

# Masterwork of the Messiah

## Expositional Study Of Matthew's Gospel

### *The King And The Kingdom: Part 1*

Matthew 24:1

Written By

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The world as we know it seems to be spinning out of control. Yes, I know, there has always been social evil, economic ruin, natural disasters, raging famines, and wars perpetuated by some totalitarian, bloodthirsty and power hungry leader bent on world domination; however, this time around things just seem more ominous.

- America, the bastion of hope for a world overrun with ruthless dictators and inferior economies, is imploding from within morally, spiritually, economically, socially, legally and constitutionally. We all see it and there doesn't seem like there is a whole lot we can do about it because our leaders continually choose policies which court darkness while eschewing light. The late Robert Bork was right when he wrote in the introduction of his book *Slouching Toward Gomorrah*, "in the United States, at least, that decline in the mounting resistance to it have produced what we now call a culture war. It is impossible to say what the outcome will be, but for the moment our trajectory continues downward. This is not to deny that much of our culture remains healthy, that many families are intact and continue to raise children with strong moral values. American culture is complex and resilient. But is also not to be denied that there aspects of almost every branch of our culture that are worse than ever before and that the rot is

spreading.”<sup>1</sup> Judge Bork spends the rest of his book demonstrating how we are, in fact, driving as fast as we can toward the complete chaos of the ancient city called Gomorrah, a city whose very name speaks of out-of-control sinful behavior which aroused the fiery wrath of the Almighty God. Other fine, well-documented books address what looks like our logical and impending collapse, books like Steyn’s *After America* and Buchanan’s *Suicide Of A Superpower*. Voices like that of Cal Thomas in his new book *What Works* seek to give us solutions to keep us from going on the proverbial cliff; however, from what we see in the news and from the lives of our leaders, it doesn’t appear that anyone has the courage to do what needs to be done to slow our brakeless car down. In light of this, I think Chuck Colson is right in his book *Against The Night: Living In The New Dark Ages* when he says, “Our great civilization may not yet lie in smoldering ruins, but the enemy is within the gates. The times seem to smell of sunset.”<sup>2</sup> He, like Bork and Steyn, trace the roots of our cultural decay, and he, like Bork, Steyn, and Colson, gives us solutions to halt the decay, but from what I see, it appears that decay is the order of the day. Leaves you shaking your head and mumbling under your breath, “What is the world is going on? Has everyone lost their minds? Can’t people see what is going on?”

- Global war, far beyond what a Hitler or a Ho Chi Min ever achieved, is engulfing the world under the banner of radical Islam. The Arab Spring didn’t usher in a time of refreshing breezes, but ruthless power grabs as nation after nation has fallen to their brutal, religiously empowered, highly intolerant methods and mindset. Egypt? Gone. Lybia? A hotbed of insurrection. Iraq? Engulfed by the religious fanatics of ISIS who were dedicated to the death to restore an ancient caliphate across Iraq, Syria and whatever other lands they can devour. And their leaders make no qualms about the fact they are coming after our President. Afghanistan? It is teetering on the edge of the Al Qaida abyss as our departure is imminent. Africa? Torn apart by tribal factions and the ever-growing shadow of radical Islam. The Philippines? They have their share of Islamic warriors who want nothing more than to seize victory over the islands. And in the mix of all of this stands little democratic Israel, battling a fearsome foe on their southern border whose charter reveals they are committed to Jewish annihilation at all costs. Over the last few years, Israel, though absorbing countless rockets almost daily and experiencing shocking abductions of their people for murder or for ransom, has retaliated in a limited fashion and then acquiesced to the calls for peace from the United Nations. But what did this get them? More attacks, and more mayhem, and now as they seek to deal with the fearsome fanatics who want to obliterate them, the world erupts in riots calling for their demise and destruction.

Yes, the world is spinning out of control like an astronaut cut off from their umbilical cord while walking in space.

What is going on? According to Jesus’s prophetic teaching in the Olivet Discourse, which is found in Matthew chapters 24 through 25, the world is merely prepping for the arrival of the messianic king and His kingdom. As Paul teaches in Romans 8, the earth is currently groaning because of the presence and power of sin; however, as Jesus makes clear in His longest answer to any question ever asked by His disciples, the dismay, decay, and destruction is all

<sup>1</sup> Robert Bork, *Slouching Toward Gomorrah* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996): 2.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Colson, *Against The Night: Living In The New Dark Ages* (Ann Arbor: Servant Publications, 1989): 19.

sovereignly planned and will terminate in the revelation of the kingdom to end all kingdoms. This is the blessed hope of the kingdom member as times smell of sunset. The sun will set on this old, sinful world system, however, it will be replaced the new, holy kingdom of the Messiah. Will you be there? Do you have this hope?

Having spent the entire day (Tuesday) debating the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Scribes on the Temple mount, having just giving these religious leaders His most pointed, condemning words about their false theology in chapter 23, and having just pronounced impending judgment specifically on them for rejecting Him as the long-awaited Messiah (Matthew 23:37-38), Jesus left the Temple precincts only to hear from His disciples this statement:

“Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!” (Mark 13:1, NIV).

The stones were massive. I've seen some of them beneath the Wailing Wall as I've ventured in the Rabbinical Tunnel. Some of these hand-carved stones are 40 feet long, twelve feet high and twelve feet wide and weighing in at 100 tons ... and they were created without pneumatic tools and moved without earth moving equipment. Jaw dropping. The Herodian Temple was something to behold with stones of this stature, coupled with massive columns, and an ornately decorated Temple. Jesus, however, wasn't impressed with the place of worship. He wanted people of worship, and because His people rejected Him as the divine Messiah, He would literally bring their false house of worship down around them. He said this much in His reply to the statement of His disciples:



<sup>2</sup>And He said to them, “Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down” (Matthew 24).

In mere thirty-seven years,<sup>3</sup> or 70 A.D., the Romans, under the ruthless leadership of Titus would fulfill this prophecy of Jesus. Just the glory of God departed from the Temple in Old Testament times because the people rejected the Law of God and God Himself (Ezekiel 10), the glory of God would depart again and judgment would come as Israel moved to reject the divine Messiah. I'm sure the disciples didn't expect Christ's stinging statement in light of their blissful comment. God does have a way of awakening us out of our unfounded spiritual stupors, does He not?

Walking out of the Temple through the Eastern Gate, Jesus and the disciples headed for the Mount of Olives. While seated there watching the sun go down behind the glory of the Temple (an apt metaphor in light of Christ's castigation of the religious leaders), the disciples,

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<sup>3</sup> Calculating Christ's crucifixion in 33 A.D. as Dr. Harold Hoehner validates in his definitive book on the subject, *Chronological Aspects Of The Life Of Christ*: III.

who were still convinced the messianic kingdom was about to arrive despite all that had just transpired over the last couple of days, asked Jesus some logical questions:

<sup>3</sup>As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things happen, and what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?”



They wanted to know what we all want to know: When will divine judgment come and righteousness reign? ... What signs can we look for to know the messianic kingdom is about to be revealed? As times smell of sunset, don't you, as a saint, long for knowing when the King of Kings and Lord of Lord's will show up to judge sin and bring His prophesied kingdom to earth? And wouldn't you like to know what concrete signs you can look for so you can have hope as you prepare for the

King's arrival?

In the ensuing chapters, which will take us many studies to analyze effectively because of their theological, eschatological, and practical meaning, Jesus will answer the disciples questions in reverse order. From chapter 24, verse 4 through verse 35, Jesus will tell His men/saints what signs will precede His coming to erect the prophesied Davidic Empire over the earth (2 Samuel 7; Psalm 89, Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5-6; 30:1-33:21; Daniel 7:13-14; Hosea 3:4-5; Amos 9:11; Zechariah 12-14 ).<sup>4</sup> With verse 36, He will brush off the question about timing of the kingdom's arrival by letting them know it's time is unknown. From this verse through Matthew 25, verse one through verse 46 at the close of the chapter, He will underscore the need for His people to always be ready to appear before Him when He arrives. In chapter 24, verse 25, Jesus says after explaining the ominous signs which will precede His coming, “Behold, I have told you in advance.” The implication is this: I've told you what to expect, so stay faithful and obedient, regardless of what happens, as my kingdom people. He will develop this pragmatic motif in five parables: the parable of Noah (Matthew 24:36-41), the parable of the thief (Matthew 24:42-51), the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), and the parable of the money loaned by a master to his servants while He went away (Matthew 25:14-30), and the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46). The import of these can't be missed:

- Since the people of Noah's day heard that judgment was coming they should have acted accordingly, but they didn't. When it started to rain suddenly and catastrophically, they were not spiritually prepared. They should have been. The implication of saints is clear: We cannot be lax in our approach to following hard after Christ, for will appear at a time we didn't anticipate.

<sup>4</sup> For an excellent discussion about the Davidic messianic empire, read Charles Ryrie's *The Basis of The Premillennial Faith*, chapter 5.

- Since a homeowner doesn't know when a thief will strike, he should always be ready for the thief's arrival. So it with the Messiah. He will come at a time you least expect him, regardless of the signs you've been given. Will you be caught spiritually napping, or will you be ready to give account of your spiritual walk when He suddenly appears?
- Since the all of the ten maidens of the bridal party knew the groom would be coming at any time, according to Jewish marriage custom, they should have all been ready to go with him. But the majority weren't. Again, the import is clear: We must be ready and watching for the arrival of the groom. Are you? Will you?
- Since we have all been entrusted with various levels of gifting and abilities in light of His departure, we should all be spiritually prepared to show Him how we've advanced His holdings when He suddenly returns from His journey. Once more, Christ drives home that fact we shouldn't be caught up with studying signs, but studying how we can live out our Christian life effectively before His unannounced and glorious arrival. Are you prepared? Will your life make Him proud?
- Since the Master Shepherd will reward His sheep for their obedience in acting like His sheep during His absence, and that He will judge those goats who rejected Him with eternal damnation, we should be mindful to live doing the things which bring Him glory and demonstrate we are, indeed, kingdom members.

Signs of the Messiah's arrival are interesting and exciting to ponder; however, what matters most is we actually live out the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, regardless of the carnal complexities of our times. Eschatology is instructive and educational, but it is also highly pragmatic, as Jesus demonstrates in this extended lesson. While we sail into these deep eschatological waters in the next several sermons, don't lose this balance, please.

Also, as we take this exciting and sober journey, we must pause and make some much needed foundational observations. Why? So you will be better equipped to study and appreciate this message of the Messiah. This is a complex passage, to be sure, theologically, structurally, and chronologically.

Theologically and chronologically, there are two problematic areas we need to address: The timing of these events, and the kingdom motif as understood by the disciples, a concept which is foreign to most westerners.

There are three main views of how to interpret this final discourse of Jesus.

One, some believe these prophetic words of judgment were completely fulfilled with the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., a concept Matthew does not address, but Luke does, although only briefly (Luke 21:24 ... "and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled"). The strength of this view is it takes seriously Christ's words of judgment He pronounced at the end of His diatribe against the false religious leaders of His day. The weakness of the view, in my estimation, is it downplays many things in the passage which have never occurred in human history: (1) the Lord speaks of future saints who endure the time of tribulation and are saved, which could not, of course, refer the disciples (Matthew 24:13); (2) at no time in human history has the prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27 concerning the literal seven year tribulation, with the Anti-Christ setting himself up as God in the middle of the period, been realized (Matthew 24:15); the gospel has not yet been preached to the entire world (Matthew 24:14), at no time have we experienced the full magnitude of the Great Tribulation when the

entire cosmos disintegrates into chaos (Matthew 24:21-35); (3) the generation which actually sees these things occurring will not pass until all the things Christ prophesied would occur, do occur (Matthew 24:32-35). This couldn't apply to the disciples, by any means. Some of them had already died prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

Two, others view the import of these prophetic words as primarily futuristic. The strengths of this view are several: (1) It takes seriously the prophesied of Daniel concerning Israel and the end of time, as disclosed in chapters 9 and 11 and 12 specifically; (2) It interprets the words of Jesus from a logical, normal perspective; therefore, if Jesus said the sun and the moon would be darkened, along with all the stars, then this is exactly what will happen; (3) It correctly sees this time, this 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel, as God's dealings with Israel, i.e., Jacob, and not the Church; (4), It fits with the literal Old Testament promises of rewarding Israel with the land, as is showcased through the covenants: Abrahamic (Genesis 12), Palestinian (Deuteronomy ), Davidic (2 Samuel 7), and the New Covenant (Jeremiah 30-31).

This is the position I take. If you take the other or a new mediating position, which seeks to incorporate the best of both positions, I respect you and challenge you to remember we are both called to be faithful to Christ, regardless of where our eschatology takes us. I, personally, however, believe the futuristic view is more tenable in light of reasons stated.

From my study, I believe what Jesus says here does not apply specifically to our time. True, there will be wars, famines, and false teachers. There always have and always will be. What Jesus describes here is what is going to happen when the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel (Daniel 9:24-27), or when the seven year tribulation commences. Revelation 6, which introduces us to the first of seven seal judgments, which begin at the chronological start of the seven year tribulation,<sup>5</sup> presents us with a one to one chronological flow in relation to Matthew 24.

Conditions	Matthew	Revelation 6
False Christs	24:4-5	6:1-2
Warfare	24:6-8	6:3-4
Famine	24:7	6:5-6
Death	24:7-10	6:7-8
Witnessing	24:14	6:9-11
Cosmic Changes	24:29	6:12-23

Regarding this perfect chronological flow, Barnhouse observed years ago:

“The order of events follows closely to that which was announced by our Lord in answer to the disciples questions on the Mount of Olives, ‘for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many’ (Matt. 24:5). This is the white horse. ‘And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars ... for nation shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom ...’ (24:6, 7). This is the red horse of war. There are some who apply this passage to our day, thinking that the wars which troubled this age are those spoken of in prophecy. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The worth of our day are about rehearsals, but the worse

<sup>5</sup> For an excellent discussion of the *chronological* nature of the 21 judgments in the book of Revelation, I would direct you to Gary Cohen's book *Understanding Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978).

which Christ prophesied take place after the believers are removed from the earth, at the man of sin has been revealed (2 Thessalonians 2:3). These campaigns are described in the book of Daniel.”<sup>6</sup>

The good professor couldn't be more right.

What all of this means is when these unique pains start, they will be like nothing the world has ever seen. The famines we see in Africa today, the diseases ... like Ebola ... we are worried about coming here by plane, the wars we see cropping up all over the place ... like with Russia rolling over Crimea and now rattling their saber over the Ukraine, are all child's play in relation to what is coming. In other words, they are but a small taste of the divinely appointed terror which will usher in the judgment of God and the revelation of the Messiah as the Davidic king of kings. When the Devil, who knows Scripture, too, sees the implementation of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week, when he knows his time is short, he will be allowed to pull out all the stops to deceive mankind into following him via the Satanic trinity, compromised of the Satan, the Anti-Christ, and the False Prophet. God will also pull out all the stops to judge mankind for his sinful ways so that He can, in turn, cleanse the cosmos of sin and usher in the prophesied kingdom of His Son and our Messiah, Jesus.

Right now, then, mankind is just getting a small, occasional wake-up call from God, via catastrophic occurrences we see before us. Whether it is a massive, destructive tsunami or a powerful earthquake in Turkey, they are just precursors of a full breakdown of order as mankind is accustomed to. In the time of the end, when the King deals with evil prior to the erection of His empire, divine judgment on the cosmos will assume monolithic, mind-boggling dimensions. In light of this I must ask, "Are you prepared to meet God face to face?" Only a faith relationship with Jesus Christ, the Savior, can and will prepare you.

Additionally, right now the world enjoys the presence of the Church of Jesus Christ, the entity which holds back true evil and the unraveling of culture. But that restraining will be short-lived, as Paul teaches in 2 Thessalonians 2:

<sup>1</sup>Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him, <sup>2</sup>that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. <sup>3</sup>Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, <sup>4</sup>who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. <sup>5</sup>Do you not remember that awhile I was still with you, I was telling you these things? <sup>6</sup>And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he may be revealed. <sup>7</sup>For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. <sup>8</sup>And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; <sup>9</sup>that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, <sup>10</sup>and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the

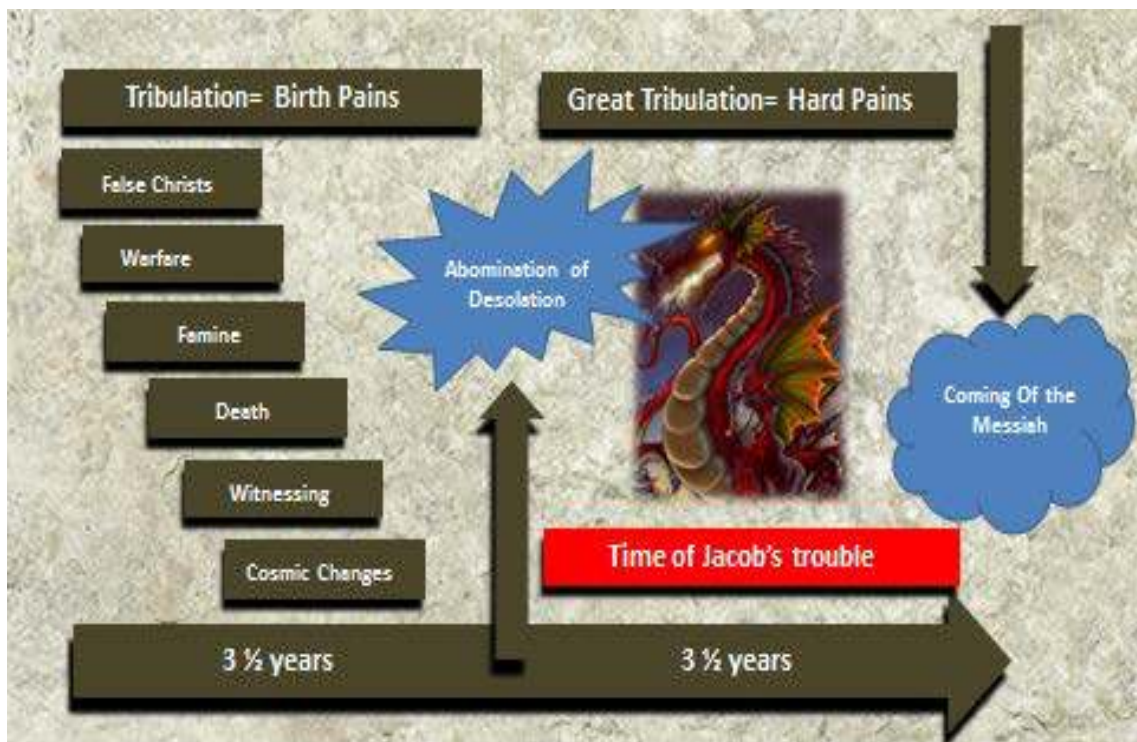
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<sup>6</sup>Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Revelation: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971): 124.

truth so as to be saved. <sup>11</sup>And for this reason God I will send upon them deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, <sup>12</sup>in order that they all may be ljudged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.

The lawless one is none other than the Anti-Christ, the Satanically inspired man who will oppose God and all that is godly before the return of Jesus. What or who holds him in check now from doing all he wants? Verse six calls the restrainer a “what,” while verse 7 calls the restrainer a “who.” All of this leads to a simple question: “Who has the ability to withstand and hold back the Devil?” There is only one answer: God. Where is God specifically in this current age? He is in the Church, in the lives of believers (1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:30). When we are raptured at the beginning of this time designed specifically for the nation of Israel, as detailed in Daniel 9:24-27, the restraining power of the Spirit will be, in this sense, removed. When this occurs, when the Church is out of the way, the man of sin can unleash evil, control, and domination of the world which has never been seen before. And when this occurs, everything Jesus prophesied here in Matthew 24 will be realized. Ironic, isn’t it? The world, even our own government and educational institutions, is devoted, more than ever before, to silence and sideline the Church so they can live like they desire with total freedom. They’ll have freedom all right, freedom to be enslaved in ways we can only being to comprehend.

Applying all of this to the structural arrangement of Matthew 24, we get this picture of the chronological flow of things:



God, who is highly organized and methodical in carrying out any plan, certainly has a well-devised, intricate, systematic plan for dealing with sin, once and for all, and bringing the



peace on earth He calls us to pray for in His model prayer (Matthew 6:9). What hope this gives us as we, as Christ-followers, watch the world being primed for judgment and glorious coming. He is coming, as He said He would, to replace godlessness and unrighteousness with godliness and righteousness. Are you prepared for His coming? Hopefully, our time in these important passages will move you to a saving relationship with the Savior, Jesus, the Messiah.

### *Additional Information*

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Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology: Church, Last Things*. Vol. 4: **PRETERISM**

The preceding discussion is based on the premise that the Tribulation is yet future. However, some have adopted a view called *preterism*, which is derived from the Latin word *preter* (*past*). Preterism claims that apocalyptic biblical prophecy—the events described by Jesus in the Mount Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24–25) and by John in the Revelation (especially 6–18)—have already been fulfilled. There are two basic forms of preterism: moderate (partial) and extreme (full).

*Moderate (partial) preterism*, represented by Gary DeMar (b. 1950—see *End-Times Fiction* and *Last Days Madness*), R. C. Sproul (b. 1939—see *The Last Days According to Jesus*), Hank Hanegraaff (b. 1950—see *The Last Sacrifice*), and Kenneth Gentry (b. 1953—see *Before Jerusalem Fell*), holds that the resurrection and the Second Coming are future, but that all the other prophecies made in Matthew 24–25 and in Revelation 6–18 were fulfilled in the first century, particularly in the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

*Extreme (full) preterism* maintains that *all* New Testament predictions are past, including those about the resurrection and the Second Coming, which likewise occurred in the first century. This model has been held by Max King (*The Spirit of Prophecy*), Ed Stevens (*Expectations Demand a First Century Rapture*), and John Noe (*Shattering the ‘Last Behind’ Delusion*).

### **Arguments for and Responses to Partial Preterism**

Extreme preterism is heretical, denying two of the great fundamentals of the faith: the physical Resurrection and the literal Second Coming (see Geisler, *BR*). As we have already established that the Second Coming and the final resurrection (of all humankind) are future, physical events, we will focus here on moderate preterism.

#### **Argument One**

Preteristic elements are said to exist in some early Fathers (e.g., Origen [c. 185–c. 254], Eusebius [263–340]), some Reformers (e.g., John Calvin), and some post-Reformation writers (e.g., John Owen [1616–1683], Milton Terry [1840–1914], B. B. Warfield [1851–1921], Loraine Boettner [1932–2000]).

#### **Response**

On the contrary, the vast majority of the earliest Fathers openly opposed the idea that such prophecies had already been fulfilled; preterism is not even found in the *medieval* Fathers. In fact,

it was formulated by the Jesuit scholar Luiz de Alcazar (1554–1613) to counter the Reformation, drawing attention from the Reformers' critique of Roman Catholicism as a fulfillment of the Revelation prophecies about the beast. Furthermore, fragmentary support can be found in church history for many views, including some that are unorthodox and heretical. Such evidence is no definitive argument for preterism.

### Argument Two

The repeated use of *you* in Jesus' apocalyptic teachings (e.g., cf. Matt. 24:38–25:3) is alleged to reveal that He was speaking only to His immediate disciples. Otherwise, it would have made no sense to urge His listeners to flee from Jerusalem when those things happened (cf. 24:15–16).

### Response

Some predictions *were* fulfilled in A.D. 70, but some were for “the end of the age” (Matt. 20:3). The *you* is used here proleptically (in advance) in reference to those who will be alive in the times being described, when these events will be fulfilled. Paul similarly referred to “we who are still alive” at Christ's return (1 Thess. 4:17); at best this expresses a possibility and expectation (not a prediction) that he would be on earth during the Second Coming. Furthermore, Isaiah told King Ahaz, “The Lord himself will give *you* a sign” that “the virgin will be with child” (Isa. 7:14), which did not find its complete fulfillment until hundreds of years later in the Virgin Birth (Matt. 1:23). Also, the “blessed are you” (Matt. 5:11) in the Sermon on the Mount isn't limited to the first-century disciples, nor is the “you” who murdered the prophet Zechariah (Matt. 23:35) a reference only to New Testament Jews.

### Argument Three

*This generation*, as in “This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened” (Matt. 24:34), shows that Jesus was speaking of the immediate future (viz., A.D. 70), not a distant-future tribulation. This is common New Testament use of the term, and, further, Jesus said all His predictions here would come to pass on “this generation.”

### Response

As noted by lexicographers William Arndt (1880–1957) and Wilbur Gingrich (1901–1993), the word *generation* (Gk: *genea*) can mean “clan,” “race,” or “nation” (*GELNT*, 153), and this is supported by other New Testament usage (e.g., cf. Luke 16:8 NKJV). So taken, the phrase does not necessarily imply that Israel will pass away after the Second Coming; more likely, it means Israel will not pass away before the Second Coming. Also, the phrase may refer to a future generation of Jews alive during the Tribulation—that is, the end-time crisis will not be of indefinite duration.

Some take the verb translated *takes place* as meaning “begins to take place,” namely, all these things began to take place in A.D. 70 but will not be completed until the Second Coming. Jesus did refer to these as “the beginning of birth pains” (Matt. 24:8). Whatever the case, clearly this cannot mean that all those things, including the Second Coming, were fulfilled by A.D. 70, for the many reasons given above.

### Argument Four

Jesus seems to have said He would return before the disciples had evangelized all the cities of Israel (Matt. 10:17–23). This they did immediately, in Jesus' time or at least by A.D. 70.

### Response

This text is not part of Matthew 24 (where He speaks of His coming “with power and great glory,” v. 30), so it may not be about the Second Coming at “the end of the age” (v. 3). Rather, it may refer to His return to reunite with the disciples at the end of their evangelistic campaign through the cities of Israel, which He commissioned. Or, as in verses 15–31, Jesus may be speaking proleptically of His followers' final mission “at the end of the age,” for during the Tribulation, just before His return, they will evangelize not only Israel but the world (Rev. 7:9).

### Argument Five

Jesus said there were some of his followers “standing” there who would not taste death until they saw Him return, “coming in His kingdom” (Matt. 16:28). Therefore, this had to occur in the first century, while these contemporaries were still alive.

### Response

Jesus was referring to His transfiguration (Matt. 17), which prefigured His second coming. Peter, James, and John *did* see Him “coming in His kingdom,” power, and glory, as Peter confirmed (2 Peter 1:16–18). This transfiguration experience was a foretaste of Christ's final glorious appearance at the end of the age (24:30), when “the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works” (16:27 NKJV). Those who are raptured (1 Thess. 4:13–18) before this time of wrath (5:9; Rev. 3:10) will witness the Second Coming without tasting death.

In any event, Jesus could not have been referring to A.D. 70 for many reasons:

- (1) He did not come with His angels at that time.
- (2) He did not distribute the rewards at that time.
- (3) “Some” (two or more) of the disciples standing were not still alive in A.D. 70, since all but John had been martyred by then.
- (4) He did not set up a visible kingdom at that time, wherein He and His twelve apostles reigned on thrones (Matt. 19:28).
- (5) There was no physical coming of Christ in A.D. 70; He and His angels promised they would “see” Him (24:30; Acts 1:10–11; Rev. 1:1).

### Argument Six

If the Tribulation is to be worldwide, then it would have made no sense for Jesus to tell the disciples to flee to the mountains during it (Matt. 24:16).

### Response

This was a specific warning to avoid the center of trouble (Jerusalem) and flee to the mountains, which is what the remnant will do at that time. There they will be safe from the general judgment falling on Jerusalem and the rest of the world. However, contrary to preterism, there is strong evidence that the general Tribulation judgments will be worldwide.

**Argument Seven**

These events all took place between 66 and 70 in the Jewish Wars with Rome and in the destruction of Jerusalem. Their fulfillment is recorded by Josephus (see *The Wars of the Jews*), so we need not look for any future fulfillment.

**Response**

These events did not all take place in the first century. For example, the glorious Second Coming did not occur (24:30), nor did Christ begin His literal enthroned reign in Jerusalem (25:34; cf. 19:28). There is also no evidence that all the astronomical events occurred, such as the stars falling from heaven and the heavens being shaken (24:29).

**Argument Eight**

Luke 21 is a parallel account to Matthew 24, yet even many futurists hold that Luke 21 was fulfilled by A.D. 70. Why then should not Matthew's passage have also been fulfilled?

**Response**

Luke omits elements like "the abomination that causes desolation" (21:20), which is still future and is connected with the Tribulation (Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24:15). The "times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24), which intervene between Christ's first and second comings, are still going on in the New Testament era (cf. Rom. 11:25) and will continue until Israel is restored to its ultimate promises. Further, many scriptural predictions have a partial fulfillment now and a fuller fulfillment in the future.<sup>80</sup>

**Argument Nine**

Revelation is a book of symbols and should not be taken literally. So taken, it *has* been fulfilled in the history of the church.

**Response**

Once again, symbols refer to literal realities, and in the Revelation John gives literal interpretations (e.g., cf. 1:20). The whole Bible should be taken as literally true, but not all the Bible should be taken literally (e.g., cf. John 15:1).

**Argument Ten**

That the biblical writers thought Jesus was coming soon is indicated by *many* passages, such as Romans 13:11–12; 1 Peter 4:7; James 5:8; 1 John 2:18; Revelation 1:1; and Revelation 22:12.

**Response**

The Bible teaches that Jesus may come at any moment (viz., imminently), but it does not teach the moment at which He is coming (Matt. 24:36; Acts 1:6–7). This argument confuses imminency and immediacy. There are many texts in which Christ's coming is said to be imminent, that is, at any moment.<sup>83</sup> Again, A. T. Robertson said, "Quickly should be translated 'I am coming (imminently):' ... We do not know how *quickly* is meant to be understood. But it is a real threat" (WPNT, 7.306; cf. Morris, RSJ, 258; Seiss, A, 523). The word means "suddenly," not necessarily "soon."

**Argument Eleven**

John was told that Jesus would come “quickly” (Rev. 22:12, 20 NKJV), which points to an immediate event, not one in the distant future.

**Response**

If this were so, then it would support extreme (not partial) preterism, since it refers to the Second Coming, which has not yet occurred. Further, the Greek word *quickly* (*tachus*) can and often does mean “swiftly, speedily, at a rapid rate.” Thus, it does not necessarily refer to a *soon* event, but rather a *swift* one, when it occurs.

**Argument Twelve**

John refers to the events of Revelation as being “near” (Rev. 1:3; 22:10) and coming “shortly” (1:1; 22:6 NKJV). These events must have been fulfilled in A.D. 70, since two thousand plus years is a long time later.

**Response**

*First*, the word translated *shortly* (1:1; 22:6 NKJV) is *tachei*, which is from the same root as *tachu* and also means “swiftly” or “speedily.” As such, it refers to a *sudden* but not necessarily *soon* event.

*Second*, *near* (1:3) is translated from the word *engus*, which means “near” or “at hand.” This is a relative term like *short* and *long*, of which one can ask, how near? Compared to what? As measured by whom? What is long *to us* is short *for God* (2 Peter 3:8), and, furthermore, there are clear biblical examples where a “short” time was actually long *for us*. Hebrews 10:37, written almost two thousand years ago, says Jesus will come “in just a very little while” and He has not yet returned.

*Third*, if preteristic reasoning is valid—that is, if these terms mean an event in the near future (e.g., A.D. 70), then moderate preterism is false, since it believes that the Second Coming and resurrection passages (Rev. 19–20) were not fulfilled in the first century.

**Argument Thirteen**

There is evidence that Revelation was written before A.D. 70 and was fulfilled at that time. Thus, supposedly, we need not look for any future fulfillment of these events.

**Response**

To the contrary, both external and internal evidence strongly support a later date for Revelation (c. A.D. 95). First, even if it was written before A.D. 70, it need not all have been fulfilled at that time. Partial preterists admit that not all had been fulfilled by then, acknowledging that the Second Coming and the millennial reign of Christ (Rev. 19–21) are yet future.

Further, the evidence for a later date (c. A.D. 95) under Domitian (r. 81–96) is strong, which, since Revelation is still predicting the Tribulation after A.D. 70, would be additional evidence that preterism is wrong. (1) This date for Revelation was upheld by many of the earliest Fathers, including Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202), who said it appeared “not very long ago, almost in our own generation, at the close of the reign of Domitian” (AH, 5.30.3). This was confirmed by Victorinus

(c. third century): “When John said these things, he was in the island of Patmos, condemned to the mines by Caesar Domitian” (CABJ, 10:11). Eusebius (263–340) also confirmed the Domitian date (EH, 3.18). (2) Other early Fathers after A.D. 70 refer to the Tribulation and/or Antichrist, spoken of in Revelation, as yet future (see Commodianus [fl. between third and fifth centuries], ICAGH, 44, and Ephraem of Syria [c. 306–373], OLTAEW, 2). (3) The conditions of the seven churches (Rev. 2–3) fit this later period; the Ephesians, for instance, had lost their first love (2:4) and others, like the Laodiceans (3:14ff.), had fallen from the faith more seriously than reflected in earlier New Testament times (before A.D. 70). (4) It was not until the reign of Domitian that emperor worship as reflected in Revelation was instituted. (5) Laodicea appears as a prosperous city in 3:17, yet it was destroyed by an earthquake (c. A.D. 61) during the reign of Nero (r. 54–68), and would not have recovered so quickly (i.e., within just a few years). (6) John’s exile on Patmos implies a later date, when persecution was more rampant (1:9). (7) The references to persecution and martyrdom in the churches reflect a later date (cf. 2:10, 13). (8) Polycarp’s reference to the church at Smyrna (EP, 11.3) reveals that it did not exist in Paul’s day (by A.D. 64) as it did when John wrote Revelation 2:8. (9) The Nicolaitans (cf. 2:6, 11) were not firmly established until nearer the end of the century. (10) The early date does not allow sufficient time for John’s arrival in Asia (late 60s) and his replacement of Paul as the respected leader of the Asian church.

#### Argument Fourteen

That John was told to unseal the revelations he received about the future (22:10) indicates they were to be fulfilled in his day.

#### Response

John was clearly told there were things in the Revelation that were after his time—they were called “the things which will take place after this” (1:19 NKJV). Again, moderate preterists admit that some of it is future (e.g., 19–20), and since the chapters on the Tribulation (6–18) form a unit with those that follow, there is no good reason why they too cannot be future.

#### Argument Fifteen

Matthew 24:1–2 clearly refers to the destruction of the temple (in A.D. 70):

Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its building. “Do you see all these things?” he asked. “I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”

#### Response

*First*, futurists do not deny that this refers to the temple’s destruction in A.D. 70.

*Second*, in prophecy there is a principle of continuity, whereby, in this case, the temple can be destroyed and rebuilt and still be considered the same temple. For instance, Haggai refers to both Solomon’s temple and Zerubbabel’s rebuilt temple as “this temple” (cf. Hag. 2:3).

*Third*, the principle of multiple references demonstrates the same fact in which one prediction has two or more referents. For example, compare this with the prophecy of Zechariah 12:10—that the Jews will look on the One “whom they have pierced”—for this is applied to both the first (John 19:37) and second comings of Christ (Rev. 1:7).

**Argument Sixteen**

Preterists contend that futurist interpretation depends on positing a large gap of time between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks in Daniel's prophecy (9:24–27) of the seventy weeks. They insist that no such gap can be found in the text.

**Response**

*First*, there clearly is a gap (or break); the prophecy refers to sixty-nine weeks before and “one week” after, separated by the middle in which the oblation ceases (ibid.).

*Second*, there are other time gaps in biblical prophecy. For instance, Malachi 3:1 foretells the coming of John the Baptist, followed by Christ's second advent, without mentioning the gap of at least two thousand years between the events. Likewise, Isaiah 9:6 speaks of Christ's birth, followed by His earthly reign, without referring to the same span; this is also true of Zechariah 9:9–10.

*Third*, the events of Daniel 9:24 have never been fulfilled for Israel, to whom they were foretold.

*Fourth*, and finally, Jesus spoke of the “abomination of desolation” as yet future, and there was a break of at least thirty-seven years between His crucifixion (in A.D. 33, which is the end of the sixty-ninth week) and A.D. 70.

**Argument Seventeen**

Matthew 26:64 records Jesus saying, “I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” Preterists object that the only event that “all” to whom Jesus spoke could have seen occurred in A.D. 70.

**Response**

In reply, Jesus did not say when they would see His return; He only said it would be “in the future,” which could be either the near future or the distant future. Plainly, it was not in the near future, since many of the accompanying events (noted above) did not happen in A.D. 70. Jesus must have been referring to the distant future, to His second coming, and thus the “you” should be taken proleptically.

**The Basic Evidence**

Opposing preterism are the *futurist* views, which maintain that the prophecies about the Tribulation, the Second Coming, and a following kingdom (relating to the Millennium) are not yet fulfilled and are all future. Favoring the futurist views is the following:

*First*, Revelation speaks of the Tribulation (6–18) in connection with Christ's Second Coming, the final resurrection, and the subsequent kingdom (19–22). They are an inseparable unit, and all orthodox Christians hold that they are yet future. To deny this is heresy (2 Tim. 2:18). Thus, the Tribulation must be future as well.

*Second*, there was no literal fulfillment in A.D. 70 for many of the events described in Matthew 24–25. To mention just a few: The stars did not fall from heaven (24:29); Jesus did not return “on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory” (v. 30); the Romans did not desecrate the

temple with “the abomination of desolation” (v. 15 NKJV); Christ did not set up His kingdom, separating the sheep from the goats (25:34–41), sending the latter to hell (v. 41).

*Third*, most of the apostles’ earliest followers upheld futurism. After A.D. 70 they referred not only to the Second Coming and resurrection as future but also the coming Tribulation and Antichrist. *Fourth*, again, there has never yet been a literal fulfillment of the unconditional Abrahamic promises that Israel would possess the Holy Land from Egypt to Iraq, including Lebanon, Jordan, the Palestinian Territories, and Syria. Likewise, the unconditional Davidic promise that Messiah would sit on His throne and reign forever has never been fulfilled (cf. Ps. 89:24–37). God’s promises cannot fail (Heb. 6:13–18).

*Fifth*, nor has Jesus’ promise been literally fulfilled that “at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt. 19:28). The only way to avoid the conclusion that this is a future literal kingdom is to deny literal biblical interpretation and to allegorize it away.

*Sixth*, nor has the promise of Jesus to “restore the kingdom to Israel” (cf. Acts 1:6–8) ever been fulfilled, and certainly not in A.D. 70, since Israel as a nation in their land was decimated at that point. The same is true of Peter’s offer of the kingdom to the Jewish nation (3:19–21).

*Seventh*, Romans II was not fulfilled in A.D. 70 but awaits Christ’s return (see Rom. 9:3–4; 11:24–26).

*Eighth*, the events of the Tribulation are not local to Jerusalem and surroundings, as preterists contend, but are universal as is indicated by

- (1) the comparison with Noah’s worldwide flood (Matt. 24:38–39; cf. 2 Peter 3:5–6; 1 Peter 3:21);
- (2) the phrase “all the tribes of the earth” (Matt. 24:30 NKJV);
- (3) the fact that “every eye will see him” (Rev. 1:7);
- (4) the worldwide judgments listed in Matthew and in Revelation (e.g., Matt. 24:29);
- (5) “the kings of the earth and of the whole world” (Rev. 16:14 NKJV) being involved;
- (6) judgments that kill “every living creature in the sea” (16:3 NKJV), and the like.

*Ninth*, the plagues predicted in Revelation have never been literally fulfilled. Just to mention a few: Neither in A.D. 70 nor since was “a third of mankind ... killed” (9:18); two hundred million soldiers from the East have never invaded Israel (9:13–15; 16:12) for a battle at “Armageddon” (v. 16); nor has “every living creature in the sea died” (16:3 NKJV). Only by the most radical allegorizing of Scripture, which if applied to the Gospels would undermine our faith, can one avoid the conclusion that these have never yet been fulfilled.

*Tenth*, in Matthew 23:39 Jesus said, “I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’” This “you” cannot refer to His immediate disciples, since they died before they “saw” Him coming. Further, since the “you” is plural, neither could it refer to their seeing Jesus come spiritually in A.D. 70, because all except John were killed before



then. Instead, this text implies that Israel's repentance and acceptance of Christ as their Messiah will come before He returns (see also Zech. 14:3–11; Rev. 1:7). What is more, He could not have returned in A.D. 70 because they did not repent as a nation before then, nor have they yet.

*Eleventh*, in Matthew 24:14 Jesus told of when they would “see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel [9:27].” Jesus said there would be time to escape (Matt. 24:16), and this does not fit with the events surrounding A.D. 70, so the preterist view does not fit with His prediction. In addition, since Matthew related His words to Daniel's prophecy, rather than relating this to anything that happened in the first century, it seems best to take this as a future act that will parallel the actions of Antiochus Epiphanes, which involved both pagan sacrifice and idolatry in the temple.

*Twelfth*, in Matthew 24:21 Jesus said that “then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again.” It is improbable that (as preterists suggest) this is hyperbole, for the phrase “never to be equaled again,” coupled with “no flesh” KJV, which elsewhere in the New Testament refers to all humanity, argues for a unique future in the “great distress” (24:21). Certainly, Jews living in Judea in A.D. 70 were too limited a group to fulfill “all flesh.”

*Thirteenth*, in Matthew 24:27 Jesus said that “as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.” Nothing so broad and visible literally occurred in A.D. 70. This text is better taken as part of the “end of the age” and signs of His coming passage (24:3ff.), for both indicate a future (not immediate) fulfillment.

*Fourteenth*, when the Jewish high priest asked Jesus if He was the Messiah, He replied, “Yes, it is as you say.... But I say to all of you: ‘In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven’ ” (Matt. 26:64). As we have observed, contrary to partial preterism, the “you” cannot refer to His immediate disciples; Jesus did not come again during their lifetimes. It is heretical to hold (as do extreme preterists) that this refers to Christ's second coming having taken place in A.D. 70. Hence, this passage must refer either to Christ coming spiritually in a judgment (cf. Isa. 19:1) or, proleptically, to the literal yet-to-occur Second Coming “at the end of the age” (Matt. 24:3).

*Fifteenth*, in Luke 21:28 Jesus said, “When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” The great Bible commentator Alfred Plummer (1841–1926) stated, “The disciples present are regarded as representatives of believers generally. Only those who witness the signs can actually fulfill this injunction ... at the Second Advent” (CCGL, 540–41). It is evident from Mark 13:32, where “that day” refers to the Second Coming, that these words point to the faithful's deliverance from distress at Christ's return.