

“Last Days” or “Past Days” Madness

By Dr. John Sweigart

In recent years, the idea that the Bible is a book of history and not a book of prophecy has gained increasing popularity. The term used to express this way of thinking, or this view of Biblical interpretation is “preterism.” The preterist view builds upon three basic pillars: a unique understanding of Matthew 16:28, a historical fulfillment of Matthew 24-25, commonly termed the Olivet Discourse, and the dating of the Book of Revelation. A close examination of these three building blocks will show that preterist writers do not understand the literary structure of the applicable verses, ignore significant contextual clues, and misuse other internal evidence in determining dating.

The first Scripture passage in which preterists misunderstand the structure is Matthew 16:28, which says, “Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here, which shall not taste death, till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” The reader must understand both the context of the verse and the structure of this small section. The context starts at verse 21:

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, ‘If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.’ (KJV)

According to Jack Kingsbury, a major structural marker occurs at Matthew 16:21, which lets the reader know that the third major part of the gospel begins there (453). Matthew uses this literary formula first in 4:17. He says, “from that time Jesus began to preach and to say ‘Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” Then he uses it again in 16:21 stating, “...from that time Jesus began to show unto His disciples...” (my emphasis). This makes a major literary change from the proclamation of a kingdom message to the nation of Israel to the proclamation of a suffering message to his disciples. The reader expects any discussion of Matthew 16:28 to include a discussion of suffering.

After discussing the context, the reader must examine the structure since structure also informs meaning. E. W. Bullinger helps when he demonstrates that the verse is part of a large chiasm, or concentric parallelism that reaches from 16.21 to 17.13 in the form A/B/A'. The first part of the chiasm is 16.21-28, foretelling the future suffering of the Christ and His return in glory; the turning point of the chiasm is 17.1-9, commonly called the Transfiguration; and the third leg of the chiasm is 17.10-13, an explanation of the sufferings and the glory.

Indeed, the structure shows an even smaller chiasm from 16:21 to 16:28. In this chiasm, the sufferings of the Christ in 16.21 are parallel to the sufferings of disciples in 16.24-26. The resurrection of the Christ in verse 16.21b (with its implied glory) is parallel to the glorification and reward in 16.27-28 of the disciples at the arrival of the kingdom. The above context and structure determines literary meaning in this passage.

The advocates of preterism have problems with Matthew 16.28. This is especially true regarding its timing. Gary DeMars, a leading spokesman, says the following:

If we maintain that the event Jesus is still in our future, then how should we interpret His statement that some of those with whom he was speaking would still be alive when He did in fact “come in the glory of His Father with His angels”? Some claim that the “coming” Jesus had in mind was the transfiguration. But the transfiguration cannot be its fulfillment since Jesus indicated that *some* who were standing with Him would still be alive when He came but most would be *dead*. If we adopt the view that the transfiguration is the fulfillment, we must conclude that most of the people with whom Jesus spoke were dead within a week of Jesus’ prediction (Matt. 17:1)! (44)

After presenting his view that the verse is not referring to the transfiguration in the next chapter, DeMars suggests that this predicted coming refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (45).

DeMars makes at least two errors. The first error is the logical error of a false dilemma. He insists that the verse states an implied comparison between “some who remain alive” and a larger circle who die. In doing this, he ignores the possibility that Matthew may have a special audience in mind when he uses the term “disciples” in 16.21 and 24. Matthew never numbers the band of “disciples” as larger than twelve. Quite noticeably, after the betrayal by Judas, the disciples appear in 28:16 as “eleven disciples.” Matthew puts strong emphasis on the call of the disciples by mentioning them by name in 11.1. If there were only twelve disciples present in Matthew 16, then the interpreter is dealing with a subset of twelve in defining the word “some.” The group that will not die must be less than twelve but more than one. Indeed, David Wenham and A.D.A. Moses argue that:

The synoptic gospels suggest that Jesus had twelve apostles, and that Peter, James, and John had a position of special privilege within the twelve. The three are invited to witness particular events...they are the first to be called...they regularly come at the top of lists of the apostles' names...they have received new names...they argue for top seats in the kingdom...and one designates himself as 'beloved' in another gospel (146).

DeMars obscures this idea when he argues, “History tell us that Peter died before Jerusalem was destroyed and John lived beyond Jerusalem’s destruction, a perfect and expected fulfillment of Matthew 16:27-28” (44). But this statement seems like a case of special pleading since history reveals that Herod put James, the third mentioned disciple, to death in about A.D. 44. Indeed, tradition tells the student that all the apostles except John became martyrs (2.563). Apparently, DeMars’ idea of a perfect fulfillment is an approximation.

Demars makes a second error in his argument: he ignores the obvious. Matthew presents the obvious contrast between those who “see” and those who “do not see.” Some who are standing there will not die until they receive special revelation of the future. Penner says, “the central theme of the Transfiguration is revelation” (201). The remaining nine disciples will not see the revelation since they do not accompany Jesus up the mountain in 17.1. A number of threads connect chapter 16 and 17 in the Book of Matthew. The first of these connections is the use of the coordinate conjunction “and” as the opening word in 17.1. This usage is very unusual if Matthew wanted a disjunction in the narrative. The Greek language had words to indicate disjunction in narratives as well as word to indicate chronological sequence. Matthew chooses not to use any disjunctive conjunctions here.

Secondly, Peter’s confession of the divine Sonship of Jesus in 16:16 parallels the voice from out of the cloud in 17.5. Thirdly, a semantic link exists between the “seeing” in 16.28 and the word “behold” used in 17.3 and 5 (Hodges and Farstad 15). Fourthly, the expression in 17.1, “after six days,” acts as a temporal link between chapters 16 and 17 (Penner 202). Fifthly, there is a link between 16.28, “some standing here” and 17:4 “it is good for us to be here” (emphasis mine). Sixthly, there are other accounts in the gospel writings that enhance understanding of the Matthean passage. Indeed, James Efird, tells the reader:

The material found here (Matt. 16:21-27) is also found with certain differences in both of the other Synoptic Gospels. However, each of the evangelists presents the ministry and teaching of Jesus with different nuances. Even though the stories and materials may be the same or quite similar, one must look for slightly different meanings of the data when used in the individual gospels. (284)

Even though the gospel accounts differ in minor respects, the key point is that the other gospel accounts eliminate the chapter separation present in Matthew 16:28 and 17:1. Indeed, since there is no connective word in the beginning of verse 28, but rather an oath formula, the logic of the verse argues that verse 28 connects more with 17:1 than with 16:27. This adds strong support for a literary connection between the two chapters. All this evidence, the structure, the logic, and the literary links of this passage, clearly connects chapters 16 and 17.

The preterist position is defective in other ways. Thomas Ice says, “Preterists believe that Matthew 16:28 and parallel passages (Mk. 9.1; Lk. 9.27) are a prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem accomplished through the Roman army in A.D. 70” (Ice, Part One 14). That proposal does not stand up to close examination. The first objection to understanding Matthew 16:17-28 as fulfilled at the fall of Jerusalem is the semantic force of the word “for” (Greek=*gar*) that begins verse 27. Usually that Greek connective gives the semantic force of “reason” when used in New Testament writings. An accurate paraphrase between verses 26 and 27 would be, “The reason why a man will not be profited if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul/life (the word can be translated either way) is because the Son of Man will come in the glory-cloud of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his deed [singular].” This verse tells the reader that whenever the events occur, angels, the Son of Man, and judgment and reward will be involved. With the use of the term “reward”, Jesus limits the discussion to disciples, especially those who were willing to suffer martyrdom “for His sake” in 16:25. Although preterists want to see Jesus fulfilling this by coming to Jerusalem in the form of the Roman armies, there is no way that a judgment of believers occurred at that time. In fact, Jerusalem believers heeded the warning in the Gospel of Luke, escaped the Roman encirclement, and made their way to Pella. Further, there is no way that the Son of Man rewarded His disciples at that time.

In another attempt to argue that Matthew 16:27 means the fall of Jerusalem, DeMar states that the language used is similar to the way Jehovah came to the ‘sons of Israel’ in the Old Covenant. He quotes Deuteronomy 33:1-2 to support his view: “The Lord came from Sinai, and dawned upon them from Seir; He shown forth from Mount Paran, and He came from the midst on ten thousand holy ones. At his right hand there was flashing lightning for them” (49). However, this Old Testament reference to God is not to one who appears to judge a disobedient people, but, in fact, to one who appears to reveal His law and make a covenant. This activity is normally understood as a blessing not a judgment, so the analogy falls apart.

Lastly, Demars uses Jude 14-15 in the New Testament to support his idea that when Christ comes, it is to punish the city of Jerusalem. The verse is interesting since Jude quotes it from non-canonical literature, the Book of Enoch. Jude 14-15 tells the reader that, “Behold, the Lord came with many thousand His holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done against Him.” Contextually, however, the

letter is talking about the judgment of false teachers who have entered the assemblies of believers and turned the message of grace into licentiousness. This verse cannot support the idea of the conquest of Jerusalem by the Roman armies.

Preterists also misunderstand another major section of Scripture normally called the Olivet Discourse. Preterists use Matthew 24:34 to establish their thesis that historical events explain so-called prophetic texts. This much-debated passage says, “Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” (Ice “Part One” 9) Mark 13:30 and Luke 21:32 give a similar rendition. The preterists see this concept of a generation contemporaneous with Jesus as one of the key elements of their scheme of interpretation. Ice cites R.C. Sproul as saying “I am convinced that the substance of the Olivet Discourse was fulfilled in A.D. 70...” (Ice, “Part Two” 8). Ken Gentry, another leading preterist, refers to Matthew 24:24, and says, “This statement of Christ is indisputably clear—and absolutely demanding of a first century fulfillment of the events in the preceding verses, including the Great Tribulation” (26-27). Finally, Demar argues “that all the events before Matthew 24:34 referred to events leading up to and including the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70” (75).

In order to determine the validity of their position, the student must do a careful analysis of the structure of the Olivet Discourse. The structure unfolds as presented on the next page.

A careful study of the structure instructs the reader several things. First, the structure sets up the possibility that the Olivet Discourse is not chronological in structure. For example, the “seat of Moses” in Matthew 23:2 is parallel and contrastive of “the throne of the Son of Man” discussed in 25:31. Second, the verse of interest, Matthew 24:34 is parallel and possibly contrastive of Matthew 23:36. No preterist writer deals with the first occurrence of the phrase “this generation” in Matthew 23:36. Finally, the cursing of the “fig tree” (a symbol for the Jewish temple and possibly for the whole nation) in 21:20 is parallel and contrastive to the blessing of the “fig tree” in 24:32. The preterist writers want the coming of the Son of Man to refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in Matthew 24:34 but the structure of the larger section of Scripture argues that the last half of the section does not deal with Jerusalem’s destruction but some future event.

The preterist writers also ignore another problem in the literary structure of the passage. None of their writers seems to be interested in the literary organization of the discourse proper. In the preceding context to Matthew 24:1-44, Matthew has Jesus making a triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem to present himself to the nation of Israel as a king on a peaceful mission. Israelite kings customarily rode a donkey when on a peaceful mission and rode a horse or drove a chariot when on a wartime mission. Matthew brackets this section with the quotation found in Matthew 21:9 and 23:39 with the phrase, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”

Figure 1. Chiastic Structure of Matthew 23.1-25.46

- A (23:1-3) Scribes and Pharisees sit on the chair of Moses to judge matters of the law.
- B (23:4-12) Scribes and Pharisees exalt themselves rather than humbling themselves.
- C (23:13-33) Scribes and Pharisees will be excluded from the kingdom of heaven because of their hypocrisy.
- D (23:32-33) Scribes and Pharisees will be condemned to Gehenna for murdering the prophets.
- E (23:34-35) Righteous blood will come upon the Scribes and Pharisees who persecute and kill the prophets and wise men and the scribes that Jesus sends.
- F (23:36) This generation...all these things. (From the death of Christ to the Fall of Jerusalem)
- G (23:37-24:2) Destruction of temple and promise of Second Coming.
- H (24:3) False Messiahs
- I (24:4-8) Signs on the earth.
- J (24:9-13) The Preliminary Tribulation. (First 3 1/2)
- X (24:14-15) The Abomination of Desolation accompanied by Kingdom Proclamation to all the nations.**
- J' (24:16-22) The Great Tribulation. (Last 3 1/2)
- I' (24:23-28) False Messiahs.
- H' (24:29) Signs in the heavens.
- G' (24:30-33) Second Coming and the Restoration of the Temple.
- F' (24:34) This generation...all these things. (From the Rapture to the Second Coming)
- E' (24:35-44) The Son of Man will come unexpectedly to take his people to safety from the tribulation just like Noah was secured in the ark before the Flood came.
- D' (24:45-51) Faithful rulers who serve others will be exalted while unfaithful rulers who abuse others (during the delay) will suffer loss of ruler-ship.
- C' (25:1-13) Wise virgins who have faith and good works will be included in the wedding feast while foolish virgins who have no works (during the delay) will be excluded from the joy of the wedding feast.
- B' (25:14-30) Obedient and faithful servants who invest their finances for the benefit to their master enter into joy while disobedient and lazy servants who use their finances for themselves (during the delay) will suffer loss of ruler-ship and joy.
- A' (25:31-46) Son of man will sit on His glorious throne to judge the nations based on their works.

However, since the Jewish leaders reject the offer of the kingdom presented by Jesus, he pronounces a curse in 23.38 on the temple saying, “Behold your house is left to you desolate.” He reinforces this curse by telling the disciples in 24.2 that, “there shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down.” This prediction of destruction actually occurred in A.D. 73 by the Roman Tenth Legion and again later during the Bar Cochba revolt. Matthew has Jesus and the disciples discussing the fate of the temple in Matthew 24:1-2.

Because of an unfortunate chapter division, readers sometimes fail to notice that in 24.3 the physical location of Jesus and the disciples has changed radically. They left the temple mount, descended down through the Kidron valley where there was a causeway, and ascended again the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem. Only then do the disciples approach Jesus, who sits as a teaching rabbi would sit, and ask three key questions. The original language shows us that there are really two questions asked, with the second question in two parts. The disciples want to know, first, “when will these things be?” But they also want to know “what will be the sign of your coming (Greek=*parousia*; question two—part A) and [what will be the sign] of the end of the age (Greek=*sunteleia*; question two—part B). The standard Greek lexicon defines this latter word as “completion, fulfillment” (BAG 799). The word implies the tying together of a number of things or loose ends of a matter. Matthew uses the word *suntelia* and the phrase “the end of the age” in only two other places. In 13.39, he has Jesus interpreting one of his parables to be referring to the “end of the age” and in the very important section at the end of the book at 28.20, Matthew has Jesus promising that He will be with the disciples “until the end of the age.” Demar, the preterist writer defines this phrase according to his system of thinking. He says that, “the ‘end of the age’ refers to the end of the Old Covenant redemptive system with its attendant sacrifices and rituals” (69). However, if that were true, then the author Matthew presents the reader with the unnatural paradox that Jesus is no longer with His people, certainly an unattractive idea. Further, the reader must conclude that the harvest where good and evil pictured by the wheat and the tares in the parable in Matthew 13 has already occurred. The preterist could conceivably advance the argument that angels separated good and evil at the fall of Jerusalem. However, Matthew tells the reader explicitly in 13.38 that the extent of this harvest is “the world.” Finally, there would be some people running around in glorified bodies since that section tells the reader that at that time the “righteous” are to be shining like the sun.

After the reader looks at the opening questions to the discourse, he may assume that Jesus will answer the questions in the order in which the disciples have asked the questions but that is not the case. The attentive reader notices that the word “end” appears in verse 6; it also appears in verse 13 where it says, “the end is not yet”; then the text reads in verse 14 that “the end will come.” It seems obvious that the text is giving the answer to the disciples’ last question in verse 3: “What shall be the sign of the end of the age?” This inference leads to the conclusion that Jesus is answering the questions in reverse order. In fact, due to the nature of Semitic thinking, whenever a New Testament writer introduces

multiple subjects or questions, he discusses the last subject first. When preterist writers argue that this whole discourse refers to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, they never discuss the literary order of the questions and their respective answers. The conclusion that Jesus is answering the questions of the disciples in reverse order establishes the logical and literary order but it does not answer the chronological question.

To answer the question of the chronological relationship between the three answers, the reader needs to trace the time indicators by working backward in verses 4-34. Matthew brackets the text initially with an overall picture that starts with a discrete time-period. He says in verse 8 that certain events are “the beginning of birth-pangs.” This corresponds with “the end of birth-pangs” in verse 14. The author shows that he has a discrete period in mind. He then elaborates on this period with more detail revolving around the two-fold pivot of the desecration of the temple and the proclamation of the kingdom message to all the nations. This covers verses 4-28. All through this section, the chronology advances by the use of *tote*, a Greek adverb for time (BAG 831). In verse 29, Matthew gives a major time marker when he says, “immediately after the suffering of these days.” This statement confirms that Matthew is considering verses 4-28 as a discrete period of time. Matthew then presents the heavenly sign of the coming of the Son of Man that is the answer to question number two above. The chronological relationship between the sign and the days of suffering is that the sign of the Son of Man in the sky follows the suffering.

However, when the reader arrives at Matthew 24.36, something new informs the discussion. This new section opens with the phrase “now concerning.” The New Testament writers use this phrase consistently throughout the New Testament to introduce a new subject. The Apostle Paul uses the phrase especially in 1st Corinthians in the following ways, “now concerning the things whereof you wrote me” (7.1); “now concerning things sacrificed to idols”(8.1); “now concerning spiritual things” (12:1); and “now concerning the collection for the saints” (16:1). Matthew wants the reader to understand that he is turning to a new topic.

The phrase “now concerning that day and hour” corresponds to the question of the disciples that asks “when.” Matthew gives the answer to the “when” question as being unknowable. This idea of mystery then leads to exhortations to watchfulness in verses 42, 44, and the key metaphor that the coming will be like a “thief in the night.” Matthew also follows this section with a series of parables that respectively having the hero figure “delaying his coming” in 24.45; “delaying” in 25.5; and coming “after a long time” in verse 25.13. Matthew then follows these parables with the judgment of the nations. If the reader takes the preterist position, then the parables of delay, that have been shown above to be part of the structure, make no sense. Further, the logical conclusion must be that this section in some way precedes the discussion of the end and occurs chronologically before the answers to the first two questions. More than that, the judgment of the nations gives rewards for treatment of the “brethren” of the Christ. This appears to be a

judgment with different subject than the judgment of disciples promised in Matthew 16.

This difficulty with the preterist position continues when Matthew suggests that the reader can use a Biblical analogy to determine what the days of the coming of the Son of Man were going to be like after the delay. He has Jesus saying that the days of the coming of the Son of Man were going to be like the “days of Noah. Therefore, the reader has to go back to the Book of Genesis, to determine what the days of Noah were like. First, the days of Noah were much longer than the reader would normally think. The author of Genesis tells the reader that, “the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years” (Gen. 9.29). This makes viewing the whole Olivet Discourse in chronological order increasingly difficult. Reverse chronology seems a much safer position for the interpreter to take. Secondly, both the Old Testament and New Testament writers argue that the days of Noah included a day- when there was the bodily assumption to heaven of a prophet named Enoch (Hebrews 11.5) Thirdly, the writer characterizes the days of Noah as normal activity until the day that Noah entered the ark. (24.38)

Concerning the idea of bodily assumption, Matthew presents some verses that have been traditionally misunderstood due to an unwillingness to deal with the original language. Matthew 24.38-41 says:

For as the days of Noah were, so will the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left.

The preterist understanding of this passage is that it teaches that God or Jesus will take one person away in judgment the same way that He swept one away by the flood. However, McReynolds in his interlinear translation translates that “the flood lifted up all.” (96) The Greek word is *airw* and there is no justification for the translation in current versions. The word “all” of course is limited to Noah and his family who the waters, often a symbol of judgment, lifted up. In the following verse where the text says, “one shall be taken and another left”, another Greek word, *paralambanō* reinforces the idea of “lifting up” or bodily assumption. Delling states that *paralambanō* with a personal object means “to take to (or with) oneself (e.g. in close fellowship) (4.13). John uses the word in apparent nuptial imagery in John 14.3 where the text talks about the unexpected taking away of the bride by the groom. Matthew uses the word to describe the physical levitation of the body of Christ in 4.5.8. Most who have read the gospel accounts are familiar with the fact that Satan set Jesus on the pinnacle of the temple. However, this overlooks the fact that the pinnacle of the temple is forty stories high at the place of the narrative. Again, Matthew communicates the idea of a bodily assumption. The text

communicates the idea that before the flood comes; some divine agency will make provision for the disciples to escape the events delineated in the first part of the chapter. If Matthew organized the chapter chronologically, the idea of anyone escaping persecution would be nonsensical. The most normal way of understanding Matthew’s Olivet Discourse is to realize that he has Christ answering the questions of the disciples in reverse chronological order and thus the preterist understanding of this section collapses. There is no record of any bodily assumption occurring before the siege of Jerusalem. There is no record of the siege of Jerusalem being comparable to the world wide extent of Noah’s flood. Matthew writes the Olivet Discourse in exclusively futuristic terms.

The last problem with the preterist interpretation of the literature of the New Testament is their manner of understanding the dating of the Book of Revelation. Widely conceded by many to be the most difficult part of Biblical literature to understand, the reader needs to search in depth to discern the dating. As always, preterist David Chilton is very clear about his position. He said in his commentary on Revelation:

The Book of Revelation is not about the Second Coming of Christ. It is about the destruction of Israel and Christ’s victory over His enemies in the establishment of the New Covenant Temple. In fact, as we shall see, the word “coming” as used in the Book of Revelation never refers to the Second Coming. Revelation prophesies the judgment of God upon apostate Israel; and while it briefly points to events beyond its immediate concerns, that is done merely as a wrap-up to show that the ungodly will never prevail against Christ’s Kingdom. However, the focus of Revelation is upon events that were soon to take place. (43)

Because of the assumptions inherent in the above passage, preterists have problems with the theme, the structure, and internal evidence of Revelation. These three items give the reader clues to dating the writing of Revelation. Almost every commentator and scholar acknowledges that John states the theme of the book in 1.7. However, that consensus rapidly falls apart. Gentry, a leading preterist says, “The nature of the event has to do with a “Cloud-Coming’ of Christ. It is here necessary to understand the Old Testament background for a proper comprehension of the matter. The Old Testament frequently uses clouds as an indicator of divine judgment” (123). There are a number of problems with holding Gentry’s point of view. First, in his lengthy discussion of the word for “coming” he ignores the literary genres where the word occurs. The context is the determining factor for the meaning of any usage. His references originate in the so-called “letters to the seven churches” which includes chapters 2 and 3. The letters in reality are legal proceedings. The mysterious commissioning ceremony in 1.10-20 is a stereotypical formulation used to commission an Old Testament prophet who became a lawyer for God. God then sought legal proceedings against his people who were in a vassal status. (33-44) In addition to the commissioning of John,

angels witness the proceedings, another Old Testament norm. In addition, the text when studied lexically yields an unusual number of terms that have a technical legal meaning. Finally, an element-by-element comparison of legal proceedings current in the time of the Old Testament reveals a perfect match. (Huffmon 285-95) This helps understand the nature of the preterist error in their discussion of the verb “*erchomai*” in the theme verse. Gentry says that the theme verse of 1.7 deals with the Cloud Coming of the Lord based on an Old Testament model. He argues that this judgment coming comes upon the “tribes of the land.” However, if the “seven letters” are actually judicial proceedings then they apply to the churches mentioned in chapter 2 and 3 and not the nation of Israel. He argues his point based on occurrence in 2.5, 16,25; 3.3,11,20, all of which refer to the churches and not to the nation of Israel.

The structure of the book of Revelation is another area where the preterists go wrong. John the author presents a very clear structure using the formula “what things must come to pass.” He uses this phrase in 1.1; 1:19 (a cognate variant); 4.1; and 22.6. The most interesting variation occurs in 4.1 where the author adds the expression “after these things” to the literary marker. In other words, the author wants the reader to understand that chapters 4.1 through 22.6 are subsequent in time from chapters 2 and 3. However, Gentry’s scheme does not allow for any significant time gap between the events in chapters two and three (which are being pictured as occurring in heaven) and the events of chapters 4 through 22. In his chapter entitled “the temporal expectation of the author,” Gentry argues that the phrase *en tachei* must mean at its most extreme to be “six years.” (158) The Greek phrase that some translations have translated “soon,” he uses to establish the timing of the book. “Soon” communicates the idea of linear time. The standard academic Greek grammar disagrees and lists this entire lexical family of *tachos* as an adverb of manner (Blass—Debrunner 252). In other words, John has the Lord promise or threaten that He is going to come “quickly” rather than soon. Therefore, the structure that requires a gap between the last verse of chapter 3 and the first verse of chapter 4 and the manner of the promised coming in 1:1 and 22:6 argue against the preterist understanding of the book.

Lastly, the preterist wants to argue that the major evil protagonist in the book of Revelation is the Roman emperor Nero. That would guarantee an early date of authorship and allow for the book being about the destruction of Jerusalem. In order to do this, they must ignore all evidence that directs the reader to a later date. Three lines of evidence argue for a late date of Revelation and the elimination of the possibility of a historical fulfillment in the fall of Jerusalem. The first line of evidence that argues that John wrote the book under the reign of Domitian is the precedent setting use of the title “God the Lord.” Contemporary writers point out that Domitian first used this title concerning himself in A.D. 89 (Suetonius, Domitianus 13). John uses this title in 4.11 along with four other titles that Domitian reserved for himself when referring to God. Secondly, both Pliny and Suetonius speak with scorn of the cult attached to the divine throne of the emperor. The throne stood in the circus in a raised tabernacle, exalted above common life and

withdrawn from vulgar gaze (Stauffer 187). In Revelation 11, John the author tells the readers that the Ark of the Covenant appears (considered to be God’s throne) and in 19.3, the throne actually speaks. Next, Domitian the emperor was the first Roman emperor to have 24 lictors. These men accompanied him wherever he went carrying the *fasces*, a bundle of rods with a protruding ax head. This meant that the official had the authority to order a beating or an execution (Aune 13). In Revelation 4, John introduces the emperor of heaven as having 24 elders surrounding his throne. (13) Lastly, the Book of Revelation shows a preoccupation with astrological symbols. Charlesworth asserts that Domitian was a careful student of astrology. (XI. 23) Every chapter in the Book of Revelation has at least one major astrological symbol. Suetonius gives a fascinating parallel between astrological predictions and Revelation 9:15. He says, “Astrological predictions had long since warned him [Domitian] in what year and day he would die; they even specified the hour (5th hour) and the manner (by sword)”(309). In comparison, Revelation reads, “Loose the four angels who are prepared for the hour, and month, and day, and year.” These historical correspondences argue for a later date for the composition of the Book of Revelation.

Preterist authors argue that all Biblical records are historical and not prophetic. Advocates of this theory argue that the Bible does not give much information about the future. Preterists rest on the understanding that Matthew 16.28 refers to a historical event, the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. They believe that a normal understanding of the Olivet Discourse leads the reader to the conclusion that all the events discussed there have already occurred. Lastly, preterists believe that John wrote the Book of Revelation before the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. To maintain their position, preterists ignore the literary structure of the text, ignore contextual clues in the narrative itself, and ignore historical allusions within the text that argue for a late date to the writing of the Book of Revelation.

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