

# Episode 267

## Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. Today we are continuing our series on questions about the end times. Joining me today is Jeff, the managing editor of BibleRef.com, and Kevin, the editor-in-chief of Got Questions Ministries. I was told recently that I haven't introduced myself in a really long time, so my name is Shea Houdman. I'm the president and CEO of Got Questions Ministries. In case you were wondering, who's the other guy? That's me.

## Shea Houdmann

Today's episode, we're actually going to be covering some false views of the end times. There are different interpretations that we definitely don't hold to and disagree with, and the strength to which we disagree is varied depending on the particular position. So today we're going to be covering replacement theology, also known as supersessionism, and then partial preterism, and then we're going to touch briefly on full preterism, even though I actually don't know I've ever met a full preterist. Kevin, why don't you start us off? What is replacement theology, and why do we reject it?

## Kevin Stone

Replacement theology is, as you mentioned, Shea, also referred to as supersessionism or fulfillment theology sometimes. People who hold to this particular view sometimes object to the term of replacement theology, but really, no matter what term they use, the end result is the same, that in some form, in some manner, the church has replaced Israel in God's program. So the Jews are no longer God's chosen people. God does not have specific plans in the future for the nation of Israel. God's work with them is done. That covenant that God made with Abraham so long ago is done, and now it is all, all of those promises are being fulfilled in the church.

## Kevin Stone

So on some level, the church is the new Israel or has replaced Israel, even if they use terms like it's an expansion of Israel. The result is the same, that the promises that were given to Israel in the Old Testament are now being applied to the church. And so there's some taking verses out of context, in my mind, where you see something that's in the Old Testament that is specifically given to Israel, to Abraham, the children of Abraham, those promises then are applied to the New Testament church.

## Kevin Stone

We believe that the church is completely different from Israel in God's program, that God has a plan, specific plan for Israel, ethnic Israel, national Israel, and God has a specific plan for the church. And right now, this is the church age. This is what dispensationalism teaches.

**Kevin Stone**

Well, there are four tenets to fulfillment theology or replacement theology. One is that the New Testament teaches that there's been a permanent rejection of Israel as the people of God. National Israel no longer considered the chosen people or the people of God.

**Kevin Stone**

Secondly, the New Testament applies language and terms that are normally thought of as being Hebrewisms or applied to Israel in the Old Testament, but takes those same terms and applies them to the church. And that shows that now the church is the true Israel or the new Israel.

**Kevin Stone**

Third, Jews, Gentiles save the same way today. So this unity of the plan of salvation rules out any restoration of national Israel into God's plan in the future.

**Kevin Stone**

And then fourth, the start of the new covenant that was ratified by Christ, the new covenant that was established by his death on the cross, the shedding of his blood, that shows that now the church is the true Israel. There's a new covenant that has replaced the old.

**Kevin Stone**

So replacement theology says that many of the promises that were made to Israel in the Bible are fulfilled in the Christian church, not in Israel. Whatever we see in the Old Testament that maybe hasn't been fulfilled yet for Israel, well, that's being fulfilled now in some way, usually spiritually or allegorically being fulfilled in the church with God's people today. And then the prophecies then have to be spiritualized or allegorized into promises for God's blessing on the church.

**Kevin Stone**

We believe that Israel and the church are different entities and that we go through scripture, it's important to keep those distinct. For example, if you read through Romans chapters 9, 10, and 11, which talks a lot about Israel and the church, if you take every reference to Israel in Romans 9, 10, and 11, and you replace it with the word church, nothing makes sense in those chapters. I mean, it just doesn't work. Paul is talking about two distinct groups of people in those chapters.

**Kevin Stone**

We believe that the church is an entirely new creation that came into being. It's not an extension of the old covenant with Israel. It's not an extension of Israel itself. It is a new creation that came into being in the day of Pentecost, there in Acts chapter 2, and that the church will continue as an entity, as a body of Christ here in this world until the rapture, until God takes us home in his timing at the rapture.

**Kevin Stone**

And we believe that the church has no relationship to the curses and the blessings that were given to Israel in the Old Testament. That was all part of the Mosaic covenant. So those covenants, those promises, those warnings in the Mosaic covenant were valid only for Israel in the promised land. They are not to be applied to the church.

**Kevin Stone**

We do believe that Israel in God's plan has been temporarily set aside. And during this time of dispersion, during the past 2,000 years, God has primarily been working with the church. This is the church age, we call it, the age of grace. Jesus said, I will build my church. But once the time of the Gentiles has been fulfilled, Scripture says, then we believe that God will be again working with the with national Israel, ethnic Israel, to bring them back to himself. There will be a remnant who was saved. And that's all. We've talked about this with one of the purposes of the tribulation, to bring Israel back to God.

**Kevin Stone**

Another big reason why I believe that replacement theology is an error, I don't think it's heresy. I have good friends who take this particular viewpoint of Scripture. But I do believe it's an error. And one of the big reasons is the land covenant that God gave to Israel in several places in Scripture. Genesis 15, Exodus 23, Deuteronomy 11, and more places than just that, where God specifies the extent of the land that was promised to Israel. So, for example, Exodus 23, verse 31, God says, I will establish your borders from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea and from the desert to the Euphrates River. And Deuteronomy 11 mentions up to Lebanon, Euphrates River is mentioned in all three of these passages that I have just cited.

**Kevin Stone**

But Israel's never possessed all of that territory, all the way to the Euphrates, from the Red Sea to the Euphrates, all the way up to Lebanon. Israel's never had all of this as its territory. So, it's still a prophecy that has been repeated multiple times in the Old Testament. When will it be fulfilled? I think a lot of replacement theologians just say, well, it's null and void. This has all been transferred, maybe spiritually, to the church, and this will not ever be fulfilled for Israel. And I just have a hard time with that because it seems to be so

specific. It seems to be so concrete, where God says, here are the boundaries. And I don't think God was being, He wasn't being abstract, He wasn't being symbolic. And I believe that this actually will be fulfilled, literally, someday in the earthly kingdom that we call the Millennium, when Christ rules and reigns. But the church is not going to be the recipient of those promises.

### **Jeff Laird**

That's the consistency for me that makes that a little bit of a hard sell. And you hit the points that I would think the same, Kevin, is particularly with something like the promises made to Israel. I can understand somebody possibly saying that God could still fulfill the, you know, the promises about land and such to Israel, but He's replaced Israel in the plan of salvation or something like that. But there again, now you have an inconsistency. Like, how am I supposed to know which of these applies and which of these doesn't apply? Plus, lacking supernatural influence, it's really hard for me to imagine the nation of Israel actually possessing the territory that the promised land describes at any point in the future. Strangely, things have happened, I suppose. But it seems to be more consistent to fall into that framework that says that there's going to come a time where the rapture and dispensationalist standpoint, where God is going to essentially remove the church, and there's Israel. And Israel then becomes restored as the focus of what's happening.

### **Jeff Laird**

To me, that's a pretty clean separation. It makes sense that that would be the way that that would work. So, like you said, this is not something that rises necessarily to the level of heresy, where you just, you struggle to believe whether or not a person is being sincere in their faith with this. There's things in there that can sort of make sense.

### **Jeff Laird**

I have some concerns with it when it comes to some of the outcomes that you can get from replacement theology. I think if you get in a mode of setting aside Israel in that sense, I think it can lead to attitudes that aren't helpful when it comes to Israel and the things that happen in the world. That's not a particular judgment or an accusation. I'm just saying that some of what we see happening in the world, I think, is because the Jews are still God's chosen people, and there's a spiritual component to what's happening. And I think it's important for us to recognize that.

### **Jeff Laird**

I also think we have to be careful, because if we look at the promises that are made to Israel, and we try to allegorize them and apply them to the entire church and then the entire world, now we start getting in conflict with things that Jesus said, like, my kingdom is not of this world, otherwise my followers

would fight to defend it. We start getting into this idea that, well, we are supposed to be actively conquering the political and social world, and we get focused on that, sort of this kingdom now type of thing, instead of understanding what we do need to do and where we are.

### **Jeff Laird**

So I would agree with everything you said, Kevin, that it's not something that I would question a person very strongly on, but it's an impossible sell, I guess, for me, and I would think it would be a hard sell for other people.

### **Shea Houdmann**

For sure. Both of you, I agree 100%. Kevin, you said the word, like, spiritual or spiritualized a few times. I think, in my experience with replacement theology, which ultimately is amillennialism, it's how the amillennialists view Israel. That's what they do. They take a promise that God made to Abraham, say, your descendants, like, oh, his spiritual descendants, because there are verses in the New Testament that say we are all children of Abraham and these spiritual descendants, and Abraham had faith and we had faith. So everything that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Solomon would have interpreted very literally, very tangibly, very related to a kingdom and a territory, they spiritualized those promises. No, that meant that God's blessings is now on the people. And the Jews are part of the Church now, too, so He has not abandoned them, He's just— but ultimately, as you said, if God made a very specific promise, I will give your descendants this specific thing, and everyone who heard that promise would have interpreted it a certain way, to say, no, that's not—what I meant is a way that that person never would have understood. It's actually fulfilling the promise in a completely different way than how I promised. I see how they get there, but I don't think that's a valid way of interpreting those passages because, again, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob never would have understood those promises as being fulfilled in a non-literal way.

### **Shea Houdmann**

And then, secondly, Kevin, you mentioned that dispensationalism is our preferred viewpoint. What I find super interesting is that dispensationalism kind of came together as a system, like in the 1800s. That's really when Darby and some of the very early writers really started to take stuff that was in bits and pieces throughout Church history and kind of put it all together as one organized system. And one of the things they said is like, well, there has to be a nation of Israel in the system. Well, in the 1800s, there hadn't been a nation of Israel for 1,700 years. Since 1870, basically, there'd never been a nation of Israel, and basically the early dispensationalists were laughed at. It's ridiculous. There's no nation of Israel. There hasn't been for 1,700

years. What are you talking about? Well, then here comes, what, 1948, I believe, and suddenly there's a nation of Israel again. And all of a sudden, it's like, oh, wait a minute. How did this happen?

### **Shea Houdmann**

And so I admire the faith of the early dispensationalists, and they believed there had to be a nation of Israel when there was no evidence that there would ever be a nation of Israel again. So it's interesting to see how it's really easy to hold a replacement theology when there's no nation of Israel, but then some Christians throughout Church history believe, no, God will fulfill his promises literally. There'll be a literal kingdom in which God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Solomon are fulfilled. I'm not sure how it's going to happen, but this is what a literal interpretation of Scripture leads to.

### **Shea Houdmann**

And then suddenly the nation of Israel is back, and we can actually see, I can now see how God could fulfill these promises literally, and it's completely changed both how dispensationalists, that we actually have evidence, this could actually work. And then Amalekites had to realize, oh, okay, maybe spiritualizing all of these promises isn't the right way to go. And I'm not saying a lot of them have changed their mind. They still do the exact same thing. But I would say it's probably gotten a little bit harder, but now there's a nation of Israel that we actually have to deal with, theologically speaking.

### **Jeff Laird**

One of the things that comes to my mind is the idea that, I want to phrase this carefully, is that in science, for example, people sometimes talk about models used to describe the universe or certain theories and things like that. And a point that has sometimes been made, and again, trying to phrase this carefully, is that in those mathematical models for science, in those cases, the important thing about the model is not that it is a perfect representation of what actually is, but does it allow the scientist to make accurate predictions within the system?

### **Jeff Laird**

So taking that in the same way to some of what we look at with eschatology, you know, we can say some of what we're arguing about in the background of some of these eschatological views is really just how is God going to do the things he said he was going to do? And to some extent, our perfect understanding of exactly how he's going to do that doesn't really matter. Where it does come down to a little bit of importance is when it comes to the predictions side of things, and that's where we come to the practical. So making a prediction like, you know, the nation of Israel is going to have to come back at some point in time.



**Jeff Laird**

Well, you're right, the dispensationalism side would give us a more realistic and more accurate representation of what was really happening. But we also have to be careful because if the models that we have for end times do not correspond with reality, and our conclusions are not in correspondence with what God intends, that's how we get into some of these other ideas where we can have incorrect views of Israel or incorrect views of the role of the church in the world today.

**Jeff Laird**

So I bring that up just because I think it's worthwhile for us to say that there's room inside the gospel church, inside biblical understanding for a lot of these different views, and they are not crucial, critical, fundamental cornerstone things that we need to be going after. But we do have to recognize that at some point in time, somebody's right and somebody's wrong, and we need to be careful that the things that we conclude from these don't run afoul of other concepts in the Bible that we already know are true.

**Shea Houdmann**

For sure, Jeff. I like that illustration. It provides a framework for us to understand these things, not necessarily say that everything in the system, we've got to actually nail down. That's been something dispensationalists have been long accused of, is like, you think you have everything perfectly figured out. It's like, I think the literal interpretation is the way to go, but I think I know the framework in which God is going to fulfill his promises. I have leanings on the specifics, but I don't want to actually claim, no, God has to do it in this exact way, in this exact timing, because that's where people have gotten into a lot of trouble over the years in terms of eschatology.

**Shea Houdmann**

So let's go ahead and jump to the other doctrine we want to cover today. A few minutes ago, I mentioned AD 70, when Israel ceased to become a nation, and that plays an important role in the next doctrine we cover, which is partial preterism and also preterism, which is also, essentially, partial preterism is what all millennialists believe, although they don't, just like replacement theology, they generally don't like the term. Some would even say, no, that's not what I believe, but Jeff, I'll let you fill it in, but essentially, partial preterism teaches that everything in times related other than the second coming of Christ and the new heavens and new earth was fulfilled essentially in AD 70, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. So, Jeff, tell us a little bit more about partial preterism.

**Jeff Laird**

For me, it's an interesting example, because I would have probably identified more with partial preterism years and years ago than I do now. And I've always been, we joke about, I'm only doing this series on end times, so I don't get fired, because I'm not deeply interested in end times. And sometimes I think it could be a distraction from the things that we need to do, but there's important aspects to it.

### **Jeff Laird**

And at one point in time, I would have leaned towards the partial preterism side of things. And it's important as we discuss all these things to remember that when it comes to doctrinal beliefs, if a doctrinal belief is widely held for a long time, that doesn't necessarily mean it's true, but it means that people hold it for a reason. You know, we say the same things about other religions. There's a reason people have believed in Islam and Hinduism and Buddhism for thousands of years, not because they're true, but because there's something about them that does correspond to what people see. Partial preterism for me was one of those things where I could look at what it said and go, I get it, I understand it.

### **Jeff Laird**

So partial preterism, like you said, is the idea that pretty much everything in the book of Revelation happened in 70 AD. It was all done at that point in time. All the disaster, all of the bloodshed, all of the imagery, all applied to things that were going on between the Roman Empire and Israel up till AD 70. And that the only thing that's really left to happen, essentially, are the last three chapters, the second coming of Christ, judgments, and the new heavens and new earth.

### **Jeff Laird**

The advantage to that is it does help make some things a little bit plainer. For example, when Jesus is talking in Matthew chapters 24 and 25, if you were to just read that, as we would say, plainly, if you just sort of read it as it is and then sit and compare it with a history book, it's very easy to take what Jesus said in Matthew about the destruction that's going to happen and all the terrible things and the abomination of desolation and say, yeah, I can see the parallels right here for what's there. You can also take those and say, why would Jesus be saying things like you need to flee to the mountains if we're talking about the apocalypse? Partial preterism asks a question like, why would we be given a book like Revelation that has so much detail and so much intrigue over things that we could not possibly understand until, essentially, it's really happening, and we can't do anything with it until it's really happening.

### **Jeff Laird**



But that doesn't mean there aren't weaknesses to that. There is an issue with partial preterism where you do have to sort of play tennis with your literal figurative interpretations. You have to kind of waffle back and forth between saying, well, I think this chapter is literal, and then this part is figurative, and then this sentence is literal, and that's figurative. And I was aware of those things when I saw it. But the partial preterism side of things, again, is within the biblical orthodoxy. It's a way of saying, I do believe that Christ is who he says he is. There is a resurrection, there is a judgment, there is an eternity. You know, the things that connect to the cornerstones of the faith are all still there in the partial preterist view.

### **Jeff Laird**

The biggest weakness it really has is all the things we were just talking about when it comes to things like replacement theology, where it starts to become difficult to form a system that holds to itself without starting to step on its own toes and do so pretty strongly.

### **Jeff Laird**

Now, full preterism is another step beyond partial preterism. Full preterism essentially says that absolutely everything that has been prophesied or promised is done. It has all already happened, including the second coming and the judgments and the new heaven and new earth. Everything is already done. So a true full preterist view basically says the world you're looking at right now, the universe we have, this is just how it's going to be now forever. God has already done the things, and here we are.

### **Jeff Laird**

Again, I suppose you could fit that into a biblical sense of things. If somebody says, yeah, I still believe that there's an eternity with Christ, but it just gets exponentially harder to start to pack some of those things in. For example, prophecies about Israel possessing land and Jesus actually coming and some of the things that it describes with martyrs and witnesses and things like that. You say, how am I supposed to explain those if all of this stuff is figurative? So full preterism for me, I would say, is just way too much of a square block and a round hole to fit into what the Bible is asking for.

### **Jeff Laird**

Partial preterism is sort of like an octagon in a circular hole where you can make it work. You might have to push a little hard, but it's one of those views that reiterates what we've said about a lot of these end times topics. There are different ways for people to view these. Some of them are more reasonable than others.

### **Jeff Laird**

For me, I would say if I was to be convinced that the premillennial dispensationalism view, which I don't hold with everything in my being to begin with, if you convinced me that wasn't true, I would probably revert back to something like partial preterism. But as I understand it right now, I don't think that partial preterism is the best understanding of what scripture says.

**Kevin Stone**

I think that any form of preterism, partial or full, or I'm sure there are other degrees of it, various degrees of the partial, it's all very depressing to me. You know, if this is the millennium, because I've been in discussions with personal friends who are preterists, and they say, well, this is, we're living in the millennium. Satan is bound right now. This is very depressing to me. You know, if this is the time of peace and Satan is bound, then, you know, is this as good as it gets?

**Kevin Stone**

And then for full preterism, boy, that's really depressing.

You know, the belief that the establishing of the new covenant was also the establishing of the new heaven and new earth. And this is as good as it's going to get for all eternity. Jesus has already come, you know, spiritually or whatever. You know, boy, we have nothing to look forward to, in my mind.

**Kevin Stone**

But I think scripture just gives us so much hope that this world is going to give way to a better place where Jesus is going to be physically in this world, and he's going to be ruling and reigning from David's throne in righteousness, and there's going to be true peace in the world. And we just have, we have so much to look forward to.

**Kevin Stone**

Jeff, you mentioned the ping-ponging back and forth between the literal and the figurative that preterism kind of relies on, and that is, I think it's illustrated very well. Book of Revelation, chapters 6 through 18 of Revelation have to be interpreted as highly symbolic and not really referring to any type of real events in this world at all. That's all the stuff about the plagues, the bowls, the judgments of God that are being poured out during what we would call the tribulation period.

**Kevin Stone**

So, for example, the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 did not involve wholesale destruction of sea life,

**Jeff Laird**

Right.

**Kevin Stone**

we read about in Revelation 16. It did not involve agonizing darkness, also Revelation 16. So, those judgments have to be interpreted as allegorical of some kind. But then chapter 19 of Revelation is literal. Jesus is going to physically return to this world, partial preterism says. Chapter 20 then is probably going to have to be allegorical. Chapter 21, chapter 22 of Revelation, we're back to literal, because the new heaven and new earth, according to partial preterism, is going to be a real thing. So, yeah, there's a back and forth, pick and choose kind of thing between the literal and the figurative with preterism. To me, that inconsistency is bothersome.

### **Jeff Laird**

Yeah, and I'm glad you brought up some of those points in the mid-chapters, because we see places in Scripture where God makes semi-literal comments that are mixed in with allegorical or symbolic, and that's not necessarily the issue. The point is that in a book that is specifically said to be prophetic, that is specifically said to be saying, I am showing you what is to come, what is going to happen, that sometimes within the same sentence, you may have to flip back and forth between saying, well, that phrase was literal, but this phrase was figurative. At that point in time, you're kind of stuck right back where you were before, where you're just going, I don't know what any of this means.

### **Jeff Laird**

And I wasn't laughing at you when you were making your comment about the depressing side of the preterism thing. But the reason I was chuckling is I was picturing a scene from an animated movie from not long ago about these penguins, and these penguins hijack a boat because they believe they need to get to Antarctica, and they finally get there, and there's this long shot where they're just standing in Antarctica looking at everything going around. And I'm not going to repeat what the one says, but he looks around and he expresses what he thinks of the situation. I can see us doing the same thing and looking at the world around us and going, really? This is it? Now, still even in that, you have preterism and partial preterism believing that individual persons are still looking at an eternity with God.

### **Jeff Laird**

So from their perspective, they would say, you're right, everything is still terrible here, but there's something in the future. And again, that's the reason where we can fit these into the biblical model. This is not something we need to be kicking people out of churches over or splitting our fellowship over, even though it's fair for us to say, look, I think some of these are better and easier to fit with a biblical understanding than others. I think partial preterism is easier. Full preterism is very difficult.

**Shea Houdmann**

Agreed. A hundred percent. You guys, you two covered it very well, both the why some people hold to partial preterism, but also some of the problems, both interpretively and then also just like practically speaking. And I won't name the individual I spoke with, but a fairly well known Bible teacher who's a partial preterist, although he wouldn't even choose that term. We were having dinner one time and he was just like, we're just kind of not debating, but just explaining our viewpoints back and forth. And I was like, so is Jesus just coming back next Tuesday? I mean, there's nothing prophetically that's going to happen that's going to drive the second coming of Christ. You read the book of Revelation and the second coming of Christ is to put an end to all the terrible stuff that's happening in Revelation six through 18. It's like judgment, judgment, judgment. It's getting worse, worse. The earth is going to be destroyed. We're not Christ to come back. Battle of Armageddon, Christ comes back to rescue us right at that point. In the amillennial or partial preterist calendar, there's nothing particularly that has to happen that's related to the second coming. It's just, he just comes back.

**Shea Houdmann**

I'm glad they believe he comes back, but is there nothing prophetically speaking that's happening that in a sense causes him to come back, to be the triumphant king riding in on a white horse to rescue, to save, like none of that? And he was like, oh, there could be something happening, but I don't think there's anything that has to happen. So I kind of jokingly said, is it possible that the stuff that's happening is the stuff that premillennialists think is going to happen before he comes back? And he's like, well, no, it can't be that. Like, oh, okay. It just can't be that.

**Shea Houdmann**

So, and not a major argument against partial preterism, but it's the idea of the second coming of Christ because it's happening on some random day where nothing of significance is happening in the world. That doesn't fit any of the description of the second coming in the Bible.

**Jeff Laird**

What's your saying Shea, this is so far above my pay grade, holy smoke. I'm so glad that I don't have to know all this stuff and understand it perfectly. I'm glad that Christ tells me what I need to know for right now. I do what I need to do and I don't have to be an expert on it. Thank God for that.

**Shea Houdmann**

For sure. So again, I think you hear us say, with replacement theology we do not agree with it. We believe God will still fulfill his promises to the nation of Israel. Partial preterism we do not think it's heresy but we disagree with it for

various reasons both interpretively and practically. And as Kevin described, even the sense of giving us hope. Full Preterism, strongly, strongly disagree with that. Can you believe in full preterism and be a Christian? Yes? But you are denying some clear teachings of scripture if you are denying the second coming of Christ. I can't think of an easier way to say that. So very, very difficult for me to see how you can hold to the inerrancy and authority of scripture and be a full preterist. Fairly long episode trying to cover these three issues that all kinda outflows of amillennialism to various degrees.

### **Shea Houdmann**

So hopefully our conversation today has helped you understand replacement theology and full and partial preterism better and understand why we believe the way we do in terms of a literal interpretation of scripture which leads we believe to a premillennial and dispositional interpretation of the end times. Again, hope our conversation has been helpful, encouraging to you. Got questions? The Bible has answers and we'll help you find them.