

## Preterism

The recent rise of preterism has helped the Christian community focus more attention on the Bible verses that suggest a "coming" again of the Lord in the first century. Critics of Christianity for many years have used these verses to attack the faith, saying that Jesus claimed He would come in the disciples' lifetimes yet He didn't. Preterism can help us better understand these prophecies and defend the faith against the gainsayers.

However I think preterists over-reach by placing the fulfillment of too many prophecies in the past. An example of this is the preterists' insistence that all the verses before verse 36 in Matthew 24 describe events that were *completely* fulfilled in A.D. 70. A plain reading of the text reveals that the events described are much broader in scope than a local Jewish war and the destruction of the Jewish temple in A.D. 70.

In my thinking, the concept of progressive fulfillment better explains these prophetic passages. The Lord's promise of "coming" in His kingdom in His disciples' lifetimes (Matt 10:23; 16:28) does not take the place of His personal, visible, bodily second coming in power and glory. Rather, the inauguration of the kingdom and the destruction of Jerusalem in the first century are a part of God's unfolding kingdom program with its final manifestation to be witnessed in the glorious appearing of Jesus Christ at the end of the world.

### A Description of Preterism

Preterism espouses that many, if not all, prophetic passages of the coming of Jesus have already been fulfilled in A.D. 70 when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem.

a. Full or hyper preterism--Considers most *all* second coming pronouncements to be fulfilled in A.D. 70, including the resurrection of the dead and the great judgment. Full preterism is extreme to the point of heresy (1Tim 1:18-20; 2Tim 2:15-18).

b. Evangelical preterism or partial preterism--Views only certain passages regarding Christ's coming and associated events such as the abomination of desolation, antichrist, and the great tribulation period as being time-marked to be fulfilled in that first century generation of Jews. The visible, physical second coming of Christ, bodily resurrection of the dead, and the great judgment are believed to be end-time events not yet accomplished.

According to preterists, Jesus' coming described in the Olivet discourse (Matt 24; Mark 13; Luke 17,21) and other passages refers to His judgment of the first century generation of Jews who rejected Him (Matt 11:16-19; 12:41-45; 23:34-39; Matt 24:34). This coming is a local judgment of unbelieving Jews around Jerusalem and/or the Roman empire and not a worldwide judgment of all unbelievers. Interpreting many prophecies as having already

been fulfilled, preterists see no scriptural warrant for a future rebuilt temple, a revived Roman empire, a future great tribulation, or future personal Antichrist.

Preterists do not believe Christ physically left heaven to come back with literal clouds in A.D. 70. Rather, they believe that Christ's coming is often portrayed using Hebrew idioms that were used in the Old Testament and by Jews of that day (Isa 13:10 Babylon's destruction; Isa 34:4 Edom's destruction; Eze 32:7-8 Egypt's destruction). These figures of speech were therefore not meant to be understood literally as Christians today might initially think. So it is imperative for students of scripture to familiarize themselves with this poetic prophetic language of the past to properly interpret prophecies of the coming of Christ. They point out that the term "coming" is often not personal and visible (Isa 19:1; Rev 3:20; Jn 14:16-18, 23; Rev 2:5).

Preterism prides itself with preserving the integrity of the timing verses such as "this generation shall not pass", "shortly come to pass", "time is at hand", "some standing here that will not taste death" without inserting unnecessary gaps in the prophetic timeline (Matt 24:34; Rev 1:1,3; 22:10; Matt 16:28; 10:23). The prophecies of Daniel and Revelation are viewed to be largely, if not completely, fulfilled in the past.

### **Problems with full preterism**

With full preterism, most all "Christ coming" prophecies have already been fulfilled in AD 70, so many scriptures are not even applicable to us today. Since the second coming is past, we are left without a blessed hope. By allowing their timing scheme to dominate, full-preterists are forced to interpret resurrection verses such as Daniel 12:2 as being in the past and deny the physical nature of the resurrection. Since the Christian's resurrection is so connected to the resurrection of Christ (1Cor 15), this can easily lead one to deny the bodily resurrection of Christ, which is a soul-damning heresy (Rom 10:9-10). Full preterism, teaching that the resurrection is past, is extreme to the point of heresy (1Tim 1:18-20; 2Tim 2:15-18).

### **Problems with partial preterism**

Some preterists believe that the disciples were not asking a question about the end of the world in the Olivet discourse (Matthew 24:3) but rather about the end of the Jewish age. Yet in the Olivet discourse, partial preterists acknowledge that starting with verse 36, the subject changes from A.D. 70 to the second coming in the future. Why would Jesus start speaking about the end of the world if the question was not even asked? Also, the words "end" and "end of the age/world" used in Matthew 24 are used elsewhere in Matthew's gospel in reference to the end of the world, not the end of the Jewish age (Matt 13:39, 49; 28:20). By firmly placing the Olivet "coming of Christ" in A.D. 70, preterists often interpret other more unlikely "Christ coming" verses to be past, with their attending events. For example, the man of sin (2Thes 2) and the beast (Rev 13) are also placed in the past. Yet the man of sin and the beast are destroyed by the coming of Jesus, which appears to be the second coming (2Thes 2:8; Rev 19:11-20). Daniel 12 is perhaps the most difficult

chapter to reconcile with preterism. A time of great trouble, the abomination of desolation (spoken of by Jesus in Matt 24:15), and a period of 3.5 years (the same time as the beast's persecution of the saints in Revelation 13) is spoken of in association with the resurrection of the just and unjust from the dust of the earth (Dan12:2). Since the resurrection occurs at Jesus' second coming (Jn 6:39-44, 54; 1Thes 4:16-17), this chapter tends to place the tribulation period with the abomination of desolation in the future. One of the arguments levied against preterism is its apparent failure to heed the warning of Jesus Himself that His coming would not be invisible and obscure (Matt 24:26-27). Verses indicating a soon coming must also be compared with verses indicating a delay in Christ's coming (Matt 24:45-41; 25:1-13, 14-39, 31-46; 2Pet 3:3-4; 2Thes 2:1-3).

### **Progressive fulfillment**

Progressive fulfillment is the idea that prophecies do not have to be fulfilled in a single event but may have a near-term and far-term fulfillment, or may be fulfilled in a succession of several events. The progressive nature of God's revelation presents an increasingly fuller view of the scope of God's unfolding prophetic plan. A prophecy's fulfillment may be realized now but also await a fuller realization in the future. An example is the Devil's predicted defeat (Gen 3:15; Matt 12:28; Jn 12:31; Heb 2:14; Rom 16:20; Rev 20:10). These verses show a succession of defeats culminating in his final defeat. Another example is the Messianic prophecies. The two comings of Messiah, one to suffer and one to reign, was not obvious until the advanced revelation of the New Testament revealed this multiple aspect of Messiah's appearing. This principle is also observed with Antichrist(s) (Dan 8; Dan 11; Matt 24; 1Jn 2:18-23; 2Thes 2; Rev 20). These examples do not show separate fulfillments of the same prophecy, but rather a progressive realization of the prophecy with the near term being a part of the full manifestation. Many other examples are found in scripture (2Sam 7:1-16; 1Chron 17:1-14; 22:6-10; Luke 1:31-33).

Regarding Christ's second coming, the Olivet discourse (Matt 24, Mark 13, Luke 17 and 21) has reference to both the destruction of the temple (Matt 24:1-3) which occurred in A.D. 70 and the second coming at the end of this age (Matt 24:3; Matt 24:36-25:46). Christ's cleansing of the temple before and after His ministry (Jn 2:13-17; Matt 21:12-13) was a preview of A.D. 70 when the temple would be completely destroyed. The local judgment against Israel in A.D. 70 was a type or rehearsal or preview of the worldwide visible coming of Christ in the future to judge the world. Progressive fulfillment allows verses in the Olivet discourse to apply to both the destruction of the temple in His generation's lifetime *and* to His visible, personal coming in the future. Note: Since Christ's first coming we have been in the last days (Acts 2:17; Heb 1:2; 1Pet 1:18-20). He came to Israel first with salvation (Matt 10:5-6), then to the whole world. Likewise, in judgment, he started with first-century unbelieving Israel in A.D. 70, and then (after the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled at the end this age) He will judge the whole unbelieving world at His appearing (2Thes 1:7-9).