

An Introduction to The Preterist view of Eschatology

By [David B. Curtis](#)

As we read the Bible, we must keep in mind the hermeneutical principle of [audience relevance](#) which seeks to discover what the **original audience** understood a passage to mean. The Bible is written “*for*” us, but it is not written “*to*” us. We must seek to understand what Scripture meant to its original audience, then we can apply it to ourselves. As you read the following scriptures, ask yourself these questions: Who is this written to? When was it written? When did they expect Christ to return?

Jesus said to His disciples:

Matthew 10:23 (NKJV) "When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

Matthew 16:27-28 (NKJV) "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. 28 "Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

Matthew 24:34 (NKJV) "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.

Jesus said to Peter:

John 21:21-22 (NKJV) Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, "But Lord, what about this man (John)?" 22 Jesus said to him, "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me."

Paul said to the Roman Christians:

Romans 13:11-12 (NKJV) And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. 12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.

Romans 16:20 (NKJV) And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

Paul said to the Corinthian Christians:

1 Corinthians 1:7-8 (NKJV) so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 7:29-31 (NKJV) *But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, 30 those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, 31 and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away.*

1 Corinthians 10:11 (NKJV) *Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.*

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 (NKJV) *Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed; 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*

Paul said to the **Philippian Christians**:

Philippians 1:6 (NKJV) *being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;*

Philippians 4:5 (NKJV) *Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.*

Paul said to the **Thessalonian Christians**:

1 Thessalonians 4:15 (NKJV) *For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.*

1 Thessalonians 5:23 (NKJV) *Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul said to **Timothy**:

1 Timothy 6:14 (NKJV) *that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing,*

Paul said to **Titus**:

Titus 2:12-13 (NKJV) *teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,*

The writer of Hebrews said to the **Hebrew Christians**:

Hebrews 10:37 (NKJV) *"For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry.*

James 5:7-9 (NKJV) *Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. 8 You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. 9 Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!*

Peter wrote to **Christians**:

1 Peter 1:13 (NKJV) *Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;*

1 Peter 4:7 (NKJV) *But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers.*

John wrote to the seven **Churches in Asia Minor**:

Revelation 1:1 (NKJV) *The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants; things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John,*

Revelation 1:3 (NKJV) *Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.*

Revelation 2:25 (NKJV) *"But hold fast what you have till I come.*

Revelation 3:11 (NKJV) *"Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.*

Revelation 22:6-7 (NKJV) *Then he said to me, "These words are faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place. 7 "Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."*

Revelation 22:10 (NKJV) *And he said to me, "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand.*

Revelation 22:12 (NKJV) *"And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.*

Revelation 22:20 (NKJV) *He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am Coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*

Keep in mind **audience relevance** which seeks to discover what the original audience understood a passage to mean. He said he was coming soon, He said his coming was "at hand." He said he was coming in the life time of those he was speaking to. He said he was coming in their generation. You cannot read the New Testament without seeing the imminent expectation that they had for the return of

Christ. This has caused problems for many.

The self-proclaimed atheist, Bertrand Russell, made use of this obvious conclusion in his work *Why I Am Not A Christian* : *"I am concerned with Christ as He appears in the Gospel narrative as it stands, and there one does find some things that do not seem very wise. For one thing, He certainly thought that His second coming would occur in clouds of glory before the death of all the people who were living at that time. There are a great many texts that prove it.... That was the belief of His early followers, and it was the basis of a good deal of His moral teaching"* (page 16).

Russell used the New Testament's "imminent" texts as "proof" that Jesus could not be the Son of God. And modern Christianity, in general, has not been able to answer adequately such objections from atheists and non-Christians. Believers today must address directly the vast misunderstanding that exists within the realm of Christianity regarding Christ's eschatological teachings.

Matthew 24:34 (NKJV) "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.

Jesus, here, very plainly and very clearly, tells His disciples that ALL of the things he had mentioned would come to pass in **THEIR GENERATION**. If you study the context, you will see that this includes the gospel being preached in all the world, the abomination of desolation, the great tribulation, and the Second Coming of Christ. This is so clear that it greatly troubles those who hold to a futuristic eschatology. Look at what C.S. Lewis said about Matthew 24:34:

"The apocalyptic beliefs of the first Christians have been proved to be false. It is clear from the New Testament that they all expected the Second Coming in their own lifetime. And, worse still, they had a reason, and one which you will find very embarrassing. Their Master had told them so. He shared, and indeed created, their delusion. He said in so many words, 'This generation shall not pass till all these things be done.' And he was wrong. He clearly knew no more about the end of the world than anyone else. This is certainly the most embarrassing verse in the Bible." (Essay "The World's Last Night" (1960), found in *The Essential C.S. Lewis*, p. 385)

Is Lewis right? Was Jesus wrong? I can't accept that, can you? Fortunately, Christ did keep His promise to come within the first-century generation. Christ's Second Coming occurred spiritually — the way He intended it — at the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem. This highly verified historical event signified that sin finally had been atoned forever and that all Christians, from generation to generation, could live eternally — on earth and in heaven — without separation from God.

Now, I'm sure that you're thinking, "If the Lord did come back in 70 AD, how did we miss it for all these years?" How could he have come back and we not have known it? The problem here is one of **preconceived** ideas. It is because of the paradigms that we have developed. We think that the second coming is an earth burning, heaven melting, globe changing event; so we assume it could not have already happened.

I submit to you that either Scripture is wrong about the time of the second coming and thus not inerrant, or our paradigms are wrong about the **nature** of the second coming. Which one of those are you more

comfortable with; an incorrect paradigm or an uninspired Scripture? I think I can prove that our understanding of the “nature” of the Second Coming is wrong.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 (NKJV) Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, 2 not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.

How is it that the Thessalonians thought that the second coming had already happened? If they viewed the nature of these things as literal, how on earth could they have thought that they already happened? If their concept of the second coming was an earth burning, heaven melting, globe changing event; how could they have thought it had already happened? If Paul was teaching the second coming as an earth burning, heaven melting, globe changing event; all he would have had to say to the Thessalonians is, "Hello, look out your windows, the earth is not on fire, the sky is still blue." Paul never corrects their idea of the nature of the second coming; he simply says it has not happened yet. They must have viewed the nature of the second coming differently than we do.

Nowhere do the Scriptures teach that the **physical creation** will be destroyed. Notice what God said after the flood of Noah's day:

Genesis 8:21 (NKJV) And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in His heart, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.

Now, folks will say that the Lord destroyed the earth by water one time, and He'll destroy it by fire the next time. Is God's promise here to just change his **method** of destroying everything? Is there comfort in being destroyed by fire instead of water? Or is he promising not to destroy the earth again?

Psalms 148:4-6 (NKJV) Praise Him, you heavens of heavens, And you waters above the heavens! 5 Let them praise the name of the LORD, For He commanded and they were created. 6 He also established them forever and ever; He made a decree which shall not pass away.

What decree did God make concerning the establishment of the heaven and the earth that will never pass away? Genesis 8:21! God said that he would never again destroy every living thing. God can be trusted, He keeps his word. He said He was coming soon, and he did.

Until January, 1997, I had never heard of the preterist (meaning past in fulfillment) view of eschatology, so, I obviously could not believe what I didn't know. When a friend first shared it with me, I thought he was MAD. As I began to study this view, I saw that though it went against what the majority of the Church was teaching, it was what the Bible was teaching. I had to make a choice between tradition and the Scripture—the choice was easy. If this view is new to you, I would ask that you would openly and honestly look at what it is saying.

Almost every book in the New Testament talks of a "soon" return of Jesus Christ and it is very hard to make 2,000 years "soon," by any [hermeneutic](#). The major issue to me in all of this is the **Inspiration of**

Scripture. Don't let tradition rob you of the precious truths which our Lord taught. I challenge you to be a [Berean](#) and daily search the Scripture to see if these things are so.