

Preterism — an antidote to Christian pessimism

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Bible Version

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Many Christians today have a pessimistic view of the future:

The world is irrevocably wicked; things can only get worse; everything is soon going to be burnt to a crisp; our only hope is to be raptured out of this mess.

But the truth, thankfully, is much better.

The purpose of this article is to show how preterism serves as the perfect antidote to Christian pessimism.

Preterism holds to the following tenets:

1. **God's eternal kingdom has arrived.**

People need to listen anew to the Christmas message.

For with Jesus, the Throne of David has been fully restored and God's eternal kingdom has come.

Luke 1:32-33:

³² He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: ³³ and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

Old Testament promises concerning Messiah and his kingdom have been (and are being) fulfilled:

Psalms 2, 72 and 110; Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1-10; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Ezekiel 37:24-28; etc.

Jesus promised that some who heard him would live to witness the kingdom coming "with power" (Mk 9:1).

Revelation shows the first-century fulfillment of all these promises (Rev 11:15-17).

It's important to realize that Jesus rules the nations from the heavenly Zion (Ps 2:6; 110:1-2).

The fact that he rules them "with a rod of iron" (Ps 2:9; Rev 12:5; 19:15) implies ongoing sin and rebellion.

2. **Christ has defeated all our enemies.**

Our worst enemy is the sin within, not the government or Satan or anything/anyone else.

In Isaiah, the birth of Immanuel was God's sign that he was with his people and would deliver them from foreign oppression (Isa 7:14-16; 8:9-10).

But Jesus — the ultimate Immanuel — came to "save his people from their sins" (Mt 1:21-23).

Through him, death and Satan have been rendered irrelevant (Heb 2:14-15; 2Tim 1:10; Rev 20:10).

The Beast and other nasties portrayed in Revelation are all in our past.

In fact, Christ has put down every enemy (1Cor 15:25-26).

Messiah's peaceable kingdom has begun (Psalm 72; Isa 9:6-7; 11:1-10).

3. Death for Christians is but a portal to heaven.

Death itself, as the last enemy, has been destroyed (1Cor 15:26; Rev 20:14).

Because the Resurrection is a past event, believers who die now are instantly clothed with their final heavenly body.

This is our privilege under the New Covenant, something that Paul anticipates in 2 Corinthians 5:1-10.

Heaven was not accessible to the Old Testament saints because Jesus had not yet died (Heb 11:39-40).

But in Christ, we now have full access. At death we join with the saints who have gone before.

Related to this, heaven is our final destiny, not some renewed physical world.

4. The Great Tribulation has come and gone.

The Tribulation refers to a time of severe trial, never to be equaled again (Mt 24:21), which first-century people would experience.

For Christians, the Tribulation entailed their brutal persecution under Nero (Mt 24:9) — 64 to 68 AD.

For the Jews, the Tribulation related to their War with Rome (Lk 21:20-24; 23:28-29) — 66 to 70 AD.

For the Roman world, the Tribulation related to the many disasters that engulfed the Empire around that time: political turmoil, warfare, famines, plagues, earthquakes and the like (Mt 24:7; Rev 3:10).

Especially unsettling was the so-called Year of the Four Emperors (69 AD), where, following the death of Nero, rival claimants to the throne fought it out with their armies.¹

Numerous Christians perished under Nero, over 1 million Jews perished in the War, and vast numbers of Roman soldiers and citizens perished in the civil wars of 69 AD.

5. The world will ultimately be a Christian world.

The ascended Lord Jesus has been granted universal authority (Dan 7:13-14), and he calls the nations to himself through the gospel (Mt 28:18-19).

All nations have been given to him as his reward and inheritance (Ps 2:8).

Via the gospel all nations will be blessed, in accordance with the promises made to Abraham (Gen 12:3; 22:18; Rom 4:13; Gal 3:8, 14).

For ultimately, all nations will turn to Christ (Ps 86:9; Rev 15:4).²

6. Christians presently share in Christ's rule.

The new world order that Jesus has inaugurated is depicted in Revelation 21 – 22.

There we see a new heaven and earth and a New Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is the royal city of this new world — the seat of government, its capital.

Only Christians dwell in Jerusalem (Rev 21:27).

Jerusalem is where we “live” — spiritually and legally — under the New Covenant (Heb 12:22).

There we serve as priests before God's throne (Rev 22:3-4; cf. Rev 1:6; 7:15).

Outside the city (but still on the new earth) are the ungodly — those still in their sins (Rev 22:15).

As citizens of the city Christians co-reign with Christ (Rev 22:5).

They rule the world with him (cf. Rev 2:26-27; 5:10; Dan 7:14, 27).

¹ The political turmoil of that year almost resulted in the collapse of the Roman Empire.

² The turning of the nations to God does not mean that each and every person will finally be converted. That will never be the case! What it does mean is this: via the gospel, large numbers in each nation will believe, resulting in a transformation of both national life and international relations (e.g., Isa 2:1-4). National laws will reflect biblical principles, and Christ will be publicly owned as Lord. Having said that, Psalm 2:9 does seem to imply that periodic rebellion on the part of national leaders will necessitate ongoing discipline with Christ's “rod of iron”.

But just how do we rule?

Answer: God's people (collectively Christ's bride, the Church) are the light of the world (Rev 21:24).

They minister gospel healing to the nations (Rev 22:2); they invite unbelievers to repent (Rev 22:14, 17).

They rule by influencing the world for good: living godly lives, witnessing to the truth, praying for the lost.

The world's progress over the past twenty centuries has been due largely to the influence of Christians — in education, government, healthcare, labor relations, science and technology, art and music.

Every facet of human culture has been influenced for good.

7. Is there a final wrapping up?

Perhaps. But consider the following:

Jesus' reign is said to last *forever* (Ps 72:5; Isa 9:7; Dan 7:14; Lk 1:33; Rev 11:15).

He must remain a king-priest forever (Ps 110:4; Heb 6:20; 7:3, 17, 21, 24).

Sinners (on earth) will always need a priestly mediator to intercede for them (Heb 7:25; Rom 8:34; 1Jn 2:1).

Doesn't this imply that the world must continue on, if not literally forever, at least for a very, very long time?

Tens of thousands of years at the very least!

Appendix: Premillennialism and Pessimism

A close correlation exists between Christian pessimism and premillennial belief: the two reinforce each other. Pessimism historically led to the widespread acceptance of premillennialism, and premillennialism affirms that the world must get worse.

The growth of dispensational premillennialism at the end of the 19th century, and in the first decades of the 20th century, can largely be ascribed to the perception that the world was getting irrevocably worse.

The Church's rapture out of this mess was its only hope.

One author lists the following "signs of the times" — pointers to the inevitable end:

Political corruption, pornography, alcohol abuse, the rise of monopolies, labor unrest, the desecration of the Lord's Day by immigrants, worldliness in the church, liberal theology, international conflicts, forest fires, earthquakes, revivals, the rise of cults like Christian Science and Millennial Dawnism (Jehovah's Witnesses), polio and influenza epidemics, changing weather patterns, the rise of Zionism, the sinking of the Titanic, the partitioning of Europe after World War I, radio — these and countless other events and trends were seen as proof that premillennialism was correct and the end of the age was rapidly approaching.³

Sounds familiar: international conflicts, fires, earthquakes, epidemics, and changing weather patterns.

And the invention and use of radio — whatever would that lead to?

The real remedy for such fear and pessimism is, of course, true faith — faith in God's promises.

Specifically, the promises cited in the foregoing article.

Only the preterist and postmillennialist views affirm that things can get better — that God has things in hand, and that he is working to bring about his peaceable kingdom.

³ From an online article on the Christian History Institute website: "Dispensational Premillennialism: The Dispensationalist Era." Author: Timothy Weber. This article was originally published in *Christian History* Issue number 61 in 1999. Via: https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/dispensational-premillennialism-the-dispensationalist-era?ios_app=true.