

How I Arrived At My Current Eschatological Position

by Tony E. Denton

You know, as a member of the Lord's church, I've been taught the importance of abiding by rules of interpretation (aka hermeneutics): I was taught the importance of them; I read about them; I spent an enormous time studying them! If you're in my shoes in this regard, how would you feel if you discovered that you haven't actually been all that skilled at applying those rules because you were still subconsciously allowing preconceived ideas to influence your application? Well, if you were in the process of trying really hard to emulate the Bereans of Acts 17:11 when you made this discovery, you probably felt pretty bad about yourself. However, if you haven't experienced this pain yet, and just in case there happens to be those here who are of the humble, genuine, truth-loving, regardless-of-the-ramifications type of heart, please allow me to provide us with some questions to ask ourselves:

1. "Acknowledging that the Bible ultimately has only one Author, *how serious am I really about truly allowing the Bible to interpret the Bible as I know I should?*"
2. "Realizing that although the Bible is for me, it wasn't written to me, *how serious am I really about truly placing myself in the shoes of the recipients of the original biblical writings?*" And...
3. "Believing that God and His Word are immutable, *how serious am I really about truly believing that any given passage cannot mean what it never meant?*"

This sort of heart-searching is what has caused hundreds, yea thousands within the Lord's church alone, to arrive at what many call preterism. No, I'm not implying that everyone who hasn't arrived at this ideology is closed-minded, hard-hearted, and egotistical about his/her knowledge of God's Word, for many noble Christians haven't even considered studying the subject of biblical end-times. But I do know from experience that there are brethren who refuse to "test all things" that arise with calm, loving, patient, and open-minded attitudes, demonstrating concern, not only for the brother believed to be in the wrong, but also for truth regardless of its consequences. Well...

When I went through this time of self-realization, it didn't occur all at once; it occurred something like this: After I encountered a passage related to eschatology and concluded that I, due to my learned prejudices, had completely missed its clear import, I began to discipline myself to try harder to make sure that I didn't continue missing what God actually had recorded for me to comprehend. When you read my web-article on open-mindedness, don't merely think of it as just another sermon, for I take the thoughts therein *very* seriously! "So," you ask, "what was the passage that triggered this adjustment in your self-perception as well as your philosophy concerning biblical eschatology?" It was Matthew 16:27-28.

Instead of reading, as we're accustomed to doing, Mark 9:1 which has been disconnected from 8:38, I beg you to please do your best to empty your mind of any and all preconceptions, and listen very carefully to exactly what Jesus said here: **The Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will reward each according to what he has done. I assure you: There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom** (Holman Christian Standard Bible). Some questions I asked myself were these:

1. Am I willing to dispose of my tendency to insert 2000 years in the midst of these two, single-breath statements, and allow the Bible [v. 28] to interpret the Bible [v. 27]? And I had to discipline myself, for the love of truth, to answer in the affirmative.
2. Am I willing to put myself in the shoes of Jesus' audience, and understand His declaration from their point of view? In other words, since these two statements were essentially both stated in one breath, and since the first phrase of statement two connected the thoughts, wouldn't I, in their place, have perceived Jesus to be speaking about a single event that couldn't have been separated by thousands of years? And I had to push myself, for the love of truth, to answer in the affirmative. Then lastly...
3. Am I willing to force myself to accept the meaning that this declaration had then to mean the same thing now? And, again, I had to compel myself, for the love of truth, to answer in the affirmative.

So what did this mean to me? Well, what all does this pretty plain proclamation of Jesus teach?

1. *Before all the disciples in Jesus' audience that day died*, Jesus would come in the glory of His Father, an expression the disciples would've associated with many Old Testament passages about how Yahweh had come in glory against various nations in judgment, described as in or on clouds (which have always been associated with God's glory, Exo. 16:10, 24:16, 40:34-35, I Kgs 8:11, & Eze. 10:4) as well as with lightning, thunder, storms, and earthquakes (cf. Isa. 19:1-17, Eze. 38:1-17, Psa. 18:14, Zec. 9:14, Isa. 29:6, et. al.).
2. *Before all the disciples in Jesus' audience that day died*, Jesus would come with angels, something else associated in the Old Testament with God's anger against nations (Psa. 78:49 & 104:4); besides that, Jesus had just previously spoken of angels in this fashion in Matthew 13: in verses 39, 41, & 49 He spoke of His sending angels to cleanse out the chaff.
3. *Before all the disciples in Jesus' audience that day died*, Jesus would come to reward each one according to what he had done. Ouch! That was a hard one to discipline myself to accept! And lastly, what sort of sums up all of this...
4. *Before all of the disciples in Jesus' audience that day died*, Jesus would come in His kingdom, the kingdom He would soon leave to receive; Jesus was obviously speaking of Himself in Luke 19:12 when He spoke about A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for Himself a kingdom and to return.... Besides...

Since Jesus sent the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost precisely because He couldn't come to them, this Matthew 16 coming must have been an allusion to another coming which would've still been within that generation of time. Furthermore...

If the first part of Jesus' declaration (v. 27) is to be taken literally, then that's another reason why the second part (v. 28) couldn't have been an allusion to the day of Pentecost either. So...

With this crystal clear information before me, I obviously couldn't help but remember where else Jesus had spoken of this same incident and how it would affect my understanding of it. Just a few weeks later He not only talked about the same event, but even provided more information and reaffirmed the timing. When was this? At His Olivet Discourse recorded in Mark 13, Luke 21, and Matthew 24—25. Again, allowing the Bible to interpret the Bible, or in this case allowing Jesus to interpret Jesus, the following obvious parallels, spoken to the same disciples as in Matthew 16, are observable:

1. In Mark 13:26, Luke 21:27, and Matthew 24:30 Jesus told them that people would see the Son of Man coming on [or in, per Mark & Luke] the clouds [or a cloud, per Luke] of heaven with power and great glory—"coming ... with ... glory."
2. In Matthew 24:31 and Mark 13:27 Jesus told them that at this time He would send His angels and gather together His elect (perfectly corresponding to Ephesians 1:10, by the way).
3. In Luke 21:31 Jesus told them, When you see all these things happening, know that the kingdom ... [with its redemption, v. 28] is near, which corresponds to Matthew 24:14 where Jesus called *this* the good news of [or about] the kingdom.
4. In the extended account of The Olivet Discourse (an account written specifically to Jews, incidentally), Matthew recorded Jesus in 25:10, 21, 23, & 34 as also telling these disciples about *the reward* to be gained: listen especially to verses 31 & 34 together: When the Son of Man comes in His glory [catch that, "His glory," just as in Luke's account of Matthew 16:27, Luke 9:26], and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.... Then the King will say to those on His right hand, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you. So...

In the context of this article, when did Jesus place the consummation of those events? Matthew 23:36, 24:34, Mark 13:30, & Luke 21:32 all clearly have Him telling them that they would transpire within the generation of that very audience, perfectly corresponding to Matthew 16:28! (August 2008)