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ON SOLID GROUND

by Thomas Ice

On February 26, 2002 I debated Gary DeMar on preterism verses futurism at BIOLA University in California.¹ Post debate banter continues to reverberate. Demonstrating that he has learned nothing from the exchange, DeMar wrote an article entitled “On Thin Ice,” which appears on his website.²

THIS GENERATION

DeMar says³ that the burden of proof for my taking “this generation” differently than he does is on me. This is what I demonstrated in the article that DeMar is responding to.⁴ DeMar—as he did in our recent debate—ignores interaction with the details of my substantial argumentation and primarily just repeats “this generation,” as if in a catatonic state. DeMar, held captive by his *a priori* allegiance to the preterist system, appeals to D. A. Carson who I had quoted. Because I had quoted Carson in one book, DeMar goes to another book and suggests that I should believe what Carson says there. If I don’t, then DeMar portrays me as somehow inconsistent. Yet, if DeMar were held to the same standard, I could produce many instances where he favorably quotes someone he agrees with, but would not agree with them in other instances.

Using DeMar’s logic, it would mean that he should agree with all that the quoted individual espouses. For example, DeMar favorably quotes full-preterist J. Stuart Russell in his book *Last Days Madness*.⁵ Based upon DeMar’s standard, this would mean that he must also adhere to full preterism, since Russell held that position. Either DeMar is inconsistent when he quotes favorably Russell or he must believe, like Russell, in no future second coming and no future bodily resurrection.

DeMar quotes Carson’s commentary on Matthew as supporting his view of “this generation,” in Matthew 24:34, as if this somehow upstages me. It is true that Carson favors DeMar’s view of “this generation” in the debate passage. However, Carson does favor my understanding that Matthew 24:27-31 refers to a future event—Christ’s second coming. Carson says,

Here are references to the Son of Man’s coming angels gathering the elect, trumpet call, clouds, glory, tribes of the earth mourning, celestial disturbances—all unambiguously related to the Second Advent. It seems very doubtful, to say the least, that the natural way to understand vv. 29–35 is a reference to the Fall of Jerusalem. . . .

Daniel 7 portrays something glorious and wonderful, the end of the pagan emperor’s reign; but A.D. 70 marks success by the pagan emperor.⁶

This is one of the points that I have consistently made with DeMar, that Matthew 24:27–31 did not happen in A.D. 70. Therefore, “all these things” of verse 34 were not fulfilled in the first century. In the debate and in my article,⁷ I provided an extensive discussion of why “this generation” in verse 24 must be future. Part of the reason why is that “all these things” were not fulfilled by the first century Roman invaders. I have

given an interpretation of Matthew 24 that provides a consistent understanding of the details of verses 4–34. Yet DeMar, blinded by his preterist bias, finds only what his system will allow him to see. We have in Carson, one who agrees with DeMar’s view of “this generation,” yet, unlike DeMar, is honest enough to admit that the language of verses 27–31 must reference a future second advent.

WHO IS “YOU”?

DeMar is less than honest when he says, “Ice never deals with the second person plural or my extended argument and how it relates to ‘this generation.’” This is just not true! I dealt with this in our BIOLA debate (check out the recording). I noted that the Deuteronomy 4 and 30 use the second person plural “you” to refer to the Jewish nation since it would have been impossible for the events spoken to “you” people in 1400 B.C. to have occurred in a single generation. Instead those events have occurred throughout the thousands of years of Jewish history and some are still future to our time.

Further, in the debate, I brought up Matthew 23:35 which speaks of “from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom **you** murdered between the temple and the altar.” I noted that the second person plural “you” in this passage could not refer to Christ’s contemporaries. I believe, as in many biblical prophetic sections in other parts of Scripture that are directed to Israel, the second person plural “you” refers to the Jewish nation in Matthew 22–24.

BLIND ALLEGIANCE

DeMar cites what he believes to be a few first century fulfillments of wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines and tribulations. The problem with citing just those items is that there is never a generation when these things could not be said to be true. They don’t *prove* a first-century fulfillment. At best, they only make a first-century fulfillment possible.

One thing that DeMar did not cite in his article from Matthew 24:5 is Jesus’ reference to false Christs. The emphasis in verse 5 is upon “many.” Not just a single person will come claiming to be the Messiah, but a whole host of individuals will make such claims. Multiple claims to Messiahship is one of the reasons why this passage is not referring to events leading up to the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem as DeMar dogmatically supposes. A. H. M’Neile says, “No such definite claim to Messiahship is known till that of Barkokba in the reign of Hadrian.”⁸ The Barkokba revolt was put down by the Romans in A.D. 135 when Hadrian lead the Roman legions to once again destroy Jerusalem, and the surrounding area, which resulted in the death of half a million Jews.⁹ Robert Gundry notes the following:

The lack of evidence that anyone claimed messiahship between Jesus and Bar-Kokhba a hundred years later militates against our seeing the discourse as a *vaticinium ex eventu* [a prophecy of an event] concerning the first Jewish revolt (A.D. 66–73). False prophets figured in that revolt (Josephus *J.W.* 6.5.2 §§285-87; 7.11.1 §§437-39; *Ant.* 20.5.1 §97); but one did not have to claim messiahship to be a false prophet. Cf. Acts 5:36; 8:9; 21:38.¹⁰

DeMar dogmatically declares the following in one of his books: “Josephus tells of ‘a certain impostor named Theudas . . .’ Dositheus, a Samaritan, ‘pretended that he was the lawgiver prophesied of by Moses.’”¹¹ DeMar contends that these all made claims to be the Messiah. However, none of these actually claimed to be Messiah when examined closely.

Some of these statements could be described as false prophets, but not false Messiahs. DeMar is playing fast and loose with the data because he has such a large investment in their view that all this took place in the first century. H. A. W. Meyer clarifies the issue when he notes,

*We possess no historical record of any false Messiahs having appeared previous to the destruction of Jerusalem (Barcochba did not make his appearance till the time of Hadrian); for Simon Magus (Acts viii. 9), Theudas (Acts v. 36), the Egyptian (Acts xxi. 38), Menander, Dositheus, who have been referred to as cases in point (Theophylact, Euthymius Zigabenus, Grotius, Calvinus, Bengel), did not pretend to be the Messiah. Comp. Joseph Antt. Xx. 5. 1; 8. 6; Bell. li. 13. 5.*¹²

Another says, “The first and second centuries saw quite a few famous false prophets who made eschatological claims,” as I have noted above. However, they further say, “That any of them (before Bar Kochba) said, in so many words, ‘I am Messiah’, is undemonstrated by the sources.”¹³ Finally, Leon Morris tells us, “in this place the meaning is rather that they will claim for themselves the name *Messiah*, Jesus’ own title.” Morris explains:

This will surely be a reference to the last days, for there is little evidence that any of the turbulent men so active preceding the fall of Jerusalem ever claimed to be the Messiah. Some claimed to be prophets, but that is not the same thing.¹⁴

Even if some first century individuals did claim to be the Messiah—they did not—it would not fulfill this passage. This is one of the many reasons that it looks to the future tribulation and the coming of the beast of Revelation, popularly known down through Christendom as the antichrist. DeMar is just plain wrong. But this doesn’t matter because he has a position to defend.

THE DAY AND THE HOUR

One of the main reasons why preterism is wrong is because it cannot satisfactorily demonstrate that Matthew 24:27–31 was fulfilled in the A.D. 70 event. This is why I challenged DeMar in the date and in the article to tell us when Christ returned to planet earth in the first century. Had Christ returned as described in that passage, surely Josephus would have observed it. But even the verbose Josephus does not record such an event, because it did not occur. When the second coming of Christ—as

described prophetically in Matthew 24:27–31 —occurs, we will all be able to note the day and the hour. The description of Christ’s return in this passage is of a nature that it will be such a public event that will be observed by multitudes of people. The exact day and hour of this event will not be lost in human history.

Since DeMar cannot answer my question, as usual, he attempts a debater’s ploy. He asks me to tell him when Jesus was born. Such a question supports my point, not DeMar’s. There were a few people who observed that event and had God desired, they could have recorded for history the exact day, time, and place. It was a distinctly observable event. However, with thousands of people on the scene in A.D. 70, no one was able to observe the event of Christ’s return, since it did not happen. Even with one of the world’s most famous historians on the scene—Josephus—no one was able to see our Lord’s return as described in Matthew 24:27–31. Reason: It did not happen! Thus, Matthew 24 was not fulfilled in A.D. 70.

DeMar suggests that Matthew 24:27–31 was fulfilled in the same way that passages like Isaiah 19:1 and Micah 1:3 were fulfilled. As DeMar so often does in his preterist writings, he attempts to read back into Matthew 24 the contexts of those Old Testament passages into Matthew 24. In a nutshell, the problem with DeMar’s approach is that it is not supported by the Matthew 24 context. The contexts of Isaiah 19 and Micah 1 support DeMar’s contention, but only in those Old Testament contexts. However, if he is going to import such an idea into Matthew 24, he must make a case from Matthew 24 that supports his idea of a non-physical return in A.D. 70. Of course he cannot. DeMar just declares that these passages govern Matthew 24. The only possible relation is that it is driven by DeMar’s enslavement to supporting his preterist system.

DeMar believes that Acts 1:11 teaches a future second coming. There are more similarities between Acts 1:9–11 and Matthew 24:27–31. Why not have Acts 1:11 inform Matthew 24:27–31? In fact, Jesus said that the next time He would come, it would be to the Mount of Olives and riding on a cloud. Sorry Gary, but the focus of A.D. 70 was the Temple Mount, not the Mount of Olives. Maranatha!

ENDNOTES

¹ An audio copy of the debate can be obtained from The Pre-Trib Research Center, P O Box 14111, Arlington, TX 76094.. For \$15.00 you can receive an MP3 CD that will contain the DeMar vs. Ice debate and also the Gentry vs. Ice debate. For \$20.00 you can receive an audio cassette copy of either the DeMar debate or the Gentry debate. For \$30.00 you can get both debates on cassette.

² Gary DeMar, “On Thin Ice,” <http://www.americanvision.org/page.asp?id=19>.

³ All DeMar quotes that are not noted will be from his “On Thin Ice” article.

⁴ Thomas Ice, “Matthew 24 and ‘This Generation,’” *Pre-Trib Perspectives* (Vol. VII, No. 3; June 2002).

⁵ Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1999), p. 121, 125.

⁶ D. A. Carson, “Matthew” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, gen. ed., Frank E. Gaebelein, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), vol. 8, p. 493.

⁷ Ice, “Matthew 24 and This Generation.”

⁸ Alan Hugh M’Neile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (London: MacMillan, 1915), p. 345.

⁹ Roman historian “Dio Cassius relates that the Romans demolished 50 fortresses, destroyed 985 villages, and killed 580,000 people in addition to those who died of hunger, disease, and fire.” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 17 vols. (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, n.d.), vol. 4, p. 233.

¹⁰ Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, second edition, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 477.

¹¹ DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, p. 74.

¹² Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to The Gospel of Matthew*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1879), vol. 2, p. 128.

¹³ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), vol. 3, pp. 338–39.

¹⁴ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), p.597.