

**Revelation 6: 1 - "The 4 Major Views of the Book of Revelation" -  
Part 4- "Preterism" - Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on  
February 4th, 2007, in the Afternoon Service. Sermon # 46  
in the series- "The Faithful and True Witness".**

As we go through this overview of the 4 Views of the book of Revelation, we must ask ourselves, "Why is it that it is so difficult to come to terms with what this book means?" And I think that as we study these views we come to see why. It is because as we look at the text of this book we find that it is hard to distinguish between what is literal and what is figurative. The prophetic words of the Scripture are often figurative, but they have a literal spiritual reality related to Jesus Christ and some aspect of the advancement of His kingdom. Sometimes, as we shall see, it is an opposition to that kingdom that is being described. And ultimately, there is always given to all of God's people, the hope of the Church advancing to victory in regard to the witness that she bears. The Church knows, because of this book, that God will grant her the ability to see the cause of Truth triumph upon the earth. As we think about interpreting the pictures and symbols, every serious student of the Bible wants to take the words of the Bible at face value, but in the book of Revelation we are forced to see the words written there as a picture of something other than what is literally being mentioned or described. Our mind fights this because we do believe that God is Truth and His Word is Truth; and we believe that therefore it must be true that He would speak simply and straightforwardly in a literal way in every passage. But sometimes we forget that the Bible is a spiritual book, full of spiritual words. And the words which represent a literal reality are often given to us to convey an unseen spiritual reality either within or outside of ourselves. In the gospels and the epistles it is the reality of what our hearts are like and what needs to take place in us by God's grace that is being told us. The Bible is primarily a book for the heart. It has instructions and principles that are wholesome for the body as well, but it is the state and needs of the soul that come first. When it comes to the book of Revelation, what we are seeing is the state and needs of Christ's Church in relation to how she can fulfill her witness to her Lord; how Christ's kingdom can come to reign upon the earth even as Christ now reigns in heaven. The Advance of Christ's kingdom and the oppositions to that advance are given to us, with her final triumph.

As we enter the overview of Preterism, I must state that I am sure that many of the men who hold this position believe in the inerrancy of the Scriptures. They believe that the Word which God has given to us is credible, it is infallible, and that all the prophecies of the Bible have their definite fulfillment. The Preterist is particularly concerned with this. He believes in looking at the text of

Scripture in the context in which it was written. He believes that most or all of the prophecies of Matthew 24 and the book of Revelation have already been fulfilled, because he believes that he can prove that the time-frame reference of these prophecies refer to that generation which followed the life of our Lord. Full Preterists believe that these prophecies have all been fulfilled, and Partial Preterists believe that many or most of them have been fulfilled with the exception of our Lord's return and the resurrection of the dead. Some Preterists are Post-Millennial in their view of the triumph of the Church gradually and surely, before Christ returns again. But it appears to me that all Preterists, whether full or partial, believe that the book of Revelation was not written at the end of the first century, but before the destruction of Jerusalem. The prophecies have been fulfilled specifically in the time frame of the generation in which Jesus and the apostles lived. They are fulfilled in that approximately 40 year period of time from 30-70 A.D. The climax of those prophecies was the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. This may be shocking to some of us who are so used to hearing about prophecy from the standpoint of the pre-millennial dispensational view of things. We are so used to hearing about the rapture, the seven-year tribulation, and a Millennium to follow in which Christ will reign personally and visibly in Jerusalem in a rebuilt temple; that it is hard for us to understand why we should even begin to consider such a view as Preterism has to offer. But there are some important truths to be gleaned from this system of prophetic interpretation as well. So this afternoon I will attempt to give to you some of the reasons why some Christian people are Preterists. I am going to use R.C. Sproul's recent book, The Last Days according to Jesus as a source book, to attempt to convey this position. Let's look 1st at the Preterist view of time-reference first, this week. Then we will look at the Preterist view of the Resurrection next week. I will attempt to draw conclusions after I have described each.

### **1st- The Preterist view of time-reference.**

There are a number of key words which are found in Matthew chapter 24 and in the book of Revelation, that cause Preterists to believe that the fulfillment of prophecies in both, is limited to the first generation after our Lord. Turn with me to Matthew 24. This is what is known as the Olivet discourse, from verse 3 where it says, "Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things be?' 'And what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?' These questions, given to Jesus by His disciples, are set in the context of Jesus and his disciples coming out of the temple and the disciple's desire to "show Jesus the buildings of the temple." In the parallel passage in the gospel of Mark it says in chapter 13, verse 1, "Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!" "And Jesus answered and said to him, 'Do you see these great buildings?' "Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down." Then it says in verse 3, that "Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately, 'Tell us, when will these

things be?" "And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?" Remember the questions. They regard when the destruction of the temple will take place, the sign of Christ's coming, and the end of the age or the world as it is called in the KJV. "When will all these things be?" Then in both passages follows a description which many people in our day who are Premillennial and dispensational, apply major parts of the things mentioned by Jesus, to our own day and the days proceeding the rapture of the Church and on into what they call the time of Great Tribulation. The full Preterist sees, from the context of the verses, that "all these things", the "sign of Christ's coming and the end of the age" have been fulfilled in that generation. Verse 34 says, "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place." They believe that the word "generation" which is *genea* in the original, does not refer to the Jewish race, as many Christians have believed, but it refers to the people who were contemporaries of Jesus, people alive in that generation.

J. Stuart Russell, who is a full Preterist, has tried to prove that in every usage of this word by Jesus in the gospels, He is referring to his contemporaries, and that therefore it is right to consider the fulfillment of the prophecies in Matthew 24 as taking place in that day. Today's Christians should not be looking, he thinks, for all the prophetic events described in Matthew 24 to be fulfilled in the future. In order to be consistent in his conclusion, he also then has to go on to assert that the second coming of our Lord Jesus took place in 70 A.D. as well. Partial Preterists, while they believe that many of the events of Matthew 24 were fulfilled in the time period from 30-70 A.D., believe that it is going too far to conclude that the Parousia, or Christ's 2nd coming has already taken place. But the full Preterists respond, When the text in Matthew 24: 34 says, "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place," does it mean what it is saying? To the full Preterist it means exactly that. And so they conclude that not only has Christ come to judgment in 70 A.D. against Israel; they believe also that Jesus has returned in His 2nd coming. They do not like the idea that the text of the Scripture, once established in its meaning, should be interpreted to apply to 2 different events thousands of years apart when the meaning of the word "generation" only applies to that generation. Partial Preterists, "though they see the coming of Christ predicted in the Olivet Discourse as having been fulfilled, they still believe in a future consummation of Christ and His kingdom in Christ's coming again personally and visibly."

Another word or phrase that is very central to the understanding of the Preterist position, which ties in to our trying to understand in what sense Christ's returned a second time, is the phrase "the Day of the Lord." The Preterist, in his thinking, believes that the Old Testament references to the Day of the Lord, and many, if not all of the New Testament references to the Day of the Lord, both have their fulfillment in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. rather than a time yet future from our day. These Old Testament prophecies

which are found in Malachi 4: 1-5, Amos 5: 18-20, Zephaniah 1: 7-17 find their fulfillment not in the more immediate context of the invasion of the Chaldeans upon Jerusalem and Judah, but rather in the destruction of Jerusalem and the ending of the Jewish theocracy. The Day of the Lord is a day of visitation in judgment in this sense. But it is also a day of visitation in the deliverance of His true people. In this sense the Day of the Lord begins for the Preterist in Christ's 1st coming, from the time when He first engaged in His public ministry. "A great prophet has risen up among us", it says in Luke 7: 16, "and God has visited His people." Because this time of Jesus' visitation was not recognized by the nation at large, the stage was set for His visitation in judgment. And that Day of Judgment would not be hundreds or thousands of years off. The Day of the Lord's visitation of wrath and judgment on Jerusalem would be just a few decades away. J. Stuart Russell believes that the day of the Lord's visitation of wrath and judgment on Jerusalem is the same time predicted in Malachi 3; 1. "Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me, and the Lord whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple." "But who can endure the day of His coming and who can stand when He appears?" This is fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem and the ending of the Jewish theocracy. For full Preterists it also means that Christ returned the second time also. His coming was secret and invisible and not open and public. For partial Preterists it does mean that Christ came to judgment against the Jewish nation but they still look for a future return of Christ.

The way that Preterists view chapter 24 of Matthew is the same way that they view the book of Revelation. Since they believe that it can be demonstrated to satisfaction that the book was written by the Apostle John before 70 A.D. and the destruction of Jerusalem, they believe that its correct interpretation is found in relation to all the trials and oppositions that the early church would face in that generation. Nero is asserted to be the Antichrist. The number 666 is thought to correspond numerically to him, and this they attempt to prove. You can read the proofs for this in Sproul's book or the writings of the various authors. I will not give it to you here. But "understanding the time-frame references of Revelation is key to all Preterist interpretations of the book." J. Stuart Russell says, "Must it not of necessity refer to matters of contemporary history?" "The only tenable, the only reasonable, hypothesis is that it was intended to be understood by its original readers; but this is as much as to say that it must be occupied with the events and transactions of their own day, and these comprised with a comparatively brief space of time." He says further, "If there be one thing which more than any other is explicitly and repeatedly affirmed in the Apocalypse it is the nearness of events which it predicts." "This is stated, and reiterated again and again, in the beginning, the middle, and the end." "We are warned that 'the time is at hand.'" "These things must shortly come to pass," Behold I come quickly," "Surely I come quickly." "Yet in the face of these express and oft-repeated declarations, most interpreters have felt at

liberty to ignore the limitations of time altogether, and to roam at will over ages and centuries, regarding the book as a syllabus of church history, an almanac of politico-ecclesiastical events for all Christendom to the end of time." "This," he says, "has been a fatal and inexcusable blunder."

Well, how is it that I can respond to what Mr. Russell has said and what I have laid out before you this afternoon? I would like to say this. The book of Revelation, as it the Word of God, like other books of the Bible, must have its reference to every generation of Christians and not simply the first. All Scripture is inspired by God and it is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness. It is that to us, just as much as to the first generation of Christians. I believe that prophecy in the Bible is not just a document stating events that were to take place in relation to the Jewish nation alone. It has further fulfillment and future reference to the New Testament Church, composed of Jews and Gentiles the world over in all generations following the first. Mr. Russell condemns the "historical" view of Revelation applying to all generations generally and thus blunts or cuts off the application of its truth to all succeeding generations. This view of wrapping up of almost all prophecy in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. is much too confined and specific, whereas in A-Millennialism it is much too broad and general. The truth lies in between. There is specific fulfillment and there are also specific principles which govern the fulfillment of prophecy and its application to ourselves today. This is why both Amillennialism and Preterism have certain aspects of them that are true. The Preterists have done a great service for all Christians in showing us that much of Matthew 24 has reference to the immediate contemporary context which was the coming of Christ in judgment upon Jerusalem. It was "that generation" that saw "all those things" of verses 4-34. Verses 29 to 34 can refer in the primary sense to the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of that Jewish age or world. All Christians need to see and understand this of Matthew 24. But, the Preterist having brought this truth to light needs not be so "wooden" in his interpretation of those verses as to insist that verses 29-34 do not also have reference to Christ's second coming at the end of the world. There is a near fulfillment and a far fulfillment. In the prophecies of the Old Testament where the Day of the Lord is mentioned; to those people and to that day, or coming days, there was a specific fulfillment or application that applied to them. They were warned of the coming judgment of God on their Jewish society, because of their persistent sin, and that prophecy could apply, in the first sense, to the generation who would see the Chaldeans come in and destroy the temple and take them away captive; but it also has a most definite word of application for us who live thousands of years later to prepare for a greater judgment at the end of time. There were prophecies about the destruction of Babylon in the Old Testament, which also have an application to the destruction of New Testament Babylon in days yet to come. So we find that there have been in the history of the church, a number of major spiritual comings of Christ. There will only be

one literal, visible, bodily 2nd coming of Christ at the end of the world. Theologians such as Jonathan Edwards and commentators such as Thomas Scott, David Brown, and John Gill have done a good job of giving us much help on the application of these prophecies to ourselves and our day, even if all the timing and dates of great events in the history of the Church are not fully known or understood. Yet there is much profit in the application of truth which is in, or which surrounds, the prophecies. We have seen this already and we will see it more as we go through the book of Revelation. I haven't time to show you these things in detail, but we will see and understand more as the exposition of this book continues. Next week we will look at Preterism from the standpoint of the resurrection from the dead.