

# Has Bible Prophecy Already Been Fulfilled? Part X

by Thomas Ice

All doctrine has practical implications. What are the practical implications of those who hold to the view that most, in some cases all, Bible prophecy has already been fulfilled? This is the question I want to explore in this article.

## Preterist Implications For The New Testament

“The overwhelming majority of the eschatological events prophesied in the Book of Revelation have already been fulfilled,” declares preterist Dr. Gary North.<sup>1</sup> Since subjects relating to prophecy dominate virtually every page of the New Testament (NT) this would logically mean, for the preterist, that most of the NT does not refer directly to the Church today. Since so much of the NT is written to tell believers how to live between the two comings of Christ, it makes a huge difference if one interprets Christ’s coming as a past or future event. If preterism is true, then the NT refers to Believers who lived during the forty-year period between the death of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Therefore, virtually no part of the NT applies to believers today according to preterist logic. There is no canon that applies directly to believers during the church age.

Preterist advocate, Dr. Kenneth Gentry, actually believes that current history is identified as the new heavens and new earth of Revelation 21—22 and 2 Peter 3:10–13.<sup>2</sup> This is a common preterist viewpoint. Dr. Gentry provides four major reasons why “the new creation begins in the first century.”<sup>3</sup> It stretches credulity to think of the implications of the details of such a conclusion. If we are currently living in any way in the New Heavens and New Earth then this means that there is no Satan (Rev. 20:10), no death, crying or pain (Rev. 21:4), no longer any unclean, nor those practicing abomination and lying (Rev. 21:27), no curse (Rev. 22:3), the presence of God the Father (Rev. 22:4), just to name a few. Amazing!

## Implications Of The 40 Year Interval

I will now provide an example of how the preterist position would practically impact a believer today. Many preterists believe that passages like Titus 2:13 refer to the coming of Christ in A.D. 70. This would mean that it was a hope only for those Christians living between the time the Epistle was written and the destruction of Jerusalem—A.D. 65-66. Paul says that Christ’s appearance the first time impacts the lives of Believers in the “*present age*.” Titus 2:12 says, “*instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age.*” The grammar of the next verse (2:13) relates the activities of 2:12 to the activity of “*looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.*” If 2:13 is a reference to A.D. 70, as preterist generally believe, then the “*present age*” in 2:12 would have ended when 2:13 was fulfilled. Therefore, the total admonition of 2:12 was temporary and applicable only to Christians up until A.D. 70. This would mean that the instruction “*to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age*” would not directly apply to the current age, but to the past age which ended in A.D. 70 when “*the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus*” occurred in the destruc-

tion of Jerusalem. Sadly, such logic would have to be the practical implication of the preterist view as applied to this passage and to most of the NT.

The clear implication for preterists would be that Titus no longer relates directly to the current age in which we live. Instead, it applied for three or four years, since Paul wrote Titus around A.D. 65. There is no way that a preterist can use this or similar passages as doctrine, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness for believers, who are living in the New Heavens and New Earth. Yet, hypocritically, preterists regularly use and apply these passages in a way that practically denies their theoretical belief that Jesus returned in A.D. 70 and we are now in some form of the New Heavens and New Earth. Preterists need to develop some consistency between their theory and practice.

### **The Opening of Pandora's Box**

The story of Pandora's Box is an apt illustration of how one act can have a wide, multiplying effect upon many other issues. The belief, that there "are no major eschatological discontinuities ahead of us except the conversion of the Jews (Rom. 11) and the final judgment (Rev. 20)"<sup>4</sup> has a wide and great impact upon NT prophecy, especially the Epistles. It is clear that the application of the preterist interpretation virtually wipes out the *direct* application of the teaching of the Epistles to our current age. Just as the Law of Moses was given by God to Israel to be the focus of their dispensation, so the NT Epistles are the focus, giving vision and direction to the church during "this present age."

### **Satan: Bound or Loose?**

The preterist view relating to the current work of Satan and the demons should reflect their theology on the subject. According to the preterist view, Satan is currently bound (Rev. 20:2-3) and crushed (Rom. 16:20). The enemy was not just defeated *de jure* (legally) at the cross, but has been crushed *de facto* (in fact). Therefore, the spiritual road blocks of the world and the devil have been removed and only the enemy of the flesh remains that would obstruct believers from reigning and ruling now in the New Heavens and New Earth. On the other hand, if the binding and crushing of Satan and his company is still future, then the commands in the Epistles make sense in this present age. Commands such as "*resist the devil and he will flee from you*" (James 4:7b). "*Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world*" (1 Peter 5:8-9). "*Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity*" (Ephesians 4:26-27). "*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly place*" (Ephesians 6:12). These are instructions which are the very tactics to be applied by the believer in this present age because we are not yet in the New Heavens and New Earth. If Satan is bound and crushed, as the preterist interpretation insists, then they are unfaithful to their understanding of Scripture to apply the above passages to the Christian life today, as they so often do. A crushed and bound enemy does not prowl, or wage war, etc. This becomes crystal clear when one realizes that Satan resumes his war with God only after he has been "*released from his prison*" (Revelation 20:7b).

Similar thinking could, even should, be applied from the implications of preterism to many passages and subjects in the Christian life. Just think. No more suffering. If no suffer-

ing, then no need for endurance. No need for the sanctification process which involves suffering, endurance, faith and hope. No hope, because Christ returned in A.D. 70 and ushered in a new day. No apostasy of the church. No pain, suffering, or death. Therefore, since we are obviously not living under such conditions it means that preterism is also wrong.

### **The Sufferings Of This Present Time**

The New Heavens and New Earth is to be a time of peace and rest for God's people. The era preceding this time will be one of suffering and struggle. Again, if the preterist interpretation is correct, then the instruction of the NT Epistles on the issue of suffering only directly applied to believers until A.D. 70, because we would now be in the time of peace, not "*the sufferings of this present time*" spoken of by Paul (Rom. 8:18).

Endurance of unjust suffering is a major theme in the Epistles. In fact, the NT paints it as one of the major ingredients which God brings into our life to produce Christ-like character in His children (Heb. 12:1-17). Peter notes, "*For this [unjust suffering] finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. . . . But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God*" (1 Pet. 2:19-20). Revelation promises a future reward of co-rulership with Christ to believers who have remained faithful and loyal to Christ during this present age of humiliation (Rev. 3:21; see also 2:25-28). Revelation 3:21 not only promises future rule with Christ after this current age of humiliation, but notice it also makes a distinction between Christ's future kingdom and the Father's current rule. "*He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.*" These passages do not make sense and certainly would not apply to today if we are in the New Heavens and New Earth of the preterists.

### **Present and Future Apostasy?**

"If preterism is true," says Gary North, "then most of the prophesied negative sanctions in history are over."<sup>5</sup> I would say, if futurism is true, then great apostasy lies ahead. Does the current church age become increasingly apostate concluding with "the Great Apostasy" during the Tribulation, or were the scores of passages speaking about apostasy fulfilled in A.D. 70, as preterism demands? "The 'Great Apostasy' happened in the first century. We therefore have no Biblical warrant to expect increasing apostasy as history progresses; instead, we should expect the increasing Christianization of the world,"<sup>6</sup> declares preterist David Chilton.

This is another area where large sections of the NT, especially the Epistles and Revelation, would have to be adjusted away from the meaning Christians have historically seen in those passages. An example of this is seen in how the different approaches would handle Paul's warning in 2 Timothy 3. Paul begins by saying that "*in the last days difficult times will come*" (3:1). The "last days" likely refers to the whole of the current Church age, or perhaps it is a general reference to the final portion of the current Church age. Either way, it is a reference to the period of time before the final phase of history which preterists say we are not in. Paul goes on to describe how these times will be characterized by men who "*will be lovers of self,*" . . . (3:2) "*rather than lovers of God*" (3:4). The general course of "the last days" are described as a time when "*all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived*" (3:12-13). Therefore, if "the last days" have already come and gone, we

should expect that the persecution of the godly should be absent and “evil men and impostors” should not “proceed from bad to worse.” According to preterism, this would directly apply to the events before A.D. 70, but not after that time.

### **Conclusion**

Apostasy increases, not decreases, during the current church age. Because preterism is errant, then they have to take a theoretical interpretation on this and most other NT doctrine that is so far out that even the inventive minds of preterists cannot apply them in our current age. It is clear that the preterist interpretation of NT prophecy is so far removed from what the Bible teaches because it is impossible to practically apply their teaching in our current age. I continue to be motivated by the practical hope of the imminent rapture of the church. Maranatha!

### **Endnotes**

1. Gary North, “Publisher’s Preface” in Ken Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), p. xi.
2. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., “A Preterist View of Revelation” in C. Marvin Pate, gen. ed., *Four Views on the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), pp. 86-89.
3. Gentry, “A Preterist View of Revelation,” p. 87 and pp. 86-89.
4. North, Publisher’s Preface”, p. xii.
5. North, Ibid.
6. David Chilton, *Paradise Restored: An Eschatology of Dominion*, (Tyler: Reconstruction Press, 1985), p. 225.