

# Introduction To Preterism

[David Curtis](#) and [Richard Anthony](#)

In short, a **preterist** is the generally accepted term for those who believe that **all** biblical prophecy events have been completed, and were accomplished in the past - the first century to be exact. The event usually associated with the fulfillment of Bible prophecy is the [Roman-Jewish War](#) of A.D.66-73, especially during the [destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD](#).



The term "Preterist" is taken from the Hebrew language's "Preterite" tense, which is the "past perfect" sense, in terms of once for all completion or accomplishment. When applied to Bible Prophecy, the term has reference to events being fulfilled (completed, accomplished) in the past.

The term "preterist" can be found in the Unabridged versions of Webster's Dictionary. In the 1913 edition, the definition of "preterist" is: "2. (Theol.) One who believes the prophecies of the Apocalypse to have been already fulfilled. *Farrar*." Dictionaries are by definition authoritative compilations of word meanings, and the inclusion of a word is significant. The fact that the word "preterist" can be found as far back as 1913 shows conclusively that it has had the meaning we've been associating it with for many years!

Any modern dictionary will define "preter" as a prefix, meaning "past, beyond." This word is from the prefix "pre" which means "before in time, before in place, before in rank." And the terms "ist" or "ism" are simply suffixes, which can refer to doctrines. Therefore, "preterism" or "preterist" is simply a prefix and a suffix put together!

Just for the record, only those who believe that the Scriptures teach that all the events related to Christ's Parousia (i.e. "Second Advent," the resurrection and judgment, etc.) are past deserve the name "Preterist." All others are simply futurists of a sort.

## Paradigm Shift

Have you ever wondered why it is that two men can read the same passage of scripture and come up with two totally different interpretations? Or why two men can read the same Bible and yet see things so differently? Two men who love God and yet see the same scripture in two different ways. Is it that one of them is stubborn or unreasonable? No, it is because each of us has within us paradigms of what life is really all about. The word **paradigm** means a model or a map. We look at life through our paradigms. Inside each of us is a map or model of what life ought to be like. Our paradigms are representations of life. We all have them, and we all have paradigms of eschatology. Eschatology is a word that frightens people, they don't understand it so they are afraid of it. When I talk about eschatology, I am not talking about the end of time, but the time of the end. There is a very large difference between those two ideas. Eschatology is the doctrine of last things but it is the last things of God's plan to redeem us, not the last things of planet earth.

We all interpret life through our paradigms. We look at life and compare it to our model to decide if life is good, bad, right or wrong. We interpret life through the model that we have developed within us. Most people don't question the models that they have developed, we all assume that we have the

right model. Our paradigms are developed over a period of time and we see life through them. Our eschatological paradigms have been developed throughout our church life by what we have heard. The predominant eschatological paradigm of the church today is the late great planet earth exploding in a cataclysmic destruction of fire.

There is a thing called a paradigm shift which is when you view things one way and then you shift and view them another way. For example, at one time, most all men held the paradigm that the earth was flat. Then at a point in time men made a paradigm shift and began to believe that the earth was round. As another example: A man was on a subway in Long Island New York. As he was riding the subway, a gentleman got on the subway with three small children. The three children were about as rowdy as kids could get, they were bothering all the other passengers on the subway. The longer the man sat there and watched this the more irritated he got with the father of the children. Finally he couldn't take it any longer. He was so angry with the irresponsibility of the man that he couldn't contain it any longer. He said, "mister don't you think you should get a handle on your kids they're bothering everyone in the subway car." The man looked up and said, "I'm sorry, you're right, we just came from the hospital where their mother died and I don't know how to handle it and I guess they don't either. I'm sorry." The man's feelings were pulled inside out because what he thought was one way was in fact not that way at all. He experienced a paradigm shift. Paradigm shifts are in Scripture and they are part of your life and my life. Paul had a paradigm shift on the road to Damascus. He thought that Jesus Christ was a heretic and he was preaching against him. Then Paul met Jesus on that road and everything he believed about him was turned inside out. The person he preached against now became his life. That is a paradigm shift.

I had a paradigm shift, my views on the second coming of Christ began to change. I have believed in a future second coming, but **in light of some very compelling Scriptural evidence, I no longer believe that the second coming is future**. Now listen carefully, I am not saying I don't believe in the second coming of Christ, I strongly believe in the second coming, but I believe it is **past** not future. To deny the fact of the second coming is to deny the inspiration of scripture. Do you agree? Well, I believe that the **time** of the second coming is just as clear as the **fact** of the second coming. I believe that to deny the time statements that the Bible gives of the second coming is also to deny inspiration. Do you still agree?

In an educational study, people were given a new concept (such as the earth is round, or the second coming has already happened) and asked to believe it, which resulted in them setting aside some things they already believe. It required a paradigm shift. This is very applicable to our study. 50% believed it immediately -- without thinking. 30% didn't believe it, immediately -- without thinking. 15% wanted to wait awhile while they make up their minds, but asked for no clarification and no further information. 5% analyzed all the details and finally came to a conclusion. The results of the study go like this, It is estimated that 5% of the people think, 15% of the people think they think, and 80% of the people would rather die than think. I think that the Bereans in Acts 17 were among the 5% that think. They analyzed the details and came to a conclusion.

In Acts 17:11, the Bereans, "were more fair-minded" in that they: (1) "received the word with all **readiness**," (2) "**searched the Scriptures** daily," (3) apparently had the true spirit of open-mindedness for religious thought, and (4) in the spirit of truth sought to understand "**whether these things were so**" which Paul had spoken.

I am asking you to be one of the 5% that think, I am asking you to be a Berean, to search the Scriptures -- not to poll your friends, not to see what Church history says, not to search the commentaries, but to search the scriptures to see if these things are so. The cry of the reformation was

"Sola Scriptura" -- the Scriptures alone! Anything that contradicts Scripture must be set aside and the Scriptures must be authoritative.

I want to remind you of something -- **all truth must come from scripture!** Instead of superimposing a meaning on the biblical text, we must seek to discover the author's intended meaning (the only true meaning). One must recognize that what a passage means is fixed by the author and is not subject to alteration by readers. **Meaning is determined by the author; it is discovered by readers.** Our goal must be exegesis (drawing the meaning out of the text) and not eisegesis (superimposing a meaning onto the text). We, as believers, need to hold a belief, a paradigm if you will; we need a model or map to check out the things which we hear. But if your paradigm conflicts with the Scripture you need to modify your belief, not the Scripture. Do you agree with that?

Now, I know that most of you hold to a paradigm that says the second coming of Christ is yet future. What I would like to do is to get you to examine your paradigm in light of the inspired Word of God. I know that you believe in the second coming because the Bible teaches a second coming and you believe in inspiration. What I want to get you to realize is that **the same scripture that teaches the second coming also teaches the time of the second coming.** And to deny either the fact or the time of the second coming is to deny the inspiration of the scripture.

What does the inspired revelation teach us about the time of Christ's return? As we look at these Scriptures in the following articles, please examine your paradigm and see if it lines up with the Scripture. If it doesn't, maybe you need to make a paradigm shift.

### **Audience Relevance**

As we work our way through this discourse, we must fight the temptation to read scriptural prophecies as if it was written **to us** in the present century. Jesus is speaking to **his disciples** in the first century and we must study it in that context. **Audience Relevance is something we must always keep in mind as we read and study the Bible;** what did this mean to the original audience? Do you know of any book in the Bible written to the saints in Tidewater, Virginia? I don't. **The Scriptures are not written to us! They are for us, but they were not written to us.**

The Scriptures are God-breathed and profitable for us (2 Timothy 3:16-17), but they are not written to us. Thus we must understand the original intent of the writer before we apply it to our lives. Now, as I'm sure you understand, it is not always easy to find out exactly what the original intent of the author was; we are separated from the original audience by thousands of years, by culture, by history and by language. But if we do our homework and compare Scripture with Scripture, we can get a good idea of the authors original intent.

One of the things we must ask ourselves when reading prophecies is, "What did the passage mean to the recipients of the message?" Modern prophetic interpreters would tell you that these passages meant little or nothing to the hearers at that time because the text dealt with matters that would take place 2,000 years later. That is, God really intended these prophecies for us and not for the people to whom they were spoken or written to.

It is rare that a writer originally sets out to write scripture. When Paul wrote letters to the Christ's assembly, he was not trying to create the Bible, he was trying to respond to situations in the communities of where he preached the gospel. When Jeremiah is told to write his messages in a scroll, the purpose is clearly stated: ***"Perhaps the house of Judah will be warned of all the disaster I am planning to inflict on them, and everyone will abandon his evil conduct; then I shall forgive their wrongdoing and their sin"*** (Jeremiah 36:3). There is no sense here of writing scripture which is

applicable for all time. We are actually spectators in a process which has everything to do with the moment at which the message is presented. Neither Jeremiah nor Paul are speaking directly to us; each is addressing a particular situation in his individual community at a particular time.

With this in mind, let us examine Matthew 16:27-28.

### **Matthew 16:27-28**

Here is just one of the many numerous passages that reveal **when** the "second coming" of Christ was to take place. This is the context: Jesus is the speaker of this passage, and His audience is His twelve disciples who are standing in front of him (Matthew 16:5-6,13,20-21,24). Put yourself in the place of those being addressed 2,000 years ago.

Matthew 16:27-28, "For the Son of man **is about to come** in the glory of his Father with his angels; and **then he shall reward every man according to his works**. Verily I say unto you, There are **some of those standing here**, who **in no wise shall taste of death**, **until they have seen** the Son of man coming in his kingdom."

Notice how Jesus said that some of his disciples, who were standing right there in front of him, would not die until He came with his angels to reward every man according to his works (Revelation 22:12). But since this contradicts the belief that Jesus will come sometime in **our** future, many try to come up with excuses why this passage does not mean what it says. Here are some objections to this passage. And remember, whatever this event, it must meet all of the above criteria; not just one or two of them.

### **First Objection - Transfiguration:**

Some try to explain these verses as relating to the transfiguration, but the transfiguration was only six days later! None of them had died in that six day period, Jesus did not come with his angels, and he did not reward every man according to his works. Therefore, the transfiguration does not fit this passage.

### **Second Objection - Pentecost:**

Some try to explain these verses as relating to the day of Pentecost, but the day of Pentecost was only two months later. They were all still alive except for Judas, Jesus did not come with his angels, and every man was not judged and awarded according to his works.

Notice that, in Matthew 16:27-28, the subject is the **coming** of the Lord. These verses speak of the **coming** of Jesus! Now consider the promise of the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. In John 16:7, Jesus said that he had to **go away** so that the Holy Spirit could come. In other words, **the coming of the spirit signified the absence of Jesus!**

In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit was poured out. In verse 33, Peter said Jesus was on the throne in heaven when the Holy Spirit was sent with power on Pentecost! This is proof that the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8, John 16:7) signified the **absence of Jesus**. Therefore, Acts 2, which is the coming of the Holy Spirit, cannot be speaking about the coming of Jesus!

### **Third Objection - Another Age:**

Many of our opposition refute the notion that our Savior was speaking of his disciples that were present that day. By suggesting that the Savior did not specifically state it was the individuals of his day that would be standing there, but those of another age that would be standing in the exact same spot when he appeared. But Mark also has something to say on this subject.

Mark 8:38-9:1, "**Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.**"

Mark pin-points the people that he referred to in this statement, "there be some of them that stand here" from "this generation" which shall not taste of death, This quote eliminates any doubt that Christ addressed any other than those of his generation in his day, when he spoke of the nearness of his return. We have established our point, but for the words of another witness see:

Luke 9:26-27, "***For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels. But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God.***"

To say that when he said "this generation," he was speaking of a generation that would be living more than 2000 years in the future at the delayed time of His second coming is preposterous. This is to accuse the Messiah of a deliberate deception. But what is more, such an interpretation is a corruption of the English language. Visualize, if you will, Christ suddenly appearing to rapture the church, and then fit this statement into the scene. Why would he need to say that some of the people living on earth at the time of the rapture would not die before he returned being as he would have already returned by that time? That is saying, "There will be some people living on earth at the time of Christ's second coming that will not die before Christ's second coming." Senseless statement, huh?

### **Fourth Objection - Second Death:**

Some try to explain these verses as relating, not to physical death, but to the "second death." But this passage could not possibly be referring to the second death because only "***the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death***" (Revelation 21:8).

To believe Christ was referring to the second death is the same thing as believing that Jesus said to his disciples, "There be some standing here, which shall not burn in the lake of fire, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." Does anyone really believe that Jesus told his apostles that some of them would burn in the lake of fire when they see Jesus come in His kingdom? Of course not! It is obvious that Jesus could not have been referring to the second death, but to physical death.

### **Fifth Objection - Jesus Talked to a Crowd:**

Now, some claim, in order to believe that this passage is in reference to the second death, that Jesus was talking to a crowd of people, and not just to his disciples, and that the second death applied to those in the crowd, not to his disciples. My question is, where is the evidence of this assumption?

Let's examine this whole chapter in context, starting from when the disciples went to the other side of the sea of Galilee, and see if it's possible for there to be any other people around them:

Matthew 16:5-6, *"And when his disciples were come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees."*

Who do the "they" and "them" in this passage refer to? Verse 5 says "the disciples." It does not mention anyone else. The rest of the verses from verse 7 through 12, whenever the word "they" and "them" appear, it is in reference to these disciples only. Now, let's look at verse 13.

Matthew 16:13, *"When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?"*

The conversation that takes place between verses 13 and 20 are between Jesus and his disciples only. There is no scriptural evidence that anyone else is present. If other men were present, Jesus would not need to ask his disciples who other men say Jesus is, because Jesus could have simply asked those other men in the crowd directly! Jesus always addressed people to their face, and did not go behind their backs if they were right there in front of him.

Matthew 16:20-21, *"Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ. From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must..."*

Notice the intimacy of this conversation. He is giving his disciples explicit directions to tell no man that he is the Christ. If other men were standing around them, it would be meaningless for Jesus to tell his disciples this. Why? Because the crowd would then know that Jesus is the Christ, which Jesus was trying to hide at this point.

Matthew 16:24, *"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."*

Again, scripture says Jesus was talking to his disciples. It does not say anywhere in this chapter that Jesus was speaking to a crowd! And a few verses later, at verses 27-28, is when Jesus said his "second" coming would take place while some of those in front of him would not die! Now tell me, where is it that a "crowd" appeared in this chapter? To force this passage to say that Jesus was addressing a crowd would be to add something to the scriptures that just is not there, and that would contradict many verses already in this chapter. And since the disciples would not die "the second death" (burn in a lake of fire), this passage could not possibly be referring to the second death, but to physical death.

### **Sixth Objection - Different Kingdoms:**

Due to the traditions of men, most separate verse 28 from verse 27, seeing it as the beginning of a new topic with a different coming of the Son of Man in view. Since most commentators and pastors approach Matthew 16:28 with a prejudice instead of doing honest exegesis, they simply imply that Christ couldn't be referring to His second coming in this verse. We must first see if there is any justification for dividing verse 28 from verse 27. Is Christ speaking of two different comings or are they one and the same in these two verses?

The common and authoritative phrase of Jesus "Verily, I say unto you." links the coming of the "Son of Man" in verse 28 back to the same coming of the "Son of Man" in verse 27. "Verily" is used 99

times in the New Testament, and is never used to introduce a new subject but rather to authoritatively reiterate the subject matter previously under consideration.

Jesus uses this phrase to emphasize to the Apostles the timing and significance of His coming. In verse 28, Jesus reiterates the same time frame of His coming, in their generation, (see parallel verse in Mark 8:38) but gets more specific and adds an even more dramatic statement to the same subject; that being that not all of them would live (verse 28) within that generation (verse 27) to see it happen.

### **Seventh Objection - Majesty:**

The objection is the silliest. Some claim that verse 28 does not say "kingdom," but should be interpreted "majesty." Thus, it should read, "...the Son of man coming in his **majesty**." Well, there is not one shred of evidence that this should be "majesty."

The Greek word here is #932 "*basileia*." It is used 162 times in scripture, and refers to a "kingdom" each and every time it is used in the New Testament. Every time the word "kingdom" appears, it is from this same Greek word. It is never, ever, translated as "majesty."

Would these same people who want to replace "kingdom" with "majesty" do the same thing to other passages with the word "kingdom?" No, they just want to change this one passage. There is no reason to do this, except if one has a pre-conceived idea that the Kingdom will come at some future time. In that case, all the scriptures that say the kingdom would come during the first century "must" be wrong, and we must replace it with something else, anything else but "kingdom!" In other words, they are placing their own beliefs above the word of God.

### **Eighth Objection - Spiritual Death:**

Some say the "death" spoken of by Jesus was spiritual death. If this is true, and Jesus said "some" of his apostles would not experience spiritual death, that implies that "most" of his apostles would experience spiritual death. I do not believe that most of his apostles, who lived side by side with him in the flesh, and received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, would fall away from the faith and lose the Holy Spirit. Because if most of Jesus' apostles could not avoid spiritual death, how much harder it would be for us to avoid going astray! Who, then, can enter the Kingdom of God if not His Holy Apostles?

Not the End

Only just the Beginning