

Preterisms Interpretation of the Second Coming of Christ

In addition to the review of the origin of Preterism and Futurism, a few pages should be penned giving clear Scriptural authority as to why Preterism, especially, is in error. This will be done, but first a few thoughts as background material.

It should be remembered that all viewpoints, be they Preterist, Futurist or Historicist, have the same Rulebook to play by – the Holy Bible, all sixty-six books. New manuscripts by Paul or John have not surfaced in Egypt, nor has the Vatican brought forth additional writings by Peter. The problem is how one interprets the existing Scriptures that have been given to us by God Himself.

While the writers previously quoted agreed that Rome was responsible for the present-day teaching that all prophecy found in John's Book of Revelation was fulfilled in 70 AD, or at the fall of Pagan Rome, church history reveals traces of this error beginning in the early church age.

Actually, the Preterist of today can trace some of their dogmas back to the first and second centuries AD, so the revival of Preterism is nothing new. As Solomon said, ". . . There is no new thing under the sun." (Ecclesiastes 1:9)

The seeds are planted

So how and when were the seeds of Preterism planted?

As those Apostles and disciples who knew and spoke with Christ after His resurrection began dying off, and Christ had not returned as promised, the thought arose among some of the ecclesiastical leaders in the early centuries that perhaps they had misunderstood. Could there be another explanation as to why He had not returned? While the early church fathers as a whole stood fast in the original teaching, there were some who were disappointed and open to further speculation and theory.

One of those early church fathers was Origen (185-254 AD) who, along with others of the Alexandrian School of Theology, was prone to spiritualizing Scripture. As to Jesus' Second

coming it was spiritual and already past. Some equated His coming with Pentecost, others to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

By the fourth century AD, when it was reported that Constantine had converted to Christianity, it became popular to be a Christian. Constantine made Christianity the state religion, which brought about the marriage of church and state.

As the state church increased in size, power and wealth, the teachings of Christ and the apostles and disciples faded into the background. It began to teach that surely Christ had already come, and the church was the Kingdom. Who needed Paul's admonition in Titus 2:13: "Looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ"?

Centuries passed, and in the Middle Ages, when Rome was at its height of power, a literal coming of Jesus Christ would have been an embarrassment to the "Church." They were doing quite well, thank you! They controlled the ecclesiastical world as well as the political and had no need of Christ. They were already in the millennium, ruling and reigning with Christ. Why would they think otherwise? They had control of it all.

A Matter of Timing

As the reader may have noted, it was and still is a matter of timing. Man's timing was out of sync with God's eternal plan. The lack of understanding of God's timing has often led man into many blind alleys. Although Peter reminds us in II Peter 3:8 to ". . . be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day," it is difficult for we mortals to comprehend that God does not live in time as we do.

The problem with timing occurs not only with the Second Coming, but also with all historical events in Scripture. Example: the manifestation of the Kingdom. Most Christians believe in the Kingdom, but is it spiritual, literal, or both? Is it present now or to be set up at Christ's Second Coming? This small booklet will not attempt to examine the many answers that individuals give to those questions, but it will provide those clues that exist within the Scriptures regarding the Second Coming.

Even in Paul's day, there were those who were off in their timing and understanding of the resurrection. Paul scourges Hymenaeus and Philetus with the following words:

2 Timothy 2:17-18

"And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some."

Preterism's Progressive Course

During the early centuries when the spiritualization of Scripture had secured a firm footing, other errors began to creep in. Error begets more error. Some of those errors that took hold in the church and the events that took place subsequent to those errors led progressively to a state church. A few of these errors and events are shown below:

Errors:

- Christ returned spiritually, either at Pentecost or at 70 AD at the destruction of Jerusalem; therefore, we must be in the Kingdom now. The Church is the Kingdom.
- The promises made to Israel in the Old Testament are of a spiritual nature, therefore, they find their fulfillment in the "church."
- The millennium has arrived; therefore, we are ruling and reigning with Christ.

Events:

- Once-pagan ruler, Constantine, converted to Christianity and declared Christianity to be the state religion.
- The church and state married, and as time passed, "the church" assumed more and more power and wealth.
- This state church began teaching the foregoing spiritual interpretation as truth, and they believed it was their duty to teach these precepts to all nations and to stamp out all error and unbelief wherever found.

Any knowledgeable Christian should at once recognize these progressive steps as the history of the Roman Catholic Church.

An in-depth look at church and secular history will reveal the inevitability that any church group or organization that follows these progressive steps and erroneous precepts will eventually terminate in a state or world church. While all Christians earnestly yearn for God's Kingdom to rule the earth, knowledgeable Christians recognize that until the King returns and those who will rule with Him are incorruptible, there can be no righteous ruling and reigning.

It is of interest that the early church had one Sword – the Sword of the Spirit – and did very well. In less than 300 years, by prayer, preaching, teaching and witnessing, they had won so much of the populous to Christ – from slave and peasant to those of Caesar's household – that the pagan state wanted to join them. Unfortunately, the state churches, by whatever name, attempted to use two swords: the Sword of the Spirit plus the sword of the magistrate. History would seem to indicate that this combination is not nearly as effective spiritually as those who used but the one Sword – the Sword of the Spirit.