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ARTICLE

Preterism Is Creeping Into America's Churches



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pret·er·ist | \ 'pretərəst, -rēt- \
plural **preterists**

FALSE

Definition of *preterist* (Entry 1 of 2)

in Christianity : one who holds that the prophecies in the Bible about the End Times have already been fulfilled

— compare FUTURIST, PRESENTIST

BY DAN PRICE/HARBINGER'S DAILY DECEMBER 30, 2025

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There are some days I want Jesus to come back so badly that I feel I can barely breathe. One more day of the heartache of our sin-cursed world just might be too much. Another shocking experience of watching the world twist itself into knots as everyone crows their own "authentic truth."

Feeling the cynicism sneak into my heart, whispering that there is no accountability for injustice or wickedness. The constant grind of our culture's selfishness, cruelty, and frivolity weighs so heavy on my soul that sometimes I can't help but cry out, "Come back, Jesus!"

Do you ever have days you feel the same?

Did you know there are some people who believe that Jesus already has come back?

It's true, as shocking as that sounds.

Ultimately, every opinion on eschatology boils down to issues of hermeneutics, the discipline of how you interpret the Bible. Because I hold to a literal (historical, grammatical) interpretation of Scripture, even when reading prophecy, I naturally use a futurist interpretive method.

In other words, when I read prophecies or promises that have obviously not been fulfilled physically, I assume, like the original audience, that those events must still be in the future. This basic principle of hermeneutics leads to a premillennial systematic theology of eschatology. Those that hold other positions on eschatology? Their hermeneutics led them there too.

One prominent position on how to read and interpret prophecy is called Preterism, preter being a Latin word meaning "past." This style of interpretation teaches that all (or most) of the Bible's prophecies have already been fulfilled.

And yes, in its most extreme form, Preterism will tell you that Jesus has already come back, there is no future resurrection of the dead, and we are currently living in a spiritualized version of the New Heavens and New Earth! Preterism is on the rise in the American church, and Christians should be aware of some of the issues involved.



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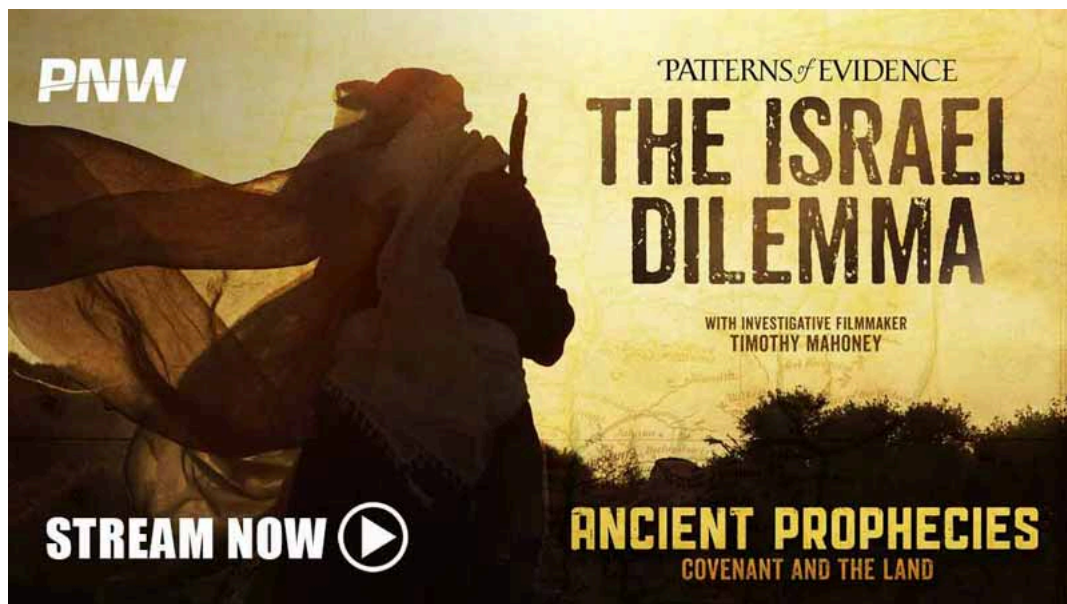
What is Preterism?

There are two versions of Preterism:

1. Full Preterism teaches that all of the prophecies of the Bible were fulfilled around AD 70. These interpreters claim that the prophecies of God's judgment in Revelation, Matthew 24, and elsewhere describe events during the war between Rome and the Jewish people leading up to AD 70, when Jerusalem was sacked and the second Temple was destroyed. Preterists teach that these prophecies describe God's rejection of Israel and the Jewish people.

Full Preterism reasons that because some passages indicate the end will happen "soon," these prophecies had to be fulfilled in the lifetime of Jesus' disciples--including prophecies of God's judgment on the nations, Jesus' return, and the creation of the New Heavens and Earth. It's heresy because they teach that Jesus isn't coming back, we shouldn't expect anyone will be resurrected, and the current state of the world is essentially its final form.

2. Partial Preterism (or orthodox Preterism) tries to avoid the weaknesses of Full Preterism. Its well-known proponents, including R.C. Sproul, Gary DeMar, and Kenneth Gentry, teach that most but not all of the prophecies of the Bible were fulfilled in the past; Revelation 20-22 are still to come. In other words, they recognize the difficulty of claiming that God wrapped up all of His plans in the past. Most partial preterist interpreters end up postmillennialists or amillennialists and frequently teach Replacement Theology.



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The Danger?

What's the danger here for Bible-believing Christians?

1. The denial of literal interpretation of the Bible is dangerous for Christians. For example, preterists intentionally employ allegorical interpretations for many of the symbols of Revelation 4--19. For them, the Beasts in chapter 13 are symbols for the Roman Emperor Nero in AD 54-68, and the "tribulation" described in the text is a symbol for Christian persecution. But partial preterists switch interpretive methods for the last three chapters and arbitrarily claim that chapters 20--22 are still in our future, though they don't believe all of it will be fulfilled literally.



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2. If the prophecies of worldwide judgment were actually fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem, as though Israel is God's real target. This leads to an insipid form of Christian antisemitism.

But the obvious conclusion from Revelation, Daniel, Matthew 24--25, and other prophecies is that God will judge all the nations of the earth with the events of the Tribulation, not just Israel. Preterists' certainty that God has judged and rejected Israel is not found anywhere in the Bible, and it falls far short of the scope of the judgment described in these prophecies.

Preterists claim that Revelation was written to give hope to Christians during the difficult days of the Roman war with the Jewish people. But what conclusion should a Christian reading it today draw if that's true? The most common reasoning is that if God has judged and rejected Israel and raised up a new people for Himself, namely the church, then it's acceptable for Christians to treat Jews with the lowest contempt. This reasoning has led to repeated pogroms, expulsions, and murder of countless Jewish people by Christians throughout history. God has not rejected Israel and cast them aside in favor of the church.

3. Preterists support the belief that all prophecy is fulfilled, in large part, by two basic arguments: 1) certain passages (Matthew 16:28; 10:16-25; chap. 24; Revelation 1:1; 22:6-7) that they interpret as Jesus teaching that all would be fulfilled in the lifetime of the 12 disciples or their generation, and 2) their early dating of the book of Revelation.

However, their interpretation of these passages is highly disputed. Jesus was not teaching that He would come back in the disciples' lifetime; otherwise He would have been lying. Broadly speaking, He was affirming the continued existence of the Jewish people until the end-times--He wasn't done with them, and they will be part of His plans.

Preterists argue the book of Revelation was written in AD 65, thereby placing its writing before the destruction of Jerusalem and satisfying John's claim that he was writing a "prophecy" about God's supposed judgment in AD 70. The problem with that argument is that virtually every scholar agrees that Revelation was written in the AD 90s during the reign of Domitian, as the church fathers attest. So if the book was written for the purpose of describing God's judgment on Israel through Rome, then John was writing history, not prophecy!

Prophecy is always meant to give readers hope. Hope that God will do what He says. Hope that, despite the pain and suffering we're facing, God has a plan to win the day. Hope that God will bring justice and healing to this broken world. What hope could John give his readers if everything he wrote about was already done and gone? What hope does God offer to us today if the book of Revelation means little to nothing to our futures as well? It's vitally important that we hold on to the hope He has given us in prophecy!

Hold on, church! Jesus actually is coming back. We haven't somehow slipped into the New Heavens and New Earth or the Millennial Kingdom unaware. God's future plans for both Israel and the church are staggeringly genius, as He works to redeem Jews and Gentiles from among the nations of the earth and all the cosmic created order through Messiah Jesus!

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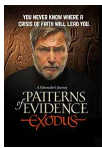
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