

What Is The Preterist View?

By Edward E. Stevens

Is the End of the World near? Are we living in the Last Days? Is Christ's return at hand? For 150 years here in America we have constantly been told we were living on the threshold of the end of the world and Christ's return. Prediction after prediction failed to materialize, and false hope after false hope has been foisted upon the Christian community. Some Christians were defrauded of their possessions, and were so disillusioned they left the faith or committed suicide. End time speculation in Korea got so far out of control that some Christian women had abortions. The secular media (who are always looking for an excuse) are further discrediting Christianity because of it. Something is terribly wrong with traditional views of Bible Prophecy. We need to re-examine the whole issue of Last Things.

Bible prophecy can be understood, but Futurist views have fallen far short: their extreme physical/literalizing approach, their seeming inability to distinguish between figurative and literal language, and their failure to properly take into account the historical-grammatical-cultural context of the prophecies (specifically what they meant to their original audience). Even the most difficult prophetic passage comes alive when approached properly. It is time to look at some alternatives, and the *Preterist* view is a great place to start.

What is the Preterist view, you say? "Preterist" means past in fulfillment, and "Futurist" means future in fulfillment. *Preterist* basically means the opposite of *Futurist*. Futurists believe most end-time prophecies (especially the major ones) are yet to be fulfilled. Preterists believe that all of Bible Prophecy has been fulfilled in Christ and the on-going expansion of His Church. Most Futurists do not really believe Christ has been successful yet in fully establishing His kingdom.

The "Preterist" interpretation of Bible prophecy is compatible with the essential beliefs of all Christians, and is already represented in nearly all denominations. It has been mentioned several times in publications such as *Christianity Today*, *Christian News*, *World Magazine*, and others. There are Radio and TV programs around the country teaching from the preterist perspective, and several monthly and quarterly publications. Scores of preterist books, tracts, video and audio tapes have been produced and many more are in the works. Authors of preterist books have been interviewed dozens of times on Radio Talk Shows. It is capturing significant public attention, and is "spreading like wildfire" on the Internet and at the grass roots level, especially among Reformed folks.

Ever wonder why the First Century Christians expected Jesus to come in their lifetime, and where they got this expectation from? When did Christ and the apostles say He would return? Take a look at the extreme sense of **imminency** in these passages (note boldfaced words):

Matt. 10:23 "But whenever they persecute you in this city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, **you shall not finish** going through the cities of Israel, **until the Son of Man comes**."

Matt. 16:27,28 "For **the Son of Man is about to come** in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds. Truly I say to you, there are **some of those standing here** who shall **not taste death** until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

Matt. 24:34 "Truly I say to you, **this generation** will not pass away until all these things take place."

James 5:8 You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for **the coming of the Lord is at hand**.

IPet. 4:7 **The End of all things is at hand**; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.

Rev. 1:1-3 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the **things which must shortly take place**; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for **the time is near**.

Rev. 22:6-7 And he said to me, "These words are faithful and true"; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the **things which must shortly take place**. And behold, **I am coming quickly**. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book."

Rev. 22:10 And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for **the time is near**."

Rev. 22:12 "Behold, **I am coming quickly**, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done."

Rev. 22:20 He who testifies to these things says, "**Yes, I am coming quickly**." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

Did Jesus keep His promise to come in that generation? Were the apostles correct in saying that Christ would return soon in their lifetime? These verses have always troubled Bible students, and are used by liberal theologians to attack the inspiration of Scripture. They say these passages were not fulfilled when they were supposed to be (the first century generation), so Jesus and the NT writers foiled in their predictions and are therefore not inspired. These verses point to Christ's coming in connection with the Fall of

Jerusalem, the destruction of the Temple, and the end of the Jewish sacrifices in AD 70. Those final events of the redemptive drama came to pass in the first century just as he said, so there is no need to try to explain-away the seeming non-fulfillment.

Christ has conquered all His enemies and has given us the Kingdom. We have "eternal life" now in Christ. We no longer have to fear waiting in Hades for a long time until the resurrection and judgment. In Christ we have passed out of judgment into the life of the eternal kingdom. These are present and abiding benefits, not pie-in-the-sky bye-and-bye. The book of Revelation has been fulfilled and relates to the Kingdom that we are now a part of.

It's just simple, straight-forward Bible interpretation. Prophecy finally makes sense when approached from this perspective! It offers a much more positive and realistic worldview. It is conservative, consistent, optimistic, responsible and accountable. And it robs us of no motivation for either living the Christian life, or evangelizing the world. It puts emphasis on the spiritual nature of God's Kingdom, not on the physical, materialistic, sensual, and sensational. It teaches a realized spiritual salvation in Christ and the Church now, instead of a frustrated hope for a postponed sensually-gratifying paradise way off in the future. It doesn't engage in wild-eyed speculation about the future, but documents the fulfillment from the pages of first century history. The world will be here for a long time (if not forever), so we need to make it a better place for our children and grandchildren instead of retreating from involvement in society and longing for escape.

Some of the great theologians and scholars of the last 300 years took this view, but most of Christianity was too caught up with the idea that the Pope was the Antichrist or some other such Futurist notion. That has changed. We are not as gullible now as they were when William Miller, Darby, Russell, Rutherford, Scofield, Walvoord, and Hal Lindsey came along. A constant barrage of false predictions has made us more wary.

Over a hundred years ago, Dr. James Stuart Russell (1816-1895), pastor of a Congregational Church in Bayswater, England, wrote a book entitled, *The Parousia - A Critical Inquiry Into The NT Doctrine Of Our Lord's Second Coming*. It is now back in print and selling well in Christian bookstores in America and elsewhere. This is a classic defense of the Preterist view. Most Christian theologians in Europe a century ago took a similar approach, so it is not surprising to hear Russell's contemporaries say nice things about his book: F. W. Farrar said it was "full of suggestiveness." Milton Terry, who wrote *Biblical Hermeneutics*, quoted extensively from Russell's book and fully endorsed Russell's Preterist approach. Here's what well-known scholars in our day are saying about Russell and the Preterist view.

"How many times have you struggled with the interpretation of certain Biblical texts related to the time of Jesus' return because they did not fit with a preconceived system of eschatology? Russell's Parousia takes the Bible seriously when it tells us of the nearness of Christ's return. Those who claim to interpret the Bible literally, trip over the obvious meaning of these time texts by making Scripture mean the opposite of what it unequivocally declares. Reading Russell is a breath of fresh air in a room filled with smoke and mirror hermeneutics." - (Gary DeMar - Author of *Last Days Madness*)

"I believe that Russell's work is one of the most important treatments on Biblical eschatology that is available to the church today. The issues raised in this volume with respect to the time-frame references of the New Testament to the Parousia are vitally important not only for eschatology but for the future debate over the credibility of Sacred Scripture." - (Dr. R. C. Sproul -Chairman, *Ligonier Ministries*)

"Although I do not agree with all the conclusions of J. Stuart Russell's *The Parousia*, I highly recommend this well organized, carefully argued, and compellingly written defense of preterism to serious and mature students of the Bible. It is one of the most persuasive and challenging books I have read on the subject of eschatology and has had a great impact on my own thinking. Russell's biblico-theological study of New Testament eschatology sets a standard of excellence." - [Dr. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. - Author of *Before Jerusalem Fell*]

Russell's book has certainly been a very helpful resource for understanding Bible prophecy, but many have discovered the preterist view through their own independent study of scripture. Biblical prophecy is bursting with meaning for them now. If you haven't taken a look at the past fulfillment approach to Biblical prophecy, it is time you did.

This and other fine books dealing with the preterist view are available from us here at *IP A*. Contact us, so you can finally make sense out of Bible Prophecy without being taken for a ride by the date-setters. We will send a free packet of information about our books, tapes, tracts, and videos. Visit our web site to read the great articles posted there, plus read about and order any of our resources.

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