

Why I Am Not a Preterist

The word "preterist" is taken from the Latin word meaning "past." This view denies any future fulfillment of the book of Revelation and sees the events it describes as already having been fulfilled within the first century after Christ.

There are several different forms of Preterism. Full Preterism views all of the prophecies of the Bible as having already been fulfilled in their entirety since the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Full Preterism is a very recent innovation that has no adherents in any of the writings of the early church.

Partial Preterism maintains a future return of Christ, but views His "coming in the clouds" as described in Matthew 24:29-31 as having been fulfilled in A.D. 70 with the fall of Jerusalem. While I also disagree with this interpretation, most of my remarks henceforth will be dealing with full preterism.

1. Jesus and Preterism.

With regards to Preterism, I am reminded of the words of Jesus when He said to the disciples, *"The days shall come when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. And they will say to you, 'Look there! Look here!' Do not go away, and do not run after them. For just as the lightning, when it flashes out of one part of the sky, shines to the other part of the sky, so will the Son of Man be in His day."* (Luke 17:22-24).

It seems to me that the Preterist is one who is pointing to the A.D. 70 event and saying, "Look there! Look here!" But there is going to be no mistaking the coming of the Son of Man when He finally returns. By contrast, none of the believers of the early church viewed the 70 A.D. fall of Jerusalem as fulfilling the promise of the return of Christ. This brings us to our next point.

2. The Church Fathers and Preterism.

It is clear from a reading of the apostolic and church fathers that ALL of them expected a future return of Jesus Christ. It would be strange indeed if the entire church failed to understand the fulfillment of so many of the New Testament prophecies on such a major point. This is especially striking when we remember the promise of Revelation 1:7 that tells us, *He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him.* A preterist interpretation calls for this to be a reference to the "tribes of the land" of Israel, even though Israel was never described in such a way elsewhere in the Bible. But such an interpretation would demand that the Jews who suffered through the A.D. 70 event would have recognized that their sufferings were a punishment for their treatment of Jesus since the prophecy is not merely that they would mourn, but that they would mourn "over Him." Just as there is no evidence that anyone in the church ever

recognized the fall of Jerusalem as the return of Jesus, so also there is a complete absence of evidence that the Jews ever recognized the coming of Jesus in those events.

3. The Resurrection and Preterism.

Fundamental to full Preterism is the idea that there is no future physical resurrection of the dead. But the pattern for our resurrection is that of Jesus. The big idea presented in 1 Corinthians 15 is that Jesus arose from the dead. This was not merely some sort of spiritual resurrection. The point is made throughout this chapter that His resurrection was bodily and physical. Furthermore we are told that His resurrection serves as the paradigm for our own resurrection. *But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep* (1 Corinthians 15:20). He is the firstfruits and we are the "later fruits."

When Paul came to Athens, he was mocked by the Greeks for believing in a physical resurrection. Such mockery would not have been forthcoming had he held that the resurrection was only going to be of a spiritual or mystical nature. But he went out of his way to side himself with the Pharisees who believed in a physical resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:6-8).

In denying any future resurrection at the coming of Christ, the preterist also finds himself out of accord with the words of Paul when he says, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:51). The reference to sleep is used throughout this epistle as a euphemism for death (11:30; 15:6; 15:18; 15:20). While Paul says of the coming of the Lord that it will be a time when all do not die, the preterist is left with the rather obvious historic truth that everyone who lived in the first century did indeed die.

When it comes to the resurrection, the Bible teaches that Jesus is our prototype. His resurrection is the forerunner and the pattern for our own resurrection. This point is made in 1 Corinthians 15 where Paul says that if there is no resurrection then even Jesus has not risen.

The resurrection of Jesus was a physical resurrection. He was able to stand before His disciples in His resurrection body and say, *"See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."* (Luke 24:39). 1 John 3:2 says that *when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is.* Therefore we can conclude that our future resurrection will be of a physical AND spiritual nature.

4. Preterism and the Lord's Supper.

One wonders whether the Full Preterist is completely consistent in his views. After all, most Full Preterists continue to partake of the Lord's Supper in spite of the fact that Paul said that the eating and drinking serves to *"proclaim the Lord's death UNTIL HE COMES"* (1 Corinthians 11:26).

5. Preterism and the Promise of a Soon Coming.

Preterists like to point out that Jesus and the disciples stated that the kingdom was near and at hand. What they often ignore is that this same formula was used in the Old Testament in instances where the eventual fulfillment was a long way off.

An example of this is seen in Isaiah 13:6 where, speaking of a coming judgment against the city of Babylon, the prophet says, *"Wail, for the day of the LORD is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty."* Isaiah writes these words in the 8th century B.C. but it is not until 539 B.C. that Babylon fell to the Persians.

The preterist attempts to make a similar case via the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:34 where Jesus says, *"Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place."* What is conveniently ignored is the earlier context of Jesus' words in the previous chapter.

"Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, 35 that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. 36 Truly I say to you, all these things shall come upon this generation." (Matthew 23:34-36).

Notice that it was "this generation" that murdered Zechariah, the son of Berechiah. The problem is that this murder took place 400 years earlier as recorded in 2 Chronicles 24:20-21. This tells us that Matthew's use of the term "generation" means something different than a mere life span of the people who were living at that time.

Another common argument by preterists is the use of the second person such as when Jesus says, "You shall see the Son of Man sitting with power" (Mark 14:62). It is maintained that such a prophecy must necessitate a fulfillment within the lifetime of those to whom it is addressed. But such a claim ignores the multitude of prophecies in the Bible that addressed people as representing a future generation. Several examples will suffice:

As he is about to die, Joseph tells his brothers, "You shall carry my bones up from here" (Genesis 50:25), yet the fulfillment of this prophetic command would not be seen for many generations.

Jeremiah addresses the elders who were taken into the Babylonian Captivity (Jeremiah 29:1) and says to them, "When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place" (29:10). Because he is addressing the elders, we do not need to

assume that they must all have lived another 70 years to see the fulfillment of this prophecy.

In Malachi 4:5, the prophet says, “Behold, I am going to send to **you** Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.” This prophecy was not fulfilled for at least 400 years, yet it utilizes the same 2nd person in addressing those to whom Malachi addresses his prophecy.

6. Preterism and the Angels at the Ascension.

Another problem facing the preterist is seen in the promise that was given to the disciples at the ascension of Jesus. The event took place on the Mount of Olives.

And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10 And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them; 11 and they also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven." (Acts 1:9-11).

The promise that was given by the angels is that Jesus would come again in exactly the same way as they had watched Him go into heaven. This had not been a spiritual ascension, but a physical and visible one. It is for this reason that Christians throughout the ages fully expect a future physical and visible return of Christ.

7. Preterism and the Judgment of the World.

When Paul preaches to the Athenians on the Areopagus, he declares to them that *God has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed* (Acts 17:31). The Preterist interpretation of this verse is that it points to the A.D. 70 fall of Jerusalem, yet that fall would have absolutely no impact upon the Athenians who had gathered to listen to Paul. He says that they ought to repent because of this coming judgment and such a warning is nonsensical if it only refers to a local judgment in a far away land.

8. Preterism and the Redemption of Creation.

In Romans 8, Paul teaches that the creation has fallen as a result of sin and that *the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God* (8:21). He goes on in verse 22 to describe how *the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now* as it looks to its final redemption.

The Preterist foresees no physical redemption of creation. According to his scheme, world is fallen and will always be fallen. In this way, Preterism embraces the tenants of Gnosticism with its lack of regard for the redemption of the physical world.

Jesus said that the meek would inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5) and Abraham was promised that he and his descendants would be the heirs of the world (Romans 4:13). The preterists deny that Abraham or his spiritual descendants will ever have anything to do with the earth.

9. Preterism and a Brief Millennium.

It is no surprise to find that Preterists hold the prophecy in Revelation 20 of a thousand year reign to be symbolic. The idea of a symbolic fulfillment of this passage has been argued back and forth since the early days of the church. What is particularly problematic for the Preterist treatment of this passage is the view that this thousand year reign is to be understood as having been fulfilled in the 40 years between the resurrection of Jesus and the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem. One cannot help but wonder what is to be meant by the use of an obviously long period of time as suggested by a thousand years.

10. A View of Perpetual Sin and Death.

Because there is no future Second Coming or final judgment, Preterists believe that sin will continue indefinitely. 1 Corinthians 15:26 tells us that *the last enemy that will be abolished is death* and Revelation 21:4 tells us of a time when *there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain*, but the Preterist would have us believe that death will never be abolished and that it will always be with us.

About the Author

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John met his wife, Paula, at Florida Bible College where they were both students. "Paula is the light of my life, my constant companion and beloved partner." She and John have both served as visiting instructors at the Moldova Bible Seminary in Eastern Europe. John is an ordained pastor in the Presbyterian Church in America.

Note: The doctrinal positions taken by the author of this work are not necessarily those of Redeemer Church of Piketon, Ohio.