John Lightfoot — an early preterist

Bible Version
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John Lightfoot (1602-1675) was an English theologian and rabbinical scholar.
He was renowned for his profound knowledge of all things Jewish — the Hebrew language and culture, and of the rabbinical teachings found in the Talmud.
Lightfoot was a prominent member of the Westminster Assembly (1643-1652), participating in the debates and highly regarded for his knowledge of Hebrew and of the Jewish background to the New Testament.
In 1650 he was appointed as Master of St. Catharine College, Cambridge, and in 1654 he became the University's Vice-chancellor.
Though Presbyterian in his convictions, Lightfoot submitted to the Act of Uniformity in 1662 and so was able to continue his ecclesiastical roles.[1]

The citation on the following pages is from Lightfoot's monumental work *Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae*.
He commenced this work in 1658 but passed away before he could finish it.
Lightfoot had, however, completed large tracts of verse-by-verse commentary on the Gospels.
Horae was originally written in Latin and published at intervals between 1658 and 1674.

The citation here constitutes Lightfoot's commentary on John 21:22, where Jesus informs Peter that John may very well remain alive until his return. This excerpt clearly demonstrates Lightfoot's preterist convictions.
Lightfoot draws from numerous Scripture passages to support his view that New Testament eschatology is principally concerned, not with the Final Judgment and end of the world, but with the 70 AD fall of Jerusalem.
Several other notable theologians of that time were also (partial) preterists:
Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), Henry Hammond (1605-1660), and John Owen (1616-1683).

The cover page of the 1859 English Edition has the following:

> *Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae:*
> *Hebrew and Talmudical Exercitations upon the Gospels, the Acts, some chapters of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and the First Epistle to the Corinthians.*
> By John Lightfoot, D.D., Master of Catharine Hall, Cambridge.
> A New Edition by the Rev. Robert Gandell. M.A.,
> In Four Volumes.
> Volume 3.
> Oxford: At the University Press, 1859.

[1] John Lightfoot is sometimes confused with the 19th century bishop of Durham, J.B. (Joseph Barber) Lightfoot (1828-1889). There was also an Oxford clergyman, John Prideaux Lightfoot (1803-1887).

Lightfoot's commentary on John 21:22 comes from Volume 3, pages 451-454.
The entire work (volume 3) is available online via the HathiTrust Digital Library:
https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=ia.ark:/13960/t21c28714&seq=5.

Verse 22: ᾽Εὰν αὐτὸν θέλω μένειν ἕως ἔρχομαι: *If I will that he tarry till I come*.]

Till I come: that is, till I come to destroy the city and nation of the Jews. As to this kind of phrase, take a few instances:—

Our Saviour saith, Matthew 16:28, "There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom:" which must not be understood of his coming to the last judgment; for there was not one standing there that could live till that time: nor ought it to be understood of the resurrection, as some would have it; for probably not only *some*, but, in a manner, *all* that stood there lived till that time. His coming therefore, in this place, must be understood of his coming to take vengeance against those enemies of his which would not have him to rule over them, as Luke 19:12, 27.

Perhaps it will not repent him that reads the Holy Scriptures to observe these few things:

I. That the destruction of Jerusalem and the whole Jewish state is described as if the whole frame of this world were to be dissolved. Nor is it strange, when God destroyed his habitation and city, places once so dear to him, with so direful and sad an overthrow; his own people, whom he accounted of as much or more than the whole world beside, by so dreadful and amazing plagues. Matthw 24:29, 30, "The sun shall be darkened," &c. Then shall appear the "sign of the Son of man," &c; which yet are said to fall out within that generation, verse 34. 2 Peter 3:10, "The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat," &c. Compare with this Deuteronomy 32:22, Hebrews 12:26: and observe that by *elements* are understood the Mosaic elements, Galatians 4:9, Colossians 2:20: and you will not doubt that St. Peter speaks only of the conflagration of Jerusalem, the destruction of the nation, and the abolishing of the dispensation of Moses.

Revelation 6:12, 14: "The sun became black as sackcloth of hair, &c. and the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together," &c. Where, if we take notice of the foregoing plagues, by which, according to the most frequent threatenings, he destroyed that people, viz. the sword, verse 4, famine, verses 5, 6, and the plague, verse 8; withal comparing those words, "Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us," with Luke 23:30; it will sufficiently appear, that by those phrases is understood the dreadful judgment and overthrow of that nation and city. With these also agrees that of Jeremiah 4, from verses 22 to 28, and clearly enough explains this phrase. To this appertain those and other such expressions as we meet with, 1 Corinthians 10:11, "On us the ends of the world are come;" and 1 Peter 4:7, "The end of all things is at hand."

II. With reference to this, and under this notion, the times immediately preceding this ruin are called 'the last days,' and *the last times*, אַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים; that is, *the last times* of the Jewish city, nation, economy. This manner of speaking frequently occurs: which let our St. John himself interpret, 1 John 2:18; "'There are many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time:' and that this nation is upon the very verge of destruction, when as it hath already arrived at the utmost pitch of infidelity, apostasy, and wickedness."

III. With the same reference it is, that the times and state of things immediately following the destruction of Jerusalem are called 'a new creation,' 'new heavens,' and 'a new earth,' Isaiah 65:17; "Behold, I create a new heaven and a new earth." When should that be? Read the whole chapter; and you will find the Jews rejected and cut off; and from that time is that new creation of the evangelical world among the Gentiles.

Compare 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Revelation 21:1, 2; where, the old Jerusalem being cut off and destroyed, a new one succeeds; and new heavens and a new earth are created.

2 Peter 3:13: "We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth." The heavens and the earth of the Jewish church and commonwealth must be all on fire, and the Mosaic elements burnt up: but we, according to the promise made to us by Isaiah the prophet, when all these are consumed, look for the new creation of the evangelical state.

IV. The day, the time, and the manner of the execution of this vengeance upon this people are called, 'the day of the Lord,' 'the day of Christ,' 'his coming in the clouds, in his glory, in his kingdom.' Nor is this without reason; for from hence doth this form and mode of speaking take its rise:

Christ had not as yet appeared but in a state of humility; contemned, blasphemed, and at length murdered by the Jews: his gospel rejected, laughed at, and trampled under foot: his followers pursued with extreme hatred, persecution, and death itself. At length, therefore, he displays himself in his glory, his kingdom, and power; and calls for those cruel enemies of his, that they may be slain before him.

Acts 2:20: "Before that great and notable day of the Lord come." Let us take notice how St. Peter applies that prophecy of Joel to those very times; and it will be clear enough, without any commentary, what that 'day of the Lord' is.

2 Thessalonians 2:2: "As that the day of Christ is at hand," &c. To this also do those passages belong, Hebrews 10:37, "Yet a little while, and he that shall come will come:" James 5:9; "Behold, the judge standeth before the door:" Revelation 1:7; "He cometh with clouds:" and 22:12; "Behold, I come quickly." With many other passages of that nature, all which must be understood of Christ's coming in judgment and vengeance against that wicked nation: and in this very sense must the words now before us be taken, and no otherwise, "I will that he tarry till I come:" "For thy part, Peter, thou shalt suffer death by thy countrymen the Jews: but as for him, I will that he shall tarry till I come and avenge myself upon this generation: and if I will so, what is that to thee?" The story that is told of both these apostles confirms this exposition; for it is taken for granted by all that St. Peter had his crown of martyrdom before Jerusalem fell; and St. John survived the ruins of it.