

INTERNATIONAL PRETERIST ASSOCIATION: REFORMATION OR RETROGRESSION?

Dennis M. Swanson
Seminary Librarian and Director of Israel Studies

The International Preterist Association (IPA) has made itself known most recently at significant venues across the United States. It serves as an umbrella organization for the theological/eschatological position called Hyper-Preterism (HP), a position that sees all prophecies of the future fulfilled in the period around A.D. 70. The ostensible motivation of the movement is to provide an answer to critics who think that Jesus was mistaken when He promised His return during the same generation of which He was a part. That motivation is flawed, however, because such critics doubt that Jesus ever existed and a response on that single issue is insufficient to change their minds. The methodology of IPA has been to position itself within the mainstream of evangelical Christianity by redefining preterist terminology and conveying the false impression of acceptance by evangelicalism. The theological claims of IPA are heterodox in the area of eschatology, lying outside any creed or statement of faith of orthodox Christianity. It rejects the millennial kingdom, the physical return of Christ, all post-A.D. 70 fulfillment of prophecy, and the traditional view of the resurrection. The consequences of IPA teachings lead to a hopeless and helpless church, a church with no remembrance and message, with no ethical imperative, with no hope and reason for patience, with no rewards for faithfulness, and with no purpose and useful equipment. The system amounts to a regression to the error of Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Tim 2:18).

* * * * *

Introduction

In the last several years an emerging eschatological movement has made itself well known and highly visible at the annual and regional meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society, the Christian Booksellers Convention, and other

significant venues. The International Preterist Association¹ (hereafter IPA) has become something of the umbrella organization for a group advocating the theological/eschatological position commonly known as Hyper-Preterism (hereafter HP).

This novel position initially began to form² within some Church of Christ assemblies in Ohio through the ministries of “C. D. Beagle and his son-in-law, Max King.”³ HP is the view that all biblical prophecy saw its fulfillment at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. It differs from the moderate form of preterism in terms of extent.⁴ Among other things, it teaches that (1) Christ has already returned and established His kingdom, (2) the resurrection of the just and unjust has occurred, (3) the final judgments have been pronounced at the Great White Throne, (4) Satan and his cohorts among men and the angelic realm have been cast into the lake of fire, and (5) Christians are now enjoying the new heavens and new earth.

The view has spread beyond the Church of Christ denomination through several writers and speakers, notably Edward E. Stevens, John Noë, and Randall E. Otto. For a while, the HP novelty seemed to be simply an internecine debate within the larger preterist sphere, so much so that outside those circles very few were aware of the issue. Of the large number of HP publications in about the last ten years, only three reviews of their books have appeared in non-preterist orientated publications.⁵

¹John Noë is president of another group called, *Prophecy Reformation Institute* (www.prphecyrefi.org). Max King is the leader of an organization called *Living Presence Ministries* (www.livingpresence.org). Several other Websites, including www.planetpreterist.com and www.preteristarchive.com, present Hyper-Preterist materials.

²Here we are speaking of the organization and systematization of the HP scheme: J. Stuart Russell's book, *The Parousia: A Study of the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord's Second Coming*. This work was originally published anonymously and then with Russell's name (London: Daldy, Isbiter & Co., 1878) and (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1887). Besides influencing Milton Terry and his work, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, Russell's work made little impact and was out of print for nearly 100 years, until Walter Hibbard (who himself had adopted the HP position) arranged with Baker Book House to reprint the work in 1983. *The Parousia* is available through Baker Books and smaller single-subject publishers. However, even Russell was not entirely within the HP position as it is currently formulated. Russell viewed the millennial kingdom as “still future and unfulfilled” (523).

³Bob L. Ross, *The Historical background of Modern Preterism or AD 70ism* (Pasadena, Tex.: Pilgrim Publishing, n.d.) 2. This is one of a series of short monographs by Ross on the subject of preterism. All are available on his Website at <http://members.aol.com/pilgrimpub/pretrist.htm>.

⁴We do not mean by this that extent is the only difference between preterism and HP. The theological and practical differences will be noted in the following sections. To date, preterist writers themselves have been among the most vocal critics of the HP position.

⁵In 1994 John F. Walvoord (*Bibliotheca Sacra* 151 [October-December 1994]:492) reviewed John Noë's *The Apocalypse Conspiracy* (Brentwood, Tenn.: Wolgemuth & Hyatt Publishers, 1991). Another book by Noë, *Beyond the End Times; The Rest of the Greatest Story Ever Told* (Bradford, Pa.: Preterist Resources, 1999) has been reviewed by A. Boyd Luter (*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* [43:4 [December 2000]:743-44); and by the present writer (*The Master's Seminary Journal* 12/1 [Spring 2001]:119-21). While Walvoord's review could be characterized as “dismissive” and not extremely detailed, the reviews by Luter and this writer were more thorough, although both have been characterized

However, in the last few years more interest has arisen in the HP position, caused in no small part by aggressive marketing by the IPA and the ubiquitous nature of the Internet. Anecdotally, this writer has recently served as interim pastor in two premillennial churches in which those advocating HP doctrine had to be disciplined. The growth of the HP position and claims of the IPA and related groups necessitate an examination what many have called the resurgence of the error of “Hymenaeus and Philetus” (2 Tim 2:18).

This article will briefly examine the HP position in four areas: (1) Motivation; (2) Methodology; (3) Claims; and (4) Consequences. The purpose is not to dispute with normative or classic preterists, Yet this discussion’s premillennial perspective will probably bring disagreement from such preterists over some points of argumentation. The present focus deals strictly with the HP position and its claims.⁶

IPA’s Motivation: Flawed

Reading the material from HP authors, especially those associated with the IPA, clarifies their motivation immediately. The title of a recent book by John Noë states the motivation: *Dead in Their Tracks: Stopping the Liberal/Skeptical Attack on the Bible*.⁷ He follows the lead of *The Last Days According to Jesus*, in which R. C. Sproul introduces the objections to Christianity by the near nihilistic philosopher Bertrand Russell (1872-1970).⁸

One of Russell’s objections to Christianity (and they were certainly not limited to the singular selection quoted by Sproul and Noë) was that Christ claimed that He would return within the lifetime of His hearers and, in fact, He did not.⁹ Noë

as “scathing.”

⁶For a recent and thorough treatment of traditional preterist (and by extension hyper-preterist) arguments, see Richard L. Mayhue, “Jesus: A Preterist or a Futurist?,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 14/1 (Spring 2003):9-22. The foundational issue in establishing preterism is the date for the writing of the Book of Revelation. As Mayhue notes,

Regarding the writing dates for Revelation, Bible scholars generally recognize two possibilities. First, the early date is shortly before A.D. 70 (ca. A.D. 68) during Nero’s reign (A.D. 54-68). Second, the late date would be ca. A.D. 95 during Domitian’s time (A.D. 81-96). Significantly, a futurist would not have to change his eschatological thinking if a pre-A.D. 70 date for the writing were to be established. However, the preterist position is eliminated from consideration if the late date of ca. A.D. 95 can be validated (13).

⁷John Noë, *Dead in Their Tracks: Stopping the Liberal/Skeptical Attack on the Bible* (Bradford, Pa.: International Preterist Association, 2001).

⁸R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus: When Did Jesus Say He Would Return?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) 12-13.

⁹Sproul notes (ibid.) that Russell did not believe that Christ actually existed as a real historical figure, but more likely was a literary creation of the Gospel writers. Russell wrote, “Historically it is quite doubtful whether Christ existed at all, and if He did we do not know anything about Him, so that I am not concerned with the historical question, which is a very difficult one. I am concerned with Christ as He appears in the Gospels, taking the Gospel narrative as it stands,

also cites the “Father of the Historical Jesus” movement and noted liberal theologian, Albert Schweitzer, along with several Jewish and Islamic writers who object to Christianity on the same basis. Noë then cites the famous Christian apologist C. S. Lewis as one who concluded that Jesus was wrong about His second coming. Part of Noë’s citation has Lewis voicing the objections of Lewis’ created critic of Christianity,

It is clear that they [the disciples] expected the Second Coming in their own lifetime. And, worse still, they had a reason, and one which you will find very embarrassing. Their Master had told them so. He shared, and indeed created their delusion. He said in so many words, ‘this generation shall not pass till all these things be done.’ And He was wrong. He clearly knew no more about the end of the world than anyone else.¹⁰

To his credit, Noë takes these criticisms of the veracity of Christ and the inerrancy of the Bible seriously. He states,

Do you hear what these critics and even C. S. Lewis are saying? They are saying that Jesus was literally wrong when He made numerous time-restrictive predictions and statements regarding his coming, his return. As we shall see, the embarrassment belongs to C. S. Lewis et al. But this perceived weakness was, and still is, the crack that let the liberals in the door to begin their systematic criticism and dismantling of Scripture with its inevitable bankruptcy of the faith.¹¹

On this basis Noë asserts, “Regrettably, this ‘nonoccurrence’ problem cannot be lightly brushed aside without undermining the integrity and divinity of Christ and

and there one does not find some things that do not seem to be very wise. For one thing, He certainly thought that His second coming would occur in the clouds of glory before the death of all the people who were living at that time (Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects* [New York: Simon and Shuster/Touchstone, 1957] 16).

¹⁰C. S. Lewis, *The World’s Last Night and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1960) 98. In his citation, Noë actually references this essay as it appeared in *The Essential C. S. Lewis*, ed. Lyle W. Dorsett (New York: Collier Books, 1988; reprint, New York: Simon and Shuster, 1996) 383-92. A notation about IPA publications in general and Noë’s works in particular is in order. The works use many secondary and even tertiary sources as references. Sources are often poorly cited and even more poorly checked. In this case, Noë indicates that this essay was written in 1960, when in fact, it was first written in 1952 and appeared with a different title in the periodical *Religion in Life*. See the review of Noë’s *Beyond the End Times* (*The Master’s Seminary Journal* 12/1 [Spring 2001]:119-21) for several other examples. One work published by the IPA, Daniel E. Harden, *Overcoming Sproul’s Resurrection Obstacles* (Bradford, Pa.: International Preterist Association, 1999), is perhaps the most egregious case to date. This book has no footnotes, even though it has extensive quotations (apparently) from various other writers. Occasionally only page numbers are listed, apparently referring to a short bibliography at the end of the book, but to no other real information. The formatting makes it difficult to know where a quotation ends and the author’s words begin. This is certainly not the paradigm for what purports to be informative or scholarly publications.

¹¹Noë, *Dead in Their Tracks* 8. Edward E. Stevens makes the same comments (using a few of the same examples) in his work *What Happened in A. D. 70?* (Bradford, Pa.: Kingdom Publications, 1997)

placing the inerrancy of the Bible in question. It's that simple. It's that profound. And it calls for another reformation of Christianity around a more conservative and biblical view of eschatology."¹² His view is that only the HP position, which sees fulfillment of all prophecy in the A. D. 70 time frame, can answer the critics of the Bible and hopefully force them to see its truthfulness.

Despite the noble intentions and zeal exhibited here, the motivation of IPA and HP writers is overstated and apologetically flawed. A brief examination of the examples cited will demonstrate this. In the example of Russell, his objections regarding the *parousia* are a fraud at their very foundation. Russell was an atheist, and as already noted, he doubted that Jesus even existed! The idea that answering his objection about the supposed "nonoccurrence" of the second coming would sway him is naive at best. Russell stated,

The whole conception of God is a conception from the ancient Oriental despotisms. It is a conception quite unworthy of free men. When you hear people in church debasing themselves and saying that they are miserable sinners, and the rest of it, it seems contemptible and not worthy of well-respecting human beings.¹³

In contrast to such unbelief, the writer Hebrews stated, "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, *for he who comes to God must believe that He is*, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (Heb 11:6 [emphasis added]).

The Jewish skeptics that Noë cites are of another category. Judaism has consistently denied the identity of Jesus as the Messiah. Despite the overwhelming evidence of His deity and fulfillment of OT prophecy and even in light of the indisputable evidence of the resurrection, the Jewish leaders created an illusionary explanation as noted in Matt 28:11-15. The Islamic skeptics simply do not believe that Jesus ever claimed to be God or that He would ever return, as Noë himself notes.¹⁴ Islam teaches that these are simply lies that were added to the Bible. Efforts to prove that Jesus returned in A.D. 70 is a useless exercise as a foundation in witnessing to Muslims.

Regarding C. S. Lewis, the issue is a little more difficult. As significant an apologist for Christianity as he was, Lewis rejected the inerrancy and inspiration of Scripture.¹⁵ He was not a theologian and he affirmed several non-evangelical theological positions.¹⁶ For Lewis the seeming contradiction (between Jesus at one point saying that no one knows the day or hour and then seemingly giving an exact

¹²Noë, *Dead in Their Tracks* 10.

¹³Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian* 23.

¹⁴Noë, *Dead in Their Tracks* 4.

¹⁵See Michael J. Christensen, *C. S. Lewis on Scripture*. (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1979).

¹⁶See this writer's review of Jeffrey D. Schultz and John G. West, eds., *The C. S. Lewis Reader's Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998) in *The Master's Seminary Journal* 13/1 (Spring 2002):140-41 for a more detailed discussion of Lewis and his theology.

time reference with “this generation”) was actually a mark of the “historical reliability” of the Bible.¹⁷ However, Lewis does get the issue correct when he states, “The doctrine of the Second Coming teaches us that we do not and cannot know when the world drama will end. The curtain may be rung at any moment: say, before you have finished reading this paragraph.”¹⁸ In this Lewis correctly understands that the doctrine of imminence is not so concerned with “soon” but rather with “at any time.”¹⁹

But the motivation of the IPA and HP is flawed at a deeper level. Second Pet 3:4 declares that there will always be mockers, liberals and skeptics decrying the Christian faith asking, “[W]here is the promise of His coming?” As Hiebert notes, “‘Where is the promise of his coming?’ embodies their taunting reaction to the orthodox teaching concerning the return of Christ.”²⁰ This is the same type of mocking that Isaiah dismissed in Isa 5:19 and the Lord through Ezekiel did the same in Ezek 12:21-25.

Richard L. Mayhue, addressing Sproul’s work particularly, clearly summarizes this issue as it relates to the HP position, stating,

The advocates of preterism appear to have missed, or at least undervalued, Peter’s reminder that in the days prior to A.D. 70 there also were scoffers similar to Russell and Schweitzer. Instead of foretelling the events of A.D. 70, just a few short years away, Peter encourages them to wait in faith, believing that all will eventually happen in God’s timing, which is different from man’s timetable (2 Pet 3:3-4, 8-9). Attempting to answer objections from the skeptics is no way to validate or evaluate a particular eschatological system.²¹

IPA’s Methodology: “Spin Control”

The IPA has clearly attempted to position its unique views within the mainstream of evangelicalism and evangelical theology, because its theological conclusions have been labeled as heretical by both preterists and those who hold a futurist position. The noted preterist scholar, Kenneth L. Gentry, calls the position

¹⁷Lewis, *The World’s Last Night* 98-99.

¹⁸Ibid., 105.

¹⁹For further, see Robert L. Thomas. “Imminence in the NT, Especially Paul’s Thessalonian Epistles,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 13/2 (Fall 2002):191-214. See also idem, “The Doctrine of Imminence in Two Recent Eschatological Systems,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* [BSac] 157 (October-December 2000):452-76, and Wayne A. Brindle, “Biblical Evidence for the Imminence of the Rapture,” *BSac* 158 (April-June 2001):138-51. Another notable, albeit slightly unique, presentation of imminence is J. Barton Payne, *The Imminent Appearing of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962).

²⁰D. Edmond Hiebert, *Second Peter and Jude: An Expositional Commentary* (Greenville, S.C.: Unusual Publications, 1989) 143. See also Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, *The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1901) 291-92.

²¹Mayhue, “Jesus: A Preterist or Futurist?” 12.

“heterodox,” stating, “It is outside of the creedal orthodoxy of Christianity.”²² Thomas Ice, Director of the Pre-Trib Research Center, wrote, “Both Dr. [Kenneth] Gentry and I believe that such a position is heretical, for it denies a bodily resurrection of believers and a future second coming of Christ.”²³ MacArthur forcefully declares,

The hyper-preterist error is exactly like that of Hymenaeus and Philetus, who “strayed from the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past. . . . They overthrow the faith of some” (2 Tim. 2:18). The apostle Paul was not reluctant to speak plainly about the seriousness of such soul-destroying error, nor should we be hesitant to point out the dangers posted by such a serious departure from biblical truth. It is, after all, heresy of the worst stripe to deny the bodily return of Christ, and this particular brand of that heresy is currently overthrowing the faith of many.²⁴

Without using the term “heresy” R. C. Sproul states, “I share Gentry’s concerns about full preterism, particularly on such issues as the consummation of the kingdom and the resurrection of the dead.”²⁵ West, however, does not mince words, calling HP a “damnable heresy.”²⁶

In view of these widely-shared conclusions, the IPA’s strategy has been to engage in what has been referred to in the political arena as “spin control,” that is, attempting to place itself in a favorable light by deflecting criticism away from the main issues. To that end, it has employed two main deceptions: (1) redefining terminology and (2) presenting an illusion of evangelical and, by extension, orthodox acceptance.

1. Redefining Terminology

Those associated with the IPA have strenuously objected to characterizing their position as “hyper-preterism.” They wish to be called “Full” or “Consistent” preterists. By doing this, they wish to redefine the terms of the debate granting to themselves the high ground as “consistent” and to give their opponents within the preterist camp labels such as “partial” or “inconsistent” preterists. In fact, in the IPA’s published material it always refers to its own position as “preterist” and all

²²Kenneth L. Gentry, “A Brief Theological Analysis of Hyper-Preterism,” *Chalcedon Report* 384 (July 1997):23.

²³Thomas Ice and Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Great Tribulation: Past or Future? Two Evangelicals Debate the Question* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999) 7.

²⁴John F. MacArthur, *The Second Coming: Signs of Christ’s Return and the End of the Age* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1999) 13.

²⁵Sproul, *Last Days* 158.

²⁶Jim West, “The Allurement of Hymenaeus Preterism: The Rise of ‘Dispensable Eschatology,’” *Chalcedon Report* 384 (July 1997):22.

others as either futurist or partial preterists.²⁷ As Edward Stevens, the current president of the IPA, notes,

Actually the term “preterist” is all that is needed to describe our view. “Preterist” means past fulfillment. Only those who take a past fulfillment of all the eschatological events (e.g. the return of Christ, resurrection, judgment) can rightly be called “preterist.”²⁸

Despite such disclaimers, it seems that the prefix “hyper” is entirely justified. Hyper connotes the taking of a position to perhaps a logical, but unwarranted and unbiblical, continuation. Two other examples in the theological world suffice to illustrate this: (1) hyper-Calvinism and (2) hyper-Dispensationalism.²⁹

The attempt to “spin” the terminology has not gone unnoticed and to a certain degree has been a successful tactic. R. C. Sproul attempts to forge some kind of peace in the use of terminology, and in so doing, grants to the IPA a victory in “spin.” Sproul states,

Maybe the terms that best describe the two positions are *full preterism* and *partial preterism*. Both are preterist with respect to some eschatological events, but both are not preterist with respect to *all* eschatological events. The terms *full* and *partial* can then be safely applied to these two positions.³⁰

However, this concession ignores the fact that the preteristic method of interpretation has a long history, a history that never included the novelties that the IPA and its associates have introduced since the early 1970s.³¹ To take the long-established theological and hermeneutical construct of preterism and grant to usurpers the high ground that the term “full” or “consistent” denotes, while relegating the established position to that of “partial” or some other weaker label, is to yield ground without reason. One preterist writer has seen this clearly and stated,

²⁷As Luter noted in his review of Noë’s *Beyond the End Times*, preterists like Gentry must be “dumbfounded” to note that the HP’s label them as “futurists” (Luter, review of *Beyond the End Times* 744). This is simply more of the HP “spin” not only to redefine the terminology to suit their needs, but also to redefine the position of their opponents.

²⁸Edward E. Stevens, *Stevens Response to Gentry: Detailed response to Dr. Ken Gentry’s critique of the Preterist view entitled, “A Brief Theological Analysis of Hyper-Preterism”* (Bradford, Pa.: International Preterist Association, 1999) 3. Virgil Vaduva, apparently the operator of the “Planet Preterist” Website (www.planetpreterist.com), has even filed an application with the United States government to “trademark” the word “preterism,” giving it Hyper-Preterists’ own definition in an attempt to gain control of the word, see <http://tess2.uspto.gov/bin/showfield?f=doc&state=gojj7b.2.1> (accessed 1/20/2004).

²⁹Hyper-Dispensationalists also wish to be rid of the “hyper” label and so often they call themselves “Pauline Dispensationalists” or “Consistent Dispensationalists.” Hyper-Calvinists also often follow the same pattern, referring to themselves as “Consistent Calvinists.”

³⁰Sproul, *Last Days* 155-56 [italics in the original].

³¹Ross, *Historical Background* 2.

We must not let them get away with calling themselves “preterists” or “consistent preterists,” or believers in “fulfilled eschatology.” The word “preterist” is a good word, the disciples of Hymenaeus are not preterists; their “dispensable eschatology” makes them heretics.³²

HP adherents are seeking to usurp a birthright that is not theirs.

2. *The Illusion of Evangelical Acceptance*

The IPA has maintained a conspicuous presence at both regional and national meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society. At the annual meetings for the last several years they have had a large and prominent display in the exhibitor’s area. Two of their leading spokesmen, John Noë and Randall E. Otto, have regularly presented papers at regional and national meetings. Noë’s books in particular, with few exceptions, always make mention that the material was originally presented at one ETS meeting or another.

On Noë’s Website (www.prophecyrefi.org) he notes that the flyer “9.5 Theses for the Next Reformation,” a sort of credo for the Hyper-Preterist movement, was released at the 2001 National ETS meeting. The press release for this document begins, “A new era in church history began last week with the “posting on the Church door”—i.e., presenting and distributing—of the 9.5 Theses for the Next Reformation document at the 53rd Annual Meeting of Evangelical Theological Society.”³³ The press release goes on to talk about how many ETS participants “took” their material.

Their literature often contains anecdotal stories of “conversions” to their position, such as a “Christian college instructor” who was “convinced” of the position by reading Noë’s paper read at the 45th Annual Mid-Western Regional meeting of ETS.³⁴ Of course, the “instructor” is not identified nor is his field of instruction divulged.

The IPA and other HP’s make a great deal out of the fact that the well-known theonomist theologian, David Chilton, “converted” to the HP position shortly before his death. However, Vern Crisler observes that before this conversion Chilton had suffered his first heart attack and his friends recognized that “the resulting neurological trauma probably affected his judgment more than he realized.”³⁵ Crisler also predicted the “spin” of the IPA and other HP’s as he stated,

³²West, “Hymenaeus Preterism” 22.

³³John Noë, “The Next Reformation Has Begun,” Prophecy Reformation Institute press release at http://www.prophecyrefi.org/release_95theses_1101.htm (accessed 11/6/2002).

³⁴ John Noë, *Dead in Their Tracks* vi & viii. The page numbers of this book are incorrect as the preface moves from page “v” to an unnumbered page (which we have listed as page “vi” and then to page “viii.”

³⁵Vern Crisler, “The Eschatological *A Priori* of the New Testament: A Critique of Hyper-Preterism,” *Journal of Christian Reconstruction* 15 (Winter 1998):226.

Chilton's last minute conversion to heresy will be exploited by the remaining full-preterists, but they will only be exploiting a debilitated man's eccentricities, not his healthy and mature judgments.³⁶

Other attempts at "spin" can be noted in the material from IPA and its associates. In his work, *What Happened in A.D. 70?*, Edward E. Stevens, the president of the IPA, compiles an impressive bibliography. It is lengthy and outwardly impressive. He breaks down categories with two interesting headings. The first section he entitles "Books Which Teach a Similar View."³⁷ However, it is clear after looking at the listing of 76 works that "similar" is used in the most expansive manner possible. The next category, entitled "First-Century Fulfillment of Revelation,"³⁸ is equally misleading. This unqualified statement attempts to give the impression that the listed writers agree with Stevens' HP interpretations when, in reality, several of those listed have been among the most vocal critics of HP.³⁹

Occasionally their "spin" borders on incredulity. One example is the aforementioned book by John Noë, *Beyond the End Times*. On the back cover a biographical sketch refers to Noë as a "conservative, evangelical scholar, and an active member of the *Evangelical Theological Society*."⁴⁰ However, in his preface for this book, Stevens, though calling him a "scholar," admits, "John is not a professional theologian. He has had no formal seminary training, but that may be an advantage—it might have handicapped his communication style."⁴¹ Whatever information this *non sequitur* may be intended to convey, it is certainly a strange manner in which one affirms his scholarly *bona fides*.

In the face of condemnation of their position by both the futurist and preterist camps, the concept of "spin-control" is certainly helpful public relations, but it is certainly less than forthright in many instances.⁴²

³⁶Ibid., 227.

³⁷Edward E. Stevens, *What Happened in A.D. 70?* (Bradford, Pa.: Kingdom Publications, 1997) 35.

³⁸Ibid., 38.

³⁹Various HP Websites are also notorious for this type of misrepresentation. The "Preterist Archive" site (www.preteristarchive.com) lists dozens of writings as "Preterist Commentaries" that are clearly no such thing. Some of the names listed in their Websites as supposedly supporting their position include John Bengel, F. F. Bruce, and even John Nelson Darby!

⁴⁰Noë, *Beyond the End Times* back cover.

⁴¹Ibid., x. According to the by-laws of the *Evangelical Theological Society*, Noë cannot be a "full member" as he lacks the necessary academic credentials. He can only be an associate member. Apparently this lack of education is no longer seen as an "advantage" as the most recent IPA publications indicate that Noë is currently a "candidate for a Ph.D. degree from Trinity Theological Seminary and the University of Liverpool" (an institution with recognition only from a non-recognized accrediting organization in Colorado).

⁴²Whether a deliberate part of its "spin" or not, the IPA has used several different names for its publishing arm. Members have used mostly *International Preterist Association*. However, they have also used *Kingdom Publications* and *Preterist Resources*.

IPA's Claims: Heterodox

The IPA's claims have already been noted. In short, it claims that all biblical prophecy has been fulfilled, although Stevens attempts to deflect this slightly by stating that HP does not "teach that all prophecy has been totally fulfilled with absolutely no continuing implications, applications, or ongoing fulfillment."⁴³ By this he means that the present "Kingdom Age" continues to grow and expand:

The church only had the "earnest" and the "seal" of their kingdom inheritance during that transitional generation (AD 30-70). If anything, we in the post-70 period have a more relevant and applicable revelation [by which he means the Scripture]. We are now in the kingdom. The full inheritance is here. All the things Jesus, Paul and the other apostles taught about the kingdom now apply fully to us. Several prophetic passages have ongoing fulfillment in the kingdom (i.e. Ezek. 47:1-12 and Rev. 21:24-22:5).⁴⁴

The HP's, particularly Stevens, chafe at any mention or reference to the great doctrinal statements or creeds in the history of the church in evaluating their orthodoxy, especially as it relates to the resurrection of Christ and that of believers.

Creeds can be wrong since they embody more than just biblical material. They contain uninspired interpretations and applications of Scripture, which must always be subject to some suspicion of error. Only inspired Scripture is infallible and beyond question. And only the Biblical content of the creeds is above suspicion, error and correction.⁴⁵

Though this statement is true, it is a two-edged sword for the HP's. Stevens wants to believe that the creeds can be in error (which also is true), but somehow a material difference exists between a creedal statement and his own documentation of "properly exegeted Scripture."⁴⁶ What is a creedal or doctrinal statement other than a systematic presentation of the exegesis and interpretation of Scripture as it relates to different areas of doctrine? Stevens would like somehow to posit a supposed

⁴³*Stevens Response to Gentry* 46. This is perhaps the most detailed response to criticisms faced by HP to date. However, it is a rambling 114 pages (as compared to Gentry's original articles of little over two pages) of largely fallacious reasoning in which the *tu quoque* (commonly called the "you too") fallacy is rampant. It majors on Gentry's minor points and gives little attention to the major ones. Stevens fails to do any real exegesis of the texts that are raised in objection, making instead superficial and often *non sequitur* observations from the English Bible only.

⁴⁴*Ibid.* It is beyond the scope of the present discussion to analyze how these two passages can possibly be viewed as having "ongoing fulfillment" today. In short the passage in Revelation speaks of (1) no longer any night or darkness, (2) no longer any curse [that is the complete reversal of Gen 3:14-17], (3) the glory and honor of the nations are brought into the New Jerusalem, (4) believers see Christ's face to face. How one can claim that these things have begun to occur now, much less currently have "ongoing fulfillment," staggers the imagination.

⁴⁵Edward E. Stevens, *Questions About the Afterlife* (Bradford, Pa.: International Preterist Association, 1999) 1

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

superiority of his interpretations of the Bible over against those that have been formulated throughout the last 2,000 years.

Here is the problem that the HP position cannot wish away. As Gentry notes, "No creed allows for any second Advent in A.D. 70. No creed allows any other type of resurrection than a bodily one. Historic creeds speak of the universal, personal judgment of all men, not a representative judgment in A.D. 70."⁴⁷ It is an indisputable fact that outside their own small group, they cannot point to a single denominational statement of faith, a single one of the great creedal statements in the history of Christianity, a single seminary or academic theological institution presently or in the past, that affirms the HP view on the return of Christ, the resurrection, and the judgments, and affirms that the new heavens and new earth have been enjoyed by believers since A.D. 70. HP finds bits and pieces here and there from this person or that (normally accomplished with violence to the original context and the overall corpus of a particular writer), but nowhere in the history of doctrine can it cite anything remotely resembling its unique theological construct.

The issue is not the creeds *per se* (which Stevens uses as a red herring); it is the absolute negation of the HP view in the history of the church. Stevens states, "Only the canon of Scripture can be used to determine true biblical orthodoxy."⁴⁸ But this is little more than obfuscation on his part. Though honesty forces one to admit that it is *possible* that the HP position is correct and all of Christendom for 2,000 years has been incorrect, that possibility is so remote as to be nonexistent.

Space does not allow for a full examination of some other claims of HP. However, four are briefly noted here:

- *Rejection of the Millennial Kingdom.* The HP position rejects the notion of a 1,000-year millennial kingdom, whether the 1,000 years is taken literally or figuratively. The only place it can fit in a millennium is in the 40 years or so between the Cross and its Second Advent. Max King has developed something that he calls "transmillennialism."⁴⁹ In this scenario the time before the Cross is called "This Age," the period between the Cross and the Second Advent is the "Last Days," and the post-A.D. 70 era is the "Age to Come." Stevens is hopeful about this approach, stating, "I hope Max King's suggestion (that the Millennium was the period from 30 to 70 AD) is the correct one (it certainly sounds

⁴⁷Gentry, "Theological Analysis" 23.

⁴⁸Stevens, *Response to Gentry* 17.

⁴⁹Max King, "Frequently Asked Questions" (questions 2-3), Living Presence Ministries, <http://www.livingpresence.org/lpm/faq.htm> (accessed 9/26/2002). For some reason King has actually trademarked the word "Transmillennialism." Another HP writer, Kurt M. Simmons, has created another scheme called "Bimillennialism" or the idea that Rev 20 teaches that there will be two separate millenniums (http://preteristarchive.com/Preterism/simmons-kurt_03_p_01.html [accessed Jan. 19, 2004]).

good).”⁵⁰

- *Rejection of the Physical Return of Christ.* The HP position states that when Christ returned in A.D. 70 it was “in clouds of judgment.”⁵¹ This return was invisible to the physical eye. This is a patent rejection the description of Christ’s return predicted in Acts 1:11.
- *Rejection of Any Post-A.D. 70 Fulfillment of Prophecy.* Stevens claims that, “Jesus said that all OT prophecy would be fulfilled by the time Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70.”⁵² One passage among many in the OT, then, requires explaining. In the passage dealing with the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31, the chapter ends with a prophecy related to the city of Jerusalem (31:38-40). In that prophecy, physical Jerusalem is said to be (1) rebuilt and enlarged, (2) sanctified, and (3) immune from future destruction. The boundaries of the city are given with exacting geographic detail. This prophecy in the HP view apparently failed, in that the city was never rebuilt and enlarged to the borders stated in the prophecy, and even if it were, the prophecy failed because Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70 and also afterwards.⁵³
- *Rejection of the Traditional View of the Resurrection.* Since the resurrection occurred in A.D. 70, HP writers have to redefine what the resurrection means today. To accomplish this they, in large part, have adopted the views of Murray J. Harris concerning the nature of the resurrection, which certainly alters the nature of the physical resurrection, making it essentially “spiritual in nature.”⁵⁴ Stevens, in rather convoluted language, denies that Christ had a literal physical resurrection body.⁵⁵ He states, “Preterists are not removing the physical body

⁵⁰Stevens, “Questions and Answers” (<http://www.preterist.org/preteristQA.ASP> [accessed Feb. 11, 2004]).

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Stevens, *What Happened?* 32.

⁵³For further, see this writer’s paper, “The Expansion of Jerusalem in Jeremiah 31:38-40: Never, Already, or Not Yet?” (a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Nashville, Tenn., 2000). As previously noted, if the traditional dating for the Book of Revelation is correct, then the entire superstructure of the HP and the normative preterist views collapses as does the HP demands that all of the NT have a pre-A.D. 70 date of writing.

⁵⁴See Murray J. Harris, *Raised Immortal: Resurrection and Immortality in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), and *From Grave to Glory: Resurrection in the New Testament: Including a Response to Norman L. Geisler* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990). Harris’ works were highly controversial and led to a lengthy series of articles and exchanges, including Norman L. Geisler, *The Battle for the Resurrection* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989). In the height of the controversy a panel of scholars on behalf of the Evangelical Free Church examined Harris’ views. Stevens notes that the panel, “J. I. Packer, Gleason Archer and Peter Toon have all stated in print that they see Murray Harris’ position as Scripturally orthodox” (Stevens, *Response to Gentry* 52). Nine pages later in the same book, Stevens misrepresents Packer, Archer, and Toon, stating that they “take the same view of the resurrection body as Preterists [and Harris] do” (ibid., 61). It apparently escaped Stevens that there is a significant difference between stating that something falls within the realm of orthodoxy and personally agreeing with that position.

⁵⁵Stevens, *Response to Gentry* 51-55.

from the Bible's systematic theology regarding the resurrection. It was never the ultimate kind of resurrection body God had planned and revealed in Scripture in the first place."⁵⁶ Stevens presents this summation of the HP position on the resurrection:

The "change" of the living saints at AD 70 was not giving them their new bodies, but giving them immortality. For the dead saints, it was the reception of immortality, their new bodies, and full access to the presence of God. For both the dead and living saints, it was the consummation of the change that had already begun with Christ's resurrection, and which was guaranteed (pledged, sealed) by the "eternal life" the Holy Spirit had quickened them with during the transition period. The "change" from being "dead in their trespasses and sins" to "alive in Christ Jesus" was fully consummated.⁵⁷

IPA's Consequences: A Hopeless and Helpless Church

Beyond the theological implications of Hyper-Preterism, the practical life of the church must be a matter for consideration. Of course, the IPA does not like to refer to today's church as the assembly of believers. Stevens states,

I'm not totally comfortable using the word "church" in reference to the Kingdom of God today. The word "church" just might refer to the "calling-out" process of the transitional period from 30-70 AD when Christ was building His Kingdom.⁵⁸

In the preface for the book, *Beyond the End Times*, Stevens also remarks that the author (John Noë) is "working on a sequel that will explore more implications for Christians living after A.D. 70."⁵⁹ Such a work is certainly necessary to explain the absolute havoc their theology has wrought on the life of believers in the present age, however the church may be defined. It is clear that even a cursory examination of the NT will demonstrate that the outworking of the HP position leaves the church in a confused muddle of hopelessness and helplessness.

The HP's overarching problem presented for believers today is that the totality of the NT is relegated to a past era, not really applicable in terms of imperatival commands. As Gentry has concluded, the position leaves the church without a revelation from God by which to guide their lives in this current age.

If all prophecy was fulfilled prior to A.D. 70 and if the entire New Testament spoke to issues in the pre-A. D. 70 time-frame, we do not have any directly relevant passages for

⁵⁶Ibid., 55.

⁵⁷Ibid., 65.

⁵⁸Edward E. Stevens, "Questions and Comments," International Preterist Association Webpage, <http://www.preterist.org/articles-old/q&a.htm> (accessed 11/12/2002).

⁵⁹Noë, *Beyond the End Times* xii.

us. The entire New Testament must be transposed before we can use it.⁶⁰

Beyond this, there are five specific passages of Scripture dealing with everyday life in the church that are rendered useless by the HP position.

1. *The Church Is Left without a Remembrance and Message*

First Cor 11:26 gives the purpose of communion for the church. In the celebration of communion the assembly “proclaims the Lord’s death until He comes.” The phrase, “proclaiming the Lord’s death” can only refer to the totality of the gospel message. As Mare notes, communion is to be celebrated until “the second advent.”⁶¹ Erickson states that communion is “also a proclamation of a future fact; it looks forward to the Lord’s second coming.”⁶² Thiselton makes the point quite clear:

Just as the sun outshines any source of illumination otherwise provided in everyday life, so when **he** (*the Lord*) **comes**, this reality [as pictured in communion] will eclipse and outshine the pledges and promises that have been hitherto pointed to it. In this sense the fellowship gathered around **the table of the Lord** (10:21) provisionally and in partial measure constitutes the pledge and first preliminary imperfect foretaste of the “Supper of the Lamb” of the final consummation to which the Lord’s Supper points in promise. . . . The story does not reach its culmination **until he comes**, and only then will the full meaning of all present moments be disclosed, beyond the need for partial significations.⁶³

In the NT one of the clearest connections between evangelism and eschatology is Paul’s presentation at the Areopagus in Acts 17. In verses 30-31 Paul brings his address to conclusion with a call to repentance. The reason for repentance is *καθότι* (because, or in view of the fact) that God “has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness” (v. 31), and the proof of that is the resurrection from the dead. But for HP that day is past; Christ has returned and judgment has occurred. If he were preaching to a group of philosophic skeptics today, Paul would need an entirely different conclusion, according to HP.

2. *The Church Is Left Without an Ethical Imperative*

In Titus 2:11-15 Paul tells Titus to instruct those in Crete to live a godly life in light of their salvation. Particularly they are commanded to be “looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God, even Our Savior, Christ Jesus” (v. 13). Godly living is tied directly to the anticipation of Christ’s return. If

⁶⁰Gentry, “Theological Analysis” 23.

⁶¹W. Harold Mare, “First Corinthians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) 10:259.

⁶²Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988) 1120.

⁶³Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmann, 2000) 888-89 [bold and italics in the original].

that has already happened, the imperative is gone. Knight comments, "We live from the vantage point of 'expectedly waiting' and 'looking forward' to Christ's appearing."⁶⁴ He further adds, "Paul joins to the instructions given by grace about living the Christian life (vv. 11-12) this note of looking forward to Christ's appearing, so that the two give perspective to each other."⁶⁵ Christian ethics and the outworking of the Christian life are always bound up in the anticipation of the return of Christ (see also Phil 3:15-21; 1 Tim 6:13-16). As Quinn summarizes,

The "sensible, honest, godly way" of Christian life does not derive itself from Greek ethical demonstrations; it does not hope for that knowledge (φρόνησις) of the good which the philosophers promised. The consolation and release that believers expect are bound up with the coming of the risen Lord and their own resurrection, literally, "the blessed hope and manifestation (ἐπιφάνεια) of the glory of the great God and our savior, Jesus Christ." "Hope" in the PE [Pastoral Epistles] means the person hoped for (see 1:2), Jesus, hidden for the time being but certain to appear.⁶⁶

Additionally, in verse 14 Paul states that Christ will "redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good works." Since, according to the HP position, everything related to the second coming has already occurred, the conclusion must be that Christ has already purified a people. Romans 13:1-10 enjoins Christians to be subject to the governing authorities. But that set of imperatives is also enforced by anticipation of the second coming (v. 11). Far from giving a chronological time frame, Paul simply states, "[O]ur salvation is nearer now than when we first believed" (v. 11). Harrison, citing Leenhardt, makes a point that HP needs to note:

The time of the appearing is subordinate to the fact of the appearing. "If primitive Christianity could note, without its faith being shaken thereby, that the 'end' did not come within the calculated times, that is just because the chronological framework of its hope was a secondary matter" (Leenhardt, in loc). The believer is not like a child looking for a clock to strike the hour because something is due to happen then. He is content to know that with every passing moment the end is that much closer to

⁶⁴George W. Knight III, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 321. See also I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Titus*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999). He adds that this text "shows that balance of realized and future divine action and salvation which is characteristic of the NT generally" (272). The Puritan divine, Thomas Taylor, demonstrates that this is an interpretation that has stood the test of time: "From this our apostle includes a very strong argument [the second coming of Christ] to enforce all the former duties, of which we have spoken in the verse going before, and an effectual means to contain believers in those duties" (Thomas Taylor, *Exposition of Titus* [Cambridge, 1619; reprint, Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, 1980] 348).

⁶⁵Knight, *Pastoral Epistles* 321.

⁶⁶Jerome D. Quinn, *The Letter to Titus: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary and an Introduction to Titus, I & II Timothy, The Pastoral Epistles*, vol. 35 of The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1990) 169.

realization.⁶⁷

3. *The Church Is Left Without Hope and a Reason for Patience*

James 5:8 instructs the assembly to be patient amid oppression “because the coming of the Lord is at hand.” “The readers know that the Lord is coming back in the capacity of Judge. They ought to exercise patience toward their adversaries and demonstrate patience in respect to the coming of the Lord. He will avenge His people when he returns (II Thess 1:5-6).”⁶⁸ Obviously, if the Lord has already come the church has no source of comfort when oppressed and persecuted..

Without the promise of a second coming, the church is alone and without hope in the world. No future coming Christ means no promise of God’s intervention on behalf of His people in this age. The HP position teaches that this present world will never end⁶⁹ and offers no promise that the condition of this world will ever be anything beyond what it is: a place where the truth is suppressed by ungodly men, where Christians are persecuted and sometimes martyred, and false religions, cults and other error-laden philosophies spring up almost daily to capture men’s souls. In the middle of this, HP’s only hope for the believer is death, escape from this present and never-ending world. All of this would seem to lead ultimately to a return to the “gloomy amillennialism” of Francis Turretin.⁷⁰

4. *The Church Is Left Without Rewards for Faithfulness*

In 1 Pet 5:4 the apostle instructs elders to exercise wise servant leadership over the flock, reminding them of the reward that will be theirs “when the Chief Shepherd appears.” This may seem like a minor issue, yet the thought of reward is extremely important in NT teaching. At the end of his life Paul stated, “[I]n the future there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Tim 4:8). Paul speaks of this “day” as future and distant, certainly not in keeping with the relatively short time between his death in A.D. 68 and the HP notion of an A.D. 70 culmination.

5. *The Church Is Left Without a Purpose and With Useless Equipment*

⁶⁷Everett F. Harrison, “Romans,” in the *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) 10:142-43.

⁶⁸Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: James, Epistles of John, Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995) 164. See also Todd C. Penner, *The Epistle of James and Eschatology*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplemental Series #121 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1976). “The themes of reversal, boasting, humility, pride, wealth, and commerce come together within the framework of God’s expected judgment at the παρουσία του κυριου” (170).

⁶⁹Noë, *Beyond the End Times* 41-57.

⁷⁰Earl William Kennedy, “From Pessimism to Optimism: Francis Turretin and Charles Hodge on ‘The Last Things,’” in *Servant Gladly: Essays in Honor of John W. Beardslee III*, ed. Jack D. Klunder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 104.

The phrase “even to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20) limits the Great Commission (Matt 28:16-20). Since HP teaches that “the age to come” is already present, the age of the Great Commission, in their view, must no longer exist. Stevens admits this point, stating, “But the ‘Great Commission’ (just like the ‘Great Tribulation’) was a special time of inspired apostolic activity that will never be duplicated.”⁷¹ He admits “evangelism goes on”⁷² for the HP in this age, but it is certainly not the evangel of the NT that is proclaimed. Even the ministry of the Holy Spirit toward unbelievers is severely weakened. John 16:8 promises that the Spirit will “convict of sin, righteousness and judgment.” But if the final judgment has already occurred, of what does the Spirit convict men?

One of the more startling problems with the HP position arises when the Christian arrives at Eph 6:10-20. The entire imperative of Paul to “put on the full armor of God” is predicated on the need for such armor to “stand firm against the schemes of the devil” (6:11). Paul continues by warning believers that their battles are not against “flesh and blood” but against Satan and his demonic hosts.⁷³ But according to the HP position Satan and his demons are no more, they have been cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:10), no longer able to wage war against the saints. The “shield of faith” (Eph 6:16) needed to combat the “flaming missiles of the evil one” is needed no more. All the armor of God (which includes the Word of God) is rendered obsolete and useless, as the enemy for which it was designed is no longer a threat (see also Eph 4:27; 1 Tim 4:1ff.; 2 Tim 2:26). As Hoehner clearly demonstrates in his commentary on Ephesians,

Due to this, one must always be cognizant that the strategies or schemes of the devil are based on lies and are designed to deceive believers. Consequently, Paul exhorts believers to put on the full armor of God for the purpose of being able to stand firmly against the lying strategies of the devil. In these strategies, the devil is crafty in that he “does not always attack through obvious head-on assaults but employs cunning and wily stratagems designed to catch believers unawares.” They are told not to attack the devil or advance against him; they are only told to “stand,” hold the territory that Christ and his body, the church, have conquered. Without the armor of God it is certain that believers will be deceived and defeated by those “schemes” of the devil, which have been effective for thousands of years.⁷⁴

Hoehner clearly points out, “[T]he entire armor is absolutely necessary in the

⁷¹Stevens, *Response to Gentry* 104.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³This is perhaps one of the most remarkable aspects of the HP scheme, the idea that Satan and demons have been completely and eternally dispatched to the Lake of Fire. To propose that there is no Satanic activity in the world today is utterly ridiculous.

⁷⁴Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002) 824. See also Hoehner’s entire argumentation on the nature of the battle as being against spiritual evil personally lead and directed by Satan and the relation of the armor to that battle (819-54).

spiritual warfare against the devil and his angels.”⁷⁵ In the same context, one wonders what the HP view of prayer (v. 18) might be.

One of the most dramatic charges to pastoral fidelity and responsibility is in 2 Tim 4:1-5 where Timothy is told to “preach the Word.” However, Paul prefaces the charge with the concept that it is to be done to serve God and Christ Jesus, who will “judge the living and the dead by His appearing and His kingdom” (v. 1). If that appearing has already happened and the judgment has fallen, the entire motivation for gospel preaching is severely weakened. Additionally, the HP teachers must also believe that “the god of this world” is no longer blinding “the minds of the unbelieving that they might not see the light of the Gospel” (2 Cor 4:4) since, again, Satan has been dispatched to the Lake of Fire.

Why the NT writers have no instruction about the Christian life for the post-A.D. 70 believers is an eminently significant issue, one that HP has no answer for. Every affirmation for the message of the church, the ethical conduct of the church, hope for the church in light of persecution, rewards for faithfulness, and the purpose and equipping of the church are all bound up in passages that teach believers to “look forward” to a future appearing of Christ, a future resurrection of the saints, and a future judgment of the wicked. The HP position robs the church of every precious promise and comfort in this life that God affords to His people.

Conclusion

The IPA trumpets the claim that its view of preterism may be the “spark that ignites the next Reformation of Christianity.”⁷⁶ Strangely, nowhere in their numerous writings do its associates ever detail what this “reformation” would entail or what they expect to see happen.

In his review of Noë’s book, *Beyond the End Times*, A. Boyd Luter has written, “No doubt, much of his overall theological position is within the evangelical pale. However, I know of no denomination or academic institution, of whatever evangelical stripe, with an eschatological plank of consequence in its doctrinal position that Noë could affirm.”⁷⁷ In this assessment Luter is far too kind. The particular eschatological position of the IPA or HP and its resulting conclusions cannot be categorized as evangelical, even in the broadest sense.

The HP position, as currently construed, is “comprehensive” in that it (whether its adherents realize it or not) has developed a theological construct that affects every aspect of theology and biblical interpretation.⁷⁸ So pervasive are the implications of this system and so pernicious are the outcomes that it is not too much

⁷⁵Ibid., 853.

⁷⁶John Noë, *9.5 Theses for the Next Reformation* (Fishers, Ind.: Prophecy Reformation Institute and Bradford, Pa.: International Preterist Association, 2001).

⁷⁷Luter, review of *Beyond the Ends Times* 744.

⁷⁸See Gentry, “Theological Analysis” for a listing of the implications of the HP position.

to call this movement “proto-cultic,” that is, a potential cult in the making.

The implications of HP in terms of both theology and practical Christian living will not lead to the “reformation” envisioned by its adherents; it can only lead to “retrogression,” a movement backwards to the error of Hymenaeus and Philetus, an error Paul roundly condemned as “overthrowing the faith of many” (2 Tim 2:18).