

Quail Lakes Baptist Church's Position on Preterism

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When it comes to the interpretation of biblical prophecy there are four distinct systems of thought embraced by Christians today:

1. The Preterist view teaches that most prophetic events have already been fulfilled primarily in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.
2. The Historicist view teaches that the present day is equal to the tribulation and thus prophecy has been and is being fulfilled in the current age.
3. The Idealist view, which teaches that biblical prophecies are a symbolic representation of the ongoing battle between good and evil, God and Satan.
4. The Futurist view that teaches the biblical prophecies have, by in large, yet to be fulfilled.

Preterism is the focus of this paper. The term Preterism is derived from the Latin word "praeteritum" which means "something past." Preterism itself has developed into two distinct schools of thought, one group adhering to "Full or Hyper preterism" and the other "partial preterism." It is the "Full" or "Hyper Preterist" view that represents error such that we feel the need to clarify the teaching of Quail Lakes Baptist Church as it relates to this issue.

Hyper Preterists believe that there is no prophecy of Scripture that has yet to be fulfilled. They assign fulfillment to the time period that spanned the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 to the fall of the Roman Empire in the 5th century. Hyper Preterists deny a future bodily return of Christ, a physical resurrection of the dead, and a physical renewal of the heavens and the earth.

Hyper Preterism is not a legitimate interpretive position for an evangelical Christian, and not permitted as an interpretive option in the teachings found within the ministry of Quail Lakes Baptist Church. We realize that the prophetic passages of the Bible do indeed portray the eternal battle between good and evil, and we recognize that there are aspects of those prophecies that have come to pass. None of that is inconsistent with our interpretation of biblical prophecy from a Futurist standpoint which we espouse.

The Problems with Preterism:

1. The problem of the underlying principles for interpreting biblical prophecy. These can be summarized as follows:
 - a. The Futurist's interpretive principle –

Since the prophecies relating to Christ's first coming were literally fulfilled, we believe that the prophecies relating to Christ's second coming will be literally fulfilled as well.

b. The Preterist's interpretive principle –

Even though all of the prophecies relating to Christ's first coming were literally fulfilled, it is not necessary for the prophecies relating to Christ's second coming to follow that pattern. Instead some, if not all, of those prophecies are "spiritually" fulfilled.

We see no reason to change interpretive expectations as it relates to the two advents of our Lord.

2. The Historical problem.

Hyper Preterism finds fulfillment of biblical prophecy in the events around the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. As a result, the view contradicts known human history. During the seven year period of time leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem...

- Did ten nations subrogate their national sovereignties for an alliance, and did a world leader rise to power and lead this alliance? – (Dan. 7:24-25, Rev. 17:12-13) No.
- Did men and women throughout the world receive the mark of the Beast on their right hands and foreheads? (Rev. 13:11-19) No.
- Were men and women forbidden to buy or sell goods unless they had the mark of the Beast? (Rev. 13:11-19) No.
- Were there two Jewish witnesses that had the power to shut up the sky and smite the earth with plague and prophecy in Jerusalem for 3 1/2 years? (Rev. 11:3-6) No.
- Did we witness the cataclysmic events on the earth and in the heavens that are described in Revelation 8? No.

Examples like this can go on. The Hyper Preterist spiritualizes all these and other specific predictions while stating that the Futurist is too literal in interpretation. It may indeed be that some of these predictions are intended to summon an impression of calamity and not be specifically fulfilled; however, once again, if the predictions for the first advent were literally fulfilled, why would we not assume that the predictions for the second advent would be likewise fulfilled in a literal fashion?

Furthermore, the early church overwhelmingly understood Christ's words in the Olivet Discourse (a key passage for preterists) as well as the book of Revelation as referring to the future. The Didache, an ancient writing dated to AD 150, is clearly Futurist in its viewpoint,

“For in the last days false prophets and corrupters will abound...the deceiver of the world will appear...he will commit abominations the like of which have never been seen before...”

The Futurist assumptions of the Didache are significant in that, while its current form dates to AD 150, it is drawn from materials “virtually contemporaneous with the destruction of Jerusalem and (they) do not see that event as the fulfillment of the Olivet Discourse” (Donald Green, *A Critique of Preterism*, 2001).

Thus, the early Christians who lived in the Apostolic Age were not Preterists.

Justin Martyr writes in AD 140-150 saying “Two advents of Christ have been announced: the one in which He is as suffering...but the other in which He shall come in glory...the rest of the prophesy shall be fulfilled at His second coming (Dialogue with Trypho).

3. The scriptural problem

a. The date of the writing of Revelation.

Scholars generally recognize two possibilities regarding when John wrote Revelation. The early date is shortly before AD 70 and the late date is approximately AD 95. If the later date is correct, Preterism is eliminated from consideration. It is important to note that John does not date his writing, thus internal evidence regarding this issue is lacking. However, external evidence that supports the late date abounds. From the 2nd through the 19th centuries the late date was the commonly accepted view. The vast majority of scholars across the theological spectrum support the later date. Theologian Richard Mayhue in his Article “Jesus: A Preterist or Futurist” makes the case as follows:

“The earliest historical attestation to Revelation’s date of writing clearly supports the late date. A general axiom states that ancient documents whose date is closest to the historical event reported contain more accurate and reliable information than documents further removed in time.” (TMSJ14/1 Spring 2003)

He goes on to point out that the historical condition of the seven churches of western Turkey that John addresses early in Revelation point to the late date. The churches simply would have been in a much different state if they were being addressed soon after Paul’s ministry in that area.

On a related issue, it makes sense to infer that if John actually thought that the return of Christ was a spiritual one that occurred in AD 70 in judgement on Jerusalem, it would seem that he would have mentioned that in the books he wrote after that time period. But no such mention occurs.

It is an interesting point that the introductory notes to the book of Revelation in the New Geneva Study Bible of which R.C. Sproul was the general editor (a Partial Preterist) it states “Most scholars favor a date of about AD 95” for the writing of Revelation. This is after the time period when Preterists state the prophecies are fulfilled.

b. Time indicator passages

Hyper Preterists teach that there are certain prophecies from the mouth of Jesus that either must be interpreted as already having come to fruition or Jesus is made out to be a liar. But is that accurate?

Matthew 10:23

“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.”

NIV

The Hyper Preterist proclaims that it is clear that the disciples will not finish sharing the Gospel in Israel prior to the Lord’s return. Thus, it must have already happened. However, a better interpretation for this passage is that He is simply saying the ministry of the Gospel to the Jews will continue until his return. This accords well with His shift in His own self reference to the title “Son of Man” which connects to the eschatological imagery in Daniel 7:13.

Matthew 16:28

“I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.”

NIV

Once again, the Hyper Preterist will say that unless Jesus was making a mistake in uttering these words, the second coming must have already occurred. It is often overlooked that they claim the second coming occurred as an invisible event in the fall of Jerusalem and the passage clearly states that His return will be seen. However, the majority of scholars for all of church history have understood this to be a reference to Christ’s visible transfiguration that is recorded in chapter 17. One author writes, “...it seems safe to affirm that the transfiguration event was a kind of preview, and thus anticipation, of the kingdom power and glory which would come permanently at the Parousia (the return of the Lord. ” (Holman, “The Idea of an Immanent Parousia”, *Studia Biblica Et Theologica* III (1973):23

Matthew 24:34

“I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.”

NIV

This passage is probably the most often used passage in support of Hyper Preterist ideas. One Preterist author calls it “The key to locating the tribulation in history.” (Gentry, *The Great Tribulation is Past*, Kregel, 1999) The Preterist takes Jesus to be saying that the generation in which He lives on earth was not to pass away until He returns. However, what this interpretation fails to recognize is that verse 34 is preceded by an example from nature which is meant to inform the reader as to the context of the return:

Matt 24:32-34

"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. 33 Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door."

NIV

We must understand that "this generation" to which Jesus refers is not necessarily the generation in which He lives, but rather the generation that sees "all these things". The things in question are the events he has previously in the context described as signs of his return; tribulation, the abomination that causes desolation, false prophets, astronomical anomalies, etc. He is most likely saying "the generation that sees these things will also see My coming."

Scholars will also mention a second non-Preterist possibility of interpretation, called the "pejorative view." In this view, the word 'generation' refers to the category of the rebellious, sinful people who have rejected Christ.

Matthew 24:30

"At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory."

NIV

The Hyper Preterist position is that the tribulation period is to be understood as the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 and the coming of Christ was a spiritual coming in judgement in the form of the efforts of Titus of Rome. However, the statement of our Lord is very clear that the "Son of Man will appear." The plain reading of the text indicates that a visible return is described. Indeed, verse 27 of that same chapter states,

Matthew 24:27

"For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man."

NIV

In addition it is clear that the cosmic disturbances described in this prediction (sun and moon darkened, etc.) did not occur in AD 70. These descriptions may indeed be figurative; however, the Hyper Preterist forces them to be so.

Revelation 17:1

"One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters."

NIV

Most Hyper Preterists will interpret the “Great Prostitute” as Jerusalem, however, it surely is preferable to understand this imagery to apply to the future apostate church. The true church of God is called ‘the bride of Christ’ but here John is showing us the perverted image that stems from a perversion of the faith. The fact that the Great Prostitute is described as one that “sits on many waters” alone would argue against the imagery pointing to Jerusalem which is not along any body of water. This detail is intended to indicate that this apostate church will be widespread, not one city or the people of one city.

The above analysis of Scripture passages that are misinterpreted by the Hyper Preterist are not intended to be an exhaustive list, but rather intended to indicate the kind of scriptural problems with which the Hyper Preterist must contend.

Conclusion

It is clear to us that Hyper Preterism is not an acceptable interpretation of Scripture. The Scriptures do not teach such a position and the church historically has not held this position. Hyper Preterism so completely reinterprets Christ’s return and the coming resurrection that their use of the words do not conform to Christian orthodoxy. Only by ignoring and misinterpreting large portions of Scripture and thousands of years of Christian commentary and thought can one affirm the tenets of this school of Hyper Preterism.

The Scripture consistently associates Christ’s return with the resurrection of the dead (John 11:24, 1 Thess. 4:16, 1 Cor. 15:16-17), the defeat of death itself (1 Cor. 15:20-28), the final judgement that brings the defeat of Satan (Rev. 20:10) and the New Heavens and New Earth (Rev. 21:1-3). As we view the world today, we see that Satan’s activity has not been halted, death is still with us and we live on the same earth that was inhabited by generations of humankind prior to the first advent of Jesus. Thus we conclude that Hyper Preterism is in error and that Jesus has not yet returned and we fix our hope on that future and glorious day.

For further reading see:

- A Critique of Preterism – Donald Green, 2001. Available on-line.
- Jesus: A Preterist or Futurist – Richard Mayhue, 2003. Available on-line.
- A Response to the Preterist Interpretation of the Olivet Discourse – Jonathan H. Barlow, undated. Available on-line.