix.2, xvi.17) it has the literal sense. It was here, and it describes these demonic powers as between earth and heaven, in that ‘supra-terrestrial but subcelestial region (*ho hupou-ranios topos*, Chrys.) which seems to be, if not the abode, yet the haunt of evil spirits’ (Ell.)...these demonic powers, as having their seat in the air, are distinguished from the [holy] angels whose abode is in heaven (*angleoi ton our-anon*)” (in W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., *The Expositor’s Greek New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983], 3:284).

literal or bodily, then what separates it from Pentecost or the special work of the Holy Spirit upon the elect that occurs every single day?

(3) The believers who are alive at the time are said to meet together with the bodily resurrected saints in the clouds to meet Jesus in the air. If meeting Christ in the air represents a subjective spiritual experience, then what are these clouds and how do we meet the resurrected glorified saints? Although the term clouds often has a symbolic meaning of the divine presence (e.g., Ex. 13:21; 14:24; 19:9; 20:21; 24:15; 33:9; 34:5; 1 Ki. 8:12), God's abode (Ps. 97:2), Jehovah's method of transportation (Ps. 104:3), God's judgment (Ez. 30:3; Joel 2:2; Nah. 1:3; Isa. 19:1) and the glorification of Christ (Mt. 24:30; 26:64; These passages both refer to Daniel 7:13-14 where Jesus is glorified), in this passage it can be taken literally (in Ac. 1:11 Jesus is received up into a cloud) or it could be literal with symbolic overtones. Since the clouds are a meeting place in the air or atmosphere, it is exceptionally unlikely that the term "clouds" is purely symbolic in this passage. Would the Thessalonians who read in this epistle that they will be caught up into the air to meet their dead loved ones in the clouds think of this as a subjective experience? Would not the terms air or atmosphere and clouds (that exist up in the atmosphere) make them think immediately of the traditional, orthodox concept of the rapture? Of course! (Moreover, as we have already noted previously, Jesus did not leave heaven in A.D. 66-70. The destruction of Jerusalem was a sign that He was in heaven at the right hand of God).

But, what about the full preterist objection that if Paul had the traditional concept of the rapture in mind he would have used the word *ouranos* (heaven, air or sky) instead of the word *aer*? This objection is desperate and bizarre. The answer to this question is quite simple. If Paul had chosen *ouranos*, then his statement about the coming of Christ would have been ambiguous, for although *ouranos* can mean sky, it also refers to the dwelling place of God (e.g., Mt. 5:16; 12:50; Rev. 3:12; 11:13; 16:11; 20:9) which is a spiritual realm. In fact, that is usually how the term heaven is used in the New Testament. By choosing the word *aer* which can only mean the air around us or the atmosphere (not spiritual heaven or even the place where the moon and stars exist [i.e. the second heaven]), Paul made it very clear that this great event would be visible from the earth's surface. Although 1 Thessalonians 4:17 does not tell us where Jesus takes the resurrected and raptured saints after He meets them in the air, we can infer from other passages (e.g., Ac. 1:11; Col. 3:4; 2 Thess. 1:6-10; Rev. 21:2) that He continues descending with them to the earth. The dispensational idea of a rapture which takes the saints back to heaven has no basis in Scripture whatsoever. It was the invention of Margaret McDonald in 1830.

Before we consider this meeting in the air, it is important to note that 1 Thessalonians 4:17 teaches that believers who are alive at the second coming of Christ will not experience physical death. They will instantaneously receive glorified bodies that are immortal, incorruptible, holy and fit to spend eternity with Jesus. Paul spoke of this in more detail in 1 Corinthians 15:51-54: "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep [i.e. die], but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: '*Death is swallowed up in victory.*'" The similarities between this passage and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 are striking. The trumpet sounds; the believers who have died are raised from the dead and made incorruptible; then the believers who are still alive are changed. That which is mortal, and subject to decay or destruction, is made incorruptible and immortal. This transformation applies to the living as well as to the dead. The verb "to put on"

(*endusasthai*) refers figuratively to being clothed with our new glorified bodies. “For we who are in *this* tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life” (2 Cor. 5:4). The word “immortality” (*athanasia*) is a combination of two Greek words: *alpha*-negative and *thanatos*-death. The word literally means “deathlessness.” “The long chain of decay and death inaugurated by the first Adam will finally be irrevocably broken by the last Adam.”³¹ Death, decay, rotting, destruction and attendant suffering are swallowed up by the resurrection and glorification of God’s people. As long as the physical death and decay of Christians is occurring, the resurrection and rapture have not occurred.

The Nature of this Meeting

Having examined the meaning of *harpazo* (which teaches that the living saints are “caught up”) and *aer* (which means the “air” around us or “atmosphere”), we can now ask: what is the nature of the meeting? The expression “to meet” (*eis apantesin*) “was a technical expression in Hellenistic Greek for the departure from a city of a delegation of citizens to meet an arriving dignitary in order to accord the person proper respect and honor by escorting the dignitary back to the city.”³² Our Lord is greeted in the air by all of the elect (the church invisible and universal) from all of human history. The returning Savior is given the reception by the church that accords with His divinity and exalted human royalty. The same Greek word is used to describe the wedding guests going out to meet the Bridegroom (Mt. 25:6), which is a parable about the second coming. It is also used in Acts 28:15 when some brethren came out to meet Paul (who was already accompanied with other believers). They greeted Paul and accompanied him “as far as Appii Forum and the Three Inns.” The saints in unison meet Christ to salute, admire and worship Him, while those remaining on earth must wait for Him as criminals wait for the judge and executioner. The expression used rules out the idea of a secret meeting in a believer’s heart. Believers already possess the Spirit of Christ. How can they meet Jesus in a spiritual manner when they have already been baptized with the Holy Spirit? Are the full preterists proposing a second blessing like the Pentecostals? Moreover, could millions of Christians meet Jesus in their spirit, yet be completely unaware of it? In addition, what about all the believers who are born after A.D. 70? Did they miss out on this second blessing? And if they did not, how does the full preterist find a never ending progression of meetings in our text? Once again, we see that the full preterist’s interpretation is an absurd fantasy. Full preterists take a meeting that is public, official and exceptionally significant and essentially redefine it out of existence.

That the meeting described in the air is literal and objective is proved by Paul’s main thrust at the end of verse 17: “And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” It will certainly be a great and wonderful experience for us to be reunited with Christian loved ones who have died. But the chief comfort presented in this verse is that we will be in the presence of Christ. We will behold Him, admire Him, adore Him and worship Him. We will look upon His pierced hands, feet and side and we will cast our bejeweled crowns at His feet. We will enjoy the peace, bliss and joy of His magnificent presence forever. This is what Paul wants us to look forward to when death has caused a separation from a spouse or a child or a dear friend. Our souls and perfect *glorified bodies* will all meet again in the presence of the Lamb. There will be no more

³¹ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 803.

³² Wanamaker, 175.

separation from Him or the saints forever and ever. What Paul says should remove all doubts or grief about what happens to Christians who are dead and buried when Jesus returns. Their future and our future are glorious and blessed beyond our comprehension.

Contrast this amazing statement with the full preterist heresy. “Take comfort dear Christians, for although your dead loved ones’ bodies will rot in the cursed earth forever, we will have a secret indiscernible meeting with Jesus in our spirits in A.D. 70.” If we accept the full preterist interpretation of this passage we need to ask: How do we derive comfort from the second coming when all true believers were not really brought together and united forever in A.D. 70 and the curse wrought upon this earth by Adam’s sin continues forever (see Gen. 3:16-19)? In the full preterist world view, disease, calamity, suffering and death continue. They teach that, at death, we receive our new glorified bodies that have been hanging in storage in heaven since A.D. 70; but, while we enjoy heaven our posterity is still on earth suffering the effects of the fall. Their theological system is a heretical monstrosity haphazardly coupled together with eisegesis and human invention. (Moreover, if this gathering together of all the saints is purely spiritual and subjective, how does this passage teach anything different from what occurs in regeneration and conversion when Christians are united to Christ?)

Comfort One Another

With his teaching about the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of dead believers and the rapture of the living saints completed, Paul draws out an inference from this doctrine: “Therefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:18). These are precious words given to us by divine inspiration. They contain the teachings that are designed to give believers a genuine and lasting consolation. Our dead Christian friends and loved ones have absolutely no disadvantage compared to those who are alive at Christ’s coming. The dead will rise first. Both will meet our blessed Savior in the air as He descends. Both will be joined together as worshippers of Christ forever. When we see another Christian who is upset because their husband or wife has died, we have the teaching at hand to comfort them and support them. This doctrine is very practical; it adds joy and hope to our tears. It tells us that a time is coming when all believers *both body and soul* will dwell forever before the loving gaze of Christ. Please tell me, what is more comforting to sorrowful believers, the teaching of Paul, which has been the orthodox view for almost 2000 years; or the full preterist fantasy of a *secret, indiscernible* meeting of Christ within our Spirit? Obviously, we will do much better if we place our faith in Scripture and Christian orthodoxy.

Chapter 2: The Fall of Adam and Physical Death

Introduction

One of the central teachings of the Christian church since its inception has been the resurrection of dead believers at the second coming of Christ. The Apostles’ Creed (which is called the first ecumenical symbol because it was universally accepted by the eastern as well as the western churches) says, “I believe in...the resurrection of the body [literally “flesh”; Latin

caro, Greek *sarx*].³³ The Nicene Creed says, “I believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life in world to come.” The Athanasian Creed says that at Christ’s coming “all men shall arise again with their bodies.” It is very important that we get the doctrine of the bodily resurrection correct because not only is it presented in Scripture as a great hope and consolation for Christians, but it is also intimately connected to other major doctrines such as the consequences of Adam’s fall and the salvation achieved by Christ.

As we study this topic we will interact with the full preterist heresy. Full preterists view the resurrection only in terms of deliverance from sin-death, not physical death. They believe, with secular humanists and Socinians, that physical death is natural; it is a normal aspect of God’s created order even before the fall. Thus, all full preterists reject the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body. All hyperpreterists have one thing in common. They believe that the dead physical bodies of Christians remain in the grave forever. When it comes to defining the resurrection that occurs at the second coming of Christ, there are basically three different views among full preterists. Some attempt to define every mention of a future resurrection in terms of a spiritual resurrection (e.g., regeneration). Others view the resurrection as a release of souls from Hades in A.D. 70. Still others believe a bodily resurrection occurred in A.D. 70, but this involved the creation of completely new spiritual bodies that replace the bodies left to rot forever in the earth. They contend that everyone who dies after A.D. 70 receives their new resurrection bodies immediately at death. Consequently, instead of being a part of the great one time eschatological event at the end of history, they teach that the resurrection is progressive and occurs millions of times throughout history. All of this teaching is heretical nonsense. To properly understand the necessity and importance of the bodily resurrection, we need to examine a number of different doctrines.

The first point that we need to consider is what happened when Adam fell? Did Adam *only* experience what full preterists call sin-death? That is, is the first man’s death merely spiritual and nothing more? Or, as orthodox expositors and theologians have asserted for almost two thousand years, is physical death a consequence of spiritual death? This is a very important question, for if physical death is a consequence of the fall and of spiritual death, then Jesus

³³ The ancient church scholars used the term *sarx* or *caro* meaning “flesh” as a bulwark against the teaching of the Gnostics who believed our bodies were intrinsically sinful, disgusting and inferior and thus would not be resurrected. The Gnostics held to a purely spiritual conception of the resurrection. By the term “flesh,” however, the ancient church was not teaching that the resurrection was purely physical or that our bodies would not be transformed gloriously by this event and made spiritual and incorruptible. This is evident by the writings of the church fathers on this subject such as Tertullian. One of the foremost authorities on theology and apologetics, J. N. D. Kelly writes, “The Parousia will be preceded, states [cf. 16, 6] the *Didache*, by the resurrection of the dead. The author appears to restrict this to the righteous (cf. *ou panton de*), but the normal teaching was that good and bad would alike rise. Ignatius cites [Trall. 9, 2] Christ’s resurrection as a prototype of that of believers, and ‘Barnabas’ reproduces [5, 6] the Pauline argument that the Savior arose in order to abolish death and give proof of our resurrection. We should observe that both he and the author of *2 Clement* insists [Ib. 21, I; 2 Clem. 9, 1-4] on the necessity of our rising again in the self-same flesh we now possess, the idea being that we may receive the just requital of our deeds. Clement, too, teaches [1 Clem. 24-26] that Christ’s resurrection foreshadows ours, and is a pioneer in devising rational arguments, of a type later to become classic, to make the idea of a resurrection plausible. The transition from night to day, he urges, and the transformation of dry, decaying seeds into vigorous plants supply analogies from the natural order, as does the legend of the phoenix from pagan mythology; in any case it is consistent with divine omnipotence, and is abundantly prophesied in Scripture (e.g. *Pss.* 28, 7; 3:6; 23:4; *Job* 19, 26). The insistence of these writers is probably to be explained by the rejection of a real resurrection by Docetists and Gnostics, who, of course, refused to believe that material flesh could live on the eternal plane. Polycarp had them (or possibly Marcion) in mind when he roundly stated [Phil. 7, I.] that ‘he who denies the resurrection and the judgment is the first-born of Satan’” (*Early Christian Doctrines* [San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1960], 463).

Christ would have to conquer physical death to affect a full salvation for man. (This is exactly what Scripture teaches.)

Full preterists do two things to avoid the reality that spiritual death leads to physical death. First, they point out that the penalty for eating the forbidden fruit was a death that occurred on *the very day* the fruit was eaten: “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:17). Since Adam died physically over 900 years after eating the forbidden fruit, full preterists argue that physical death (logically) has nothing to do with the fall. (This view ignores the broader context of this passage.) Second, full preterists argue that physical death is a natural aspect of God’s created universe. Adam and Eve would have died physically even if they did not eat of the forbidden fruit. They must adopt this position to avoid the obvious conclusion that redemption also involves our physical bodies and, therefore, a literal resurrection.

Is Physical Death Natural?

There are a number of reasons why the full preterist view of the fall as only involving sin-death or spiritual death must be emphatically rejected.

First, the idea that physical death is a natural part of God’s created order would mean that God regards physical death as something “good.” This would be the natural implication of Genesis 1:31: “Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.” If physical death is not part of the fall, then it should be accepted as one of the good things of God’s creation. The whole purpose of Genesis 1:21 is to emphasize the *perfection* of God’s creation. This perfect and “very good” creation reflects the character of God. But if death is good, then why is the universal response to death sorrow, anguish and tears? Why did Jesus weep when He heard that His friend Lazarus had died (Jn. 11:35)? Moreover, if death is good and natural, then why does it involve suffering? There is the suffering of a violent end (e.g., nature red in tooth and claw) and there is the suffering of growing old with all its infirmities and diseases. In fact, growing old is itself a form of slow degradation and decay. No one looks forward to a loss of mobility, poor eyesight, hearing and memory loss, lack of stamina, arthritis and the host of negative changes involved in aging. Growing very old is not intrinsically good or healthy and neither is death.

In addition, if death is normal, for men and animals, then why was vegetarianism God’s pre-fall standard for food (cf. Gen. 1:29-30)? Why does Isaiah’s prophecy of the blessings of Christ’s coming restoration describe an eventual return to vegetarianism, when the lion will eat straw and the lamb and wolf will feed together in harmony (Is. 65:25)? The obvious answer is that Christ’s sacrificial death and resurrection will eliminate the curse on this earth that brought the animals under the rule of “tooth and claw.” In the coming, literal new heavens and new earth we are told “there shall be no more curse” (Rev. 22:3), “no more death, no sorrow, nor crying” or “pain” (Rev. 21:4). Physical death is not good or natural!³⁴

³⁴ It is particularly tragic that the full preterist rejection of the orthodox Christian doctrine of the second bodily, literal coming of Christ has forced them to adopt a heathen, secular humanistic concept of death. Robert A. Morey faithfully contrasts the Christian and humanist concepts of death. He writes, “All the humanistic concepts about death being ‘natural’ or part of human nature are false. Death is the terrible and unnatural ripping of the soul out of man’s body. Death tears man in half. Man was made to live, not to die. Christian attitude: 1. Death is unnatural. 2. Death flows from sin. 3. Death is a time of sorrow (John 11:33-39). 4. Death will be done away with when Jesus returns (Rev. 21:4). Humanist attitudes: 1. Death is natural. 2. Death is part of life. 3. Death should mean little or nothing to us. 4. Death will always be here” (*Death and the Afterlife* [Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1984], 40).

It is interesting and significant that the first recorded deaths of animals in the Bible is when God made tunics of skin to clothe Adam and Eve. Immediately after the fall the narrative says, “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they know that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings” (Gen. 3:7). Then right after the section on punishments we read, “Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them” (Gen. 3:21). God shed the blood of animals to cover Adam and Eve’s shame associated with their knowledge that they were naked. Their sin led to the killing of an innocent animal. Was this a lesson to Adam that leaves were an inadequate covering for guilt; that sin could only be atoned for by the pain, blood and death of an innocent victim? When we consider that verse 21 is clearly designed to be compared with verse 7 this conclusion is unavoidable. We have the covering of fig leaves verses the covering of animal skins. “The first is an attempt to cover oneself, the second is accepting a covering from another. The first is man made and the second is God made. Adam and Eve are in need of a salvation that comes from without. God needs to do for them what they are unable to do for themselves.”³⁵ “It was made apparent that sin was a real and deep evil, and that by no easy and cheap process could the sinner be restored.”³⁶ As the author of Hebrews says, “Without the shedding of blood there is no remission” (Heb. 9:22). Moreover, God’s act of grace precedes His act of judgment. God covered Adam and Eve before He cast them out of the garden. They both learned about the necessity of a death—that is, a blood sacrifice—as an atonement for sin by direct revelation from God at some point, for their second son Abel knew about sacrificing clean animals (a first born sheep) unto God (Gen. 4:4). Once again we see the clear connection in Scripture between sin and physical death.

God’s Punishment for Sin

Second, the verses which describe the consequences of the fall upon the earth and mankind make it very clear that physical death is part of God’s judgment against sin. In Genesis 3 God pronounces specific punishments against Adam and Eve as a result of their sin that apply to their posterity:

To the woman He said: “I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you.” Then to Adam He said, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’: “Cursed *is* the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat *of* it all the days of your life.” (Gen. 3:16-17)

Because of the fall, both man and woman’s God-given tasks are made difficult and painful. Woman naturally wants to be a joyful mother of children (cf. Ps. 113:9). But because of the fall, pregnancy and childbirth are exceptionally difficult and painful. Prior to modern medicine, the number one killer of women of childbearing age was childbirth. Because of Adam’s fall the earth is cursed; bringing forth food will require great toil. The pleasantness of tending the Garden of Eden is replaced by sweat and pain. Adam will have to leave behind the lush fruit-bearing trees of the Garden to fight against the “thorns and thistles” that God will cause to spring forth. “The toil that now lies behind the preparation of every meal is a reminder of the fall and is made the

³⁵ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapter 1-17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 207.

³⁶ Marcus Dods, Ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, *The Expositor’s Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1940), 1:11.

more painful by the memory of the ready supply of food within the garden (2:9).³⁷ Adam and his posterity had the whole earth to enjoy. As they took dominion over it they could have used the great abundance the land brought forth with comfort and pleasure. But man's great blessing is turned into a curse. Hardships, drought, disease-bearing insects, famine, earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis, volcanoes, tornadoes, blight, sterility, insect and animal attacks are all a result of sin. They all flow from the curse. Work, necessary for taking dominion, is not the curse, the great hardships, difficulties, setbacks, frustrations and failures that accompany man's work after the fall are.

The earth is cursed because of Adam's sin and, consequently, the work of Christ, to be perfect and complete, must eliminate this curse. Paul speaks to this issue when he writes, "The creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected *it* in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only *that*, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:20-23). The apostle says that the elimination of the curse on this earth is coterminous with the bodily resurrection of the saints. As long as this earth is cursed and Christians are asleep in their graves, we know that Jesus has not returned. The full preterist attempt to fit everything into an A.D. 70 framework has rendered Christ's work of salvation ineffective and incomplete.³⁸

³⁷ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 82.

³⁸ Full preterists have argued that in Romans 8:2-23 the word "creation" (*ktiseos*) does not refer to this world, but rather to Israel. This view is absurd and should be rejected for the following reasons. (1) The creation was subjected to futility unwillingly (v. 20). This cannot refer to Israel. Israel willingly sinned against God, while the creation suffered because of what Adam did. "'Not of its own will' does not imply that 'the creation' possesses will or that it could have willed its own subjection to vanity. This is simply a statement to emphasize the fact that it was wholly on account of the will of another that the subjection took place" (John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959, 65], 1:303). (2) Israel was not delivered from the bondage of decay in A.D. 70. Instead it was destroyed and judged by God. The nation was not delivered from futility in A.D. 70, but rather was rendered purposeless (i.e. the Roman armies obliterated the temple and the sacrificial system that was set out of gear at the cross). Full preterists take an act of wrath and judgment upon apostate Israel and turn it into an eschatological, redemptive event. It certainly helped Christians at the time, but at the most it was a temporary reprieve in persecution. (3) Israel did not obtain "glorious liberty" in A.D. 70, but rather was judged and destroyed. How can the full preterist apply this to Israel when Paul says their time will not come until the long, indefinite period called the times of the Gentiles is fulfilled (Rom. 11:25)? As of this writing, the vast majority of those called Jews are still blind to the gospel. (Preaching the gospel is illegal in modern Israel.) (4) The renewal of the earth is tied by Paul to the redemption of our bodies. If Israel was liberated in A.D. 70, then the physical resurrection already happened. But it is obvious that the resurrection has not occurred. Charles Hodges' comments on this passage are excellent: "That *ktisis* here, is to be taken, not as meaning the whole human family, nor the heathen world, nor all rational creatures, but the whole creation with which we are immediately connected—the earth, and all its tribes of beings, man excepted—is the opinion of the great majority of commentators of all ages. It is supported by the following considerations: 1. In the first place, the words *pasa e ktisis*, *the whole creation*, are so comprehensive, that nothing should be excluded which the nature of the subjected and the context do not show cannot be embraced within the scope [Hodge goes on to explain why angels are excluded].... 2. In the second place, the apostle clearly distinguishes between the *ktisis* [creation] and, believers, the latter cannot be included in the former.... 3. Neither can 'the creature' [or creation] mean the race of mankind as distinguished from Christians...[because] (a) It cannot be said of the world of mankind, that they have an earnest expectation and desire for the manifestation of the sons of God.... (b) It cannot be said, in its full and proper force, that mankind were brought into their present state, not by their own act, or 'willingly,' but by the act and power of God. The obvious meaning of verse 20 seems to be, that the fact that the creature was subjected to its present state, not by itself, but by God, is the reason, at once, why it longs for deliverance, and may hope to obtain it.... (c) A still greater difficulty is found in reconciling this interpretation

At the end of the pronouncement of punishments against man, we read that, after a whole life of sweat, toil and struggle, all men will die physically. “For dust you are, and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19). Although a number of interpreters see this as only meaning that man’s hard toil has a terminus in death, in this context it must be seen as part of the general penalty. This penalty now determines that man’s body, which was his instrument for dominion, must decay and return to the dust from which it came. As Paul says, “Death came into the world through sin” (Rom. 5:12). Spiritual death is the direct cause of physical death.³⁹ This statement is a confirmation of the threat of death given earlier. The moment Adam ate the forbidden fruit he died spiritually and became a mortal, perishable creature. His clock of mortality, so to speak, began to tick. Man’s body “was *made dust*, and was still so; so that there needed no more than to recall the grant of immortality, and to withdraw the power which was put forth to support it, and then he would, of course, *return to dust*.”⁴⁰ The fact that Adam and his wife Eve were not killed

with ver. 21. How can it be said of mankind, as a whole, that they are to be delivered from the bondage of corruption, and made partakers of the glorious liberty of the children of God? And, especially, how can this be said to occur at the time of the manifestation of the sons of God, *i.e.*, at the time of the second advent, the resurrection day, when the consummation of the Redeemer’s kingdom is to take place? According to the description here given, the whole creation is to groan under its bondage until the day of redemption, and then it also is to be delivered. This description can, in no satisfactory sense, be applied to mankind, as distinguished from the people of God. (d) This interpretation does not suit the spirit of the context or drift of the passage. The apostle is represented as saying, in substance, ‘The very nature and condition of the human race point to a future state: they declare that this is an imperfect, frail, dying, unhappy state; that man does not and cannot attain the end of his being here; and even Christians, supported as they are by the earnest of future glory, still find themselves obliged to sympathize with others in these sufferings, sorrows, and deferred hopes.’ But how feeble and attenuated is all this, compared to the glowing sentiments of the apostle! His object is not to show that this state is one of frailty and sorrow, and that Christians must feel this as well as others. On the contrary, he wishes to show that the sufferings of this state are utterly insignificant in comparison with the future glory of the sons of God. And then to prove how great this glory is, he says, the whole creation, with outstretched neck, has been longing for its manifestation from the beginning of the world; groaning not so much under present evil as from the desire for future good” (*A Commentary on Romans* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, (1835, 64) 1972], 270-271).

³⁹ That the Jews did not regard physical death as good or natural is quite obvious. The Psalms often speak of the great blessedness of a life lived in communion with God and His people; and of death as an enemy or threat (cf. Ps. 6:4 ff.; 86:2-14; 30:2-4; 116:1-4, etc). When Hezekiah became sick and was told that he would die, he wept bitterly, prayed and was healed of his sickness (Isa. 38:1-5). Resurrections unto earthly *temporal* life (e.g., 1 Kgs. 17:17-24; 2 Kgs. 4:31-37; 13:20-21) were viewed as great blessings because death in the middle of one’s days (Ps. 102:25; Isa. 38:10) was viewed as bad, unacceptable and even, in certain contexts, a judgment. The Jews’ view of man and the future bodily resurrection influenced their method of dealing with dead bodies. Instead of burning or cremation, which was common among certain heathen tribes and nations, the Hebrews treated the dead body with utmost respect as if they were placing it in safe storage for the day of resurrection (e.g., Mt. 27:57-60; Lk. 23:50-56; Jn. 19:38-42; note verse 40 reads “as was the custom of the Jews to bury”). Interestingly, to not receive a proper burial, but to be left out in the open to be consumed by animals was regarded as a curse (cf. 2 Kgs. 9:16; Jer. 8:1-3; 16:4-6; Isa. 14:19). By the second century after the birth of Christ, the Jewish rabbis were teaching that anyone who denied the future resurrection of the body was excluded from the world to come. (see Mishnah, Sanh. 10.1a). That non-Hellenized Jews believed in the resurrection of the body during the inter-testamental period is proven by the account of a Jewish elder (Razis) who lived during the period of the Seleucid persecution. When he knew that his capture by the hated Greeks was inescapable, he disemboweled himself with a sword. In the non-inspired apocryphal book, 2 Maccabees 14:46, we read, “Finally, standing on a sheer rock, and now completely drained of blood, he took his entrails in both hands and flung them at the crowd. And thus invoking the Lord of life and breath to give these entrails back to him again, he died” (NEB).

⁴⁰ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (McClean, VA: McDonald, n.d.), 1:32. The great Hebrew scholar and expositor Edward J. Young makes observations regarding this passage that are noteworthy: “Again an emphasis upon death. Having been formed of the dust of the ground man is to return to that dust. Man had wanted to be like God, but he is only dust. Herein is the culmination of the threat ‘thou shalt surely die.’ As soon as man had

physically the very moment they sinned was an act of grace, so that a Seed could be born of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent (cf. Gen. 3:15).

Exclusion from the Tree of Life

Third, that the fall of Adam results in spiritual death leading to physical demise is proven beyond a shadow of doubt by the expulsion narrative in Genesis 3:

Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”—therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life (22-24).

As a result of eating the forbidden fruit God drove out Adam from the garden. The verb “drove out” “is a stronger term than ‘send out’ used in v. 22. It is often used in the Pentateuch of the expulsion of the inhabitants of Canaan (e.g., Exod. 23:28-31).”⁴¹ The idea is that Jehovah drove Adam out of the garden completely as an act of judgment. Adam did not leave the garden because he wanted to. He was thrown out because of his sin. Sin results in spiritual death as well as separation and alienation from God. The time when Adam walked and talked with Jehovah in the cool breeze of paradise is over. Adam must leave and enter the realm of thorns and thistles. Not only is Adam forced to leave Eden, but cherubim and a flaming sword are stationed to make sure that the man does not attempt to reenter Eden. What is the main purpose of this expulsion and the guards with the sword of fire? God wants to make sure that Adam is completely shut off from access to the tree of life, because if he takes from the tree and eats he will live forever. This prohibition was given as a necessary consequence of the fall. It obviously implies that had Adam not sinned, he would have had free access to this tree and not died physically. He also would eventually have obtained glorification and everlasting heavenly life. “The actual tree in the Garden of Eden could enable Adam and Eve to live endlessly if they could continue eating its fruit. But their access to that tree had been conditioned upon their obedience. By cutting mankind from access to the tree of life, by barring access to it, men could then be prepared to receive the true tree of life, Jesus Christ.”⁴²

One can only conclude from this narrative that death is unnatural. It is a result of sin and a consequence of separation from God. From the moment Adam ate the fruit he was a dying creature. If one argues that Adam was created mortal and corruptible and would have died even if he had never sinned, then the denial of access to the tree of life makes no sense. Moreover, those who argue that the fall only causes sin-death or spiritual death because the penalty had to

disobeyed God he became mortal. The power of death came over him and the germ of death entered his nature. He was separated from God and in the throes of spiritual, eternal death. The germ must ripen, and when it does man’s body will be dissolved and return to the dust from which he was taken. We must note the force of the word ‘till.’ It is not used in a chronological sense, as though merely to teach that man would eat bread until his return to the dust. Rather, it is emphatic and climactic in force. Man is to eat bread and this eating of bread as a result of hard toil will culminate in death. Man is the loser in his struggle with the ground, for, as it were, the ground will at last overcome him. Death is not the natural end for man, but a tragic punishment for his disobedience” (*Genesis 3: A Devotional and Expository Study* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1966], 138-139).

⁴¹ Gordon J. Wenham, 85.

⁴² Rousas John Rushdoony, *Genesis* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 2002), 42.

begin the very day the fruit was eaten, fail to take into consideration that Adam's expulsion from the Garden and the tree of life is connected to his physical death. Adam was already spiritually dead when he was excluded from Eden. Therefore, physical death had to be the consequence of this permanent exclusion, even a death over 900 years later.

In addition, Jesus died on the cross and rose again that through Him we might recover what Adam lost as our federal head. Obviously, if Adam had obeyed he would have had access to the tree of life. The tree of life signified and sealed both unending physical life (the immortality of the body) as well as glorification and the happiness of eternal fellowship with God that glorification guaranteed. Scripture refers to Christ as the tree of life because He completely obliterated the consequences of the fall for His people and restores that life to His church whose promise the tree of life could have sealed to our first parents. Turretin writes, "Truly he is the only tree because no one except Christ is the author of eternal life (nor is there salvation in any other, Acts 4:12). No one except Christ is in the midst of paradise (Rev. 2:7) and of the street of the city (Rev. 22:2). Christ is in the midst of the church (as a more honorable and suitable place) to be near all and diffuse his vivifying power among all; to be seen by all, as the center in which all the lines of faith and love ought to meet, that they may acquiesce in him."⁴³

Why Did Jesus Have to Die Physically?

Fourth, the full preterist idea that Adam only suffered sin-death (or spiritual death) and that physical death is natural is explicitly disproved by the atoning death of Christ. If physical death was not a direct consequence of sin, then Jesus did not have to die physically to redeem the elect. His suffering would have been sufficient by itself. But the Scriptures emphasize the fact that, as a sacrifice for sin, our Lord's atoning work was brought to completion by His death. Jesus "became obedient to the point of death" (Phil. 2:8). Paul says, "We were reconciled to God through the death of His Son" (Rom. 5:10). "Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6). "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). "Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him" (Rom. 6:8). "For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all" (Rom. 6:10). "It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen" (Rom. 8:34). When Paul summarizes the gospel he writes, "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). "If One died for all, then all died; and He died for all that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again" (2 Cor. 5:14-15). "We believe that Jesus died and rose again" (1 Thess. 4:14). Our Lord came for "the suffering of death" (Heb. 9:15). Because the penalty for sin is death, "no degree of suffering would have been sufficient as an atonement for our sins without the actual death of the sacrifice.... Jesus Christ might have suffered all that He did suffer without a total extinction of life: but He must not only suffer,—He must also die."⁴⁴ The death of Christ was necessary to satisfy divine justice. Hodge writes,

He was put to death, and we in him. To be slain to the law, means to be freed from the law by death. Death, indeed, not our own, but ours vicariously, as we are crucified in Christ, who died on the cross in our behalf, in our stead. It is therefore added by the body of Christ, i.e. by his body as slain. He redeemed us from the law by death; "by being a curse," Gal. iii. 13; "by his

⁴³ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1997), 1:582.

⁴⁴ Robert Haldane, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1874] 1958), 197.

blood,” Eph. i.7, ii.13; “by his flesh,” Eph. iii.15; “by the cross,” Eph. ii.16; “by the body of his flesh,” Col. i. 22. These are all equivalent expressions. They all teach the same doctrine, that Christ bore our sins upon the tree; that his suffering and death were a satisfaction to justice, and, being so intended and accepted, they effect our deliverance from the penalty of the law.⁴⁵

Indeed, “He is the mediator of the new covenant, by means of death” (Heb. 9:15).

The sacrificial death of Christ is the whole point of the Old Testament sacrificial rituals. Whenever cleansing from sin was required, a clean animal had to be slain and there had to be a blood ritual, for blood represents the essence of life (Lev. 17:10-11). The blood of a slain clean animal was used to make atonement, for the relationship with God could not be renewed without it. Christ suffered, shed His blood and gave His life in the place of His people. Christians are “justified by His blood” (Rom. 5:9). If sin-death (or spiritual death) has no relationship to physical death at all because physical death is natural, then Christ’s physical death was arbitrary. It was unnecessary and merely served a dramatic role. Such a view is radically defective and unbiblical.

As the second Adam who came to save His people from the first Adam’s and their own sins, Jesus suffered *the full penalty for sin*. Therefore, if we want to learn what the consequences or punishments for sin are, we simply need to look at the divine punishments that the Savior experienced. There are basically three: (1) Our Lord experienced separation and alienation from God on the cross. “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” (Mt. 27:46). (2) He also experienced the suffering, curse, pain, anguish and dread that attend alienation from God, His wrath and displeasure. “Thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer” (Lk. 24:46). “Christ also suffered for us” (1 Pet. 2:21). “Christ suffered for us in the flesh” (1 Pet. 4:1). “And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly” (Lk. 22:44). “A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief...He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted” (Isa. 53:3, 4). (3) Finally, He suffered physical death on the cross and His soul was separated from His body. “He was cut off from the land of the living.... He poured out His soul unto death” (Isa. 53:8, 12). “They made His grave with the wicked” (Isa. 53:9). “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3).

Given all of this evidence, the penal consequences of Adam’s sin in the Garden cannot be limited to spiritual death. The term death in the Genesis narrative must include death in the widest sense of that term. It comprehends spiritual death and all the misery which flows from our estrangement from God. It affects the soul as well as the body and is the very antithesis of life in the broad sense of the term. Adam’s physical death was guaranteed the moment he ate the fruit. It is organically connected to his spiritual death.

Because full preterists do not understand the relationship between sin and physical death, they pervert the meaning of the resurrection. Jesus had to suffer and die to pay for our sin and conquer death. In order to be raised from the dead, our Lord had to first die on the cross and be buried in a tomb. In order to forever conquer death for His people, He had to pay the penalty in full and then take possession of His enemies’ stronghold. Death and corruption could not hold Him, so He emerged from the grave victorious. He now holds the keys of the grave because He passed in and out again and has earned by His redemptive work free entrance and free exit for us. We will receive resurrected bodies at the second coming of our Lord that are glorious, incorruptible, spiritual, and powerful because Jesus submitted to death and was raised. Christ

⁴⁵ Charles Hodge, *Romans* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1864] 1972), 216-217.

died to save our bodies as well as our souls. The resurrection of the dead in Christ is called the “redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:23).

But with the doctrine of the fall as only entailing sin-death (or spiritual death) the full preterist can either define the general resurrection as merely some kind of spiritual experience; or, as only a release of souls from Hades; or, the creation of a completely new and different spiritual body that has no connection with the previous body that lived on earth. They, in essence, disconnect Christ’s literal resurrection from the believer’s bodily resurrection. They are supposedly two very different resurrections. All of this equivocating, faulty exegesis, creative theologizing and heresy flow from the rejection of physical death’s connection with the fall. Consequently, when they come to Paul’s statement about the end of death at the second coming of Christ (“For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy *that* will be destroyed *is* death. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘*Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?*’ The sting of death *is* sin, and the strength of sin *is* the law. But thanks *be* to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” [1 Cor. 15:25, 26, 54-57]), they deny that it means exactly what it says. In their theologically perverted worldview death continues forever. (If they deny this charge and posit a future terminus of death and suffering, they can only do so by contradicting their own system. Moreover, since they believe everything in Scripture has already been fulfilled, they cannot appeal to the Bible to argue that at some future time sin and death comes to an end. Consequently, *they deny the efficacy of Christ’s death and resurrection to ultimately defeat death and the consequences of Adam’s fall.* What a disgusting and pitiful heresy!)

Excursus on Full Preterist Attempts to Justify Physical Death before the Fall

The attempts to justify the full preterist position that physical death is good, normal and natural to God’s created order *before the fall* are erroneous and pitiful. Their typical proofs are as follows. First, they argue that physical death had to exist outside of the garden of Eden to serve as a spiritual warning to Adam. Moreover, they say that death had to exist before the fall so that Adam could understand what the threat of death meant.⁴⁶ Some full preterists even go so far as to say that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil implies that not only death, *but also evil existed before the fall.*⁴⁷ There are a number of serious problems with these arguments. (1) The idea that death had to exist outside the garden as a warning is an argument from silence. In addition, it assumes that God was unable to communicate the concept of sin, rebellion and evil to Adam *without first creating examples of death and evil to observe.* This is a great error. All orthodox theologians teach that Adam and Eve had natural law or the work of the moral law of

⁴⁶ In this section this author is referring to the arguments of the full preterist book *Beyond Creation Science: New Covenant Creation* by Timothy P. Martin and Jeffrey L. Vaughn (Whitehall, MT: Apocalyptic Vision Press, 2001, 05). On page 217 they write, “Physical death existed, outside the boundaries of the garden, at the very least, in order to serve as a *spiritual* warning to Adam. Death had to exist *before* the fall if Adam was to be informed in some manner about what God meant by the threat of death.”

⁴⁷ Martin and Vaughn write, “Also consider that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil also existed before the fall. This implies not only death, but evil existed *before* the fall. If death and evil existed before the fall in some form, then we should not be surprised if they exist in some form *after* Christ’s redemption is complete” (Ibid). According to an endnote they got the idea that God is the author of evil from a lecture by John Noe. Their book, which essentially teaches that God created evil and intends evil to exist in this world forever, was endorsed by: Don K. Preston, Walt Hibbard, Terry M. Hall, Ed Burley and many others.

God written upon their hearts (Rom. 2:15). Consequently, given this fact and the reality of direct revelation from God, it would be absurd to insist that God would have to create liars, thieves, adulterers and murderers so that Adam could understand these moral concepts. God could warn Adam about the consequences of sin without first having to directly create the consequences of sin which would violate His nature and character.

(2) The idea that God deliberately and *directly* placed evil into this world *before* the fall is blasphemous and contrary to all sound theology and exegesis. If God created evil before the fall, then God is the *direct author* of evil. This is biblically and theologically impossible. Jehovah is not the direct cause or responsible author of sin in this world, Adam is. "...Far be it from God to do wickedness, and from the Almighty to commit iniquity" (Job 34:10). God is absolutely holy and righteous and hates sin and evil (Isa. 6:3; Dt. 32:4; Ps. 92:16). He cannot be tempted and does not tempt man to sin (Jas. 1:13). The Bible explicitly teaches that, after God created this world, He proclaimed it to be "very good" (Gen. 1:31). If evil existed, then God would be proclaiming evil itself to be "very good." Such a view is obviously irrational and wrong. Full preterist attempts to justify physical death before the fall have led them not only to deny the gospel (i.e. They argue that Jesus' physical death was not a substitutionary atonement, but was necessary *only* in order to produce the resurrection as a *sign* to the Jews. Others argue that Jesus died so His soul could go to Hades and release the Old Testament saints trapped there.), but also to pervert the doctrine of God.

Second, full preterists argue that death, calamity, violence, hurricanes, meteor impacts, tornadoes, tsunamis and the like were built into the fabric of creation by God to teach human beings to beware of God.⁴⁸ They say that before the fall nature was naturally dangerous so that we would understand that God is inherently dangerous.⁴⁹ What is the problem with this kind of reasoning? It ignores the fact that God is only dangerous to people who sin and rebel against Him. Adam and Eve were without sin and lived in paradise. The Bible explicitly teaches that the earth only became cursed as a result of Adam's sin (Gen. 3:17-19). Also, the full preterist reasoning, once again, ignores the fact that God communicated His will to Adam about rebellion through *direct revelation*. The full preterist posits a universe where God's wrath against sin is exhibited *before* sin even exists. God does not need to create death, suffering, evil and calamity to warn man against sin. His verbal revelation is sufficient. Like the previous argument, here the full preterist makes God the direct cause and responsible agent of evil and not man. Such a view should be *immediately rejected* by any Bible-believing Christian.

Third, full preterists argue that the Hebrew terms used in the Bible for various carnivores (e.g., "lion" means "violent"; "hawk" means "tearing") indicate that Adam described a world *already* full of death and destruction (i.e. nature red in tooth and claw) *before* the fall. This argument is refuted by the following considerations. (1) Given the biblical history and what modern scholars know about linguistics, it is extremely unlikely that Adam spoke Hebrew in the garden of Eden. All men were of *one* "race" and spoke *one* language until God divided the human race and made several different languages at the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). These few languages are the large branches that come out of the main trunk from which all languages

⁴⁸ "Those who believe there was no biological death before the fall suggest the original creation was *tame* and *safe* in its entirety. But would that not teach falsehood about the biblical God? Is God tame and safe?" (Ibid, 217-218). Here we see why the full preterist extends evil and suffering into eternity. Evil, calamity, suffering and death exist so man can know God's nature and character, they say. Not only does the full preterist ignore the fact that God can reveal Himself to us in special revelation without creating evil as an object lesson, but they essentially teach a form of dualism. Evil becomes externalized forever as a *necessary* symbolism.

⁴⁹ "The creation [before the fall] is naturally dangerous, because *God* is inherently dangerous" (Ibid, 218).

evolved. It is likely that one of these languages was a proto-Semitic language out of which developed Hebrew and other Semitic languages. We must remember that Adam stands in the same relationship to the Hebrew language as he does to Chinese, Indo-European, Latin and African tongues. Adam was no more a Semite than an Indian or Japanese person. Moreover, even if Adam spoke Hebrew (which is exceptionally improbable given Gen. 11:9, “The LORD confused the language of *all the earth*”), languages are so fluid that it is extremely unlikely that Adam could even have a conversation with Moses. (We, for example, would be completely unable to communicate with an Anglo-Saxon from Roman times.)

(2) The names that Adam gave the animals are *not recorded in Scripture*. Thus, their argument is an assumption based on no evidence. The Hebrew names of animals written down thousands of years after Adam and Eve lived would have probably originated with the Semitic tribes in the Middle East and not in the garden of Eden.

(3) The full preterist argument assumes that Adam went outside of paradise to observe the various wild, dangerous and savage practices of the animals as they ripped each other apart and then named the animals accordingly. This assumption is refuted in two ways. a) The biblical text says that God brought the animals to Adam to see what he would call them (Gen. 2:19). God certainly did not bring the animals into paradise so they could tear each other apart in Adam’s presence. Moreover, even full preterists think of the violence, suffering bloodshed, brutality and death that existed at that time as occurring outside of Eden. b) The biblical account explicitly teaches that before the fall both man and animals were vegetarians. “And God said, ‘See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which *is* on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food. Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food’; and it was so” (Gen. 1:29-30). Verse 30 means exactly what it says. “[T]his verse is an indication of the perfect harmony prevailing in the animal world. No beast preyed upon the other. Rapacious and ferocious wild beasts did not exist. This verse, then, indicates very briefly for this chapter what is unfolded at length in chapter two, that a paradise-like state prevailed at creation.”⁵⁰ As Victor P. Hamilton writes, “Man is to have as his food the seed and fruit of plants. Animals and birds are to have the leaves. (The latter point accords with the description of the eschatological age when ‘the lion shall eat straw like the ox,’ Isa. 11:7; 65:25). At no point is anything (human beings, animals, birds) allowed to take the life of another living being and consume it for food. The dominion assigned to the human couple over the animal world does not include the prerogative to butcher. Instead, humankind survives on a vegetarian diet.”⁵¹ Those who object to what the Bible teaches in this passage based on the way carnivores function or appear today are simply guilty of unbelief.

Some will object to this interpretation and will argue that we do not find an *explicit* prohibition upon killing animals and using them for food in this passage. The problem with this objection is that this kind of positive command is clearly designed to limit man’s diet. It presupposes such a prohibition. When God says, “This is what I have given you to eat as food,” it has the same sense as “this is what you are permitted to eat.” With this positive command God does not need to set forth a laundry list of forbidden items. The fact that they are *not* permitted automatically excludes them. Similarly, when God told Moses to speak to the rock, it implied that striking the rock instead would be an act of disobedience (Num. 20:8-12; Dt. 32:50-51).

⁵⁰ H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Columbus, OH: The Watburg Press, 1942), 98-99.

⁵¹ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, 140.

Further, when God presented Eve to Adam to be his wife, He automatically excluded all homosexual relationships including sodomite and lesbian marriages.

Moreover, the full preterist scenario of nature before the fall as full of violence, bloodshed, pain, suffering and death *contradicts* the broad context of Scripture. If Adam and Eve could kill or scavenge dead animals to supplement their diet, then why did God give Noah specific permission to eat animals after the flood (Gen. 9:3-4)? Why do the Scriptures say specifically that the victory of Christ's kingdom will result in the *end* of animal upon animal violence; that even the most dangerous carnivores will be vegetarians (e.g., Isa. 11:7)? If the full preterist objects to this point by saying that the end of animal upon animal violence and killing is not to be taken literally because it is a metaphor for peace, then they still have an insurmountable problem. Note, if animal upon animal violence and killing were taking place *prior* to the fall and was a *good thing*, then why (even if the prophecy is simply a metaphor) would the exclusion of this violence and killing be presented to us by God as *one of the great benefits of Christ's victorious kingdom*? According to full preterists this cessation of death and violence would not be natural or good. In fact, as we have noted, they teach that a world without violence, suffering, pain and death would communicate a *false picture of God*. The only logical conclusion that we can come to based on the prophetic picture of the kingdom is that God regards violence, suffering and death, *even in the animal kingdom*, as abnormal, as a consequence of sin, as a perversion of the created order.

Fourth, full preterists will point to passages that compare beautiful, lush, post fall geographical areas to Eden (e.g., Gen. 13:10; Joel 2:3) and argue that *all the conditions* in the post fall lush area must be attributed to the garden in paradise.⁵² This argument should be rejected for the following reasons. (1) The point of the comparison regards *only* the beauty and lushness of a place. We have no exegetical or logical reasons to assume that the inspired authors of such passages are telling us that death, disease, calamity, destruction and animals ripping each other apart, existed in the garden of Eden. Are we to believe that God had to protect Adam and Eve from malaria-bearing mosquitoes or encephalitis or hungry crocodiles? That does not sound like paradise at all. (2) It also ignores the explicit statements in Scripture that tell us the earth was subjected to a curse as a *direct consequence of Adam's sin* (Gen. 3:14-19; Rom. 8:19-22). Thorns and thistles existed in Egypt, but they did not exist in Eden.

Fifth, full preterists appeal to the way in which God made the ostrich as proof that biological death existed before the fall. They quote Job 39:13-17 (NIV): "The wings of the ostrich flap joyfully, but they cannot compare with the pinions and feathers of the stork. She lays her eggs on the ground and lets them warm in the sand, unmindful that a foot may crush them, that some wild animal may trample them. She treats her young harshly, as if they were not hers; she cares not that her labor was in vain, *for God did not endow her with wisdom or give her a share of good sense.*"⁵³ All that this passage is telling us is that God did not create ostriches with much intelligence or brain power. This is true of innumerable creatures. An animal's lack of intelligence, however, tells us nothing about whether or not death or evil existed prior to the fall. The statement about eggs being crushed, and so forth, describes conditions they existed in Job's own day. There are no exegetical reasons whatsoever to assume that such conditions existed prior to the fall. This full preterist argument (once again) is based on an assumption with no actual proof.

⁵² E.g., Martin and Vaughn, 222.

⁵³ Ibid, 223. The NIV is their preferred text.

We have seen in this brief excursus that there are no good reasons for abandoning the traditional orthodox understanding of the creation and the fall. The full preterist heresy teaches us a very important lesson: that a radical, foundational perversion of eschatology leads to a heretical perversion of protology—the history of the beginning.

Chapter 3: The Old Testament Evidence for a Bodily Resurrection

The Old Testament Scriptures contain few references to the hope of the bodily resurrection. This is an area of thought that becomes much clearer as revelation progresses into the New Covenant era. (This observation, however, does not at all mean that the bodily resurrection was unknown or unimportant to the Old Testament people of God.) Since the redemptive work of Christ was only gradually revealed and since the resurrection of the body unto eternal life is a result of Jesus' conquering of death, it makes perfect sense that there are only a few explicit references to the bodily resurrection in the Old Covenant Scriptures.

In the Old Testament, the language of resurrection is used to describe four types of resurrection. (1) There is the resurrection of various persons to a renewed mortal life (1 Kgs. 17:21-22; 2 Kgs. 4:32-35; 13:21). These persons were raised but then grew old and died like everyone else. (2) Vivid resurrection terminology is used in a metaphorical sense to describe a future spiritual and national restoration of God's people out of captivity and judgment (e.g., Ezek. 37:1-14, some expositors and theologians see a double fulfillment in this passage; Hos. 6:2). Some full preterists attempt to use these passages to redefine the other passages that speak of the general bodily resurrection. In other words, the passages that have been used for two thousand years as proof texts for the resurrection of the body on the last day really only refer to Israel's deliverance from sin-death in A.D. 70. The problem with this view is that national Israel was *not* delivered in A.D. 70, but rather was destroyed. Moreover, any Jews who were saved between A.D. 30 and A.D. 70, as well as throughout history, were redeemed by believing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Messiah who died for them on the cross and rose from the dead for them. In addition, the only possible *en masse* conversion of Jews that the New Testament speaks of (Lk. 21:24; Rom. 11:25 ff.) clearly has not yet occurred. Although Jews here and there have been turning to Christ for almost two thousand years, the vast majority of those that call themselves Jews are still spiritually blind and are enemies of the gospel. The only way for Israel as a nation or moral person (i.e. an organic body of people) to be delivered from "sin-death" would be for a *majority* of Jews to confess Christ and join themselves to Bible-believing Protestant churches. Such a wonderful historical event obviously has not taken place. (3) There are at least three references to the resurrection of the Messiah (Isa. 53:10; Ps. 2:7; 16:9-11). These passages can only be understood through the further light of the New Testament canon. (4) There are references to the future bodily resurrection of believers to immortality (Job 19:25-27; Dan. 12:2; Ps. 16:9-11, implied; Isa. 25:8; 26:19) and unbelievers to everlasting shame (Dan. 12:2). The universal view of non-Hellenized, theologically "conservative" Jews was in a future, literal, bodily resurrection of the righteous.⁵⁴

As we study the Old Testament on the resurrection, our focus will be only on passages that speak of a general bodily resurrection. If we do not impose a theological paradigm on these

⁵⁴ The Sadducees who denied the resurrection of the body were the theological liberals of their day. They denied the inspiration and authority of the whole Old Testament canon except the five books of Moses. They denied the existence of angelic beings and even that man had a soul or spirit (Ac. 23:8). They were skeptics that liked to come up with clever arguments to make a mockery of the Scripture (cf. Mt. 22:23-33; Mk. 12:18-27; Lk. 20:27-28).

passages, but instead accept what they plainly teach, we will see that the orthodox Christian understanding of the general resurrection has its roots in the Older Testament.

Before we turn our attention to the traditional, more explicit passages on the resurrection, let us consider a few passages that imply a bodily resurrection. In the song of Moses, the Israelites sang, “There is no God besides Me; I kill and I make alive” (Dt. 32:39). This is not simply a statement that God is the author of life, but that God can also raise the dead. Abraham understood this truth, for the author of Hebrews says that the patriarch was willing to kill his son because he believed “that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead” (11:9). The writer of Hebrews writes that the godly patriarchs all died in faith because they were looking forward to a city prepared for them in a heavenly country (11:16). This implies more than a hope to go to Sheol or Hades. In the Old Testament there were the bodily translations and ascensions of Enoch (Gen. 5:23-24; cf. Heb. 11:5) and Elijah (2 Kgs. 2:11, 12). These men obtained eternal life with God in heaven *with their physical bodies still united to their souls*. This implies not only that God can transform our fallen physical bodies and make them fit for a heavenly environment, but also that there is a blessed future for the saints in their complete persons, both *body and soul*. If the full preterist theory were true, then only Enoch, Elijah and Jesus have true glorified, spiritual bodies that are really their own bodies. (The only way to avoid such a strange idea would be to assert that at some undetermined time they shed their bodies and put them in storage or let them dissolve. Such a view is unsupportable by Scripture, arbitrary and absurd. Moreover, it radically denigrates the true humanity of the theanthropic Mediator.)

Job 19:25-27

Perhaps the earliest explicit reference to an eschatological resurrection comes from the pen of the patriarch Job: “For I know *that* my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this *I know*, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. *How* my heart yearns within me!” Although this passage is difficult in Hebrew and has resulted in a rather wide range of translations, conservative Bible-believing scholars agree that it presents a graphic picture of the resurrection of the body.

That Job is speaking of a bodily eschatological resurrection is supported by the following considerations: (1) Job introduces these comments by a solemn preface (vs. 23, 24) that indicate that he wants this statement recorded for all the generations to come. He wants his words written in a book. He wants these verses written in stone with an iron pen as a permanent monument. If he were only speaking about his health being restored, there would be no need of so magnificent a memorial. (2) The reference to his Redeemer living and standing at last on the earth is a reference to the second coming of Christ. (Job may not have *fully* understood the complete meaning of his own inspired words.) “The Septuagint understands Christ by *g’l* and by standing upon the earth, the resurrection itself.”⁵⁵ “‘Arise above the dust,’ strikingly expresses the fact that Jesus Christ *arose* first Himself *above the dust*, and then is to *raise* His people *above* it (1 Cor. xv.20, 23).”⁵⁶ Job looks with faith toward the living Redeemer who will vindicate him in the last times of all, in the close of time, at the end of the world when He comes to judge the quick and the dead. “Upon the dust in which he is now soon to be laid, into which he is now soon to be

⁵⁵ Turretin, 3:563.

⁵⁶ A. R. Fausset, *A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical on the Old and New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 2:47.

changed, will He, the Rescuer of his honour, arise...Oetinger's interpretation is substantially the same: 'I know that He will at last come, place Himself over the dust in which have mouldered away, pronounce my cause just, and place upon me the crown of victory.'"⁵⁷

(3) That Job is speaking of a literal bodily resurrection is proven by his references to *skin*, *flesh*, and *eyes*. He is not a disembodied spirit when His Redeemer comes; nor does he merely see the Savior with the mind's eyes. The whole point is that he will behold Christ with a real physical (yet spiritual) body. Long after Job dies and his body turns to dust, he will arise and look upon God with his own eyes. "Nor is it an objection that he adds, 'whom I shall behold with mine eyes, and not another,' as if he was speaking of a thing which pertains to himself alone. By attributing the vision to himself in particular, he does not deny it concerning others, but intimates that he, in his own body (which had died), and not another, would arise and see God."⁵⁸ This observation disproves the full preterist theory that at the resurrection the saints' dead bodies do not arise from the grave, but are replaced with completely new and different bodies.

(4) That Job's hope was in a bodily resurrection is also demonstrated by the fact that he had no faith or hope that his health was going to be restored. He had resigned himself to the probability that his sickness was unto death and, therefore, was looking forward to a far greater, nobler deliverance at the resurrection. He did not expect to be fully vindicated before his accusers until the day of judgment. The common modern objection that the idea of the bodily resurrection entered Judaism quite late is nothing more than the speculation of modernists. This passage makes it very clear that the hope of the resurrection of the body unto eternal life was a centerpiece of Job's faith.

Daniel 12:1-2

At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands *watch* over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, *even* to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame *and* everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever. (Dan. 12:1-3)

In Daniel 12:1-2 we find a passage which speaks clearly about a simultaneous bodily resurrection of the righteous and the wicked from the dead. Although verse two is not hard to understand, the context of this verse has engendered much disagreement. Verse one refers back to the time of the end described in 11:40-45. Although it is generally acknowledged that chapter 11 up to verse 40 is discussing the period of conflict between Egypt and Syria (i.e. the Ptolemies vs. Seleucids) and the activities of the Greek tyrant Antiochus Epiphanes (Antiochus is famous for a severe persecution of the people of God and for placing idols in the Temple and sacrificing a pig in the sanctuary—the abomination of desolation), verses 40-45 are interpreted in a number of ways. Some see these verses as a continuation of Antiochus Epiphanes' activities. Others see them as describing the activities of his ruling posterity. Still others attribute these verses to the conquest of the Roman Empire. There are dispensationalists who believe that this applies to a revived Roman Empire at the end of time. There are also a number of commentators who see a

⁵⁷ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 4:354.

⁵⁸ Turretin, 3:564.

double fulfillment; in other words, these verses apply to the period before the birth of Christ as well as the end of the world. Many full preterists believe that the passage refers to the destruction of Israel in A.D. 66-70 and consequently they teach that the general resurrection is an event in the distant past.

Without taking the time to figure out precisely what is the specific history of the inter-testamental period under discussion, there are a number of important things that we can learn from verse two. First, there is a *simultaneous resurrection* of both the righteous and the wicked. This fact eliminates a number of interpretations. (1) The premillennial dispensational idea of a separate and later resurrection of the wicked explicitly contradicts this passage. (2) The idea (based on the word “many”) that this is the partial resurrection of saints that occurred when Jesus rose from the dead (c. A.D. 30) is untenable because *only saints* came out of their tombs on that wonderful day (Mt. 27:52-53). There is no indication that wicked arose with Christ and there are no good theological reasons for such an occurrence. (3) The fact that both arise at the same time rules out any idea of a figurative meaning; for example, that this refers to the restoration of the Jewish nation or that this resurrection symbolizes regeneration. (4) It refutes the full preterist interpretation because they (at least most of them) believe in a progressive view of the resurrection from A.D. 70 onward for eternity. Daniel teaches a general resurrection followed by everlasting life (*hayye olam*) or everlasting contempt (*diron olam*).

Second, note that the righteous and the wicked who are dead will awake or come forth from the dust of the earth. Those who have died and turned to dust will come out of the dust. This passage refers to *literal* graves and a *literal* bodily resurrection. Something physical is happening. This reality refutes a number of ideas. (1) This cannot be a reference only to souls being set free from Hades, either at the resurrection of Christ or in A.D. 70. Souls do not go to sleep at death and they do not arise out of the dust. (2) It cannot refer to a bodily resurrection in A.D. 70 because the dust of the earth still contains the dust of the dead—both righteous and wicked. (3) In verse 12:13 Daniel is told that he also will arise on that day and will receive his reward at the end of history. (“But you, go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days.”) This verse also contradicts any conceptions of simply a release from Hades or a spiritual experience. Daniel’s body is at rest in the grave and will arise at the end of the days, the final period (the consummation). A.D. 70 was the end of the Jewish age, but it was not the end of the days. God does not have two separate bodily resurrections, one for Old Testament saints and one for the New. Everyone who is saved by Christ will arise together at the end of the world.

Given the plain teaching of Daniel 12:2 on the nature of the resurrection, we need to ask two questions. First, why does this prophecy speak of the final resurrection of the righteous and the wicked at the end of a section dealing with inter-testamental history that involves severe hardship and persecution of the righteous Jews (i.e. those Jews unwilling to compromise ethically and religiously to get along with their Greek and/or Roman overlords)? The reason was simple. The final resurrection was a special consolation and hope for persecuted Jews, as it would be for persecuted suffering Christians. After the great storm of persecution is over, the faithful Jews who have not soiled their garments with compromise will be recompensed according to their works at the resurrection. Moreover, their wicked persecutors, and the apostate Jews who supported them to save their skin, will suffer the just punishment that they deserve. God will avenge his saints. A time of full salvation and complete justice is coming. “And the apostle, speaking of the pious Jews that suffered martyrdom under Antiochus, tells us that though they were tortured yet they *accepted not deliverance*, because they *hoped to obtain this better*

resurrection, Heb. xi.35.”⁵⁹ Paul also grounded his hope on the resurrection of the dead (cf. Ac. 24:15; 1 Cor. 15:54-58; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; etc). The righteous awake to a resurrection of life and the rewards of grace while the wicked arise in their sins to eternal loathing and agony. Consequently, suffering for Christ and His kingdom is wise, right and definitely worth it. Our eyes must be looking forward to that great day.

Second, many expositors have been perplexed by Daniel’s use of “many” instead of using the word “all.” Some people ask, how could this be the final resurrection when the word “all” is not used in the passage? Did not our Lord say that “all” would come out of their graves (cf. Jn. 5:28)? The use of the word “many” is not a serious problem when we consider that “many” can have the sense of “all” in Scripture (e.g., Rom. 5:15, 19). The author is not emphasizing that every single person will arise, but simply that the resurrection would consist of a great number of people, a vast multitude. This is how the word is used in Psalm 97:1. An innumerable multitude of the dead will arise from the dust. As Calvin notes, “The word *many* seems here clearly put for all, and this is not to be considered as at all absurd, for the angel does not use the word in contrast with all or few, but only with one.”⁶⁰ “Here it is clear...that reference is made to the final resurrection, in which there shall be a separation of the good and the bad; not temporal, but eternal—as to eternal life and as to death and everlasting disgrace.”⁶¹

Once we understand the word “many” is not designed to teach a partial resurrection, then we see a striking resemblance between Daniel 12:2 and Jesus’ statement on the resurrection in John 5:28-29:

Daniel 12:2

Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake. Some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt.

John 5:28-29

The hour is coming in which all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

Virtually all commentators and theologians of the Christian church throughout the ages have regarded these passages as plain statements about the final resurrection.

That Christ Himself understood the Daniel 12:2 passage as a reference to the final resurrection is demonstrated by His probable allusion to Daniel 12:3 as the end of the parable of the tares. Note the striking similarities:

Daniel 12:3

Those who are wise shall shine like (LXX, *lampousin os*) the brightness (*lamppotes*) of the firmament, (cf. Ac. 26:13 where Paul says “the brightness of the sun,” *lamproteta tou eliou*)...forever and ever.

Matthew 13:43

Then the righteous will shine forth as (*eklampousin os*) the sun in the in the kingdom of their Father.

⁵⁹ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 4:1112.

⁶⁰ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Prophet Daniel*, 2:374.

⁶¹ Turretin, 3:565. Some commentators believe the word “many” is used because Daniel is focusing on the people who are alive at that time: the many who are righteous or faithful and the many who are wicked.

Full preterists ignore the nature of the resurrection described by Daniel and instead insist that the resurrection had to occur in A.D. 70 because Daniel connects the abomination that causes desolation (11:31; 12:11) with the resurrection (12:2). This view has serious problems and must be rejected for the following reasons. (1) In Daniel the abomination of desolation refers to the horrible sacrilege perpetrated by the infamous king Antiochus Epiphanes. “The reference is clearly to the events of 167 B.C., when Antiochus Epiphanes conquered Jerusalem and prohibited Jewish sacrificial worship, setting up an altar for pagan sacrifices (including the slaughter of pigs) on top of the altar of burnt offering (Josephus, Ant. 12.253).”⁶² When Jesus says, “When you see the ‘desecrating sacrilege’ spoke of by Daniel,” He is not necessarily saying that A.D. 70 is the *specific* fulfillment of Daniel, but that, just as the temple was desecrated under Antiochus, something like it will happen again. Lenski concurs, “Jesus does not say that Daniel prophesied the event that would usher in the destruction of Jerusalem. He says only that the same kind of abomination with the same kind of effect would appear in the Temple.”⁶³

Moreover, since it is obvious that no bodily resurrection occurred at the abomination of desolation that occurred in 167 B.C. (and continued for three years), then there is no reason to insist that a resurrection took place in A.D. 70. If the full preterist was consistent and argued for some type of double fulfillment (e.g., 167 B.C. and A.D. 70), then he should argue for two resurrections and not just one in A.D. 70. The full preterist is essentially no better than the dispensational futurist who ignores the original prophecy to look for a future revived Roman Empire and the Antichrist. The fact that no resurrection took place in 167 B.C. supports the orthodox Christian view of prophecy that at times God can place crucial information about distant events next to events that are soon to come to pass for the comfort and hope of believers. The great hope of persecuted believers in *every age* is the bodily resurrection at the end of history.

(2) There is nothing in Matthew 24 about a rapture of the living saints or a literal bodily resurrection. The dead bodies of the righteous and the wicked did not come forth from the dust. It simply did not happen. The full preterist can only arrive at a resurrection by redefining physical, literal resurrection out of existence. Moreover, as we noted in our discussion of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Jesus did not leave heaven in His theanthropic Person in A.D. 70. The second bodily coming of Christ and the eschatological events that surround it are for us still future.

Psalm 17:15

As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness.

In this Psalm David describes himself as a righteous man who earnestly desires the grace to be kept in a righteous and holy manner of life, even though he has enemies who desire to oppress, encircle and tear him apart. David seeks God’s loving kindness and deliverance from those who rise up against him. His inspired prayer closes with a great statement of faith in God’s complete love and salvation. David will behold God’s face and enjoy His presence. (The sight of God and His face is often referred to in Scripture as a great privilege that, generally speaking, is

⁶² R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 91.

⁶³ R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, [1943] 1964), 936.

denied to believers in this present life. It is something that is reserved for the next life and the time after the consummation [cf. Ex. 33:20; Jdg. 13:22; Mt. 5:8; 1 Cor. 13:12; 2 Cor. 3:18; 1 Jn. 3:2; Rev. 21:3, 23; 22:3-5]). David will receive perfect and complete satisfaction when he awakes from death in his resurrected body in God's likeness.

A very small number of commentators do not see a resurrection of the body in this passage. Therefore, we would benefit from looking at their arguments. One argument is that the term awaking means to awake from a literal sleep. This is based on the reference to night in verse three. But why would David expect to see God when he wakes up the next morning, or on the morning of any other day? Such a view is absurd. Another argument is that "waking" is a metaphor for deliverance from his present time of sorrow and suffering. This interpretation, however, is a completely inadequate explanation. Suffering and affliction is never compared in Scripture to sleeping. But, waking from death and sleep, as a metaphor for death, is common in the Bible (2 Kgs. 4:21; Isa. 26:19; Jn. 11:11; 1 Cor. 15:18; 1 Thess. 4:13, 14; etc). Some interpreters argue that it cannot refer to a hope of a bodily resurrection because at this point in God's history such a clear conception of the resurrection was unknown. The problem with this view is that Job 19:25-27 as well as Psalm 16 offer very clear proof that God's people did indeed already have a hope in the resurrection and the blessedness of the hereafter.

The only interpretation that does justice to this passage and the analogy of Scripture is that David will be truly satisfied when his soul is reunited with his body that awakens from the slumber of death to behold the face of God. This is the salvific climax to the request of verse 7, "Wondrously show thy steadfast love." Spurgeon writes, "The saints in heaven have not yet awaked in God's likeness. The bodies of the righteous still sleep, but they are to be satisfied on the resurrection morn, when they awake. When a Roman conqueror had been at war, and won great victories, he would return to Rome with his soldiers, enter privately into his house, and enjoy himself till the next day, when he would go out of the city to reenter it publicly in triumph. Now, the saints, as it were, enter privately into heaven without their bodies; but on the last day, when their bodies wake up, they will enter into their triumphal chariots."⁶⁴

Psalm 116:9-11

Therefore my heart is glad, and my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Sheol. Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.

Although Peter applies this passage directly to Jesus Christ in his Pentecost sermon (Ac. 2:25ff.) and points out that David is still moldering in the tomb, nevertheless this prophecy is directly linked with David's own hope of the redemption of his flesh or body. "So great victory over death and the grave is gotten by faith in Jesus Christ, that a believer can lay down his body, as in a bed, to rest it there, in hope of the resurrection."⁶⁵ "For those that are 'in Christ' do most

⁶⁴ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: An Expository and Devotional Commentary on the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1882-87] 1983), 1:252. "And since the doctrine of the resurrection of the just to a blessed and endless life was not unknown to the holy men of God in the Old Testament, as it were very easy to prove, nor to David in particular, as appears from Psal. xvi.10, 11, and from divers other passages, it cannot be imagined but David would support and comfort himself here opposing his hopes and portion to that of his enemies; and having noted, not without a secret reflection and reproach upon them for it, that their portion was in this life, ver. 14, it was most consonant to the place and to the thing itself, that he should seek and have his happiness in the future life." (Matthew Poole, *Commentary on the Holy Bible* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, (1700) 1962], 2:25.

⁶⁵ David Dickson, *A Commentary on the Psalms* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1653-55] 1959), 1:70.

assuredly share in the fruits of His resurrection has vindicated David's bold assertion of faith."⁶⁶ David has consolation in the redemption of his body because all of Jesus' own are delivered from the grave through His glorious resurrection. As our Lord said, "Because I live, ye shall also" (Jn. 14:19). If David's hope was only that his spirit would be released from Hades as some full preterists assert; or, that he would receive a completely different body that had nothing to do with his physical body as other full preterists assert, then his hope in Jesus' bodily-physical (yet spiritual) resurrection makes no sense. As we noted in our discussion of physical death as a consequence of spiritual death, the full preterist system cannot explain why Jesus had to die physically and then rise again in the same body (although now glorified) that died.

Isaiah 25:8

He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces; the rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; for the Lord has spoken.

This passage is applied specifically by Paul to the resurrection of the saints in 1 Corinthians 15:54 (cf. Hos. 13:14). (Paul, following a common LXX idiom, translates the Hebrew word "forever" as "victory.") The coming of Christ and the resurrection and glorification of the saints results in the abolition of death itself. After God says in verse seven that He would destroy (lit. "swallow") the veil or covering that represents the sorrow and suffering of the nations, Jehovah uses the same verb to tell us how their suffering and mourning will cease. God, through the death and resurrection of His Son, will put away sin and conquer death forever. Edward J. Young writes,

Isaiah uses the definite article with death, to stress the fact that it is well known that death has been a terror to mankind. Hitherto, death itself had swallowed up all else. As in Genesis 2:17 so here, the word "death" includes all the evils which attend it. When death is swallowed up, so also are all the miseries that it brings. Furthermore, death is to be swallowed up forever; it will never again reappear. Paul's interpretation is entirely true to the Old Testament: "death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:54b). The book of Revelation brings out the meaning clearly: "there shall be no more death" (Rev. 21:4b).

When God begins to reign on Zion, He will provide a feast of rich things for the nations, and He will at that time also swallow up death, so that there will not longer be any cause for mourning and sorrow. This is the entire picture in compact form. From the New Testament, moreover, we learn that with the establishment of the kingdom on Zion, the Church, the blessings herein predicted were indeed fulfilled. By His death Christ did swallow up death in victory. At the same time, we also learn from the New Testament that the effects of sin remain, and that only with the second advent of Christ will we see the promised blessings realized to their fullest extent. Isaiah is speaking of the fundamental victory of the Lord...⁶⁷

Jesus Christ has defeated death once and for all. This complete victory encompasses all the people of this earth (cf. Rom. 6:14; 1 Cor. 15:12-57; 1 Thess. 4:14; Rev. 1:17, 18; 21:4; etc). If Christ had not defeated death by the cross and the empty tomb, then the consequences of Adam's fall would still be in effect over this world and its peoples after the consummation. Moreover, as this verse makes clear, if we are not delivered from death and the sin which issues in death, then

⁶⁶ Hengstenberg as quoted in H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker [1959] 1969), 153.

⁶⁷ Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 2:196.

suffering and sorrow cannot be removed as well. But God promises to remove all heartache and sorrow. As a loving mother wipes away the tears of her child, Jehovah will wipe off our tear-stained faces. The removal of all forms of sorrow is obviously the consequence of the Messiah's complete victory over death. The Redeemer eliminates sin, guilt and pollution as well as all the consequences of sin at His final coming. Calvin's application of this verse is on the mark. He writes, "If we now 'sow in tears,' then undoubtedly we shall 'reap with joy' and ecstasy. (Psalm cxxvi.5). Let us not dread the insults or reproaches of men, which will one day procure for us the highest glory. Having obtained here the beginnings of this happiness and glory, by being adopted by God, and beginning to bear the image of Christ, let us firmly and resolutely await the completion of it at the last day."⁶⁸

Full preterism tragically makes a complete mockery of this verse and others like it. God says that Christ will swallow up death in victory. The full preterist teaches that death is natural and will continue forever. The Bible clearly asserts that the consequences of the fall such as suffering, sorrow and tears will be obliterated and removed forever by God's Son at His coming. The full preterist worldview extends suffering tears and anguish into eternity. They have greatly reduced the salvation of Christ to an individualistic progressive saving of a few souls here and there in a world of misery and sin that extends into eternity. The defeat of Satan, sin and death and the regeneration of all things at the cross is never brought to completion. In their worldview it can never be brought to completion because they substitute a national judgment upon Israel in the middle of history for the second bodily coming of Christ at the end of history.

Isaiah 26:19

Thy dead shall arise; my dead bodies shall arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust; for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast forth the dead" (ASV).⁶⁹

The context of this passage is that "the people have not been able to deliver themselves from oppression in all its forms and demonstrate God's power to the world by striking down the oppressive world power. As the following verse makes plain, the implication is that instead of new life resulting from the struggle, only death has resulted. This raises the underlying question of the lament: it is fine to believe that God will one day be crowned on Mount Zion and invite all saints to feast with him in the presence of their enemies, but what about all those saints who had lived and struggled and died in the meantime with no apparent result?"⁷⁰

In verse 19 we see the answer to the implied question of verses 17 and 18. Isaiah gives an inspired response that God will restore what the saints have lost. All of the godly people who lived and died without seeing the victory of the Messiah will rise again out of their graves. This verse is not intended to be taken figuratively. The statement "my dead bodies shall arise" emphasizes that the dead are bodies or corpses. Isaiah is not speaking merely of spirits in Sheol,

⁶⁸ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, 2:199-200.

⁶⁹ The King James Version translates this verse, "Thy dead men shall live, *together with* my dead body shall they arise." The reason for the difference in translation between the KJV and the ASV is that "my dead body" is singular while the verb "shall arise" is plural. The American Standard Version translation has been chosen over the KJV and NKJV because the singular noun "my corpse" is *feminine* while the plural verb is *masculine*. This indicates that the noun is used collectively for God's people and thus very likely does not represent Christ as in the KJV (Although the KJV translation certainly follows the correct theology on this matter) "...the noun refers to the nation as a unit, the plural of the verb points to the individuals who compose the entire body" (E. J. Young, 2:226).

⁷⁰ John T. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah 1-39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 485.

but of the raising of physical corpses out of the dust. These saints arise of the dust and come forth out of the earth. As in Daniel 12:2, “dust” is the place of the dead. In Psalm 22:15 the crucifixion of Christ brings Him “to the dust of death.” In modern Arabic the same word *turab* (dust) is a designation of the cemetery;⁷¹ the place where dead bodies sleep in death and rot in the dust. Dead believers will come out of their tombs singing praises of joy. Isaiah clearly believed and taught that God would raise the dead bodies of the saints out of their tombs.⁷² We must either accept the plain meaning of what the prophet here teaches or we must twist Scripture and render this passage as meaningless. Either we embrace the glorious orthodox doctrine that the living God will cause the dead bodies of the saints to arise and shout for joy or we can accept the heretical, arbitrary, presuppositions of the full preterists.

Chapter 4: The New Testament Evidence for a Bodily Resurrection

The New Testament, as is to be expected, gives us a much fuller picture of the resurrection. It gives the following usages of the term. (1) Like the Old Testament there are examples of resurrections back to mortal life. There are three examples of Jesus raising people from the dead (Jairus’ daughter, Mk. 5:35-42; Mt. 9:23-26, Lk. 8:49-56; the widow’s son, Lk. 7:11-17; and Lazarus, Jn. 11:1-44). In the book of Acts the resurrections of Tabitha (9:37-41) and Eutychus (20:9-12) are recorded. No one disputes the fact that these are real resurrections of dead physical bodies.

(2) There also is the example of the saints who came out of their tombs the moment Jesus died on the cross (Mt. 27:51-53).⁷³ Regarding the specific nature of this resurrection Matthew is

⁷¹ See Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 2:227, footnote 45.

⁷² Some may appeal to verse 14 to argue either that verse 19 must not be taken literally or that there is no general resurrection of the dead. Verse 14 reads, “They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise: therefore has thou visited and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish.” Edward J. Young does a fine job of countering such a view: “It is a mistake to use this verse to support the position that no general resurrection of the dead is taught here, but only a resurrection of the just. What Isaiah is speaking of is not so much a resurrection, as the fact that those who had once acted as lords over Israel are now dead, and cannot return to life again to afflict the Israelites. He is not denying that in the general resurrection they too shall arise unto everlasting punishment. On that particular subject he is not now speaking. What he is saying, however, is of comfort to the Israelites, for it teaches them that in the kingdom founded on Zion, they shall be free from those who formerly had oppressed them” (*The Book of Isaiah*, 2:220).

⁷³ Because the Greek in this verse is somewhat ambiguous, commentators are divided over whether the saints arose the *moment* Jesus died or immediately after His resurrection. The phrase “after His [Christ’s] resurrection” (v. 53) can be taken with the preceding participial clause and thus could mean that these saints were raised and came out of their tombs *after* the resurrection of Jesus. Those who favor this interpretation point out that 1 Corinthians 15:20 refers to our Lord as “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” Further, Colossians 1:18 and Revelation 1:5 identify the Redeemer as “the firstborn from the dead.” Therefore, according to this view, it would be theologically inappropriate for these saints to arise *before* the resurrection of Christ.

The phrase “after his resurrection” could also go with the verb that follows. This would mean that the saints were raised the moment Jesus died, but did not enter the holy city until after the resurrection of the Savior. Those who object to this interpretation usually raise a question regarding the whereabouts of these saints from 3:00 pm on Friday to Sunday morning. What did they do before they went into Jerusalem? (Some commentators argue that after the saints were raised they remained concealed in their tombs until after the resurrection of Christ).

Although both views are possible and acceptable interpretations, the second interpretation is to be preferred for the following reasons. a) Matthew is setting forth signs that are clearly associated with the death of the Redeemer. His account leaves the impression that all these signs occurred virtually simultaneously. The saints showing themselves to believers in Jerusalem was not itself a miracle but rather the exhibition of a miracle. b) The

silent. Therefore, commentators are divided as to whether they received glorified immortal bodies which were eventually received up into heaven. Given the fact that these saints were resurrected as a sign of the victory of the Redeemer's sacrificial death and as a token of all believers, it is likely that they were resurrected with glorified physical (yet spiritual) bodies that could not die.

This passage is problematic for full preterists for two reasons. First, the whole purpose of this resurrection was to testify regarding the efficacy of the Savior's suffering and death. It was designed to give the people of God an *example of the new life* which they ought to expect. "[I]n order that the minds of believers might be more quickly raised to hope, it was advantageous that the resurrection, which was common to all of them, should be tasted by a few."⁷⁴ As these saints came out of their tombs literally and bodily, we should expect to come forth literally and bodily. What else could anyone conclude from reading this passage unless he was unwilling to accept the plain teaching of God's Word? Second, no one disputes the fact that Matthew describes a real bodily resurrection. The evangelist describes solid rocky cliffs being rent and *tombs* or *graves* being opened. He uses the expression, "many bodies" (*polla somata*), which refutes all those who view the resurrection in a purely spiritual or complete replacement manner (e.g., Gnostics, Docetists, neo-Platonists, modernists, full preterists, etc). The victory of the cross resulted in physical bodily resurrections and empty sepulchers that all the people of Jerusalem could examine. Moreover, after Jesus rose, these glorified believers went into town and showed themselves to the saints (Mt. 27:53). The Christians in Jerusalem obviously would have concluded that what Christ did for these Old Testament believers, who a few days before were only dust and bones, He can and will do for all the saints who have died. The cross has defeated physical death as well as spiritual death.

(3) There is the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ (Mt. 28:2-8; Mk. 16:2-8; Lk. 24:1-8; Jn. 20:1-10). That this was a real bodily resurrection is proven by the following observations. a) An angel rolled away the stone (Mt. 28:2) so that the women (Mk. 16:5; Mt. 28:5) and the disciples (Jn. 20:4-9) could see that the tomb was empty and the grave clothes were lying in place. Moreover, so that no one would come to a wrong conclusion about what happened the angel told the women what had happened: "He is not here for He is risen" (Mt. 28:6; Mk. 16:6; Lk. 24:6). (It is noteworthy that the spices and ointments used to anoint our Lord's body would have essentially been glued to each layer of cloth and the Redeemer's body. It seems that when Jesus arose He passed right through the grave clothes). The exact same body that was crucified arose from the dead.

b) Christ set forth the proof of His bodily resurrection to His doubting disciples. "Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and

objection that these saints could not rise until after our Lord's resurrection is not tenable. Even if these saints arose before Christ's resurrection, they did so because of the efficacy of His death. "Jesus remains 'the Firstborn from the dead' (Col. 1:18) because he alone conquered death, and even these saints arose only through the blessed power of Jesus" (R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, 1131). We must remember that the Savior's own resurrection is not an event unrelated to the cross but was achieved and guaranteed by it. The Redeemer's sacrificial death is the cause, while the resurrection is the effect. "[T]he triumphant death and resurrection of Jesus remain the legal basis for the glorious resurrection even of the saints. Besides, the comparison in 1 Cor. 15:20, taking its point of departure in Christ's resurrection, looks to the future, the second coming: in relation to all believers who will *then* arise, Jesus is the firstfruits." [William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 975, footnote 894.] Further, Enoch (Gen. 5:24) and Elijah (2 Ki. 2:11) both escaped death and ascended directly to heaven. This proves that the efficacy of the Mediator's death and resurrection was not bound by time. These Old Testament saints escaped the jaws of death because of the Savior's merits and not their own "good works."

⁷⁴ John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark and Luke*, 3:325.

bones as you see I have.’ When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet” (Lk. 24:39-40). In John’s account He also showed them the scar on His side (20:20). The disciples could touch and squeeze the Mediator’s arms. They could feel the bones in His fingers and in His wrist. Thus, they could not deny that their crucified Lord stood before them in the same (albeit glorified) body in which He was buried. To add further indisputable evidence, our Lord even eats a piece of broiled fish and some honey in their presence (Lk. 24:41-43). A week later Jesus ordered doubting Thomas to touch the imprints on His hands and side (Jn. 20:27), once again proving that He was not a disembodied spirit or a completely new creation that had nothing to do with His body which had been crucified and buried. From these accounts, it is obvious that Christ not only wanted the apostles to believe in the historical reality of His bodily resurrection and be important eye witnesses of it (e.g., Ac. 2:32; 3:15; etc); but also, *He wanted them to know what a resurrected glorified body is like*. It is the exact same body that was dead and then was raised up again. However, the resurrected person’s body exists in a new glorified wonderful state.

Our Lord’s resurrection is unique in that His resurrection was a victory over death itself which ushered in a new creation. He arose as the complete victor over sin who is exalted to the right hand of power (Mt. 28:18; Rom. 1:4). He is now “a life-giving Spirit” (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:18) who ever lives to intercede for His people. When Jesus rose, He did so as a covenantal representative of His people. Because of the Savior’s resurrection, His people receive a spiritual resurrection from the dead (Col. 3:1; Eph. 2:1; Rom. 6:4) and progressive sanctification in history (Rom. 6:4 ff.). Moreover, the saints will receive new glorified, resurrected bodies at the second coming because He is the “firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20). By His sacrificial death and resurrection, the Redeemer has become the source of all true spiritual and physical *everlasting life*. His redemptive work even completely overturns the effects of the fall and results in a literal new heavens and earth (Rom. 8:20-22; Rev. 21:1-6). The resurrection of Christ which flows from the cross is the most important event in history. It is the turning point of all the ages and the centerpiece of all history.

The resurrection of Christ also is a great problem for the full preterist system. If (as we noted in our discussion of the fall) Adam’s sin only resulted in sin-death or spiritual death and has nothing to do with physical death, then why did our Lord have to die and then rise again in His physical body? If mankind’s only problem was spiritual death and physical death was normal or natural, then there was no reason whatsoever for Jesus to retain His physical body after death and rise out of the tomb. If full preterism is true and believers do not rise with the same body that was in the grave, then why did the Savior rise with His same body? Was the resurrection of the Messiah purely arbitrary? Was it solely for dramatic or apologetic effect? Paul certainly did not think so. He said, “If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.... And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.... But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor. 15:14, 17, 20, 21). It was necessary for Jesus to die and then be raised out of the grave so that believers who are dead physically and buried could be raised unto eternal glorified life. “While Paul is here concerned with the eschatological resurrection of saints at the parousia, the eschatological resurrection is inseparable from the resurrection of Jesus because he describes these two resurrections as two parts of a single event. The resurrection of Jesus is the firstfruits of the eschatological resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20). All who are in Christ stand in solidarity with him as all men in Adam stand in solidarity with Adam.

All in Adam share Adam's death, so all who are in Christ will share Christ's life.... The resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of those who belong to Christ constitute two parts of a single entity, two acts in a single drama, two stages of a single process."⁷⁵ Given this fact, the full preterist rejection of the literal bodily resurrection of the saints in favor of the idea that they receive completely new and different bodies that are created out of nothing makes no sense whatsoever. (Their attempts to support this doctrine with their seed analogy [see section on 1 Cor. 15 below] is desperate and a mockery of sound exegesis.) Full preterists believe that even though Jesus rose bodily so that we could arise, our bodies never do rise but remain dust in the earth forever. They must teach this heretical nonsense because it is obvious that graveyards were not emptied in A.D. 70.

Thus once again we see that full preterism is not simply a heresy related to eschatology. It also perverts, distorts and changes the doctrine of the fall and the whole meaning and purpose of the cross and empty tomb. For a full preterist to adhere to the traditional, orthodox conception of the cross and empty tomb he essentially must *contradict* his own system. In addition, the doctrine of the incarnation itself is called into question because the literalness and sameness of glorified bodies is rejected by their paradigm. Consequently, a number of full preterists believe that at some point after the resurrected Jesus discarded His genuine human nature. Such thinking is totally heretical.

Moreover, would not the fact that Christ came out of the tomb *with His same physical body* (although glorified) and the many saints came out of their tombs (when our Lord died on the cross) *with their same physical bodies* lead the saints to expect a literal, bodily (i.e. the same bodies that were buried) resurrection at the second coming of Christ? Of course it would! This is certainly the explicit, inspired teaching of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:14, Philippians 3:21; 1 Corinthians 15:49 and of John in 1 John 3:2 and Revelation 20:11-15. As Schep writes, "The resurrection of the dead in a body of flesh is guaranteed by Jesus' resurrection in a body of 'flesh and bones,' with the scars of His wounds visible, and capable of being touched and of eating food (Luke 24:38-43; Acts 10:41). At His ascension Jesus did not discard this flesh body, as is clear from Acts 1:11; Philippians 3:21; Revelation 1:17. Since the resurrected believers will be like the risen Christ (1 Cor. 15:49; Phil. 3:21; 1 John 3:2), they too will be raised in their bodies of flesh (cf. 1 Cor. 15:32-42). Only in this way is man saved in his totality, and able to live on a new earth (Isa. 65:17 ff.; 66:22; Matt. 5:5; Rev. 21:1-3)."⁷⁶

(4) The New Testament speaks of a spiritual resurrection of believers to new life in Christ. In other words a Christian's past spiritual resurrection is a metaphor for regeneration or the new birth. "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Eph. 2:1-5). "In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with *Him* through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your

⁷⁵ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 326.

⁷⁶ J. A. Schep, "Resurrection" in General Editor Merrill C. Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975, 76), 5:74.

trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses” (Col. 2:11-13; cf. 3:1-5). “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection...Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:4, 5, 11).

These passages which speak of a spiritual resurrection are clearly teaching something very different than the passages which elaborate on a bodily or physical resurrection. Let us note the differences so that we will not confuse the two or be deceived by the full preterist’s equivocations on this matter. First, note that this resurrection is *past tense* for true believers. Paul says, “we were buried” (aorist passive indicative) with Christ in order that “we should walk (aorist active subjunctive) in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). The apostle says that at one time Christians were spiritually dead in their sins, but God made us alive (*sunezoopoiesen*, aorist active indicative) with Christ (the exact same verb is used in Ephesians 2:5 and Colossians 2:13). In all of these examples Paul refers to a definite event in the past. “Our resurrection here is not the future resurrection of the body, but the past resurrection of our soul, a resurrection not from a literal grave, but from the deadness of sin.”⁷⁷ In Romans 6 the death to sin and spiritual life is used to discuss the impartation of new life and sanctification (i.e. deliverance from the pollution of sin). In Colossians 2:13 he speaks of regeneration and conversion. Unlike the passages which speak of the resurrection of the body which are always looking to the future, these passages always look back to the past when we were born again and saved from our sins.

Second, the spiritual resurrection of believers is something that occurs progressively throughout history as Christ imparts His vivifying Spirit to regenerate and save individuals in each successive generation until the consummation. Speaking of spiritual resurrection our Lord said, “The hour is coming and now is” (Jn. 5:25). When Jesus walked the earth He had the power to speak to dead hearts and cause them to live; this power continues throughout history. The resurrected Savior is “a life giving Spirit” (1 Cor. 15:45). Both Ephesians 2:1-5 and Colossians 2:11-13 assume that at one time in our lives we were dead in trespasses and sins and then, at a certain time, each individual was spiritually quickened and made a Christian.

But when Scripture speaks about the general resurrection of the body (and the final judgment), it always describes it as a singular event in history that is *not repeated or progressive*. Jesus will raise His own “at the last day” (Jn. 6:39, 40, 44, 54). The last day is preceded by “the last trumpet” (1 Cor. 15:52). The “last day” cannot refer to the last day of the Jewish age or Old Covenant administration, for the context makes it clear that Jesus is speaking about the preservation in grace and bodily resurrection of all those that the Father has given to the Son (i.e. the elect). The complete body of saints throughout all human history will rise out of their graves “at the last day.” Consequently, the second coming must come at the end of history and not in the middle of history in A.D. 70. (See the section on Jn. 6:39 for a more detailed discussion of this point.)

Some full preterists attempt to circumvent the meaning of this expression by arguing that “the last day” refers to the day of each believer’s death. This view is easily refuted by examining how this expression is used in John’s gospel. After Jesus and Martha learn that Lazarus is already dead (i.e. his final day, so to speak) Christ tells Martha that Lazarus will rise again, then “Martha said to Him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day’” (Jn.

⁷⁷ Gordon Clark, *Ephesians*, 67.

11:24). Martha distinguished between a personal event and the general resurrection of the saints on the last day of history. Our Lord also used this expression to describe the day of judgment (Jn. 12:48). The day of the general resurrection is also the day of the final judgment .

Third, the references to spiritual resurrection speak of a deliverance from sin as guilt and pollution but do not mention physical death or graves at all. Paul said, “You...were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 1:1, 5); “You being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh” [this phrase is a metaphor for being unregenerate]; “the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin, but alive to God” (Rom. 6:6, 11). Likewise Jesus said, “He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and...has passed [perfect active indicative: they were raised spiritually in the past and this new spiritual life has a continued effect upon their spiritual state and life] from death into life” (Jn. 5:24).

The passages which speak of the resurrection of the body use language that makes it perfectly clear that this resurrection involves the emptying of real graves and the resurrection of real physical bodies. Jesus said, “All who are in their graves will hear His voice and come forth” (Jn. 5:28). Paul said, “We shall not all sleep [physical death], but we shall all be changed” (1 Cor. 15:51); “He...will...give life to your mortal bodies” (Rom. 8:11). “If our earthly house, this tent [i.e. our physical bodies] is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands...For we who are in this tent groan being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life” (2 Cor. 5:1, 4); “the Savior...who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself” (Phil. 3:21); “...concerning those who have fallen asleep...we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus” (1 Thess. 4:13, 14); John said, “The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works” (Rev. 20:13). These passages are obviously not referring only to deliverance from “sin-death” or spiritual death, but to physical death as well. Moreover, since all these promises are given to believers who have already been delivered from the guilt and pollution of sin, they can only refer to a future bodily resurrection.

Given the fact that in A.D. 70 tombs were not emptied of their bodies and no physical bodily resurrections took place, full preterists have only three explanations for these passages all of which are completely untenable. a) Some argue that all the references to graves being emptied and bodies coming forth are merely metaphors for the regeneration or salvation of souls. This view does not work because the promises of a future bodily resurrection are given to people who are *already saved*. Believers are not regenerated twice. If they argue that it is a subjective spiritual experience subsequent to salvation, then they need to explain what it is and why regeneration and baptism in the Holy Spirit needs an additional work of grace. Moreover, they need to explain why our Lord discriminates between two types of death and life in John 5 when He was really only saying the same thing twice. In addition, this view does not explain why unbelievers are said to rise bodily also. b) Other full preterists argue for a secret partial resurrection. The dead bodies of Christians did not come out of their graves, but rather they were simply given new bodies in A.D. 70 while their old bodies remain in the earth as dust. This view not only completely ignores the fact that Scripture teaches that the graves will be emptied (Dan. 12:1, 2; Jn. 5:28-29; 1 Cor. 5:42, 52; 1 Thess. 4:14, 17; Rev. 20:11-15; Ac. 24:15), but also the fact that Scripture teaches that the final resurrection is universal (Rev. 20:13; Mt. 25:32 ff.) and occurs on the final day of history (Jn. 6:39, 40, 44, 45, 54; 11:24; 12:48; 1 Cor. 15:24-28). They

also teach that all believers after A.D. 70 receive their resurrected bodies at death. Both of these views are totally arbitrary and are not supported by any sound biblical exegesis. It is simply a theory made up to attempt to harmonize the many clear resurrection passages with their erroneous teaching that the second coming of Christ occurred in A.D. 70. Would any rational expositor come to these same conclusions when interpreting the resurrection of the body passages unless he was attempting to harmonize them with the full preterist paradigm? This is a dishonest, dangerous and heretical way to treat God's Word. c) There are others who view the resurrection of the body passages as teaching the restoration and salvation of Israel. This view (as noted above) explicitly contradicts Scripture and is totally absurd. Israel was not delivered in A.D. 70, but rather judged and destroyed.

Matthew 10:28

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

This passage does not reference the resurrection directly, but assumes that a literal bodily resurrection must take place. There are a number of things in this verse that refute the full preterist conception of the resurrection. First, there can be no denying that our Lord is discussing what happens to the soul or spirit (the invisible, immaterial aspect of a person) of man as well as his *physical body* (his body of flesh and bones). The term body (*soma*) is contrasted with the soul (*psyche*); it is something that can be killed. Consequently, "body" cannot be a metaphor for the spirit or a non-material experience. Unbelievers can cause *temporary* pain and suffering to a Christian's physical *body*, but they cannot touch our relationship to Christ. God, however, is able to afflict suffering on the *physical bodies* of unbelievers *forever* in hell (*Gehenna*, the abode of the wicked body and soul, after the day of judgment).⁷⁸ The clear contrast between the *temporary* suffering of the physical bodies of Christians in this life and the *eternal* bodily suffering of unbelievers in hell make this verse impossible for full preterists to circumvent. Their attempts to apply this verse to spiritual suffering alone or some national experience are totally absurd. Second, Jesus says that eternal destruction, *both body and soul*, awaits all those who reject Him. The point is not simply that believers should be willing to suffer persecution and die for the faith because their soul is safe and secure even if they are tortured, mutilated and killed; but also that their whole person both body and soul will be safe and secure at the final judgment. Third, if the full preterist teaching on the resurrection were true, our Lord's statement would make no sense at all. The full preterist teaches that the bodies of Christians and unbelievers rot in their graves forever. If the same bodies that lived and died will not be resurrected to be turned over to eternal destruction and suffering, then Christ's teaching is *wrong*. What He says is totally incompatible with full preterism.

⁷⁸ J. A. Alexander notes that, "Besides this careful guarding against natural and common errors, there is a great precision in the choice of terms, the term *kill* being only used in reference to the body as distinguished from the soul, while that employed in reference to the soul, even when reunited to the body, is *destroy*" (*The Gospel According to Matthew* [Grand Rapids: Baker, (1860) 1980], 295). The term *destroy* does not mean annihilate in this context, but ruin, perdition or the destruction of all that makes existence desirable. Paul speaks "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord" in 2 Thessalonians 1:9. The smoke of their torment ascends upward forever and ever (Rev. 14:11).

Matthew 22:23-32

The same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him and asked Him, saying: "Teacher, Moses said that if a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up offspring for his brother. Now there were with us seven brothers. The first died after he had married, and having no offspring, left his wife to his brother. Likewise the second also, and the third, even to the seventh. Last of all the woman died also. Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her." Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven. But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, '*I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

In this section of Scripture the Sadducees (who rejected the resurrection of the body) ask Jesus a question on one of the most important theological questions which divided the Jews at that time. A main purpose of this question was to ridicule the Pharisees' understanding of the resurrection by making it look absurd in the eyes of the people. By asking this question, they intended to make Christ look incompetent as a teacher before the people and also wanted to alienate Jesus from many in the ruling classes who were Sadducees. This portion of Scripture refutes the full preterist understanding of the resurrection in the following ways.

First, note that the question presupposes that Jesus Himself held to a position on the resurrection that to one degree or another was similar to the Pharisees. If Jesus did not believe in the resurrection of the body at all or merely held to some spiritual view as many full preterists do, this question would never have been asked. Remember, they were trying to make our Lord's own position foolish. This was not a sincere inquiry to learn more about doctrine, but an attack.

Second, the Savior never denies a literal resurrection of the body in His answer. Christ rather attacks their assumption that married life continues in the hereafter. If our Lord rejected the Pharisees' notion of the actual dead physical bodies of the saints being raised to life out of their graves, then He would have refuted this aspect of their question in His answer. But He has no problem with the Jewish view of a literal resurrection. Our Lord's statement, "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven," does not mean that after the resurrection the saints are disembodied spirit beings. It simply means that the resurrected saints will be like the angels who do not get married, have conjugal relations or bear children. The glorified saints will be like the angels *in this one respect*. The Sadducees had based their whole argument on a false premise, one that has absolutely no support from Scripture at all, that in the consummate kingdom the exact same social and familial conditions exist that are present in this age. Luke's account adds the fact that, in the resurrection, the saints will be equal to the angels because they will be unable to die (Lk. 20:36). Consequently, the necessity of bearing children to propagate a living heritage is unnecessary. As "sons of the resurrection" our glorified bodies will never grow old or die. Such comments would be completely unnecessary and out of place if our Lord did not believe in a literal bodily resurrection.

Third, because the Sadducees only accepted the authority of the Pentateuch, Jesus proves the resurrection of the body from Exodus 3:6: "I am the God of Abraham...Isaac, and Jacob...God is not the God of the dead but of the living." Although these saints are dead physically they are alive spiritually in God's presence; consequently, their bodies will be raised

because they are saved and have a covenant relationship with God. “‘Dead men’ are men whose bodies are lifeless, who are lying in their graves. If there is no resurrection, then the bodies of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would remain dead forever, and that would make God ‘the God of dead men’—an impossible thought. That would mean that death was not conquered; that death was holding its prey and was stronger than God; that redemption had failed, leaving death still triumphant. But no; the resurrection proves that God is ‘the God of living men.’ Death has suffered its deathblow.”⁷⁹

Fourth, the Sadducees’ question assumes that the resurrection of the righteous is a singular event, “therefore in the resurrection.” The full preterist idea of progressive resurrections throughout history resulting in literally millions of different resurrection days is obviously an invention to make the resurrection that supposedly occurred in A.D. 70 apply to believers who die after that date. The only problem with that view is that it is totally arbitrary and explicitly contradicts Scripture.

Luke 14:12-14

Then He also said to him who invited Him, “When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite *the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind*. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

In this passage we learn that the believer who extends mercy and compassion toward the poor and disadvantaged outcasts of society will receive a reward at the resurrection of the righteous. This passage assumes that all those who believe in Jesus and are declared righteous will be raised up together: “the resurrection [singular] of the righteous [plural].” It also connects the general resurrection to the final judgment where men are rewarded according to their works (Mt. 25:31-46; 1 Pet. 4:5; Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:6-10; Rev. 20:11-15; etc). Once again we see an explicit contradiction between Scripture and the full preterist concept of progressive resurrections.

John 5:28-29

Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

Here we have a very plain statement of a general bodily resurrection, both of the good and the bad. As we noted in our discussion of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, it is clear that this verse is speaking of a literal bodily resurrection out of tombs and not regeneration or a spiritual resurrection out of a state of spiritual death. Even the full preterist J. Stuart Russell admits this obvious truth. He writes, “There can be no doubt that the passage just quoted (ver. 28, 29) refers to a literal resurrection of the dead. It may also be admitted that the preceding verses (25, 26) refer to the communication of spiritual life to the spiritually dead.”⁸⁰ This is a startling, but

⁷⁹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, 875.

⁸⁰ J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia*, 124.

scholarly and honest admission (He even uses the expression “the buried dead,” “the dead from their graves,” and “the corporeally [i.e. pertaining to matter, material, physical, bodily] dead” in his discussion of this text on the same and the following page. But being a dedicated full preterist he ignores the fact that a literal general resurrection of the dead did not take place in A.D. 70 and proceeds with a discussion of time indicators. Our Lord makes a distinction between the spiritual resurrections that were already taking place as He went about preaching the gospel by using the expression “and now is” in verse 25. The resurrection from the graves is in the indeterminate future—“the hour is coming.” Russell argues that since the expression “the hour is coming” is used with the Samaritan woman about the inauguration of the New Covenant which took place very soon (when Jesus died and rose again) it must imply imminence in this passage also. The problem with such an argument is that one usage of an individual’s unique use of a phrase is not enough to find a consistent pattern to fix an *assigned* consistent meaning. Moreover, there is the insurmountable difficulty of the tens of thousands of graveyards that are still full of dead bodies.

The full preterist only has three options with this verse, none of which work at all. First, he can argue that verses 28 and 29 are discussing regeneration and not a literal bodily resurrection. The problem with this view is that regeneration only applies to the elect or Christ’s sheep, while this verse discusses a general resurrection of *both* the saved and the lost. Moreover, obviously people who are saved do not need to be born again. In addition, the expression “will come out [of] the tombs” is never used as a metaphor for regeneration in the Bible. Further, the fact that verse 25 discusses regeneration and verse 28 uses a different time indicator which is wholly future proves that two different topics are under discussion (v. 25, regeneration from spiritual death; vs. 28-29, resurrection from physical death). Also, if this is a spiritual resurrection, how does it apply to those who are raised unto condemnation? The Bible unequivocally teaches that unbelievers are *already* spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1-5; Col. 2:13) and under the condemnation of God from birth (Jn. 3:18-19). What does this resurrection *add* spiritually to the state of the wicked that is different from where they are at present spiritually? The full preterist cannot answer this question using Scripture. This question is not a problem for the traditional orthodox view because after the general resurrection they will suffer in *both* body and soul. If the full preterist argues that the bad are regenerated also then: a) he has become a universalist; and b) he must explain how a raising unto spiritual life is called a “condemnation” by our Lord. Both options are obviously unscriptural.

Second, the full preterist can argue that Jesus is discussing a release of the *souls* of saints and unbelievers from Hades in A.D. 70. But, this doesn’t work because: a) Our Lord does not use the word *Hades* which can refer to the place where the souls of the dead are. Instead He uses the very specific word *mnemeiois* which means grave, tomb or sepulcher. A tomb or sepulcher refers to a safe place for keeping a *dead physical body*.⁸¹ Jewish tombs were usually caves

⁸¹ Full preterists attempt to circumvent the clear teaching of John 5: 28-29 and the use of the word “graves” (*mnemeiois*) by appealing to Ezekiel 37 which speaks of dry bones as “the whole house of Israel” (v. 11) and of God’s people coming up from their graves (vs. 12-13). Thus, we are told that John 5:28-29 speaks of a great restoration of Israel; and, must not be taken literally. This full preterist attempt to avoid the plain teaching of Jesus in John 5:28-19 must be rejected for the following reasons. First, it is very clear in the immediate context of Ezekiel that God is using a *metaphor* for the restoration of Israel. The “slain” (v. 9) are those in exile. That death is the state of exile is proved from verse 12 where they are brought out of their graves to return to the land of Israel. The bones represent the whole house of Israel living in exile at the time of the restoration. The graves represent being under the power of their enemy, living under judgment and perhaps even being in a state of gross declension. Although Ezekiel makes it perfectly clear that he is using metaphors that are not to be taken literally at all, Jesus speaks plainly. The coming out of the tombs is connected not to a restoration of Israel, but to the final judgment.

carved into limestone cliffs or rocky areas. The word “grave” is a more general word that can refer to a tomb and also undesirable places where dead bodies can end up (e.g., “the sea was his grave”). Clearly, Christ is discussing dead physical bodies coming out of graves and not simply souls being released from Hades. b) The purpose of raising the dead bodies of unbelievers on the day of judgment is so that their suffering in hell will be increased because they will suffer in the same bodies in which they sinned and rejected God. If only their souls are removed then this so-called resurrection would serve no purpose. Souls would simply move out of Hades and then go right back to Hades. c) If they argue that the souls go from Hades to the lake of fire which is a worse punishment, then they have an even greater problem, for according to their system Hades is emptied and destroyed in A.D. 70 when it is cast into the lake of fire. This would mean that unbelievers who die after A.D. 70 cannot experience a soul resurrection from Hades. This would mean that the general resurrection has absolutely nothing to do with people throughout post-A.D. 70 history. Under such a system believers could only experience a resurrection if they first spent time in the lake of fire. Such a view is patently absurd. d) As we have previously noted, the New Testament explicitly teaches that the souls of believers at death *immediately* go to be with Jesus in heaven (Lk. 23:43; Phil. 1:21-23; Rev. 20:4). Consequently, a release of souls in A.D. 70 according to Scripture is impossible and superfluous. e) The resurrection of believers is frequently described as a coming to life from the dead or of a rising from sleep (i.e. death). The souls of believers in Hades are not dead and they certainly are not asleep. Therefore, the coming out of Hades theory explicitly contradicts the Bible’s own language of resurrection. A soul

Second, there is nothing in the immediate or mediate context of John 5:28-29 which would lead an objective interpreter to conclude that our Lord was appealing to Ezekiel 37 in His comments. The context has nothing to do with national Israel. Christ is discussing how *individuals* can have everlasting life (Jn. 5:24) and is emphasizing how He is sovereign over salvation. The Savior imparts spiritual life (vs. 25-26) and is the One in charge of the final judgment (v. 27). The comment on judgment leads to a statement about the resurrection which leads to the judgment (vs. 28-29). This has nothing to do with a national restoration of Israel. The full preterist arbitrarily applies Ezekiel 37 to this passage because it explicitly contradicts their paradigm.

Third, the Roman war against the Jews and the destruction of the Temple (A.D. 66-70) clearly cannot be connected to Ezekiel 37 and its prophecy of the restoration of Israel. The events of A.D. 70 were not a restoration but the exact opposite. The Jews rejected their Messiah and persecuted the church and thus were vomited out of the land. They were excluded from the land because of their own guilt and apostasy. They were not gathered together but rather were dispersed among many nations. They were not protected from hostile powers but instead began a lengthy period of hardship and suffering. (Note the context of Ezekiel 37: “Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers... I will call for the grain and multiply it, and bring no famine upon you [Under the Roman siege there was widespread starvation in Jerusalem]... And I will multiply the fruit of your trees and the increase of your fields [The Roman soldiers cut down all the trees within a wide radius around Jerusalem for firewood and siege works; see Josephus *Wars* vi; 1:1]... This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities *are now* fortified *and* inhabited.’ [The Romans not only cut down thousands of trees, but also destroyed crops and sowed salt in the fields. Moreover, the land was depopulated and *all the Jews* were kicked out of the land in A.D. 12]... I will increase their men like a flock [Over 2 million Jews were slaughtered in the siege and defeat of Jerusalem alone], Ezek. 36:28, 29, 30, 35, 37.) The only possible way that Ezekiel 37 can be applied beyond its fulfillment in the restoration after the Babylonian captivity is to argue that either it is being fulfilled in the gathering of elect Jews into the church throughout history or to argue as dispensationalists do that its fulfillment is still future even to us in the 21st century. (Modern secular *unbelieving* Israel cannot be regarded as a fulfillment of this passage [see Ezek. 36:25-27].)

Fourth, the connection to Ezekiel 37 does not at all explain or fit with the statement about a resurrection of life and a resurrection of damnation. In Ezekiel 37 we see nothing about condemnation. In addition, full preterists who argue that Ezekiel 37 proves that verses 28 and 29 are speaking about regeneration and not a literal bodily resurrection cannot explain the resurrection unto condemnation. Either both resurrections are literal or both must be figurative.

moving from one place to another without the physical body is never called a resurrection in Scripture. Moreover, why would the word resurrection mean one thing for Jesus (His physical body coming out of the tomb) and something completely different for Christians (a release of souls from Hades)? The Hades viewpoint leaves one with a maze of contradictions and absurdities.

Third, some full preterists, because of the explicit nature of this passage and others, argue that a “literal” bodily resurrection did take place in A.D. 70. However, they argue that the same bodies that died and were buried were not raised, rather God created *completely new bodies* for the final judgment. They use the seed analogy in 1 Corinthians 15:35 ff to argue that the bodies of saints that arise are new different bodies. The whole purpose of the seed analogy (which we will deal with under 1 Cor. 15) is to come up with an explanation as to why the resurrection occurred in A.D. 70, but all the physical bodies of the saints and the wicked are still in their graves. This view suffers from a number of insurmountable exegetical difficulties. a) They arbitrarily apply the seed analogy to the saints and not to Christ even though Paul specifically applies it to Jesus. Our Lord rose in the exact same body in which He died and left behind an empty tomb and empty grave clothes. Although, the Savior’s body was obviously transformed (it was now spiritual, incorruptible, glorified and powerful), nevertheless it was the *same body* and still was *physical* (flesh and bones). He was not a disembodied spirit. b) The seed analogy cannot be applied to unbelievers, yet unbelievers are also said to rise out of their tombs. How do full preterists deal with this inconsistency? Moreover, what about unbelievers who die after A.D. 70? Does God have a storage room of resurrection bodies created in A.D. 70 awaiting the death of each unsaved person also? This makes no sense whatsoever when we consider that the seed analogy can only be applied to Christians. Unsaved persons were not united to Jesus in His death and resurrection. Our Lord is not the firstfruits of pagans and reprobates. Therefore, the full preterist who uses the seed analogy must argue that either unbelievers do not rise physically at all (e.g., the souls are transferred from Hades to the lake of fire) or that, *unlike* believers, unbelievers do arise with their same physical bodies. Both of these views are completely arbitrary and cannot be proven from Scripture. c) Most importantly, why does Christ teach in John 5:29 that the physically dead and buried, both good (Christians) and bad (unbelievers), will come out of their tombs when according to full preterism no such thing will ever really happen? Was Jesus mistaken? Was He simply using a metaphor for dramatic effect? No! It is obvious that when the Savior said “tombs” He meant ‘tombs.’ The full preterist system explicitly contradicts Scripture. There is absolutely nothing in the immediate context to lead us to conclude that our Lord was speaking metaphorically. If the tombs still contain dead bodies, then the general resurrection has not yet occurred. Once we accept the plain teaching of Scripture without imposing a preconceived theological paradigm upon it, the general resurrection passages are quite simple and contain no absurdities, contradictions or strange, hidden meanings.

John 6:39

This is the will of Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. (cf. vs. 40, 44, 54)

This passage is important for two reasons. First, it explicitly teaches that *all* of the saints throughout *all* of human history will be raised on the same day. In this context it is clear that the word “it” (singular) denotes the elect or the whole company of believers in Christ. The context defines this group as “he who comes to Me” (v. 35); “all that the Father gives Me” (v. 37); “all

He has given Me” (v. 39); “everyone who...believes in Him” (v. 40); everyone who the Father draws to Christ (v. 44); “He who believes in Me” (v. 47). Every single individual purchased by the blood of Christ throughout all of human history to the consummation will arise at the same time and appear together with Jesus at His coming (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13-18). The all inclusiveness of the resurrection disproves the two or three separate bodily resurrections of premillennialists and dispensationalists as well as the idea of progressive resurrections throughout history after A.D. 70. All believers must wait until “the last day” before they are raised out of their tombs to a life of glory. The whole purpose of the unity of the eschatological complex where the second coming, the general resurrection and the final judgment occur on “the final day” is to *publicly* vindicate, glorify and exalt Jesus Christ *before the whole human race* and angelic hosts. Obviously, a local, non-bodily, secret coming before the vast majority of human beings are even born does not fulfill that objective.

The full preterist argument that every single believer did receive a new, glorified body in A.D. 70, but that these bodies are placed in storage by God until believers who exist in the future die is a ridiculous, pitiful attempt to circumvent the passages which teach that all the saints rise together. It is disproved by the following arguments.

(1) It essentially redefines the whole meaning of the resurrection because: a) Resurrection presupposes the rising up of a body that has already lived and died. What they posit is a *creation*, not a resurrection. b) It posits the absurdity of a resurrected body existing prior to a person’s real physical body. Moreover while the person is alive they possess *two bodies simultaneously*, a real human body and a resurrected body in storage. This idea is completely absurd. c) A resurrection in Scripture involves the reuniting of a person’s soul or spirit with his body. The creation of an inanimate shell in heaven is not a resurrection.

(2) They offer no biblical argumentation or Scriptural support for their idea of preexistent resurrection bodies. Fabricating concepts out of thin air is not a credible way to form theology. If full preterists want to write a novel about a fantasy world, that’s fine; but they should keep their fantasies out of the sphere of eschatology.

(3) The resurrection at the last day is presented as the *completion* of the salvation that Jesus has imparted to His own. It is the capstone to all His promises connected with trust in Him and perseverance in the faith. In fact, our Lord repeats this great assurance four times, in verses 39, 40, 44, 54 to drive this point home. The promise is extended to people who are the elect (God’s love gift to the Son) who then “believe in Him” or “come to Him.” If the full preterist interpretation were true, the resurrection, at least for the vast majority of believers, would *precede* their regeneration, effectual calling, faith, justification and sanctification. Consequently, the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation) is turned upside down and the saints are glorified before they are saved or even exist! It the full preterist counters by saying that the Christian is not actually resurrected until the moment he dies, then he must deny that a resurrection of all the saints took place in A.D. 70 and thus he must reject our Lord’s explicit “final day” teaching in John 6:39, 40, 44, 54 and many other passages; or, he must teach that all Christians who die after A.D. 70 experience two separate resurrections, one in the past in A.D. 70 and one in the future at death. This position also explicitly contradicts John 6:39.

The full preterist attempts to ignore or circumvent many of the very clear passages of Scripture on Christ’s second coming, make a mockery of Greek exegesis and Christian theology. One must study their writings to learn that: grave does not mean grave; body does not mean body; air or atmosphere does not mean air or atmosphere; being snatched away does not mean

being snatched away; final judgment does not mean final judgment; last trumpet does not mean last trumpet; and, last day does not mean last day.

Second, as noted, the expression “the last day” which is only found in John’s gospel (7:37, 9:39, 40, 44, 54, 11:24) refers to the final day of human history, the day when Christ returns, the final judgment takes place and death and hell are cast into the lake of fire. As noted above, if Jesus returned in A.D. 70, then the vast majority of mankind has no part in the general resurrection or final judgment whatsoever.

Full preterists object to this interpretation by pointing out that John uses a similar expression “last hour” to describe his own day in 1 John 2:18: “Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour.” This would be a problem if John was discussing the second coming of Christ, the general resurrection and the final judgment, but none of these things appear in the context at all. What then is John talking about? Some scholars point out that 1 John 2:18 does not have the definite article before hour and believe he is simply pointing out “a critical time” (e.g., Stafford North). Others take the expression as an equivalent to “the last days” or “these last times” (cf. Ac. 2:17; Heb. 1:2; Jas. 5:3; 1 Pet. 1:20) and point out that the last days run from the first to the second coming of Christ (e.g., Simon J. Kistemaker). Still others think that John believed that Jesus was about to return, but was mistaken (e.g., Alfred Plummer). This view is unacceptable to those who take biblical inerrancy seriously. Given the fact that the immediate context is “even now many antichrists have come,” John may have in mind the destruction of Jerusalem which may have happened only a few years after this epistle was written. Jesus warned in the Olivet discourse that many false Christ’s would arise (Mt. 24:5, 23). But, as we have previously noted, the literal bodily coming of Jesus must not be confused with a local coming in judgment upon Jerusalem. These are two completely different events. We do not deny that there are passages in the New Testament that have the destruction of the Jewish nation in mind. We simply reject the full preterist’s vain attempt to put everything into an A.D. 70 framework. Each passage must be carefully interpreted without attempting to fit everything into a preconceived paradigm. If full preterists would do this they would avoid butchering the Greek language and would abandon their heresy.

John 11:21-27

Now Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?” She said to Him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

This portion of Scripture is devastating to the full preterist position. Martha acknowledges that Jesus could have easily healed her brother if He had been present before he died. She also confesses her faith that whatever Jesus asks of God, God will certainly answer His prayers. This confession, which pours out of a grieving heart, leads to an amazing statement by Christ: “Your brother will rise again” (v. 23). Martha misunderstands the Savior to be speaking about a distant comfort, that her brother would rise from the dead on the last day: “I know that he

will rise again in the resurrection at the last day” (v. 24). This statement disproves many aspects of full preterism. Note the following observations.

First, there can be no question from the context that Martha believed in a literal, bodily resurrection at the end of history. She was speaking of Lazarus who had been physically dead for four days and was already beginning to decay. Obviously, Martha did not believe that the resurrection was only a spiritual event. She also certainly did not believe in the replacement theory of the resurrection.

Second, note that Jesus accepts what she says as true without any sort of correction for holding to what full preterists consider to be a major error in doctrine. This section of Scripture makes it very clear that Martha’s concept of the resurrection as a literal bodily (i.e. the same body that was buried) resurrection was the same as Christ’s understanding. In fact her use of the identical terminology (“the resurrection at the last day”) that we find of the lips of the Redeemer in John 6:39-54 indicates that she was a faithful student of her Master. As F. F. Bruce notes, “The resurrection on the last day has been mentioned repeatedly by Jesus in earlier discourses in this Gospel, with this addition: he himself is the one who will raise the dead then, for the Father has authorized him to do so (John 5:21, 25-29; 6:39f.). Matthew’s answer was one of intelligence and faith, and it called forth from Jesus a further assurance, which went beyond the accepted belief [among the Jews] in the resurrection of the dead.”⁸²

Third, the Savior’s response to Martha contains an amazing revelation about the resurrection to come which clearly is intended to strengthen Martha’s faith and place it squarely on a solid foundation. In other words, instead of rejecting what Martha has just said, Christ takes the opportunity to elaborate on it and flesh it out. “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die’” (Jn. 11:25-26). Our Lord begins by saying not simply that He is the One who bestows resurrection and life, but also that, in His person and ministry, He is the very source and foundation of resurrection and life. “Jesus is the resurrection and the life *in person...*, the full, blessed life of God, all his glorious attributes: omniscience, wisdom, omnipresence, love, holiness, etc. As such he is also the cause, source, or fountain of the believer’s glorious resurrection and of their everlasting life. Because he lives we too shall live.... The Prince of life is ever the conqueror of death.”⁸³

Following this amazing statement our Lord makes a glorious inference based on who He is and what His salvation has and will accomplish. He does this with an exceptionally brilliant and poetic parallelism where each statement is similar, but not synonymous (i.e. a synthetic parallelism). In fact each statement is laid out in reverse order of the other: “he may die...he will live...whoever lives...shall never die.”

There are a number of things to note about these verses. (1) Both contain the statement, “he who believes” [present participle—“believes abidingly”]. There can be no question but that Christ is stating truths that can only be applied to genuine believers. (2) A careful reading of these verses reveals immediately that the main terms used “shall die” (*apothane*, vs. 25, 26) and “will live” (*zesetai*, v. 25) or “living” (*zon*, v. 26) are used in different senses. In verse 25 the person who believes will die but will live again. But in verse 26 the believer who lives will *never* die (the Greek, *ou me apothane* is emphatic: “in no way shall he die”; or to paraphrase, “he most certainly will never ever die”). If we apply the same meaning to the main terms used, then we have an explicit contradiction. Obviously, our Lord is not speaking nonsense. What then is Jesus

⁸² F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 244.

⁸³ William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John*, 2:150.

saying? In response to the physical death of Lazarus (a believer) and Martha's statement about the future general resurrection of believers on the final day, our Lord first speaks about physical or temporal death. Like Lazarus all Christians will die, but they will come to life again in the resurrection. Then in verse 26, the Savior says that all who possess spiritual life can never experience a spiritual or everlasting death. (If one interprets "whoever lives" [*ho zon*] as simply a person who happens to be alive physically who believes in Jesus, then: a) he only has stated what is superfluous [Corpses don't believe and go to church]; and b) the emphatic statement about never experiencing death does not fit or make sense with this clause). Given all these considerations, we could paraphrase these verses as follows: "He that believes in Me even if he dies [physically], he will come to life [again at the resurrection]. And every one who lives [i.e. who possesses the spiritual life that I give to him] and believes in Me most certainly will never die [i.e. experience everlasting death both body and soul in the lake of fire].")

The only other interpretation of this passage of Scripture that makes sense also disproves full preterism. This interpretation views "the one who lives" in verse 26 as the one brought to glorified life in the resurrection. To paraphrase: "...he will come to life again at the resurrection. And everyone who now possesses this glorified life...can never ever experience death."

If, as the full preterist asserts, physical death is natural and is not a result of the fall, then our Lord's statement of comfort and hope to Martha makes no sense at all. Moreover, if believers are only delivered from spiritual death these verses are incomprehensible and contradictory. Full preterism has been disproved by the impossibility of the contrary.

Acts 17:31-32

...He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead. And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this *matter*."

In this section of Paul's sermon at the Aeropagus in Athens (the center of the Greek philosophy) the apostle begins the climax of his sermon by discussing the bodily resurrection of Christ and its relationship to His exaltation. It is proof positive that He will be the judge of the entire world (*oikoumenen*). Then in verse 32 we hear the reaction of some of these Greek philosophers. They mocked and rejected Paul's message because he spoke of the resurrection of the dead (plural). Translated literally it would be "a resurrection of dead men," or "a resurrection of dead people (corpses)." This statement indicates either that Luke's account is an accurate *summary* of what Paul preached and that he must also have discussed with the general resurrection of the just and unjust in association with the judgment. Or perhaps, they inferred a general resurrection based on the resurrection of Christ and Paul's discussion of the final judgment. In either case it is clear that they rejected a literal bodily resurrection of men out of their tombs. The Greek philosophers (except perhaps the Epicureans) had no problem with the concept of the immortality of the soul. That idea was taught by their greatest philosophers. But Greek philosophy emphatically rejected the idea of a resurrection of the body. They regarded the corporeal (flesh and bones) aspect of man as intrinsically inferior and lower on a scale of being than man's spirit. These observations raise the following questions. If all men who become Christians experience *only* a spiritual resurrection (as many full preterists assert), would the Greek philosophers have objected to such a doctrine? No, of course not! If the resurrection were only a metaphor for the restoration of Israel in A.D. 70, as other hyperpreterists teach, would it

be offensive to Greeks living far away from Israel in Athens? No, that would be unlikely since the Romans and not the Greeks held the reins of power.

If the definite article was intentionally omitted before the expression *anastasin nekron* (a resurrection of dead men) because only Jesus is meant as a sample, then why did not Paul simply explain that Christ's resurrection was only a one of kind, temporary affair, to get the souls of Christians out of Hades as many full preterists assert. Moreover, they teach that once Jesus accomplished His mission, His human body dissolved or was put into storage as a monument. Such teaching would be far less offensive to Greeks than the traditional orthodox view.

Paul's Statement of Solidarity with the Jews

Another insurmountable exegetical difficulty for full preterists is found in Paul's explicit statements where he implies that his understanding of the resurrection of the dead is virtually the same as the non-Hellenized Jews and Pharisees. Note the following passages:

Acts 23:6

But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!"

Here Paul sought to divide the council by first appealing to his affiliation; and, then to a major doctrine that he held in common with the Pharisees. Disagreement over this doctrine greatly contributed to division and contempt between these two parties. Paul presents himself as a faithful defender of Pharisees' doctrine of the resurrection. The Sadducees were the modernists of their day and rejected the biblical teaching on the resurrection, angels and spirits (v. 8). What did the Pharisees believe regarding the resurrection that Paul could heartily agree with? According to Josephus, the Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the body (see Flavius Josephus, *The Jewish War* 2.8.11, 14; *Jewish Antiquities* 18.1.3-5). They believed that the soul would return to the dead body which would be raised and the saints would rule in a kingdom of righteousness with the Messiah. The ultimate triumph of the Pharisaic understanding of the resurrection of the body within Judaism can be seen in the strong teaching of the Mishnah that "he that says there is no resurrection of the dead...has no share in the world to come" (Sanhedrin, 10:1).

Acts 23:6 raises an obvious question. If Paul were a full preterist and rejected the resurrection of the body in favor of only a spiritual resurrection, or a national revival of the Jewish nation, or the setting free of spirits from Hades so they could float up to the third heaven, could he have honestly appealed to his concurrence with the Pharisaical teaching on the resurrection? Of course not! The Pharisees' doctrine had nothing in common with full preterism. The full preterist must either admit that Paul believed in a literal resurrection of dead bodies or he must affirm that Paul deliberately lied in a public court of law after swearing to tell the truth before God. Given the fact that Paul was defending an aspect of the gospel and there is no disapprobation in Scripture regarding Paul's defense, the latter alternative is impossible. Paul, the greatest of apostles and defender of the faith, believed in the traditional, orthodox conception of the resurrection.

Full preterists attempt to circumvent the obvious implications of the apostle's statement of agreement with the Pharisees on the resurrection by arguing that, at first, the Pharisees

misunderstood Paul on this doctrine. They assert that later, when the Pharisees finally figured out what the apostle's teaching on this subject *really* was, they became very angry, opposed Paul and wanted to kill him. Consequently, full preterists argue, these Acts passages cannot be used as proof texts for the resurrection of the body.

This argument (which may sound good to a person who is ignorant of Scripture) must be rejected for two reasons. First, as noted, it presents the holy apostle as a person who *deliberately deceived* the council while under oath to tell the truth before God. Paul was raised a devout Pharisee (cf. Phil. 3:5-6). He knew exactly what the Pharisees believed regarding the resurrection of the dead. Therefore, if his beliefs were radically different than their teaching (as full preterists assert) it would have been totally dishonest for Paul to appeal to a concurrence with their views.

Second, there is not a shred of evidence in the book of Acts to support the full preterist contention that the Pharisees discovered Paul's doctrine was different and as a consequence turned against him. In fact, a careful reading of the events completely disproves such a theory. The apostle's troubles begin in Jerusalem when Paul is seized in the temple. As he is seized by Jews from Asia, these men make the following accusations: "This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple" (Ac. 2:28). Then, as Paul stands before the crowd and makes his defense, note what he says that turns the mob decisively against him: "Then He said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles'" (Ac. 22:21). The mob cried out, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!" (Ac. 22:32). After this, the apostle is taken into custody and appears before the Sanhedrin, where he appeals to belief in the resurrection in order to divide the council (Ac. 23:6-10). At this first appearance, Paul is mistreated and beaten by the temple police at the direct orders of Ananias, the high priest and leader of the Sanhedrin (Ac. 23:2-3). Then, only a day later, we are told of a conspiracy by some of the Jews to murder Paul (Ac. 23:12). This conspiracy had the full approval of the chief priests and elders (Ac. 23:14), including the high priest (Ac. 25:2-3). The whole point of these facts is that there were Jews who hated Paul and wanted him dead from the beginning to the end of the historical account. While it is true that there were Pharisees on the council who came to Paul's defense on account of his comments about the resurrection, the high priest (Ananias) and those who had the highest authority were Sadducees. Moreover, we do not even know whether the Pharisees in the council turned against Paul because he was forced by the conspiracy to place himself under the jurisdiction and control of the Roman government (Ac. 23:22-35). In addition, when the high priest and his cronies came before Felix and made their case against Paul, they made no mention of the resurrection: "We have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He even tried to profane the Temple and we seized him" (Ac. 24:5-6). Note that these charges reflect the original accusations made when Paul was seized (Ac. 21:28). Given all these historical details, if the full preterist theory of a radical change in the Pharisees' attitude were true, it would mean that they would have had to meet privately with Paul *in prison* before the conspiracy (which was formalized the next day); ask Paul various details about his doctrine of the resurrection; and, then decide that his doctrine was wrong and heretical. Not only is no such meeting recorded, but it would be highly unlikely that the high priest (a leading Sadducee), who controlled the temple police and the jail, who hated the Pharisees, would allow such a meeting. The full preterist contention is a contrived fantasy to avoid the plain teaching of Scripture that Paul agreed with the Pharisees on the resurrection of the body.

Full preterists, however, simply ignore the historical circumstances and hang their theory upon Paul's statement to Felix in Acts 24:21, "Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day." This is viewed as an admission by Paul that the Jews were now going after him because they disagreed with his understanding of the resurrection. The problem with this interpretation is that Paul first challenges Ananias and his cronies to name actual crimes he committed (v. 20); then in verse 21 Paul refers to what had already been brought up at the original hearing before the Sanhedrin. "Paul states when he was before the Sanhedrin he uttered only one critical sentence, and it pertained not to the political concerns of the Romans but to the theological concerns of the Jews and Christians. This means that the point of conflict between Ananias and Paul is a theological issue that ought to be discussed in a Jewish ecclesiastical court. In brief, Paul expects the judge to dismiss the case, which had no place in a Roman civil court, and to set him free."⁸⁴ This is not evidence of a change of attitude on the part of the Pharisees, but is simply an excellent argument as to why Paul has not committed any violation of Jewish or Roman law. If the Pharisees were angry with Paul over his view of the resurrection and were out to get him, then his appeal to his statement at the original hearing makes no sense whatsoever as a tactic. If anything, it demonstrates that Paul was still confident that the Pharisees were on his side on this issue. If Felix sent the matter back to the Sanhedrin, then the Pharisees and Sadducees, once again, would be at each other's throats and Paul could not be convicted under such circumstances. Consequently, the argument for the resurrection of the body from the book of Acts cannot be avoided.

Acts 24:14-15

But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.

In these verses we find more statements by Paul that contradict the full preterist paradigm. In his answer to Felix, Paul openly admits that he is a Christian but in doing so he implies that Christianity is founded upon and logically flows from the Law and the Prophets. In other words, Christians are the true Jews who have faith in the holy Scriptures. Then Paul says he has the same hope in God that the Jews also have (here he is obviously speaking of the vast majority of Jews who followed the Pharisees on the doctrine of the resurrection). Then the apostle identifies this hope: "there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust." Christians and the vast majority of Jews in the first century had the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead in common.

Full preterists attempt to circumvent this passage with a number of desperate unsound arguments. Some seize on the phrase "hope of Israel" and argue that Paul was talking about a great deliverance or revival of national Israel. Then they will immediately appeal to passages which speak of both judgment and deliverance (e.g., Isa. 65, 66) and apply such passages to A.D. 70. Israel, they argue, hoped for national deliverance and revival. This national deliverance is tied to judgment; Israel was judged in A.D. 66-70. Therefore, the resurrection of the dead must be a metaphor for Israel's deliverance. There are a number of serious problems with such argumentation.

⁸⁴ Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 847.

First, full preterists completely ignore the immediate context and the usage of the same expressions within the book of Acts to look for remote and unrelated passages that support their paradigm. Note the immediate context: Paul defines *hope* as “the resurrection of the dead, both the just and the unjust.” Would anyone present in the room with Paul connect this statement to a national deliverance of Israel? Felix the governor, who was a pagan obviously would have taken it literally. The Pharisees who were present certainly would have taken Paul’s statement literally. In the chapter immediately prior to this statement, there can be no question but that Paul was appealing to a literal resurrection. In fact, a careful examination of the whole book of Acts demonstrates that resurrections from the dead are always used either literally of Jesus’ bodily resurrection, bodily resurrections back to mortal life, or the literal bodily resurrection on the final day (Ac. 1:22; 2:31; 4:2, 33; 9:40; 17:18, 32; 20:9-10; 23:6, 8; 24:15, 21). Regarding this passage, full preterists are offering nothing more than unsupportable speculations. Obviously, people can hope for different things. It is exegetically illegitimate, however, to substitute a hope from a very remote context for the hope defined in the *immediate* context.

Second, how can the destruction of the Jewish nation and the slaughter of over 2 million Jews be equated with a national deliverance from sin or a massive revival of the true religion among the Jewish people? The only historical event between the resurrection of Christ and the present day that even remotely resembles a revival among the Jews was the great conversion of Jews at Pentecost and the days which followed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. But even these great conversions involved only small fraction of the Jews then alive.

Moreover, (and this point is decisive) the New Testament passage which gives us the most information about a great redemption or revival for ethnic Israel—Romans 11:25-27—makes it perfectly clear that the salvation of Israel must be *commensurate* with their rebellion, hardening and consequent breaking and casting away as described in chapter eleven. As the great mass of Israel rejected Christ and the gospel, a great mass (i.e. the vast majority) of ethnic Israel must receive hearts of flesh, turn from their wicked unbelief to faith in Jesus Christ as the Messiah, Son of God, Lord and Savior. The hardening of Israel must terminate on a *massive scale* before this prophecy is fulfilled. To view the salvation of Israel in terms of the destruction of Jerusalem where no conversions were recorded is ludicrous. Paul, obviously, never speaks of the great reclamation and ingrafting back into the church of ethnic Israel as a slaughter of Christ-hating idolaters. The mass conversions predicted in Romans 11 are still future.

Third, the expression “resurrection from the dead” applies to both believers and unbelievers. The fact that it is a resurrection that both the saved and lost *have in common* rules out a national revival unless one is a complete antinomian or a universalist. Also, it cannot be regeneration or a spiritual resurrection because the saved are already born again. Moreover, if both the saved and the lost are regenerated, then once again we have universalism. This passage cannot refer to a release of spirits from Hades, for why are unbelievers released? The only resurrection that believers and unbelievers have in common is a resurrection of dead bodies. The universal testimony of Christian orthodoxy on the matter of the resurrection stands firm.

Excursus on Time Indicators

When full preterists are backed into a corner in debates with orthodox Christians, they almost always fall back on their core argument and theme—the time indicators. Indeed, even in private when they are willing to admit that their exegesis of certain passages is somewhat forced and strange, they will say that they have no other choice because they must take seriously the

time indicators. Believers who are unfamiliar with the intricacies of the Greek language who hear discussions between orthodox Christians and scholarly full preterists will often ask about the time indicator argument. They may not agree with the full preterist interpretations of specific passages, but they are baffled by the use of certain verbs which they have been told *always* teach imminence. They are told that certain passages cannot refer to events thousands of years in the future because they say these events are “about to come to pass.” Consequently, they must be interpreted within the A.D. 66-70 framework. Since Acts 24:15 is one of those passages, this is an appropriate time to refute this main pillar of full preterism.

In this passage the Greek of the Received Text reads, “*anastasin mellein esesthai nekron.*” The full preterist will argue that *mellein* (from *mello*) *esesthai* should literally be translated “being *about to be.*” Thus, the resurrection of the dead is something which is *about to* take place. It is an event that is historically close to the apostolic period and not far away. The verb *mello*, which they say always teaches imminence, is found in other passages which speak of events connected with the second coming of Christ such as Romans 8:18 (*ten mellousan dozen apokalupth-enai*, “the coming glory to be revealed in us”). Note also 2 Timothy 4:1, “Jesus Christ who will (*mellontos*) judge the living and the dead at His appearing.” In 1 Peter 5:1 the apostle says, “I...am...also a partaker of the glory that will be (*mellouses*) revealed.” A possible allusion to the end of the world is found in Hebrews 13:14, “For we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come” (*mellousan*) (cf. Ac. 17:31, *mellei* “He is going” *krinein* “to judge”).

If it were indeed true that *mello* *always* taught imminence, then the full preterist could argue that Luke, Paul, Peter and the author of Hebrews genuinely believed and taught *under divine inspiration* that the second coming of Christ, general resurrection and final judgment *were about to take place.* They were events about to come to pass. After looking at the clumsy, sloppy manner in which full preterists twist the second coming passages we could say that the time indicators are the *foundation* of their system and serve as the axis of all their main argumentation. Consequently, we need to ask a crucial question. Is it indeed true that *mello* always teaches or implies imminence? The simple fact of the matter is that their core argument is completely untrue.

The verb *mello* in both classical and *koine* Greek can have different meanings depending on the context and syntax. In Liddell and Scott’s massive study of classical Greek they give the following usages: “I. *to be destined or likely to*, indicating an estimated certainty or strong probability in the present, past or future... fut. inf., of a destiny or probability in the future...II. *to be about to*, in [a] purely temporal sense...III. *to be always going to do* without ever doing: hence, *delay, put off*...IV. part. *mellon* is used quasi-adjectivally...the *future time*...*things to come, the future*...V. Pass. *mellomai, hos me melloito ta deonta* that the necessary steps *might not be delayed*...”⁸⁵

In Walter Bauer’s (revised by William Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich and Fredrick Danker [sec. ed.]) exhaustive study he gives a number of different meanings: “1. ...with the future inf. *u* denotes certainty that an event will occur in the future...*will certainly take place or be* Ac. 11:28; 24:15; 27:10...*be on the point of, be about to b. be destined, inevitable* (acc. to God’s will)...*be about to, be on the point of* he was at the point of death (Aristot. In Apollon. Paradox 27...)...in a weakened sense it serves simply as a pariphrasis for the fut...Of Christ *ho mellon krinein* 2 Tim. 4:1...denoting an action that necessarily follows a divine decree *is destined, must, will*

⁸⁵ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1099.

certainly...2. the ptc. is used abs. in the mng. *future, to come* Mt. 12:32; Eph. 1:21...the judgment to come Ac. 24:25...3. *delay ti melleis*; why are you delaying?...Ac. 22:16.”⁸⁶

Walter Radl in the *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* writes,

Mello has (1) meaning *be about to, be present, even begin*, thus Luke 7:2: “he was *near* death/at the point of dying”; Acts 16:27; Rev. 10:4: “I *wanted to begin* to write”; 10:7: “he *began* to blow the trumpet/he *sounded* the trumpet.” (2) *Mello* is often used periphrastically for the simple fut. esp. the disappearing inf. and partic. forms: the inf. only in Acts 28:6 and 19:27 (cf. BDF 356), while the partic. is frequent, as in 2 Tim 4:1 (“Christ Jesus, who *will* judge/the *future* judge” or—as a substitute for the fut. pass. partic.—Rom 8:18 (“the glory that *will* be [is intended to be] revealed”); likewise Gal 3:23; 1 Pet 5:1; cf. 1:5 (with *etoimos*)....

In Acts *mello* contains no suggestions of a *near* future [i.e. when discussing the eschaton not ordinary every day actions; e.g., Ac. 3:3; 5:35; 11:38; 12:6; 16:27] (3) *Mello* also designates the intended action, as in Matt 2:13: “*he intended* to search for the child”; Acts 20:3, 7, 13, with reference to travel *plans* of Paul. (4) Finally, *mello* can express the necessity of an event that is based on the divine will and thus is certain to occur, e.g., Matt 17:12: “he *must* suffer” (cf. Matt 16:21 par. Luke 9:22 with *dei*); John 12:4: Judas..., who was *later* to betray him” (or “who *intended* to betray him”—then the passage is to be arranged under 3; cf. BAGD s.v.). The latter example indicates clearly that *mello* does not always have a fixed meaning.

b) Besides the combination with an inf. *mello* appears in the NT 18 times as an absolute partic. (1) Used as an adj., it appears always in the attributive position and means *coming, future* (Matt 3:7 par. Luke 3:7; Matt 12:32; Acts 24:25; Rom 5:14; Eph 1:21; 1 Tim 4:8; Heb 2:5; 6:5; 10:1; 13:14). (2) As a substantive it designates *the future (to mellon)*, 1 Tim 6:19, once *the coming year (eis to mellon)*, Luke 13:9; so BAGD s.v. with reference to Pap. London 123.4), or *that which is to come (ta mellonta)*, Col 2:17; 1 Tim 1:16; Heb 11:20; with *enestota*, the present situation, Rom 8:38; 1 Cor. 3:22).

c) *Mello* appears as an independent vb. only in Acts 22:16” “What is *still delaying* you?”.... In the NT letter *mello* is used with reference to the suffering (of Christians; 1 Thess 3:4) and for the anticipated future, the judgment, the new aeon, the future life, and other “blessings” that are objects of hope (Rom 4:24; 5:14; 8:13, 18; Eph 1:21; Col 2:17; 1 Tim 4:8; 6:19; 2 Tim 4:1; Jas 2:12; 1Pet5:1; Heb 1:14; 2:5 6:5; 10:1, 27; 13:14, with the wordplay *menousan [polin]—mellousan*).⁸⁷

The excellent Greek scholar Joseph Henry Thayer essentially agrees with everything we have seen thus far. He says that *mello* has the following meanings: “...1 Tim. vi.19; *ta mellonta*, things future, things to come, i.e., acc. to the context, the more perfect state of things which will exist in the *aion mellon*, Col. 2:17. 2....a. *to be on the point of doing or suffering something*...b. to intend, have in mind, think to...c. of those things which will come to pass...by fixed necessity or divine appointment...d. in general, of what is *sure* to happen...e. to be always on the point of doing without ever doing, i.e. *to delay*.”⁸⁸ G. Abbott-Smith notes that in the Septuagint *mello* is used for the future tense. He adds, “(a) of intending or being about to do [something]...(b) of compulsion, necessity or certainty...”⁸⁹

⁸⁶ William F. Arndt and F. William Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 500, 501.

⁸⁷ W. Radl. “*mello*,” in Horst Balz and Gerhard Scheider, eds., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1981] 1991), 2:404.

⁸⁸ Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 396-397.

⁸⁹ G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 282-283.

W. E. Vine also notes multiple meanings. He says that *mello* signifies: “of intention, to be about to do something...of certainty, compulsion⁹⁰...[It] is used of purpose, certainty, compulsion or necessity. It is rendered by ‘shall’ or ‘should’ (which frequently represent elsewhere part of the future tense of the verb)...Notes: (1) The use of shall, shalt, is frequently part of the future tense of a verb. (2) The phrase ‘it shall come to pass’ is the rendering of the future tense of *eimi*, to be, in Acts 2:17, 21; 3:23; Rom. 9:26.⁹¹” Simon J. Kistemaker notes that when two infinitives are used that both express the future such as in Acts 24:15, one is redundant.⁹² This construction explains why virtually all English translations such as the KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB, NEB, NIV, RSV, JB, Moffet, Wuest, Berkeley, Amplified, translate *mullein esesthai* in Acts 24:25 as “there will be.” The reason that Luke uses the infinitive *mellein* in Acts 24:15 is not because he believes that the second bodily coming is about to occur, but because he is emphasizing the *certainty* of a future resurrection of the righteous and the wicked: “there certainly will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.”

If one is going to accept what the full preterists have been teaching about the time indicator *mello*, then one must accept the patently absurd and fantastic claim that there has been a massive conspiracy over the last two thousand years by Greek scholars, translators, writers of lexicons and expositors to hide the true meaning of this word. This conspiracy would have to encompass scholars that are atheists, Roman Catholics, Unitarians, Eastern Orthodox, Protestants, as well as rank modernists. It would have to include all the classical Greek scholars as well as all those who specialize in *koine* Greek (i.e. New Testament Greek). One would also have to conclude that the Greek church fathers who spoke, wrote and studied in Greek had a much poorer understanding of the Greek language than modern full preterists. The bottom line on this matter is simple. Full preterists have perpetuated a myth about the main time indicator and have been either ignorant or have deliberately misused the Greek language to prove their heretical theory. It is time for orthodox Christian to obliterate the main argument that upholds this foolish, false and dangerous teaching.

The absurdity of the full preterist hermeneutic can also be demonstrated by applying their interpretive methodology to other sections of Scripture. In Isaiah 7 we have Isaiah’s interaction and prophecy to King Ahaz (his life is discussed in 2 Kgs. 16:1-20 and 2 Chr. 27:9-28:27). Ahaz came to the throne around 735 B.C. and reigned sixteen years (or, perhaps twenty one years if there was a short co-regency with his father, Jotham). The problems with Syria and Israel described in Isaiah 7 (i.e. Ephraim) were already taking place when he began his reign. When Isaiah comes to Ahaz in Isaiah 7 (cf. 2 Kgs. 16:5) Ahaz was appealing to Assyria (Tiglath-pileser) for an alliance against Syria and Israel. God does not want Ahaz to ally himself (and Judah) with heathen Assyria,, but rather to trust in Him for deliverance. God tells Ahaz that the evil plans of Syria and Israel (Ephraim) will not be accomplished. In order to strengthen the faith of Ahaz in what He has promised, God orders Ahaz to ask for a sign. This sign was obviously intended to convince unbelieving Ahaz that Jehovah would carry out His prophecy. Rebellious Ahaz, however, refuses to obey God and does not ask. This act of rebellion demonstrated the king’s unbelief and resulted in a promise of a sign not just for the king, but for the whole nation: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (v. 14). The promise to Ahaz and the covenant people was made around 725 years before its fulfillment in the birth of Christ. If one follows the full preterist method of interpretation he would have to

⁹⁰ W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, 1:15.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 4:15.

⁹² See Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of Acts of the Apostles*, 845.

argue that this prophecy could *only* be fulfilled in the generation to which it was given. This, of course, did not happen unless one believes in some kind of double fulfillment of this passage, which is problematic to say the least.

In the book of Isaiah we have imminence passages along with prophecies that discuss the distant future. When God discusses the destruction of Assyria, Judah and Babylon he uses near time indicators: “yet a very little while” (10:25); “the day of the LORD is at hand” (13:6); “her time is near” (13:22). Yet, in this book, we also have prophecies regarding John the Baptist (40:3-5); the suffering, death and burial of Christ (53); the virgin birth (7:14; 9:6) and the exaltation of the Messiah (9:7). Interestingly, right after the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity, the prophecy with no explanation jumps many hundreds of years into the future to discuss John the Baptist. The full preterist contention that an imminency passage means that *everything* in the immediate and mediate context must also be viewed as about to occur would make Old Testament prophecy incomprehensible. If the prophets could seamlessly move from events that are about to occur to events in the distant future without explicit demarcations, then Jesus and the apostles could also discuss the destruction of Israel (which was near) and then also teach about the second bodily coming of Christ (which was in the distant future).

Given these considerations we would do well to heed the wisdom of Patrick Fairbairn on this matter. He writes,

This aversion of prophecy to clearly defined historical periods—its tendency to exhibit coming events under relations in space or time, or, as successive only, without being on either hand definitely bounded—appears also in New Testament predictions. It appears in the discourses of Christ himself, in whom the Spirit resided above measure, and who received no revelations in dream or vision. He gives certain signs of the approaching destruction of Jerusalem, and of His own personal return to the world, by the careful consideration of which His followers might not be taken unawares by either event; but the precise period in both cases is altogether indeterminate. Nay, so essential did He deem it to the spiritual interests of His church to have the time so left, as regards the great object now of the church’s expectation, His own second coming, that He refrained from knowing it Himself when on earth. He *voluntarily* refrained from doing so; for, beyond doubt, He might have had the knowledge of that also, if He had so willed it, since, as the Son in the highest sense, He knew the Father (Matt. xi. 27); nay, had all things of the Father’s delivered into His hand (John xvi. 15). But He did not will it; He purposely restrained the intercommunion between divine and human natures, that He might exhibit Himself an example to His people, as not seeking to know what were not proper to be known, even by the most perfect, in a state of humiliation and trial. Therefore, he said, “Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven; neither the Son, but the Father” (Mark xiii. 32). Not only so, but when the disciples showed, at their last interview with the Master, that they had failed to profit aright by this declaration, and came to Him with the question whether He was then going to restore the kingdom to Israel, He rebuked their curiosity by the answer, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father has put in His own power.” This specific announcement, delivered in a face to face communication, we may be sure, from the fundamental laws of prophetic revelation, could not be annulled by any subsequent information on the subject, communicated in vision. *It fixed, from the first, the abiding condition of the church as regards the knowledge of coming epochs in her history.* It did so, more especially in regard to the great epoch of her Lord’s personal return.⁹³

⁹³ Patrick Fairbairn, *Prophecy Viewed in Respect to Its Distinctive Nature, Its Special Function and Proper Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Guardian, [1865] 1976), 172-173.

Acts 26:6-8

And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers. To this promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain. For this hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews. Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?

This passage defines the resurrection of the dead (plural, v. 8) in terms of the resurrection of Christ in verse 23 (cf. 1 Thess. 4:14; 1 Cor. 15:20 ff.). Note that Paul defines Israel's hope in terms of the Savior's resurrection. The Old Testament Scriptures taught the Messiah's victory over death (e.g., Isa. 25:8) and the resurrection of the saints to everlasting life (Job 19:25-27; Dan. 12:2; Isa. 26:19). If this is the hope of Israel, and Paul defines this hope in terms of a bodily resurrection, then a supposed national deliverance of Israel in A.D. 70 or a release of souls from Hades cannot be the resurrection of the dead. Paul was trying to convince Agrippa of a literal physical resurrection. He was not bringing up metaphors that would have been incomprehensible to the governor.

Romans 8:10-11

And if Christ *is* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin, but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

In verse 10 Paul describes the present state of a believer. Although this verse has its difficulties, it along with 11 could be paraphrased as: "But if Christ is living in you, then, though because of sin the body must die, nevertheless, because you have been justified, the Spirit, himself Life, is alive within you. And if that Spirit, namely the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is dwelling in you, then he who raised Christ from the dead will, on the day of the resurrection, impart life also to your mortal bodies. He will do it through the agency of the Spirit who is dwelling within you."⁹⁴

These verses (especially verse 11) completely refute the full preterist's attempts at redefining the resurrection. Therefore, the only thing they can do here is to argue that the term body (*soma*) is a metaphor for the sinful nature. There are a very small number of expositors (Calvin included) who view the term "body" metaphorically, as another way of identifying the sinful nature (or flesh, *sarx*) that remains within all believers. This view is rejected by the vast majority of expositors and is easy to disprove. That a literal body is what Paul had in mind is proved by the following observations.

(1) If one holds to the view that is common among older commentators that "Spirit" in verse 10 should not be capitalized because it refers to man's spirit, then one has a clear antithesis between the physical and immaterial aspects of man in this verse. Even if we take the view that spirit refers to the Holy Spirit, which in this context makes more sense, the term "body" (*soma*) still refers to the physical body.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, 251.

⁹⁵ The arguments for Holy Spirit here are strong: a) In all preceding eight instances (vs. 1-9) as well as twice in verse 11 *pneuma* refers to the Holy Spirit. b) Paul uses *zoe* which literally means life. In verse 2 of this same chapter the Holy Spirit is called "the Spirit [*pneuma*] of life" (cf. 2 Cor. 8:6). Saying the human spirit is life is strange and

(2) The immediate context points to a physical human body. The resurrection of Christ was a literal bodily resurrection and the phrase “mortal bodies” in verse 11 clearly is not intended to be taken figuratively.

(3) The only other possibility does not make any sense. Paul uses “body” literally throughout the book of Romans (e.g., 1:24; 4:19; 6:12; 7:4; 8:10, 11, 13, 23; 12:1) with only a few exceptions. In chapter 12 he speaks of the church as “one body” (vs. 4, 5); and, in chapter 6 he speaks of the body of sin (6:6), the body in which sin reigns (6:12) and the body of death from which we want to be delivered (7:24). Here Paul is discussing the body as a metaphor for the old man, or our depraved nature. If we interpret “body” in verse ten as “the sinful nature” then Paul would be saying that our sinful nature is dead because of sin which is nonsense. “We are delivered from sin, not because of it. We should accordingly take death to be physical death. Because we have sinned we will die...”⁹⁶

(4) The grammar would also be quite different if Paul were revisiting the same theme as Romans chapter 6. “One would expect a dative as in 6:2, 10, 11 rather than an accusative if the thought was the same in Rom. 6. Even more decisive, the reference to the resurrection of the body in the very next verse (8:11) suggests that the death of the physical body is contemplated...”⁹⁷ Consequently, the expression “the body is dead because of sin refers to the fact that our physical bodies have the seeds of literal death in them. A time is coming in which every Christian must die physically. “The moment we enter into this world and begin to live, we also begin to die. Your first breath is one of the last you will ever take! ...the principle of decay, leading to death, is in every one of us.”⁹⁸

In verse 11 Paul turns his attention to the believer’s future. Although there are some differences of opinion among scholars regarding the interpretation of certain terms in verse 10, expositors and orthodox theologians are almost unanimous regarding the interpretation of verse 11. The apostle is speaking about the future resurrection of believers from the dead. This interpretation is proven by the following considerations. a) All true believers have already experienced a spiritual resurrection the moment they were regenerated and turned to Christ. Although our sanctification is founded upon our union with the Redeemer in His death and resurrection, it is a life long process and not a one time future event. Paul always speaks of the new birth as a past event in the life of the Christian (Eph. 2:1-5; Col. 2:11-14). b) The comparison of the resurrection of Jesus to our own future resurrection means that God will raise us, just as He raised Jesus. This teaching is common in Paul’s writings (cf. 1 Cor. 15:23; 2 Cor. 4:14; 1 Thess. 4:14). c) In this passage Paul is not focusing on the mystical union of believers with the Savior as a source of new life, but rather on the Holy Spirit’s presence as the guarantee and agent of our future bodily resurrection. The life that we have *already obtained* through

doesn’t make much sense. But, the Holy Spirit as “the Spirit of life” is soteriologically significant. Jesus called Himself “the life” in John 14:6 and “the resurrection and the life” in John 11:25. c) “The Spirit of life” (*zoe*) in verse 10 corresponds perfectly with the Holy Spirit as the one who imparts glorified resurrection life in verse 11. The verb used is *zoopoiēsei*, which means “will make alive.”

⁹⁶ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 309.

⁹⁷ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 414.

⁹⁸ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 8:5-17, The Sons of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 69. John Murray writes, “The ruling thought of this verse is that although believers die and this fact is conspicuously exhibited in the dissolution of the body, yet, since Christ dwells in believers, life-giving forces are brought to bear upon death and this life is placed in sharp contrast with the disintegrating power which is exemplified in the return to dust on the part of the body” (*The Epistle to the Romans*, 1:290).

Christ will ultimately result in a complete triumph over death. Even though we will die physically, our bodies will not continue under death's power. "These mortal bodies shall be made alive by Him who raised up Christ's body, shall be glorified like Christ's body (v. 17; Phil. 3:21). We are wholly redeemed, body as well as soul. Having been created as embodied spirits, God will complete his work in us and will bring it to perfection also in our bodies."⁹⁹ We must not neglect the fact "that man was a physical whole at his creation. Man was not created to be an angel or to exist as a spiritual entity. Thus the resurrection of the body is necessary in order to reconstitute man to live once again as he did originally in the paradise of God."¹⁰⁰ One major difference between believers and Adam before the fall is that, as glorified beings, the saints will not be able to fall into sin. Our souls and bodies will be *spiritual*.

(4) The use of the word "mortal" (*thnetos*) clearly refers to weakness, corruptibility and mortality of our physical bodies as a result of sin. The adjective "mortal" means "*subject to death*." Once a person truly believes in Jesus he is no longer subject to death spiritually because the Holy Spirit seals him and preserves him spiritually throughout his whole life (see Ps. 37:28; 121:3, 7-8; Jer. 32:40; Jn. 6:39; 10:27-29; 17:11; Rom. 14:4; 16:25; 1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Cor. 9:8; Eph. 5:25; Phil. 1:6; 1 Thess. 5:23-24; 2 Thess. 3:3; 2 Tim. 1:12; 4:18; Heb. 12:12; 1 Pet. 1:4-5; Jude 1, 24; etc.). Moreover, this word (or one of its forms) occurs six times in the New Testament (Rom. 6:12; 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:53, 54; 2 Cor. 4:11; 5:4). In every single example it is speaking of our physical bodies. Since believers already possess everlasting life (Jn. 3:15, 16, 36; 5:24; 6:47; 10:28; 1 Jn. 5:13, 14; etc.) and are already raised from the dead metaphorically or spiritually, the only thing mortal about us is our physical bodies. Because of sin our bodies grow old, wear out, get sick and die. Then they rot and turn to dust. But, because of the redemptive work of Christ (who died and rose) and our possession of the Holy Spirit, our bodies will be raised immortal and incorruptible (cf. 1 Cor. 15:53-54).

This verse teaches that the same substance which made up the physical bodies of believers will be made alive by God and come out of their tombs. The soul of each believer will be reunited with his own body that arises glorified, spiritual, incorruptible and immortal. Yes, the victory achieved by the death and resurrection of Jesus extends even to our mortal bodies. As Moule notes, "In Christ, the body is seen to be something far different from the mere clog, or prison, or chrysalis, of the soul. It is its destined implement, may we not say its mighty wings in prospect, for the life of glory."¹⁰¹ That Paul is speaking of a literal bodily resurrection of believers in Romans 8:11 is taught by Matthew Poole (3:504), Matthew Henry (6:417), Robert Haldane (346-347), John Gill (2:484-485), Charles Hodge (260), William G. T. Shedd (240-241), H. C. G. Moule (215), E. H. Gifford (151), David Brown (3:240); F. F. Bruce (155-156), Frederic Louis Godet (305-306), J. P. Lange and F. R. Fay (10:258); John Stott (226), John Murray (1:291), Leon Morris (310), William Hendriksen (251), D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (7:69), William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam (198), James Montgomery Boice (2:818), C. E. B. Cranfield (1:390-391), Chrysostom and Augustine (see Cranfield 1:391), C. H. Dodd (125-126), Thomas R. Schriener (415-416), James Stiffler (112), Ernst Kaseman (224-225), R. C. H. Lenski (513-514), Everett F. Harrison (10:90), James Denney (2:647), Ralph Earle (177), John Wesley (vol. 2, no pagination), Paul E. Kretzman (2:41), R. J. Rushdoony (132-133) and Henry Alford (2:906).

⁹⁹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, [1936] 1945), 514.

¹⁰⁰ Robert A. Morey, *Death and the Afterlife* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1984), 96.

¹⁰¹ Handley C. G. Moule, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1982), 215.

Romans 8:22-23

For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only *that*, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

In Romans 8:19-22 Paul personifies the whole sub-personal creation and discusses its subjection to futility as a consequence of the fall, as well as its longing to be set free from its bondage to decay. Nature was subjected to the fall because of Adam's sin, but nature will be delivered from this bondage and will participate in the glorious liberty of God's children. Then in verse 23 Paul, with a strong emphasis ("we ourselves"), adds Christians to the creation that is groaning. Because believers have the firstfruits of the spirit, they long for their full redemption to come.

The expression "firstfruits" refers to the Old Testament practice of God's people bringing the first fruits of their harvest to the temple in order to offer it to God (cf. Lev. 23:10-11). The purpose of the Old Testament ordinance was to consecrate the whole harvest to come. First fruits presuppose later fruits. God was praised for these first fruits because they contained the proof of God's blessing and the assurance of even greater blessing—the whole harvest to come. In the New Testament Jesus is called "the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20) because, by His death and resurrection, He secured the resurrection of His people. His resurrection is a pledge and proof of the resurrection unto glorified life to come.

Here, however, Paul applies this expression to the Holy Spirit who regenerates, sanctifies and preserves believers. The gift of the Holy Spirit to believers is a pledge of subsequent salvation in all its fullness for believers at the second coming of Christ. All Christians have the Holy Spirit and are regenerated and declared righteous by God. But there is a sense in which their salvation is incomplete in this life. There is the struggle that we have every day of our lives with our flesh, or sinful natures. Also, our physical bodies are still subject to infirmities, suffering and death. Consequently, we groan within ourselves and long for the redemption of our bodies. We find a very similar statement about the Holy Spirit in Ephesians 1:13-14: "In whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory." Although we are regenerated and saved right now our mortal bodies have not yet been delivered. But the fact that we are a purchased possession and have been sealed we are guaranteed our full redemption, even "the redemption of our body."

The expression "the redemption of our body"¹⁰² refers to our body's deliverance from death, corruption and the grave. The word "redemption" is used instead of "resurrection"

¹⁰² Some full preterists argue that since the singular "body" (*soma*) is used that Paul is not speaking about individual Christians being resurrected, but merely about the redemption of the church as a corporate body. This view should be rejected because Paul is using a common Hebrew idiom where the singular (*soma*) applies to each member of a group (see Leon Morris, 324, footnote 103). Moreover, what Paul says must apply to individual believers or it is meaningless. Note that when Paul is discussing the need for individual *Christian men* in Corinth to stop fornicating with prostitutes he writes, "your (plural) body (singular) is the temple of the Holy Spirit." Clearly Paul is not saying that the whole church at Corinth as an organic body (including women and children) is having sexual intercourse with prostitutes; but rather that it is wicked for individuals who have the Holy Spirit within them to unite their bodies with a whore. In addition, when the *corporate* nature of the church is being discussed in the New Testament the inspired authors always say "one body" (e.g., Rom. 12:4; 1 Cor. 10:17; 12:12, 13), the "body of Christ" (1 Cor. 12:27) or "the body" (1 Cor. 12:15ff) and *never say* "your body" or "our body."

because Paul is emphasizing *the deliverance* of our physical bodies from the effects of sin and death. Unbelievers will experience a resurrection, but their physical bodies will not be redeemed. Our bodies which are fallen, weak, corruptible and which are the seat of our sinful natures are going to be transformed into glorified, spiritual, incorruptible bodies that cannot be tempted, cannot sin and cannot die. Only when this occurs will our redemption in the broad sense of that term be completed. “The consummation of the redemption process is waiting for the transformation by which the body of our humiliation will be conformed to the likeness of the body of Christ’s glory (*cf.* Phil. 3:21) and it is for that consummation that the sons of God wait.”¹⁰³

The only question that may arise regarding this verse is the meaning of the clause immediately prior to the statement about the resurrection of our bodies. How can believers eagerly wait for the adoption when they have already been adopted into God’s family at the beginning of their Christian life? Obviously, Paul is using the term in two different senses. In one sense believers are already adopted into God’s family and are sons of the Father in Christ. Everyone who is a Christian has a special relationship to God and this relationship of love, fellowship and communion can never be broken. But, at the resurrection of the body and the consummation, believers receive their *full inheritance* as sons. Moreover, at the second coming, believers will be *publicly* and fully recognized as the children of God. Boice notes that Paul is probably thinking of a special Roman custom relating to adoption. He writes, “The Romans (as well as the Greeks) had adoption in our sense, that is, when a child is taken out of one family and is placed into another. But the Romans also had an important ceremony in which the son of a leading Roman family would be acknowledged publicly as the son and heir.”¹⁰⁴ When Christ returns, believers receive their new glorified bodies; they are publicly acknowledged by Jesus and vindicated before all at the judgment; and they receive their full inheritance as well as the rewards of grace. Once again, salvation in the broadest sense of that term is brought to completion.

This passage of Scripture is very clear and is exceptionally difficult to twist and pervert into the full preterist paradigm. It poses a number of insurmountable exegetical difficulties for their system.

(1) Since believers are already regenerated (and made holy), justified and sanctified definitively (i.e. delivered from the dominion of sin; Rom. 6:2-22) what are believers “groaning” about or looking forward to with hope (*cf.* Rom. 8:24)? It must be something they do not already have. Consequently, the redemption of the body (*soma*) must refer to a deliverance from our *physical* mortality and corruption.

(2) If one argues that they are looking forward to having their souls released from *Hades*, then one must explain why Paul uses the term *body (soma)*. The body does not refer to man’s spirit and in this context certainly is not a metaphor for the church (see footnote 59).

(3) The full preterist must deny the clear teaching of Scripture on “the unity of the eschatological complex” (i.e. the teaching that the second coming of Christ results immediately in the resurrection of the body, the rapture, the final judgment, the complete elimination of death and the beginning of the final state), in order to make this section of Scripture relevant to Christians living after A.D. 70. If the adoption, the redemption of our body” took place in A.D. 70, then one must argue that either: a) Believers after A.D. 70 have no reason to groan about their condition or look forward to the redemption of their bodies because these things are

¹⁰³John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1:308.

¹⁰⁴James Montgomery Boice, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 2:881.

accomplished historical events in the distant past (This of course is complete nonsense. Christians after A.D. 70 are still mortal and corruptible); or, b) The passages that speak of the resurrection, judgment, rapture, etc are intended to be taken progressively throughout history after A.D. 70. In other words, each individual believer will experience a resurrection and judgment at death. This view is not only completely arbitrary (i.e. full preterists simply made it up), it also contradicts the explicit teaching of Scripture.

Full preterists appeal to a few passages in a feeble attempt to justify the progressive fulfillment view. One passage is Hebrews 9:27: “It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.” The idea is that at death each person will experience a separate judgment. This interpretation should be rejected for the following reasons. First, Hebrews was written before the destruction of Jerusalem. Consequently, what it says here applies to believers *before*, as well as *after* A.D. 70. It is ignorant and even dishonest to only arbitrarily apply it to saints who die after the destruction of Jerusalem. Second, the author is simply pointing out that judgment follows death in *logical* sequence. “The exact time of the judgment the writer of the epistle purposely omits. He calls attention not to judgment as such but to Christ who ‘will appear a second time.’”¹⁰⁵ Third, it is exegetically irresponsible to ignore the many clear passages that speak of the final judgment as occurring on “the final day” or “that day.” The judgment is inseparably connected with the second coming of Christ, with that day when “He will appear a second time” (Heb. 9:28). If one holds that the resurrection of believers and the final judgment is progressive, then, if he were consistent, he also would argue that the second coming is progressive, for these events are bound together in Scripture. As usual, full preterists are both arbitrary and inconsistent in their interpretation of Scripture.

Another common full preterist argument is based on a misinterpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:20, which says that Christ “has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” The idea is that Jesus is the firstfruits and then the saints are progressively harvested throughout history. This interpretation ignores the context which says that the full harvest comes at the second coming of Christ: “But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming” (15:23). “The ‘order’ of resurrection is only two: Christ the firstfruits: the full harvest of those who are his at his Parousia.”¹⁰⁶ “First Christ, then those who are Christ’s. There is no intimation of any further division or separation in time in the process of the resurrection.”¹⁰⁷ “In brief, because Christ has been raised, all his people who are dead or alive at this coming will be raised and glorified.”¹⁰⁸

1 Corinthians 6:13-15

Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body *is* not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make *them* members of a harlot? Certainly not!

These verses are particularly devastating to the full preterist position because it is very clear that Paul is speaking about *the human body* and not regeneration or ethnic Israel. The first

¹⁰⁵ Simon J. Kistemaker, *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 265.

¹⁰⁶ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 752.

¹⁰⁷ Charles Hodge, *I & II Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 265.

¹⁰⁸ Simon J. Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 551.

statement, “foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods,” is likely a Corinthian slogan. Paul acknowledges this fact, but points out that a time is coming when food and stomachs will no longer be necessary. Then Paul makes a statement that is probably intended as a refutation of another unstated Corinthian slogan which was used to excuse sexual immorality. The apostle has no problem acknowledging that food and stomachs are needed in this present age, but he strongly refutes the unsaid saying (or what had been implied from the food saying to sexual activity) that some Corinthians were using as a justification for sexual relations with prostitutes. Paul’s construction of the propositions implies that some Corinthians had developed the following line of reasoning: ““since everything is permitted, and since food is for the stomach and the stomach for food (after all God will destroy them both in the end), and since all bodily appetites are pretty much alike, that means that the body is for sex and sex for the body—because God will destroy them both in the end as well.””¹⁰⁹

Paul refutes this antinomian false reasoning with two closely related arguments. First, Paul points out that our physical bodies were not created to be used for sexual immorality but in order to serve and glorify God. (The eating of food is a matter of adiaphora and is necessary in the present age to sustain life; but, sexual immorality is a violation of God’s law. We exist to serve God by obeying His Word.) Moreover, the Lord Jesus came for the body. The body is not to be discarded but is to be saved. Our bodies were purchased by Christ’s blood (1 Cor. 6:20); are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19) and are mystically united to the Savior (1 Cor. 6:15). “Christ is *for the body*, to inhabit and glorify it.”¹¹⁰ This statement about Jesus being for the bodies of Christians leads directly to Paul’s next argument. Second, the Lord is for our bodies and will demonstrate this by raising them from the dead, just like He raised Jesus from the dead. Christ’s work of redemption includes the whole person—body and soul. The fact that our earthly bodies will be resurrected in this context is obviously intended to cause us to treat our bodies with reverence and respect as the future organ of our glorified personality. Because of our union with Jesus in His resurrection, our body is destined for a resurrection of life into eternity. Paul obliterates the idea that we can do what we like with our bodies (as some Corinthians wrongly supposed) because they will be destroyed and will not be part of the consummate kingdom. Our bodies will indeed be changed and transformed, but there is a true, vital, genuine connection to our bodies of flesh that lived on the earth and were placed in the grave. “The body cannot be disregarded as unimportant. The body *is for the Lord*... That the Father raised the Son from the dead, and did not simply cause His soul to persist through bodily dissolution, indicates something of the dignity of the body. Bodily life enshrines permanent values. The resurrection forbids us to take the body lightly.”¹¹¹ Note once again that Paul’s whole argument is dependent on a literal understanding of the resurrection of the body. With the case of food God will “destroy” or “abolish” (*katargesei*) it; but, regarding the physical bodies of Christians: “He will raise [them] up” (*exegerei*) and save and glorify them forever. If we remove the resurrection of physical bodies from this passage, then we completely destroy Paul’s main argument.

Full preterist views of the resurrection make a complete mockery of Paul’s argument because none of them have a true, lasting significance or place for the human body in relation to

¹⁰⁹ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 255.

¹¹⁰ Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, [1989] 1977), 307.

¹¹¹ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1958] 1983), 100. “In the case of *soma* [body] and the *Kurios* [Lord] to which it is related, God has raised the *Kurios*, and will raise up the *soma* of every one who is a member of Him. The contrast between the two cases is complete. On the other hand, the close relationship between the Lord and all true Christians, is shown by the double conjunction; *kai ton Kurion...kai emas*” (Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* [Edinburgh: T and T Clark], 124).

the resurrection. Would Paul order the men at Corinth to stop using their physical bodies to fornicate with prostitutes because some day the Jews will have a revival? Would he tell them to respect their physical bodies and use them in a holy manner because some day their physical bodies will rot, turn to dust forever and be replaced with a *completely different body* that has no connection whatsoever to the body in the tomb? The full preterist teaching places the physical bodies of the saints in the same category as food and stomachs, which will be done away as unnecessary in the eschaton. Consequently, the parallel argumentation that Paul uses completely breaks down. Would Paul teach these men to treat their physical bodies with holy respect and dignity because in A.D. 70 the souls of the saints trapped in Hades will be released to go to heaven? Of course not! Paul gives the Corinthians the assurance that God will raise their physical bodies by His power so they understand that not just their souls but also their bodies are precious in God's sight and will take part in their eternal salvation. Only this biblical truth will cause the men at Corinth (who were apparently influenced by Greek thinking about the physical body) to sanctify their bodies unto Christ.

The apostle continues to argue against using the physical body to fornicate in verses 15-20. Note, that each argument clearly deals with *the physical bodies* of the saints: (1) We must not take our physical body which was joined to Christ and join it to a prostitute (v. 15). (2) It is immoral, inappropriate and disgusting to take what is spiritually joined to Christ and then join it together in one flesh with a prostitute (vs. 16-17). These verses are an elaboration on verse 15. (2) The man who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body (v. 18). (3) Our physical bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (v. 19). (4) Our physical bodies do not belong to us because they were redeemed by Christ (vs. 19-20). (5) Therefore, we are obligated to glorify God with our physical bodies. This obvious fact makes it possible for the full preterist to circumvent the meaning of this passage.

1 Corinthians 15

In 1 Corinthians we have Paul's most extensive teaching on the resurrection of the saints. A careful examination of the portions of this chapter which are relevant to the debate on the resurrection between orthodox Christians and full preterists will solidify and strengthen our faith in the historic creedal teaching on this all important doctrine. Paul's purpose in writing this chapter was to defend and define the doctrine of the future, literal bodily resurrection of believers from the dead. Paul's statement in verse 12, "How do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" indicates that the reason Paul wrote this chapter was to deal with people in the church who were denying the future, bodily resurrection of Christians. Verses 35-58 indicate that the false teachers at Corinth apparently objected to the corporeal aspect of the resurrection. Although we do not know what specifically caused their rejection of a bodily resurrection, it is likely the influence of Greek philosophy, perhaps coupled with their perverted concept of spirituality. In light of 1 Corinthians 6:13 it is probable that they regarded the salvation of the body as unnecessary; that the physical body would eventually be destroyed. Because they viewed the physical body as inferior and unnecessary, they redefined the future resurrection in a purely spiritual manner. It is for this reason that 1 Corinthians 15 is so well suited to refute the full preterist heresy.

This chapter contains three divisions in subject matter. In *the first part* of the chapter (vs. 1-11), the apostle appeals to the commonly held belief among the Corinthians that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. Paul emphasizes the historical factual nature of our Lord's resurrection

by appealing to a number of important points. First, he appeals at the beginning (vs. 1-2) and the end (v. 11) of this section to the fact that the Corinthians had accepted the true gospel from Paul. In other words, given the fact that Paul had preached the full content of the gospel and the Corinthians had believed it and owe their very salvation to this teaching, then how could they now accept a doctrine that implies it is not true? “If they do not hold fast to the gospel, that is, if their current position as to ‘no resurrection’ is correct, then Christ did not rise, which in turn means that they did indeed believe in vain. If they are right, everything is a lie, and they cease to exist as believers altogether.”¹¹²

Second, Paul explains the gospel by setting forth two fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith: the sacrificial substitutionary death of Christ on the cross and the literal bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead (vs. 3-4). Paul mentions the fact that our Lord was buried and then rose to emphasize the historical fact that the Savior’s dead physical body was placed in a tomb and, consequently, His corpse was raised and came out of the tomb. The resurrection of Christ’s body is an objective historical reality. It is not metaphorical or simply some spiritual phenomenon.

Third, Paul gives a list of appearances of Christ which includes Cephas, the twelve, five hundred brethren at once, James, all the apostles and Paul. “This muster of witnesses indicates the importance Paul attaches to the resurrection of the Lord. He is about to show its consequences for Christian faith, and he lays the foundation by showing how well based is belief in it. He does not give a complete list of witnesses, but gives enough to show that the fact is extremely well attested. So reliable is the evidence that it must be accepted...”¹¹³

Paul’s Refutation of the “No Bodily Resurrection” Position

In the second part of this chapter (vs. 12-34), Paul builds his argumentation upon the teaching of the first section and sets forth an air-tight, logical refutation of the Corinthians’ “no bodily resurrection” position. This section is devastating to the full preterist concepts of the resurrection of the saints because the apostle’s arguments could be applied to full preterists. This section contains three arguments designed to prove the absurdity and impossibility of the “no bodily resurrection” position.

(1) Paul argues that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then our Lord did not rise from the dead (vs. 13-15b). The Greek literally reads, “But if a resurrection of dead men [*anastasis nekron*] is not, neither Christ has been raised.” Then the apostle lays out the shocking implications of such a statement. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then our faith in Christ is worthless, the apostolic message is untrue and no one is saved (vs. 12-17). Moreover, everyone who has believed in Christ and then died has perished forever (v. 18). Their bodies will never come out of the grave. “Paul sees at once what others at first apparently failed to see: the resurrection in general cannot be denied without ultimately advancing to a denial also of Christ’s resurrection. Both stand and fall together.”¹¹⁴

¹¹² Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 721.

¹¹³ Leon Morris, *I Corinthians*, 207.

¹¹⁴ R. C. H. Lenski, *I and II Corinthians*, 649-650. Charles Hodge’s comments on verses 12-13 are excellent. He writes, “The admission of the resurrection of Christ is inconsistent with the denial of the resurrection of the dead. What has happened, may happen. The actual is surely possible. This mode of arguing shows that the objections urged in Corinth bore equally against the resurrection of Christ, and against the general doctrine of the resurrection. They, therefore, could not have been founded on the peculiar difficulties attending the latter doctrine. They must have been derived from the assumption that the restoration to life of a body once dead is either an impossibility, or

Paul's argument in verse 13 (which is repeated in verse 15) disproves the full preterist position because his statement, "if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen," clearly assumes a literal resurrection of dead bodies. The apostle's argument would be invalid if the resurrection of the saints was defined *in a completely different manner* than the Redeemer's resurrection. Paul is saying if there is no plural *A*, then there can be no singular *A*. If we define the saints' resurrection as merely a spiritual experience or a metaphor for a revival in ethnic Israel, then Paul is comparing apples to oranges. He would be saying if there is no plural *B*, then there can be no singular *A*. The fact that full preterists can find references to spiritual resurrections in Scripture does not enable them to circumvent the clear meaning of Paul's argument. Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit beyond measure (Mt. 3:16; Mk. 1:10; Lk. 3:22; Jn. 3:34), but He was never regenerated or born again. His resurrection was a bodily, physical, literal resurrection out of a tomb. The clarity of Paul's argument cannot be denied.¹¹⁵ Full preterists have a heretical, unbiblical understanding of the resurrection of dead believers. They will, of course, vehemently object to what has just been said by insisting that they do indeed believe in the resurrection. But if their definition of the resurrection of the saints on the final day is completely different than Christ and the apostles, then what they teach is no better than the doctrine of modernists, Bartians or the cults. *They deny the resurrection by redefinition.*

(2) In verses 20 to 28 Paul argues from the opposite direction and points out that since Jesus has been raised from the dead the bodily resurrection of believers must also take place. (The apostle uses the perfect tense [*egegetai*, v. 20] which means that Christ rose from the dead in the past and He continues permanently in His character as the risen and glorified Savior.) The covenantal union of believers with the Redeemer in His death and resurrection established a necessary connection between Christ's resurrection and the resurrection of all those who are redeemed. Paul speaks of our Lord's resurrection as "the firstfruits of those [Christians] who have fallen asleep [died physically]" (v. 20). The Savior's resurrection is the pledge and guarantee that there will be a full harvest of all Christians out of their graves unto glorified immortal life. "Paul is asserting by way of metaphor that the resurrection of the believing dead is absolutely inevitable; it has been guaranteed by God himself."¹¹⁶ As Adam is the covenant head of all those who die (i.e. death is inevitable because of the imputation of Adam's sin and our own

an absurdity. Most probably, these objectors thought, that to reunite the soul with the body was to shut it up again in prison...His design is to show that their objections to the resurrection proved too much. If they proved any thing, they proved what no Christian could admit, viz., that Christ did not rise from the dead. The denial of the resurrection of the dead involves the denial of the resurrection of Christ. The question discussed throughout this chapter is not the continued existence of the soul after death, but the restoration of the body to life. This is the constant meaning of the expression "resurrection of the dead," for which the more definite expression "resurrection of the body" is often substituted. Whether the false teachers in Corinth, who denied the doctrine of the resurrection, also denied the immortality of the soul is uncertain. The probability is that they did not. For how could any one pretend to be a Christian, and yet not believe in an hereafter? All that is certain is, that they objected to the doctrine of the [general] resurrection on grounds which logically involved the denial of the resurrection of Christ" (*I and II Corinthians*, 319).

¹¹⁵ On verses 13 and 14 Gordon Clark writes, "One is almost ashamed to write a commentary on these verses. No other language could make the meaning plainer" (*First Corinthians*, 258). Clark then adds this germane comment, "The Confession is right when it says, 'Those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned [and perverse Corinthians] in the due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them' (Westminster Confession, I.7)" (*Ibid*, 259). The resurrection of the dead is a crucial aspect of the gospel which is one of the most perspicuous doctrines in Scripture. But, if full preterism is true, then *all professing Christians for over 1,800 years* have had a completely unbiblical view of this foundational doctrine.

¹¹⁶ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 749.

sins), Jesus is the covenant head of all those who will be made alive. Although it is indeed true that union with Christ results in regeneration and spiritual life (Eph. 2:5-6; Col. 2:11-13), the main thought of Paul in this context is on the physical resurrection of believers at the Parousia. This resurrection is in the future and Paul is writing to Christians who have already been raised spiritually in the past.

This section of chapter 15 refutes a number of full preterist errors. First, to deny that here Paul is speaking about a future bodily resurrection of believers, one must completely ignore the context, which is the bodily resurrection of physically dead believers. This is what Paul is setting out to prove. To ignore this fact and pretend that the apostle is discussing regeneration, or a release of souls from Hades or a revival of ethnic Israel is complete nonsense. Full preterists must do great violence to the plain meaning of Scripture to maintain their paradigm.

Second, verse 23 (“But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming”) completely disproves the full preterist concept of progressive resurrections throughout history for believers living after A.D. 70. The word *tagmati* (*tagma*) translated “order” is a military metaphor which refers to a company troop, band or body of troops. The point of this passage is that when Jesus returns the *whole body of believers* from throughout human history will come forth in the resurrection like troops coming out together to assume a proper position and order around their leader. The expression “those who are Christ’s” (*hoi tou Kristou*) is *comprehensive*. It refers to the *whole body of the elect*. As Paul had just said in verse 22, “in Christ all shall be made alive.” This resurrection of the saints is said to occur “at His coming.” “*At his coming* makes it clear that Paul is referring to the second advent. The word he uses is *parousia*, which basically means no more than ‘coming’ or ‘presence’.... But it came to be used among Christians as the technical term for the Lord’s return.”¹¹⁷ “‘Each in his own order’ means exactly two and not three [or three million]. First fruits are followed by the harvest, and that is all.”¹¹⁸ There are not five, six or millions of separate harvests. David Brown’s comments on this section of Scripture are right on the mark:

Any one who even glances at this sublime chapter will see, that the burden of it is the resurrection of believers *in general*—of “them that are Christ’s,” considered as the second Adam. As their death is deduced from their federal relation to the first Adam, so their resurrection is argued from their federal connection with the second. “As in Adam (they) all die, even so in Christ shall (they) all be made alive.” And it is immediately after this that the apostle says, “But each (party) in his own order”—that is, the federal Head and those federally related to him—“Christ the *first-fruits*; afterward they that are Christ’s (the *full harvest*) at his coming.”

Can any thing be more decisive than this? What commentator explains it otherwise? What unbiased reader ever understood it otherwise? Is it not, then, a very bold liberty with the Word of God to say, that only a *fractional part* of “them that are Christ’s” are here spoken of?—that it means only such of them as shall have lived before the millennium?—that there will be millions of “them that are Christ’s,” that will not be “made alive at his coming,” but remain in their mortal and unglorified state upon earth for at least a thousand years thereafter? Here, on the contrary, we find *the whole federal offspring of the second Adam* made alive together at his coming. As surely as “Christ, the first-fruits” of *espoused* them “to one Husband, that he might *present* them (*paratesai*) as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Cor. xi.2), there can be no doubt, I think, that they are right. Well, when is this to be? Clearly, “at his coming.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Leon Morris, *I Corinthians*, 215.

¹¹⁸ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of I and II Corinthians*, 669.

¹¹⁹ David Brown, *Christ’s Second Coming: Will It Be Premillennial?*, 53-54.

This verse completely concurs with 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 where we are told that Christ will descend from heaven and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then believers who are still alive when Jesus returns will be transformed and glorified and all the saints will meet the Savior in the earth's atmosphere. Our Lord is the first fruits because His victorious resurrection results in and guarantees the full harvest at the second coming. Paul mentions only two categories: Jesus and everyone purchased by His blood. Jesus alone, who is the Captain of our salvation, is in the first category and *all* believers are in the second category. This means that if the resurrection of the dead saints and the rapture of living saints occurred in A.D. 70, then there will be no resurrection for people living after A.D. 70. Obviously, the second coming can only occur at the end of human history and not at the end of covenant Israel's history.

Note also that if we accept the full preterist contention that all believers after A.D. 70 simply receive their resurrected bodies at death and the general resurrection is a progressive instead of puncticular event, then 1 Thessalonians 4:17 doesn't make any sense whatsoever. If the resurrection is what normally happens at death (as many full preterists assert), then why would believers who were alive at Christ's coming need to have their bodies transformed into glorified, spiritual bodies which are raptured into the air to meet Jesus as He descends? The saints who were alive at that time could simply wait their turn and die a natural death just like everyone else after A.D. 70. The only explanation of 1 Corinthians 15:23, 1 Thessalonians 4:17 and many other passages¹²⁰ that does not contradict that plain meaning of Scripture is that there is one resurrection of all the saints at the end of history, and not an endless series of separate resurrections throughout history.

Most of the New Testament passages on the second coming of Christ and the resurrection are not difficult passages. They are not what expositors call "problem passages." The comments of Greek scholars and exegetes on these passages are virtually in complete harmony. They only become exceptionally difficult when a person attempts to fit them into an A.D. 70 framework. When confronted with such clear passages full preterists can only fall back on their time indicators and ignore what these passages actually say or they can equivocate and twist the obvious meaning of the text of Scripture or both.

Third, verses 24-28 connect the resurrection of the saints, not with the destruction of Jerusalem, but with Christ's complete and final victory over all powers or forces that are against His throne. This section is very important because Paul is elaborating on the extent of the victory of Jesus' resurrection. Because of Adam's fall, sin and death (in the most comprehensive sense of the word) spread to all men. (In fact the whole creation was affected by sin and the fall.) But by dying on the cross and rising from the dead, Jesus has conquered death. Yet, even though our Lord has achieved a complete victory over death, believers still die physically and their bodies decay. Consequently, for salvation in the most comprehensive sense of the term to be complete, all those who were united to the Savior in His resurrection must arise because His victory was their victory. Only then will the last enemy, which is death, be finally and completely subdued.

¹²⁰ That the whole church universal is presented to Christ on the final day is taught or implied by the following passages. "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself to her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her...that He might present her to Himself a glorious church" (Eph. 5:26, 27). "...that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints" (1 Thess. 3:13) "...when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe" (2 Thess. 1:10; cf. Col. 1:21, 22; Jude 24; 2 Cor. 11:2). Christ will only return when His church or bride is complete. This can only happen at the end of history. The A.D. 70 date chosen by full preterists is unbiblical and impossible.

There are a number of important things to note about this section of Scripture that refute the full preterist system.

(1) The context of this passage is the resurrection of Christ and the bodily resurrection of believers. Paul is still setting forth reasons as to why a bodily resurrection of Christians must take place. To argue that Paul is discussing regeneration, deliverance from spiritual death or a deliverance of Israel in A.D. 70 is purely arbitrary. There is nothing at all in the context to support such a claim. People who make such arguments are simply imposing their own preconceived ideas onto the text. Moreover, since believers have already been regenerated and justified before God, Paul's use of the word "death" must refer to a type of death that believers still experience—physical death.

(2) Paul very clearly connects the bodily resurrection of the saints with the end of the world. After Paul sets forth the order of the resurrections—Christ the firstfruits then the full harvest of the saints at the second coming—he says, "then [comes] the end" (*eita to telos*). Although the word *eita* ("then") does not necessarily mean "immediately after"; in this context, it almost certainly connects the final resurrection with Christ's total victory and the consummation of all things. Because the word *eita* can either mean what is subsequent or what is immediately consequent, premillennialists see a thousand year gap between the resurrection of the saints at the Parousia and the end of the millennium 1,000 years later. The problem with the premillennial view and the full preterist view, which is far worse (no final victory; death, suffering and sin continue on forever; all the prophecies and promises of Scripture have already been fulfilled), is that Scripture clearly places the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked on the final day (Dan. 12:1-2; Jn. 5:28-29; Ac. 24:15). This happens on the same day as the final judgment of the righteous and the wicked (Mt. 13:30-50; 25:31-46; 2 Thess. 1:7-10) and the end of all opposition to God together at the coming day of the LORD (2 Pet. 3:10-13; 1 Cor. 15:24-27; Rev. 20:11-15). Consequently, "unless it can be proved from other sources that events which are foretold as contemporaneous, or as following the one the other in immediate time, no such separation can properly be assumed."¹²¹

All of this raises the question: Does the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 comport well with Paul's description of the events at the end or that must come to pass before the end? Paul says that Christ's reign as the theanthropic Mediator continues until every authority or power that opposes Him is subdued. The last enemy that is destroyed is death itself. The Messianic rule that began at our Lord's resurrection must continue until He has put all His enemies under His feet including physical death. "By subjecting death to himself through the resurrection of the dead [saints], which is causally related to his being the firstfruits, Christ will thus have brought Satan's tyranny to its conclusion."¹²² As Christians we should view death as a power that is contrary to God's original intention for the human race. It became a triumphant enemy over man when Adam ate the forbidden fruit. "Adam's disobedience resulted in the death of himself, his wife, and all his descendants. But Jesus conquered death through his resurrection and will abolish it in the consummation."¹²³

It should be obvious by now that Paul is not describing the end of Israel as a covenant nation or the end of the Jewish age, but the end of the redemptive process itself. Jesus brings the work of redemption to completion at the second coming and then hands the kingdom over to the Father. As long as there are enemies of Christ in this world, people still sin and Christians still

¹²¹ Charles Hodge, *I & II Corinthians*, 328.

¹²² Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 756.

¹²³ Simon J. Kistemaker, *I Corinthians*, 553.

die, the salvation process has not yet been fully realized. The resurrection of the saints cannot be restricted to regeneration, coming out of spiritual death or a revival of the Jews; for physical death will be done away in the removal of every power that opposes the will of God. The verb translated “destroy,” “abolish” or “put down” (*katargeo*) means to render null and void, make inoperative, render ineffective. At the resurrection of the saints all unbelievers are judged and cast into the lake of fire with the devil and all his angels. From the resurrection to the second coming Satan was on a leash, but after the Parousia he is in the lake of fire with absolutely no influence over this world. In the completely renewed heavens and earth, “there will be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4). According to the full preterist concept of the ultimate results of Christ’s work, the world was much better off before the fall than *it will ever be* for according to their system sin and the enemies of Christ will always be with us. There is no ultimate victory.

Paul’s Discussion of the Nature of the Resurrection Body

After proving that believers are to arise bodily at the second coming of Christ, Paul turns his attention to the nature of the saints’ resurrected bodies. There is a sense in which this section is still dealing with objections to a literal bodily resurrection, for the apostle sets out to answer a common objection to this doctrine. “How can a literal bodily resurrection take place when bodies have been consumed by insects, bacteria, plants and/or animals and have completely disintegrated into the earth?” A modern scientific person would want to know how all the scattered atoms and molecules that once composed our bodies are put back together again. Many full preterists actually think that this is an excellent argument against the traditional Christian view of the resurrection of the body. One such author quotes M. C. Tenney:

When the body of Roger Williams, founder of the Rhode Island colony, was exhumed for reburial, it was found that the root of an apple tree had penetrated the head of the coffin and had followed down Williams’ spine, dividing into a fork at the legs. The tree had absorbed the chemicals of the decaying body and had transmuted them into its wood and fruit. The apples, in turn, had been eaten by people, quite unconscious of the fact that they were indirectly taking into their systems part of the long dead Williams. The objection may therefore be raised: How, out of the complex sequence of decay, absorption, and new formation, will it be possible to resurrect believers of past ages, and to reconstitute them as separate entities?¹²⁴

¹²⁴ M. C. Tenney, *The Reality of the Resurrection*, as quoted by David B. Curtis, internet article. The great Reformed theologian Francis Turretin does an excellent job of refuting such unbelieving, foolish and heretical arguments: “To the objections drawn from the scattering of the corporeal dust, the devouring of human flesh by brutes and cannibals, the words of our Savior furnish an abundantly satisfactory reply: ‘Ye do err not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.’ For these human reasonings arise from an ignorance of the Scriptures and of the absolute and infinite power of God. For whoever is firmly persuaded of both can easily beat back such cavils. Truly if the thing was to be measured by human strength, this would end the matter. But since it is a work of God, whose knowledge nothing can escape, whose power nothing can hinder, who can suppose this to be impossible? It is as easy for God to restore to the dead their own bodies and to separate them from all other bodies (even of cannibals themselves who may have devoured others) as it was easy to form the body of the first Adam out of the dust or to bring all things out of nothing. If a careful and attentive head of a family knows well where each thing is to be found in his house however large, why should God, whose wisdom and power are infinite, not know where the matter of our bodies lies concealed, since the whole world is far smaller to him than the most contracted chest or case to any man? Therefore, he can by his almighty nod alone recall these who at any time may have either been devoured by beasts, or turned into ashes and dissolved into moisture, or sunk in the waters, or exhaled into air; nor is there any hiding place, or cave, or recess, which is either concealed from the knowledge of the Creator, or can escape his power. For as

Paul deals with this objection, not with a discourse on the power or sovereignty of God or a scientific dissertation on our DNA molecules, but with a strong rebuke for even considering such an argument. Paul's response begins with the word "fool" [*aphron*] translated as "foolish one" or "thou fool." The word literally means "mindless," "senseless," "ignorant," or "foolish." The point of this word is not to insult the Corinthians who held to such a ridiculous idea, but to tell them they are not thinking correctly, logically or biblically. They are fools in the Old Testament sense for not taking God or His power into account on this crucial doctrine. After this one word rebuke, he appeals to the analogy of sowing seed to gather a harvest. The seed is buried in the earth, but is then raised up with a new more glorious body. "Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain—perhaps wheat or some other grain. But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body. All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:36-44). This section of Scripture contains a number of excellent arguments against full preterism.

First, note that Paul's argument only makes sense if what is sown into the earth are the dead bodies of believers. Seeds are buried in the earth and Christians' dead physical bodies are buried in the ground. This analogy cannot apply to the souls of believers because they are not buried. They go immediately at death to be with Christ (Phil. 1:21-23; Lk. 23:43). Moreover, once a Christian is regenerated and saved, his soul cannot die again spiritually. Paul is writing to Christians. Therefore, he cannot be telling them that their regeneration and deliverance from sin-death is in *the future*. Also, any idea that Paul is dealing with ethnic Israel's death and resurrection is complete nonsense. The context shows that the Corinthians were not discussing ethnic Israel at all. Rather, they were denying a literal, bodily resurrection of the saints (1 Cor. 15:12).

Second, that Paul is talking about a real resurrection of physical bodies is proved by verses 38 and 39 where the apostle is talking about bodies made of "flesh." The use of the term "flesh" in this context cannot refer to our corrupt nature or unregenerate state for Paul is talking about the different kind of bodies that animals, birds and reptiles have in comparison to human bodies. Animals are not unregenerate. They do not have sinful hearts or souls that are under sin-death. Remember, Paul is answering the question, what kinds of bodies do Christians have when

nothing vanishes into nothing and always at least a minute particle containing the seed of a new body remains; and which, wherever scattered and thrown, nature holds at least in her bosom and care—so she restores it to God asking it back. Here belongs the passage of Tertullian: 'Not the soul alone is separated; the flesh also has its place of concealment, in the waters, in fires, in birds, in beasts, since it seems to be dissolved into these as if poured into vessels, if also the vessels themselves have ceased, since it has flowed out of them also, it will be absorbed as if in a roundabout way into its mother earth, that it may again be recovered from her' (*On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 63 [ANF 3:594; PL 2.885-86]). Besides, neither is it necessary for the essence of the same body that all its particles of dust be reckoned up and be united together in its new formation. It is sufficient that the principal and more solid parts remain. For every day some particles perish from the body, some are added to it, and still we see that the same man remains" (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3:569-570).

they are resurrected (v. 35)? This observation also completely rules out the idea that Paul is discussing a release of souls from Hades. Souls are not made of flesh and are never referred to as bodies in Scripture. Paul is establishing the point that God has made many different kinds of bodies and therefore He has the ability to raise up our dead bodies to a new form of existence that is different and superior from that which was placed in the grave.

Third, the major point of Paul's seed analogy is to establish a genuine resurrection as well as a radical transformation. The dead body which is placed in the tomb (the seed) will be raised and transformed into a spiritual glorified body (what the seed becomes). The seed that is placed in the ground doesn't simply rot into nothing while God creates a completely new and different plant somewhere else. No, the seed becomes the plant. This analogy assumes *continuity* or it is simply false. Farmers don't plant wheat so that God can create a bushel of grain out of thin air. The planted seed becomes a beautiful field of wheat. Paul is telling us that the resurrection of believers is not simply the resuscitation of a corpse (as happened with Lazarus). It rather involves a transformation of dead bodies into something that is spiritual, incorruptible, immortal and glorious. As Paul says in another place, "Jesus...will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body" (Phil. 3:20, 21).

The seed analogy assumes that God starts with something (a dead body) and not nothing (full preterist's creation of a resurrected body out of nothing). The amazing transformation of the dead body is described using the passive "quicken." "The seed does not come to life of itself, but God gives it life.... A dead-looking, bare, dry seed is put into the ground, but what comes up is a green plant, vigorous and beautiful."¹²⁵ The passive indicates that the seed is acted upon. The full preterist believes the seed is not acted upon, but rather is ignored. While we must be careful not to make too much out of a simple analogy, the full preterist teaching ignores a central feature of this analogy.

Full preterists turn the teaching of Paul in 1 Corinthians upside down by using the seed analogy as a basis for their idea that believers receive a completely new and totally different body at death. This interpretation should be rejected for the following reasons.

(1) As noted the seed analogy assumes both *continuity* and radical *change*. If (as full preterists teach) our physical bodies are left in the earth forever and there is no connection between our resurrected body and what is left in the tomb, then the seed has nothing to do with the plant. There is no real connection at all and Paul's analogy does not fit the resurrection of the saints at all. What full preterists teach is not a resurrection, but instead an *ex nihilo* creation. They do not really regard the dead bodies of Christians as seeds, but rather as garbage. Instead of being redeemed, the bodies of believers are abandoned to the grave forever.

(2) The analogy with Jesus as the firstfruits is also destroyed. The Redeemer is the firstfruits precisely because He first rose from the dead bodily. He rose as the captain of our salvation; because He conquered death and the grave, we rise also. If we do not conquer death and the grave in Christ but are left to rot in the grave forever, then the firstfruit analogy breaks down. Full preterists do not believe in a real resurrection of the saints. They believe that Christians receive completely new bodies at death that have no organic connection to their physical bodies that lived and died. They also believe that Christ's resurrection was solely for dramatic apologetic effect. They must believe this because they view physical death as a natural part of God's pre-fall world. They teach that Jesus rose literally and bodily, but Christians *never* rise literally and bodily. Therefore, the most they could say about our Lord's resurrection is that it was a *sign* that at some point in the future God would create new spiritual bodies for Christian

¹²⁵ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 224.

out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). But the firstfruits of a barley or wheat harvest is some barley or wheat not a cow or a sheep. The firstfruit is an indication of what is to come or it is not firstfruits. It is a sample of what is to come in the future and not a metaphor for a completely different kind of event or thing (cf. 1 Cor. 15:20, 23; Rom. 16:15; 1 Cor. 16:15). Gill writes,

Christ is the first, and rose in the first in dignity, as well as in time; he rose as the head of the body, as the first-born, the beginning, that in all things he might have...the pre-eminence. The first-fruits sanctified the rest of the harvest, representing the whole, gave right to an in-gathering of it, and ensured it; Christ by lying in the grave, and rising out of it, sanctified it for his people, and in his resurrection represented them; they rose with him, and in him; and their resurrection is secured by his; because he lives, they shall live also. The first-fruits were only such, and all this to the fruits of the earth, that were of the same kind with them, not to tares and chaff, to briars and thorns; so Christ, in rising from the dead, is only the first-fruits of the saints.¹²⁶

Fourth, a proper interpretation of the transformed bodies of Christians rules out the full preterist interpretation. Paul gives a detailed contrast between our bodies which are sown in corruption and the resurrected body that we are to receive. “The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body” (1 Cor. 15:42-44). Using the figure of a seed once again, Paul says that the bodies of believers are placed in the grave and at the appointed time they are to arise into a state that is radically different and superior to what it was before. The expression *speiretai*, “it is sown,” is out of place and completely irrelevant if it does *not* refer to the human body. Likewise, “it is raised” (*egeiretai*) refers to the *same body* that was sown or Paul is speaking nonsense. Paul notes four differences between the body before and after the resurrection.

The body before the resurrection is a corruptible body. In this mortal life our physical bodies wear out, get sick, grow old, die and rot because we are fallen and polluted creatures. The death and putrefaction of the body is a great humiliation for man who was created to rule over God’s creation. The Greek word “corruption” (*phthora*) means that something is “destructible” or “perishable.” Paul is obviously discussing the human body which is liable to decay. Consequently, the Christian physical body that was committed to the tomb to rot and turn to dust will arise without the ability to die or decay. It cannot be destroyed. Incorruption is the opposite of corruption or decay. As Grudem writes,

The fact that our new bodies will be “imperishable” means that they will not wear out or grow old or ever be subject to any kind of sickness or disease. They will be completely healthy and strong forever. Moreover, since the gradual process of aging is part of the process by which our bodies now are subject to “corruption,” it is appropriate to think that our resurrection bodies will have no sign of aging, but will have the characteristics of youthful but mature manhood or womanhood forever. There will be no evidence of disease or injury, for all will be made perfect. Our resurrection bodies will show the fulfillment of God’s perfect wisdom in creating us as human beings who are the pinnacle of his creation and the appropriate bearers of his likeness and image. In these resurrection bodies we will clearly see humanity as God intended it to be.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ John Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, 2:730.

¹²⁷ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994, 2000), 831.

In fact, in our new state we will be superior to Adam in that we will be unable to fall and we will not be dependant on food for nourishment (1 Cor. 6:13). It is the only state that is truly the opposite of corruption or decay; our bodies will be immortal. A body free of all moral and physical corruption awaits all those who trust in Jesus. One of the central features of the human body (its corruptibility) that caused Greeks to view it as defective and lesser on a scale of being will not be a characteristic of the saints' resurrected bodies.

Before the resurrection believer's bodies are sown in dishonor; that is, subject to humiliation. The moment our bodies die they begin to rot and degrade. The funeral home can pump in embalming fluid to slow the process and put make up on the corpse to mask the effect of death, but soon the body becomes discolored, bloated and begins to stink. The body is enveloped in dishonor and must be removed from sight and entombed to remove its stench from the community. It must be buried deep because its putrefying mass is a danger to public health. The sight of a decomposing body causes people to recoil in horror. But the resurrected body comes forth in glory; it comes out of the grave perfect, without blemish or defect. Our bodies will be changed into a thing of great beauty and radiance, transformed and fashioned like the glorious body of Christ. "And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man" (1 Cor. 15:49). Jesus "will transform our body that it may be conformed to His glorious body" (Phil. 3:21).

The body before the resurrection is weak. Man's whole existence because of the fall is one of weakness. The body has a natural inclination toward sin; it is frail and easily struck by disease and death. When the body dies and is laid in the earth, it is a poor helpless thing, wholly in the power of death and corruption. It is deprived of all its vital capacities and powers and comes under the domination of insects, bacteria and viruses. Without life and strength it cannot move or defend itself from the degradation of decay and putrefaction. But when Christ raises this body out of the grave it is powerful; a heavenly, glorified life will be infused into it. No more can the body get sick or die; it will be made with the ability to endure forever.

The body is sown a physical or natural body, but it is raised a spiritual body. The expression natural body (*soma psuchikon*) has engendered much discussion because the adjective *psychikos* can have a variety of meanings. The word can mean "pertaining to the soul or life." "The adjective *psuchikos* occurs six times in the New Testament: 1 Corinthians 2:14, three times in the present passage, James 3:15, and Jude 19, where it is translated *sensual*."¹²⁸ The general consensus of commentators is that *psuchikon* refers to a body subject to the laws and conditions of physical life. Before the transformation our bodies are earthly and function in the same manner as brute beasts. "Paul intends to describe only the present natural state of the body and not the spiritual condition of the person to whom the body belongs."¹²⁹ "A natural body consists of flesh and blood; is susceptible of pain and decay; and needs air, food, and rest. It is a mere animal body, adapted to the conditions of an earthly existence."¹³⁰

At the resurrection all believers receive a "spiritual body" (*soma pneumatikon*). The expression "spiritual body" does *not* mean a disembodied spirit. Rather Paul describes our new bodies as being completely Spirit-filled and Spirit-governed. "[T]he spiritual body is a body such as the Holy Spirit designs to be suitable and competent for the functions of the future life."¹³¹ This point is explained in verses 45-49: "And so it is written, 'The first man Adam became a

¹²⁸ Gordon H. Clark, *First Corinthians*, 298.

¹²⁹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of I and II Corinthians*, 714.

¹³⁰ Charles Hodge, *I & II Corinthians*, 348.

¹³¹ Gordon H. Clark, *First Corinthians*, 300.

living being.’ The last Adam became a living-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.”

Adam by creation was a *psyche* being. He was of this earth. But Christ, by His resurrection, is a *pneumatikos* being. The first Adam was given a body that had the possibility of death and decay. As the federal head of humanity Adam fell and brought death into this world. He is the representative man for all who bear his *psychikos* likeness. But Christ, the second Adam and federal head of the elect, gained a “spiritual (glorified) body” through His redemptive work. He is not only the covenant head and representative Man for everyone who will bear His *pneumatikos* likeness, He also is the source of our spiritual life and our future spiritual (glorified) bodies. Everyone who is in Christ will share in the likeness of the heavenly man.¹³² His resurrection will result in us receiving a heavenly body like the glorified Savior. Just as Jesus was literally resurrected with His same body that was radically transformed we shall be resurrected with a transformed spiritual body. “The resurrection body of Christ shows us

¹³² The full preterist Kurt Simmons writes, “The term ‘spiritual’ in 1 Cor. 15:44 is substantive, not qualitative, and that the body of the resurrection will be intangible [incorporeal, immaterial, having no physical existence], immaterial, and eternal. The spiritual man has a physical body only because he has not yet put it off in death. Upon the death of the body, the inner man lives on, clothed upon with a spiritual body of life.... The ‘earthly house’ [2 Cor. 5:1] is the fleshly body of this material realm. Upon death, it is replaced by a spiritual and immaterial house from heaven. Since it is from heaven, it clearly is not the ‘self same’ body put off in death. In the resurrection we will be spirit beings with spiritual bodies. (Heb. 12:23; 1 Cor. 5:5) (*The Resurrection of the Flesh*, internet article). There are a number of serious problems with Simmons’ view. (1) Why would Christ or Paul describe what Simmons describes as a resurrection? It obviously has nothing to do with a resurrection. The old body remains in the grave forever and a spiritual shell is created of nothing to house the person’s spirit. (2) The Corinthians who denied the resurrection of the body would also have no problem with Simmons’ view. It was precisely the idea of the raising up of the old dead body of flesh that was rejected by Neo-Platonists and Gnostics. (3) If there is nothing physical or material about the resurrection body, then we have the rather absurd notion of a spirit created to house men’s disembodied spirit. As Turretin writes, “It is said that our bodies will be heavenly (1 Cor. 15:48), not in origin and essence, but in abode and seat; spiritual, not in substance and nature (because it implies a contradiction for a body to be made a spirit, and for a body to be granted which is not material), but in qualities and gifts. The flesh will perish as to its moral and qualitative being, but will remain as to its physical being essentially. All defects will be removed from the bodies to which they have been exposed in this mortality, but their essence will not be destroyed; while they will be blessed with immortality, glory, splendor, activity and similar gifts, which will be to them for an ornament and garments, they will always remain as to substance, material, quantity, visible, extended, standing together with its own dimensions, commensurate with place, as he who will give it glory will not take away its nature. Augustine says, ‘The bodies of the just will be spiritual after the resurrection, not because they will cease to be bodies but because they will subsist by the vivifying Spirit’ (CG 13.22 [FC 14:333; PL 41.395])” (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3:573). (4) Simmons’ view presupposes a Neo-Platonic concept of the human body. Man is saved only when he gets rid of his physical body and becomes a pure spirit being. For Paul, man’s problem was the nature of his physical body *due to sin*; its weakness, perishability, and so on. The resurrection of the physical body will eliminate these bad things without eliminating man’s body. (5) As we have noted in our study of 1 Corinthians 15 above, it is very clear that Paul is discussing a real bodily resurrection and not a creation of a spiritual shell *ex nihilo*. (6) Simmons’ appeal to 2 Cor. 5:1 as a proof text for a completely new spiritual body that has nothing to do with our current body is fallacious. Paul uses the verb *ependysathai* (to be covered over) which conveys the idea of covering over what already exists. The apostle is talking about the transformation of our earthly mortal bodies into heavenly spiritual bodies. This point is proved by verse two which says our present tent (i.e. our earthly physical bodies) shall be clothed over with the additional clothing of our heavenly glorified bodies. Simmons chooses an interpretation which explicitly contradicts 1 Cor. 15:51; Phil. 3:21; 1 Thess. 4:17 and Rom. 8:11, 23.

something of what life will be like for believers in that new world which their resurrection will usher in.”¹³³

Many full preterists appeal to 1 Corinthians 15:45 as a proof text against the doctrine of a literal bodily resurrection because it says, “the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.” They argue from Luke 24:39 where Jesus said, “a spirit does not have flesh and bones.” This interpretation reveals how going to Scripture with a preconceived theological paradigm results in unbiblical exegesis. We can say this for two reasons. First, the full preterist view completely ignores the broad context of Scripture. When did Jesus become “a life-giving spirit?” The Bible teaches that it happened at the resurrection when our Lord received all power and authority to send the Holy Spirit and grant the gift of immortality to His people. When Jesus paid the full penalty for sin and defeated death and the grave through His resurrection from the dead, He obtained a transformed, glorified human body that is spiritual. When He rose from the dead, the Holy Spirit became the Spirit of Christ (the theanthropic Mediator) in a special redemptive sense. Jesus now has the authority to send the Holy Spirit to His people to raise them up spiritually (regeneration), sanctify and preserve them and also transform their physical bodies like unto His own glorified body (Phil. 3:21; 1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Thess. 4:16-17). When Jesus received all this authority was He only a disembodied Spirit being? No. He had a real (albeit glorified) physical body that could be touched and handled. Moreover, all four gospel accounts go out of their way to prove that He rose in the exact same body in which He died. Full preterists simply ignore all this strong biblical proof and, *with no biblical evidence whatsoever, arbitrarily* argue that at a point subsequent to the resurrection Jesus shed his resurrected physical body and became a pure spirit being. This argument not only suffers from being an arbitrary idea without proof, but also contradicts Scripture. The Word of God teaches that, as the *divine-human Mediator*, our Lord’s high priestly work must continue until the final person is saved, all the saints are resurrected and glorified and the eternal state (the consummate kingdom) begins. This most certainly has not yet occurred. (Even the full preterist would have to argue that it did not happen until A.D. 70.)

Second, it also completely ignores the context in 1 Corinthians 15 itself. That Paul is discussing the dead physical bodies of believers is proved by the following considerations. (1) Paul argues that if dead men (plural) do not rise, then Jesus did not rise (vs. 13, 16). He must be comparing the same type of events or his argument is invalid and fallacious. (2) He turns the argument around and says if Jesus did not rise then we will not rise either (v. 15). (3) Paul is discussing Christians who have fallen asleep (i.e. died physically) (vs. 18, 20). If he is not discussing dead bodies, then he can only be discussing a spiritual experience (e.g., the new birth) or a release of souls from Hades. But the Bible explicitly teaches that all Christians are already regenerated, baptized and sealed by the Holy Spirit. Moreover, all believers go to be with Jesus the moment they die (Phil. 1:21-23; Lk. 23:43). (4) Paul’s discussion of Christ rising from the dead as the firstfruits would not be true if he was not discussing a real bodily resurrection of the saints. Firstfruits indicate a *full harvest of the same kind*. Firstfruits of wheat do not indicate a successful pumpkin harvest. (5) The last enemy that is destroyed is death (vs. 26, 54-55). If this only refers to spiritual death and things will continue as they are forever, then the full preterist must teach that the last person was converted in A.D. 70 and the world ever since has been left to the heathen. They have only one other alternative which is to simply ignore what Paul says and pretend there is no end of death. This is actually what they do. What Paul is actually teaching is a complete total victory of Christ’s kingdom where even physical death and suffering are conquered. (6) When describing the nature of the resurrection Paul asks, “with what body do

¹³³ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 230.

they come?” (v. 35). He is discussing a bodily resurrection (cf. v. 38). (7) The seed analogy presupposes a body is sown and the same, albeit transformed and glorified body, comes forth (vs. 37-38). (8) Paul discusses different types of flesh and material objects to inform us about the nature of our resurrected bodies (vs. 39-41). This would be out of place if our bodies never rose and we became pure spirit beings. (9) Paul says explicitly that our dead bodies are sown and these dead bodies are raised incorruptible (vs. 42-44). Before the resurrection the body is natural (i.e. fallen, corruptible, weak, etc). After the resurrection it (i.e. the same body that was sown or buried) is spiritual, incorruptible, powerful and glorified. (10) Paul explicitly says that the bodies of the dead saints and the saints alive at the Parousia are not disregarded, or completely replaced, but rather transformed or changed (v. 52). If the full preterist system is correct, then this whole chapter is incomprehensible and false. But God is true and full preterists are liars and heretics.

Chapter 5: Our Final Victory

In verse 50 and following Paul introduces a new subject and brings his discussion of the resurrection to a climax. This section is important because verse 50 has become a proof text for the full preterist position; that the bodies of the saints remain in their graves forever and are replaced by completely new bodies that have no organic connection at all to what existed before. Full preterists take a chapter of Scripture which is designed by Paul to prove the reality of the resurrection of the body (the same body that was buried) and read into it their own perversion of this doctrine. They can only do this by ignoring and/or twisting what Paul says.

Paul begins by making it clear that the bodies of the saints that rise are very different from our mortal bodies. “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption” (1 Cor. 15:50). The expression “flesh and blood” forms a unitary concept (both terms do not have articles and the verb is singular) that refers to the human body as fallen, weak and corruptible. The term “flesh” can refer to our sinful nature, but the phrase “flesh and blood” is meant to be taken literally. Earlier, Paul referred to our “natural body” and now he uses a synonym for our *physical body as it exists in this life*. These two terms point us to two crucial aspects of the human body which are particularly liable to damage, disease and decay. The focus is not simply on flesh and blood as such, *but as things that perish and are corruptible*. These terms focus our attention on the frailty and mortality of our bodies. Paul is saying that our mortal bodies in the present state are not fit to enter God’s presence and exist forever in the final state. The apostle affirms the reality of the resurrection, yet rejects the idea that our bodies are not transformed. Paul is *not* saying our physical bodies are to be cast off as refuse so that a spirit body can be substituted for our old body. No, our old bodies will be *changed* (1 Cor. 15:51) or *transformed* (Phil. 3:21). That Paul is focusing on the human body as weak, frail and perishable is proved by the parallel clause, “nor does corruption inherit incorruption” (v. 50b). Believers’ mortal bodies must be changed into bodies that are immortal, imperishable, powerful and glorious.

Once we understand this verse, we see that Paul is *not* teaching that our new resurrected bodies have no physical characteristics or have nothing at all in common with our old bodies made of flesh. The point throughout this chapter is that what goes in the grave (the seed that was sown) comes out radically changed to meet all the contingencies of our new glorified existence in the consummate kingdom. If Paul’s point was that there is nothing at all physical or material about our new glorified bodies, then there would be absolutely no reason for a resurrection or redemption of our bodies that were sown. We could simply remain disembodied spirits forever.

Moreover, if our new bodies only consist of spirit, then the biblical and theological connection between Jesus' resurrection, which was bodily and real, and our resurrection is severed.

Changed Not Replaced

One of the most problematic passages for full preterists is 1 Corinthians 15:51-53: "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

These verses tell us explicitly that when Jesus returns not only will dead believers be transformed, but Christians who are alive at that time will also receive new glorified incorruptible bodies. Even though *not* every believer will undergo physical death, every Christian will have to undergo a radical change so that what is corruptible or perishable will become imperishable and immortal. This happens to dead believers by resurrection and living believers by an instantaneous transformation. It is impossible to enter the kingdom of glory and dwell in God's presence forever with our weak, corruptible, perishable bodies. In 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 we learn more details about this event; in particular, that the dead in Christ will rise first. Then all believers who are still alive at that time will be caught up to meet Jesus in the earth's atmosphere (*aer*) as He descends toward the earth.

The full preterist ignores the meaning and significance of what Paul is saying and turns once again to an argument of imminence. This argument boils down to personal pronoun "we," as in "we shall not all sleep" [i.e. die]; "we shall all be changed." As Russell boldly asserts, "When the apostle says 'we,' he no doubt means the Christians of Corinth and himself."¹³⁴ The problem with such an argument is that if Paul were truly teaching that not all the Corinthians would die (fall asleep), then he was a false prophet for they all did die. Moreover, the radical change from corruptible and mortal to incorruptible and immortal that Paul describes applies to *all Christians* whether dead or alive. It is for this reason that all Bible-believing commentators regard the personal pronoun "we" as general or generic (i.e. all believers who have died [this would now include all the apostles] as well as those believers who happen to be alive at the second coming). "Paul is not saying that Christ's return will happen during his lifetime. Like every one of us, Paul looked forward eagerly to the end. From God's revelation we learn that ...no one except God the Father knows the day or hour of this event (Matt. 24:36). Indeed Jesus told the apostles that it was not for them to know the times and seasons the Father has determined (Acts 1:7)."¹³⁵

There are a number of things in this section of Scripture that refute the full preterist system. First, Paul is discussing an event that encompasses *all believers* whether dead or alive. Consequently, unless one completely redefines the resurrection of the dead saints and the transformation of the living saints, one must admit that such an event has obviously not occurred. It is for this reason that full preterists have invented their own unbiblical theories regarding the final resurrection and the rapture (e.g., regeneration only, a subjective spiritual experience, a release of souls from Hades, a deliverance of national Israel).

Second, given the context and the meaning of the words used it is impossible to deny that Paul is discussing a bodily physical resurrection of the dead and a radical transformation of

¹³⁴ J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia*, 209.

¹³⁵ Simon J. Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 583.

living saints. The terms “natural body,” “man...of dust,” “flesh and blood,” “sown in corruption,” “one kind of flesh,” “the dead” [Christians] are not ambiguous. Human spirits are not made of “flesh” and cannot be equated with “flesh and blood.” Paul is answering the questions, “How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?” (v. 35). Christian spirits do *not* die and are *already* spiritually raised up. The souls of believers in heaven obviously do not need to be changed from that which is perishable and mortal to that which is imperishable and immortal. *All Christians* (whether dead or alive) will be changed in a very brief moment of time from corruption to incorruption, from dishonor to glory, from weakness to power, from a natural body to a spiritual body. The full preterist must either abandon his system or completely ignore the plain and explicit meaning of Paul’s words. Disease, dishonor, humiliation and death are incompatible with the apostle’s description. Consequently, Jesus has not yet returned bodily from heaven.

Third, Paul’s description of how the resurrection of dead believers and the transformation of living believers take place completely rules out the full preterist teaching of progressive resurrections throughout history. A radical transformation of *all* the dead believers and *all* the saints who are alive occurs virtually simultaneously. Paul says that it happens in “a moment,” “in the twinkling of an eye.” “*Moment* is *atomos* (‘that which cannot be cut, or divided,’ i.e. the smallest possible; we get our word ‘atom’ from it). It signifies the shortest possible time.”¹³⁶ A change that takes place instantly and completely for all the saints whether dead or alive cannot be stretched into eternity. Full preterists are guilty of twisting Scripture and adding to it.

Fourth, since this radical transformation involves all dead believers as well as living believers, we would expect this event to usher in the final state where suffering, disease and death are completely abolished. This point is precisely what is taught in the immediate context. There is the last trumpet on the last day (v. 52; cf. Jn. 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 1 Thess. 4:16-17). Not the last trumpet of the judgments in Revelation or the last trumpet for a new phase of the earthly economy, but the last trumpet of all history.

Then Paul indicates that the result of this resurrection-transformation process is the complete abolition of death itself. Earlier (vs. 23-28) the apostle had argued that God used the resurrection of Jesus to achieve a total victory. Christ’s resurrection results in the resurrection of all the saints (vs. 22-23), a complete victory in history over everyone who opposes God (vs. 24-25), and even the destruction of the last enemy—death itself (v. 26). Paul returns to this theme as the climax of the power of the Redeemer’s resurrection. “So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?’ The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:54-57).

Paul appeals to Isaiah 25:8 where the prophet proclaims that on the great day of salvation God “will swallow up death forever.” The apostle follows the LXX in translating “forever” as “victory.” Then he uses a text from Hosea 13:14 to taunt death as a defeated foe. Under divine inspiration Paul makes changes to the Hosea text so that it agrees with the Isaiah passage. With his exposition of the victory of Christ’s resurrection essentially completed, Paul mocks this great enemy because he knows that its doom was sealed by the cross and the empty tomb. Even though believers prior to the Parousia continue to “fall asleep” in the Lord, Paul can exult in the fact that Christ has removed the sting of death. Death is really powerless over God’s people. It cannot truly harm them, because they will be raised and changed into the glorious image of Jesus

¹³⁶ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 233.

Himself. Interestingly, Paul expresses this taunt in the present tense because Christ's victory has already set in motion the final victory over death at the second advent. Hodge writes,

The apostle places himself and his readers in presence of the Saviour and of the risen dead arrayed in immortality; and in view of that majestic scene he breaks out in these words of triumph: "Christ has conquered. His people are redeemed. Death is disarmed. Hades is no more." Death is addressed under the figure of an animal armed with a poisonous sting which pierces even to the soul; for that sting is sin. The grave, or the Greek word Hades, means, what is unseen, the invisible world, the abode of the dead in the widest sense. It depends on the context whether the immediate reference be to the grave, the place of departed spirits, or hell, in the modern sense of that word. Here where the special reference is to the bodies of men and to the delivery of them from the power of death, it is properly rendered the grave. The only sense in which the body can be in Hades is that it is in the grave. The apostle is not speaking of the delivery of the souls of men from any intermediate state, but of the redemption of the body.¹³⁷

The complete lack of a final and total victory over sin, evil, suffering and death is one of the greatest problems with the full preterist world view. Full preterists will acknowledge that the devil, sin and evil were defeated by the redemptive work of Christ. They will even admit that there is a sense in which the victory of the cross is being worked out in the present age. But, because they believe that every eschatological passage in Scripture was fulfilled by A.D. 70, they are forced to redefine our Lord's final victory as a massive failure. Even though Jesus has returned, defeated His foes, judged the human race and cast the devil, death and hell into the lake of fire: rebellion against God continues on a world wide scale; cults and false religions are growing by leaps and bounds; Christians in many countries are being persecuted, tortured and murdered; it is illegal in the land of Christ's birth to preach the gospel; and the mortality rate for human beings stands at 100%. God haters, blasphemers, atrocities, sin, evil, suffering and death are tolerated by God forever and ever and ever. The present evil world system is eternalized by the full preterist eschatology. The full preterist world view is not only radically unbiblical, but it is an attack on God's nature and character as well as the cross of Christ. The Bible teaches that Christ's redemptive work leaves the world in an even better state than it was before the fall. It will be redeemed and unable to rebel against God. It will be perfect and holy and we will dwell with Christ forever. But in the full preterist system, the world was far better *before the fall* than it will ever be again, forever and ever. The full preterist god allows evil to continue forever and the full preterist cross and empty tomb (at best) only achieve a partial, rather insignificant victory. It should be rather obvious by now to any Bible-believing Christian that full preterism stands firmly outside the bounds of genuine orthodox Christianity. Full preterism is clearly in the category of a cult.

When full preterists are asked how death was destroyed in A.D. 70, they will often respond that in A.D. 70 the law of Moses was removed or nullified and sin which is death's sting was removed. They attempt to prove this assertion with verse 56, "The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law." The full preterist view must be rejected as unscriptural for the following reasons. First, there is not a shred of evidence from the Bible that God eliminated our sins (judicially or foundationally), Israel's sins or anyone's sins in A.D. 70. Full preterists turn an event of judgment on Israel into some kind of crucial *redemptive* historical event. This denigrates the sacrificial death of Christ. God dealt decisively with sin in His only begotten Son at the cross of Calvary where Jesus paid the *full* penalty for all His people. Israel was judged and destroyed

¹³⁷ Charles Hodge, *I & II Corinthians*, 357-358.

in A.D. 70 because she rejected her Messiah and persecuted His people. The covenant nation suffered the sting of death. They were not delivered from it by the Roman armies.

Second, Paul is simply making a statement about the moral law. He is not elaborating on the fate of the Mosaic law as a covenantal administration. Sin is the sting of death because sin leads to death and sin is what renders death a terror to unbelievers. Christians do not fear death and do not experience the terrors that attend death (the pain, tortures and anguish of hell) because Christ has forgiven their sins. Moreover (and here is the main point in this context), believers have conquered death in Christ and will be raised glorified, incorruptible and immortal. Because of the perfect work of our Savior, death is harmless. It has no sting. It can inflict no evil.

When Paul says, “the strength of sin is the law” he is pointing out a few very important things about the moral law of God. (1) If there were no law or ethical absolutes based on God’s nature and character, there would be no sin (cf. Rom. 4:15). (2) The law makes us exceedingly sinful in two ways. It reveals to us our sins committed against God by giving us knowledge of what sin is (Rom. 7:7). It also gives sin its power by arousing sinful passions within us (Rom. 7:8-11). “The law convicts and condemns the sinner to death because the sinner is unable to fulfill its demands.”¹³⁸

The full preterist contention that the law was done away in A.D. 70 is absurd for two reasons. (1) The New Testament makes it crystal clear that the ceremonial laws and that which was unique to the Mosaic administration of the covenant of grace was rendered obsolete and nullified *the moment* that Jesus died on the cross (Mt. 27:51; Mk. 15:38; Ac. 15:6-29; Gal. 2:4, 11-14; 3:28-29; 4:10, 21-31; 5:1-6; Eph. 2:14-22; Heb. 7:11; 8:13; 9:25, 26; 10:8, 9). Moreover, Daniel says that the death of the Messiah brought an end to sacrifice and offering (9:27). When Jesus died on the cross, Jerusalem ceased to be God’s holy city and the temple was no longer the house of God. When Christ died and the temple veil was torn from the top to bottom God departed and the continued use of the temple was a sign of unbelief and the rejection of the Redeemer. The temple became an abomination that had to be destroyed. (2) The law as a curse (the penalty of the law) and the obligations of the law (i.e. a perfect, perpetual obedience in thought, word and deed to all its demands) was fulfilled by the Savior in His life, death and resurrection and thus, when a person believes in Christ and grasps what He has done by faith, he is justified or declared righteous before God. Consequently, to say that Jesus removed the sting of death in A.D. 70 is complete nonsense.

The sting of death was removed by the redemptive work of Christ around forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Throughout history people are regarded by God as ethically perfect *judicially* the moment they believe in Christ. But subjectively the process of personal mortification and holiness takes place and grows *throughout life*. The full process of redemption in the broad sense of the term is completed only when the body is fully redeemed and made perfect at the second coming of Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:1-5

For we know that if our earthly house, *this* tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in *this* tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be

¹³⁸ Simon J. Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 586.

unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing *is* God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

Of all the passages considered on the resurrection of the body thus far, there has been *general agreement* as to their meaning by scholars, commentators and writers within Christendom. The passage before us, however, is a difficult passage which has engendered much disagreement as to its meaning. There are essentially two different views among orthodox commentators. One view is that this passage has absolutely nothing to do with the resurrection of the body, but rather is speaking of heaven itself or a building or dwelling place in heaven (cf. Ephraim, Herveius, Aquinas, Hodge and Tasker). The other view, which is the majority view of conservative commentators, is that Paul is speaking about the reception of a new glorified body at the Parousia. The latter view makes the most sense and should be embraced. We will briefly examine this passage and discuss the manner in which full preterists have misused it.

This section of Scripture is part of an encouragement that Paul began back in 4:14. After discussing the great hardships and sufferings of the apostles and evangelists in their ministry, the apostle discusses why he is not discouraged and why we also should have hope. He begins with an explicit statement on the resurrection (“Knowing, that he who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you,” v. 14) and follows this with a number of reasons why the struggles of life are worthwhile and temporary.

Paul’s introductory phrase, “for we know,” indicates that what the apostle is about to say is common knowledge among believers because it had already been revealed to them by inspired apostolic instruction. Paul had given detailed instructions regarding the resurrection to this church (cf. 1 Cor. 6:6:13-14; 15:2-58) and had written about this issue in his first written epistle (1 Thess. 4:13-18), which had likely already been circulated widely among the churches. (1 Thessalonians was probably written during Paul’s stay in Corinth in A.D. 50 or 51. The Corinthians may have heard this letter *before* the Thessalonians.)

He says, “If our earthly house, this tent is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” Paul first emphasizes the fragile impermanence and perishability of our human bodies. Our bodies are tent-like in their frailty and removableness. They are mortal and easily killed. They are “destroyed” or “dissolved” because they decay into the earth. Our bodily existence on this earth is like living in a tent which may be taken down at any time. Our bodies are called “earthly” (*epigeios*) because they live on this world and are connected to and dependant upon this earth. Although as believers we are citizens of heaven, we are only sojourners on this present world. The use of “tent” to describe the human body as perishable is not uncommon. Peter spoke of living in his “tent” (i.e. body) which he must put off soon (2 Pet. 1:13-14). “In Jn. 1:14, indeed, the tent-metaphor is used of our Lord’s incarnation and earthly sojourn: ‘the Word became flesh and pitched His tent [*eskenosen*] among us.’”¹³⁹

After our tent dwelling (the physical body) is taken down by death we have a house (*oikodomen*) from God not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. This section of verse one is difficult and has been the source of much misunderstanding. The full preterist will point out that Paul uses the present tense (“we have”—*echomen*) and will argue that Christians who die after A.D. 70 receive their resurrected bodies at death. There are three serious problems with such an interpretation.

¹³⁹ Philip E. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 162.

First, the “present tense is often used of a future which is absolutely certain.”¹⁴⁰ “New Testament writers frequently penned a present tense with a future meaning that is determined by the context. One example is in the Gethsemane narrative, where prior to his arrest Jesus says, ‘The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners’ (Matt. 26:45). Just as Jesus knew the nearness of his betrayal, so Paul knew with certainty that a heavenly home was waiting for him (see John 14:2-3).”¹⁴¹ In fact the great Greek scholar A. T. Robertson regards the verb used here as a futuristic present that expresses Paul’s confidence.¹⁴² Full preterists either out of ignorance or (with some) out of dishonesty capitalize on the ignorance of most Christians concerning Greek grammar in order to trick people into accepting their system.

Second, the manner in which full preterists approach this passage reveals how they often violate fundamental rules of exegesis. The whole New Testament consistently and repeatedly teaches that the resurrection of the body occurs at the second coming of Christ on “the last day.” Paul throughout his career both before (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:22-28, 52-55) and after this epistle (Rom. 8:11, 22-24; Phil. 3:11, 20-21; 2 Tim. 2:18—the apostle’s last letter) teaches the unity of the eschatological complex. Given this fact, it would be exegetically irresponsible and untenable to interpret 2 Corinthians 5:1 in a manner that explicitly contradicts the rest of Scripture. Full preterist methods of interpretation where several clear verses are twisted and forced into paradigm has more in common with a cult’s methodology than historic Protestant hermeneutics. If there is a valid, sensible interpretation of this passage that is in harmony with the rest of Scripture we should accept it.

Third, if one accepts the full preterist “present tense” argument (which they use in other sections of Scripture as well), then one has not only refuted the historic, confessional, orthodox concept of the resurrection, but the full preterist view as well. Full preterists teach that the general resurrection of the dead occurred in A. D. 70. But, if we accept the present tense reasoning, then we would have to acknowledge that resurrections were occurring in A.D. 52 when Second Corinthians was written. This interpretation would mean that resurrections of the dead saints have *always been progressive*, both *before* and after A.D. 70. If they were consistent in their reasoning, full preterist would argue that *both* the historic understanding of the resurrection as well as the full preterist view were erroneous.

Paul, in this and the following verses, tells us a number of things about the house that will clothe us in the resurrection. First, it comes from God and is not made with human hands. This observation does not mean that our earthly bodies are crafted by human hands but that they come from a natural biological process through procreation, pregnancy and birth. Our glorified bodies come *directly* from God. The process is miraculous and not biological. In fact, the expression “not made with hands” is applied to regeneration (a “circumcision not made with hands,” Col. 2:11) and indirectly is used to describe the heavenly sanctuary (cf. Heb. 9:24). The whole point is that our new bodies are radically changed by God into spiritual, heavenly, glorified bodies.

The full preterist seizes upon this verse as a proof text that our old earthly bodies are allowed to remain in the earth forever and then are replaced by *completely* new bodies that have absolutely no organic connection to our old bodies. Perhaps if this was the *only* verse on the resurrection in the entire Bible we could understand such and interpretation. But as we have

¹⁴⁰ Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1978), 144.

¹⁴¹ Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 168.

¹⁴² A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: TN, 1934), 1019.

studied this doctrine, we have proved that the original body that died is raised (e.g., Rom. 8:11, 23; 1 Cor. 6:13-20; 15:12, 13, 18, 20-23, 36-38, 42-44; Phil. 3:21; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; etc); and the body is not *completely* replaced, but rather changed or transformed by God's power (1 Cor. 15:52; Phil. 3:21; cf. 1 Thess. 4:16-17).

Moreover, the striking similarities between Paul's terminology and language attributed to Jesus ("I will destroy [*ego kataluso*] this temple that is made with hands [*cheiropoieton*], and in three days I will build [*oikodomeso*] another made without hands [*acheiropoieton*"]) in Mark 14:48¹⁴³ removes all equivocations on this matter. Our Lord said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (Jn. 2:19). By this statement He meant "the temple of His body" (Jn. 2:21). Paul almost certainly had in mind the connection between the resurrection of Christ's body and the resurrection of the saints' bodies. Although our Lord rose in the exact same body in which he was buried, His new glorified, spiritual body was a body made without hands. It was transformed and raised by the power of God. Full preterists are guilty of reading their own preconceived notions into this passage.

Second, the full preterist interpretation is refuted by Paul's description of what takes place. He talks about being "clothed with our habitation from heaven" (v. 2) or "further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life" (v. 4). The verb used (*ependusathai*) refers to putting *one garment on over another*. Does this new garment simply cover the disembodied spirit of man as the full preterist asserts? No. Paul says "having been clothed we shall not be found naked" (v. 3). He says that he wants to be *further clothed* so that he does not have to be unclothed (v. 4). His whole point is *not*, "I want to die and get rid of my body so I can receive a spiritual shell to house my spirit"; but, "I want to put on my new glorified body so that I will not have to experience death at all." The apostle desired to be alive when Christ returned so that his present body could be *further clothed* by his new glorified body. If the full preterist view, that we receive completely new resurrected bodies at death (that have no relation to our physical bodies that are allowed to decay forever) were true, then Paul would not have dreaded the idea of being naked (i.e. a soul without a body). Paul longed for an instantaneous change (1 Cor. 15:51 ff.) and transformation (Phil. 3:21). He wanted to be like Enoch (Gen. 5:24; Heb. 11:5) and Elijah (2 Kgs. 2:11) who were taken bodily to heaven and glorified without experiencing physical death and decay.

Because of his biblical worldview, Paul had a very negative concept of death. He recognized that death was a consequence of sin; that the separation of the soul from the body was unnatural. The soul and body of man were created by God to be together. God is not a Gnostic or neo-Platonist. He created us as beings with two separate aspects that were meant to be together forever if sin had not entered the picture. Consequently, Paul regarded the soul without the body as "naked." He looked at death as something repugnant because of this separation. Therefore, Paul wants his glorified, heavenly body to cover his present earthly body like we put our overcoat on over our clothes. "The picture conveyed is that of the heavenly body being put on, like an outer vesture, over the earthly body, with which the Apostle is as if were clad, so as not only to cover it but to absorb and transfigure it. In this way the ideas both of continuity and of transformation, which are also prominent in the great resurrection chapter of 1 Cor. 15, are

¹⁴³ What is false about this testimony is the statement that Jesus would destroy the temple. Our Lord said, "Destroy this temple," which indicated that the Jews would kill Him. But the statement, "in three days I will build another made without hands" is accurate. The resurrection of Christ is attributed to the Father (Ac. 2:24), Son (Jn. 2:19) and the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:11). Christ arose in a glorified, heavenly, spiritual body. His vivification came from heaven and was not a natural biological process.

effectively communicated. Indeed, the very same metaphor is employed in the earlier epistle when it is said that ‘this corruption must *put on* incorruption and this mortal must *put on* immortality’ (1 Cor. 15:53).¹⁴⁴

Paul’s use of metaphors in verses 2 through 4 indicates he may have still had a concern about certain “proto-Gnostics” that he had to deal with in his previous epistle. These men denied a future bodily resurrection likely in favor of a disembodied or purely spiritual immortality. Consequently, Paul asserts, “We do not desire to be *unclothed* but to be *overclothed* with our heavenly, immortal bodies.” To anyone who may have been under the influence of Greek philosophy who were looking forward to a non-bodily existence Paul says, “We will not be found naked.” This passage is perfectly suited to refute the full preterist concepts of the resurrection. The apostle makes it very clear that our present physical bodies are incorporated into our spiritual, glorified bodies so that although radically different, they are still the same bodies.

Philippians 3:20-21

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

In these verses Paul makes a statement regarding the position and expectation of believers as an antidote to the wicked behavior and unholy attitude of the church’s enemies (cf. Phil. 3:18-19). There had been infighting in this church and thus the apostle wants them to have unity and follow his example. The Philippians need to focus on their citizenship in heaven (Philippi was made a Roman outpost in 42 B.C.. It was governed as if it was on Italian soil and the inhabitants of the city were proud of it). They need to keep in their mind that ultimately they belong to a heavenly commonwealth. Consequently, their attitude, behavior and priorities in life should reflect this heavenly rule. They are “to await eagerly” (*apekdechomai*). They are to have an urgent anticipation of the Redeemer’s eschatological victory. “So Christians eagerly await the revealing of the sons of God (Rom. 8:19), their sonship, here described as the redemption of the

¹⁴⁴ Philip E. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 168-169. Hughes writes of this verb, “This is beyond doubt the correct meaning of *ependusasthai*. The prefix *epi* signifies the putting on of an *additional* or *outer* garment. We cannot agree with Tasker, Hodge, and others that Paul is using the compound and simple forms (*ependusasthai*...*endusameno*) indiscriminately as synonyms. On the contrary, that a precise distinction in meaning is intended is confirmed by the terminology of verse 4, where he says that it is not that he wishes to put off a garment (*ekdusasthai*), that is, his present earthly body, but to put on over it another garment (*ependusasthai*), that is, the glorified body which will be provided at Christ’s Parousia. The usage of the same compound verb in Herodotus (*Hist.* I, 195), Josephus (*Ant. Jud.*, V, I, 12), and Plutarch (*Pelop.*, 11) establishes yet further that it bears this specific sense. To this evidence may be added that of the cognate nouns *ependuma* (Plutarch, *Alex.*, 32) and *ependutes* (Sophocles, *Frag.* 391, Psuedo-Thepiss in Pollux, VII, 45, Nichochares, *Her.* 1, and, in biblical Greek, I Sam. 13:18, and Jn. 21:7) which are used to signify an outer garment” (Ibid 168, footnote 31). Plummer essentially concurs. He writes, “*ependusasthai*. A double compound which is not found elsewhere in N. T. or LXX. Cf. *ependutes* (Jn. xxi. 7; Lev. viii. 7; the A text of I Sam. xviii. 4). The body may be regarded either as a dwelling or as a garment, and here we have the two ideas combined; ‘longing to be clothed upon with our habitation which is from heaven.’ The more permanent dwelling is to be drawn over the less permanent one, as one garment is drawn over another, and is to take its place. In some way not described, the now useless *skenos* is destroyed, without being dissolved in the grave, as in the case of those who die before the Lord comes. The change from the carnal to the spiritual body is regarded as instantaneous (I Cor. xv. 52), and the change is longed for” (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1978], 145).

body (8:23), the future hope (8:25), the hope of righteousness (Gal. 5:5), the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:7), and the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior (Phil. 3:20).”¹⁴⁵

What is particularly important for our discussion of the resurrection is Paul’s description of what takes place when Jesus returns. The verse literally reads, “[the] Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of our humiliation for it to be conformed to the body of His glory.” There are a number of things that we need to examine in this verse. First, what does Paul mean by our “lowly body” or “the body of our humiliation?”¹⁴⁶ When Scripture speaks of the body of humiliation it is not discussing the body as intrinsically evil, but what the body has become as a result of the fall and sin. Because of sin our bodies are weak, subject to disease, dishonor, death and physical decay. Our bodies are mortal and perishable (Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:42-44). As such, they are not fit or ready to inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:50). As Paul has noted before, they must be “changed” (1 Cor. 15:51) before they are ready for eternity with Christ: “this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Cor. 15:53).

Second, what is meant by the word “transform?” The word (*metashematizo*) used is a compound verb consisting “of *meta* which carries the idea of change or transfer, and *schema*, which means ‘appearance’ or ‘form.’ The compound means ‘to change in fashion or appearance’ (A-S, p. 288). Thayer gives: ‘to change the figure of, to transform’ (p. 406).”¹⁴⁷ Given this definition, the best English translation is probably “transform” (NKJV, NASB). The words “change” (KJV, RSV) and “fashion anew” (ASV), however, are certainly adequate. What is important for our study is that Paul’s description of the glorification of our physical, mortal bodies involves a change, refashioning or transforming of what is *already there*. This description is an explicit contradiction of the full preterist conception of the resurrection. The full preterist teaches that the body of our humiliation is not changed or transformed, but rather disregarded. It is left to rot in the grave forever and is replaced by something completely new different.

Third, Paul says that our bodies are *transformed* in order to be *conformed* to Christ’s glorious body. The *result* of this transformation also supports the orthodox, traditional concept of our glorification. Our physical bodies will undergo a change that makes them like our Lord’s resurrected, glorified body. This supports Paul’s teaching that “as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly man” (1 Cor. 15:49). It also concurs with John who wrote, “We know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 Jn. 3:2). Our bodies will be “changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet” (1 Cor. 15:51-52). Paul is not describing sanctification, but rather the *miraculous instantaneous transformation* that takes place at the Parousia. Our Lord’s resurrection body is the prototype of His people’s glorified bodies. Our bodies, which are weak,

¹⁴⁵ Peter T. O’Brien, *Commentary on Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 462.

¹⁴⁶ The word body (*soma*) is a collective singular. This is a common Hebrew idiom where the singular applies to each member of the group. Some full preterists seize on the fact that the word is singular and argue that Paul is speaking metaphorically about a deliverance of national Israel in A.D. 70. This view not only ignores the grammar, but also has Paul making an application that doesn’t even relate to the Philippians. Christians that are suffering in Philippi need to take heart and be holy *because* God will redeem Israel? This doesn’t make any sense. If what Paul says does not apply directly to the Philippians (i.e. their resurrection in the eschaton) then the apostle’s application is illogical. “‘The body our humiliation’ is the body possessed by us in this state, and which also marks its humiliation. It connects us with the soil out of which it was formed, and by the products of which it is supported; on which it walks, and into which it falls at death” (John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Philippians* [Grand Rapids: Baker, (1884) 1979], 223-224).

¹⁴⁷ Ralph Earle, *Word Meanings in the New Testament*, 344.

frail and liable to sickness, suffering, death and decay, will be made spiritual, imperishable, glorious, powerful and perfect. As Robert Johnstone eloquently asserts,

Yet how different the whole man will be,—how gloriously different! The body, “sown in corruption,”—free from pain and disease, from decay and mortality. “The eyes of Jacob shall no more be dim for age; Mephibosheth shall not be lame in his feet; nor shall the senses of Barzillai be dull and languid” [Thomas Boston]; for alike age and infirmity are unknown to the “children of the resurrection.” “Sown in the dishonor” of uncomeliness it shall be “raised in the glory” of perfect and unending beauty, “fashioned like unto the body of Christ’s glory.” “Sown in weakness,” it shall be “raised in power”—power to serve the Lord unwearyingly day and night in His temple, and to bear the “exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” “Sown a natural body”—a body fitted for the uses of earth,—it shall be “raised a spiritual body”—a dwelling suited in everything for the holy and happy spirit, an instrument exquisitely adapted for prosecuting the pursuits of heaven, and ministering to its pure and exalted joys.¹⁴⁸

Fourth, the transformation of our body of humiliation is in accordance with our Lord’s power that subdues all things to Himself (v. 21b). As in a number of other resurrection passages, Paul places the glorification of believers’ mortal bodies in a connection with the Savior’s subjection of everything under His kingship. “Christ is able not only to transform the body, but ‘also to subject’ (*kai upotaxai*) the entire universe (*ta panta*) to Himself. Indeed, one may state that ‘Christ’s transformation of man into his own image (cf. Rom. 8:29) is an integral part of his subjection of the entire universe to his own person.’”¹⁴⁹ Thus, once again, we see that by redefining the resurrection of the body passages and placing the second coming of Christ in A.D. 70, the full preterist is forced to redefine and *greatly limit* the victory of the cross and the empty tomb. The physical part of Christians is *never* redeemed and the planet earth is *never* purged of the effects of sin.

Conclusion

Our examination of the doctrine of the resurrection of the body and the treatment of this doctrine by full preterists has demonstrated a number of serious errors in the hyper-preterist system.

First, there is the problem of faulty hermeneutics used by full preterists. They come to every passage about the second coming and resurrection with the presupposition (which is contrary to the explicit teaching of Scripture) that everything took place in A.D. 66-70 with the destruction of Israel. This assumption forces them to treat *every single passage* on the eschatological resurrection of the body in the *entire Bible* as *metaphorical or apocalyptic*. This methodology has forced them to repeatedly follow a number of erroneous procedures. (1) They often ignore the plain intent of the author (e.g., Paul’s comforting of believers who have *dead* loved ones [1 Thess. 4:13-18]; the proper sanctified treatment of our *physical bodies* [1 Cor. 6:13-18]; the *nature* of our resurrected physical bodies [1 Cor. 15:35 ff.]; etc). (2) They ignore or redefine the plain meaning of words without any exegetical justification in the immediate context (e.g., graves, mortal body, descend, air, those who sleep, the dead in Christ, raised incorruptible, changed, transformed, etc). Passages that are didactic and non-metaphorical are treated as difficult and esoteric. (This may explain why their literature ignores the very large body of

¹⁴⁸ Robert Johnstone, *Lectures on the Book of Philippians* (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, [1875] 1977), 330-331.

¹⁴⁹ Peter T. O’Brien, *Commentary on Philippians*.

orthodox Christian scholarship, study and exposition on the passages in question. Are we to believe that, out of all the scholars, pastors and Christians from the church fathers in the first century to the nineteenth century, *not even one* saw the truth on eschatology? I challenge every full preterist to produce five Christian authors *prior* to the nineteenth century who believe that the second coming of Christ occurred in A.D. 70). (3) When the plain teaching of a passage contradicts their theology, they use an unrelated passage to explain it away (e.g., Matthew 24 is superimposed on 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and thus the fact that Paul is discussing a literal resurrection, a literal descent of Christ and a literal meeting of the saints in the air is ignored or explained away). (4) They are very adept at finding a specific meaning of a word (e.g., body, air, etc) in a context that agrees with their eschatology and then *arbitrarily* applying it in contexts where it is obviously inappropriate (e.g., In 1 Corinthians 6:13 ff. the word “body,” which clearly refers to the physical body [cf. 1 Cor. 6:15, 16, 18], is said to be the body of sin [i.e. the sinful nature] or Israel as a corporate body. In 1 Thessalonians 4:17 the word air [*aer*] is said to be in man’s spirit or in the spirit realm because Satan is the prince of the power of the air [Eph. 2:2]. Why would dead Christians who are already in Christ’s presence in heaven go to meet Him in a spiritual realm?).

Full preterists essentially deny the perspicuity of Scripture. Although there are some things in the Bible that are difficult to understand, those things that we need to comprehend for salvation and biblical living are so plainly revealed that any Christian can easily grasp them. The Scriptures which describe the resurrection of the body are straightforward didactic passages. That is why the church has always agreed on the *bodily* resurrection of believers. It is only when the full preterist takes hold of these passages do we learn that they are exceptionally difficult, metaphorical and esoteric. Perhaps, this is why the full preterists have so many different viewpoints among themselves about the events surrounding the second coming of Christ. They spend far more time attempting to explain away the meaning of passages than actually exegeting them. They are like those of whom Peter spoke who twist the Scriptures to their own destruction (2 Pet. 3:16).

Second, the most serious problem with full preterism is that its denial of a bodily resurrection results in a redefinition of the fall and the rejection of the gospel itself. Because salvation from physical death or the redemption of the physical bodies of believers obviously did not take place in A.D. 70, full preterists are forced to accept physical death in the animal realm and even among humans prior to the fall as perfectly normal. This results in two radical heresies. (1) Death, suffering, bloodshed and evil are attributed to a *direct creative act* of God. Jehovah becomes the *responsible agent* of pain, suffering, death and evil instead of man. The earth is dangerous and evil outside of Eden because God made it that way and in their worldview always intends it to be that way. This is a radical departure from the biblical concept of God. (2) Because hyper-preterists accept physical death as purely good, normal or natural and not something that is a consequence of the fall, they are forced by their paradigm to *redefine* the death and resurrection of Christ as something far less than what they are. Although a full preterist could say that Jesus experienced “spiritual death” for His people on the cross, they cannot say that He *died* for our sins without contradicting their own system. They are left to argue that He died so His soul could visit the saints in Hades and tell them of their release; and/or so that He could rise as a sign to the Jews. The vicarious atonement is denied. The saving nature of Jesus’ death is denied. The biblical teaching that without the shedding of blood there is no remission (Heb. 9:22) is denied. The central core of the gospel, that Jesus died for our sins according to the Scripture (1 Cor. 15:3; cf. Rom. 5:6-10; Gal. 3:13; etc), does not fit into their

system. They must reject it or admit that physical death is part of the penalty for sin. It is for this reason that full preterism cannot be considered as part of Christendom or evangelicalism. It must be classified as an eschatological cult.

Moreover, because full preterists believe that death is natural and physical bodies do not rise, they radically distort the resurrection of Christ. This should be expected because Paul warned the Corinthians that if physically dead men do not arise, then logically Jesus did not rise (1 Cor. 16:13). They do not explicitly deny the bodily resurrection of Christ. They do, however, radically redefine it and distort it. Full preterists do *not* believe that Christ rose with a glorified body. They teach that He arose with a regular unchanged human body and that, after it was used as a sign to the Jews, it was discarded. Why would they teach this? They teach this because if our Lord rose with a glorified, incorruptible spiritual body it would imply the redemption of the physical bodies of all Christians. They use the first fruits analogy to teach that all believers receive *completely* new and different spirit bodies. They believe that all Christian physical bodies will rot in the earth forever. They are never redeemed. Consequently, they are forced by their system to reject the saving efficacy of Christ's resurrection for believers. His resurrected glorified body is not really a first fruit at all. Indeed, the full preterist view of the human body has more in common with Gnosticism or neo-Platonism than Christianity because they teach that our physical bodies *as created by God* are defective (i.e. perishable, corruptible, liable to sickness, disease and death) and were *always designed* to be permanently disposed of like a bag of trash. They even teach that if Jesus had not been crucified He would have died of old age like everyone else! Thus, full preterists, like modernists, deny the resurrection of Christ by redefinition.

Third, because full preterists view suffering, death and evil as a normal part of God's created order and because they believe the second coming, resurrection and final judgment happened in A.D. 70, they teach that the suffering, death and evil in this world will *never* come to an end. In other words, the ultimate victory of the cross and empty tomb are redefined and consequently denied. The Bible explicitly teaches that *every* enemy of God will be subdued by the theanthropic Mediator until even death itself is conquered (1 Cor. 15:54-57; Rev. 21:4). The hyper-preterist has reduced the efficacy of Jesus' redemptive work to the point that Satan's victory over Adam in the garden is made *permanent*. They teach that the work of Christ will leave this world in a *far worse condition forever* than it was *before* the fall. Their doctrine makes a mockery of God's character, the power of the cross and the kingship of Christ.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ There are some very lenient partial preterists who argue that full preterists should be accepted into the church as genuine believers with some errors that are not fundamental because Paul considered the professing Christians at Corinth who denied the resurrection to be brethren. This argument suffers from a number of serious problems. First, church members are not excommunicated without being given an opportunity to repent. If those who denied the resurrection rejected Paul's corrective teaching in 1 Corinthians 15 and were obstinate in their false doctrine, they would have been disciplined in due time. Second, such an argument would prove too much because Paul has a whole section in Chapter 6 where he deals with church members who were having sex with prostitutes. Does this reality mean that churches should tolerate habitual whoremongers as church members and serve them the Lord's supper? Obviously, like those who denied the resurrection, they would have been disciplined if they refused to repent. Third, Paul's first and foremost argument against those who deny the resurrection of the body is that it logically destroys a central feature of the gospel itself—the resurrection of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 15:13-19). Clearly, Paul himself regarded a *denial* of the literal resurrection of believers' physical bodies from the dead as destructive of the Christian faith. Given the apostle's argumentation in 1 Corinthians, the full preterist teaching that God is the *direct* cause of death, suffering and evil in this world and the full preterist's *explicit* denial that Jesus saves both our bodies and this fallen world, they must be treated as damnable heretics. Such a view may be regarded as unloving,

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intolerant and even unchristian in our pluralistic culture where church discipline is almost non-existent, but we are thoroughly convinced it is the biblical position.