

# A Biblical Analysis of the False Doctrine of Preterism

Evangelist Donald Perkins <http://www.according2prophecy.org/Preterism.html>, January 18, 2014

## The New Last Days Scoffers

**DR. EDWARD HINDSON**

Assistant to the Chancellor  
Liberty University

The Second Coming of Christ is one of the fundamental doctrines of Scripture. Jesus emphatically said, “I will come again” (John 14:3). The questions raised by believers over the centuries have always been “When?” and “How?” The answers to these questions divide Christians into various views of eschatology (“last things”). Some believe He will come before the Tribulation. Some believe He’ll return during it; and some after it. Some believe He will come at the end of the Church Age and some think He will come after the millennium.

One of the most bizarre interpretations of eschatology is the view that He has already come back! No, I’m not talking about the Jehovah’s Witnesses who think Jesus returned in 1914. I’m talking about a viewpoint called Preterism, which teaches that Jesus returned in AD 70 when the Roman army destroyed Jerusalem.

You may be thinking that no sensible person really believes that Jesus already came back. Well, it may surprise you to know that Preterism is experiencing a new wave of interest these days thanks to the encouragement of popular radio personalities like R.C. Sproul and Hank Hanegraaff. Sproul openly admits he is a “partial preterist” and Hanegraaff claims he is seriously considering it.

I have watched various eschatologies come and go over the past 40 years. Some last a few weeks (like “88 Reasons the Rapture will be in 1988”) and some a few years (like the fast-fading so-called “Pre Wrath view”). But none have had more insidious implications than Preterism – the idea that Jesus already came back and we missed it! In fact, the Bible warns us: “there shall come scoffers in the last days...saying, where is the promise of his coming” (II Peter 3:3-4).

### What is Preterism?

The term preterist is Latin for “past.” Thus, preterists believe that Bible prophecy was fulfilled in the past. Therefore, they view the major prophetic passages of Scripture, such as the Olivet Discourse and the Book of Revelation, as already fulfilled. Preterism is the exact opposite of Futurism, which views these major biblical prophecies as being fulfilled in the future.

Extreme preterists, who prefer to call themselves “consistent preterists,” hold that all Bible prophecy was fulfilled in AD 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem. They view this event as the Second Coming of Christ and reject any belief in a future return of Christ. Thus, they deny a future bodily resurrection of believers and a literal return of Christ to earth. Extreme preterists believe we are already in the “New Heavens!” Their view is not only ludicrous, but it is also heretical and places them outside the parameters of biblical orthodoxy.

Moderate preterists, like R.C. Sproul, claim they still believe in a future Second Coming, but still insist on interpreting the Olivet Discourse and the Book of Revelation as basically already fulfilled in the past. As a result, they reject such basic concepts as: Rapture of the Church; Literal Seven Year Tribulation Period; Literal Antichrist; Conversion of Israel; Battle of Armageddon; 1000-year Millennium; Future Binding of Satan.

In contrast to the basic beliefs of premillennialism, moderate preterists believe that God is finished with biblical Israel. They see no prophetic future for national Israel. The fact that the State of Israel exists today is blamed on an “accident of history” perpetrated by “ignorant premillennialists” who supported the Balfour Declaration that

eventually led to the formation of the modern state of Israel in 1948. While most preterists would insist they are not anti-Semitic, their theology certainly leans in that direction. One of the symbols of the current preterist movement is an artist's rendering of the smoldering ashes of Jerusalem in AD 70, as though they are rejoicing in the destruction of the Holy City.

### **Preterist Beliefs**

As a rule, moderate preterists tie their belief system to a postmillennial vision in which the church becomes the new "Israel" and must bring in the Kingdom on earth in order to prepare the world for the return of Christ. Most preterists believe the following:

1. Nero was the Antichrist. There will be no future individual Antichrist.
2. The Tribulation Period is already over. It occurred when the Roman army besieged Jerusalem in AD 66-70.
3. Christ "returned" in the clouds in AD 70 to witness the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman army.
4. God replaced Old Testament Israel with the Church. Therefore, all the biblical promises to Israel belong to the Church.
5. Armageddon already happened in AD 70. The fall of "Babylon" refers to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.
6. Satan is already bound in the abyss and cannot hinder the spread of the Gospel. Revelation 20 has already been fulfilled.
7. We are already in the Millennium, but it is not literal. Some preterists equate the entire Church Age as the Millennium. The 1,000 years are not literal but figurative, even though they are mentioned six times in Revelation 19-20.

The basic assumptions of preterism rest on passages that refer to Christ coming "quickly" (Revelation 1:1), or "this generation will not pass" (Matthew 24:34). They insist these must be related to and limited to the first century. By contrast, premillennialists believe that Christ's coming is imminent and; therefore, could occur at any moment. Darrell Bock of Dallas' Theological Seminary counters the preterist view, observing: "What Jesus is saying is that the generation that sees the beginning of the end, also sees its end. When the signs come, they will proceed quickly; they will not drag on for many generations. It will happen within a generation."

### **Fallacious Reasoning**

Preterists insist they are defending the Bible by making its prophecies fulfilled in the past. That way, they can't be accused of making false assumptions about the future. In other words, their interpretive methodology might be called: "back up and punt!" By confining predictive prophecy to a past fulfillment they eliminate any real need for eschatology. However, their fallacious reasoning and flimsy logic leaves them supporting a series of ridiculous conclusions that fly in the face of the whole history of biblical interpretation.

For example, the idea that Satan is already "bound" is clearly contradicted by Peter's statement: "the devil, as a roaring lion, wanders about seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). The Apostle Paul refers to Satan as the "prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2). One would have a difficult time convincing Peter and Paul that Satan was already bound by the power of the cross. If Satan is bound today, why are the nations still deceived?

If we are already in the Millennium, why is there still war in the world? When did the lion lay down with the lamb? And when did the nations beat their weapons into plowshares? If the 1,000 years are only symbolic, then is the reign of Christ only symbolic? If God broke His everlasting covenant with Israel, how do we know He will not break His covenant of everlasting life with us?

If God is finished with ethnic Israel, why did Paul ask: “Has God cast away his people?” And why did he respond so emphatically, “God forbid!” (Romans 11:1)? Why did Paul ask of Israel, “Have they stumbled that they should fall?” And why did he respond again: “God forbid!” (Romans 11:11)? Why did Paul state that “blindness in part has happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles comes” (Romans 11:25)? Why did he believe, “all Israel shall be saved” (Romans 11:26) if God is already finished with Israel?

If the Church replaces Israel and becomes the Kingdom of God on earth, why did the disciples ask Jesus at the ascension: “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). That was the perfect opportunity for Jesus to tell the disciples that He was finished with Israel and that they were the new “Israel.” But He did not! He simply told them it was not for them to know that time which the Father has predetermined for Israel to have the kingdom (Acts 1:7).

### **Practical Implications**

Theologian Tom Ice writes: “Because of the current spread of preterism, pastors and teachers need to be prepared to defend orthodox eschatology from this attack.” Those who believe that Christ already came back in AD 70 can hardly obey our Lord’s command to “keep watching” until He comes (Matthew 24:42).

Preterism rests on a faulty hermeneutic and raises serious concerns for sincere students of Scripture. Consider the following; Preterism:

1. Destroys the Literal Meaning of the Bible. Once you start arguing that the language of prophecy cannot be taken literally, you are not that far removed from not taking the rest of the Bible literally either. Preterists are following the dangerous path of liberalism which began denying predictive prophecy and soon rejected the literal interpretation of creation, the flood, the virgin birth of Christ, His vicarious death and bodily resurrection.

2. Distorts the Promise of the Second Coming. Placing the return of Christ in the past robs the Church of a confident expectation about the future. We are left on earth trying to “make the best of it” without any real hope of divine intervention. It leaves the Church trying to “bring in the Kingdom” without the King.

3. Diminishes the Hope of the Believer. Preterism negates the biblical commands to “watch” and “be ready” for the coming of Christ. It limits those injunctions to the first century believers prior to AD 70. In fact, it limits every biblical command related to the return of Christ. The phrase “until He comes” would have to be limited to AD 70. How can we “build the church” (Matthew 16:18) or “occupy until he comes.” In fact, how do we celebrate the communion service to “show forth the Lord’s death until he comes” (I Corinthians 11:26)? Should we stop celebrating the Lord’s Supper because He already came in AD 70?

4. Deprives Israel of Her Future. Preterists insist that God is finished with Israel. Many of them teach that it is actually Jesus who breaks the covenant with Israel in Daniel 9:26-27. In essence, Preterism pits Jesus against Israel and therefore smacks of anti-Semitism. Preterists actually teach that the “Babylon” of Revelation 17-18 is Jerusalem! Therefore, the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 represents Christ’s ultimate triumph over unbelief.

5. Denies the Power of Christ. While most preterists would insist they are defending the power of Christ, they are actually denying it. They are trying to “bring in the Kingdom” without the King. And might I add, they are fighting a losing battle! Christianity is under attack like never before. We are not winning the battle for world dominion and we never will. Yes, the church will continue to grow (Matthew 16:18), but so will the resistance of Satan (1 Timothy 4:1). God will continue to do marvelous things in this world. But the Church will never bring the Kingdom of Heaven to earth until the King of Heaven returns in person.

**Dr. Ed Hindson**, article appeared in the May 2005 issue of Jerry Falwell’s The National Liberty Journal. The Conservative Christian’s Newspaper, and also on their website [www.nljonline.com](http://www.nljonline.com).

# The Fallacy of Preterism

*Dr. David R. Reagan*

Preterism is a system for the interpretation of the book of Revelation. Its strange name comes from a Latin word meaning past tense. The word is appropriate because this view holds that either all or most of the book of Revelation was fulfilled in the First Century!

## The Origin of the Viewpoint

The view was developed in the 17th Century by a Jesuit priest named Luis de Alcazar (1554-1613). His purpose was to defend the Catholic Church against the attacks of the Reformers. He denied the Reformers' charge that the book of Revelation was a prophecy about the apostasy of the Roman Church. Instead, he argued that the book was a prophecy about the Church's struggles during its early years. Chapters 4 through 11 were interpreted as depicting the Church's fight against Judaism, culminating in the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Chapters 12 through 19 were viewed as the Church's struggle against paganism, ending with the fall of Rome in 476. Chapters 20 through 22 were interpreted to be a symbolic description of the glories of papal Rome. Using this clever approach, Alcazar was able to limit the range of Revelation's prophecies to the first 500 years of the Christian Era.

Alcazar was a mild Preterist. A more radical form of Preterism gained popularity in the latter part of the 20th Century and is today the most widely held version of this interpretive approach. It sees nearly all the prophecies of Revelation as fulfilled in the 70 A.D. destruction of Jerusalem, except for the resurrection of believers and the Second Coming of Jesus. It assigns the Tribulation to the fall of Israel, the great apostasy to the First Century Church, and the last days to the period between Jesus' ascension and the destruction of Jerusalem. The beast is viewed as a symbol of Nero in particular and the Roman Empire in general. The False Prophet is equated with the leadership of apostate Israel. Needless to say, many of the spokesmen for this viewpoint are anti-Semitic.

There is a more extreme form of Preterism whose advocates consider themselves to be "consistent Preterists." They take the position that all so-called "end time prophecy" was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. -- including the Second Coming and the resurrection of believers! They do not look forward to any future resurrection or any end of history. They believe we are currently living in the eternal state.

## The Cornerstone of the Viewpoint

The cornerstone of the Preterist position is a belief that the book of Revelation was written before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. This belief flies in the face of strong evidence to the contrary.

The internal evidence of the book regarding the Roman Empire and the external testimony of the Church Fathers both point to a date of authorship around 95 A.D., 25 years after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

The type of widespread Roman persecution of the Church that is pictured in Revelation did not occur until the reign of Domitian (81 - 96 A.D.). The persecutions of Nero were limited to the area of Rome. One of the Church Fathers, Irenaeus (c. 130 - c. 202), wrote that the book of Revelation was authored by the apostle John "toward the end of Domitian's reign." Irenaeus was discipled by Polycarp (c. 70 - c. 155 A.D.) who, in turn, had been discipled directly by John himself.

## References to the Temple

One of the arguments for an earlier date is based on a reference to the Temple in Revelation 11:1-2. John is told to measure the Temple, which in this case seems to be a command to assess the Temple's spiritual condition. This reference to the Temple, it is argued, must mean that the book was written before the Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D.

But this argument ignores the fact that the Scriptures teach there are going to be two future Temples, one during the Tribulation which the Antichrist will desecrate (Daniel 9:27 and 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4), and another during the Millennium which Jesus Christ will consecrate (Ezekiel 40-46).

The Temple mentioned in Revelation 11 must be the Tribulation Temple since the passage says it will be trampled down by the Gentiles for 42 months (the last half of the Tribulation). It also says this will be immediately preceded by the testimony of the two witnesses for 1,260 days (the first half of the Tribulation).

## An Eclectic Observation

I can agree with the Preterists when they insist that the book of Revelation contained a message of encouragement to First Century Christians, assuring them that the Church would ultimately triumph over the Roman Empire. I can also relate to the Reformation Historicists when they argue that the prophecies of Revelation relate to the corruption of the Roman Church and its persecution of true believers.

In other words, I believe the book of Revelation has always had a continuing relevance as a source of encouragement to suffering Christians throughout the history of the Church. It has always served as a reminder that the Church will ultimately triumph over all its oppressors.

That's why I can even agree with the liberal, Idealist viewpoint when it argues that the ultimate message of the book is that good will triumph over evil. How can anyone argue with that conclusion when the book clearly teaches that Satan will be crushed and Jesus will emerge totally triumphant?

But I also believe in the Futurist view that most of the book of Revelation is yet to be fulfilled and is to be fulfilled in its plain sense meaning. In other words, I believe there's going to be a real Antichrist and not just a symbolic Antichrist. Yes, there have been symbolic antichrists in the past, but there is going to be a fulfillment in a literal Antichrist in the future. I also believe the Tribulation, Millennium and Eternal State are all yet future.

## **Relating the Views to Each Other**

As I look at these four systems of interpretation (Historicist, Preterist, Idealist, and Futurist) and consider their relationship to each other, I am reminded of how an overhead projector works. You can put a transparency on the projector that shows the land of Israel in the time of Joshua. Then you can lay on top of that transparency another one that shows the boundaries of the land at the time of Jesus. Another overlay could show the land's boundaries during the time of the Crusaders. A final overlay could outline the boundaries as they exist today. Each transparency contains an element of truth about the land. The light shines through all the transparencies to give you the full picture, showing you how the boundaries have changed over the years.

I think that's the way these schools of interpretation relate to each other. Each one of the four contains an element of truth. The problem comes when you accept only one and reject all the others. We must never forget that the book of Revelation contained a very relevant message to First Century Christians. It assured them of their ultimate victory over the Roman Empire. We must also remember that the book has been given relevant application to the struggles of the Church throughout history.

## **Looking to the Future**

But we must also keep in mind that the Futurist view is correct when it says that the ultimate fulfillment of the book's prophecies is yet future.

There really is going to be a seven year period of Tribulation. A Jewish temple is going to be rebuilt in Jerusalem. A real person empowered by Satan will march into that temple, blaspheme God, and declare himself to be a god. This Antichrist will become the scourge of the earth. He will attempt to exterminate the Jewish people. Just as he appears to be on the verge of victory in accomplishing this satanic goal, the Lord Jesus will break from the heavens with all His holy ones, returning to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem from which He ascended into Heaven. The Lord will crush the Antichrist and inaugurate the greatest kingdom the world has ever known. The earth will be flooded with peace, righteousness and justice -- as the waters cover the sea.

## Date of Revelation Debate

Hank Hanegraaff and Mark Hitchcock

- A. Preterists argue that Christ's use of "soon and near" dictate that the events must happen within a few years of Christ ascension into Heaven.
  - 1) Soon or shortly (*tachos*) is used by Christ in Rev 1:1; 22:7, 20
  - 2) Near or "time is at hand" (*eggus*) is used in Rev 1:3 and 22:10
  - 3) These serve as a "book-ends" for the entire Revelation. They are terms of immanency, which can break in on the world at any time. All the events of the Revelation are "at hand".
  - 4) Therefore, only the Futurist or Full Preterist position can be true. Particulate Preterists believe that Revelation 20-22 are coming in the future, which would not be consistent with the immanency of the book once these events begin.
- B. Three Towers for an Early Date included in Hank's book **The Apocalypse Code**
  - 1) No mention of the destruction of Jerusalem in the Revelation.
    - a) The audience for the Revelation was Gentile believers in Asia Minor in 95 AD.
    - b) The destruction of the Temple occurred 800 miles away and happened 25 years before.
    - c) The audience was removed ethically, geographically, and historically from the destruction of the Jewish Temple in 70 AD.
  - 2) No mention of the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem in Matthew 24.
    - a) The Revelation is not a "history", it is a "prophecy". It deals with the future and not the past.
    - b) Christ instructs John to write about the present and the future in Revelation 1:19. If John wrote about the past it would be in direct violation to a command of God in recording the Revelation.
  - 3) John mentions the Jewish Temple as intact when he writes (Rev 11:1-2).
    - a) This passage does not mean that the Temple had to be standing at the time of the Vision when John was in Heaven. Both Dan 9 (538 BC) and Ezek 40-43 (573 BC) wrote about a future Temple; because Solomon's Temple was destroyed in 586 BC and rebuilt after the 70 years of Babylonian captivity in 515 BC. In fact, the Revelation records two temples. One is a tribulation Temple (Rev 11:1-2; Dan 9:26-27) that would be desecrated and destroyed by the beast. The other is a Millennial Temple that will be consecrated by Christ Himself (Ezek 40-46).
- C. In order to prove the pre 70 AD writing of the Revelation, he has to discount the testimony of all early Church Fathers from (110 – 508 AD). His conclusion, the fathers should be scrutinized against the Scriptures as a whole. However, while rejecting the testimony of Eusebius concerning the late date of the Revelation, Mr. Hanegraaff utilizes his testimony that the Apostle John was the author of the Revelation. Can't have it both ways.
- D. The absence of any mention of Paul would be unusual if John was writing the Revelation at the same time Paul was writing and ministering to the churches in Asia. Most of the churches

mentioned in the Revelation were founded by Paul during his third missionary journey in 53 – 57 AD).

- E. Laodicea experienced an earthquake in 60 AD that devastated the city. It took 30 years to repair the damage, yet at the time of John's vision they are considered rich.
- F. Conclusion: The preponderance of the evidence of both the internal and external evidence favors the late date for the writing of the Revelation in 95 – 96 AD.