



Preterist Language Studies

Foundational to the preterist view is the idea that certain words in the gospels that have historically been thought to describe the entire world apply only to a localized area, sometimes focusing on the region surrounding Jerusalem. A number of articles by preterists point to the Greek word *oikoumene* as key to interpreting Matthew 24. They propose that *oikoumene*, which according to lexicons means “the world” or “the habitable world” typically refers to the local region or the civilized portion of the world. If the word is understood in this way, it can be argued that Matthew’s use of this term in chapter 24 intends to limit the scope of the prophesied distribution of the gospel to an area no larger than the portions of the world controlled by the Roman Empire. If the prophecy in Matthew stated that the gospel was to be proclaimed only in the Roman world before the end, the proposal that Christ returned in some form a short period after his death can be supported. Other problems like multiple “second comings” and at least one return where Christ returns not visibly and not physically as is expected from Acts 1:11 would remain, but at least one obstacle could be removed. In contrast, if the Matthew 24:14 text was talking about the gospel being proclaimed throughout the entire world, “the end” and the return of Christ would be delayed at least until the current age.

Matthew 24:9-14 “Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

The argument from the preterist view is that the Greek word *oikoumene* has a primary meaning of “habitable earth”. The term “habitable earth” is thought to refer only to the areas controlled by Rome. To support their view, preterists point to Luke 2:1 where the word *oikoumene* appears. This passage describes a decree from Caesar Augustus that the entire world would be taxed. Caesar’s decree would have had effect only in the portion of the world that

Rome controlled. It is therefore thought that this example provides evidence that *oikoumene* only refers to the portion of the world that the writer would consider to be civilized.

There are two problems with the idea that the meaning of *oikoumene* is intentionally limited to a “habitable world” area that is limited to the Roman Empire. First, the Roman emperor, who wrote the decree, would have viewed the part of the world he controlled as the whole world, not as a portion of the world. While the practical outworking of the taxation was that the Roman dominated portion of the world was taxed, the emperor would not have condoned use of a term that implied his reach was limited. Luke, in recording this taxation event, would be unlikely to record this as though making a distinction between the Roman controlled world and the rest of the world. It is unlikely that either the emperor or Luke would have thought to use a word that explicitly expressed that the Roman control was limited.

Second, it is true that *oikoumene* can be used in a way that, if viewed with an absolute literalism, is limited. However, it appears that in many places where the word is used in Scripture the intention of the author is not to speak with absolute literalism but to use the word as a broad generalization with reference to the entire world. Additionally, some uses of the word *oikoumene* require a meaning of the entire world including areas beyond Roman control. In either case, it appears that the key word in Matthew 24 for determining the portion of the world intended is not *oikoumene*, but another word that appears later in the verse.

IS OIKOUMENE USED TO DESCRIBE A LIMITED REGION?

Preterists insist that *oikoumene* is used primarily with reference to a local region or the habitable world. One of their preferred examples is the occasion when Satan took Jesus to the top of the temple in Luke 4:5. From the temple Satan showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world. Clearly from this perspective Jesus could not have seen beyond the curvature of the earth. So in a literal sense Satan showed Jesus a relatively small portion of the earth. But the point in the text is not that Satan was offering Jesus control over a few local nations or provinces. It is understood from the text that Satan is offering authority over the entire earth. In the text Satan shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the *oikoumene* “in a moment of



time” and says ‘I will give you authority over all these and their glory’. The “moment of time” reference suggests that Jesus may have seen more than what was visible from the top of the temple. If Jesus saw only what could be seen from the temple there would be no need to mention how quickly Jesus saw it. The offer had to exceed what could be seen or it would have been less than what the Roman emperor controlled. It appears that imposing a limit on *oikoumene* based on a strict literalism in this passage is inappropriate.

In contrast with the preterist view, *oikoumene* is sometimes and perhaps usually used in Scripture to mean the entire earth. People in the New Testament period had a limited knowledge of geography, but they could speak universally without knowing the extent of the area covered by their statements. A common use of *oikoumene* is comparable to what would be meant if one said ‘they searched the world looking for the Bickman diamond’. It would not be proper to insist that in order for someone to say this he must have traveled to Antarctica to look for the diamond. The intent is to describe a search that covered many areas across the globe. It would likewise not be appropriate to suggest that because the search was not universal, the term world typically means certain regions on the planet. This is what is being required by preterists when they propose that certain uses of *oikoumene*, where it is used non-literally, show that the word should not be taken universally. In a number of cases *oikoumene* must necessarily mean the entire earth even if taken absolutely literally.

Hebrews 2:5 It is not to angels that he has subjected the world (oikoumene) to come, about which we are speaking.

Revelation 12:9 The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world (oikoumene) astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

It would appear plain that a reference to the “world to come” is not talking about a regional area or a land mass limited to the civilized world. It is not thought that Christ has had only some portion of the world to come subjected to Him. Likewise, the devil is not deceiving only those people located in the Roman empire or “habitable world” but leaving barbarians and those in remote locations alone.

From the Revelation passage it could be argued that similar uses of the same phrase, in the same book, should be presumed to have the same meaning. If this is true, it would then be expected that Revelation 3:10, 13:3 and 16:14 would all refer to the entire world. If this were true it would seriously undermine the preterist interpretation.

Revelation 3:10 Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

Revelation 13:3 One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was astonished and followed the beast.

Revelation 16:14 They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.

What is required to support the preterist position is that Revelation 12 use the term “whole *oikoumene*” to mean the entire globe but the other passages in Revelation and the passage in Matthew 24, use the exact same term “whole *oikoumene*” to mean only a portion of the world. This change of meaning is to be understood in spite of there being no necessary change of meaning required by the context. Additionally, the phrase “whole *oikoumene*” is not used in Luke 2:1. Luke uses the phrase “all the *oikoumene*”. Likewise, Luke 4:5 uses the phrase “all the kingdoms of the *oikoumene*”. The only place where the precise phrase “whole *oikoumene*” is used where there is an absolute certainty about whether it refers to a local region or the globe is Revelation 12:9 and in that place it means the entire globe.

It should be noted that preterists will want to use Revelation 3:10 to support their contention that “whole *oikoumene*” can mean a limited region. It is thought that the time of trial described to the church in Philadelphia as coming upon the whole world, will come only on areas within the Roman Empire since the persecution will be sponsored by a Roman Emperor. The problem is that Revelation 3:10 does not impose any specific limitation because it clearly is not intended to be literally the entire world or even literally the entire Roman Empire. The persecution will come on the whole world but not on Philadelphia, so it does not literally come on the whole world or the whole Roman Empire. Some areas within the empire will be spared and there is no certainty that Christians scattered outside the boundaries of the empire will avoid persecution from the barbarians. So it is not reasonable to suggest that the term *oikoumene* is limited to the area of the Roman Empire. If the persecution will not affect the entire Roman Empire and could spill over to areas outside the empire, no specific limitation can be determined. The text intends to describe a broad general persecution from which Philadelphia is protected, not to define the particular boundaries of the persecution. The “whole *oikoumene*” in this text is describing the whole world in a general non-literal way, not with the intention



of defining the specific area impacted.

While the use of *oikoumene* modified by the word "whole" cannot be shown to necessarily ever refer to a limited region, there is a phrase used in Scripture that always refers to a limited area. In Matthew 9:26 and 31 the word "ge" which means land is modified by the word "whole" and in context clearly refers to an area of limited scope. In both instances where it appears in Matthew the text is describing how news of Jesus' raising the dead and healing the blind spread through an entire region. The phrase that appears is properly translated "in that whole land." This is an ideal phrase because it defines the scope so well. So if Matthew intended to describe a preaching of the gospel in a limited region all he had to do was use the exact same phrase he used twice in chapter 9.

The other places where the whole land (*ge*) appears is where darkness fell on the whole land at the crucifixion. In Mark 15:33 and in Luke 23:44 darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour. There is no record of a universal solar eclipse at that time that would have been observed outside of the holy land. So once again, the phrase whole land (*ge*) is used to describe an event that was limited in scope. Had Matthew used this phrase it would have been clear that he intended to describe a distribution of the gospel that was of a limited range. The text would then have said, *And the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in that whole land as a testimony to all the nations and then the end will come.* The fact that Matthew instead used *oikoumene* modified by the whole, that in the only place where it appears and the usage is certain refers to the entire world, tends to discredit the preterist argument. Matthew has already used a phrase that in context conveys exactly what preterists want Matthew 24:14 to mean, why did he not simply use it again?

To be as generous as possible toward preterists, these arguments raise serious questions about the preterist arguments that *oikoumene* normally refers to a local region. Even if some case could be made that *oikoumene* with the modifier "all" has a limited scope, the same case cannot be made for *oikoumene* modified by "whole". While there is at least one clear example of "whole *oikoumene*" referring to the entire earth, there is simply no evidence that "whole *oikoumene*" ever is used to refer to a defined limited region. This suggests that the long articles written by preterists defending the idea that *oikoumene* refers only to the local region or habitable world are not correct. Even if it could be accepted that in some passage the actual intent of the author was to use *oikoumene* in a way that explicitly limited its range, the fact that *oikoumene* modified by the word "whole" cannot be shown to ever explicitly refer to a local region denies the preterist interpretation.

It seems clear then that the portion of the world described by *oikoumene* in Matthew 24:14 should be presumed to refer to the

entire earth. Preterists will do well if they can convince anyone that the meaning is ambiguous. But, for their arguments to be compelling, they need agreement that Matthew 24:14 must necessarily be understood to say that the gospel will be preached merely in the habitable world (understood to be the Roman world) before the end comes. Their arguments cannot be sustained unless *oikoumene* is thought to mean the local region only. In light of the discussion above it appears more likely that Matthew 24:14 describes the gospel being proclaimed throughout the entire earth which denies the preterist view.

ALL THE NATIONS

If some case could be made that the phrase "whole *oikoumene*" in Matthew 24 could potentially have a limited scope, the remainder of the passage in context must be examined to see if it is describing a 70 AD "end" or an "end" occurring at the conclusion of human history. There is a second Greek word in Matthew 24:14 that should be considered in determining the scope of the gospel proclamation in that passage. The gospel will be proclaimed in the whole *oikoumene* as a testimony to all *ethnesin* and then the end will come. The word *ethnesin* is translated nations in the NKJV in Matthew 24:14. But in almost every other passage where it is found it is translated Gentiles. The following long list of passages is provided to allow you to evaluate how the word is used in Scripture and what it means.

Matthew 10:18 You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. (ethnesin).

Matthew 12:18 Behold! My Servant whom I have chosen, My Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased! I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He will declare justice to the Gentiles (ethnesin).

Matthew 20:18, 19 Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles (ethnesin) to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again.

Matthew 24:9 Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.

Matthew 24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations (ethnesin), and then the end will come.



Matthew 25:32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

Matthew 28:19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Mark 10:33 Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles (ethnesin);

Mark 11:17 Then He taught, saying to them, "Is it not written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations' (ethnesin)? But you have made it a "den of thieves."

Mark 13:10 And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.

Luke 18:32, 33 For He will be delivered to the Gentiles (ethnesin) and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again."

Luke 24:47 and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

Acts 4:27, 28 For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles (ethnesin) and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.

Acts 11:18 When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles (ethnesin) repentance to life.

Acts 14:16 In the past, he let all nations go their own way.

Acts 14:27 Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles (ethnesin).

Acts 15:12 Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles (ethnesin).

Acts 21:19 When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles (ethnesin) through his ministry.

Acts 26:22, 23 Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come— that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles (ethnesin)."

Acts 28:28 Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles (ethnesin), and they will hear it!

Romans 1:5, 6 Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations (ethnesin) for His name, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;

Romans 1:13 Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles (ethnesin).

Romans 2:24 For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles (ethnesin) because of you," as it is written.

Romans 11:11-13 I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles (ethnesin). Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles (ethnon—a form of ethnesin), how much more their fullness! For I speak to you Gentiles (ethnesin); inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles (ethnon), I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them.

Romans 15:8-12 Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, and that the Gentiles (ethne) might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: "For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles (ethnesin), And sing to Your name." And again he says: "Rejoice, O Gentiles (ethne), with His people!" And again: "Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles (ethne)! Laud Him, all you peoples!" And again, Isaiah says: "There shall be a root of Jesse; And He who shall rise to



reign over the Gentiles (ethnon), In Him the Gentiles (ethne) shall hope.”

Romans 16:26 but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him

I Corinthians 1:22-24 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks (Hellenes—meaning Greeks) seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks (ethnesin – should be translated Gentiles) foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks (Hellenes), Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

I Corinthians 5:1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles (ethnesin)—that a man has his father's wife!

Galatians 1:15, 16 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles (ethnesin), I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood,

Galatians 2:2 And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles (ethnesin), but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain.

Galatians 3:8 The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.”

Ephesians 3:8 To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles (ethnesin) the unsearchable riches of Christ,

Colossians 1:27 To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles (ethnesin): which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

I Thessalonians 2:16 forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles (ethnesin) that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.

I Timothy 3:16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness:

God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles (ethnesin), Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.

I Peter 2:12 having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles (ethnesin), that when they speak against you as evil-doers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Revelation 10:11 And he said to me, “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations (ethnesin), tongues, and kings.”

Revelation 11:2 But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles (ethnesin). And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months.

Revelation 12:5 She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.

Revelation 14:8 A second angel followed and said, “Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.”

Revelation 15:4 Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.

Revelation 18:23 The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again. Your merchants were the world's great men. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray.

It is clear from the passages above that the term translated nations or more often Gentiles, is not of any limited scope. Obviously, God has not granted just to the Gentiles in the Roman Empire repentance to life (Acts 11:18). Isaiah did not write that God's house would be a house of prayer for nations in the Roman Empire (Mark 11:17 quoting Isaiah 56:7) nor does it appear that he had any specific limitations in mind. At the same time, it is possible that in a particular context, presumably when the use of the term in that context required it, *ethnesin* could apply to a limited group of Gentiles or nations. However, it must be emphasized that the context, outside



of any predisposition for any particular end times view, should clearly require such a limitation. In fact, the same should be required of any term (including *oikoumene*) that could sometimes be used in a limited way and sometimes not. No argument can be built on the presumption that a limitation is meant when the text in its context does not require it.

In this case one of the critical questions is how the modifier attached to *ethnesin* affects its meaning. It is fine to understand the meaning of the word translated nations or Gentiles but it is just as important to know what is meant when the phrase “all the nations” or “all the Gentiles” appears.

So what is found in the passages that contain the precise phrase (“all the nations”) used in Matthew 24:9, 14 and in the parallel passage in Mark 13:10? It appears that the vast majority of these passages refer to the entire world rather than a limited area. Where the phrase could be referring to a limited area, the reason that possibility exists is because the context is potentially referring to a specific situation that if a strict literalism were imposed would refer to a limited area. It appears likely that the phrase is being used in a general way not intended to be applied so literally. However, since preterists support their views by interpreting with this kind of literalism, passages that could be understood this way are separated out. The passages where the phrase “all the nations” clearly refers to the entire world and not a limited area are; Matthew 25:32, 28:19, Mark 11:17, Luke 24:47, Acts 14:16, Romans 15:11, 16:26, Galatians 3:8, Revelation 12:5 and 15:4. The passages where it is possible the text is referring to a limited area are Romans 1:5f, Revelation 14:8 and 18:23.

The reason that the Romans 1 passage could possibly be limited in scope is that the gospel had not passed much outside of the Roman Empire when Romans was written. So Paul’s reference to “obedience to the faith among all the nations” could be asserted to be limited in scope because “all the nations” could in that context mean primarily nations in the Roman Empire.

The reason that the Revelation 14 and 18 passages could be limited in scope is that Babylon (Rev. 14) and the Great City (Rev. 18) appear to refer to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is called the Great City in Rev. 11:8 and the harlot who has Babylon written on her forehead is identified as the Great City in Rev. 17:18. The destruction of Jerusalem described in these passages likely points toward the 70 AD destruction of the city and so a preterist would view these passages as being limited to all the nations that conducted trade with Jerusalem prior to 70 AD.

It could be countered that the intention of Paul and John when they wrote these passages was to speak of all the nations in a broad, general way. Regardless, the vast majority of passages that use the phrase “all the nations” use it in a way that requires a meaning of

the entire world. These passages include a text in Matthew 25 that is in the near context of Matthew 24:14 and that appears to be continuing to discuss eschatological concepts that were first presented in Matthew 24. Certainly the reference in Matthew 25:31 to “when the Son of Man comes in His glory and all the angels with Him...” sounds like the same event described in Matthew 24:30b-31 “They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.”

UNIVERSAL ADJECTIVES

In examining Matthew 24:14 there is reason to think that the text is referring to more than the local region. The adjectives in the passage are universal. The gospel is preached in the whole world as a testimony to all Gentiles/nations. The universal adjectives do not prove that the text is referring to the entire globe. However, it would be unusual to use universal adjectives to modify words that could mean the entire world without some clarification that they did not mean the whole world.

The phrase all Gentiles/nations appears earlier in the passage in verse 9. In that verse the followers of Christ will be hated by all Gentiles/nations. Opposition to the gospel is not local or regional but results from a heart condition that is at enmity with God. But, a preterist will say, ‘it could be argued that by 70 AD the gospel had only dispersed within the Roman Empire. For this reason, it could be presumed that the intention in verse 9 was to describe opposition to the gospel in the Roman Empire.’ Perhaps, but the common use of “all the nations” described above tends to suggest that a universal meaning should be preferred over a local meaning.

It seems to be a problem that Jesus used universal adjectives if he intended to prophesy regarding a limited opposition within a certain region. Jesus easily could have couched His terms in a way that made it clear He was speaking of the local region. He could have simply used the nouns describing the scope of the distribution of the gospel without universal modifiers. In verse 9 Jesus said that believers would be hated by all nations. He could have said many nations, nations throughout the empire, or nations in the *oikoumene*. In verse 14 He said the gospel would be preached in the whole *oikoumene* as a testimony to all *ethnesin*. Why did He say the whole world if He meant the habitable world? He could have simply said the habitable world, but He included the adjective whole. He could have said, as a testimony to the nations, but He said to all nations. It should be expected that a phrase found twice within five verses in a biblical passage would have similar meanings. If they do, neither phrase is limited in its geography.

The same problem occurs in the parallel account in Mark. The



passage in Mark 13:10 uses the same “all the nations” phrase found in Matthew 24. The passage includes no reference to *oikoumene* which eliminates the argument made in the Matthew passage that the account could be suggesting that the gospel would have to first be preached to the habitable world. The entire flow of the passage argues against a preterist understanding.

For example, wars and rumors of wars are “not yet the end”. When nation is against nation, and when there are earthquakes and famines, these are “the beginning of birth pangs”. It is after these statements that Jesus says, “And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.” The phrase “all the nations” appears here as it did in Matthew 24:9 and 14 and it has been demonstrated above that it typically refers to the entire world. Since *oikoumene* does not appear in this text, the scope of “all the nations” should be whatever it normally is in other texts.

Both Matthew 24 and Mark 13 refer to the various signs as not yet the end and the beginning of birth pangs. When were there wars and rumors of war in the period between 33 AD and 70 AD? What were the dates of major earthquakes and famines in that 37 year period? It does not appear true to history to suggest that there were wars and rumors of wars, nation rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom in the period from 33 AD to 70 AD. Rome was in control during the period and the only time that the empire was upset was in 69 AD. But that was not nation against nation or kingdom against kingdom. The language in Matthew and Mark appears to be pointing toward multiple wars and additional rumors of other wars. The reference to nations and kingdoms seems to suggest that a number of countries are fighting against each other. But in the 37 years that this was supposed to be happening leading up to the 70 AD “return” of Christ in judgment, Rome completely dominated the international landscape. The *pax romana* (27 BC – 180 AD) the Roman peace, had established order in the empire and prevented nations from fighting each other. It could be suggested that the wars and rumors of war refer to Roman internal fighting, but even this does not fit. Roman intrigues were not wars and rumors of wars. The problems that occurred in that period normally related to succession and were not nation against nation or kingdom against kingdom. At best they were nation against itself. But suppose it could be argued that Roman succession problems were what is being discussed in Matthew and Mark as nation against nation. The only major succession difficulty between 33 and 70 AD occurred in 69 AD, the year of the four emperors. Prior to that time the reigns of Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius and Nero and their successions from one to the other were relatively peaceful. If 69 AD was a time of “wars and rumors of war”, one year before the 70 AD destruction of Jerusalem, that period is defined in both texts as not yet the end and merely the beginning of birth pains. The Matthew

and Mark texts appear to suggest to the reader that when the events in 69 AD occur, if they fit the biblical description of nation against nation - which is certainly questionable, there is still some significant time to wait before the end.

BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

The way that *oikoumene* has been used by preterists to support their case is a fine example of bad biblical exegesis. Their arguments are appealing because in the absence of anyone to point out the problems, the theological slight of hand performed on *oikoumene* looks like good biblical scholarship. It is amazing that the preterist arguments err on both sides of what is literal and what is not. Many of the preterist arguments emphasize that some texts are not intended to be taken literally. The assertion by preterists that large parts of eschatological passages are hyperbole undermines the clear teaching of those passages. What principle of interpretation justifies viewing these passages as hyperbolic? It simply does not appear to them to be literally true, presumably because a literal understanding of the passages necessarily denies the preterist view. Yet in those same eschatological sections, a Greek word that has a clear meaning (world) and that is modified by the word “whole” is taken to mean a very small region. It might be thought that this would be accomplished by saying the passage is not literal but interestingly the opposite is true. Denial of the objective meaning of the words is accomplished by doing a detailed study and applying absolutely literal criteria to a word that normally means world in a broad general sense. What is the justification for the imposition of such literalism? Is it the necessary meaning from the context? No, it is required because the words in their typical use deny the preterist position. This is the reason they have gone to Luke 2:1, to a passage that is using world in a broad general sense and have imposed on it inappropriate limits, not justified by the clear intent of the text.

The abuse of *oikoumene* then leads further to the abuse of *ethnesin*. The text clearly states that the gospel will be proclaimed as a witness to all nations. Were this literally true it would once again deny the preterist view. So the phrase “all the nations” becomes all the nations that dwell in the local region or habitable earth. The only basis for arguing that “all the nations” does not mean what it literally says and what it means in a majority of New Testament passages is that *oikoumene* has been assigned a primary or exclusive meaning that is not typical of how it is used when modified by the word “whole”.

The obvious difficulties presented to preterists by these passages suggest that there was no return of Christ in judgment in 70 AD to fulfill the gospel and Revelation eschatological passages. Rather, the return of Christ is expected as described in Acts 1:11;



“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

Certainly it would have surprised the disciples that Jesus who ascended physically and visibly into heaven would return not physically and not visibly in judgment and destruction. The preterist proposed 70 AD coming of Christ is not a return “in the same way you have seen him go”. It would seem that in contrast to the preterist view a single, visible and physical return of Christ coming down from heaven, returning in the same way He left, as expected by the vast majority of the church throughout its history, is what should be anticipated.