

The Only Solution to the Liberal/Skeptic Attack on the Bible

by [John Noe](#)

In America over the past 50 to 100 years, seminary after seminary, church after church, and believer after believer have fallen victim to the liberal/skeptic attack on the Bible. They have departed from the conservative faith. It's called the "battle for the Bible." How or why has this happened? Critics have hit Christianity at its weakest point. Read it for yourself:

Atheist Bertrand Russell, in his book *Why I Am Not A Christian*, discredits the inspiration of the New Testament:

"I am concerned with Christ as He appears in the Gospel narrative... He certainly thought that his second coming would occur in clouds of glory before the death of all the people who were living at the time. There are a great many texts that prove...He believed that his coming would happen during the lifetime of many then living. That was the belief of his earlier followers, and it was the basis of a good deal of his moral teaching."

Russell later reasons that it would be fallacious to follow a religious leader (such as Jesus) who was mistaken on so basic a prediction as his parousia.

Liberal Albert Schweitzer, in his 19-century book *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, Schweitzer summarized the problem of "Parousia delay" as follows:

"The whole history of Christianity down to the present day... is based on the delay of the Parousia, the nonoccurrence of the Parousia, the abandonment of eschatology, the process and completion of the 'de-eschatologizing' of religion which has been connected therewith."

Jewish skeptics contend that Jesus didn't complete the whole mission of the Messiah within the time frame their prophets had predicted. They allege that Christians invented the idea of a "second coming" off in the future to cover up Jesus' failure to return as He promised. This is the Jews' primary excuse for rejecting Jesus and belittling Christianity.

Muslim skeptics paint Christianity as a failed and false religion. They acknowledge that Jesus was a prophet, but discredit his divinity and destroy the credibility of the faith He presented by pointing out alleged errors and inconsistencies concerning his perceived nonreturn. They rightly recognize the logical implications of the Bible's time statements as having a direct bearing on the messianic and divine claims of Christ. They believe that Jesus and the Apostles either lied about his imminent return and other eschatological matters, or Jesus prophesied things that were not fulfilled when He said they would. Either way, He was a false prophet. These arguments naturally seek to undermine the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible and open the door for the acceptance of the Koran and Islam.

Even C.S. Lewis, the respected Christian apologist and author, we are embarrassed to report, said in 1960:

"Say what you like, we shall be told, 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. It 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.

Do you hear what these critics and even C.S. Lewis are saying? They are saying Jesus was literally wrong when he made numerous time-restrictive predictions and statements regarding his coming, his return. This was, and still is, the crack that let the liberals in the door to begin their systematic criticism and dismantling of Scripture with its inevitable bankrupting of the faith. But what predictions, what statements are they citing?

While talking with his disciples, Jesus told them, "When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another, I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of man comes" (Mt 10:23). And in Matthew 24, "'Tell us,' they said, 'when will this happen [destruction of the Temple] , and what will be the sign of your coming [parousia] and of the end of the age'" (vs. 3). That's a simple question – "Tell us when...?" not if, but "when." Then Jesus goes into a long answer to their three questions. It includes: the coming of the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place, instructions to flee, great tribulation, sun and moon darkened, stars falling from the sky, heavenly bodies shaken, the coming [parousia] of the Son of Man, the sign of the Son of Man appearing in the sky, all the nations of the earth mourning and the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. Then in verse 34 He answers their time question ["Tell us...when"] by declaring, dramatically , "...I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened."

"What do you do with these passages" (and many others like them), liberals and skeptics ask? Most evangelicals are forced to agree that Jesus didn't return as and when He promised, in that generation or in that century. Standard Christian explanations for this claim that Jesus' coming has been delayed or postponed, or that the timing was misunderstood, and that He will come again (return) someday "soon" and finish the job. These attempts to evade the plain meaning of clear and emphatic statements are at a real disadvantage against the skeptics' attack. The informed critics of Christianity have no trouble seeing though the biblical inconsistencies of this poor scholarship. Not only do these cover-up attempts prove the point but add more ammunition to the skeptics' claim

✂ Jesus was incorrect about his time-restricted predictions and therefore cannot be the Messiah. The bottom line is that postponement theories directly contradict the teachings of Jesus, and nonoccurrence leaves Christianity vulnerable to all manner of critical scorn and harmful assaults. It gives the skeptics all the license they need to blaspheme Jesus as not only a false prophet, but a deceiver as well. It opens wide the door to the dismissal of all Christian claims.

Let's face it, the liberals and skeptics have a legitimate complaint if Jesus did not do something that He said He would. They are more than aware of the dilemma that nonoccurrence presents for the Christian Church and the impossibility of escaping it without being disloyal to Christ. Fact is, Jesus made clear, concrete, future predictions about his coming in glory that seemingly did not come to pass. Or so we've been told. Liberal criticism concentrates on that point.

R.C. Sproul, a respected Reformed theologian, calls this dilemma:

"One of the most critical issues that the church faces today and has been facing for some time, and that is, a serious crisis...in the area of eschatology... a wholesale attack on the trustworthiness of the Bible and of the truth of the Scripture concerning the Person and work of Jesus Himself..." "I have never been satisfied that the evangelical community has dealt with the problems of the time-frame references that are set forth in the New Testament about the near-term expectations...things that were to happen within the first century." -- "Last Days Madness," Ligonier Ministries' 1999 National Conference.

"...skeptical criticism of the Bible has become almost universal in the world. And people have attacked the credibility of Jesus. Maybe some church fathers made a mistake. Maybe our favorite theologians have made mistakes. I can abide with that. I can't abide with Jesus being a false prophet, because if I am to understand that Jesus is a false prophet, my faith is in vain." -- "The Problem of Imminency," 1993 Covenant Eschatology Symposium, Mt. Dora, FL.

"The evangelical world cannot afford to turn a deaf ear to the railing voices of skepticism that gut Scripture of its divine authority, that assault the credibility of the apostolic witness and even of Christ himself. We must take seriously the skeptic's critique of the time-frame references of New Testament prophecy, and we must answer them convincingly." -- The Last Days According to Jesus, p-203.

How can conservative evangelicals answer them "convincingly"? Certainly, it's not with the postponement theories of the past, or by changing the meaning of commonly understood and normally used words, or by any of the other side-stepping techniques futurists are forced to employ. Nor can we continue to ignore these attacks hoping they will go away. They won't.

The ONLY SOLUTION to the dilemma of "nonoccurrence" is OCCURRENCE! It's the only biblically CONSISTENT SOLUTION that can stop the liberal/skeptic assault dead in its tracks. It's also the simplest solution. It has been right in front of us all along. And that is ✕ Jesus was correct. He said what He meant and meant what He said. Furthermore, 1st-century imminency expectations also prove true. Is it really so unbearable to believe that everything happened exactly as and when Jesus predicted it would and every New Testament writer expected? After all, they were guided into all truth and shown the things that were to come (Jn 16:13). We are the ones who must honor the clearly used, consistently employed, and biblically defined time parameters that Scripture imposes upon itself, and, consequently, adjust our understanding of prophecy's precise past fulfillment.

This is THE PRETERIST VIEW. It documents how all eschatological events came to pass within the lifetime of Jesus' contemporaries i.e. within that same and uninterrupted "last days" time frame (Heb 1:1-2). This includes our Lord's time-restricted return. Nothing was delayed, nothing proved false, everything certainly came to pass (Hab 2:3; Heb 10:37), right on time, in conjunction with the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

For this reason, the preterist position is the most Christ-honoring, Scripture-authenticating, and faith-validating of all six major end-time views in the historic church. I encourage you to honestly and sincerely consider the great advantage the preterist view has against the liberal/skeptic attack on the Bible that it is "the only solution" to their objections. It is time for conservative evangelicals to rise up and counterattack. But we must do this "convincingly" as R.C. Sproul has well stated. Therefore, I recommend the preterist view to your serious attention.

"I am encouraging my students and colleagues to carefully consider the preterist view." ✕ L. Rush Bush, past-President ETS, in IPA's booth at ETS's 51st Annual Meeting in Danvers, MA, 1999

"There are a number of books...on four views [such as Revelation Four Views]. They are important steps on moving toward consensus and toward a solution on a problem. But they are by definition not the solution...Somehow we need to work at establishing a distinctive evangelical scholarly voice. There's a Jewish voice. And there's a Roman Catholic voice. And there's a liberal academic voice. But there is no distinctly evangelical academic voice. We lose by default...Consider the possibility that God wants the church to discover answers and reach consensus on more and more problems...to speak with a unified voice on certain issues and before the whole world." ✕ Wayne Grudem, President ETS, presidential address at ETS's 51st Annual Meeting in Danvers, MA, 1999

"The preterist movement is the only serious and significant attempt by conservative believers to preserve the inspiration of Scripture and safeguard the integrity of Christ and the New Testament writers against the liberal/skeptical attack. It is also the only hope for reviving the Church of Jesus Christ " ✕ Edward E. Stevens, President IPA, IPA's booth at ETS's 51st Annual Meeting in Danvers, MA, 1999