

Into and Beyond Preterism

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My immersion into the preterist movement began in 1992, the year after my idealist book, *The Apocalypse Conspiracy*, was published (Wolgemuth & Hyatt / Word, 1991). I was on a book tour in Cincinnati, Ohio, and being interviewed by the main AM radio station. A couple of days later a pastor from the Parkman Road Church of Christ in Warren, Ohio, called me and excitedly exclaimed, "I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Here I am driving through Cincinnati and someone is on WLW talking about preterism!"

"What's preterism?" I asked.

Shortly thereafter, I dove headlong into preterism—attending conferences, devouring books and magazine articles, and bombarding its authors, speakers, and leaders with questions. I learned a lot, benefited greatly, and ended up writing three (full) preterist books that were published by the International Preterist Association: *Beyond the End Times* (1999), *Shattering the 'Left Behind' Delusion* (2000), and *Dead in Their Tracks* (2001).

But then I began to discover that some significant things seemed to be lacking. For one, most preterist authors and speakers (including me at the time) were so focused on exploring and explaining what happened circa A.D. 70 that we gave little, if any, attention to post A.D. 70 reality. Also during this time, I started asking tougher and more challenging questions such as: How many comings of Jesus are there—past, present, and future? Why do you call it a "spiritual kingdom" and a "second coming" when Scripture never uses this terminology? How can we do the works of Jesus if the gifts of the Spirit have been withdrawn? And if withdrawn, doesn't that mean that Christ's kingdom, post A.D. 70, is different-natured from what Jesus was presenting, teaching, modeling, and conferring? What's the relevance of the prophecy of Revelation following its fulfillment? What happens to a believer after physical death? And many more.

Also during my tenure, I engaged in numerous public and private discussions and debates on these and many other issues. Most were civil. Some were not. But because of the weak, non-scriptural, and/or "I don't know" responses I kept receiving, I realized I needed to look further and elsewhere. Not surprisingly, some preterists were not pleased with my questions and the direction they felt I was headed. They warned that if I persisted I would lose my standing and influence in the preterist movement. In ways, their warnings have proven prophetic. A few even accused me of "betrayal" and of being guilty of "sending people to hell." Nowadays, other preterists, in their defensive zeal, are upset with me as well.

But I was seeking truth wherever it might be found. That's what drew me into preterism in the first place. That's also what drew me beyond (full) preterism. (Please note: I did not say "out of" but "beyond.") I now view preterism as necessary and vital but not sufficient.

So what has been the result of my twenty-some-year quest for truth and understanding in the competitive and divisive field of eschatology? Here are a few highlights.

- In 1994, after being accepted as a member of the Evangelical Theological Society and over the next eleven years, presented sixteen theological papers on issues of eschatological reform at various annual meetings around the country.
- In 1999, publically debated “Preterist vs. Futurist” vs. John No vs. Dr. Thomas Ice, Executive Director of the Pre-Trib Research Center.
- In 2003, completed and defended my doctorate dissertation. In it, I analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of the four major eschatological views of premillennialism, amillennialism, postmillennialism, and preterism and synthesized them into one meaningful, coherent, and cogent view that, in my opinion, is more Christ-honoring, Scripture-authenticating, and faith-validating than any one view in and of itself. My latest book is based on this academic work.
- In 2004, was invited to participate in a study group on eschatology meeting during the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society. The group was headed by Grant R. Osborn, Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and author of the book *Revelation* (2002), part of Baker Books’ *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* series. Toward the end, I was asked to verbally present “An exegetical basis for a preterist-idealist understanding of the Book of Revelation.” My presentation was so well received that Dr. Osborn recommended in front of the entire group that I write up my comments in the form of an article and submit it to the editor of the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* with his recommendation for publication.¹
- In 2006, that article was published in *JETS*.²
- In 2009, conducted a 13-week seminar series based on my doctoral dissertation at the Madison Park Church of God, Anderson, Indiana. The seminar was titled “Unraveling the End: A Biblical Synthesis of Competing Views.” The sessions were recorded.³
- In 2011, founded an independent publishing company, East2West Press. Its slogan is “Pioneering the next reformation.” To date, five new books incorporating my synthesis views and reformational ideas have been released. More are in the works.⁴
- In 2014, asked to present a theological paper on the topic of my latest book at ETS’s Annual Meeting of the Midwest Region in March (pending).

In closing, below is a recap of what I consider to be the strengths and weaknesses of the (full) preterist view. This recap is excerpted from the Conclusion of my latest book, *Unraveling the End: A balanced scholarly synthesis of four competing and conflicting end-time views*. I provide similar recaps for the other three views as well. Of course, you may not agree with every item on my list. And there are differences among preterists as there are among proponents of the other three views. I have also been informed that during the past few years some changes have been taking place in some of the weaknesses areas. If that’s so, I am not familiar with them. But, in my opinion, that movement could be in a right direction.

Preterist View

Strengths:

- Fully accepts the natural reading and understanding of eschatological timeframes and New Testament time and imminency statements, including those bracketing the entire prophecy of Revelation.
- Supports the 1st-century Holy-Spirit-guided expectations as the correct ones.
- Balances literal and figurative language for nature of fulfillment.
- Uses biblical precedent to explain the nature of fulfillment.
- Harmonizes time convergence of OT time prophecies with NT time statements and Holy-Spirit-led expectations.
- Recognizes that eschatology is connected to Israel and pertains to the end of the Jewish age.
- Affirms that God has always had only one, continuous, by-faith people.
- Posits a positive worldview, long-term outlook.
- Acknowledges that God's material creation is without end.
- Answers the liberal/skeptic attack on the Bible and on Christ, effectively.

Weaknesses:

- Positing A.D. 70 as the time of Christ's "Second Coming" and "Return."
- A finality paradigm that limits the comings of Jesus to only two.
- Thus, A.D. 70 was Christ's final coming.
- Overly spiritualizes and diminishes the kingdom and resurrection.
- Enormous exegetical and historical burden for documenting fulfillment.
- Lack of attention in writings to the nature of post-A.D. 70 reality and implications for Christian living.
- Gross cessationism—some preterists advocate the annihilation of Satan, his kingdom, and of demons, and/or the cessation of the operation of angels, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the miraculous charismatic gifts, water baptism, the Lord's Supper, and even the Church itself in A.D. 70.

I welcome your thoughts and interest.

¹ For the account of what transpired before, during, and after my presentation that day, see my article published in *Fulfilled* magazine, Fall 2011, pp. 6-7, 9. Also in my book, *The Greater Jesus*, pp. 413-416.

² John No., "An Exegetical Basis for a Preterist-Idealist Understanding of the Book of Revelation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (Dec. 2006): 766-796. This article is posted on www.prophecyrefi.org / click on "About Us" and "Preterist-Idealist Academic Journal Article."

³ To listen, go to: www.prophecyrefi.org and click on "Podcast" and "Unraveling the End Audio."

⁴ To see, go to: www.prophecyrefi.org and click on "Our Books" or check them out on Amazon.com.