

THE PRETERIST ROAD TO HYPER-PRETERISM AND CHURCH ABANDONMENT

Refuting Richard Eckhart, Max King, Don Preston and the Literal 70 AD Rapture Theory of Ed Stevens

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Introduction

This paper is an examination of the foretold literal second coming in light of the many idealist fulfillments which were sign markers fulfilled around AD 70. There have been a number of Full and Hyper Preterists that have felt the need to convert back to Futurism or Partial Preterism. But thus far they have given little Biblical argument why this must be so. Though practical, Preterism does not have enough evidence to make it work consistently. Having been a Consistent Preterist, and thereafter holding to a Preterist Idealism I can confess that today I find a belief in a literal second coming fantastic and difficult, yet I am convinced by the Scriptures that it must be so. One of the most compelling arguments is that when the Second Coming is put only in the past (either forever idealistically or literally) it is only logical to hold to a Consistent Preterism where all things no longer have a consistent definition.

The Scriptural Idealist Prophecies

Definition: The idealistic view states that such things as, the Rapture, Christ coming to conquer on a white horse, and the heavenly Jerusalem coming down out of heaven surrounded by the world all speak of spiritual truths which have to do with things far greater that transcend what is merely physical. These idealistic truths speak of our relation to God and eternity in poetic language too deep to be reduced to mere facts. Though there are no poetic books in the New Testament, God here has incorporated just the same kind of terminology as He did in the Psalms and the Prophets. For example, the church should be understood as clouds of witnesses in 1 Thess. 4, which would relate back to what we read in Hebrews 12:1 and Daniel 7:13-14 where those who were martyred are shown to be clouds of witnesses. It is not actual clouds that are in view but something far greater. The same can be said for the stars in Daniel 12:3, where they are shown to represent saints. Literal stars and clouds are not the subjects of the Scriptures here. Furthermore, when Christ was on earth He demonstrated that the necessity of the miraculous is the subject of study for those weak in faith. Jesus said, *"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed"*, (John 20:29) *"A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah."* *And He left them and departed."*, Matthew 16:4

When is the Resurrection: Preceding the Second Coming is the Resurrection of the dead, who are raised that we might go out to meet the Lord together, which defines the word Parousia. This coming must happen within the one-time generation of the one-time Temple of God in Jerusalem; that has now been abandoned forever by God that it will never be rebuilt again to be called "The Temple of God". This is because God will no longer accept sacrifices from such a Temple, and to even suggest such a temple in worship today is Antichrist. The Temple spoken of in Matthew 24 and 2 Thess. 2 was tolerated as the Temple of God after the cross and the veil rent. God allowed a transitional period up until AD 70. This was when the Gospel was preached in all the known world in the NT, Roman 1:8. Now, this resurrection was to happen at the same time with those who are

alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord. The church members then present would soon be translated into clouds of witnesses, who shall “*ever be with the Lord*”. This is what the Greek refers to as “*the air*” between heaven and earth.

What is the Resurrection: 1 Thess. 4 says, “*caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord*”. How was this to happen ideologically? In the ideological sense, when believers in the church united with Christ and His martyrs by the strength of the Holy Spirit to make Christ Lord of all without any limitations, they entered an eternal and holy dimension, into the very throne room of God. In this they departed from the natural world of flesh and blood (1 Cor. 15:50), they transcended the abode of the dead (1 Cor. 15:51), and even conquered death itself (1 Cor. 15:54). All this was only done through the cross of Christ (1 Cor. 15:57).

Where the Air is: We read in 1 Thess. 4 that the church is to be “*caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air*”, and this is not heaven but a place before it having “*already but not yet*” implications as does the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is likewise seen as a city in the air, and here it is revealed that it is a city “*coming down*”. This is the air that believers are raptured up into, and if so thus giving undeniable reference to the idealistic view. This can have something to do with Revelation 19 prior to the end of the Millennium, where the Lord comes on a white horse with His saints dressed in white robes to judge the earth. This idealism is portraying how God sees martyrdom, where when Christ and His saints are humiliated and crucified with the elect church, it is by these very means that they are likewise glorified, and the world is judged. Jesus said in John 12:32 “*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. 33 This he said, signifying what death he should die. 34 The people answered him, We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, The Son of man must be lifted up? who is this Son of man? 35 Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth.*” The air therefore is a place of meeting, a place worthy to be with Christ and defined as to be like Him. 1 John 3:2 says “*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.*”. The destiny of the church according to Rev. 1-3 was that was the church was to be like Christ, to be the bride of Christ, and this is what is prophesied. Is this true today in the same way? In some ways and places yes, and in others no. Our sanctification today has to do with looking for and preparing for the return of Christ, that’s how it is defined in the NT and not any other way.

How the Man of Sin is fulfilled ideologically: What is spoken of here as the resurrection and the second coming must have clearly happened just as it was foretold to that generation, but it only could have been in the ideological sense---yet there are literal fulfillments such has had to do with the Temple and Man of Sin types. The Man of Sin was understood to have been the mind of the apostate Israel in rebellion against God as one man (Judges 20:8). In Luke’s account the Man Of Sin is replaced with Rome’s armies surrounding the city of Jerusalem who refuse to pay their taxes in rebellion against both God and Rome. In the future it would be the same. The point of the coming of Christ does not belong to the reason for one man’s rebellion, but the rebellion of all mankind seeking to usurp God, as in the days of Nimrod. Or when men are willing to surrender to any idol of mankind rather than God Himself, Exodus 20:1ff. When Jesus spoke He packed a lot of spiritual ideas into one saying, and of such things which are not understood with the natural mind. All these things clearly happened in their fullest sense. Nevertheless, history still awaits the literal coming and physical return of Christ to judge the quick and the dead.

A future “*Already but not yet*”: Why is Paul simply saying, “*we shall also bear the image of the heavenly*”, as if this is not the case already in their “*Already but not yet*”, even as we have witness elsewhere in Scripture? (Romans 7:5,22,23; Galatians 5:16-17). Considering the then present circumstances Paul must be defining “*The Already But Not Yet*” as not yet fully subjected to Christ until the church is perfected at the end of their trials outlined in Rev. 1-3. This would explain the

meaning of the Book of Revelation, the divorce of apostate Israel and the Marriage supper of the Lamb. For, where in the end of the book of Revelation we see the new heavens and earth (the bride which is the church) surrounded by sinners as there is the healing of the nations at the tree of life at a New Jerusalem that has replaced the Old, this being the foremost subject of the NT. Therefore, the New Heavens And Earth are clearly another “already but not yet” prior to the eternal state.

The nature of the words of Jesus: The natural man cannot accept these things any more than Peter could when he was being rebuked by Jesus. Understanding these things is only through the revelation of Jesus Christ. John 16:29-31 says “*His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. 30 Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that it thou camest forth from God. 31 Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe?*” First Corinthians 15 appears to be the parabolic form of the very words of Jesus again, just as they were before.

The nature of the subject matter: The subject matter is rarely the hereafter. Foremost, the point of all things prophetic has little to nothing to do with heaven itself, but rather foremost the manifestation of the kingdom of Heaven on earth. These things are left in Scripture as a mystery. Furthermore, it would be unusual for the point of a prophetic verse or verses to be written about Christ and His people making a retreat from the kingdoms of this world and the office of the church in a 70 AD rapture.

Idealism proof texts: The following are proof texts and argument that show Scripture foretold an intended and Idealistic second coming:

1. Revelation / believer / white throne judgment: Revelation 1-3 shows that the faithful church had to remain, if it was indeed faithful. If not it would be raptured to the place where the vultures gathered as foretold in Matthew 24:28. The church is seen again in Revelation 21-22 where behind walls, the wicked surround it and may come in to eat of the tree of life if they repent and do His commandments, Revelation 22:14. The last chapters in the Bible referring to the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven has already but not yet aspects to it. The goal of all of Revelation is not heaven but the perfection of the church. Therefore, to say that the only goal of 1 Thess. 4 and 1 Cor. 15 is merely the hereafter would not be in keeping with the primary concerns of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, or the New Testament.
2. Revelation / unbeliever / white throne judgment: For those who had not believed and rejected the Gospel, they were judged as foretold by Jesus. Those judgments Jesus mentioned are in the apocalypse in the Gospels and Revelation; and these judgments are shown to be ongoing. They are not equal to a literal coming but rather an idealist coming with real world changing consequences. It was foretold that there would be ongoing persecution as the temple was dismantled, not that they would be straightway cast into hell literally. When Christ comes again physically to earth, then they shall be physically cast into the Lake of Fire. Nevertheless, there are also judgments (such as seen in Revelation 20) which have to do with Gog and Magog gathered to battle for the purpose of destroying the Gospel and the church, and these are seen to be destroyed idealistically in this chapter immediately.
3. Matthew 21: Christ foretold that the kingdom on earth would be transferred from the nation of Israel to the faithful to bear fruit, and to continue in the selfsame work in His vineyard, Matt. 21:43.

4. Daniel: The book of Daniel refutes any notion of a removed and raptured church that leaves the Kingdom behind to others who would need to pick up the pieces and start all over again from the beginning, but rather predicts a steady ongoing successive kingdom of victories and expansion through the stone that the builders rejected. Daniel 2:44.45 *“And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. 45Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.”* The second coming was to come to remove the wicked from off the face of the earth and so that they could not be found, Ps 37:10. This was so that the kingdom of God would be established on earth, in answer to The Lord’s Prayer “Thy Kingdom come”. Christ would build His church and the gates of Hell would not prevail. If there were a literal rapture in AD 70 for Judaism to continue without any Christian representation on the earth, the Jews would need to assume it was so because God brought judgment upon Christ and now His church. A literal rapture would destroy everything Christ and the Holy Spirit had done from Acts until AD 70. The kingdom of God would cease to be, and the Gates of Hell would have been said to have prevailed. This idea is also seen in 1 Corinthians 15:23-26, *“But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming. 24 Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. 25 For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”* Therefore, the book of Daniel here shows us two things, 1.) That there should be an idealistic coming and 2.) It is followed by a strong ongoing kingdom evangelism without interruption.

The Prophecies Of The Literal Parousia Presently Not Yet But Yet To Come

Refuting the AD 70 Preterist rapture theory by arguments and Scriptures showing that it is presently yet to come: The literal coming again of Jesus is the reason for 2 Tim. 2:18 *“Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.”* The literal physical Parousia has to do with literal change of location of the church from earth to heaven. It has to do with literal resurrection of the dead from out of the grave. The literal transformation of the church into the sinless likeness of Christ at the resurrection. The eyewitness account of the resurrection of the dead of 1 Thess. 4, and the physical return of Christ’s bodily to the church once and for all.

This change cannot be said to be simply idealistic but prophetically literal where it says *“so shall we ever be with the Lord”*, reunited with those clouds of witnesses that had gone before them and died as martyrs, Heb. 12:1, 1 Thess. 4:17 says whereas before the Lord was absent, now He and the resurrected church is present, and at this time the Holy Spirit will have a unhindered ministry. Likewise in 1 Cor. 15 where we see *“We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”* Some would sleep and some would not before all were changed. This saying makes it clear to say there would be a change equal to the eternal state.

The following Scriptural ordinances and doctrines make it clear that there is to be a literal second coming that would be quick and an age changing eschaton:

1. Communion: The early church did not write too much around AD 71, this was because there was a time of great persecution not because the church was raptured. Nevertheless, the church never did away with communion. Never did the church conclude that Christ had come. If they had communion ordinance would have ceased. What Full-Preterists are proposing is that not only did the church disappear without a trace, but those left behind never understood that they left. Why would those left behind assume that they needed to wait for the second coming and continue in communion if the Lord already came and left?
2. The Book of Revelation ends with, "Come Lord Jesus", Rev. 22:20. There is no verse in the Bible for instruction for after the Lord has come, and there is no indication that at any time the expectation for the coming of the Lord should have become something only given to the past.
3. White Throne: There would be a white throne judgement in Revelation where all the wicked are gathered for battle against God's elect, and whoever was not found in the book of life was cast into the Lake of Fire. All the dead are brought before the throne and either pardoned and enter the New Jerusalem or cast into the Lake of Fire. Likewise, Satan the ruler of devils and the False Prophet are cast into the Lake of Fire which would necessarily include all the devils with them, 1 Corinthians 6:3. This marker proves again that there would be an age changing eschaton where life as we know it today on earth would cease.
4. Satan: Satan is not in Hell. As long as the Christian faces opposition from the world and the flesh they are also facing opposition from the Devil himself and his minions. It is only at the resurrection and second coming where these forces are destroyed, and to say otherwise infers Hyper-Preterism. If we say Christ has come in AD 70 and the focus today is on an idealistic coming, that there is nothing literal about it how then is the Devil removed idealistically? It cannot be done. Idealism alone does not work Scripturally.
5. Death: As long as there is death we are still in that world that is passing away awaiting what is the hope of 1 Cor. 15 which is the Second Coming.
6. End of the Physical World: 2 Peter 3:10-14 *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.* ¹¹ *Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness,* ¹² *Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?* ¹³ *Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.* ¹⁴ *Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.*
7. End of the Spiritual World: 1 Corinthians 7:29-33 *"But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; ³⁰ And they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; ³¹ And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away. ³² But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: ³³ But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife."*
8. Historically, we witness saints who were the successors of the tribulation saints who make no mention of an AD 70 rapture. Irenaeus who succeeded Polycarp the Bishop of Smyrna and

Tertullian who both succeed the Apostle John spoke nowhere of a rapture. Rather all are present here at work expanding the kingdom as foretold in the Scriptures.

The whole of Scripture is written for our sanctification now unto the coming of the Lord, not that we would understand that the Lord has already come. This is seen by the following Scriptural arguments below:

1. The Christian life demands a second coming that ends the sanctification process, Malachi 3:2.
2. The fact that your personal history has not yet become that of what defines the Second Coming, 2 Tim. 2:18.
3. The living and the dead are equal in the Second Coming; The fact that you are not wholly equal with the dead yet who are wholly without sin and need of sanctification, 1 Thess. 4:17.
4. That you are not yet wholly separated from the world, 1 Cor. 7:29-33.
5. That the church is not yet wholly separated from the world, 1 Thess. 4:17, Rev. 21:27.
6. The Scriptures do not propose a past historical coming while one is yet in the world and God's judgments and the final judgment are still at hand, Matt. 25:31-46.

Exposing The Unscriptural Literal Preterist View

When Preterists argue for the Idealist Full-Preterist view, or a literal second coming in AD 70 of Ed Stevens, what they are doing is proposing a rule which by default answers to the Hyper-Preterist Heaven-Now view. This is because the crux of the Second Coming is historical and in their own literal past. Once Christ has come once and for all in the past, the Scriptures then agree and define that all creation is restored to a resurrected spiritual state----there is no more room for Christ to come again in bits and pieces with an out of context seed from 1 Cor. 15. The world is in His living presence having entered the eternal state according to Scripture. They deny these conclusions, but once they have said that all things literal and idealistic regarding the second coming are in the past they have nothing that can coherently define either their present state in preparation and sanctification unto what was the "coming of the Lord", nor their future resurrected sinless life thereafter. By their second coming there is no more any Scripture that can be used to avert Hyper-Preterism and Universalism. They can't provide relevant coherent Scriptures for necessary sanctification, because all those are for the reason of Christ's return. They have resolved time statements, but this has created an unresolvable problem having to do with the final return of Christ, which has to do with an end of sin once and for all. The passing away of the world can be taken idealistically to an extent, the end can be taken through AD 70 to an extent, but the end of the world needs to eventually be defined literally where heaven and earth are altogether equal at the entrance again of Jesus Christ into the world to rule and reign. This is the reason for 2 Tim. 2:18 *"Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some."* The Second Coming must therefore foremost be in the future for all and nowhere is it found to be foremost in the past-----that that which is literal concerning resurrection is literally in the future and nowhere yet found in history.

Can the Second coming said to be referring only to the death of a man? Answering Preterist Idealism and Todd Dennis:

The reasons why not are as follows:

1. The second coming is outlined as a corporate event for which the church was to wait for, 1 Thess. 1:10.
2. It would be a faith changing event (2 Tim. 2:18).

3. It would be something to happen before one would die, John 21:21.
4. It was something that would happen to the living with those who died who would have to be resurrected to see it.
5. It was an expectation that as it drew near, even the epistles written closer to that time began to emphasize on instant readiness rather than looking for signs.
6. It would bring about the change of resurrection to all the living and the dead. Though one cannot escape it through death, yet clearly death is not the definition of the second coming!
7. It was to a generation living before it passed away, not to a physical body after it passed away.

Escaping all the verses that emphasize a corporate second coming are impossible, and to do so, though it is a far safer and better solution than a corporate past fulfillment, it creates its own problems. All the glory as the church overcomes the world as God brings His judgments are reduced to one man at a time. The Man of Sin, as we have seen above, demonstrates this. The Scriptures allow no such private overarching theme for the second coming. They are given to a specific time always in the future. It is to come not without a time of testing, also known as the time of Israel's trouble. Never at any time is the death pangs of a man equated with the second coming in Scripture. Rather it relates to a process within the church as seen in Rev. 1-3.