

THE
END
OF ALL
THINGS

A Defense of the Future

C. JONATHIN SERIAH

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Thanks first of all to my wife, Cathy, for just being there and for the encouragement, support and understanding, you are truly “bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh,” and I thank God for you daily; to Mark Cave, an Elder who “holds fast to the Word”; thanks for asking me, “Why don’t you write a book about it?” Sorry that you had to spend so much time fixing the “computer from the abyss”; to the members of Bible Fellowship Church, I love you all; thanks for letting me break all the “rules”; to Doug Jones, for being interested in the first place (what does your name spell in Sanskrit?) and for all the wonderful editorial help—let’s do it again sometime; and last, but not least, to the King of kings and Lord of lords, for Your incomprehensible grace and mercy to a sinner like me.

C. Jonathin Seraiah

The End of All Things: A Defense of the Future

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To Lou,
my “perfect one,”
let me slay another dragon.

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Foreword

by **R.C. Sproul Jr.**

What would you do if you had the cure for a sickness that debilitated thousands? Now suppose that this cure of yours, if taken in too strong a dose, were fatal? There is an antidote, but those given to taking the fatal dose deny that such exists. If you could, I presume you would go back to your lab and see if you couldn't find something equally effective in combatting the sickness, but that is not quite so dangerous for those who refuse to read the warnings on your bottle.

C. Jonathin Seraiah has done just that. The sickness that is epidemic in the evangelical church is the disease of dispensationalism, and more particularly dispensational eschatology. These doctrines not only twist and distort the Scripture but bring the church to near paralysis. The harder we work to build Christ's kingdom, the more we delay it.

Thankfully, God in his mercy has done a great work in waking up many people to their condition. The rapid spread of the doctrine of preterism has been a welcome tonic. No more visits to the chiropractor after making "some of you will not sleep" and "this generation shall not pass" stretch out into two millennia. The sad news is that as more people begin to take seriously Christ's promise to return within a generation of His speaking, more people have swallowed the fatal dose of pantelism, the doctrine that all biblical prophecy has been fulfilled. This doctrine is fatal because it denies not only the return of Christ but also the resurrection of our bodies.

Too many people have leaned away from the briar patch of dispensationalism on their left only to fall from their horse into the pit of the damnable heresy of pantelism on their right.

Many of us, in doing battle with the pantelists, have been using powerful weapons that aren't quite powerful enough. We warn the pantelists that they have strayed from the confessions of the Church since its beginning. They just yawn and remind us that we ourselves confess that confessions can err.

Mr. Seraiah has taken a better approach. He has brought to bear the sword of the Lord, making his case against pantelism exegetically rather than creedally. Verse by verse, precept upon precept, he argues that Scripture not only may but must proclaim a future coming of Christ and the final resurrection of our bodies. He answers the Scripture twisting of the pantelists with straight Scripture. He deftly wields that sword and stays aright upon the horse.

But his work is not finished. Having dispatched error with Scripture alone, Mr. Seraiah wisely goes back to sharpen the creeds, to explain that while they can err, they nevertheless define historic orthodoxy. Having won the battle with one hand tied behind his back, he reminds us there still is that other hand.

It is my earnest prayer that many in the pantelist camp are merely temporarily theologically lost and not forever outside the faith. I pray they just got a little carried away, that they still might hear the voice of the still-coming Shepherd. If so, here are the call and the directions to come home. Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again.

Introduction

THE SOULLESS LIBERALISM OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY LEFT many people with a firm desire to return to a solid understanding of the Scriptures. But rather than returning to the sound teaching of the previous centuries, many believers sought out new teachings, especially in eschatology. We were told that all the “signs” of the Second Coming were coming to pass and thus that Jesus was definitely going to return within a few years. This teaching spread like wildfire (due mostly to the onset of the Scofield Reference Bible), and eventually these views took on the name “dispensationalism.” One of dispensationalism’s foremost characteristics was and is to read *all* prophecies in the New (and usually the Old) Testament as referring to the Final Advent of Christ.

Over the past few decades, dispensationalism itself has faced increasing critical re-evaluation. As many believers have been moved to delve deeper into the scriptural basis for dispensational teachings, they have often come to the conclusion that dispensationalism has missed the mark drastically. In addition, many of those who have done this have been discovering that both the liberals and dispensationalists were misdirected along the same path. Liberalism said, “Jesus was wrong to say His return was soon.” Dispensationalism said, “Jesus never said His return was to be soon in the first century but soon in the twentieth century.”

Today, a growing group of evangelicals wants to take the exegetical good of both the liberals and the

dispensationalists. They argue that Jesus did say His final return was in the first century (as per liberalism), and that He was right in what He said (as per dispensationalism). In their response, however, they have gone to the opposite extreme. The dispensationalists moved all the references to Jesus' "coming" to today. This new group wants to move *all* the references to Jesus' "coming" to the first century and say that it really did happen then. Their error is the same as that of the dispensationalists and the liberals (both of whom they want to oppose). They don't carefully let the distinctions in the references to Jesus' return speak for themselves. Both groups tend to make this debate a simplistic matter of brute, logical consistency—all then or all now. But Scripture is not that simplistic.

A Radical Distinction

Though the dispensationalists were clearly wrong in much of their eschatology, they have maintained a belief in the Final Advent of Christ, a future, physical Resurrection, and the Day of Judgment. Our "new" group has denied the historic understanding of these doctrines. In this case they have rejected the errors of dispensationalism for errors that are far worse.

Throughout history, the primary creeds that have been used by the Spirit to unite the Church (the Apostles' and the Nicene) have affirmed the three essential doctrines of the Final Advent, the physical Resurrection, and the Day of Judgment. This is certainly not to be taken lightly.

This "new" teaching I speak of strongly desires to separate itself from the sort of exegetical fallacies in the writings of Hal Lindsey and the like. Even those within dispensationalism are seeing the need to rethink much of what has been taught for years now. I can attest to this situation in my own life. I started off as a dispensationalist (it was the only thing I had heard at

first). As years went by, I began to recognize that the Scriptures did not support what I believed; I began a long and slow journey to find what the Scriptures really did say about the Second Coming. After years of prayer and study, I too have found myself disagreeing with dispensationalism on numerous grounds.

“Pantelism”

The new teaching which has arisen in response to dispensationalism has been referred to by its adherents as “fulfilled eschatology” and sometimes as “consistent preterism” (*preter* means *past*). Of course, no one wants to be “inconsistent,” so they have made their opponents’ position in error by definition. Christian communication can occur much more easily if we accept terms that appropriately define where we stand. In addition, the position presented in this book is that they are only consistent (in most cases) within their own system (which is not difficult—you merely relegate everything in Scripture to the past before you examine it). They are not consistent with Scripture itself. “Preterist” is obviously insufficient as a term for this group because they themselves find the need to add qualifiers like “consistent” to it.

Therefore, desiring to make an easy reference to this group that they themselves might accept, I shall refer to this movement as “pantelism” (from the Greek words meaning “all is completed”), and I will use the term “preterism” exclusively for those who hold that most of the eschatology of the New Testament is past. Since the term “preterist” refers to the “past,” and “pantelist” means clearly “all is past,” and the term “preterist” has not been used historically to refer to “pantelists,” I believe this is a fair distinction. I have done this with a desire to distinguish these two groups and to make their individual stances more clear in their names. We must remember here that in a certain sense every Christian is

preterist; what makes us Christians is that we believe the prophecy about the (first) coming of the Messiah is past. Every Christian has at least some preterist beliefs. Thus “preterist” is an insufficient term to describe those who hold that all of the prophecies of the Bible were fulfilled by A.D. 70.

It is true that the “eschatology” of the New Testament is predominantly preterist. For those unfamiliar with the preterist perspective, it is the ancient view that many of the eschatological passages of the New Testament were fulfilled (completely) in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. This view may sound novel, but in reality there have been orthodox adherents to it throughout church history (e.g., Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, John Lightfoot, John Owen, Milton Terry, Jay Adams). This interpretation does not deny the Final Coming of Christ; it merely finds that not all “coming” passages refer to that event. The preterist interpretation is actually the most faithful to the biblical text because it recognizes that Old Testament prophetic terminology was used by the New Testament authors. This recognition is helpful in distinguishing the prophecies of Christ’s coming that were near, in the first century (Matt. 10:23; 16:28; 24:30; 26:64; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 1:7; James 5:7–9; 1 Pet. 4:7; Rev. 1:3, 7; etc.) and thus fulfilled in A.D. 70, from those that were far (John 5:28–29; Acts 1:11; 17:31; 1 Cor. 15:23–24; 1 Thess. 4:16; 1 Jn. 3:2; etc.) and thus not yet fulfilled even in our day. It also helps to distinguish between a spiritual “coming” (invisible for temporal judgment, as in A.D. 70) and a physical coming (visible for eternal judgment).

It is not true, however, that the eschatology of the New Testament is exclusively preterist; some prophecies are yet to be fulfilled. But the pantelists have gone so far as to deny the Final Advent of Christ at the end of the world, an end accompanied by the final (physical) Resurrection and Judgment Day. In addition, most have

gone on to deny there is a future eternal state. In other words, this is eternity now; we go on like this forever. It is not my desire to ignore the works of those who have gone before me who have put forward an orthodox understanding of the Final Advent of Christ. It is my desire, however, to state that those who are heterodox need to be shown as such and should not be allowed to proclaim heresy as truth within the church of Jesus Christ.

Theological Ramifications

Many within the church today find the act of departing from various doctrines of the historic Christian faith to be of no terrific consequence. I am not saying one needs have all of his eschatological “ducks in a row” in order to be saved. There are many Christians I admire very much whom I believe to be wrong in their understanding of eschatology.

The issue involved here is that all doctrines (no matter how obscure) affect our relationship with God in some way. If a Christian believes the Bible says the world will be completely destroyed tomorrow, he will act in certain ways he would not act if he believed the world was not going to end until long after his death.

Our salvation is not, of course, based on our understanding of the events related to the first or second coming of Christ. Our salvation is based on what Christ did at His first coming and through our faith in Him. Pantelism, however, is a teaching—growing in evangelical circles today—that can be called nothing other than heresy, and the ramifications of this teaching are not only dangerous for individuals but destructive to the Church of Jesus Christ.

Chapter One

Historical Implausibilities

WHEN WE FIRST CONSIDER PANTELIST ASSUMPTIONS, WE FIND a basic point that is difficult for any Christian to accept: Their contention (whether expressed verbally or not) that the Church has been wrong for two thousand years about such a major doctrine as the Final Advent and only recently has anyone figured out what the Bible was really saying. The presumption about one's abilities that it takes to affirm something of this sort is incredibly high. They are essentially saying the Holy Spirit was unable to properly teach the Church what was really involved in the Second Coming (or was unwilling, and for some bizarre reason decided to leave the Church in the dark and allow her to promote errant theology for two thousand years). The primary danger of this belief is in what else it may allow. Will we find out tomorrow that the Church has been wrong about the deity of Christ?

I certainly do not want to say that the "majority rules" when it comes to Christian truth. I also, however, do not want to say the Holy Spirit died (at least with respect to eschatology) with the last apostle and was resurrected when the first pantelist came on the scene. The history of the Church (although not a history of perfectly inspired actions and beliefs) is still the history of the Holy Spirit. He continues to work in

the children of God, drawing them closer and closer to Christ-likeness in both thought and deed (Rom. 8:14; 1 Cor. 2:10–14; Eph. 1:17).

The Maturity of the Church

According to pantelism, all things must have been fulfilled by A.D. 70. This would include passages like Ephesians 4:11–13 (denoting the perfection of our knowledge of Christ) and 1 Corinthians 13:9–10 (denoting the same thing in different terms) in their entirety. This would lead us to affirm (by pantelist assumptions) that our knowledge was made perfect in an absolute sense, meaning it cannot have anything lacking or in error. The pantelist must be unwilling to allow that anything about the perfection of the church still awaits us today. If there is anything left unfulfilled by A.D. 70 then the pantelist has dug himself a hole too big to get out of (without giving up his pantelism). Thus, given their framework, the Church was brought to a perfect knowledge of Christ in all forms: Scripture, tradition, individual understanding, etc. This is hard enough to swallow by itself. But in addition, if this is so, how did the Church so quickly (once again, according to pantelism) lose that “perfect knowledge” and fall into error by affirming a Final Coming of Christ after A.D. 70? Either her knowledge was perfect and she didn’t fall into error, or her knowledge wasn’t perfect (and thus there are things left unfulfilled in the first century). Pantelism can’t have it both ways.

Another problem with the “two thousand years of error” notion is that the generation of Christians who had seen and heard the teaching of the apostles themselves must have suddenly changed their position on the Second Coming from what the apostles had taught them. They therefore delved into wholesale apostasy in regard to one of the most important teachings of the apostles, rather quickly after A.D. 70, perhaps while some of the apostles were still alive (the apostle John is universally reported by Church tradition to have survived till at

least the end of the first century). On pantelist grounds, they were still waiting for Christ to come when He had already done so and was not going to do so again. If there were any who would have known well the teachings of the apostles, it would have been the pastors and elders of the churches, the very ones who had opportunity to preach and write against it. To say the Church forgot what she was taught and underwent a radical change in belief of these proportions is an amazing assertion that cannot stand without some historical evidence.

The Church has certainly seen times of deep error, but she has never gone for long without a testimony of the truth. The pantelists want to say the Church went without a true testimony for even the basics of eschatology for two thousand years. This is indeed an amazing presumption.

The Church Fathers

At this point it is important to point directly to what the early Church believed in regard to eschatology. There is no doubt that many in the early Church held to a preterist perspective of various Scriptures,¹ and the work of those who have shown this to be so will not be repeated here; this is not my point of contention. We seek rather to see whether the Church held *also* to a coming of Christ that was future to them. Let's therefore examine the evidence for the early Church's belief in a yet-to-occur physical coming of Christ (i.e., post-A.D. 70), as well as its attendant physical Resurrection and Judgment Day.

First Clement

The writing of 1 Clement is usually dated around A.D. 95 or 96.² Though a case can be made to date it as early as the late 60s, the note of the Neronian persecution being in the past (chap. 5–6) seems to place the book after this event. Either way it is clear it was written

closely within the time of the apostles. The note that some of those appointed by the apostles are still living (44:3–5) gives credence to a date most probably within the first century. The possibility of an early date will not be ignored. This is one of the reasons why we have chosen to cover Clement first; if he was writing before A.D. 70 then some (though not all) of what is referred to below may actually be speaking about the destruction of Jerusalem. This point is therefore acknowledged at the beginning. Most of what is said below will assume a post-70 date for the book.

We find in examining 1 Clement that the author (whose name we shall assume to have been Clement, though the book itself does not give this name) gives us a testimony that is quite helpful for our discussion. Clement was most assuredly alive at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem (even if he did write in the 90s), and thus he had at least some background knowledge of the events surrounding it (not to mention the numerous prophecies about it that even nonpreterists cannot deny—Matt. 21:41; 22:7; 23:37–38; 24:2; Luke 19:42–44; 21:20; Acts 6:14). It is therefore intriguing to find that he is still looking forward to the return of Christ and its concurrent developments.

First, we find his interpretation of Psalm 110:1, 1 Corinthians 15:25, and other like passages, which say that the Father told Jesus, “Sit at my right hand, *till* I make your enemies your footstool” (emphasis mine). In 36:5, Clement refers to this as justification for not being one of Christ’s enemies. Hence he believes Christ is still upon His throne waiting for all of His enemies to be made His footstool (most particularly the last enemy, “death,” which according to pantelism has already happened³). If Christ is viewed by Clement as still on His throne, then according to the full context in 1 Corinthians 15:23–26, he believed the “end” and the “coming” of Christ that Paul is referring to had not yet come in his day.