

## Scriptures and Doctrine :: Why is Preterism dangerous to the church?

### Why is Preterism dangerous to the church?, on: 2016/4/22 15:27

The Menace of Radical Preterism

BY WAYNE JACKSON

The word "eschatology" derives from the Greek word, eschatos, meaning "last." It has to do with the biblical doctrine of "last" or "end-of-time" things. The term embraces such matters as the return of Christ, the end of the world, the day of judgment, and the resurrection of the dead.

One philosophy of eschatology is known as "preterism." The term "preter" issues from an original form meaning "past." Preterism, therefore, is an interpretive ideology which views major portions of Bible prophecy, traditionally associated with the termination of earth's history, as having been fulfilled already.

But the term "preterism" is flexible. Some scholars, for instance, have dated the book of Revelation in the late sixties A.D. They contend that virtually the whole of the Apocalypse, therefore, was fulfilled by A.D. 70 "when Judaism was destroyed by the invading Roman armies. A more moderate form of preterism moves the fulfillment of Revelation forward somewhat. These scholars hold that while Revelation was penned near the end of the first century, the major focus of the book is upon the fall of the Roman Empire (A.D. 476); consequently they feel there is little beyond that date that is previewed in the final book of the New Testament.

While we do not agree with either of these concepts of the book of Revelation, we consider them to be relatively harmless. They represent ideas upon which good men can honestly disagree with no significant error being involved.

On the other hand, there is a form of preterism that is quite heretical. This theory argues that all Bible prophecy has been fulfilled; nothing remains on the prophetic calendar.

This radical preterism was championed by James Stuart Russell (1816-95), a Congregational clergyman in England. Russell authored a book titled, *The Parousia*, (from a Greek word meaning "coming" or "presence"), which first appeared in 1878. Russell set forth the idea that the second coming of Christ, the judgment day, etc., are not future events at the end of the current dispensation. Rather, prophecies relating to these matters were fulfilled with Jerusalem's fall in A.D. 70. There is, therefore, no future "second coming" of Christ. Moreover, there will be no resurrection of the human body. Also, the final judgment and the end of the world have occurred already "with the destruction of Jerusalem.

Advocates of this bizarre dogma claim that the preterist movement is growing wildly. It probably is expanding somewhat though likely not as prolifically as its apologists would like everyone to believe. Occasionally the sect will get a thrust when a prominent name becomes identified with it. For example, noted theologian R. C. Sproul has apparently thrown his hat into the preterist ring "at least to some degree. Recently he characterized J. S. Russell's book as "one of the most important treatments on Biblical eschatology that is available to the church today" (quoted in *The Christian News* 1999, 17).

Radical preterism (also known as "realized eschatology" or the "A.D. 70 doctrine") is so "off the wall" biblically speaking that one wonders how anyone ever falls for it. But they do. And, as exasperating as it is, the doctrine needs to be addressed from time to time. One writer, in reviewing the A.D. 70 heresy, recently quipped that dealing with preterism is like cleaning the kitty litter box; one hates to fool with it, but it has to be done. He can just be thankful that cats aren't larger than they are.

#### The Basis for the Dogma

Preterists strive for consistency in their view of Bible prophecy. The goal is admirable. But when a series of propositions is linked, and they are grounded on the same faulty foundation, when one of them topples "like dominos in a line" they all fall. So it is with the A.D. 70 theory.

Here is the problem. In studying the New Testament material relative to the "coming" of Christ, preterists note that:

there are passages which seem to speak of the nearness of the Lord's coming from a first-century vantage point (cf. James 5:8); they observe that there are texts which indicate a coming in connection with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (cf. Matthew 24:30); combining these, they conclude that the Savior's second coming must have transpired in A.D. 70; and furthermore, since the Scriptures are clear as to the fact that the resurrection of the dead, the judgment day, and the end of the world will all occur on the day the Lord returns, the advocates of realized eschatology are forced to spiritualize these several happenings, contending that all will take place at the same time. In this interpretive process, a whole host of biblical terms must be redefined in order to make them fit the scheme. And so, while preterists attempt to be consistent, it is nonetheless a sad reality that they are consistently wrong!

#### Prophetic Imminence

A major fallacy of the preterist mentality is a failure to recognize the elasticity of chronological jargon within the context of biblical prophecy. It is a rather common trait in prophetic language that an event, while literally in the remote future, may be described as near. The purpose in this sort of language is to emphasize the certainty of the prophecy's fulfillment.

Obadiah, for instance, foretold the final day of earth's history. Concerning that event, he said: "For the day of Jehovah is near upon all the nations" (v. 15). This cannot refer to some local judgment, for all nations are to be involved. And yet, the event is depicted as near.

There are numerous prophecies of this nature, including passages like James 5:8 "the coming of the Lord is at hand." James could not have been predicting the literally imminent return of the Savior, for such knowledge was not made available to the Lord's penmen. Not even Jesus himself knew of the time of his return to earth (Matthew 24:36).

#### The Components Explained and Briefly Refuted

Let us give brief consideration to the four eschatological events that are supposed to have occurred in A.D. 70—the Lord's second coming, the resurrection of the dead, the day of judgment, and the end of the world.

First, was there a sense in which Christ came to folks at various times and places? Yes, and no serious student of the Bible denies this. Jesus came on the day of Pentecost via the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (see John 14:18). The coming was representative, not literal. The Lord warned the brethren in Ephesus that if they did not repent, he would come to them in judgment, and they would forfeit their identity as a faithful congregation (Revelation 2:5). In describing the horrible judgment to be inflicted upon rebellious Jerusalem, Jesus, employing imagery from the Old Testament, spoke of his coming in power and glory (Matthew 24:30). Again, this was a representative coming by means of the Roman forces (cf. Matthew 22:7). Verse thirty-four of Matthew 24 clearly indicates that this event was to occur before that first-century generation passed away. For further consideration of this point, see the essay on Matthew 24.

The Lord's second coming, however, will be as visibly apparent as his ascension back into heaven was (Acts 1:11). Indeed, he will be revealed (2 Thessalonians 1:7), or appear to all (2 Timothy 4:1; Hebrews 9:28).

It is a mistake of horrible proportions to confuse the symbolic comings of Christ with the second coming (cf. Hebrews 9:28) coming. And this is what the preterists do.

Secondly, it is utterly incredible that the preterists should deny the eventual resurrection of the human body just as the Sadducees did twenty centuries ago (Acts 23:8). The entire fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians was written to counter this error: "How say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?" (15:12).

But those who subscribe to the notion of realized eschatology spiritualize the concept of the resurrection, alleging that such references are merely to the emergence of the church from an era of anti-Christian persecution. In other words, it is the resurrection of a cause, not a resurrection of people.

The theory is flawed in several particulars, but consider these two points:

The Scriptures speak of the resurrection as involving both the good and the evil, the just and the unjust (Daniel 1

2:2; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15). Where, in the preterist scheme of things, is the resurrection of the "evil"? Was the "cause" of evil to emerge at the same time as the "cause" of truth?

As noted above, the resurrection contemplated in 1 Corinthians 15 has to do with the raising of "dead ones" (masculine, plural) not an abstract "cause" (neuter, singular). Significantly, the bodily resurrection of Jesus is cited as a precursor to the general resurrection in this very context (15:20,23). Christ charged that those who deny the resurrection of the body are ignorant of both the Scriptures and the power of God (Matthew 22:29).

Third, the Bible speaks of a coming "day of judgment" (Matthew 11:22). Preterists limit this to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. But the theory simply does not fit the facts. The devastation of A.D. 70 involved only the Jews. The final day of judgment will embrace the entire human family—past, present, and future (Acts 17:31). The citizens of ancient Nineveh will be present on the day of judgment (see Matthew 12:41), as will other pagan peoples. But these folk were not in Jerusalem in A.D. 70. How can clear passages of this nature be ignored?

Here is an interesting thought. When Paul defended his case before the Roman governor, Felix, he spoke of "the judgment to come," and the ruler was "terrified" (Acts 24:25). Why would a Roman be "terrified" with reference to the impending destruction of Judaism when he would be on the winning side, not the losing one?

Fourth, according to the preterists, the "end of the world," as this expression is employed in Bible prophecy, does not allude to the destruction of this planet. Rather, "world" has reference to the Jewish world, thus, the end of the Jewish age. This, they allege, occurred in A.D. 70.

But this view simply is not viable. Consider these two brief but potent points.

The responsibilities of the Great Commission "to teach and immerse lost souls" was commensurate with that era preceding the "end of the world" (Matthew 28:18-20). If the "end of the world" occurred in A.D. 70, then the Lord's Commission is valid no longer. This conclusion, of course, is absurd.

In the parable of the tares, Jesus taught that at "the end of the world" the "tares" (i.e., evil ones) would be removed from his kingdom and burned (Matthew 13:39-40). Did that transpire with the destruction of Judaism? It did not. The notion that the "end of the world" is past already is false.

The dogma of preterism or realized eschatology is erroneous from beginning to end. For a more detailed consideration of this matter, see our book, *The A.D. 70 Theory*.

#### A Common Method of Propagation

The doctrine of preterism is so radically unorthodox that its advocates realize that their efforts to win converts represent a formidable task. Consequently, they have developed a covert strategy that seeks to quietly spread their novel dogma until such a time when congregational take-overs can be effected. The distinctive traits of this discipling methodology are as follows.

It is alleged that this system represents an attractive, consistent method of interpretation. But there is no virtue in consistency, if one is consistently wrong!

Preterists criticize what they call "traditional" views of interpreting Bible prophecy. They suggest they have a new, exciting approach to the Scriptures with a spiritual thrust. Of course the "new" is always intriguing to some.

The messengers of realized eschatology frequently are secretive in their approach. They select only the most promising candidates with whom to share their ideas. Eventually, then, the A.D. 70 theory will be woven subtly into classes, sermons, etc.

When ultimately confronted relative to their teachings and methods, they will argue that eschatological issues are merely a matter of opinion, and that divergent views—especially theirs—should be tolerated. This, of course, ignores plain biblical implications on these themes (cf. 2 Timothy 2:16-18; 2 Peter 3:16). If church leaders fall for this ploy, more time is gained for the indoctrination of the entire congregation.

#### Conclusion

Wise church leaders will inform themselves relative to the theory of preteristic eschatology. If such ideas are discovered to be circulating within a local church, the proponents of such doctrines should be dealt with quickly and firmly. It is a serious matter.

**Re: Why is Preterism dangerous to the church? - posted by dolfan (), on: 2016/4/22 19:23**

It has LONG been a wishful wasted thought of mine that men without agendas would come together and each put forward a biblical, systematic explanation of each view on eschatology but with one cardinal rule: you must NOT disparage or critique the other views. Let the view you espouse stand on its own bottom.

To date, I am aware of none. I don't think it is possible frankly. Who is the man who can elucidate the Scriptures on this matter for the ordinary Spirit enlightened mind and heart without wobbling over into criticisms of another man's honest understanding? It is this inability to stay in one's own lane that makes the road to understanding travel like a Third World traffic jam.

This is not a criticism of you, Jeff. The article you shared does what 90% of the articles and books on this topic do.

Do y'all not want to have a thorough grasp of the God's honest truth on this? I do! And I can't wade through all of the smack down talk of men, pastors, teachers, authors, past or present, to arrive at a purely biblical apology for any view!! The church awaits one. Even if it is the wrong argument and wrong conclusion the church stands in utter need of clarity without counterpoint. If any of our views IS right, then by the mercies of God and the goodness of the Holy Ghost we ought to be able to find one end of it and trace it to the other end which is the singular truth of the matter. OR might we just all be so wrong?!! Because until this is done in purity and clarity -- without counterpoint to deny a contrary view -- we may as well all be honking our horns in the same old bottleneck.

**Re: , on: 2016/4/22 20:39**

Dolfan,

To me, when you come on here and it's a "Preterism Fest" from all sides, It's kinda like preaching to deceived false American "Christians" who are cultural ones & false converts (which I was before age 23): you have to not only state what is true, but also deconstruct what is clearly false & deceptive. I believe Hyper-Preterism to be just that. And dangerous. Eventually, we can pull out a verse here or there from context, piece them together to make a point, ignore the ENTIRE OT (the "scriptures the Bereans searches to see if these things were true"), hyper allegorization anything & everything, reinterpret whatever we like, & then if pressed cry wolf, accuse others, or say, "it doesn't really matter cause we just need to love Jesus". If I didn't think this was dangerous, I wouldn't say it was. Paul named the heresy of keeping the Law & other things pertaining to the Gnostics of his day, & doctrinally both deconstructs the false & builds up the true. So it's obviously ok to do so. I am not trying to slam. If you go to Julius' thread titled "Premils, False Gospel, False Christ, False Salvation". That to me is a bold (& foolish) statement. He will stand before God one day & account for that. I believe That's a slam & tearing up wheat Jesus warned sternly against. I never said those who have bought Preterism are not saved. I said it's a dangerous slurry slope of Biblical interpretation to start down that can lead to more grievous error. So who is slamming & who is warning from the heart?

God Bless,  
Jeff

**the Battle begins!, on: 2016/4/22 20:44**

and in this corner, at 15 stone....."IST" ....and in the other corner! we have "ISM" at 15 stone!

it shall last until one or the other, tires, or realizes the horror of religious PRIDE....and meanwhile many new forum members shall be aghast and stumbled.

and in the Heavenly Courts, JESUS WEPT.

**Re: the Battle begins!, on: 2016/4/22 20:48**

Neil,

God Bless you friend. My heart is not to "win" but to warn. I don't fast & pray to win arguments. Sorry if it comes across that way. I never said people who bought into what I believe is false (Preterism) are "False Salvation". I am warning Against the teaching, not attacking & accusing those who believe it as "False Believers". I think something I have Been praying about just showed its head. I may just get off & stay off & let the preterists have their way here then. That's clearly what I saw when I came back. The Gospel of Preterism & Replacement theology. If I didn't feel compelled It was dangerous I wouldn't spend time on it brother.

God Bless you,  
Jeff

**Re: - posted by dolfan (), on: 2016/4/22 21:34**

I'm for war bro Jeff.

Isn't there a weapon that will reveal the truth conclusively to all who believe? It is us against the world. Not us against us . The end times war of views is like a war but of the kind Jesus warned against. Brothers v one another. Seems to me He might actually have something to say that slices thru all of us and just tells us what the truth is.

**Re: , on: 2016/4/22 22:05**

brother Jeff, I love you, pure and simple.....and you know how I feel replacement theology, I was just funning.

I loved your testimony.....21 months, doing time, IN the Word....I love that. Give me brothers who have walked the hard road, y'know?...give me brothers who have missed a few meals, or in the past drove spikes in their arms, and then GOT UNDER THE BLOOD.....them are my brothers and sisters.

"clean shiny saints"?...they make me suspect, might be hiding something, like that Ted Haggard.....even Todd Bentley, he was acting, he should of wiped all them tats off his body....anyway,i love you brother, neil

**Re: - posted by TMK (), on: 2016/4/22 22:30**

Jeff- I am not sure who you are directing this to. No one on the forum I am aware of is a hyper preterist.

**Re: - posted by TMK (), on: 2016/4/22 22:33**

Tim wrote:

It has LONG been a wishful wasted thought of mine that men without agendas would come together and each put forward a biblical, systematic explanation of each view on eschatology but with one cardinal rule: you must NOT disparage or critique the other views. Let the view you espouse stand on its own bottom.

There is one source I know of that is excellent: " Revelation: 4 views" by Steve Gregg.

It lays 4 different interpretations of revelation verse by verse in column side by side format.

Extremely enlightening and helpful.

And he doesn't favor a view.

**Re: , on: 2016/4/22 22:44**

Actually, I listened to the Steve Gregg teaching at a brother's request. He absolutely does favor a view. He is a Supersessionist/Amillennialist/Partial Preterist. Clearly. I listened to the whole teaching where he made very clear his personal views. He is very hard for me to listen to as well for some reason, but I bore it all the way through & I am certain those are his personal views. No doubt whatsoever. He said it very matter of factly (in the 2 hour teaching I listened to).

**Re: , on: 2016/4/22 23:01**

Personally, I think Jim Fowler does an excellent job of laying out the differing views. Of course, he leans heavily on the Triumphalist View and so do I.

<http://www.christinyou.net/pages/revintro.html>

The real issue is not whether we "get it" - that is, get the Revelation all figured out. The real issue is whether He "gets us," and we discern what He, as Lord, wants to be and do in our lives, by His grace. The issue is not whether we know the combatants in the pictured battles, but rather whether we know the One who is the Victor, - whether we "know" Jesus Christ.