

Part Four - Greek: Stoicheia

By [Donald Hochner](#)

This is the fourth of five articles with Greek words. We are going to look into the Preterist's view on "elements." The Greek word for elements used here is "[stoicheia](#)," and it appears in the NT only seven times. When you see the terms like "elements," ask yourself what this means? In Young's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, the literal meaning of the word is "*element, rudiment, principle*." In other words, these are the elements of religious training, or the ceremonial precepts that are common to the worship of Jews and of Gentiles. We will look into it and you may find out.

Why I am talking about this is because the Futurists believe the elements of the physical heavens and earth were going to melt away or be burned up, especially in 2 Peter 3. Does this word "elements" refer to the scientific idea of the elements of matter, all the "atoms" of the universe? Or the periodic table of elements? I don't think so! We will first look into seven passages with the word "elements" or in Greek "stoicheia." I am using Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible.

1. [Gal. 4:3, 9](#) - *"So also we, when we were babes, under the elements of the world were in servitude...and now, having known God -- and rather being known by God -- how turn ye again unto the weak and poor elements to which anew ye desire to be in servitude?"* Notice Paul uses the word twice. This context is clearly his discussion of the relationship of the Jew to the old law of Moses, in verses 1-7; the Gentiles who had served idols in verse 8. The blessings, by the way, are contrasted, which are in Christ. So, the Jews were held in bondage to the old law of Moses or the tradition of men. Paul exhorted the Christian brethren not to return to the bondage to that Law. The Law was our tutor to bring us into Christ that we might be justified by faith ([Gal. 3:23-24](#)). No man could keep that Law perfectly. The Gentiles served worthless idols. Both had been in bondage to the stoicheia of the world. Therefore, the use of "elements" is not about the physical world.

2. [Col. 2:8, 20-22](#) - *"See that no one shall be carrying you away as spoil through the philosophy and vain deceit, according to the deliverance of men, according to the rudiments of the world, and not according to Christ, ...If, then, ye did die with the Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances? -- thou mayest not touch, nor taste, nor handle -- which are all for destruction with the using, after the commands and teachings of men."* Again, Paul uses the word twice. In verse 8 he pleads with the Colossian church not to allow anyone to deceive them by way of worldly philosophy, or traditions of men according to the elements or rudiments of the world. In this context, there were two different dangers they confronted: Judaistic activities in verses 16-17, and possibly some cultic or pagan activities in verse 18. The point is, once again, this one is not about the material creation.

3. [Heb. 5:12](#) - *"For even owing to be teachers, because of the time, again ye have need that one teach you what [are] the elements of the beginning of the oracles of God, and ye have become having need of milk, and not of strong food."* This writer laments to the Jewish Christians (Hebrews) the fact that they had not grown in Christ as they should. The writer says they need someone to teach them again with "milk, not solid food" in elementary principles of God's oracles before becoming teachers and mature. Obviously, this "stoicheia" is not about atoms or the creation of the universe.

4. [2 Peter 3:10-13](#) - "*And it will come -- the day of the Lord -- as a thief in the night, in which the heavens with a rushing noise will pass away, and the elements with burning heat be dissolved, and earth and the works in it shall be burnt up. All these, then, being dissolved, what kind of persons doth it behove you to be in holy behaviours and pious acts? waiting for and hasting to the presence of the day of God, by which the heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements with burning heat shall melt; and for new heavens and a new earth according to His promise we do wait, in which righteousness doth dwell*" Notice Peter uses the word twice. In both views he says the elements will be destroyed or burned up. So far, we (hopefully) agree that the fact "elements" does not, in its other previous passages, ever refer to the physical universe.

Nowhere do the Scriptures teach that this physical creation will be destroyed. In the beginning God created the universe and it was good. The sin of men only affected the human race. This is what we call "total depravity." In fact, the Scripture speaks of the earth's permanence ([Ps. 104:5](#); [Ecc. 1:4](#)) and the church throughout all generations ([Eph. 3:21](#)). Read in [Gen. 8:21](#), after the great flood God looked down the flow of time and into man's heart and said "I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth (total depravity), and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done." This one is not speaking only about the flood in [Gen. 9:15](#). This is CRITICAL! God would never again curse the ground nor destroy every living creature. Could God reverse His promise? He cannot lie. We must keep in mind that the Bible itself is in harmony as the Scriptures interpret the Scriptures. God is not a God of confusion.

We will do some study in 2 Peter 3:10-13. In verse 10, "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief" is the parallel to other passages in [Matt. 24:42-44](#) (Jesus was speaking to His disciples in their generation), in [1 Thes. 5:2-10](#) (see in verse 3 about the destruction of Jerusalem), and in [Rev. 3:3](#) (to the church in Sardis) which are referring to the first-century audience. This would fit all together in one theme.

In verse 12, notice "looking (Gk: [prosdokao](#) - *fervent, expecting, anticipating*) and hastening (Gk: [speudo](#) - *speeding, eagerness*) the coming (Gk: [parousia](#) - *presence, coming, advent*) of the day of God." Peter uses this word "prosdokao" three times in verse 12, 13, and 14. And each verse says the brethren to whom he was writing were looking (expecting) and hastening the day of God in their lifetime, for the end of all (Jewish) things was AT HAND ([1 Peter 4:7](#)).

In verse 13, "*But according to His promise* (see [Rom. 4:13, 16](#); [Eph. 3:6](#); [Heb 4:1](#); [9:15](#); [10:36-39](#); [12:25-29](#) and many more about the promise of God) *we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.*" First we will look at what "heavens and earth" means. It means that when God made His covenant with Israel at Mt. Sinai, He planted the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth. See in [Deut. 32:1](#); [Isa. 1:1-4](#); [24:1-5](#); [51:15-16](#). So, it is clearly not a literal heavens and earth. It is the covenant of God. Did you know that the great reformer John Owen embraced the preterist interpretation in 2 Peter 3? (Works, 16 vols. in 9:134-38).

Peter tells us they expected the "new" heavens and earth. We ought to check out the word "new" that he used. There are two words translated as "new" in the NT. They are "[neos](#)" and "[kainos](#)." Interesting, *neos* is *new in time, never been before, or that which has recently come into existence*. The other one is *kainos* which means *new in quality, not time*. So, Peter uses *kainos* in this verse. Now, if someone takes the position that the new heavens and earth is a literal way, it is inconsistent with the word of *kainos*. If God destroys this earth and creates another, that would be a new (*neos*) earth not a new (*kainos*). We have seen in the NT that it says we have a new (*kainos*) covenant (Heb. 8), a new (*kainos*) creation ([2 Cor. 5:17](#)) and the church is a new (*kainos*) Jerusalem ([Rev. 21:2](#) c.f. [Heb. 12:22](#)).

Lastly, "the new heavens and a new earth" must have come into Peter's mind from the book of Isaiah, chapters 65 and 66. Notice before God creates the new heavens and a new earth, He will pour out His wrath against Jerusalem, His rebellious people ([Isa. 65:1-7](#), 11-17; [66:3-6](#), 15-18, 24). This involves the making of a new Israel or the Church (Isa. 65:8-10, 15; 66:7-14). When God created the new heavens and earth, notice that physical death will remain (Isa. 65:20, 66:24), spiritual home construction and agriculture will continue (Isa. 65:21-22 = [1 Cor. 3:6-8](#); [9:7-11](#)), it will have descendants (Isa. 65:23, 66:22), the Lord will hear their prayers (Isa. 65:24), it will have evangelism (Isa. 66:19), it will have new priests (66:21), as well as weekly and monthly worship (in other word, everyday Isa. 66:23); and there will be an everlasting hell where the worm shall not die, and the fire shall not quenched to those who have transgressed against the Lord (Isa. 66:24). The new heavens and earth is referring to the eternal state while we live in the physical realm in earthly bodies; it must be referring to a period in human history. This is the period of the Kingdom of God which Christ rules in the hearts of the believers. The Kingdom of God is made without hands (spiritual - [Dan. 2:34, 44-45](#); c.f. [Col. 2:10-11](#)). If we take the statements from the scriptures at face value, then we should conclude that the first heavens and the first earth passed away and was replaced by the glorious reign of the Lord Jesus Christ, the kingdom without end.

The fact is that anytime Scripture uses the phrase "last days" (and similar expression) it means, not the end of the world or physical universe, but the period from 30-70 AD. This was the period during which the Apostles were preaching and writing, the "last days" of Old Covenant Israel before it was forever destroyed in the destruction of the Temple (and consequently the annihilation of the Old Covenant sacrificial system). Read [Acts 2:16-21](#); [1 Tim. 4:1-3](#); [2 Tim. 3:1-9](#); [Heb. 1:1-2](#); [8:13](#); [9:26](#); [James 5:7-9](#); [1 Peter 1:20](#); [4:7](#); [2 Peter 3:3-4](#); [1 John 2:18](#); [Jude 17-19](#); [Rev. 1:1-3](#); [22:6-10, 12, 20](#). The Old Covenant Israel is done. All the prophecies are fulfilled. The Bible is completed. The scheme of redemption has been accomplished. The tree of life has been restored (Jesus Christ gave us everlasting life) which Adam lost.

I would recommend you to read in [Athanasius'](#) On the Incarnation of the Word, Section 40 Verses 1-8 because I do not have enough space. Athanasius, the early Christian writer from the fourth century, made a significant preterist statement.

In conclusion, what we have seen so far is that the Preterist's view is consistent with the Scriptures. The Futurist's views do not agree with the Scriptures for several reasons. The first reason is their views are based on their church traditions or creeds. The second reason is the lack of careful analysis of the original Greek words used in the Bible and their proper meaning. The Futurists also did not carefully compare different Scriptures to determine their actual meaning.

Hopefully this will help a lot and cause you to rethink your view of eschatology. Blessed are those who abide His Word.

Soli Deo Gloria!

[Donald Hochner](#)