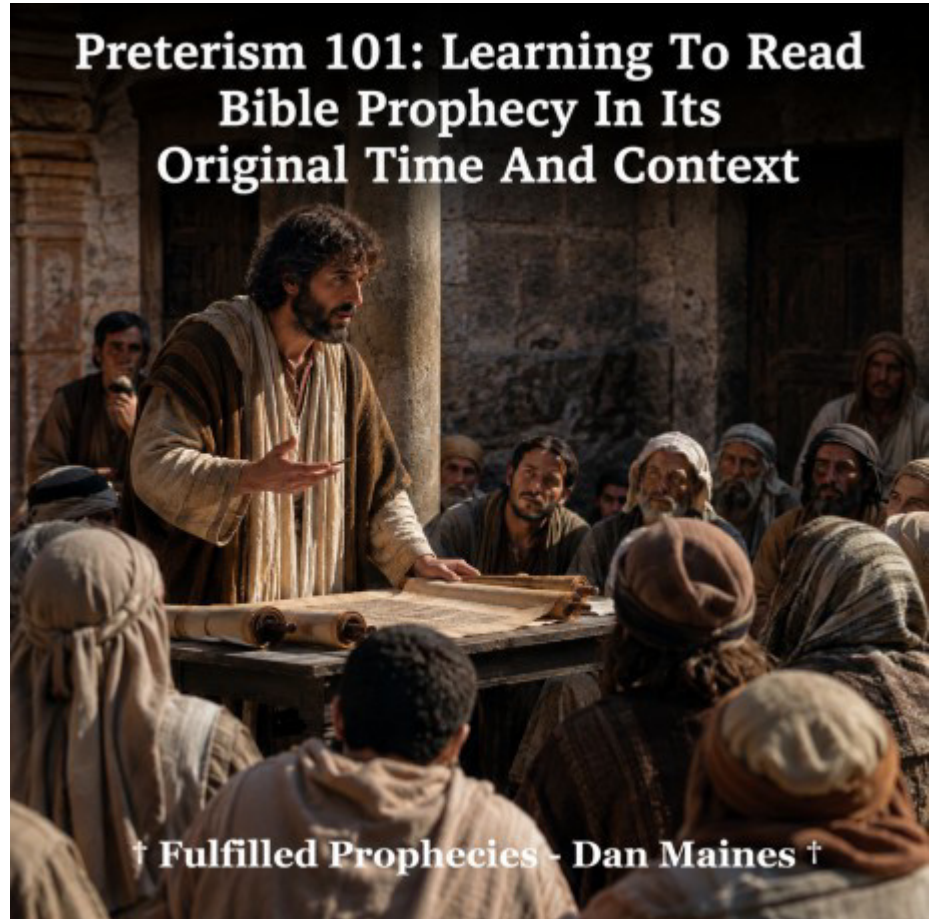


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Preterism 101: Learning To Read Bible Prophecy In Its Original Time And Context



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† Preterism is the understanding that Bible prophecy must first be interpreted according to the people who originally heard it, the time statements God inspired, and the covenant setting in which it was given.

† Jesus placed His coming, judgment, and the destruction of Jerusalem within the lifetime of His first century generation. He said, this generation shall not pass away, till all these things be

accomplished (Matthew 24:34).

† The apostles continued that same message. They said the end was at hand, the coming of the Lord was near, the Judge was standing before the doors, and the events of Revelation would shortly take place (1 Peter 4:7; James 5:8-9; Revelation 1:1-3).

† These weren't vague statements about events thousands of years in the future. They were inspired statements given to real people about events that were approaching in their lifetime.

† The foundation of Preterism is therefore simple: audience, context, covenant, and time. Before interpreting any prophecy, we identify who was speaking, who was being addressed, what covenant situation existed, and when Scripture said the prophecy would be fulfilled.

† This changes the way we read passages about the last days, the coming of Christ, judgment, resurrection, the end of the age, the New Heavens and New Earth, and Revelation.

† The place to begin is with Jesus Himself and one of the clearest prophetic time statements in the entire New Testament, this generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished (Matthew 24:34).

Matthew 24:34

Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

† Jesus identified the generation that would experience the events He had just described. He didn't say that generation would begin thousands of years later.

† The disciples asked Jesus about the destruction of the temple, and Jesus answered people who were standing in front of Him (Matthew 24:1-3).

† When Jesus said this generation, His natural audience would've understood Him to mean their generation, not an unknown generation in the distant future.

† A basic rule of Preterism is simple, don't move a prophecy away from the audience Jesus gave it to unless Scripture gives

us a reason to do so (Matthew 23:36; Luke 21:32).

Matthew 16:27-28

For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every person according to his deeds. "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

† Jesus placed His coming within the lifetime of some people who were physically standing there listening to Him.

† Whatever interpretation we give the coming of the Son of Man, it has to respect the time limitation Jesus Himself gave.

† Preterism doesn't begin by changing the meaning of some standing here. It begins by believing Jesus knew exactly what He was telling His disciples.

† This becomes one of the foundation stones for understanding New Testament prophecy, the expected coming belonged to their historical horizon (Matthew 10:23; Matthew 26:64).

Luke 21:20-22

But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are inside the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city; because these are days of punishment, so that all things which have been written will be fulfilled.

† Jesus gave His disciples a visible historical sign, Jerusalem surrounded by armies.

† He told people in Judea to flee. These instructions make sense in a first century Judean setting, not as instructions for Christians living thousands of years later.

† Most importantly, Jesus called these days of vengeance and connected them with the fulfillment of what had been written.

† Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70 wasn't a minor event in biblical history. It marked the catastrophic end of the temple, priesthood, sacrifices, and Old Covenant center of worship

(Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 9:8-10).

Hebrews 8:13

When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is about to disappear.

† The inspired writer described the Old Covenant as becoming obsolete, growing old, and near disappearance.

† That language places Hebrews inside a covenant transition that was still reaching its historical conclusion when the letter was written.

† The cross established the New Covenant, while the old temple order continued physically until Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed in AD 70.

† This covenant transition helps explain why so much New Testament prophecy focuses upon an approaching end. The writers weren't predicting the destruction of planet Earth. They were witnessing the final days of an old covenantal order (Hebrews 9:8-10; Hebrews 12:18-28).

Hebrews 1:1-2

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom He also made the world.

† The writer placed himself and his original audience in the days identified with God's climactic revelation through His Son.

† The New Testament's last days language has an original historical audience and covenant setting.

† Peter used the same framework at Pentecost when he explained that Joel's last days prophecy was being fulfilled in what his audience was seeing (Acts 2:16-17).

† John could therefore tell his first century readers that it was the last hour (1 John 2:18).

† Preterism asks us to let those inspired statements establish the prophetic timeline instead of automatically moving the last

days into our generation.

1 Peter 4:7

The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.

† Peter didn't merely say that an end would someday arrive. He told his original readers that the end was near.

† At hand communicated proximity to the people receiving the letter.

† Peter's statement fits naturally within the same first century expectation found throughout the New Testament (James 5:8-9; Hebrews 10:37).

† If at hand can routinely mean thousands of years, prophetic time statements stop communicating meaningful time to their original audience.

Romans 16:20

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

† Paul told the Roman Christians that God would soon crush Satan under their feet.

† Notice the audience, your feet. Paul gave this promise directly to believers living in the first century.

† This is another example of why audience relevance matters. We shouldn't automatically take promises addressed to them and move their expected fulfillment thousands of years beyond their lifetime.

† The New Testament repeatedly points its original readers toward approaching covenantal judgment, victory, and fulfillment (Romans 13:11-12; Romans 16:20).

Revelation 1:1-3

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, everything that he saw. Blessed is the one who

reads, and those who hear the words of the prophecy and keep the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

† Revelation tells us how to approach the book before its symbols even begin.

† The events must shortly come to pass, and John said the time was at hand.

† Those statements should control our interpretation of the visions that follow rather than allowing difficult symbols to erase the clear statements of time.

† Revelation repeats this urgency at its conclusion, showing that the time frame wasn't an accidental phrase at the beginning of the book (Revelation 22:6, 10).

† Preterism therefore reads Revelation first through its original audience, historical setting, Old Testament imagery, and repeated declarations of nearness.

Daniel 12:4

But as for you, Daniel, keep these words secret and seal up the book until the end of time; many will roam about, and knowledge will increase.

† Daniel was told to seal his prophecy because its time of fulfillment hadn't yet arrived.

† This gives us an inspired comparison for understanding prophetic time language. Daniel's prophecy could be sealed because fulfillment wasn't near to Daniel (Daniel 12:9).

Revelation 22:10

And he said to me, Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.

† John received the opposite command. He wasn't to seal Revelation because the time was near.

† Daniel was told to seal the prophecy until the time of the end, but John was told not to seal his prophecy because that time was near (Daniel 12:4, 9; Revelation 22:10).

† This comparison helps define near from Scripture itself. What was distant enough to be sealed in Daniel's day had become near enough that John was specifically commanded not to seal

it.

Historical References

† Flavius Josephus was an eyewitness to the Jewish war and described the siege, famine, internal violence, destruction of Jerusalem, and burning of the temple in *The Wars of the Jews*, especially Books 5 through 7.

† Josephus' account is important because it gives us a first century historical description of the catastrophe Jesus had warned Jerusalem about.

† Tacitus, the Roman historian, also recorded the Jewish conflict and Roman campaign against Jerusalem in *Histories*, Book 5.

† Eusebius later recorded the Christian tradition that believers in Jerusalem left the city before the war and went to Pella, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 3.

† These writers don't establish biblical doctrine. Scripture establishes doctrine. Historical writers help us understand the world in which the biblical predictions reached their historical fulfillment.

How It Applies To Us Today

† Preterism isn't simply about proving that something happened in AD 70. It's about understanding what Christ accomplished and what believers possess because of that accomplishment.

† We don't live waiting for the Old Covenant world to end. We live in the established New Covenant kingdom of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12:22-24).

† We don't need to turn every war, earthquake, election, disease, technological development, or international crisis into another supposed sign that biblical prophecy is finally happening.

† We can read Scripture with confidence because Jesus kept His promises to His generation.

† Fulfilled prophecy strengthens faith because fulfillment demonstrates that God said what He meant and accomplished what He promised.

† The goal of Preterism 101 isn't merely to win an argument about AD 70. It's to teach people how to read prophecy according to audience, context, covenant, history, and the Bible's own statements of time.

† Start with the clear passages. Establish the first century audience. Establish the time statements. Understand the Old and New Covenant transition. Then move into the more difficult subjects.

† Once that foundation is established, subjects such as the coming of Christ, resurrection, judgment, the millennium, Satan, the New Heavens and New Earth, and Revelation can be studied within the biblical framework already established by the clearer passages.

† Teaching Preterism to someone hearing it for the first time, that's the foundation upon which the rest of the course should be built.

Q: What is the first thing someone should understand about Preterism?

A: Audience relevance. We should first ask who originally heard or received the prophecy and what the words would've communicated to them (Matthew 24:34; Luke 21:20-22).

Q: Does Preterism begin with AD 70?

A: It begins with Scripture. AD 70 becomes important because Jesus connected Jerusalem's approaching destruction with His generation and the days of vengeance (Matthew 24:34; Luke 21:20-22).

Q: Why are words such as soon, near, and at hand so important?

A: Because they're inspired statements telling the original audience when fulfillment was approaching (1 Peter 4:7; Revelation 1:1-3).

Q: Were the last days the last days of planet Earth?

A: The New Testament writers already described themselves

and their first century audience as living in the last days and even the last hour (Hebrews 1:1-2; Acts 2:16-17; 1 John 2:18).

Q: Why is the Old Covenant important to understanding prophecy?

A: Because the New Testament describes an old covenantal order that was growing old and approaching disappearance while the New Covenant reality was being established (Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 12:18-28).

Q: Does fulfilled prophecy mean Jesus' kingdom ended in AD 70?

A: No. AD 70 wasn't the end of Christ's kingdom. It demonstrated His judgment and the removal of the old temple order. Christ's kingdom is everlasting (Hebrews 12:22-28).

Q: Where should a beginner go after learning these foundations?

A: The next step is to study the coming of Christ, the resurrection, judgment, the millennium, Satan, the New Heavens and New Earth, and Revelation while continuing to respect audience relevance, covenant context, and the Bible's time statements.

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† Matthew 24:34; Matthew 16:27-28; Luke 21:20-22; Hebrews 8:13; Hebrews 1:1-2; 1 Peter 4:7; Revelation 1:1-3; Daniel 12:4; Revelation 22:10; Romans 16:20

† Historical writers: Flavius Josephus, The Wars of the Jews, Books 5-7; Tacitus, Histories, Book 5; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3

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