Overview of Preterism

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Bible Version
Scripture terms and phrases are mostly taken from the ESV Bible.

Introduction

The preterist view of eschatology holds that virtually all biblical prophecy was fulfilled in the 1st century AD. According to preterism, Jesus' return, the Tribulation, Millennium, Final Judgment, and Resurrection have already happened. They are all in our past.[1]

Two features distinguish preterism from traditional eschatology:
First, preterism takes the New Testament's prophetic time statements seriously.
Second, preterism teaches that God's eternal kingdom is already here:

- That, just as the prophets foretold, Jesus has inaugurated the kingdom.
- That the kingdom came "with power" in AD 70 (Mk 9:1).
- That it will continue to grow and progress through the proclamation of the gospel.
- That it doesn't need any future radical intervention (i.e., Jesus' return) for it to fully come.

Note that preterism does not deny Jesus' second coming; on the contrary, it affirms his coming as an event that has already happened.

This article provides an overview of the "full" (or "consistent") preterist view.[2]
Each of the main points presented is further explained and developed in other articles on this website.

Promises Fulfilled

Preterism regards New Testament prophecies, such as those of Matthew 24 and the book of Revelation, as having been fulfilled already — fulfilled in first-century events such as Nero's brutal persecution of the Church (64-68 AD), the Jewish War (66-70 AD), and the calamities that befell the Roman Empire at that time.

Preterism is based on the following:

1. Jesus promised to return before his generation had all passed on (Mt 10:23; 16:27-28; 24:34).
2. Jesus tied his return to the fall of Jerusalem (Mt 24:15-20; Lk 21:20-24), which took place in AD 70.
3. The visions of Revelation (including Jesus' return) were to be fulfilled "soon" (Rev 1:1, 3; 22:6-7, 10, 12, 20).
4. New Testament authors expected a first-century Parousia, judgment, resurrection, and end of the world order (Php 4:5; 1Thes 4:15-17; Heb 10:25, 37; Jas 5:7-9; 1Pet 4:5, 7, 17; 1Jn 2:18, 28).

[1] Obviously, some prophecies are in the process of being fulfilled, notably those that anticipate the conversion of the nations to Christ through the gospel (e.g., Ps 86:9; Dan 7:14; Gal 3:8; Rev 15:4).
[2] As opposed to the so-called "partial preterist" view.

How might we account for the Church apparently having missed Jesus' coming?
In answer, we can say that the Christian Church, from early on, had a faulty view of the nature of that coming.
Christians throughout the centuries have looked for a spectacular coming:
Jesus' visible descent, myriads of angels present, bodies rising from graves, a physical gathering for judgment, a fiery, cataclysmic end to the world.
But is this how we are to interpret Jesus' promises?

Coming on (or with) the Clouds

In the preterist view, Jesus' coming "with the clouds" (Rev 1:7; cf. Ac 1:9-11) refers to his return as the divine Judge to put down his enemies: Nero, and the Jews of that generation.
Clouds, in the Old Testament (OT), were associated with the presence and glory of God:

- God's presence and glory were manifested in the Shekinah Cloud (Ex 16:10; 40:34-35; 1Kgs 8:10-12).
- God "rode" on the clouds whenever he came down to judge (e.g., Ps 18:9-12; Isa 19:1; cf. Dt 33:26).
- Daniel's "son of man" ascended "with the clouds of heaven" into God's presence to be invested with divine authority (Dan 7:13-14).

Therefore, in promising to return on the clouds (Mt 24:30; 26:64), Jesus was affirming his divine authority:
He would return "in the glory of his Father" to judge (Mt 16:27; cf. Lk 21:27).
Through his judgments he would publicly demonstrate (for all to "see") that he was the "Son of Man" enthroned in heaven alongside the Father (Mt 24:30 [KJV]; 26:64; cf. Dan 7:13-14; Ps 110:1-2, 5-6).[3]

New Jerusalem

Revelation is John's version of the Olivet Discourse.
The events foretold were soon to transpire (Rev 1:1, 3; 22:6, 10).[4]
Chapter 18 — God's judgment on the Harlot City — foretells the 70 AD fall of Jerusalem.
Following judgment, a new Jerusalem comes to earth — a faithful bride in place of the Harlot (Rev 21:2).
This new Jerusalem is a present reality. It is where Christians "live" under the New Covenant (Heb 12:22).
It's also the Church, which serves as a light and ministers gospel healing to the nations (Rev 21:24; 22:1-2, 17).

The city's descent from heaven (Rev 21:2ff.) shows the definitive fulfillment of OT prophecies — notably, those concerned with Jerusalem's restoration and the gathering and readmittance of God's people into his presence.[5]
In Isaiah, the exile of God's people in Assyria and Babylon epitomized the universal exile of all mankind in Adam.
But now, through the work of Yahweh's Servant — through his atoning death (Isaiah 53) — Jerusalem has been definitively restored and the exiles gathered (e.g., Isa 54:1; 56:8; 60:1ff.; 65:17ff.).
God has delivered his people (Gentiles too) from the captivity of sin and gathered them to himself.
In Christ, Man's banishment and exile that began in the Garden has finally ended (Rev 22:1-4).

With the city's descent from heaven, God himself has come down to dwell with his people, in fulfillment of his ancient promises (Rev 21:2-3; cf. Lev 26:11-12; Eze 37:27; 48:35; Zec 2:10).
Within the city we live in the very presence of God, serving as priests in his temple (Rev 1:6; 5:10; 7:15; 22:3).

[3] For a fuller explanation of Jesus' coming on/with the clouds, see my article on this website: *The Nature of Jesus' Return*.
[4] Revelation was written and circulated just prior to the onset of Nero's persecution, which broke out in November 64 AD.
[5] This transformation of Jerusalem via judgment and restoration is a major theme in the OT prophets.

Resurrection

As well as on earth, the city is also in heaven.
As such it represents the martyrs' final reward (Rev 21:7).
It is also our eternal posthumous destiny (Heb 13:14).
When we die, we enter heaven directly — but we can do so only because the Resurrection is a past event.

Prior to AD 70, heaven was strictly off-limits. Man's exile continued beyond the grave.
God's OT people anticipated entry into their heavenly inheritance via resurrection (Heb 11:10, 16, 35).
Yet they, and other saints and martyrs who died pre-70, had first to wait in Hades-Paradise (Lk 16:22; 20:38; 23:43; Rev 6:9-11; 20:4-6).[6]
Jesus, by virtue of his resurrection, had acquired Hades' key and would soon release its inmates (Rev 1:18).
In AD 70, the saints in Hades-Paradise were finally permitted to enter heaven via resurrection (Rev 20:11-15).
Note that Paul regarded the Resurrection as imminent; some to whom he wrote would not have to "sleep" in Paradise (1Cor 15:51).
Paul also viewed the Resurrection as tied to Israel's restoration (1Cor 15:54-55; cf. Isa 25:7-8; Hos 13:14).
Therefore, the Resurrection of AD 70 should be understood in terms of the <u>end of Man's exile</u> from God.

Gathering unto God

Only with the coming of Jesus and the New Covenant has access to God been restored (Mt 27:51; Heb 10:19-22).
That is the reason why the OT saints, when they died, had to wait in Paradise (Heb 11:39-40).
Yet on earth, believers (even before AD 70) were being gathered via the gospel into the city (Heb 12:22).
"Jerusalem" was in a sense already being restored (Gal 4:26-27, cf. Isa 54:1[7]).

However, it seems that with the city's descent (in AD 70), a more definitive gathering took place.
It's true that Jesus promised to be present with his disciples always (Mt 28:20), and he was so via the Holy Spirit.
Yet, early Christians longed for Jesus' *parousia* — his "personal arrival and ongoing presence" with them.
His coming would entail their "being gathered together to him" (2Thes 2:1).[8]
Just as a Jewish bridegroom would return to collect his bride, so also Christ would come to receive his people to himself (Mt 25:1-13; Jn 14:2-3). By AD 70 the Church was ready for her husband (Rev 19:7; cf. Eph 5:25ff.).

In AD 70 both groups of saints were gathered into God's presence together — those in Paradise entered heaven through resurrection, and those alive on earth were spiritually gathered into "Jerusalem".
So now, when we die, we immediately enter heaven with our new, spiritual bodies (1Cor 15:44, 50; 2Cor 5:1ff.).
No more waiting in Paradise. Man's exile has ended!

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[6] Jesus himself entered Hades-Paradise at death (Lk 23:43; Ac 2:31). Enoch and Elijah presumably went there too (Heb 11:5, 39-40). Paul had a vision of Paradise and/or the third heaven (2Cor 12:1-4), but probably not of heaven itself.
Note that the wicked who died entered a subsection of Hades — a place of punishment (Lk 16:23).
[7] Paul viewed Isaiah's restoration prophecies as being, for the most part, fulfilled in his own day through the gospel. We can see this from the way he relates Isaiah's prophecies to the first-century responses of Jews and Gentiles to the gospel, and to his own ministry to the Gentiles. See Acts 13:47; Romans 9:27-29, 33; 10:11, 15-16, 20-21; 15:12, 21; 2 Corinthians 6:1-2.
[8] This gathering into "Jerusalem" is probably the gathering Jesus spoke about in Matthew 24:31 — a Jubilee (trumpet) gathering through the agency of his angels.

The Kingdom is here

The "Son of Man" entered heaven on the clouds to be invested with universal authority (Dan 7:13-14; Ac 1:9).
He was (and is) enthroned in the heavenly Zion (Ps 2:6; 110:1-2).
In this way, David's throne and kingdom have been fully restored (Isa 9:7; Lk 1:32-33; Ac 2:30-36; 15:16-17).

Parousia was "the regular [Greek] word for the arrival of a governor into his province or for the coming of a king to his subjects. It regularly describes a coming in authority and in power."[9]
So, in AD 70 Jesus returned as both King and Judge (Mt 16:27-28; 25:31).
The kingdom at that time came "with power" as Jesus dealt with his enemies (Mk 9:1; Rev 11:15-17).
His first-century judgments demonstrated that he was enthroned with the Father (Mt 26:64; Rev 1:7).
But his judgment of the Roman world at that time was just the start of his ongoing rule.
Messiah's eternal reign of justice, foretold in Psalm 72; Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1-10 and elsewhere, has begun.
Jesus rules and judges the nations providentially and via his word (Isa 2:3-4; 11:4; 42:4).
And those that rebel he disciplines with his "rod of iron" (Ps 2:9; Rev 12:5).

And so, the gospel is "the good news of the kingdom of God" (Lk 4:43; 8:1; 16:16).
It's the proclamation that, through Jesus, God's kingdom has finally come (Ac 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31).
The gospel calls people to recognize Jesus' rule — to confess him as Lord (Rom 10:9; Php 2:9-11), and to submit to his rule through repentance expressed in baptism (Ps 2:10-12; Mt 3:2; 4:17; 28:18-20; Ac 2:36-38).

The New Creation

The new heaven and new earth, with its capital "Jerusalem" (Revelation 21 – 22), depicts the post-70 AD world order, with the world's nations firmly under the rule and government of Christ.[10]
Christians dwell with Jesus in Jerusalem, and co-rule with him (Rev 5:10; 22:5; Dan 7:18, 27).
The city (as the Church) serves as a light and ministers gospel healing to the nations (Rev 21:24; 22:2).
Sinners outside the city are invited to repent and enter via the cleansing work of Christ (Rev 22:14-15, 17).
All nations belong to Jesus; he rules and disciplines them as needed (Ps 2:8-9; Rev 12:5), and, ultimately, he will win them to himself through the gospel (Mt 28:18-19; Gal 3:8; Rev 15:4).

Conclusion

The Christian Church urgently needs a faith-enhancing and prayer-promoting view of the future.
Jesus has brought the kingdom. His reign will forever increase (Is 9:7; Lk 1:32-33).
Despite present appearances, the forces of darkness will not prevail.

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[9] William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 2* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1957). Via the Bible Portal website: https://bibleportal.com/commentary/section/william-barclay/the-vision-of-things-to-come-matthew-241-31.

[10] Note that the absence of death, sorrow, pain, and curse (Rev 21:4; 22:3a) relates to the state of affairs only within Jerusalem itself. Those outside the city continue to be under God's curse (Rev 22:15).
It is important to recognize that Revelation 21:4 is drawing on OT promises that foretell the joy of the redeemed gathered from exile into restored Zion (e.g., Isa 25:8; 35:10; 51:11; 60:20; 65:19; Jer 31:13). For all who are gathered into Jerusalem, the gloom and sorrow associated with exile are gone forever. This side of eternity we enjoy a foretaste of these blessings; only in the perfection of heaven itself will there absolutely be no more death, sorrow, pain, and curse.

Appendix 1: The book of Revelation

- Revelation is a prophecy of events that were to happen soon.
  The entire prophecy is bookended by immanence statements (1:1, 3; 22:6, 10).
- Revelation was written and circulated to the seven Asian churches around AD 64.
  Much of the book is a prophecy of the Jewish-Roman War of 66-70 AD.
  The "great city" (aka the "Harlot") is Jerusalem (11:8).
  Chapter 18 foretells God's judgment on Jerusalem — fulfilled by August/September 70 AD.
- Revelation was given for the benefit of first-century Christians who were soon to undergo persecution (1:3).
  Nero's persecution broke out in November 64 AD.
  Nero was the 6th king and the 666-man (13:18; 17:10).[11]
  The Beast was the Roman inquisition initiated by Nero but administered by provincial governors.
- Jesus would come "soon" to judge his enemies (22:7, 12, 20).
  Christians were to remain faithful either unto death (2:10), or until Jesus came to save them by dealing with their persecutors (2:25; 3:11; cf. 2Thes 1:6-7).
- Through these dramatic events Jesus' heavenly glory would be revealed (1:7; cf. Mt 24:30; 26:64).
- Revelation shows the first-century coming of God's kingdom "with power" (Mk 9:1; Rev 11:15-17).
  It shows what Psalm 110 anticipated: Messiah exerting his power to take possession of the nations.
  It shows him defeating his enemies who oppose his rule.
- John's final vision depicts the fulfillment of all that the prophets foretold: the new messianic world order.
  Jerusalem is restored and God's people have been gathered therein; all nations are blessed through Christ's beneficent rule (Psalms 2, 72; Isa 2:1-4; 9:7; 11:1-10; 42:1-4; etc.).

Appendix 2: The Millennium

There are several preterist millennial views.
The one that makes the most sense is that of Kurt Simmons — one that he calls *bimillennialism*.[12]
Here is a summary of Kurt's view:

- Far from being a lengthy period of time on earth, the millennium is a code or pointer to <u>time spent in Hades</u>.
  John's first readers in Asia would have been familiar with the Greco-Roman notion that the dead dwell in Hades for 1000 years before being reborn to earthly life.
- A close reading of Revelation 20 shows that there are actually <u>two separate millennia</u>:
  Revelation 20:1-3: Satan is interned for 1000 years in the "bottomless pit" (= Hades-Tartarus; cf. 2Pet 2:4).
  Upon his release he renews his deception, resulting in persecution (Rev 20:7-9).
  Revelation 20:4-6: The martyrs "beheaded" under the Beast (= Nero) reign with Christ in Hades-Paradise.
  This millennial reign of the martyrs in Paradise represents their "first resurrection" — it precedes the second or final Resurrection that's shown in Revelation 20:11-15.
  Thus there are two successive, non-overlapping millennia:
  Satan's 1000-year internment → Satan's release → Persecution → the Martyrs' 1000-year reign → Final Resurrection.

[11] "Nero Caesar" transliterated from its Greek form (Νερων Καισαρ) into Hebrew characters gives *Nrwn Qsr.* These (Hebrew) letters each have numerical values; together they total 666.
[12] See: Kurt M. Simmons, *The Consummation of the Ages* (Carlsbad, NM: Bimillennial Preterist Association, 2003), pp. 362-389.
See also Kurt's online article: https://preteristcentral.com/Studies%20in%20the%20Millennia.html.

Appendix 3: Preterism and the Kingdom of God

The preterist view of the kingdom stands in stark contrast to traditional views.

Preterism affirms that God's eternal kingdom is here already, and that it doesn't need any future radical intervention (i.e., Jesus' return) for it to fully come.

Preterism holds to the following:

- That Jesus has inaugurated God's eternal, universal, and righteous kingdom (Lk 1:32-33; cf. Isa 9:6-7).
- That in his ascension, the throne of David was fully restored (Ac 2:30-36).
- That Jesus rules the world from the heavenly Zion (Ps 2:6; 110:1-2; Dan 7:13-14; Mt 26:64).
- That the kingdom came "with power" in AD 70 (Mk 9:1; Mt 16:28; Rev 11:15-17).
  At that time Jesus exerted his power to subdue his enemies and take possession of the Gentile nations (Ps 110:5-6; Rev 11:15-18).
- That all nations are his inheritance and reward (Ps 2:8).
  He wins them to himself through the gospel (Mt 28:18-20; Ac 15:14-19 [= Am 9:11-12]; Rev 15:4).
  In this way God's promises to Abraham are fulfilled (Rom 4:13; Gal 3:8; cf. Gen 12:3; Ps 72:17).
- That Jesus continually disciplines rebellious leaders and nations with his "rod of iron" (Ps 2:9-12; Rev 12:5).
- That in John's vision of the new creation (Revelation 21 – 22) we see depicted the new post-70 AD world order that Jesus has brought about:
  Old Testament prophecies are shown to be fulfilled: Jerusalem has been restored, and God's people have been gathered into his presence therein (Rev 22:3-4).
  New Jerusalem (as the Church) serves as a light and ministers healing to the nations (Rev 21:24; 22:2).
  The wicked outside its walls are invited to repent and enter through its gates (Rev 22:14-15, 17).
  New Jerusalem is where believers "live" under the New Covenant (Heb 12:22).
- That Jesus remains a priest-king "forever" (Ps 110:4; Heb 6:20; 7:3, 17, 21, 24), because the world will continue on for a very, very long time.
  He will reign, to all intents, forever (Ps 72:5; Isa 9:7; Dan 7:14; Lk 1:33; Rev 11:15).
  Sinners (on earth) will always need a priestly mediator to intercede for them (Heb 7:25; Rom 8:34; 1Jn 2:1).