

ANSWERING GREGG

Answering Steve Gregg's Criticism of My Review of His Book *Empire of the Risen Son*.

PREFACE

The following contains a final response to Steve Gregg regarding accusations he brought against my review of his book. Since the review was not written for his benefit, and since I have not set out in an attempt to change Gregg's mind, I will not engage him in endless debate. The purpose of the review was (and still is) to raise awareness of Gregg's beliefs and influence within the church. I have appended Gregg's response that I received to the end of this article for the sake of transparency and integrity.

ANSWERING GREGG

The day after I published my review of *Empire of the Risen Son*, the book's author, Steve Gregg, read my review and submitted a comment to my site stating that I had mislabeled him as a Postmillennialist and Calvinist. A few days later I discovered that Gregg had written a 16-page response and was circulating it among some of our brethren. I later received a copy of Gregg's response from one of Gregg's assistants but am not sure where Gregg has posted his response since the copy I received came indirectly from him and nowhere states where it can be found. Be that as it is, I have chosen to respond to some of Gregg's criticisms of my review for the sake of fairness to both Gregg, myself, and truth.

I will begin my response where Gregg concluded his:

I would think that a man as desperate as Battey appears to be to undermine my book would wish to maintain his own reputation for credibility among readers, and would avoid making irresponsible claims about a book which any of his readers (some of whom, he knows, have read my book) could so easily recognize as invalid. It is hard not to think that he must be depending, not on the critical or biblical thinking skills of his readers, but only on their cult-like loyalty to whatever he tells them to think.¹

Gregg feels that I am an irresponsible and unscholarly cult leader who expects my followers to blindly follow whatever I say. He's entitled to his own opinion, but readers will have to determine whether or not that is the case.

It seems Gregg understood neither the purpose for which I wrote, nor my intended audience. So, allow me to clarify: The purpose of my review was never to change Gregg's mind or disprove all he has written; it was to expose what he teaches and warn brethren of his influence within the church. When I review a book, I do so for the benefit of those within churches of Christ with whom I interact and have influence. I also do not care what people outside the church think about my views or scholarship (or lack thereof). I have not made it my goal to gain respect within the denominational world and become a noted "scholar" since I am neither a scholar nor a theologian (nor do I encourage young men to pursue degrees in seminaries so that we can compete with such men). I am not Steve Gregg's peer and do not wish to be. I am a preacher tasked with defending the truth (2 Timothy 4:1-5 – and yes, this at times requires engaging in polemics as did John the Baptist, Jeremiah, Elijah, and Christ – see Matthew 16:14).

¹ Steve Gregg. A Response to Nathan Battey's Toxic Review of my Book, *Empire of the Risen Son, Book One*. p. 16.

I realize that both the purpose and content of my writing seem bizarre and incomprehensible to Gregg, but I don't care. I cannot help it that Gregg does not understand why I care about the topic of where we will spend eternity (in heaven or on a refurbished earth), why I have a problem with his view of baptism, or why I do not embrace his denominational views of the Holy Spirit. Simply put, I did not address my concerns over such issues in order to convert Gregg, but rather to note the distinct nature of Gregg's views on those subjects in comparison to general views held within churches of Christ. Gregg understands this on one level, but not fully, and not consistently. For example, he wrote:

The objections raised would resonate, mainly, with those who think there is the one true Christian church in the world, and is thus the standard by which all doctrine must be measured. This is the belief of many in the denomination called "The Church of Christ."²

Here are several clear examples of why I stated that Gregg does not share church of Christ views regarding the Kingdom or the church. While Gregg feels free to mislabel and misrepresent the views of churches of Christ, I find it odd that he ridicules our belief in one true church since he himself believes there is one "True Church."³ I realize that Gregg has a different definition of the "True Church" than I do, but it seems hypocritical to ridicule me for believing in a "True Church" when he believes in a similar concept. If exclusivity is the sin I have committed, I fail to see how Gregg has not committed the same sin even if he is less exclusive in degree. The fact is, if churches of Christ are not the "True Church" they had better change their views and become it (John 10:16; Ephesians 4:4).

Gregg complains that I have mislabeled some of his beliefs, yet he is not opposed to mislabeling the church of Christ as a "denomination" and at least some parts of it a "cult". He goes on to further mislabel churches of Christ by asserting that they set themselves, rather than the Bible, as the standard by which all doctrine must be measured. Such a characterization is false and ignores the fact that churches of Christ preach the necessity of Bible authority for everything we teach and practice (Colossians 3:17) and condemn all human creeds.

In a bizarre twist, Gregg turns from demeaning churches of Christ to blurring the lines of distinction between himself and our "cult." He tries to accomplish this feat by pointing out some beliefs he holds "in common" with churches of Christ. I'm not sure why he would want to be viewed as similar in some ways to a "cult," but nonetheless:

I really do have much in common with this group—chiefly that I am not a Calvinist, nor Dispensationalist.⁴

² Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey's Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 2.

³ Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 276-277.

⁴ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey's Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 2.

Gregg claims to have “much in common” with churches of Christ, but can only come up with two doctrines. I am glad that Gregg is not a Calvinist (which I have never accused him of being), or Dispensational, but that does not make him similar to churches of Christ (it doesn’t even mean we agree in our views against Calvinism or Dispensationalism). Jews, for example, are not Calvinists either, and Muslims are not Dispensational, yet that does not make churches of Christ similar to either group, even though all three groups reject pantheism.

On these point (sic) they stand in agreement with me, though not on a number of others—for example Cessationism, which they insist upon and which I deny. I could have avoided this brother’s criticism if I did not believe that the Bible, rather than any given denomination, is the ultimate source of truth to which Christian beliefs must conform. Battey often mentions that the views expressed in my book, on many points, are not those of the Churches of Christ. This should be unsurprising, since many of the views found in the majority of Christian books do not conform to the norms within that denomination—and I was not writing with a mind to represent their views particularly.

I appreciate Gregg’s free confession of disagreement over Cessationism (the ending of miracles), and the general beliefs of churches of Christ. For the record, I wrote my review of Gregg’s book out of concern – not surprise. Though Gregg refers to me as a brother, he needs to understand that I do not consider him a brother or saved since he has not been baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), does not identify with churches of Christ, and has great disdain for all “institutional” churches. Though his beliefs regarding baptism may be “about as close to the position of the Churches of Christ as one can get without actually being in that camp,”⁵ they are not the views of churches of Christ and do stand outside the camp.

Gregg further clarified:

I have some very fine friends and brothers in the Churches of Christ, who do not exhibit any of the attitudes that have led many outside the movement to view it as a cult. There have been cultic elements within the movement—not so much in its theology as in the attitudes some members and leaders in the movement. Some in the movement recognize only those of their group as true Christians. In fact, one of the earliest specific criticisms of my book that Battey provides is his objection to my believing “that there are saved people in all churches, and that no single church represents God’s true church on earth.” Later, he refers to his denomination, in contrast to others, as “the Lord’s Church” (p.20). Since this idea is at the very root of Battey’s critical review (the same criticism that every cult would raise about the beliefs of outsiders), I must view the whole of his criticism through this lens.⁶

⁵ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey’s Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 2.

⁶ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey’s Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 2.

Readers must always remember that Gregg never fully identifies with any particular camp, disdains all “institutional churches,” and yet simultaneously wants to be connected with them all (or at least the majority). Consider this quote from Gregg’s “Statement of Faith” on his website:

I believe in the unity of the whole church of the living God, which is God’s family, Christ’s Body and the Holy Spirit’s habitation among men. I believe that I should receive as brethren all who sincerely embrace Christ as Lord. I believe there is no valid reason to divide the church institutionally into separate fellowships defined by differences in particular theological convictions, much less by loyalties to men or systems of thought. I believe that to define the fellowship of the saints more narrowly than God does is sin.⁷

Such a stance allows Gregg to act as a chameleon that can identify with or disassociate himself from any group of people whenever he wants to. Even though Lordship salvation is supposed to be the only test of fellowship, any group that teaches a different version of the “True Church” concept than Gregg should apparently be labeled a cult. Gregg is willing to embrace all stripes of “Christianity” except any version that is more exclusive than his (2 Corinthians 6:17; Galatians 1:6-8; 2 John 9-11) or believes that God designed a single visible body (Ephesians 4:4; Romans 16:16). It is cultish to reject Gregg’s assessment that no “visible church” is the “true church,”⁸ or that there are saved people in all churches. Be that as it may, I am not willing to tone down my rhetoric just because Steve Gregg finds me too exclusive for his taste. Again, the point of my review was not to convert Gregg; my goal was to note how different Gregg is from churches of Christ and warn brethren about his influence and doctrinal views.

Gregg continued his complaint against me:

To be specific, Battey very much dislikes my views about baptism (which are about as close to the position of the Churches of Christ as one can get without actually being in that camp); about the Holy Spirit (including the continuing work in the conversion, guidance and empowering of believers —all of which he seems to deny); and about various aspects of my eschatology.

While it is true that I do not like Gregg’s views about baptism, the Holy Spirit, and eschatology, he is wrong in stating that I deny that the Holy Spirit has a role in the conversion of sinners and guidance of believers. What I deny is that the Holy Spirit operates on either a Christian or a non-Christian in a direct and supernatural way separate and apart from the Word of God. To argue that the Spirit works upon sinners and Christians exclusively through the Word is not to deny His influence. It should concern brethren that Gregg’s view of the direct and supernatural operation of the Spirit and full embrace of a Continuationist view of miraculous power are being

⁷ Steve Gregg. 2012. *Statement of Faith*. The Narrow Path.

https://www.thenarrowpath.com/statement_of_faith.php

⁸ Steve Gregg, *Empire of the Risen Son*. Second edition. Xulon Press. Maitland, FL. 2021. p. 31, 276.

entertained by some among us.

More could be said about the initial comments of Gregg's response, but I want to set some of that aside and focus on some of the main objections that he has raised to my review. Gregg's greatest complaint seem to be that I have misrepresented and mislabeled him on a number of issues. Here is how he framed the issue:

Now, I don't object to people disliking, or refuting, positions that I actually hold. However, when a reviewer of my work mistakes and misrepresents entirely what my views actually are, I must assume either that I am a very poor communicator, or that my critic is so incensed with me that he does not think my actual statements to be worthy of honest consideration or correct representation.⁹

In short, I have not sought to misrepresent Gregg's views (thus the extensive use of footnotes), and do find Gregg to be a "very poor communicator" (as do the other ten individuals with whom I read his book). I can't help Gregg's lack of clarity or poor communication, but for the sake of fairness, I will note Gregg's objections to the labels I used along with a few caveats:¹⁰

Mislabeled Gregg's "Optimistic Amillennial" View:

Gregg began his complaint about me mislabeling his views by stating:

To be specific, Battey very much dislikes my views about... various aspects of my eschatology—which he mislabels as Postmillennialism... However, Battey denies that I am Amillennial and repeatedly insists that I am Postmillennial. For 45 years I have identified as an "optimistic Amillennialist," but Battey apparently believes that Amillennialism must only be allowed to exist in a pessimistic variety, and that any optimism about the power of the Gospel is the unique province of Postmillennialists.¹¹

Since labels represent general categories, and since Gregg's views rarely fit into a standard system, the fact that he objects to labels that I have applied is hardly surprising. His chameleon nature allows him to both complain about labels and embrace them whenever he wants.¹²

For the record, when I and others read *Empire of the Risen Son*, most of us did not have a background with Steve Gregg. In other words, since we were not Gregg's disciples and have not followed any of his programs or writings, we had to interpret and understand his book on its own merits. I do not deny that Gregg may more clearly articulate some of his views in other writings or presentations, but based on the content of *Empire of the Risen Son* alone there are many

⁹ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey's Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 3.

¹⁰ I have also updated my original review to reflect Gregg's preferred labels.

¹¹ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey's Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 2.

¹² This is why I believe he should be identified as a wolf in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15).

statements that leave the reader bewildered. Though he insists that he has identified as an “optimistic Amillennialist” for 45 years,¹³ that label nowhere appears in his book, nor does he ever claim to be an Amillennialist period. Gregg repeatedly denies holding to the views of Postmillennialism in his response, yet nowhere in his book does he make such a denial. The only time the word “Postmillennialism” appears in the book is in the last chapter. There he identifies Premillennialism, Postmillennialism, and Amillennialism as the three major eschatological views, yet he does not apply any of the three labels to himself.

There are four reasons I labeled Gregg’s eschatological views as Postmillennial:

- First, when his book was glowingly recommended to me, his eschatological views were labeled by endorsees as “Postmillennial”. That should tell you that there is more of a clarity issue with Gregg’s writing than there is with those who label him.
- The second reason I regularly used the label “Postmillennial” was because I was writing to a specific group of readers, the majority of which do not have a nuanced understanding of all the divergent views of Amillennialism and Postmillennialism. Though Gregg’s view is not a standard view of Postmillennialism (at least when he discusses Revelation 20), it is also not a standard view of Amillennialism and is somewhat aligned with the Postmillennial views of Alexander Campbell (a reference point my readers would understand).
- Third, though I did label Gregg’s view as “Optimistic Amillennialism” at the beginning of my article,¹⁴ I chose not to use the label repeatedly because it is a problematic label that falsely accuses all other versions of Amillennialism of being pessimistic.¹⁵ Gregg made this false accusation when he stated:

I have always identified as an optimistic (rather than a pessimistic) Amillennialist. The fact that Battey is a pessimistic Amillennialist, whereas I am not, seems to be intolerable to him.¹⁶

Since we are discussing the topic of mislabeling, I want it noted that I do not identify as a Pessimistic Amillennialist. Just because I do not share Gregg’s utopic vision of the kingdom and end times¹⁷ does not make me a “Pessimistic Amillennialist.” I am very optimistic that the Kingdom will accomplish that for

¹³ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey’s Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 2.

¹⁴ Nathan Battey, *A Toxic View of the Kingdom: A Review of Empire of the Risen Son*. April 11, 2023. p. 2. <https://www.christianresearcher.com/articles/a-response-and-a-review>.

¹⁵ Kim Riddlebarger. *Eschatology by Ethos: Why the “Optimism” vs. “Pessimism” Paradigm Doesn’t Work*. Modern Reformation. Sep-Oct, 2011. p. 29-34.

¹⁶ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey’s Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 15.

¹⁷ Remember that he compares the Kingdom with Communism. See: *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 251-252.

which God established it, and that when the Lord returns he will redeem His people and punish all wickedness. Though I may be a realist about the wickedness that is in the world,¹⁸ I am highly optimistic about the kingdom and the power of the Gospel. Such a view of the kingdom simply does not require that I advocate the world will be “better” when the Lord returns than when it was first created.¹⁹

- Lastly, the fact is that all Amillennialists are actually Postmillennialists since they all believe that Christ returns after the millennium (thus the term post-millennium). While it is true that not all Postmillennialists are Amillennialists, all Amillennialists are in fact Postmillennial.²⁰ So before Gregg cries too loudly about being labeled a Postmillennialist, he needs to properly define his labels and clearly articulate his viewpoint.

Not only did I label Gregg an “Optimistic Amillennialist” in my review,²¹ but I further clarified that Gregg is not a Theonomist²² and tried to distinguish his views from those of his friends of whom Gregg states, “I am not postmillennial—much to the chagrin of many of my postmillennial friends.” I recognize that Gregg’s views are different from those of J. Stuart Russell, Marcellus Kik, David Chilton, Gary DeMar, and Kenneth Gentry. I used the term “postmillennial”, not in the sense of Theonomy, but in the sense of Optimistic Amillennial to describe Gregg’s view that the majority of the world will be saved.

Simply put, when Gregg claims to be Amillennial, you have to understand how labels are being used, just as you have to understand how I am using labels when I called him Postmillennial.²³

¹⁸ As Gregg himself is in the Preface of *Empire of the Risen Son*.

¹⁹ Steve Gregg, *Empire of the Risen Son*. p.74.

²⁰ Readers who are interested in a nuanced approach to the distinctions between Amillennialism and Postmillennialism should read Sam Waldron’s article on the subject for further clarity. See: Sam Waldron, #Datpostmil: A Friendly and Reluctant Response to James White and My Postmillennial Friends. March, 22, 2021. <https://cbtseminary.org/datpostmil-a-friendly-and-reluctant-response-to-james-white-and-all-my-postmillennial-friends/>. See also: Kim Riddlebarger, Princeton and the Millennium; A Study of American Postmillennialism. July 20, 2021.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f7f81cd67b88d47b94051ed/t/60f711afa5bb770798284be3/1626804655755/Princeton+and+the+Millennium+2021+Revision.pdf>

²¹ Nathan Battey, *A Toxic View of the Kingdom: A Review of Empire of the Risen Son*. April 11, 2023. p. 2. <https://www.christianresearcher.com/articles/a-response-and-a-review>.

²² Nathan Battey. *A Toxic View of the Kingdom: A Review of Empire of the Risen Son*. April 11, 2023. p. 2. <https://www.christianresearcher.com/articles/a-response-and-a-review>.

²³ As per Gregg’s request I have updated my original review and re-labeled him as an Optimistic Amillennialist.

The bigger issue is that regardless of what label is placed upon Gregg's vision of the kingdom and end-times, his views are wrong.

The Many and the Few:

Though not willing to fully embrace a full Postmillennial view, he is still not willing to deny the potential correctness of its optimism:

Of course, there is no predetermined limitation that would necessarily preclude everyone eventually becoming part of this society, so that "*the kingdoms of this world*" through the Church's efforts should "*become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.*"²⁴

Since Gregg will not fully distinguish his optimism from that of Postmillennialism, it is odd that he objects so strongly to being grouped alongside them. The problem with his argument that I have just quoted (besides it being based on silence), is that it goes against the clear teaching of Scripture:

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. (2 Timothy 3:12)

Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:18)

This brings us to Gregg's interpretation of Matthew 7:14. Though his view is somewhat different than what I had been told, it is still a position that limits the passage to the days of Jesus rather than applying it to the whole of the Christian Age and the Final Judgment.

The basic problem with Gregg's interpretation of Matthew 7:14 is that it cannot be harmonized with the parallel statement in Luke 13:24-28:

"Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, open to us,' then he will answer you, I do not know where you come from.' Then you will begin to say, We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' But he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!' In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out. (Luke 13:24-28)²⁵

²⁴ Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 189.

²⁵ English Standard Version.

Since Luke speaks of a time when Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will all be present, the scene must be understood as depicting the Christian Era that culminates in the Final Day of Judgment.

If Matthew 7:14 and Luke 13:24 do speak of the final judgement, how can it then be said that “those who find it are few”? How do we reconcile such a statement with the “great multitude” that stands before the throne of God in Revelation 7:9?

The answer is that Matthew 7:14 uses the word “few” in a comparative and relative sense, i.e. there are few who enter the narrow gate in proportion to the many who enter the broad gate. To put it another way, “Many are called, but few are chosen.” (Matthew 22:14)

Numerical Growth:

Gregg claims that numerical growth is not necessary for his eschatological position since he is not Postmillennial, and yet he spends a lot of time talking about the “important” and “tremendous numerical growth” that we are supposedly seeing:

Over the course of the past two-thousand years the trajectory of victory has been on the side of Christ’s movement—which began with 120 Jewish believers in Jerusalem and now commands the nominal loyalty of almost **a third of the earth’s inhabitants**. This is **tremendous numerical growth, which is important**, though the depth of commitment in many who profess faith in Christ is open to question.²⁶

To brag about “tremendous numerical growth, which is important” and then deny its necessity seems “disingenuous.” Gregg goes on to state:

That a majority (that is, over half) of humanity may be converted is not to be sneered at (though I don’t believe I ever predicted this), since we do not know otherwise. However, even such a majority would not guarantee the total transformation of all societies.

In response to this statement, I must ask: What was the point of Gregg’s illustration about the Blob? Remember his Blob illustration?

By the end of the movie it is clear that, were the thing never to be defeated, it would eventually have grown as large as the world, having consumed **every last inhabitant**.²⁷

Surely Gregg did not call up this illustration to teach a pessimistic view of the failure of the kingdom. The comparison seems to teach that the Kingdom will grow like the Blob and succeed precisely where the Blob failed. Reflecting on this film from his childhood, Gregg stated:

²⁶ Emphasis mine. Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 252

²⁷ Emphasis mine. Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. P. 250

It was not until I learned about the Kingdom of God in scripture that I began to wonder whether the movie (which actually was written and directed by Christians, and produced by a Christian film company!) might not have been deliberately inspired by Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2.²⁸

In a footnote, Gregg further expanded this thought:

The Blob would have been a closer parallel to the Kingdom of God had the writers included the ideas that the earth was already infected with a universal, incurably deadly plague, and that the Blob had come down on purpose to rescue the doomed race! On this alternative plot line, those consumed by the Blob actually would not have not died, but, unperceived by outsiders, had entered a new world, a realm within its expanding membrane where all were cured, free and secure and lived good and fulfilling lives.²⁹

How can a man use an illustration wherein there was potential for every last inhabitant on earth is consumed by the Blob, compare it with the Kingdom of God, and then wonder why someone might think he is Postmillennial or advocates for the transformation of "all" or most societies? Yet Gregg doesn't stop with the Blob illustration but goes on to compare Christianity to Communism and claim that the main difference is that Christianity has truth (and can thus succeed I would assume), whereas Communism is based on lies.³⁰

No, simply labelling Gregg's views as Optimistic Amillennialism does not resolve all the problems and confusion surrounding his view of the kingdom and eschatological outlook.

Mislabeling Gregg's Salvific Views:

Gregg is upset that I applied Calvinistic labels to him even though I explicitly stated that he was not a Calvinist.³¹ Why did I apply such labels to his teachings? Because some of what he wrote teaches principles of Calvinism (like the necessity of a direct operation of the Holy Spirit). I often study with people who vehemently deny being a Calvinist, but by this they simply mean that they believe in some version of Free Will – not that they reject all tenants of Calvinism. It is interesting that a man who so strongly rejects the label of Calvinism never addressed the label in his book. Never once do the terms Calvinism or Calvinist appear in *Empire of the Risen Son Volume 1*.

The reason I stated he believed in the doctrine of Total Depravity, was because he views a direct operation of the Holy Spirit as necessary for salvation.

²⁸ Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 250-251

²⁹ Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 251

³⁰ Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 251-252

³¹ Nathan Battey, *A Toxic View of the Kingdom: A Review of Empire of the Risen Son*. April 11, 2023. p. 17. <https://www.christianresearcher.com/articles/a-response-and-a-review>.

Our weapons are not merely “intellectual” or “mental”—they are *spiritual*—“*mighty through God.*” Any person can verbally *inform* another person about the good news of the Kingdom of God, or, perhaps, even win a debate with an unbeliever. However, **for the message to strike the heart with *power, assurance, and the Holy Spirit*, more is required than the mere transmission of information.** It demands the power of the Holy Spirit operating through a Spirit-filled disciple of Jesus. **It requires the work of the Spirit upon the heart of the hearers.** Anyone can make another person *know* the truth of the gospel; **only the Spirit of God can make one *care about it.***³²

In order to create *hunger and thirst* for the Kingdom of God in the heart of the unbeliever, **there must be more than preaching.**³³

I must confess that I am at a loss as to why there must be a direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon a sinner if not for a belief in Total Depravity. Be that as it may, if Gregg does not believe in Total Depravity, so be it. He also denies belief in “irresistible grace”. My apologies. It appears he believes in “resistible grace” wherein a direct operation is essential for the conversion of a sinner but is somehow resistible. Here is an example of where Gregg’s poor communication causes problems. He believes that the Spirit alone can make a person care about God’s Word, and yet somehow man can resist the Spirit’s ability to make him care. If the Spirit alone cannot make man care, why does Gregg state that “only the Spirit of God can make one care about it”? It seems that if the Spirit alone can make one care, then an irresistible operation of the Spirit is necessary for salvation. Be that as it may, Gregg wants to be labeled as a promoter of Resistible Grace rather than Irresistible Grace.

Now that we have gotten the labels correct, I still strongly disagree with his view of the necessity of a direct and supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit in matters of salvation or Christian living, and would still argue that he teaches a weak view of the Spirit (which denigrates the Third Person of the Godhead). How does such a view disparage the Holy Spirit? If the Spirit must make you care enough to be saved before you can exercise your free will, then if He doesn’t make you care enough it would seem that He is too weak to accomplish His task. Furthermore, if He is able to make someone care enough to seek salvation but not maintain that salvation, it would again appear that He is too weak. Furthermore, any view (be it Calvinist, or Armenian, or whatever label you want to put on it) that teaches a direct operation of the Holy Spirit is necessary for salvation denies the all-sufficiency of the Word of God as the power of God to salvation (Romans 1:16; 1 Peter 1:24-25).

When Gregg speaks of “grace reigning” he means a direct supernatural operation of the Spirit is absolutely necessary for salvation and life as a Christian:

³² Emphasis mine. Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 98-99.

³³ Italics his. Bold mine. Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 99.

Life in the Kingdom of God is life in the Holy Spirit. ***The Holy Spirit's presence and power are not optional.***³⁴

Such passages speak of grace as a kind of sufficiency, or an enablement, to live the Christian life and to serve God acceptably... We might realize that we would need ***special divine assistance*** in order to do some of the more challenging or less-pleasant Christian duties, but most of the time we assume can handle the responsibilities of being as kind and patient as a Christian is supposed to be... It is our duty to be like Christ in all respects, and to continue and complete the work He was doing when He was here, ***in the same spirit and power*** in which He did so. Jesus did not live a life merely in the power of human energy and a naturally amiable temperament, ***and neither are we expected to do so.***³⁵

Gregg denies a belief in the doctrine of eternal security. Noted. The reason I included this point was because at times he questions whether a person was actually converted if there is no noticeable change in their life. Note what he said on two occasions:

If an imagined conversion brings no perceptible change in one's direction, habits and choices, then repentance has not actually taken place—nor has one passed from death into life or entered the Kingdom of God.³⁶

Those who have not submitted to Christ as King are not simply inferior Christians but remain unconverted. They are rebels against the Crown.³⁷

I called his view a “classic Baptist doctrine” and stand by that statement. I have spoken with many Baptists who claim that if a person has not demonstrated a repentant lifestyle after their “conversion experience” that they must have never been saved to begin with. Such individuals freely embrace the label of “Once-Saved-Always-Saved” (though some of them are Armenians), yet Gregg does not want to be lumped in with them. At least not on one hand; on the other hand, he views such individuals as saved Christians when arguing for his “Optimistic Amillennial” view:

Over the course of the past two-thousand years the trajectory of victory has been on the side of Christ's movement—which began with 120 Jewish believers in Jerusalem and now commands the nominal loyalty of almost a third of the earth's inhabitants. This is tremendous numerical growth, which is important, ***though the depth of commitment in many who profess faith in Christ is open to question.***³⁸

³⁴ Emphasis mine. Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 244.

³⁵ Emphasis mine. Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 144.

³⁶ Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 112.

³⁷ Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 112.

³⁸ Emphasis mine. Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 252.

He tried to wiggle out of this contradiction by stating “I have nowhere argued that a third of the world were fully-converted – only that this is the portion of the world’s population that *profess* to be “Christians.””³⁹ The problem with this defense is that he still counted the “nominal loyalty of almost a third of the earth’s inhabitants” as “tremendous numerical growth.” If a third of the world is not saved, why does he speak of such tremendous numerical growth and label it as “important”? Maybe he is just a “very poor communicator” as he confessed.⁴⁰

Accusation of Misquoting:

Toward the beginning of his response he addressed my “nit-picking” objections and stated:

In the beginning of his review, Battey cites “The Top 21” of what he describes as (from his point of view) “the worst quotes from the book” (p.3). It is no testament to his careful reading that one of the quotes he cites is a statement in which I am quoting the words of an atheist, and another of the 21 is my citation of another scholar, with whom I do not agree, and whose statement I afterward critique. The reviewer apparently did not notice this, and simply quoted the words of these men as if I had originated them and was affirming them.⁴¹

The “Top #21 Worst Quotes” section contains the worst quotes from the book, accompanied by footnotes (so that the reader can read them contextually if they wish), and does not attribute all of the quotes directly to Gregg. I find it odd that Gregg does not provide the citation for which quotes he references (since they are number), but rather vaguely calls out two and attributes ignorance on my part for including them. Regarding the quote from the atheist that made the list, the atheist in question is Tom Holland, and I noted his quote because Gregg used it as an affirmative proof of the impact of Christianity on the world! I found it quite incredible (and still do) that Gregg would quote an atheist who attributed wokeness to Christianity as a proof of the global impact of Christianity on the world.⁴² To claim that I have falsely attributed the statement of an atheist to Gregg is disingenuous to say the least.

The only other quote that made the list that did not come directly from Gregg was Quote #2 which is a statement from John Bright that Gregg endorsed:

“The Church is indeed the people of the Kingdom of Christ, *but the visible church is not that Kingdom.*”⁴³

How do I know Gregg endorsed Bright’s statement? Because of how the quotation was presented:

³⁹ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey’s Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 15.

⁴⁰ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey’s Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 3.

⁴¹ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey’s Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 5.

⁴² Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 256.

⁴³ Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 31.

Thus, Ladd's statements may be regarded as true only if they are understood in the manner explained by Joh Bright: "The Church is indeed the people of the Kingdom of Christ, but the visible church is not that Kingdom."⁴⁴

Both of Gregg's complaints about my lack of "careful reading" are merely two examples in an endless supply as to why readers must verify everything he says. Gregg scoffs at my statement that "Gregg...abuses the contextual meaning of Scripture, and asserts both radical and imaginative conclusions,"⁴⁵ yet does not answer any of the objections I raised to specific verses that he used out of context, nor does he address the blatant obliteration of the contextual meaning of Luke 19:10 that made the "Top #21 Worst Quotes"⁴⁶. Luke 19:10 reads ""Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." Commenting on this text, Gregg stated:

"The thing that was lost was man's original dominion over the world while in submission to Yahweh."⁴⁷ Is such an interpretation of Luke 19:10 not incredible? Have I falsely accused Gregg of ripping passages out of their context?

Gregg's assault on Luke 19:10 is no isolated incident. The fact is, in chapter 12, pages 144-147, Gregg misuses 12 passages in a row and 17 altogether. Though I am sure Gregg would deny such, readers must consider the passages and determine the validity of my claim for themselves.

Gregg again complained:

Those reading the review, but not having read the book, might wonder what specific literary and exegetical sins in the book might fall into these categories.⁴⁸

Really? When I have an entire section of my article labeled "Ignoring the Context" is it difficult for readers to identify at least one area where I felt Gregg ignored the context of Scripture? It would be better to state that those who have not read my review before reading Gregg's response might walk away confused as to what "Battey regards as imaginative exegesis." Those who have actually read my review have said it is "too polemic," but they have not said that I was unclear about where I disagreed with Gregg.

Gregg correctly stated,

One would certainly not get the idea from the review that the book, in fact, presents nothing outside the mainstream of classic, Protestant theology without

⁴⁴ Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 31.

⁴⁵ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey's Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 4.

⁴⁶ Nathan Battey, *A Toxic View of the Kingdom*. p. 5.

⁴⁷ Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p.80.

⁴⁸ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey's Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 4.

laboring exegetically to demonstrate any such points.⁴⁹

The general point of my review was not that Gregg presents material “outside the mainstream of classic, Protestant theology,”⁵⁰ but that it presents material outside the mainstream of classic church of Christ theology.⁵¹ Gregg stated that his teachings “hardly qualify as “radical” or “imaginative” in terms of mainstream Church history,”⁵² and then in the next breath states, “The main point I would make is that it is often to the credit of exegetes that they can think outside their traditional boxes (i.e. *imaginatively*) with regard to certain passages where sound exegesis has often been sparse.”⁵³ Such doubletalk is par for the course.

Response to Example #1: Assessment of the period of the Judges

Gregg is incredulous that I criticized his analysis of the Book of Judges and chastises me for calling it a “ridiculous analysis of Scripture.” He then doubles down on his position and touts that it is “irrefutable.”

Gregg again misses the purpose of why I wrote my review: there is a difference between choosing to raise awareness about a book and attempting to refute every position within it. Since Gregg wants me to thoroughly assess his “irrefutable” assessment of Judges, I shall oblige.

Here again is Gregg’s analysis of Judges:

A common refrain in the Book of Judges reminds us that “In those days there was no king in Israel” – sometimes adding, “and everyone did what was right in his own eyes. In modern preaching, it is common to hear this described as a bad arrangement. “When everyone does what is right in his own eyes, there is moral chaos” – so goes the familiar commentary. This is true, when the thing that is “right” in a man’s eyes is contrary to what is “right” in God’s eyes. However, Israel had the Torah—God’s Law—to teach them what is right in God’s eyes. It seems that, for most of the period described in Judges, what is right in God’s sight was what was deemed right in the people’s eyes as well... Freedom to follow one’s own conscience in the fear of God is the highest Biblical standard.⁵⁴

This is Gregg’s “irrefutable” statement. He did not like any of the passages that I listed as opposed to his position (Deut. 12:8; Prov. 3:7; 12:15; 16:2; 21:2; 26:12; 30:12; Is. 5:21) and attempted to discredit half of them by arguing some “do not even contain the expression under consideration” and that “Two of them use the term “wise in his [or your] own eyes” – which, of course, has an

⁴⁹ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey’s Toxic Review of my Book*. Gregg’s Review. p. 5.

⁵⁰ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey’s Toxic Review of my Book*. Gregg’s Review. p. 5.

⁵¹ A statement that not even Gregg would deny.

⁵² Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey’s Toxic Review of my Book*. Gregg’s Review. p. 5.

⁵³ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey’s Toxic Review of my Book*. Gregg’s Review. p. 5.

⁵⁴ Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 53

expression (sic) very different meaning.”

One problem with Gregg’s argument is that he has overly restricted the evidence that he will allow to be admitted for consideration. This is what D. A. Carson refers to as the fallacy of “Selective and prejudicial use of evidence”⁵⁵ or what is commonly referred to as the “Exact Word Fallacy.” In other words, unless the explicit statement “right in his own eyes” is found, the verse can have no bearing on the matter. The problem with this argument can be seen when two proverbs are placed side by side:

Every way of a man is right in his own eyes,
but the Lord weighs the heart. (Proverbs 21:2)

All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes,
but the Lord weighs the spirit. (Proverbs 16:2)

Right and pure are used interchangeably in these two passages as are heart and spirit. A proper word study must therefore include passages such as Proverbs 30:12:

There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes,
Yet is not washed from its filthiness. (Proverbs 30:12)

But that’s not all. What about Proverbs 3:7 which Gregg has rejected stating that it “of course has an expression (sic) very different meaning”?

Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.
Be not wise in your own eyes;
fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. (Proverbs 3:5-7)

Proverbs 3:5-7 forms a small chiasm in which the second line of verse 5 parallels the first line of verse 7. “Be not wise in your own eyes” must therefore be understood in conjunction with “do not lean on your own understanding.” Leaning on “your own understanding” and doing what is “wise in your own eyes” are negative concepts in these verses and are contrasted with acknowledging God at all times, doing whatever He directs, following the Lord with your full heart, and turning away from evil. To argue that “doing what is wise in your own eyes” expresses a “very different meaning”⁵⁶ than “doing what is right in your own eyes is “of course” wrong.

Proverbs 3:5-7 thus speaks of the foolishness of human understanding and wisdom, while Proverbs 16:2 and 21:2 argues that God is the ultimate Judge – not man.

⁵⁵ D. A. Carson. *Exegetical Fallacies*. 2nd ed. Baker Academic. Grand Rapids, MI. 1996. p. 54-55.

⁵⁶ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey’s Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 5.

Once it is understood that the phrase “wise in his own eyes” must also be considered within our word study, the list of relevant passages expands to include the following:

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes,
but a wise man listens to advice. (Proverbs 12:15)

Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes?
There is more hope for a fool than for him. (Proverbs 26:12)

Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes,
And prudent in their own sight! (Isaiah 5:21)

When speaking of Proverbs 12:15, Gregg states that the passage does not use the phrase “right in his own eyes” in a “necessarily negative sense.” Really? How can an honest person look at the path of the fool in Proverbs and argue that it is not “necessarily negative”? How can Gregg argue that Proverbs 12:15 simply teaches “that what is right in one’s own eyes may or may not agree with the judgments of God”⁵⁷ when the passage speaks of the “way of the fool”?

The other passage I listed in my review is Deuteronomy 12:8-9:

“You shall **not** do according to all that we are doing here today, everyone doing whatever is right in his own eyes, for you have not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance that the Lord your God is giving you. (Deuteronomy 12:8-9)

Of this passage Gregg stated:

Deut.12:8 is specifically saying (in the context of where an Israelite might properly eat the meat of his sacrifices) that, during the wilderness wanderings, the place of eating such meals was left to the individual’s discretion (“whatever is right in his own eyes”), but this would have to be restricted to a specific place of God’s choosing after the conquest of Canaan (see vv.6-12). ***This phrase does not speak of something negative***, but of a difference between the broader liberty in this matter that was allowed in the wilderness and that new arrangements pertaining to life in Canaan.

Gregg misses the fact that Deuteronomy 12:8 pictures Israel in rebellion against the law of God while in the wilderness rather than acting within a “broader liberty” granted by God. The fact is, worship was already restricted to a specific place:

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to Aaron, to his sons, and to all the children of Israel, and say to them, ‘This is the thing which the Lord has commanded, saying: “Whatever man of the house of Israel who kills an ox or lamb

⁵⁷ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey’s Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 6.

or goat in the camp, or who kills it outside the camp, and does not bring it to the door of the tabernacle of meeting to offer an offering to the Lord before the tabernacle of the Lord, the guilt of bloodshed shall be imputed to that man. He has shed blood; and that man shall be cut off from among his people, to the end that the children of Israel may bring their sacrifices which they offer in the open field, that they may bring them to the Lord at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, to the priest, and offer them as peace offerings to the Lord. And the priest shall sprinkle the blood on the altar of the Lord at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and burn the fat for a sweet aroma to the Lord. They shall no more offer their sacrifices to demons, after whom they have played the harlot. This shall be a statute forever for them throughout their generations.” ’

“Also you shall say to them: ‘Whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice, and does not bring it to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, to offer it to the Lord, that man shall be cut off from among his people. (Leviticus 17:1-9)

By doing “what was right in their eyes” they were violating the sacrificial laws that God had given them and were acting like the Canaanites whom they were going to dispossess (Deuteronomy 12:1-5). Rather than praising Israel for worshiping within their “broader liberty,” God was rebuking them and warning them that they must not so act when they enter the Land of Promise. The warning against every man “doing whatever is right in his own eyes” is contrasted with the command to “do what is good and right in the sight of the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 12:28), or else share in a similar fate as that which awaited the Canaanites.

This brings us to the heart of the Judges issue that Gregg has raised. Gregg criticizes modern preachers for teaching that the “common refrain” of “doing what was right in his own eyes” is a negative statement, and that we should actually view the period of Judges in a positive light. The problem with Gregg’s argument is that his positive interpretation of the phrase does not fit the negative context in which “right in his own eyes” occurs.

Notice the immediate context of “right in his own eyes” in Judges 17:5-6

The man Micah had a shrine, and made an ephod and household idols; and he consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest. In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Apparently, we are supposed to understand Micah the priest building an idolatrous shrine in the land of Canaan (remember Deuteronomy 12:8) as a good thing and realize that it would have been much worse had a king been seated on the throne! This is the positive type of behavior we should embrace as the highest point in Israel’s history. In *Empire of the Risen Son*, Gregg states of this passage:

The contrast is between having personal and qualified liberty of conscience, on the one hand, and having an earthly king, on the other, being forced to do what is right in his eyes. As Israel's later history proved, having a human monarch is more disastrous arrangement of the two. The biblical comment tells us that liberty of personal conscience prevailed, rather than domination by a human (and therefore corrupt) earthly ruler.⁵⁸

Yes, according to Gregg, when Micah followed his conscience and built a shrine in defiance of God's commands (Deuteronomy 12:8; Exodus 20:4-6) that was a better state than having a corrupt earthly ruler.

The second occurrence of the phrase (Judges 21:25) is even darker than the first, for it comes as the closing statement of the book right after a civil war has occurred, a tribe has almost been annihilated, and a bunch of women have been kidnapped. Yet again we are told that this picture is a better position to be in than having a "corrupt earthly ruler" reign over God's people. Gregg's imaginative interpretation of this passage defies both the rules of logic and the "mainstream of classic Protestant theology."⁵⁹

Furthermore, Gregg also ignores a couple of other negative usages of "in his own eyes" within the book of Judges:

But his father and mother said to him, "Is there not a woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she is right in my eyes... Then he went down and talked with the woman, and she was right in Samson's eyes." (Judges 14:3,7)

It is not coincidental that there is evil taking place every time Judges mentions that a person did what was right in their own eyes. In conjunction with this assessment, every time Judges speaks about the "sight of God" it presents a negative judgement on the people:

And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals. (Judges 2:11)

And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done what was evil in the sight of the Lord. (Judges 3:12)

And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord after Ehud died. (Judges 4:1)

⁵⁸ Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 40.

⁵⁹ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey's Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 5.

The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord gave them into the hand of Midian seven years. (Judges 6:1)

The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtaroah, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines. And they forsook the Lord and did not serve him. (Judges 10:6)

And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, so the Lord gave them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years. (Judges 13:1)

Maybe we should say that the “common refrain”⁶⁰ of the book of Judges is “the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.” Yet Gregg tells us that this was a glorious period in Israel’s history. The fact is, the phrase “doing what is right in his own eyes” is always a negative statement in Scripture and never speaks of “Yahweh’s ideal”⁶¹ for His people.

Gregg’s strongest argument comes from material he relegated to a footnote. There Gregg contrasts the total number of positive years versus negative years within the period of Judges (340 to 114), and concludes that since the good years outweighed the bad years by almost 3 to 1, we must understand the period of the monarchy to be “far worse” than the period of the Judges.⁶²

There are several problems with Gregg’s assessment of the period of Judges as a whole as well as his contrast between the period of Judges and Kings.

- First, Gregg’s argument is overly simplistic since it does not take into account the notoriously difficult chronological problems of the text, nor does it allow for regional judges, judges that ruled simultaneously, or periods of permanent occupation by the enemy even when a judge was present.⁶³
- Second, Gregg’s statistical assessment does not take the cyclical structure of the book of Judges into account wherein things went from bad to worse.
- Third, a statistical analysis does not take into account the non-chronological nature of the final two stories appended to the end of the book wherein idolatry and tribal division are stressed (and both are used as illustrations of what it meant when men “did what was right in their own eyes”). It is highly significant that scenes of wicked idolatry and civil

⁶⁰ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey’s Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 5.

⁶¹ Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 40-41.

⁶² Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 41.

⁶³ Andrew E. Steinmann. *The Mysterious Numbers of the Book of Judges*. Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society. September, 2005. Volume 48:3.

war are intentionally placed at the end of the book to illustrate what it was like when there was no king (neither man nor God) in Israel – but rather sheer anarchy.

- Fourth, Gregg takes a statement with a specific historical referent (“right in their own eyes” – see the previous point), divorces it from its context, and makes it the slogan for his statistical analysis. This seems an abuse of the passage.
- Fifth, the fact that God allowed periods of rest within the land following a deliverance provided by a judge does not mean that all was well within the land. For instance, Judges 8:28 states that there was rest in the land for forty years following the deliverance of Gideon, yet Judges 8 also tells us that Gideon made an ephod and caused the people “whore after it” (Judges 8:27).
- Sixth, Gregg’s analysis does not account for the fact that during the life of Joshua and David the land was purged of all the Canaanites (see Joshua 21:43-45; 1 Samuel 8:3) but not so in the days of Judges (Judges 2:23).⁶⁴
- Seventh, if Judges represents the golden age of Israel’s history as opposed to the period of the Monarchy, why did Israel long for the days of David and the restoration of the Davidic throne (Isaiah 9:7) rather than the days of the judges?
- Finally, Gregg has chosen to follow his statistical analysis rather than the clear statement of the biblical text:

And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel. And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals. And they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the Lord to anger. They abandoned the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth. So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them. And he sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. Whenever they marched out, the hand of the Lord was against them for harm, as the Lord had warned, and as the Lord had sworn to them. And they were in terrible distress. Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. Yet they

⁶⁴ See also: Earl E. Robertson. *Has The Land Promise Been Fulfilled?* Guardian of Truth XXVI: 1, January 7, 1982. pp. 11-13

did not listen to their judges, for they whored after other gods and bowed down to them. They soon turned aside from the way in which their fathers had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the Lord, and they did not do so. Whenever the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge, and he saved them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge. For the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them. But whenever the judge died, they turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them. They did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways. So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he said, "Because this people have transgressed my covenant that I commanded their fathers and have not obeyed my voice, I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died, in order to test Israel by them, whether they will take care to walk in the way of the Lord as their fathers did, or not." So the Lord left those nations, not driving them out quickly, and he did not give them into the hand of Joshua. (Judges 2:10-23)

I'm reminded of a favorite saying of a preacher friend: "Statistics don't lie, but statisticians often do." I am not saying that Gregg has lied when presenting his statistical analysis of Judges, but I am saying that he has handled the data irresponsibly and chosen to ignore the clear teaching of the text.

At the conclusion of his defense for his assessment of Judges, Gregg stated,

The fact that Israel opted to go with the Monarchy, instead of the arrangement where everyone did what was right in his own eyes, clearly was a choice that displeased God (1 Sam.8:7; Hos.13:11). Of course, Battey (like anyone else who reads the Bible) must admit all of these facts to be true—which makes it the more peculiar that he chose to attack such a common sense summary as "ridiculous."⁶⁵

Gregg's closing argument regarding the period of Judges should stand as a warning to readers and make them question his ability to exegete Scripture. The "facts" do not point to Gregg's conclusion and must therefore be rejected. Here are the actual facts: The monarchy was always God's intention (Genesis 49:10; Numbers 24:17). God was not upset with Israel because they requested a king, but because they requested a king "like the other nations" (i.e. one that was good in their eyes – 1 Samuel 8:5; 9:2; 16:6-7). The fact that God gave Saul to Israel as a punishment (Hosea 13:11) does not mean that the kingship itself (including David) was meant as a curse. No, the curse that God gave (Saul), He also took away (Hosea 13:11) and replaced with the king of His choice (1 Samuel 13:14).

⁶⁵ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey's Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 7.

Response to Example #2: In my Father's house are many mansions...

Referring to my article *Defending Heaven*⁶⁶ which deals exclusively with Gregg's and Richardson's attack on the traditional interpretation of John 14, Gregg stated:

Bathey was so offended by my view of John 14:1ff that he wrote another whole article against it. The only thing lacking in that article was anything that sufficiently refuted any of my exegesis. I believe his objection to my view of this passage was that he (like very many others) have always seen this as a principal passages assuring us of heaven in the next life. Remember, this is one of Bathey's primary (and, seemingly, most emotional) objections to my eschatology.

Since Gregg does not want to respond to my article on John 14 (which is his choice), I will simply make one point: Gregg acknowledges that my article does address his position and he does not complain that I have misrepresented him in any way. I hope readers will recognize the significance of his acknowledgement when reading that article. It has been argued that I committed the genetic fallacy by linking AK's presentation with Gregg's, yet Gregg freely admits that the material is his own. Furthermore, a genetic fallacy occurs when a person judges "a belief or practice merely on the basis of how it originated."⁶⁷ Though I did point to Gregg as the original source of the material I addressed (a claim that he has not denied), I also dealt with the arguments from a biblical perspective (and thereby failed to commit the genetic fallacy since my argumentation was not based purely off of the original source of the material).

Since my goal was never to change Gregg's mind on John 14, I will not press the matter further. Readers will have to judge the validity of the arguments in both presentations and determine for themselves where truth lies.

Response to Example #3: Man's eternal destiny on the new earth, not heaven.

Like his response to my material on John 14, Gregg simply ignored the arguments I presented, tried to cast doubt, reasserted some of what he said, introduced Romans 8:20-22⁶⁸ and Revelation 21:2 to the discussion, and continued to ignore the context of Psalm 2 and Matthew

⁶⁶ Nathan Bathey. *Defending Heaven: A Critique of the Attack on the Traditional Interpretation of John 14:1-6*. April 11, 2023. <https://www.christianresearcher.com/articles/a-review-and-a-response>

⁶⁷ Maarten Boudry. *Why the Genetic Fallacy is Not a Fallacy*. June 24, 2021. Blog of the APA. https://blog.apaonline.org/2021/06/24/why-the-genetic-fallacy-is-not-a-fallacy/?fbclid=IwAR1pAObqp5T4LrpJ2DP16ml7PI91bcfS7u_RwaFv10rQdplCdrAmPy7BJ0w

⁶⁸ Readers who wish to read a non-refurbished earth view of Romans 8:19-22 should see: Alan Bonifey. *A Commentary on Romans. Contending For the Faith*. Yukon, OK. 2016. p. 343-351. Bonifey's commentary is also available online: <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/ctf/romans-8.html>. See also: Wayne Jackson. *Will Heaven Be On Earth?* Christian Courier. <https://christiancourier.com/articles/will-heaven-be-on-earth>

5:5.⁶⁹ Later in his response, Gregg acknowledged my arguments from Psalm 115 and 1 Thessalonians 4:17, but chose rather to ignore them, repeat his assertions, and cast doubt again.⁷⁰

<u>Gregg's Response to My Exegesis of Psalm 115:</u>	<u>Gregg' Original Statement in <i>Empire of the Risen Son</i>:</u>
<p>I have never claimed that the passage in question teaches anything at all about eschatology. It speaks of God's purpose exhibited in the past, without commenting on the future. What I have used the passage to establish is that God has given man the earth for his home, which is certainly what the verse affirms, and what Genesis 1-2 demonstrates.⁷¹</p>	<p>God's ideal was that humans would be loyal children in His household and would appreciate the privilege of being entrusted with so great a stewardship. If they had remained faithful and obedient to their Creator, there is every reason to believe that this perfect planet would have been their home without interruption and without death—and our venerable first parents would still be living among us today! <i>God never intended that mankind would live in heaven with the angels.</i> The heavens are the Lord's, <i>"but the earth He has given to the sons of men."</i>⁷²</p>

There are two problems with Gregg's response:

- First, he clearly used Psalm 115:16 as a statement that proved "God never intended that mankind would live in heaven with the angels" and thereby used it to teach his eschatological view of a refurbished earth.
- Second, Psalm 115:16 has no connection to Genesis 1-2 and has nothing to say about either man's temporal or eternal possession of the earth. The "land" of Canaan, not the "earth" as a whole, is what is contextually under consideration in Psalm 115:16. Psalm 115 thus stands as one of many examples where Gregg has ignored my argument,

⁶⁹ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey's Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 7-8.

⁷⁰ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey's Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 12-13.

⁷¹ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey's Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 12.

⁷² Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 81.

misrepresented me, and ripped a passage from its context to infuse it with new and foreign meaning.

It is not coincidental that some who have been influenced by Gregg's writings have begun to use Psalm 115 to speak of earth as the eternal dwelling of humanity.

Regarding 1 Thessalonians 4:17 and the meaning of the Greek word *apantesis* Gregg stated:

The Bible itself is a pretty good linguistic authority providing evidence of how a word it uses was understood. It may not be that *apantesis* can only refer to such a meeting as I described, but it is the case that the New Testament, elsewhere, consistently uses the word strictly with that meaning.

Gregg hereby commits what D. A. Carson refers to as the fallacy of "Unwarranted restriction of the semantic field."⁷³ In other words, since *apantesis* can refer to "a welcoming delegation going out to greet a visitor as he approaches" and does so refer on three other occasions in the New Testament, Gregg asserts that it therefore *must* carry the same meaning in 1 Thessalonians 2:14. The problem with Gregg's argument is threefold:

- First, even if there were only four usages of the word *apantesis* in the Bible the contextual meaning of other passages should not restrict the semantic field of the same word within a different context.
- Second, in asserting his argument for a restricted meaning of *apantesis* based on the "linguistic authority" of the Bible, Gregg has ignored the usage of *apantesis* in the Septuagint (LXX), which I have already addressed in my review.⁷⁴
- Third, he ignores the lengthy list of lexical references that I provided since they do not match up with his preferred interpretation. Though Gregg unfairly mocks my lack of knowledge regarding "up-to-date New Testament Greek scholarship"⁷⁵ I find it interesting that he wishes to appeal to Greek scholars when it suits him and ignore them when they do not.

Since Gregg could not answer my arguments from 1 Thessalonians 4:17, it appears he has chosen to ignore them and hope that his readers will not read my actual review. Gregg has not been evenhanded regarding *apantesis*, and his discussion of *aiionios* is even more deplorable (more on this in a moment).

⁷³ D. A. Carson. *Exegetical Fallacies*. 2nd ed. Baker Academic. Grand Rapids, MI. 1996. p. 55-56.

⁷⁴ Nathan Battey. *A Toxic View of the Kingdom*. p. 40.

⁷⁵ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey's Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 10.

Before moving on, I want to note two final statements from Gregg:

Batthey challenges the view that Jesus will actually return all the way to earth. This seems to require a denial of my asserted meaning of *apantesis*. We, apparently, are not meeting Christ as He comes back, but, rather, He is meeting us as we leave for heaven. However, such a challenge raises problematic questions, like, *If Jesus is not coming back to earth at all, why leave His seat in heaven at all? Why not just summons us to come to where He already is?*

The reason I hold such a view is because that is what the passage states and because there is biblical precedence for such a view. I will therefore answer Gregg's question with two questions of my own: Why did God choose to come down from heaven in 2 Kings 2:11-12 and give Ezekiel a vision of his descent in Ezekiel 10-12, if He never intended to "come back to earth"? Could it be that the rapture of Elijah serves as a foretaste of what awaits the saved following the general resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:17)?

Lastly, when Gregg introduced Revelation 21-22 as a proof-text for his view of a Refurbished Earth he stated:

When we come to the end of the Bible, after God has put all enemies under His feet and restored the pristine conditions that prevailed before the fall, we find conditions reminiscent of the Garden in a beautiful city (Rev.21). We find the removal of the effects of the curse. In a renewed creation (Rom.8:20-22; Rev.22:3). The city of Jerusalem is not seen as remaining in heaven, but descending from heaven (Rev.21:10). Since heaven, in that vision, is distinguished from earth (Rev.21:1), and no realms other than heaven and earth are mentioned, it seems there is nowhere to which something might descend *from* heaven other than *to* earth.⁷⁶

First, Gregg assumes from the passage that which must be proven, namely that the phrase "new heavens and new earth" refers to a "renewed creation." Since the phrases "new heavens and new earth" and "New Jerusalem" are borrowed from Isaiah 65 and 66, we must consider the biblical definition of those phrases before filling them with new meaning. Contextually it appears that Isaiah 65 and 66 speak of the inauguration of the restoration of the kingdom and God's people during the Messianic age rather than a restoration of the physical universe in the eternal age since death still exists (65:20), birth continues (65:20, 23), and the serpent is still present – though subjugated (65:25).⁷⁷ To speak of this inaugurated state of the Messianic kingdom, Isaiah uses a merism⁷⁸ to speak

⁷⁶ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Batthey's Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 7.

⁷⁷ For further information see: Homer Hailey. *A Commentary on Isaiah With Emphasis on the Messianic Hope*. Religious Supply. Louisville, KY. 1992. P. 518-521, 538-539.

⁷⁸ Wikipedia provides a helpful definition of a merism and includes some biblical examples:

of the “New World” or “New Creation” of the Messiah.

Both Old and New Testament writers use New Creation imagery to describe the work of Christ, His people, and His kingdom:

1. Isaiah: 9:2-7 (light dawns when Israel is restored) and 11:1-9 (animals figuratively dwelling in peace when the King comes) and 34:1-35:10 (judgement followed by new life breaking forth described with nature concepts) all describe the Messianic Age with New Creation imagery.
2. Isaiah 51:3 and Ezekiel 36:35 describe the Messianic age as the restoration of Eden.
3. Jeremiah 31:31 speaks of a New Covenant for the newly restored people of God (see also Luke 22:20; Hebrews 8:8, 13; 9:15).
4. Matthew 19:28 speaks of the twelve apostles reigning with him in Kingdom and describes that period as the time of the “New World” (ESV).
5. John 1 is replete with echoes of the original creation to speak of the New Creation that was begun in Christ Jesus.
6. John 20:22 speaks of Christ breathing the Spirit into the disciples just as God breathed man’s spirit into his body at the beginning of creation (Genesis 2:7)
7. Acts 2 describes the Day of Pentecost as a day of New Creation as the Spirit was poured out and the church came into existence.
8. 1 Corinthians 15:22 describes Christ as the New Adam of the New Creation.

Merism (Latin: *merismus*, Greek: μερισμός, translit. *merismós*) is a rhetorical device (or figure of speech) in which a combination of two *contrasting parts* of the whole refer to the whole.

For example, in order to say that someone "searched everywhere", one could use the merism "searched high and low". Another example is the sword-and-sandal movie genre, a loose term for a genre of movies made principally in Italy in the 1950s and 1960s set in Classical antiquity.

Merisms are common in the Old Testament. For example, in Genesis 1:1, when God creates אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ (Modern pronunciation: *et hashamaim ve-et haarets*) "the heavens and the earth" (New Revised Standard Version), the two parts (heavens and earth) do not refer only to the heavens and the earth. Rather, they refer to the heavens, the earth *and everything between them*, i.e. God created the *entire world*, the *whole universe*. Other famous examples of Biblical merisms are Genesis 1:5, where "evening" and "morning" refer to "one day" (including noon, afternoon etc.); and Psalm 139, where the psalmist declares that God knows "my downsitting and my uprising", i.e. God knows *all* the psalmist’s actions.

Merism. Wikipedia. April 10, 2023. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merism>.

9. 1 Corinthians 15:23 speaks of Christ as the “firstfruits” of the resurrection – nothing less than the ultimate state of New Creation believers.
10. 2 Corinthians 5:17 states: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” Does this passage not speak of the inauguration of the process that will be consummated at the Lord’s return (Revelation 21:1)?
11. Paul speaks of light dawning in the person of Christ when he speaks of the New Creation in 2 Corinthians 4:6: “For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”
12. Galatian 6:15 speaks of Jews and Gentiles forming a “New Creation” in Christ.
13. Ephesians 1:10 speaks of All Creation being joined together in Christ: “... He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.”
14. Ephesians 2:15 speaks of Christ creating “in Himself one new man,” and then in verses 19-22 Paul describes the church as no longer being “strangers and aliens” in this world but rather “fellow citizens” of the New Creation – God’s household, who form part of the New Temple so that God can dwell with them. Is this not the reality and process that John sees reaching its culmination in Revelation 21-22?
15. Colossians 1:20 states that “all things” are reconciled to Christ “whether things on earth or things in heaven” through the blood of the cross. This is nothing less than the Restoration of the Kingdom accomplished through the blood of Christ.
16. Hebrews 4:6 indicates that a new rest was entered by Christ and yet awaits those who are His – thus tying the concept of rest back to the original creation. This Rest awaits the consummation of the New Creation and is offered by Jesus to those who would come to Him - Matthew 11:29.
17. Revelation 2:1 describes God walking in the midst of His churches (His New Creation) as he walked with Adam in the Garden of Eden in Gen. 2.
18. Revelation 3:14 describes Jesus as the “beginning of God’s creation.” (NASB)

The New Creation that all these biblical writers saw inaugurated in the person, mission, and people of Christ, is seen by Peter (2 Peter 3:13) and John (Revelation 21:1-2) in its consummated state. As such, and in light of Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22, I believe Revelation 21:1 speaks of three things: (1) the annihilation of the physical universe – “for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away”,⁷⁹ (2) the disappearance of the sea (the realm of chaos from which comes the sea beast and the harlot),⁸⁰ (3) the consummation of the “New Creation” that were inaugurated at the first coming of Christ.

⁷⁹ This stands in harmony with the clear statements of Matthew 24:35; 2 Peter 3:9-12; 1 John 2:17; and Revelation 20:11.

⁸⁰ For more information on the disappearance of the Sea: see Albertus Pieters, *The Lamb, The Woman, and the Dragon: Studies in the Revelation of St. John*. Deward Pub. Cillicothe, OH. 2012. P. 237-238.

Finally, I want to respond to one final argument presented by Gregg:

The city of Jerusalem is not seen as remaining in heaven, but descending from heaven (Rev.21:10). Since heaven, in that vision, is distinguished from earth (Rev.21:1), and no realms other than heaven and earth are mentioned, it seems there is nowhere to which something might descend *from* heaven other than *to* earth.

Since heaven and earth can no longer be found (i.e. they have ceased to exist – Revelation 20:11; 21:1), and since the “new heavens and new earth” refer to the consummated state of the Kingdom, I find it impossible for the New Jerusalem (God’s holy people) to ascend down from heaven to earth. The vision of the New Jerusalem descending from heaven is meant to be seen in contrast with the city of Babylon rising from the sea:

<u>Babylon</u>	<u>New Jerusalem</u>
The harlot who is seated upon the waters (or sea – Rev. 17:1 – which represents the nations of the earth that are in rebellion against God – see Rev. 17:15) and is joined to the beast that rose from the Sea (Rev. 17:3, 8; 13:1) to make war with the Lamb. ⁸¹	The New Jerusalem descends from heaven from God as a bride prepared for her husband the Lamb (Rev. 21:2, 9).
The harlot has the name “Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth’s abominations” written on her head (Rev. 17:5).	The New Jerusalem represents the faithful children of God with whom God dwells (Rev. 17:3) and upon whom He writes His name on their foreheads (Rev. 22:4).
Babylon the harlot is then seen seated on the top of the seven heads which represent seven mountains reaching to heaven (Rev. 17:9).	The New Jerusalem descends down atop a great high mountain (Rev. 21:10).
When the red dragon is conquered by the Lamb, the city of Babylon falls and the rebellious nations mourn (Rev. 18).	Death is swallowed up, and there is no more sorrow, nor crying, nor pain, for the former things have passed away and all things have been made new (Rev. 21:4-5).

What we have here is a contrast between the city of God and the city of Satan. When Revelation speaks of the beast “rising up out of the sea (13:1) and the harlot sitting “on many waters,” we are not meant to think of a literal beast, a literal harlot, literal water, literal rising from literal water, or literal sitting on literal water. John uses the imagery of the beast rising from the water and the harlot sitting on the water to depict their origin as coming from chaos, rebellion, wickedness, and ultimately the devil. Likewise, when we come to Revelation 21:2, 10 we are not

⁸¹ For more details on the Harlot and her connection with the Sea Beast- see: Louis A. Brighton. Concordia Commentary: Revelation. Concordia Pub. St. Louis, MO. 1999. p. 440-447.

meant to think of a literal city descending out of the literal heavens to sit upon the literal earth (which has already disappeared). The descent of New Jerusalem from heaven and God depicts the divine and holy origin of the city – not its spatial location.

We must avoid the trappings of wooden literalism and learn to appreciate what the text says rather than trying to force upon it notions of a refurbished earth.

Response to Example #5: The meaning of *aionios*

I clearly hit a nerve in Gregg when I labeled his presentation of *aionios* as “pure evil,” yet I do not apologize for that assessment.

Here is what readers need to know and why I have spent such a long time “nit-picking” what Gregg believes about the nature of “eternal” punishment: Though Gregg claims to have “never advocated “Conditional Immortality” he no longer believes the traditional view that hell is a place of eternal punishment, and he uses the arguments of those who hold the views of Conditional Immortality and Universalism to combat the traditional view.

Here is his own statement of clarity:

My most recent theological shift seems to be concerning the nature and purpose of “hell”. As of today, however, I have become less and less impressed with the nature of the biblical evidence for the traditional view, and more concerned about its implications with reference to the character of God. I have moved from my former confidence that the view of endless torment has strong scriptural support. It seems to be the weakest of the three views, from the standpoint of biblical exegesis. I am still in the process of deciding between the two alternatives to the traditional view—both of which seem to be superior, in terms of biblical evidence, to that position, though neither provides a thorough refutation of the other.⁸²

The “two alternatives” that he references are Conditional Immortality and Universalism – both of which reject the concept of hell as a place of endless punishment and espouse annihilationism. When he says that he has “never advocated Conditional Immortality,”⁸³ he means that he has never officially chosen Conditional Immortality over Universalism (not that he has never presented either position as superior to the traditional view). By his own admission, it seems that the major stone of stumbling with the traditional view are its implications on the character of God (not the grammatical challenges of the text). The same issue over the implications of God’s character is what lead F. F. Bruce and John R Stott to embrace the doctrine of Annihilationism and seek linguistic arguments to justify their claims.

Gregg shared a quote from me and then stated:

⁸² Steve Gregg. 2012. The Biography of Steve Gregg. The Narrow Path. March 10, 2023.

<https://www.thenarrowpath.com/biography.php>

⁸³ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey’s Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 10

The irresponsibility of this review is exhibited nowhere so much as in this paragraph. Battey claims that I have “deceptively changed ‘eternal punishment’...into Conditional Immortality...” Besides the fact that I have never advocated Conditional Immortality, even had I done so, it is gratuitous to declare that I would do so “deceptively.” I can suggest that Batey’s followers may be deceived by the conclusions of his poor biblical scholarship, but I would never suggest that he has said anything “deceptively”—which speaks of a deliberate misleading of his audience.⁸⁴

How can a man who writes such a statement elsewhere express confusion as to which parts of his book I felt were “toxic”?

If I were to describe a theological position as “toxic,” I would feel obligated to point out wherein lies its toxicity.⁸⁵

To use Gregg’s own term, I find this “portrayal of me as such quite disingenuous.”⁸⁶

Getting to the heart of the issue, Gregg chided,

He complains that I allude to many scholars and lexicons in support of a Greek term’s meaning, but that I name none of them. This is true, since my comment was made in passing, I saw no need to burden the page with such documentation. I assumed the lexical resources are available to anyone who has an interest in looking at them. If my readers are interested in such documentation, my book on hell abundantly provides such details (*Hell: Three Christian Views*, pp.99-109).

Battey’s statement seems to imply that such scholarly documentation for my statement would be difficult to find. His disparagement of my claim that the word *aiōnios* means “enduring for, or pertaining to, an age” tells us more about him than about me. It demonstrates that he is entirely out of the loop of up-to-date New Testament Greek scholarship (this is not a crime, but is a poor position from which to criticize another’s remarks on the subject).⁸⁷

I want to state the following as strong and clear as I can: Whenever Steve Gregg cites either a source or a passage, readers (or listeners) had better check up on what he has said because he does not handle sources or passages fairly.

Allow me to prove what I mean by sharing some excerpts of his books *Empire of the Risen Son* and *Hell: Three Christian Views* that relate directly to the false claims that he has made regarding

⁸⁴ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey’s Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 10.

⁸⁵ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey’s Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 4.

⁸⁶ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey’s Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 16.

⁸⁷ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey’s Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 10.

the word *aionios*:

Many modern Greek scholars and evangelical theologians* now believe that the word “*aionios* life” refers to the life which pertains to the Kingdom Age of the Messiah—that is, “*life in the Kingdom*”—without specific reference to its duration. Jesus spoke of entering the Kingdom of God as equivalent to entering into “life.”⁸⁸

This statement in *Empire of the Risen Son* contains a footnote (*) that points readers to pages 105-106 of *Hell: Three Christian Views* so that readers can read more about how “many modern Greek scholars... believe that the phrase ‘*aionios* life’ refers to life which pertains to the Kingdom Age... without reference to duration.” So, what exactly do the “many scholars” actually say to which he refers with his footnote?

Edward Beecher wrote: “as *aion* denoted an age, great or small, so the adjective *aionios* expressed the idea pertaining to or belonging to the *aion*, whether great or small.”⁸⁹ Gregory MacDonald elaborated:

The translation of *aionios* has been the subject of numerous studies in recent years, but there seems to be a strong case for maintaining that it means “pertaining to an age” and often refers not just to any age but to “the age to come” (cf. Heb 6:2; 9:12). Thus “eternal life” may be better translated as “the life of the age to come” and “eternal punishment” as “the punishment of the age to come.” ... but if this is so, then it is no longer obvious that the punishment is everlasting. True, the age to come is everlasting, but that does not necessitate that the punishment of the age to come lasts for the duration of that age, simply that it occurs during that age and is appropriate for that age.⁹⁰

F. F. Bruce commented: “As for ‘eternal life’ (Gk. *zoe aionios*), that is probably an abridged way of saying ‘the life of the age to come’ – the life of the resurrection-age.”⁹¹

If this view is correct, then *aionios* would often simply bear the meaning “eschatological.” The adjective would address, in such cases, not the question of duration but the nature of the thing and the time of occurrence.

That *aionios* means “pertaining to an age” seemed to be taken for granted by Chrysostom in his sermon on the book of Ephesians, where he said: “[Satan’s]

⁸⁸ Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 201.

⁸⁹ Edward Beecher, *History of Opinions in the Scriptural Doctrine of Retribution*.

⁹⁰ Gregory MacDonald, *The Evangelical Universalist*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2006, 148.

⁹¹ F. F. Bruce. *Answers to Questions*, 202.

kingdom is *aionios*, in other words that it will cease with the present age.”^{92 93}

That’s it folks. That’s the entire section referenced in Gregg’s footnote regarding the “many modern Greek scholars... believe that the word “*aionios* life” refers to life which pertains to the Kingdom Age... without reference to duration.” The “many modern scholars” include Edward Beecher (who lived from 1803-1895), Gregory MacDonald, F. F. Bruce, and Chrysostom. I’m not sure that Beecher and Chrysostom should be labeled as “modern”, and I am not sure that MacDonald and Bruce qualify as “many modern scholars.” Be that as it may, it should also be noted that MacDonald was a Universalist who did not believe that hell was a place of eternal punishment, Beecher is quoted repeatedly by Universalists (which indicates they feel he was either in their camp or sympathetic to their position, though I do not know what his personal views were), and F. F. Bruce who advocated Annihilationism (he wrote a forward to Edward Fudge’s book *The Fire That Consumes*). In other words, Gregg has hand-picked one Universalist, one Annihilationist, and one more potential Universalist to support his belief that *aionios* means “pertaining to an age.” Not only that, Gregg also believes that “*aionios* life” begins when life in the kingdom begins rather than when the Lord returns. As such he is not fully in agreement with MacDonald and Bruce whom he cites in support of his position.⁹⁴

Most readers of the English text see *eternal life* simply as a reference to immortality, or as life extended into an eternal future. However, the Greek adjective *aionios*, is associated with the root *aion*—a noun meaning “an age.” *Aionios* can speak of something *enduring for an age*, meaning for an indefinitely long time—up to and including *forever*. Alternatively, the word can refer to something *pertaining to a particular age*. The Jews thought of history in terms of distinct ages—especially “the present age,” in contrast to “the age to come”—which refers to the Kingdom Age to be inaugurated by the Messiah. This Messianic Age was depicted by the prophets as an age of the Holy Spirit’s activity, and an age of the redemption and glory of Israel.⁹⁵

In his response to my article, Gregg notes that his full-length treatment of *aionios* can be found on pages 99-109 of *Hell: Three Christian Views*. Towards the beginning of that portion of his book readers can find a section heading labeled: *Theories Concerning the Meaning of Aionios*. That should alert readers to the fact that not all scholars agree with Gregg’s definition of *aionios*.

⁹² Chrysostom’s *Homily of the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Ephesians*, Homily 4.

⁹³ The quotes of Beecher, MacDonald, Bruce, and Chrysostom can all be found in *Hell: Three Christian Views*. p. 105-106.

⁹⁴ BDAG defines one usage of *aionios* as “a period of unending duration, without end” and explicitly ties this definition to Matthew 25:46. See: ⁹⁴ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

⁹⁵ Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 201.

At one point Gregg stated,

That it is a mistake to assume *aionios* must *only* refer to endlessness is seen in the variety of its occurrences.”⁹⁶

I agree with this version of Gregg. That *aionios* does not refer exclusively to endlessness is denied by none that I am aware of. That *aionios* can refer to endlessness is not denied by the majority of scholars he cites in Gregg’s book on Hell. The problem that Gregg has with the word *aionios* is similar to the problem he demonstrated with the Greek word *apantesis* – he attempts to take a word, give it a single meaning, and then force that meaning into every context that suits his doctrine. When dealing with the topic of “eternal punishment” he tells us that *aionios*, and it’s Hebrew equivalent *olam*, simply mean “*enduring for, or pertaining to, an age,*” yet when he addressed Daniel 2:44 Gregg stated:

The Kingdom of God, itself, would be the fifth, and final, World Empire. It would differ from others in that it would encompass the entire planet. It would never be conquered or replaced by any successor empire, but would continue ***eternally.***⁹⁷

I’m not clear what Gregg means by “eternally” (Daniel 2:44) since he has stated that “*olam*” just means “*enduring for, or pertaining to, an age,*”⁹⁸ and since “no part of the Old Testament focuses on the afterlife.”⁹⁹

If Daniel 2:44 does speak of the eternal state, then surely Gregg can admit that the following uses of *aionios* also include the concept of eternity:

... but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the ***eternal*** God, (Romans 16:26)

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and ***forever.*** (Hebrews 13:8)

All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains ***forever.*** (1 Peter 1:24-25)

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and ***forever.*** Amen. (Jude 24-25)

And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls

⁹⁶ Steve Gregg. *Hell: Three Christian Views*. Thomas Nelson. Nashville, TN. 2013. p. 103.

⁹⁷ Emphasis mine. Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 56

⁹⁸ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey’s Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 10.

⁹⁹ Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 226

full of the wrath of God who lives *forever and ever*. (Revelation 15:7)

The Revelation 15:7 passage is of particular interest because *aionios* is doubled (an emphatic expression of forever). Yet somehow, whenever the same emphatic usage appears in the previous chapter, Gregg would have us believe that the punishment in view is but for an age.

And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up *forever and ever*, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name." (Revelation 14:9-11)

And again:

And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. (Revelation 20:10)

To support his definition that *aionios* means "enduring for, or pertaining to, an age," he cites part of a statement from G. K. Beale:

Addressing the use of *aionios* in Revelation 20:10, where Satan, the beast, and the false prophet are cast into the lake of fire, Gregory Beal, who defends the traditional view of hell, wrote: "Strictly speaking, even the expression 'they will be tormented forever and ever' is figurative, since the phrase *eis tous aionas ton aionon* literally can be rendered 'unto the ages of the ages.' At least, the figurative point of the phrase connotes a very long time. The context of the passage and of the book must determine whether this is a long but limited time or an unending period."¹⁰⁰

It would have been helpful if Gregg had provided the very next line of Beale's statement:

Both the immediate and broad contexts of the book indicate that the expression refers to an unending period."¹⁰¹

Beale goes on to say,

"The reality of an unending suffering of Satan, the beast, and the false prophet in 20:10 is borne out by observing that the phrase "unto the ages of the ages" (*eis*

¹⁰⁰ Steve Gregg. *Hell: Three Christian Views*. p. 102.

¹⁰¹ Gregory K. Beale in Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, eds., *Hell Under Fire*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), p. 128.

tous aionas ton aionon) elsewhere in the book refers to the eternal reign of God (11:15), the eternal power and glory of God (1:6; 5:13; 7:12), the eternal life of God (4:9-10; 10:6 15:7) or of Christ (1:18), and the eternal reign of the saints (22:5) In particular, the use of the same expression to connote explicitly an unending reign for the saints in 22:5 must mean that very same temporal phrase in 20:10, only about one chapter earlier, refers to an unending period.¹⁰²

In an attempt to get around the reality that *aionios* can and often does mean “eternal” when used in reference to hell and punishment, Gregg stated,

This meaning (everlasting, eternal) works with the majority of occurrences of *aionios*, though, even when it does, it is likewise possible to suggest one of the other interpretations for the same cases. When modifying such words as “God,” “life,” “salvation,” and the like, it poses no difficulty to understand the word *aionios* as meaning never-ending. This is not so much the case in certain other occurrences of the word. Whether *aionios* conveys this meaning when applied to such things as “punishment,” “destruction,” “fire,” and the like would be less obvious, without other modifiers or factors present to inform us.¹⁰³

The argument Gregg set forth in the previous quote is a simplified and slightly modified regurgitation of a few of Edward Fudge’s linguistic arguments regarding *aionios* that he used in defense of his argument for Annihilationsim.¹⁰⁴

Since it is not within the scope of this response to address every passage where the word *aionios* appears, I want to share one passage wherein the contextual meaning of *aionios* necessitates never ending punishment:

And these will go away into **eternal** punishment, but the righteous into **eternal** life.” (Matthew 25:46)

This statement of the Lord comes at the end of a scene which depicts the Final Day when all nations are gathered before the judgment throne of God. What is true of the punishment handed out on that day is also true of the blessing of life. To state it differently, if the punishment lasts only for an age, so does the life. There is no logical reason (and many men such as Edward Fudge have tried to come up with one) to understand the life as eternal and the punishment as annihilation.

At the conclusion of his *aionios* discussion in *Hell: Three Christian Views*, Gregg stated,

¹⁰² Gregory K. Beale. *Hell Under Fire*. p. 129.

¹⁰³ Steve Gregg. *Hell: Three Christian Views*. p. 103-104.

¹⁰⁴ For a fair treatment of Edward Fudge’s linguistic arguments see: Edward William Fudge and Robert A. Peterson, *Two Views of Hell: A Biblical & Theological Dialogue*. InterVarsity Press. Downers Grove, IL. 2000. p.96-101.

Because of the admitted ambiguity of the words “eternal” and “everlasting” in the Greek and Hebrew text, it is not necessarily clear that “endless” suffering is actually what these words are threatening.

Here again Gregg speaks in vague terms in order to insure that he has plausible deniability in case he gets accused of having a position on hell. In the end, he claims that he does not have a position on endless punishment, even though he has spent pages and pages trying to undermine the traditional view of hell and present a plausible case for Conditional Immortality and Universalism. It amazes me that a man who has written an entire book on hell claims to not have a position on the subject. But I guess I shouldn't be surprised when a chameleon refuses to identify with a single position.

Responding to Example #4: The terms “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of heaven”

Regarding my response to Gregg's usage of the circumlocution argument Gregg stated,

I assume he objects to this because he wants to retain some different range of meaning for one term vis-à-vis the other—which biblical evidence, unfortunately, does not allow. My book points out the parallel usage of the two terms in the various Gospels, and even in Matthew 19:23-24, demonstrating beyond reasonable doubt that they are used as synonyms.¹⁰⁵

I do not deny that the two terms “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of heaven” are used in parallel with one another throughout the synoptic Gospels anymore than I would deny that the names Jesus and Christ are used in parallel forms. What I do deny is that the circumlocution argument is valid,¹⁰⁶ and that the two terms are identical in every way. Just as the names Jesus and Christ refer to the same person and yet contain different meaning and emphasis, so do the terms “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of heaven.”

Since Gregg seems to have forgotten the material I shared from Pennington, I will repeat it for his benefit and that of my readers:

The history of the reverential circumlocution idea is an example of an unsubstantiated suggestion becoming an unquestioned assumption through the magic of publication, repetition, and elapsed time... There is no doubt that Matthew often uses heaven to refer indirectly to “God”... but these are clearly cases of metonymy, where heaven refers directly to God, not a direct substitution out of avoidance of the divine name, but for a rhetorical and theological purpose: to contrast heaven (God's realm) with earth (humanity's realm).¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey's Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 8.

¹⁰⁶ See Jonathan Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*. Baker. Grand Rapids, MI. 2009. p. 19-37.

¹⁰⁷ Jonathan Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*. p. 36.

Elsewhere Pennington warns:

This standard solution (the circumlocution argument) has in fact blinded our ability to see the much more elaborate scheme at work in Matthew's use of heaven.¹⁰⁸

Pennington's assessment runs counter to Gregg's view:

In truth, the attempt to distinguish between the terms *Kingdom of God* and *Kingdom of Heaven* is a vain errand. In scripture, the terms "*Kingdom of God*" and "*Kingdom of heaven*" are used interchangeably, and both refer to the same entity ***in every respect***.¹⁰⁹

To defend himself against my accusation that he has tried to drive a wedge between the heavenly aspect of the kingdom and the earthly aspect, Gregg stated:

I deny none of these things, and said as much in my book. On page 21, I wrote: "When Christians die, they do go to heaven, but that is not the thing to which the term 'Kingdom of God' generally refers..." In discussing 2 Timothy 4:18, I write: "Paul may be referring to the fact that the Kingdom over which Christ reigns encompasses both heaven and earth. In referring to his inevitable martyrdom, Paul may be anticipating his passing at death from the earthly sphere of Christ's Kingdom, where he was living, to that Kingdom's heavenly sphere."¹¹⁰

First, there is a difference between affirming that we go to heaven during the intermediate state (Gregg's position which I have never denied he holds), and affirming that we will spend eternity in heaven (the point of my contention which Gregg denies). Second, regarding Gregg's usage of 2 Timothy 4:18, he further complained:

It is clear, then, that only someone who either did not read my book, or who read it only to find what he was determined to find there, could never honestly say that I make "a concerted effort to rid the Bible of any hint of an ***afterlife*** spent in heaven," or that I suggest that "the heavenly realm has nothing to do with the Kingdom." Why do you suppose an honest reviewer would make such misrepresentations?¹¹¹

Why have I understood Gregg to teach that the Kingdom is tied exclusively to the earth and has no connection to heaven or an afterlife spent in heaven? Consider these statements from Gregg:

¹⁰⁸ Jonathan Pennington. *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*. p. 35.

¹⁰⁹ Emphasis mine. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p.18.

¹¹⁰ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey's Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 9.

¹¹¹ Emphasis Mine. Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey's Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 8.

Despite the widespread misconception to the contrary, the Kingdom of God is not a reference to heaven, *nor to the afterlife*... Heaven is the place from which we expect Christ to return—to earth, so that He will never again live in heaven, but forever among redeemed men upon a renewed earth. But the Kingdom of God is not identified with heaven in scripture. It is something else. The Kingdom of God is said to be on earth. Heaven is not on earth, and is regularly distinguished from it... The confusion of the Kingdom of God with heaven is a result of a common misapprehension among Christians that the main reason Jesus came to earth is to get as many of us as possible out of this world and into a happy sky palace for all eternity.¹¹²

Rather than properly representing what I wrote, he has chosen rather to question either my intelligence or my honesty (something he later says he would never do).¹¹³ To clear the record, here is what I actually said about Gregg's view of 2 Timothy 4:18:

Gregg notes 2 Timothy 4:18, and acknowledges that "heavenly kingdom" in that passage may be a reference to "the fact that the Kingdom over which Christ reigns encompasses both heaven and earth," but he downplays that possibility by stating that Paul's usages of "heavenly" may signify "that which has its origins in heaven."¹¹⁴ Perhaps that argument effectively convinces some that the consummated kingdom will exist on the refurbished earth through heavenly origin, but I remain unconvinced... I do not deny that "heavenly" can, and at times does mean heavenly origin, but context must determine how the term is used. Gregg makes a concerted effort to rid the Bible of any hint of an afterlife spent in heaven to propagate his views of the Kingdom and Refurbished Earth.¹¹⁵

I stand by my original statement. Though 2 Timothy 4:18 does connect the earthy kingdom with heaven in its consummated state, Gregg categorically rejects this concept:

It seems, from the way his review proceeds, that he quite simply objects to my pointing out the fact that the earth is man's appointed abode, while Battey prefers to think of that abode as being in heaven. Unfortunately, the scriptures do not accommodate our preferences. If wishes were horses, beggars would ride.¹¹⁶

Through a cute usage of rhetorical flare, Gregg makes a sweeping assertion and then proceeds to ignore more passages and arguments that were set forth.

¹¹² Emphasis Mine. Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 14-15.

¹¹³ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey's Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 10.

¹¹⁴ Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 15-17.

¹¹⁵ Nathan Battey. *A Toxic View of the Kingdom*. p. 11.

¹¹⁶ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey's Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 9.

While Gregg does acknowledge the universal reign of God on one hand, he distorts the issue by drawing a distinction between the universal reign of God and the coming of the Kingdom on the day of Pentecost:

This universal rule did not begin at that time (since the Old Testament repeatedly declares it to be eternally true in pre-Christian times, and at all times). That concept is not the subject of the Gospel preached by Jesus, and announced by John the Baptist and the apostles. If that was the Kingdom preached by Jesus, no Jew would have rejected the message, since no Jews doubted that God reigns over the universe.¹¹⁷

Though I do not argue that the universal rule (kingdom) of God began on the day of Pentecost (it merely entered a new phase), to argue that the Jews would not have rejected the universal reign of Christ contradicts the biblical fact that they did. Since Jesus was given universal power to reign over heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18), and yet the Jews rejected His rule, they did in fact reject the universal reign of God. The position that the Jewish leaders once held within God's kingdom was stripped from them and given to the apostles (Matthew 21:43; 19:28). The Olive tree that represents God's people (the "Remnant") in the Old Testament was not cut down, but rather had its natural branches broken off and wild branches grafted in (Romans 11:11-24). The kingdom of God thus entered a new phase through renewal and restoration on the day of Pentecost. God did not replace one version of His kingdom with another, but rather restored the kingdom that already was. This is not to say that at any point God ceased reigning; it is an affirmation that God's reign was reasserted in a new manner on the Day of Pentecost.¹¹⁸

The Church and the Work of the Holy Spirit

In this next to last section of Gregg's response, the majority of Gregg's complaints are that I am "preaching to the choir" (which I readily confess – this was the purpose of my entire article), that I stand on the "fringes of historic Christian belief," and that my views are therefore "cult like."

Gregg quibbles over my usage of "organized" vs. "institutional" labels when speaking of which type of churches he disdains, but his complaints are baseless as they do not take into account how my "choir" and I use the terms.¹¹⁹ I used the term "organized" rather than "institutionalized" because of the long-standing disagreement that exists within churches of Christ over institutionalism (whether or not it is Scriptural to build para-church organizations to do the work of the church for the church). What Gregg refers to as "institutional churches" is what I mean when I referenced "organized churches." Gregg freely admitted:

¹¹⁷ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey's Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 9.

¹¹⁸ For more information about the renewal of the Kingdom see: Jim McGuiggan. *Reign of God*. International Biblical Resources. 1979.

¹¹⁹ It should also be noted by readers that Gregg uses the term "organized church" only once in his book and it is unclear what he meant when he used it. See: *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 32.

He is quite correct that I am critical of the latter,¹²⁰ but have never uttered a word against the former—in which I regularly participate.

Let that statement sink in for a moment. Here is a preacher who freely admits that he is critical (and I would say highly critical) of all “institutional” churches – including churches of Christ. Though Gregg believes that there are saved people in every church, he does not believe that any single “visible church” is the True Church. Gregg is in agreement with John Bright and quotes:

“The Church is indeed the people of the Kingdom of Christ, *but the visible church is not that Kingdom.*”¹²¹

Later he doubled down on that statement:

However, the composition of the True Church has never been identical to that of the Institutional churches.¹²²

Why does he have such disdain for “institutional” churches? Maybe this quote from his “Statement of Faith” on his website will help answer the question:

I believe in the unity of the whole church of the living God, which is God’s family, Christ’s Body and the Holy Spirit’s habitation among men. I believe that I should receive as brethren all who sincerely embrace Christ as Lord. I believe there is no valid reason to divide the church institutionally into separate fellowships defined by differences in particular theological convictions, much less by loyalties to men or systems of thought. I believe that to define the fellowship of the saints more narrowly than God does is sin.¹²³

Finally, in order to justify his participation in what he labels “organized churches”, he states:

What ever became of “*Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*” (Matt.18:20)? Generally, a gathering involving two, three, or more people does not happen unless it is in some sense planned or organized (though, of course, there may be times when such gatherings materialize spontaneously). To say God has no relationship with such a gathering is to deny this promise of Christ.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ This being what he labels “institutional churches” and what I have dedicated “organized churches.”

¹²¹ Emphasis mine. Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 31.

¹²² Steve Gregg. *Empire of the Risen Son*. p. 276.

¹²³ Steve Gregg. 2012. *Statement of Faith*. The Narrow Path.

https://www.thenarrowpath.com/statement_of_faith.php

¹²⁴ Steve Gregg. *A Response to Nathan Battey’s Toxic Review of my Book*. p. 13.

The problem with Gregg's argument is that Matthew 18:20 has a context and cannot be divorced from that context and made into a universal statement that applies to all people at all times.¹²⁵ Matthew 18:20 is a statement about God's support of the two or three true witnesses who bring testimony in cases of personal dispute. It does not teach that any two or three people gathered together in His name constitutes a church, or that all such groups constitute a faithful church (as Gregg himself must admit since all institutional churches that he disdains and claims are not the "True Church" would fit this criterion). Rather than ripping Matthew 18:20 out of context, Gregg will have to find some actual authority for his "organized" home church system.

In Conclusion:

Gregg's own personal assessment captures well my assessment of Gregg opposite his own and that of some within the church:

Some would, no doubt, conclude (on the basis of all of these confessed changes in my theology) that I am theologically unstable, "tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine." Actually, since the mid-seventies, there has been no "to-and-fro-ness" about it. I have not gone back-and-forth in my beliefs. Rather, it has been a linear development. Each change I have made has been precipitated by the previous ones, and has been a necessary advance encouraged by those that preceded them. Personally, of course, I regard the sum of these shifts as "growth" and "progress." I do not expect all who read this to agree with me in this assessment.¹²⁶

I am greatly concerned that some within the church have embraced Gregg's progressive views and pray that they will re-examine them in light of Scripture. May peace prevail and truth will triumph.

I close with the words of Ezekiel:

If I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way, he shall die for his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul. Again, if a righteous person turns from his righteousness and commits injustice, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die. Because you have not warned him, he shall die for his sin, and his righteous deeds that he has done shall not be

¹²⁵ For further discussion of this point see: Aaron Battey. Where Two or Three Are Gathered Together. YouTube. 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UvBoizUkCNY>

¹²⁶ Steve Gregg. 2012. The Biography of Steve Gregg. The Narrow Path. March 10, 2023. <https://www.thenarrowpath.com/biography.php>

remembered, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the righteous person not to sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because he took warning, and you will have delivered your soul.” (Ezekiel 3:18-21)

A response to Nathan Battey's Toxic Review of my Book, *Empire of the Risen Son, Book One*
By Steve Gregg

In the two years following the publication of my two-volume treatise on the Kingdom of God, I have seen surprisingly little in the way of negative criticism of the work. On Amazon, out of hundreds of customer responses, there are a very few low ratings for either of the two books—and no negative reviews, other than one, whose review was comprised of a single word: “Trash.” The title of the review was much longer than the review itself, and read: “*Replacement theologians are blind to history of Israel.*” While I cannot be surprised that, in the wide world of readership, at least one person would esteem the book as “Trash,” yet the title of the review is clearly not an assessment of the book itself, since the contents of the book are filled with a complete review of the biblical history of Israel, concerning which the critic assumes I am ignorant..

I have just been notified, however, of a very lengthy, and very negative, review of the first volume in this set. The reviewer found the first volume so offensive that he said he could not bring himself to read the second volume. It's just as well. Those who dislike the first book will probably find as much (or more?) to object to in the second.

Given the theological position expressed in my two volumes, I assumed I would get some backlash, primarily, from Dispensationalists (a backlash which I have not yet encountered, other than in the form of that single-word “review” cited above).

This more-recent, longer, critical response came from a writer who shares my criticisms of Dispensationalism, and sees this aspect as one of the few redeeming points in my work—the remainder of which he sees as misguided and dangerous. To be precise, the review is entitled, “*A Toxic View of the Kingdom.*”

The reviewer is named Nathan Battey, and apparent belongs to one branch or another of the Churches of Christ. This is the more surprising since, while I am not a member of the Church of Christ movement, it is often people from this movement with whom I seem to share more in common than with most other denominations. Battey recognizes this affinity that many Churches of Christ have to my materials, but he sees this as something alarming. His 44-page review can be read at this link: <https://www.christianresearcher.com>. His review begins thus:

In 2021, Steve Gregg authored *Empire of the Risen Son*, and about a year later his book started making its way into our brotherhood. *Empire of the Risen Son* is now being widely read by brethren and several are praising Gregg for his openness, honesty, clarity, and general ability to exposit Scripture. Over the past six months his book has been recommended to me by several brothers in the church and a preacher. Others have told me that they are reading it or want to read it soon based on similar recommendations. One brother called it a must read, and another went so far as to say that he had never understood the concept of the Kingdom until Gregg made it clear for them. One preacher told me Steve Gregg is now his favorite writer and recommended that I check out Gregg's YouTube videos to find other helpful materials. The same preacher told me that Gregg agreed with churches of Christ on the Kingdom and eschatology (matters pertaining to the end times) and that he was very close to us when it came to matters of soteriology (salvation). Regarding eschatology, I was told that Gregg is an Amillennialist and Partial-Preterist who viewed the prophecy and the Book of Revelation similar to myself and my father. Concerning salvation, Gregg was said to be opposed to Calvinism, and an advocate of free will and obedience. A different brother said that Gregg advocated baptism and appeared to be close to churches of Christ on the subject. All-in-all Gregg was described as being a rather remarkable guy with conservative views that were similar to those within churches of Christ.

Battey goes on to say that he decided he should read these books, and, to his chagrin he found:

Empire of the Risen Son is a truly awful book, that I would never recommend to anyone for the sake of learning more about God's Word. I am baffled that so many have found it helpful and are

recommending it. As I read through the book I kept waiting for it to get better, but it only got worse. I had to force myself to finish the first volume and must confess that I cannot bring myself to read the second. The fact is, Steve Gregg does not understand the concept of the Kingdom, he is wrong about the end times, and he is not close to churches of Christ when it comes to matters of salvation.

The literary sins that Battey believes he has found in my book are then listed right up front:

Gregg frequently speaks out of both sides of his mouth, pens contradicting statements, abuses the contextual meaning of Scripture, and asserts both radical and imaginative conclusions. Gregg believes that there are saved people in all churches and that no single church represents God's true church on earth. He speaks disparagingly of all organized churches while advocating that God's relationship is exclusively with the universal church and the individual Christian... Gregg advocates the false doctrines of direct operation of the Holy Spirit in the salvation of mankind, the illumination of the Spirit, and the continuation of miraculous power throughout the Christian era.

As I read the review, I found that it does not raise such objections as I would expect to concern the majority of Christians. The objections raised would resonate, mainly, with those who think that theirs is the one true Christian church in the world, and is thus the standard by which all doctrine must be measured. This is the belief of many in the denomination called "The Church of Christ" (a fellowship that grew from the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement of the 19th century). I really do have much in common with this group—chiefly that I am not a Calvinist, nor Dispensationalist. On these points they stand in agreement with me, though not on a number of others—for example Cessationism, which they insist upon and which I deny. I could have avoided this brother's criticism if I did not believe that the Bible, rather than any given denomination, is the ultimate source of truth to which Christian beliefs must conform. Battey often mentions that the views expressed in my book, on many points, are not those of the Churches of Christ. This should be unsurprising, since many of the views found in the majority of Christian books do not conform to the norms within that denomination—and I was not writing with a mind to represent their views particularly.

I have some very fine friends and brothers in the Churches of Christ, who do not exhibit any of the attitudes that have led many outside the movement to view it as a cult. There have been cultic elements within the movement—not so much in its theology as in the attitudes some members and leaders in the movement. Some in the movement recognize only those of their group as true Christians. In fact, one of the earliest specific criticisms of my book that Battey provides is his objection to my believing "that there are saved people in all churches, and that no single church represents God's true church on earth." Later, he refers to his denomination, in contrast to others, as "the Lord's Church" (p.20). Since this idea is at the very root of Battey's critical review (the same criticism that every cult would raise about the beliefs of outsiders), I must view the whole of his criticism through this lens.

To be specific, Battey very much dislikes my views about baptism (which are about as close to the position of the Churches of Christ as one can get without actually being in that camp); about the Holy Spirit (including the continuing work in the conversion, guidance and empowering of believers—all of which he seems to deny); and about various aspects of my eschatology—which he mislabels as Postmillennialism. In particular, he is offended by my asserting that the purposes of God in Christ are to have an earthly fulfillment, and that heaven is nowhere stated to be an eternal destiny for the believer.

Like myself, the Churches of Christ are Amillennial. However, Battey denies that I am Amillennial and repeatedly insists that I am Postmillennial. For 45 years I have identified as an "optimistic Amillennialist," but Battey apparently believes that Amillennialism must only be allowed to exist in a pessimistic variety, and that any optimism about the power of the Gospel is the unique province of Postmillennialists.

There is a somewhat humorous irony in this criticism, because Battey also repeatedly says that I “talk out of both sides of [my] mouth” and often “contradict” myself. These “contradictions” are documented by his citation of passages from my book where I actually state my disagreements with Postmillennialism. So, the contradiction, apparently, is that *he* calls me a Postmillennialist, while I make many statements showing that I am not a Postmillennialist.

Like myself, the Churches of Christ are anti-Calvinist. While mentioning that I am not a Calvinist, Battey wishes to paint me as, nonetheless, a promoter of Calvinist doctrines. He writes:

“[Steve Gregg] still believes in the doctrine of Total Depravity and therefore views a direct operation of the Spirit as necessary to transform a sinner’s nature.” (p.17)

“What you have just read [in a series of citations from my book] are clear expressions of the doctrine of Irresistible Grace.” (p.18)

“Though Gregg is not a Calvinist, Calvinists would fully embrace his teaching on the Holy Spirit.” (p.19)

“Don’t let anyone fool you: Gregg believes in full-fledged Irresistible Grace and Total Depravity.” (p.19)

“[Gregg] also advocates their Once-Saved-Always-Saved doctrine.” (p.21)

It is remarkable to hear that I believe such views as I consistently refute whenever discussing them. In *Empire of the Risen Son*, I do not discuss them at all. Battey intersperses citations from the book to document these accusations, but the citations contain nothing that would establish or hint at these Calvinistic doctrines. Battey knows and admits that I am not a Calvinist, so I am not sure why he (uncharitably?) reads these doctrines into passages that do not affirm them. If he thinks I believe Calvinistic doctrine, why say I am not a Calvinist? What is it that makes a person a Calvinist, if it is not his or her belief in Calvinistic doctrines? It would seem that it is he who lapses into cognitive dissonance and contradictory statements.

Additionally, he alleges that I promote “annihilationism” (i.e., Conditional Immortality). He alludes to my book on hell (with which, I must assume, he is unfamiliar) when he writes of “another book Gregg has written on the topic of hell, wherein Gregg attacks the traditional view of hell in favor of Conditional Immortality (a fancy term for Annihilationism).” (p.22)

Since the reviewer is unfamiliar with anything I have said or written, other than the first volume of *Empire of the Risen Son*, I cannot blame him for not knowing what I believe on subjects which are not discussed in that volume. The problem is that he writes as if he actually *does* know such things. Those who have read my book on hell, or have heard my lectures on the subject, will know that, while I am critical of the traditional doctrine, I have not embraced or advocated either of the alternative views. I have never—whether in print, private conversation, or my secret thoughts—championed Conditional Immortality, though I have always said clearly that it is one of two alternatives which I consider to have respectable scriptural cases in their favor.

Now, I don’t object to people disliking, or refuting, positions that I actually hold. However, when a reviewer of my work mistakes and misrepresents entirely what my views actually are, I must assume either that I am a very poor communicator, or that my critic is so incensed with me that he does not think my actual statements to be worthy of honest consideration or correct representation..

It seems clear that Nathan Battey did not read far into my book before he determined that it contained nothing of value, and so he began to read every statement through a predetermined unwillingness to hear what I actually have to say in the book. But what could possibly have been the cause of this initial offense? He makes it clear that, prior to reading the book, he had already become

alarmed in hearing from some of his friends who had read it and had affirmed ideas learned from it which disagreed with his own denominational perspective. He writes, "The main reason I read Gregg's book was because it received rave reviews for his presentation of Postmillennialism" (p.25).

It is clear that Battey is very devoted to the doctrinal distinctives of his particular movement, and that every disagreement with that movement is seen as something to be treated as a threat. He is further alarmed to know that many within his movement have found something substantial and beneficial in my book, which he seems to feel obligated to undermine at any cost.

The specific differences between my theology and his, judging from his criticisms in the review, would seem to be:

- 1) That I believe that justification by faith occurs prior to water baptism (as, for example, in the cases of Abraham, David, the Old Testament saints, the thief on the cross, Cornelius' household, etc.);
- 2) That I affirm the essential continuing work of the Holy Spirit in the Church even after the Apostolic Age;
- 3) That I believe the venue of the eternal state of the redeemed to be upon a renewed earth; and
- 4) That I am optimistic about the power of the Gospel to leaven the world, as per the teachings of Christ, the prophets, and the apostles.

While I do, in fact, stand across the aisle from the Churches of Christ on some of these points, I am not sure what there is about any of these views that renders my theology "*Toxic*." This descriptor suggests that the embrace of such views as are found in my book would result in the compromised health or well-being of the Church, or of individuals who believe this theology. While I find a lot of misrepresentation, and a lot of what seems to be nit-picking criticism in this 44-page review, Battey's case for describing this as a "*Toxic View of the Kingdom*" seems to have eluded me completely in my reading of his review. I might, and often do, critique another man's theology as "faulty" without accusing it of posing any serious danger to those who believe it.

If I were to describe a theological position as "toxic," I would feel obligated to point out wherein lies its toxicity. The only view of the Kingdom that my book promotes is that Jesus has been given by the Father absolute lordship over all things, and that all people are expected to obey Him as King. Now, I can see someone like Battey saying, "*I see and define the kingdom differently from this*"—and then attempting to demonstrate the errors in my view. However, to describe the view as poisonous seems to imply that he sees some specific danger coming upon any who might adopt such a viewpoint. The specific identification of such a danger in his review is conspicuous only by its absence.

The above is my essential response to Nathan Battey's review of my book. I have addressed what seems to be the core of his objections. However, for those who have read his review and might wonder about the status of what I have labeled "nit-picking" objections, I will address a few of them here.

Battey writes: "Gregg...abuses the contextual meaning of Scripture, and asserts both radical and imaginative conclusions" (p.2). Those reading the review, but not having read the book, might wonder what specific literary and exegetical sins in the book might fall into these categories. I suspect that, in the usage of the reviewer, the adjective "radical" might be meant to mean "*things considerably different from the ideas that I have heard or would endorse*," and "imaginative" probably has the same meaning. But the use of these adjectives gives the impression that wild and

unsubstantiated ideas are presented in the book. One would certainly not get the idea from the review that the book, in fact, presents nothing outside the mainstream of classic, Protestant theology without laboring exegetically to demonstrate any such points. While speaking agreeably with the mainstream views of Protestantism—e.g., doctrines like justification by faith, and the essential role of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life—I may indeed disagree with some of the special distinctives of the Churches of Christ. Yet, such doctrines hardly qualify as “radical” or “imaginative” in terms of mainstream Church history.

I suspect that prime examples of what Battey regards as “imaginative” exegesis are represented in some of the examples found in his review, which I will answer presently. The main point I would make is that it is often to the credit of exegetes that they can think outside their traditional boxes (i.e., *imaginatively*) with regard to certain passages where sound exegesis has often been sparse.

In the beginning of his review, Battey cites “The Top 21” of what he describes as (from his point of view) “the worst quotes from the book” (p.3). It is no testament to his careful reading that one of the quotes he cites is a statement in which I am quoting the words of an atheist, and another of the 21 is my citation of another scholar, with whom I do not agree, and whose statement I afterward critique. The reviewer apparently did not notice this, and simply quoted the words of these men as if I had originated them and was affirming them.

Example #1

Assessment of the period of Judges

The first of the 21 quotes provided as among the “worst from the book” is my statement from pages 55-56 of my book:

A common refrain in the Book of Judges reminds us that “In those days there was no king in Israel” – sometimes adding, “and everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” In modern preaching, it is common to hear this described as a bad arrangement. “When everyone does what is right in his own eyes, there is moral chaos”—so goes the familiar commentary. This is true, when the thing that is “right” in a man’s eyes is contrary to what is “right” in God’s eyes. However, Israel had the *Torah—God’s Law*—to teach them what is right in God’s eyes. It seems that, for most of the period described in Judges, what is right in God’s sight was what was deemed right in the people’s eyes as well... Freedom to follow one’s own conscience in the fear of God is the highest biblical standard.

Battey objects to this paragraph but does nothing to refute it—since nothing in it could be refuted and it is comprised of mere statements of fact. He refers to this as a “ridiculous analysis of Scripture”—a phrase that apparently means “*a viewpoint I have never seriously considered.*”

My discussion of Judges (pp.55-59) is thorough and irrefutable (and he does not attempt to refute any point in it), but Battey, like most preachers, can only ridicule what apparently challenges a favorite preaching point of his and of his fellow preachers. He even has a sarcastic and misleading footnote that reads: “Never mind the fact that the idea of doing right in one’s own eyes is a negative concept throughout Scripture – see Deut. 12:8; Prov. 3:7; 12:15; 16:2; 21:2; 26:12; 30:12; Is. 5:21.”

In looking up the eight scriptures in this list, one finds that:

- 1) Half of them do not even contain the expression under consideration (Prov. 3:7; 26:12; 30:12; Isa.5:21);
- 2) Two of them use the term “wise in his [or your] own eyes”—which, of course, has an expression very different meaning (Prov. 3:7; 26:12); and
- 3) The remaining verses that actually use the phrase do not use it in a necessarily negative sense (Deut. 12:8; Pr. 12:15; 16:2; 21:2).

Deut.12:8 is specifically saying (in the context of where an Israelite might properly eat the meat of his sacrifices) that, during the wilderness wanderings, the place of eating such meals was left to the individual's discretion ("whatever is right in his own eyes"), but this would have to be restricted to a specific place of God's choosing after the conquest of Canaan (see vv.6-12). This phrase does not speak of something negative, but of a difference between the broader liberty in this matter that was allowed in the wilderness and that new arrangements pertaining to life in Canaan.

The three Proverbs cited (12:15; 16:2; 21:2) simply say that what is right in one's own eyes may or may not agree with the judgments of God, the latter being the more consequential. If one's personal convictions happen to be in agreement with God's laws, then it is good—if not, then it is very bad—for a man to do what is "right in his own eyes."

For example, murder is an act that is wrong in the eyes of most men. Is it also wrong in God's eyes. In this matter, then, because of such agreement between a man and God, it is no problem for the man to act according to his convictions, because what is right in his own eyes is also right in God's eyes. In my eyes, lying, slandering, lewdness, and many other things are not right. Nor are they right in God's eyes. If I do what is right in my eyes (instead of what is right in someone else's eyes) when God and I are thus in agreement, then this is not a bad thing.

In the passage from my book cited by Battey, I specifically made this point: "It seems that, for most of the period described in Judges, what is right in God's sight was what was deemed right in the people's eyes as well." I justified this statement by demonstrating (in a footnote) that, according to the tally of years in Judges, Israel, while doing what was "right in their own eyes," were obedient to God's law a total of 340 years—three times the number of their 114 years of disobedience. That is the largest percentage of years of obedience of any recorded period prior to the exile.

Battey gets stuck on the non-statistical instincts that guide most readers of Judges, and he ridicules the facts I presented, scolding: "I do not recall ever reading a more ridiculous analysis of Scripture than Gregg's assessment of Judges. Any man who can declare that Civil War, repeated subjugation, rampant idolatry, and moral depravity form a picture of things going smoothly needs to have their sanity and agenda checked" (p.16).

Any man who does think such things does indeed need to have his sanity checked. And perhaps the same can be said of any man who believes I am that man. If Nathan Battey had wished to read my statements with reasonable objectivity, and without a default hostility, he would have noticed that I never indicated that the period of Judges had no seasons of evil within it—only that it had far less of such behavior (and for briefer periods) than was practiced during the period of the Monarchy—most of which was characterized by uninterrupted idolatry and immorality. In those years, there was a king in Israel, and no one was permitted to do what was "right in his own eyes"—only what was "right in the eyes" of the corrupt monarchs.

Though Battey did not single this statement out, the only part of the citation from my book which might seem to require a defense would be my assertion that "Freedom to follow one's own conscience in the fear of God is the highest biblical standard." If this is taken as an absolute, without regard to the context in which it occurs, this might well be objected to, since the absolute highest standard in scripture would be for all people to obey God at all times—something that has never occurred in any era.

Anyone actually reading my book with an interest in understanding my points, however, would see that I was contrasting two alternative means of God's governing of Israel—contrasting the idea of monarchy with the policies of the period of Judges. It is obvious that God preferred to allow His people to follow their own consciences, informed by His laws (as was the case in the period of Judges) rather than for them to be forced to do what is right in the sight of evil tyrants (as in the Monarchy)—who often quashed the freedom to do what was right, enforced idolatry, and killed God's prophets.

The statement "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (sometimes for better, sometimes for worse) described God's ordained means of Israel's being governed—and, whenever mentioned, is always

contrasted with there being kings in Israel (which was almost always bad). The fact that Israel opted to go with the Monarchy, instead of the arrangement where everyone did what was right in his own eyes, clearly was a choice that displeased God (1 Sam.8:7; Hos.13:11). Of course, Battey (like anyone else who reads the Bible) must admit all of these facts to be true—which makes it the more peculiar that he chose to attack such a common sense summary as “ridiculous.”

Example #2

In my Father's house are many mansions...

Battey was so offended by my view of John 14:1ff that he wrote another whole article against it. The only thing lacking in that article was anything that sufficiently refuted any of my exegesis. I believe his objection to my view of this passage was that he (like very many others) have always seen this as a principal passages assuring us of heaven in the next life. Remember, this is one of Battey's primary (and, seemingly, most emotional) objections to my eschatology.

Example #3

Man's eternal destiny on the new earth, not heaven

Battey complains:

Gregg goes on to claim that the purpose of humanity is to dwell forever on earth – not heaven – and seizes the opportunity to introduce his idea of the Refurbished Earth. Such claims must be proven rather than asserted. A curious question for Gregg would be: If Adam's purpose was to eternally dwell on earth, why did God appoint Jesus as the New Adam (1 Corinthians 15:22), the perfect image of God (Genesis 1:26; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:4), and then take the New Adam away to heaven in the same manner that he took Enoch (Genesis 5:24) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:11)? Why didn't the Man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5) dwell forever on the earth in order to accomplish what the first Adam was appointed and failed to do? If man was not meant to escape earth to heaven, why did the Ultimate Man escape earth to heaven? (p.10)

Battey presents a number of rhetorical questions in rapid succession, which he apparently thinks would be difficult for someone to answer scripturally from my position. It is not clear to me how any of these questions would be viewed as presenting a challenge to my statements.

The main concern ought to be whether my statement is true and agreeable with the whole of the scriptural narrative. We do find, at the beginning, God making earth to be man's habitation, and placing in it a tree which would confer eternal continuance of life to the obedient eater. We also see that God did not wish for man to sin, meaning it was God's will for people not to die, but to eat of the tree of life and live forever. Had man done the will of God, physical death would never have occurred and there would be no occasion to speak of going to heaven after death. Earth would have been man's eternal home—just as it was designed to be.

When we come to the end of the Bible, after God has put all enemies under His feet and restored the pristine conditions that prevailed before the fall, we find conditions reminiscent of the Garden in a beautiful city (Rev.21). We find the removal of the effects of the curse. In a renewed creation (Rom.8:20-22; Rev.22:3). The city of Jerusalem is not seen as remaining in heaven, but descending from heaven (Rev.21:10). Since heaven, in that vision, is distinguished from earth (Rev.21:1), and no realms other than heaven and earth are mentioned, it seems there is nowhere to which something might descend *from* heaven other than *to* earth.

Add to this the affirmative declarations that Christ, as Abraham's Seed, will inherit “the ends of the earth” (Ps.2:8), will “have dominion also from sea to sea...from the River to the ends of the earth,” and will be the “heir of the world” (Rom.4:13), along with the meek (Matt.5:5), and we have a

pretty complete picture. To argue that the new earth will not be our eternal home would require some clear contrary statement of scripture—something entirely unavailable.

If Battey really wants to know the answers to all the rhetorical questions presented above, he may learn the answer from pages 100 through 109 in the book he ostensibly reviewed.

Example #4

The terms “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of heaven”

This one is a strange one. Battey writes: “Gregg...tries to draw a strong distinction between the Kingdom on earth and God in heaven” (p.11). It is not clear to what Battey here refers. He has just cited a paragraph from my book in which I pointed out that the term “Kingdom of Heaven” is not a synonym for “heaven.” I go on to say that this term is, rather, a synonym for the “Kingdom of God.” Neither term is describing heaven. I am not sure how this is seen as making a distinction between God in heaven and His kingdom on earth. I nowhere labor to make any such distinction, and am not sure why anyone would find fault with such a distinction if it were to be asserted. Isn’t there a distinction between God Himself and His Kingdom?

What Battey is actually disagreeing with seems to be that I deny any distinction between the concepts of the “Kingdom of Heaven” and the “Kingdom of God.” I do mention (and Battey does not deny) that the former term is found only in Matthew. The reviewer then incorrectly says, “[Gregg] asserts that the reason Matthew prefers ‘Kingdom of Heaven’ over ‘Kingdom of God’ is because Matthew, being a good Jew, has an aversion to utter the name God” (p.12).

Actually, I did not say this about Matthew, and I do not believe this. What I did say was that Matthew writes to Jews, and therefore comfortably preserves the Jewish idiom of “heaven” to replace the word “God” on the occasions when Jesus Himself made such substitutions. By contrast, the other evangelists, in writing to Gentiles, paraphrased Jesus, substituting His Hebraism, “*Kingdom of Heaven*,” whenever He used it, with the equivalent, “*Kingdom of God*,” in their records.

Battey acknowledges that the Jews sometimes substituted the word “heaven” for “God,” as I also affirm in my book, though he wants us to know that the Jews did not practice this device out of great reverence for *Hashem* (“the Name”), as I indicated. How he would know this would be interesting to learn—but our differences, on this particular, are irrelevant to the point of concern, since we both recognize the fact that “heaven” is often used as a substitute, in Jewish usage, for the name of God.

Battey’s objection (pp.12-13) seems to be that I, like the evangelists, completely identify the two terms for the Kingdom as being fully interchangeable. I assume he objects to this because he wants to retain some different range of meaning for one term vis-à-vis the other—which biblical evidence, unfortunately, does not allow. My book points out the parallel usage of the two terms in the various Gospels, and even in Matthew 19:23-24, demonstrating beyond reasonable doubt that they are used as synonyms.

It seems that Battey mostly dislikes my emphasizing the earthly career of the Kingdom at the expense of the heavenly. He writes: “Again, neither brethren nor I equate the Kingdom exclusively with heaven, though some of us still teach that the Kingdom includes the heavenly realm” (p.11) and he then, wrongly, claims, “Gregg makes a concerted effort to rid the bible [*Sic.*] of any hint of an afterlife spent in heaven to propagate his views of the Kingdom and Refurbished Earth” (p.12). On the same point, Battey also writes:

“While I am sure many people in the world believe that the Kingdom of God is merely a promise of heaven, such is not the case within churches of Christ. We do not believe that the promise of the Kingdom is merely a promise of eternal life in heaven, though the majority of us do believe that when the Kingdom is consummated God’s Kingdom will dwell with him in heaven. It is one thing to deny that that

Kingdom of God = Heaven and another thing to advocate that the heavenly realm has nothing to do with the Kingdom” (p.10).

On page 10, Battey also points out that, in the Old Testament, God’s Kingdom is said to include the concept of His reign over the whole universe (Psalm 103:19; he also gives Dan.4:31, which does not support the point—Daniel 4:3 would have served better).

I deny none of these things, and said as much in my book. On page 21, I wrote: “When Christians die, they do go to heaven, but that is not the thing to which the term ‘Kingdom of God’ generally refers...” In discussing 2 Timothy 4:18, I write: “Paul may be referring to the fact that the Kingdom over which Christ reigns encompasses both heaven and earth. In referring to his inevitable martyrdom, Paul may be anticipating his passing at death from the earthly sphere of Christ’s Kingdom, where he was living, to that Kingdom’s heavenly sphere” (*Ibid.*).

It is clear, then, that only someone who either did not read my book, or who read it only to find what he was determined to find there, could never honestly say that I make “a concerted effort to rid the Bible of any hint of an afterlife spent in heaven,” or that I suggest that “the heavenly realm has nothing to do with the Kingdom.” Why do you suppose an honest reviewer would make such misrepresentations?

It seems, from the way his review proceeds, that he quite simply objects to my pointing out the fact that the earth is man’s appointed abode, while Battey prefers to think of that abode as being in heaven. Unfortunately, the scriptures do not accommodate our preferences. If wishes were horses, beggars would ride.

Battey does cite several scriptures (2 Timothy 4:18; 1 Cor.15:50; Heb.11:16), which he says “seem to definitely teach the heavenly realm rather than the heavenly origin of the Kingdom post-mortem” (pp.11f). While I cannot see why anyone would care, one way or the other, whether our eternal life with Jesus were to be spent in heaven or in a perfect world, none of the scriptures Battey provides support the specific point he wishes to document.

Several times, Battey suggests that my treatise is deficient in not acknowledging the universality of God’s reign over heaven and earth. Of course, the book exhibits no such defect. It is the major theme of the book to declare that “*all authority in heaven and in earth*” have been given to Christ—an emphasis repeatedly emphasized in the book (e.g., pp.95-109; 145-165). The purpose of the book is not to discuss the concept of God’s general rule over the universe, which no Christian, to my knowledge, wishes to deny. My book is clearly about the “Kingdom” announced by Christ as having arrived in His time (Mark 1:15; Matt.12:28; Luke 17:20-21), which is the subject of the Gospel to be preached in all the world (Mat.24:14).

What began with the coming of Jesus was not God’s universal rule over all creation. This universal rule did not begin at that time (since the Old Testament repeatedly declares it to be eternally true in pre-Christian times, and at all times). That concept is not the subject of the Gospel preached by Jesus, and announced by John the Baptist and the apostles. If that was the Kingdom preached by Jesus, no Jew would have rejected the message, since no Jews doubted that God reigns over the universe.

The Kingdom Jesus and the apostles announced was the fulfillment of the special promises of the Messianic Order given through the Old Testament prophets, the “fulfillment” of which Jesus said had “drawn near” when He began to preach (Mark 1:15). This is the Kingdom that my book discusses.

This Messianic Kingdom had a specific arrival time, a beginning point, an earthly footprint, and a destiny. This was the message of the evangelists. God’s general rule over the planetary systems did not begin in the first century A.D., so it is not in that sense that the Gospel speaks of the historical arrival of the Kingdom of God.

The discussion in my book is restricted to the specific Kingdom message that is the subject of the Gospel. The objections of Battey cannot be that I failed to acknowledge God’s larger rule of the universe

(since I did not in any sense deny what all Christians and Jews always knew), but that I did not identify the Messianic Kingdom *specifically* with heaven. My reason for not doing so was that I was bound only to affirm what I find taught in scripture—and this identification of the Kingdom with heaven itself is found nowhere there.

Example #5

The meaning of aionios

Batthey is shocked at hearing the truth about the Greek expressions behind the English words “everlasting” and “eternal.” He writes:

“Gregg even goes so far as to advocate that the phrase “eternal life” is not a reference to immortality,

but means “enduring for an age” [p.282]. He claims that many scholars share his understanding of the word eternal, but fails to cite any lexicons or provide any evidence to prove his claim. You might think such a redefinition of “eternal life” is odd, but it is more than odd: it is pure evil. By redefining “eternal life” to mean “enduring for an age,” Gregg has deceptively changed “eternal punishment” (Matthew 25:41, 46) into Conditional Immortality where the sinner suffers punishment that endures but for “an age.” Herein lies the greatest danger with denying the eternal nature of life in heaven: if heaven is not eternal (2 Corinthians 5:1), then neither is hell.” (p.23)

The irresponsibility of this review is exhibited nowhere so much as in this paragraph. Batthey claims that I have “deceptively changed ‘eternal punishment’...into Conditional Immortality...” Besides the fact that I have never advocated Conditional Immortality, even had I done so, it is gratuitous to declare that I would do so “deceptively.” I can suggest that Batey’s followers may be deceived by the conclusions of his poor biblical scholarship, but I would never suggest that he has said anything “deceptively”—which speaks of a deliberate misleading of his audience.

He complains that I allude to many scholars and lexicons in support of a Greek term’s meaning, but that I name none of them. This is true, since my comment was made in passing, I saw no need to burden the page with such documentation. I assumed the lexical resources are available to anyone who has an interest in looking at them. If my readers are interested in such documentation, my book on hell abundantly provides such details (*Hell: Three Christian Views*, pp.99-109).

Batthey’s statement seems to imply that such scholarly documentation for my statement would be difficult to find. His disparagement of my claim that the word *aionios* means “*enduring for, or pertaining to, an age*” tells us more about him than about me. It demonstrates that he is entirely out of the loop of up-to-date New Testament Greek scholarship (this is not a crime, but is a poor position from which to criticize another’s remarks on the subject).

In the New Testament, the terms “eternal” and “everlasting” are typically an attempt to translate the adjective *aionios*, or its root word *aion*. The latter is the word for an age or era. The adjective speaks of something in some way related to an age or era. Scholars do not agree whether the adjective should be understood as “*enduring for an age*” or “*pertaining to an age*.”

These Greek words are synonymous with the Hebrew *olam* (the word behind the Old Testament use of “forever” and everlasting”). As all lexical authorities acknowledge, *Olam* means “hidden” or speaks of something so distant that its end (if there is one) is beyond the horizon of sight. That which is *olam* may be endless, or not, but its end is not visible from the speaker’s present vantage point.

In scripture, this word can describe the period of time that Jonah was in the fish (Jon.2:6), or that a servant, once having his ear pierced, will serve his master (Ex.21:6). A simple study of usage in the Old Testament will demonstrate that *olam* refers to anything very distant in time, whether in the past or the future. Such a lengthy period may be endless, in some cases, but this is not specifically implied in the word itself. Harris, Archer and Waltke (*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*) write:

The lxx generally translates *olam* by *aion* which has essentially the same range of meaning...neither the Hebrew nor the Greek word in itself contains the idea of endlessness...Both words came to be used to refer to a long period of time.

Among the scholars and lexicons upon which my comments were based (cited in my book on hell) are F.F. Bruce, Gregory K. Beale, Moulton and Milligan, Gerhard Kittel, James Strong, Gesenius, *Vines Complete Expository Dictionary*, *The Complete Word Study Old Testament*, *The Complete Word Study New Testament*, Merrill Unger, Marvin Vincent, *The Rotherham Emphasized Bible*, *Young's Literal Translation*, John Chrysostom. I would think this array of witnesses would suffice to document the point which (as Battey puts it) "*Gregg even goes so far as to advocate!*"

I suspect this is an example of what Battey calls "imaginative conclusions" on my part. It seems to me that, in light of the actual lexical evidence, his denial of my point is that which seems imaginative.

Example #6

Few find the narrow gate

Battey quotes from my book, where I write:

Of course, there is no predetermined limitation that would necessarily preclude everyone eventually becoming part of this society, so that "*the kingdoms of this world*" through the Church's efforts should "*become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.*"

He then comments: "In other words, since it cannot be proven that all men will not be converted, we must assume they will" (p.27).

I find it difficult to discover either this logic, or this conclusion, in any of my remarks—which makes me wonder why Battey would suggest this conclusion could follow from my statement. He continues:

"[Gregg's statement] contradicts the clear teaching of Jesus about the narrow gate (Matthew 7:14) and the few who find it" (*Ibid.*)

This has a footnote attached:

"I am told that Gregg's answer to Matthew 7:14 is that the verse applies to the Jews only. Such an explanation fits within his Preterist perspective, but does not properly deal with the text. Ironically, Greg's website is titled The Narrow Path."

Those who have sought to represent my view of Matthew 7:13-14 to Battey have, no doubt, been well-intentioned, but they did not understand it well enough to avoid his response that my perspective "does not properly deal with the text." I will, therefore, quickly clarify my position in a way that in no way fails to properly deal with any element in the text.

Jesus' statement in these verses has no future-tense verbs, and predicts nothing concerning the future. The verb in verse 13 is in the present passive/middle participle, while the verb in verse 14 is in the present active participle. In other words, Jesus is commenting on what was true in the present as He spoke—saying nothing about what would be true at some future time. He was giving commentary to His disciples on the then-current religious state of Israel, warning them not to follow the masses, who were on the wrong path. He observed that a relatively small number of God's alleged people, in His day, were actually pursuing the path that leads to life.

If we wished to do so, we might argue that this situation actually prevails at all times, and will always be the case—but in so arguing, we are affirming what Jesus nowhere affirms, and making up our own doctrines out of thin air.

According to scripture, there will not always be "few" who find the narrow gate. John saw, "*a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing*

before the throne and before the Lamb..." (Rev.7:9). John is told, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (v.14).

Clearly, if Jesus believed that there would forever be few who would be saved, He was in disagreement with the Book of Revelation. Of course, Jesus had never read the Book of Revelation—but such cannot serve the reviewer as an excuse for being inaccurate.

Example #7

The earth He has given to the sons of men (Ps.115:16)

Batthey wonders (probably rhetorically):

"How can Gregg simultaneously argue that Psalm 115:16 implies earth will be the eternal reward of God's people, and that "no part of the Old Testament focuses on the afterlife...?" (p.39)

He then comments on Psalm 115:16:

"There is absolutely nothing in the passage that remotely hints at an eternal inhabitation of the earth by man. To put it another way, there is no proof for Gregg's position in this alleged proof text. Brethren need to be more careful when reading Gregg and repeating what he has taught without checking to see if it is true."

The advice is good. Batthey would be wise also not to represent what I have taught without checking—to see, first, if I have taught it, and, second, if it is true. On his first comment, by speaking of God's having given mankind the earth (not heaven) as his domain, one is observing, with the Psalm, a historical fact—not a prediction of the end of the world. Thus, this observation does not stand in contrast to the claim that the Old Testament contains little that can unambiguously be applied to the afterlife. No one has represented Psalm 115 as a statement about the afterlife. Strange that Batthey would not see this.

Second, I have never claimed that the passage in question teaches anything at all about eschatology. It speaks of God's purpose exhibited in the past, without commenting on the future. What I have used the passage to establish is that God has given man the earth for his home, which is certainly what the verse affirms, and what Genesis 1-2 demonstrates. If Batthey wishes to present a verse of scripture that suggests that God subsequently changed His mind about where man belongs, that He has revoked this gift, or will do so in the future, I am more than willing to see it. Until then, my position seems very secure..

Example #8

The meaning of apantesis

Batthey quotes my book:

The phrase, "to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:17) employs the Greek verb *apantesis* (to meet), found only twice elsewhere in scripture (Acts 28:15; Matthew 25:1). In every occurrence it speaks of a welcoming delegation going out to greet a visitor as he approaches, in order to accompany him for the remainder of his journey.

Concerning this passage, Batthey comments:

"The problems with this assertion are many. First, rather than providing evidence from linguistic authorities, Gregg chooses to make a wild assertion. Second, Gregg apparently can't count, because

there are four usages of the word, not three (Matthew 25:6; 27:32; Acts 28:15; 1 Thessalonians 4:17).” (p.40).

First of all, the Bible itself is a pretty good linguistic authority providing evidence of how a word it uses was understood. It may not be that *apantesis* can only refer to such a meeting as I described, but it is the case that the New Testament, elsewhere, consistently uses the word strictly with that meaning.

Second, Battey and I have counted differently. I have said there were only three occurrences, but in one of those places, the word appears twice—making a total of four actual occurrences. The list of references I provided is actually complete, except that, in Matthew 25, the same phrase “*to meet the bridegroom*” occurs twice in the same parable (vv.1, 6). I reserve the right to speak of this as a single usage. I consider the identical phrase, found twice in one short story, to be a single usage.

Battey may count differently, but his number is strangely inflated by adding to the list Matthew 27:32, where the word does not appear in any manuscripts of which I am aware. Nor is that verse included in lists I have consulted showing every appearance of *apantesis* in the New Testament. On the other hand, Battey does not mention its occurrence in Matthew 25:1. So, he and I have both omitted one occurrence—me by combining two occurrences found in one parable as a single occurrence, and he by omitting one actual occurrence (Matt.25:1) and adding a verse where the word is not even found (Matt.27:32). I am not sure which of us is the more guilty of sloppy counting—but his way would seem to demand greater justification.

If this is one of his examples of my “radical” or “imaginative” interpretation, I would say it does not require any imagination at all to recognize that a word, which is found four times and is thrice used to speak of a welcoming committee, may be found to bear the same meaning in its fourth occurrence as well.

Battey challenges the view that Jesus will actually return all the way to earth. This seems to require a denial of my asserted meaning of *apantesis*. We, apparently, are not meeting Christ as He comes back, but, rather, He is meeting us as we leave for heaven. However, such a challenge raises problematic questions, like, *If Jesus is not coming back to earth at all, why leave His seat in heaven at all? Why not just summons us to come to where He already is?*

The Church and the Working of the Holy Spirit

Battey writes: “[Gregg] speaks disparagingly of all organized churches while advocating that God’s relationship is exclusively with the universal church and the individual Christian” (p.2). I suspect that this reviewer does not know the difference between an “organized” church and an “institutional” church. He is quite correct that I am critical of the latter, but have never uttered a word against the former—in which I regularly participate.

Nothing I have ever said would justify the conclusion that “God’s relationship is exclusively with the universal church and the individual Christian.” What ever became of “*Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*” (Matt.18:20)? Generally, a gathering involving two, three, or more people does not happen unless it is in some sense planned or organized (though, of course, there may be times when such gatherings materialize spontaneously). To say God has no relationship with such a gathering is to deny this promise of Christ. This is why I would never say any such thing—so why does Battey wish to misrepresent me as doing so? It is clear that he objects strenuously to my denial that any one church is uniquely identified with the Kingdom of God—apparently only because it prevents him from asserting that his church (alone) is identified with the Kingdom. Battey would almost certainly agree with me had I said the same things only about the other denominations.

Later, in the same paragraph, Battey adds that “Gregg advocates the false doctrines of direct operation of the Holy Spirit in the salvation of mankind, the illumination of the Spirit, and the continuation of miraculous power throughout the Christian era.”

Here, Battey takes my views on the Holy Spirit to task, calling them “false doctrines,” even though they represent the views of Christians from the earliest centuries. I am not familiar with the views of Battey’s group on the working of the Holy Spirit. On this point, he is consciously “preaching to the choir,” since He fully expects his readers to know the group’s unique position. He nowhere lays it out, and only believes I am wrong in affirming the following, comparatively uncontroversial, facts:

- 1) That it is the Spirit who convicts the world to embrace Christ (John 16:7-8);
- 2) That the Holy Spirit alone regenerates the one who is “born of the Spirit” (John 3:5);
- 3) That Christ and the apostles were not able to carry out their campaigns without the empowerment of the Spirit, and we are no better than they (John 15:5; Acts 1:8);
- 4) That not only the apostles, but all Christians are given the Spirit of Christ (Rom.8:9; 1 John 3:24; 4:13);
- 5) That the normal Christian life is to walk empowered by the Holy Spirit (Rom.8:4; Gal.5:16)
- 6) That no biblical reason can be found to limit the continued biblical functioning of the Holy Spirit to the apostolic age (1 Cor.1:7; Eph.4:11-13).

While not all Christians would share all of my convictions on this subject, there is nothing “radical” or “imaginative”—nor particularly unusual—about any of these beliefs. I am pretty sure that the first five points would not even be regarded to be controversial outside the little group called the Churches of Christ.

As for the sixth point, it is controversial in some circles, but seems only to have become so with the introduction of Calvinism in the 16th century and with Calvin’s invention of “Cessationism.” Such a view is taught nowhere in scripture, was unknown to the church fathers, and is rejected by most Christians globally. Again, one may be free to hold another opinion, but those, like myself, who believe this to be the teaching of scripture are not the odd-balls who need to be embarrassed. Though I do not know Battey’s affirmative beliefs about the Holy Spirit, his rejection of the first five points above, at least, would place him on the fringes of historic Christian belief. The more cultlike a group is, the more they revel in the “fringe” status of their special doctrines.

The desperation Battey feels in the need to discredit my views is exhibited in the wild claim:

“Gregg has an entirely different vision of the Kingdom than is taught in Scripture and it can only be maintained through a false conception of the Kingdom and a rather blasphemous view of the Holy Spirit. A blasphemous view of the Spirit? Really? I don’t know what else to call a view that makes salvation wholly dependent on the Spirit’s supernatural work, yet views Him as incapable of accomplishing His task or maintaining His progress.”

Before deciding whether a writer has blasphemed the Holy Spirit, we might reasonably find out what that writer asserts. “*Does our law judge a man before it hears him?*” (John 7:51). When defining mine as “a view that makes salvation wholly dependent on the Spirit’s supernatural work,” Battey has not represented my position. Conversion is indeed dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit. But only a Calvinist would say it is “*wholly dependent*” on the Spirit. There is the human element as well. The Spirit must “*convict the world*” (John 16:8), or “*cut the hearts*” of the unbelievers (Acts 2:37; 7:54), but it remains the choice of the convicted individual either to cry out “*Men and Brethren, what must we do?*” (Acts 2:37), or else to “*always resist the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 7:51)

Postmillennialism

Apart from the fact that I am in no degree beholden to the special beliefs of his nineteenth-century movement, Battey's principal objection to my book, judging from the number of times he returns to the subject, is what he refers to as my "Postmillennialism." I suppose it is this feature of my teaching of which he is thinking when he refers to mine as "*A Toxic View of the Kingdom.*" He is apparently very bothered by any suggestion that the efforts of Christ to save mankind could even become approximately successful.

However, my views are not Postmillennial. I have always identified as an optimistic (rather than a pessimistic) Amillennialist. The fact that Battey is a pessimistic Amillennialist, whereas I am not, seems to be intolerable to him.

Since the Bible everywhere speaks of Christ's mission as victorious and successful—insisting that "*He will not fail or be discouraged*" (Isa.42:4) until it is accomplished—I would think that it is pessimism, not optimism, which would have to justify itself.

On the other hand, not all optimism is the same as Postmillennialism. The latter is the view, as Battey puts it, that "asserts that the vast majority of the world will be converted to Christ prior to the second advent and that when the Lord returns, He will return to a largely Christianized world" (p.2). He says that this is the view that I personally advocate. I am not sure that anything I have said would justify such a claim, and the pull-quotes he uses from my book do not demonstrate it. The conversion of the world is a great concept, and I do not believe that Battey has done anything to show it to be impossible, nor contrary to the will of God. I do not affirm it. The most I say is that there seems no reason to rule out such a result, given not only the teaching of scripture, but also the trajectory of Church history.

It is Battey's insistence that I hold a view which I do not teach that causes him to find so many "contradictions" in my theology. This is how this happens: He first decides, contrary to my denials, that I am indeed Postmillennial, and then, whenever I say something contrary to Postmillennialism, he sees this as a contradiction. It never occurs to him that the reason I say so many things contrary to Postmillennialism is simply because I am not a Postmillennialist. Here is an example of this phenomenon in his review:

[Quoting me:] "Those who have not submitted to Christ as King are not simply inferior Christians but remain unconverted. They are rebels against the Crown."

Later Gregg is forced to back off that statement, and even contradict it, in order to defend his view of Postmillennialism and claim that at least a third of the world has already been converted to Christ:

[Quoting me again:] "Over the course of the past two-thousand years the trajectory of victory has been on the side of Christ's movement—which began with 120 Jewish believers in Jerusalem and now commands the nominal loyalty of almost a third of the earth's inhabitants. This is tremendous numerical growth, which is important, ***though the depth of commitment in many who profess faith in Christ is open to question.***"

So which is it: Are those who do not fully commit minimal Christians or not Christians at all? With Gregg it all depends on whether he wants to preach on commitment or Postmillennialism; he can go either way. It's hard to take a man seriously who can flop so easily on such a critical doctrine. (p.21)

Since Battey has not identified any point upon which I have "flopped," it would be curious to see if he can substantiate the accusation. There is no contradiction here, since I have nowhere argued that a third of the world were fully-converted—only that this is the portion of the world's population that *profess to be "Christians"* (that is the meaning of the words "nominal loyalty"). How can any contradiction be found between the two statements he quotes from me? I can't see any. He also writes:

When Gregg presents his full postmillennial view in Chapter 19, the parables of the Wheat and Tares and the Leaven surfaces once more to teach the “ultimate quantitative growth and qualitative influence” of the kingdom on the world, which includes the conversion of the majority of humanity and moral transformation of societies. (p.25)

Only the words that Battey places in quotation marks are actual words from my book. That a majority (that is, over half) of humanity may be converted is not to be sneered at (though I don't believe I ever predicted this), since we do not know otherwise. However, even such a majority would not guarantee the total transformation of all societies. The fact that the history of the Gospel has included the substantial transformation of societies where it has exerted the greatest influence is not an eschatological theory, but a naked fact of history, as I abundantly point out in my book. (See: *How Christianity Changed the World*, by Alvin J. Schmidt; *The Book That Made Your World*, by Vishal Mangalwadi; *What Has Christianity Ever Done For Us?*, by Jonathan Hill).

Battey sneers at my suggestion that there has been “tremendous numerical growth” of the Church over the past 2,000 years (as if there is anything inaccurate about this observation!). He counters: “‘Tremendous numerical growth’ is an essential element of the Postmillennial view.”(p.32)

True, a belief in numerical growth of the Christian movement is an essential element of that camp. It is a *necessary* precondition for Postmillennialism, but it is not a *sufficient* precondition. Anyone who reads the Bible or history must believe there has been “tremendous numerical growth” in the Church. This does not make everyone a Postmillennialist. It does make one an observant student of history, and, possibly, a believer in the scripture which anticipates “*a great multitude which no one could number*” (Rev.7:9) being ultimately saved. Does Battey deny that this is so? If he acknowledges it, does that make him a Postmillennialist?

The closing chapter of my book contains a segment entitled, “*Will everyone eventually be converted then?*” (pp.372-377). In that section, I bring five major biblical arguments proving that there will be significant opposition from unbelievers (“as numerous as the sand of the seashore”) coming against God's Kingdom, right up to the moment of the Second Coming. This does not sound to me like a “Postmillennial” vision. If Battey had read this chapter (he does seem to draw some quotes from it) then he would know better than to mistake me for a Postmillennialist—which makes his portrayal of me as such quite disingenuous.

I would think that a man as desperate as Battey appears to be to undermine my book would wish to maintain his own reputation for credibility among readers, and would avoid making irresponsible claims about a book which any of his readers (some of whom, he knows, have read my book) could so easily recognize as invalid. It is hard not to think that he must be depending, not on the critical or biblical thinking skills of his readers, but only on their cult-like loyalty to whatever he tells them to think.