

## “Why Not Full Preterism”—A Brief Response

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**M**Y FRIEND, POPULAR RADIO show host, Steve Gregg, with whom I had a two-day formal debate in Denver, Colorado in 2013, published a book entitled *Why Not Full Preterism: A Partial Preterist Response to a Novel Theological Innovation* (Xulon Press, 2022—available on Amazon). Steve’s book is an (failed) attempt to refute Covenant Eschatology. It would be accurate also to say it is intended as a direct attempt to refute me, since he mentions me in the book by name, no less than *140 times*.

This very brief article cannot deal with all of the issues that Gregg raises in the book. I am currently doing a YouTube video response to the book that is far more in-depth, and I urge the reader to go to my channel and search for Review and Response to Steve Gregg, to watch the videos.

This article will focus on Greggs remarkable claim that there is no dependency between the Thessalonian eschatological teaching and the Olivet Discourse, or at least none between Matthew 24:1-34 and Thessalonians. In fact, he writes, “The similarities between Paul’s teaching in 1 Thessalonians and the Olivet Discourse are really very few and unspecific.” (*Why*, p. 180). This is a shocking claim, and one not widely accepted.

The scholarly consensus is that Paul was indeed drawing directly from the Discourse in the Thessalonian epistles, particularly in 1 Thessalonians 4. Paul—contra Gregg—was reminding the Thessalonians of what Jesus had taught during His personal ministry. Kenneth Gentry writes: “Most commentators agree that the Olivet Discourse ‘is undoubtedly a source of the Thessalonian Epistles.’” (*Thine is the Kingdom*, Calcedon, 2003, 162; citing D.A. Carson with approval). Jeffrey Weima states Paul is referring, “to an authoritative teaching of the Jesus Christ.” (*Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, Greg Beale and D. A. Carson, editors, Baker Academic, 2007, 880). Likewise, Beale writes, “Paul is recollecting the words of the earthly Jesus and paraphrasing him. This is apparent from noticing that 4:15-5:7 has numerous parallels.” Beale states that the parallels demonstrate a high probability that Paul is dependent on Jesus’ teaching on the last things.” (*1-2 Thessalonians, The IVP New Testament Series*, InterVarsity Press, 2003, 136). Note that while Beale provides a list of thirteen parallels between the Olivet Discourse and 1 Thessalonians 4:13 – 5:7, he conveniently omits the direct parallel in the time statements! Jesus emphatically said that all of the things listed would be fulfilled in his generation, and Paul wrote, “we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord.” Of course, Beale

expends considerable effort to show that neither Jesus nor Paul really meant to express the imminence that their words would normally indicate.

It is ironic that throughout his book, Gregg castigates preterists for rejecting the consensus of scholarship, and yet, in denying the parallels between the Olivet Discourse (v. 1-34) and Thessalonians he is standing in direct opposition to that consensus! Paul was simply reiterating the content of the Olivet Discourse. The parallels between the Olivet Discourse and Paul’s Thessalonian epistles are precise, not, as Gregg claims, “few and unspecific.”

The following chart is from my book, *We Shall Meet Him In the Air: The Wedding of the King of Kings*, (Ardmore, OK, Jadon Management, 2010, 76). On the previous pages I adduce well over 20 distinct parallels between the Discourse and Thessalonians. Paul even uses some rare, distinct Greek words that Jesus used only in the Discourse. This should make us cautious about rejecting the parallels.

<b>Matthew 24:29-31</b>	<b>1 Thessalonians 4:13-18</b>
Coming of the Son of Man	Coming of the Son of Man
With the angels (vv. 30-31)	With the angels (v. 16)
With the Trumpet (v. 31)	With the trumpet (v. 16)
Coming in the clouds (v. 30)	Descend from heaven, in the air (vv. 16-17)
Gathering of the redeemed (v. 31)	Gathering of the redeemed (v. 17)
This generation shall not pass until all these things are fulfilled (v. 34)	We who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord (vv. 15, 17)

These parallels are undeniable. The themes and motifs are the same, the terms are the same, the time indicators are the same. This is not simply similar sounding language. Nor are the similarities “vague” or “generic.” This means that if Matthew 24:29-31 refers to the judgment of Israel in AD 70, then that is what

Thessalonians refers to as well. Without preconceived ideas to the contrary, no one would think differently.

Gregg seeks to blunt the parallels between the Discourse and Thessalonians by admitting that, “While the Olivet Discourse appears to be using the kind of generic language that might, in various contexts, refer to any number of judgment scenes, only 1 Thessalonians mentions the resurrection and the Raptured, as well as the descent of ‘the Lord Himself.’” (*Why*, 181). There are two claims here, both misguided.

#1 - Gregg claims that the Olivet Discourse is not about the Resurrection and Rapture while Thessalonians is. He could not be more wrong.

Consider Matthew 24:31:

*And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

What Gregg fails to realize, or acknowledge, is that Jesus is citing Isaiah 27:13:

*So it shall be in that day: The great trumpet will be blown; They will come, who are about to perish in the land of Assyria, And they who are outcasts in the land of Egypt, And shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem.*

Why is this so significant? Because from ancient through modern times, it is widely admitted that *Isaiah 27:13 is a resurrection prophecy*. It is in the context of Isaiah 25:8, one of the sources of Paul’s resurrection doctrine in 1 Corinthians 15. It is in the context of the resurrection of Isaiah 26:9f. It is in the context of the promised destruction of Leviathan / the Devil (27:1-2)—a resurrection promise. It is in the context of the discussion of Israel’s “death” through sin and captivity (27:10f). Isaiah 27:13 is the promise of deliverance from that death—i.e., resurrection. Scholars agree:

Mitch and Zhava Glaser, “The holy one, Blessed be He, will sound the shofar at the time of the ingathering of the exiles of Israel to their place (Isaiah 27:13). (*The Fall Feasts of Israel*, Moody Press, 1987, 22, 23; citing Eliyahu Zuta 2).

Gregory Beale, commenting on 1 Corinthians 15:52, writes that the sounding of the Trumpet at the time of the resurrection is an echo of Isaiah 27:13 (*Commentary on the NT Use of the OT*, Baker Academic, 2007, 747).

John Nolland, writes that Matthew 24:31 is drawing on Zechariah 9:14 and Isaiah 27:13. (*New International Greek Text Commentary, Matthew*, Eerdmans, Paternoster, 2005, 985).

Donald Hagner writes, “The reference to the blowing of the Great Trumpet in connection with the gathering of the righteous is found in Isaiah 27:13 (in the NT reference to the eschatological trumpet occurs in conjunction with the descent from heaven in 1 Thessalonians 4:16; there, as in 1 Corinthians

15:52 the trumpet is associated with the resurrection of the dead, which Matthew makes no mention of here”). (*Word Biblical Commentary, Matthew 14-28, Vol. 33b*, Word Publishers, 1995, 714).

Historically, both rabbinic and scholarly sources (we could multiply these quotes) agree that Isaiah 27:13 was a prophecy of the end time resurrection. Since Jesus was citing Isaiah in Matthew 24:31, that means Gregg is wrong to claim that the Olivet Discourse is not about the Resurrection and Rapture.

Don't forget that Matthew 24:31 speaks of the gathering of the elect at the Parousia, just as in Thessalonians we have the gathering of the saints at the Parousia. What is the difference? Gregg's denial of parallelism here smacks of a bit of desperation. Since Matthew 24:31 is citing a resurrection/rapture text, this ties the Olivet Discourse inseparably to 1 Thessalonians 4. Furthermore, since Gregg claims that Matthew 24:29-34 was fulfilled in AD 70, these connections prove that Thessalonians was likewise fulfilled at that time.

Gregg gladly affirms that Jesus' words in Matthew 24:34 delimits the fulfillment of verses 29-31 to the first century. However, in Thessalonians, he claims that Paul's repeated, "we who are alive and remain" is not a temporal indicator. He claims that if Paul was saying the Lord's coming was to be in that generation "he was mistaken, since neither the end of the world, nor AD 70, occurred in Paul's lifetime." (*Why*, 179). He thus imposes onto the text the concept (unproven) of an end of time, visible, physical Parousia.

But, given the connection of Matthew 24:31 to the Resurrection and Rapture (and thus, *to Thessalonians*), one need not even appeal to, "we who are alive and remain until the parousia," as a time indicator. These connections themselves mean that *the temporal delimitation of 24:34 applies to Thessalonians!*

So, unless Gregg can show definitively that Matthew 24:31 was not drawing on Isaiah 27:13, or, unless he can show—contra history and scholarship that he normally exalts—that Isaiah 27:13 was not a resurrection prediction, his attempt to divorce Matthew 24:29-31 from 1 Thessalonians 4:15f fails.

#2 - Gregg claims that the language of "the Lord Himself" in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, demands the "personal and bodily" coming of Christ at the end of time. But is this valid?

Gregg is seemingly ignorant of the fact that this expression, "the Lord Himself" and similar expressions, is common language from the Tanakh, and never indicated a coming even closely resembling what Gregg demands in Thessalonians. Let's consider just a few texts.

Note what Deuteronomy says of the theophany of YHVH at Sinai:

Deuteronomy 31:3 - "*The Lord your God Himself crosses over before you; He will destroy these nations from before you, and you shall dispossess them. Joshua himself crosses over before you, just as the Lord has said.*" Would anyone argue that the "invisible God" literally went before Israel to defeat their enemies?

In 1 Chronicles 14:15, David was going out to battle the Philistines, and asked that the Lord would be with him. The Lord promised: “*And it shall be, when you hear a sound of marching in the tops of the mulberry trees, then you shall go out to battle, for God has gone out before you to strike the camp of the Philistines.*” Did God visibly, somehow “bodily” go out before David?

Jeremiah 21:1ff is helpful:

*The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord when King Zedekiah sent to him saying, “Please inquire of the Lord for us, for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon makes war against us. Perhaps the Lord will deal with us according to all His wonderful works, that the king may go away from us.” Then Jeremiah said to them . . . “Thus says the Lord God of Israel: Behold, I will turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands, with which you fight against the king of Babylon and the Chaldeans . . . I Myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm, even in anger and fury and great wrath. I will strike the inhabitants of this city.”*

That impending destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Chaldeans was “the Day of the Lord” (Ezek 7; Zeph 1:5-15). That Day of the Lord would be *when YHVH put His sword into the hand of the Babylonians* (as He did to destroy Egypt, Ezek 30). So, when God used Babylon to destroy Jerusalem, it was YHVH—“*I myself*”—who came in judgment. I seriously doubt anyone would argue that the Lord visibly or bodily came out of heaven during that judgment. The point is that when YHVH used one nation to judge another, He emphatically declared that it was “I myself.” Keep in mind that Steven Gregg agrees that the Lord used the Romans to destroy Jerusalem in AD 70! Thus, in solid agreement with the biblical usage of “himself” or “I myself” or similar terms when speaking of God’s actions, there is no compelling reason to believe that the emphasis is on a bodily, visible, physical coming of the Lord.

There are other examples from the *sitz im leben* (life setting) of Israel’s world.

In 2 Maccabees 8:21-23 we have the story of Judas Maccabeus defeating Nicanor, general of Antiochus Epiphanes. Nicanor had 20,000 troops, Judas had 6000. Judas had Eleazar read from the Scripture before the battle: “After ordering Eleazar to read aloud from the holy book, he gave his men the battle cry: God will help us, and *personally lead the attack against Nicanor.*”

What do you suppose Judas meant by “*personally lead the attack*”? Was he expecting God to “personally” come out of heaven and lead the army? Or was he not thinking along the lines of Deuteronomy 31 and 1 Chronicles 14? Since Jesus told us that he was going to come “in the glory of the Father” (Matt 16:27-28), meaning like the Father had come before, we have every right to view Thessalonians in that light.

The modern reader needs to be more acquainted with biblical language. No less than seven times in the Tanakh, as God told Israel to go into the land (or even promising in Isaiah 45 that He would “go before”

Cyrus in his conquests), the Lord promised that He would “go before” the people to lead and guide them and fight their enemies (Exod 23:23; 32:32; Deut 1:30; 31:8; Is 52:12; 58:8; Isaiah 45 speaks of God going before Cyrus). I know of *no one* who would argue that God visibly, literally, came out of heaven to walk before Israel.

So, what we see in regard to Steve Gregg’s efforts to divorce the Olivet Discourse from Thessalonians is that he offers spurious, untenable arguments.

He stands at odds with church history and scholarship. Yet in his book, he castigates preterists for doing that. (It is to be noted that Gregg agrees with preterists that *when the evidence demands it*, we are justified in rejecting history, the creeds, and scholarship).

His claim that while Paul discusses the resurrection and rapture in Thessalonians, but Jesus does not do so in the Olivet Discourse, is false.

His emphasis on “the Lord himself” is not a sufficient “delineator” as it ignores the biblical usage of the very personal language of God operating in history by using one nation to judge another. That very *personal* language simply does not demand a physical, visible, literal coming of Christ at a proposed “end of time.”

Thus, the two foundational arguments offered by Gregg to divorce Matthew 24 from Thessalonians 4 are found to lack probative value. Gregg has failed to divorce Thessalonians from the Olivet Discourse. This means that Jesus’ emphatic promise to come, with the angels, the shout, the trumpet, to gather (resurrect!) the saints, *in the first century generation* is to be applied to 1 Thessalonians 4. That being true, it means that the resurrection of 1 Corinthians 15 and 2 Corinthians 5, and all other resurrection passages, are *fulfilled*. The objection is overruled, and the truth of Covenant Eschatology fully established. †