

Tuesday, July 25, 2017—Grace Impact Summer Family Bible Conference—Are the Preterits Right After All?

Purpose: A study to answer the growing Preterits claim that prophecy was fulfilled in the first century and out literal, dispensational interoperations are bogus.

Introduction

- Announce Bible Conference, October 20-22 on the 500th Anniversary of the Protestant Revolution
- Matthew 24:34—the passage that this verse is found in is commonly referred to as the Olivet Discourse. The context covers an extended time that includes the 70th week of Daniel (tribulation) until the 2nd coming of Christ.
 - Matthew 24:4-8—“beginning of sorrows”
 - Matthew 24:15—“abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet.” This occurs in the midst or middle of the week according to Daniel 9:27.
 - Matthew 24:29-31—immediately after the tribulation Jesus Christ will return bodily back to earth.
- Matthew 24:34—in the context Jesus is saying that the current generation i.e., the one he had been addressing for almost 3 years would not pass until they had seen all the things fulfilled in the passage.
- Were all these things fulfilled? Did all these events come to pass? Did the generation Christ was addressing pass? How does one account for this seeming discrepancy? Was Jesus lying? Why were “these things” not fulfilled?
- One answer that has been offered in church history is to teach they already were fulfilled in 70 AD and that we are spiritual Israel. This belief is called Preterism.
- To accomplish our purpose this morning I would like to consider the following three questions.
 - What is Preterism?
 - When and why was Preterism taught in church history?
 - What is the scriptural answer to Preterism?

What is Preterism?

- The title Preterism is derived from the Latin word *preter* which means past. Preterism claims that all Biblical prophecy including the events described by Christ in the Olivet Discourse as well as

by John in the book of Revelation have already been fulfilled. There are two basic forms of Preterism: moderate (partial) and extreme (full).

- *Moderate Preterism*—holds that that the resurrection and the Second Coming are future, but that all the other prophecies made in Matthew 24-25 and in Revelation 6-18 were fulfilled in the first century, with the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.
- *Extreme (Full) Preterism*—maintains that all New Testament predictions are past, including those about the resurrection and the Second Coming, which likewise occurred during the first century.
- Theologically speaking Preterism stands in direct contrast with Futurism or the belief that these prophecies await a yet future fulfillment. Preterism has gained traction in some quarters due to the unfortunate trend among some Futurists to date set and predict the return of Christ (William Miller).
 - ““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 big three events — the Second Coming, Resurrection, and Judgment) are yet to be fulfilled. Preterists believe that most or all of Bible Prophecy (especially the big three events) has already been fulfilled in Christ and the on-going expansion of His Eternal Kingdom. Many Futurists do not really believe that Christ has been successful in fully establishing His Kingdom.” (Preterist.org)
- Major Preterist proof texts include the following passages.
 - Matthew 10:23, 16:27-28, 24:34
- The *International Preterist Association* website (Preterist.org) states the following about their belief system.
 - “These verses [see above] have always troubled Bible students, and have been used by liberal theologians to attack the inspiration of Scripture. They reason that these passages were not fulfilled when they were supposed to be (the first century generation), so Jesus and the NT writers failed in their predictions and were therefore not inspired. But these verses point to Christ’s coming in some sense in connection with the Fall of Jerusalem at 70 AD.

So, Jesus’ predictions were fulfilled. He did not fail, nor do we need to engage in theological gymnastics to try to explain-away the seeming delay or postponement of His return. It happened right on schedule. Many theologians know that the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD was important in God’s scheme of redemption, but never understood its full significance. It has to do with the consummation of the plan of redemption. The final events of the redemptive drama came to pass in the first century within the apostles’ generation (before A.D. 70). Christ’s kingdom is here now. Paradise has been restored in

Christ (for our afterlife in heaven above). Christ has conquered all His enemies and has given us His Eternal Kingdom, “of the increase of which there shall be no end” (Isaiah 9:6-7).

This view offers a much more positive and realistic worldview. It is conservative, consistent, optimistic, responsible and accountable. . . In fact, it's the only view which gives us a consistent reason for being constructively involved in making the world a better place for the long-term, unlike the short-term escapist and withdrawal mindset of most futurists.

Bible prophecy absolutely makes sense when approached from this past-fulfillment (Preterist) perspective! 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 has an optimistic worldview that gets involved, makes a positive difference, and lights a candle, rather than cursing the darkness, longing for a rapture-escape, or retreating from society. It doesn't engage in wild-eyed speculation like futurist views. It's just simple, straight-forward Bible interpretation.” (Preterist.org)

- We see then that Preterism purports to be a defense of the Biblical doctrine of inspiration. Moreover, Preterism views dispensational premillennialism as its theological arch enemy. Particular disdain is reserved for the belief in the pretribulation rapture.

When and Why Was Preterism Taught in Church History?

- During the Protestant Revolution many of the Reformers believed and taught that the Pope/Papacy was the fulfillment of the prophecies in the book of Revelation regarding the Beast. In other words, many Protestant scholars believed the Pope/Papacy was the anti-Christ.
 - See PowerPoint
- One of the major moments of the Catholic Counter Reformation was the founding of the Jesuits by Ignatius Loyola. Preterism in its modern form was first articulated by Luiz de Alcazar (1554-1613) a Jesuit Monk to answer the Protestant teaching that the Pope/Papacy was the anti-Christ. This was done by saying that all Biblical prophecy had been fulfilled in the first century by 70 A.D.
- It is important to note that critics of Futurism in general and the Pretribulation Rapture specifically have tried to pin its origin on Jesuit monks Ribera and Lacuna as an attempt to escape the Protestant teaching that the Pope/Papacy was the anti-Christ. For a complete treatment of this history interested parties are encouraged to study Lessons 44-45 and 51-53 of the Grace History Project.

- Preterists will attempt to cry fool and site fragmentary evidence for their position in the writings of early church fathers such as Origin and Eusebius. Sixth century commentaries on Revelation by Andreas of Cappadocia and Arethas demonstrate an awareness of Preteristic ideas in the 500s A.D., but the fact remains that Preterism in its modern manifestation first appeared in the writings of Alcazar.
- Since many have sought to discredit dispensational theology as a new doctrine/development in church history we need to be careful not base our argument against Preterism on circumstantial historical evidence but on Scripture.

What is the Scriptural Answer to Preterism?

- As we saw earlier, Preterism is essentially based upon how one understands three verses in Matthew.
 - Matthew 10:23, 16:27-28, 24:34
- Matthew 3:2—John the Baptist is calling Israel to repent because the kingdom of heaven was at hand or near.
- Matthew 4:17, 23—Jesus was preaching the message that John was preaching. It is called the gospel of the kingdom in verse 23.
- Mark 1:14-15—defines the initial content of the gospel of the kingdom.
 - The time is fulfilled
 - The kingdom of God is at hand
 - Repent ye and believe the gospel
- The announcement that “the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is hand” is governed by Daniel’s prophecy of the 70 weeks in Daniel 9. According to Daniel’s prophecy the time truly was “at hand” the 69th week was winding down and Israel was within about 10 years of seeing the complete fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy and after that establishment of the long-prophesied kingdom.
- Matthew 2:1-2—how did the “wise men from the east” know that the star they saw in the sky was significant and the represented the birth of the King of the Jews? They possessed copies of the book of Daniel and other Old Testament books and were able to figure out some of the timing of Daniel’s prophecy.
- Luke 19:41-44—Israel should have known based upon Daniel’s prophecy when Messiah the Prince would arrive in Jerusalem. Jesus weeps over the city because they knew not the time of their visitation. They should have known but they didn’t.

- Matthew 3:7—the kingdom was not the only thing that was at hand. So, to was the wrath.
- Matthew 24:34—all of this proves that in the Gospels the nation of Israel is being prepared for near fulfillment of these prophetic verses recorded in the Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24 and 25. Prophetically speaking portions of the generation that Christ was addressing would not have died because all these things would have been fulfilled in a little more than 7 years (give or take), according to the prophetic time schedule outlined in Daniel 9.
- But the generation Christ was addressing did die and events that were said to be at hand did not come to pass. The question is why?
- In every language verbs possess or have a mood. The English language possesses four verb moods: indicative, imperative, subjunctive, and infinitive.
 - *Subjunctive Mood*: expresses doubt or something contrary to fact. Modern English speakers use indicative mood most of the time, resorting to a kind of “mixed subjunctive” that makes use of helping verbs: *If I should see him, I will tell him*. Americans are more likely to say: *If I see him, I will tell him*.
- The Greek language that the New Testament was originally written in also possess four moods: indicative, optative, imperative, and subjective. The subjunctive mood in Greek functions the same way it does in English.
 - This is the mood of probability or desirability. The action described may or may not occur, depending upon circumstances.
- Matthew 24:34—the Greek verb translated “shall not pass” is in the subjunctive mood meaning that its fulfillment is dependent on certain set of circumstances.
- Matthew 16:28—the Greek verb translated “shall not taste” is in the subjunctive mood.
- Matthew 10:23—the Greek verb translated “shall not have gone over” is in the subjunctive mood.
- That means that the fulfillment of this statement is potential depending on a certain set of circumstances. What is the fulfillment contingent upon? Israel’s heart attitude regarding her king and kingdom.
- Acts 3:12-18—Israel rejected and killed the prince of life thereby by bringing about the fulfillment of what the prophets had to say about the suffering of Christ (verse 18).
- Acts 3:19—what Israel must do now is repent and change her mind about who Christ is. If they do, their sins will be blotted out “when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.” The Greek verb translated “shall come” is in the subjunctive mood. There by

indicating the times of refreshing coming from the presence of the Lord is contingent upon Israel repenting. If Israel does not repent, the “times of refreshing” would not come.

- Acts 3:20—the Greek verb translated “shall send” once again is subjunctive. Once again indicating that if Israel does not “repent” in verse 19 Christ will not be sent in verse 20.
- Acts 3:21—according to the prophetic program Christ must have been received up into heaven before he could return a second time to establish the kingdom and usher in the “times of refreshing.”
 - Luke 19:12, 19—Christ went into a far country (heave) to receive his kingdom.
- The return of Christ to execute and rest of the prophetic program was contingent upon the heart attitude of the nation toward her king. If Israel would not repent Christ would not return with the kingdom. If Christ did not return with the kingdom the generation Christ was addressing in Matt. 24:34 would pass i.e., die without seeing the fulfillment of the Olivet Discourse. The subjunctive mood in Matthew 24 leaves open the possibility that it would not come to pass thereby leaving the integrity of God’s word intact.
- Acts 7—the leadership of Israel stones Stephen thereby demonstrating the unrepeated heart attitude of the nation towards her king.
- Romans 11:32, 11-15—God concludes Israel in unbelief along with the Gentiles. Temporarily Suspended his prophetic dealings with Israel so that he could reveal the mystery of the present dispensation and form the church the body of Christ.
- The answer to Preterit claims that all prophecy was fulfilled in 70 A.D. and that we are now spiritual Israel and experiencing God’s spiritual kingdom is the word of God rightly divided from the mid-Acts Pauline perspective.
- Ephesians 3:9—in time past thy mystery was “hid in God.” During his earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus Christ did nothing to tip the Godhead’s hand with respect to the revelation of the mystery. God dealt with Israel fairly accounting to the terms of Israel’s program. The integrity of God’s word is retained not by embracing Preterism but by rightly dividing the word of truth as set forth by the Apostle Paul.

Conclusion

- John Nelson Darby did (JND) not invent dispensationalism in the early 1800s. Rather, dispensationalism has been in the Bible since God moved upon human authors via inspiration to pen his word. What JND did is spearhead a resurgence in Pauline truth that cased throughout the English-speaking world like a tidal wave in the mid to late 19th century.

- This resurgence began with the realization that there was a difference between Israel and the body of Christ. Coupled with the notion that Israel hope and destiny was earthly whereas the body of Christ's was heavenly. Once this was understood the time of the rapture naturally fell into place.
- JND was not even the first person to use the term Rapture. After the Reformation, a host of theologians sought to make sense out of Biblical prophecy. The first person to use the term "Rapture" was the father of British Historicism Joseph Mede in 1665.
 - "I will add this more, namely, what may be conceived to be the cause of this Rapture of the saints on high to meet the Lord in the Clouds, rather than to wait his coming to the Earth. What if it be, that they may be preserved during the Conflagration of the earth and the works thereof, 2 Peter 3:10 that as Noah and his family were preserved from the Deluge by being lift up above the water in the Ark, so should the Saints at the Conflagration be lift up in the Clouds unto their Ark, Christ, to be preserved there from the deluge of fire, where the wicked shall be consumed."
- Mede along with Increase Mather (1709) and Cotton Mather (1729) taught a Two-Stage Coming of Christ with a Pre-conflagration Rapture.
 - See slide
- In 1788 Morgan Edwards taught a Two-Stage Pre-1260 Days or Mid-Trib. Rapture view.
 - See slide
- In 1790 Jesuit Manuel de Lacunza taught a Two-Stage, Post-1260 Days, Pre- 45 Days, Pre-conflagration Rapture view.
 - See slide.
- Before 1830 JND concluded on the basis of the distinction between Israel and the Church that the Rapture of the church would take place before the tribulation. This notion did to come from Mary Margrett McDonald a tongues speaking girl in Glasgow Scotland. B.W. Newton, who later became JND's chief opponent offers great insight into what Darby understood and when he understood it when he states the following regarding his visit with the MacDonald's in 1830:
 - "But what decided him when on the spot was when those who were inspirited were expounding prophetic Scriptures such as Isaiah respecting Israel and Jerusalem they explained them as being prophetic of Christian Churches of this dispensation."
- The word —rapture¹ was in use, to designate the catching up of the saints, long before JND was even born and therefore certainly before 1830/1832.

- Many before the time of JND were trying to reconcile 1 Thessalonians 4 with Revelation 19. Early attempts at reconciliation placed the rapture at some point during the tribulation because these men did not see a difference between Israel and the Church and therefore failed to understand dispensational truth.
- Once JND understood the difference between Israel and the Body of Christ, and the Church's unity with its Head in heaven, the correct placement of 1 Thessalonians 4 before the 70th week of Daniel was natural and easy. JND did not invent this teaching – it was contained within the pages of Scripture for almost 2,000 years. This doctrine experienced resurgence thanks to the ministry of Darby.
- When viewed in this fashion, the pretribulation understanding of the rapture is the result of a nearly 200+ years of doctrinal refinement to reconcile 1 Thessalonians 4 and Revelation 19. The resurgence of these dispensational truths was the driving force of the Reformation 2.0. Any attempt to countermand these truths via Preterism or the mid or post-tribulation positions represent a regression in truth.