

Refuting Preterism

By Scott Huckaby
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For Discussion: In-Depth: Why A Future Seven Year Tribulation Is A Biblical Necessity

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What is preterism?

Preterism is the idea that all prophecy in the Bible is really history. Preterists are also-known-as amillennialists.

- The term preterism comes from the Latin praeter, meaning “past.” Thus, preterism is the view that the biblical prophecies concerning the “end times” have already been fulfilled—in the past.

What do preterists believe?

Preterists interpret the book of Revelation as a symbolic picture of first-century conflicts, not a description of what will occur in the end times.

- Preterism allegorizes the end-times prophecies saying they were fulfilled in AD 70 when the Romans attacked and destroyed Jerusalem.
- Full preterism teaches that Jesus’ return to earth was a “spiritual” return, not a physical one.
- Partial preterism acknowledges that Jesus’ return is yet future but it initiates the Eternal State... so no rapture, Tribulation, or physical Millennial Kingdom.

How do preterists justify their belief?

Preterists usually point to a passage in Jesus’ Olivet Discourse to bolster their argument...

Matthew 24:34 – *Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened*

The preterist takes this to mean that everything Jesus speaks of in Matthew 24 had to have occurred within one generation of His speaking—the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 was therefore “Judgment Day.”

What is the problem with preterism?

It is an aspect of replacement theology... the idea that the church as replaced Israel.

- God’s covenant with Israel is everlasting (Jeremiah 31:35–37), and there will be a future restoration of Israel (Isaiah 11:12).

The apostle Paul also warned against those who teach falsely, “*that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some*” (2 Timothy 2:17–18).

- And Jesus’ mention of “this generation” should be taken to mean the generation that is alive to see the beginning of the events described in Matthew 24.

What is the Tribulation?

The Bible tells us there must be a 7-year period when God again turns His attention to the Jewish people.

- The length of this still future time comes from Daniel 9:24-27 where 70 weeks of years are described when the Lord will complete His redemptive purposes for having chosen Israel.

How can we be confident that the last week of Daniel’s prophecy awaits a future fulfillment?

It’s because the events that mark its beginning and midpoint have never happened in human history.

Daniel 9:27 – *And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.*

This last seven-year period will begin with a “prince” (9:26) establishing a seven-year peace agreement with Israel. Perhaps the most notable aspect of Daniel’s prophecy regarding the seventieth week is the ending of temple sacrifices, which the prophet later refers to as the “*abomination that makes desolate*” (Daniel 12:11).

Does it make sense that there’s a gap between the 69th and 70th week of Daniel’s prophecy?

Yes, the text itself tells us that that last week would not immediately follow the cutting off of the Messiah.

Daniel 9:25-26 – *Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.*

Please note that Daniel placed the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple during the interlude between the final weeks. This necessitates a gap of at least forty years before the start of the seventieth week, which we read about in Daniel 9:27.

How do we know that the 70th week of Daniel didn't occur in the first century AD or anytime since then?

It's been 2,000 years since the end of the 69th one, is it possible that the last week still remains unfulfilled? Yes, absolutely!

How were the actions of Antiochus Epiphanes merely a foreshadowing of the Abomination of Desolation?

It was not a fulfillment... he desecrated the second Jewish temple by setting up idols in it and offering pigs on its altar.

- Antiochus defiled the temple during the first 69 weeks rather than during the last 7-year period of years in Daniel's prophecy (9:24-27).

- two centuries later, Jesus referred to Daniel prophecy of the temple's desecration as a still future event:
Matthew 24:15 – *“When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand)”*

Did the Roman General Titus fulfill the 70th week of Daniel when he destroyed Jerusalem and the temple?

This is impossible for several reasons:

1. The Lord told Daniel that Titus' siege of Zion would happen in-between the last two weeks, not during the last one.
2. There's no record whatsoever of a peace agreement between the Roman general and Israel such as must happen to start the seventieth week of Daniel.
3. Daniel tells us that the coming “prince” would defile the temple, not destroy it.
4. The key detail that Paul adds to the fulfillment of Daniel 9:27 and Matthew 24:15.

What will the Desolator do?

Paul identifies the one who will desecrate the temple as the “man of lawlessness,” the one we refer to today as the “antichrist.”

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 – *“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.”*

The coming desolator will blaspheme the Lord, sit in the “temple of God,” and “proclaim himself to be God.”

Then, at the midpoint of Daniel's seventieth week:

2 Thessalonians 2:8 – *“And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:”*

At His return to earth, Jesus Himself will destroy the “man of lawlessness” whom the apostle had just identified as the one who would desecrate of the temple and thus fulfill the words of Daniel 9:27.

Revelation 19:19-20 – *“And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.”*

How does the destruction of the Desolator disqualify Titus as being him?

- Jesus would've returned to the earth in about AD 73-74, or 3 ½ years after Titus destroyed the temple.
- The Lord Himself would've killed Titus at His return in AD 73-74. However, we know from history that Titus died of natural causes in AD 81.

And if the desecration of the Temple didn't happen before or during the time of this Roman general, then it couldn't possibly have occurred since then because there has never been another Jewish temple.

How do we know there will be a 3rd temple in Jerusalem?

There has to be for the Abomination of Desolation to take place.

Irenaeus was an early church leader who received his training by Polycarp, whom the Apostle John himself discipled. In AD 180, he wrote in *Against Heresies*...

When the antichrist shall have devastated all things in this world, he will reign for 3 years and 6 months, and sit in the temple in Jerusalem; and then the Lord will come from heaven in the clouds, in the glory of the Father, sending this man and those who follow him into the lake of fire; but bringing in for the righteous times of the kingdom.

This quote reveals significant details about Irenaeus' beliefs about the future temple:

1. Writing 110 years after Titus destroyed the 2nd temple, he said there would be a future temple in Jerusalem.
2. Irenaeus stated that the antichrist would “sit in the temple in Jerusalem” exactly as Paul said he would do in 2 Thessalonians 2:4.

3. He predicted that Jesus Himself would destroy the antichrist at His Second Coming, which aligns with what both Paul and John wrote about the one who would desecrate the temple.

Although Irenaeus' words are not Scripture, it's more than a little significant that this highly respected 2nd century theologian believed there would be a third temple in Jerusalem in which a still future world leader would sit and defile before his destruction at Jesus' return to the earth.

How does the fact that Daniel's 70th week await a future fulfillment matter to us today?

It does because of the following reasons:

1. The Lord's purposes for Israel remain incomplete
2. Modern-day Israel fulfills Bible prophecy
3. There must be seven-year Tribulation
4. The Church doesn't belong in the Tribulation

What is the significance of the Lord's purposes for Israel remaining incomplete?

Since the 70th week of Daniel has not yet happened, it signifies that the Lord's redemptive purposes for Jewish people and Jerusalem remain incomplete...

Daniel 9:24 – *“Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.”*

Those who say that God has rejected Israel must also fit Daniel's 70th week into the events of the first century, which according to the words of Jesus, Paul, and John is impossible.

- According to Daniel 9:24, the Lord's redemptive purposes for both His “people” and Jerusalem remain incomplete and await a future fulfillment.

What is the significance of modern-day Israel fulfilling Bible prophecy?

In order for the 70th week of Daniel to start, Israel must exist as an established nation and because of threats to its future, be willing to agree to the future covenant of peace offered by the antichrist.

- The nation must also possess the city of Jerusalem and have both the means and passion to build the third temple. These things are all true.

If one were to write a script for what must happen before the last week of Daniel's prophecy begins, one couldn't do better than what's now happening in the Middle East.

- The only thing missing is Israel's access to build on the temple mount, which most students of Bible prophecy believe will be a part of the coming peace agreement with the “man of lawlessness.”

What is the significance of there being a future 7-year Tribulation?

Since Daniel's 70th week awaits a future fulfillment, there must be a future 7-year period of turmoil on the earth when the Lord will turn His attention to Israel and bring a remnant of His people to repentance.

- Jeremiah famously referred to it as the time of “Jacob's trouble” (30:7).

John placed the beast's defilement of the temple in the midst of the judgments he wrote about in Revelation chapters 6-18 and wrote that the Lord would allow him to “exercise authority for 42 months” (Revelation 13:5-6). This fits perfectly with the time of “great tribulation” Jesus said would happen between the desecration and His return (Matthew 24:15-31).

What is the significance of the church not belonging in the Tribulation?

If the Lord's purpose of Daniel's 70th week is to complete His purposes for Israel, and it is, does that mean the church age must end before its start? Yes, it does!

- The purpose of the entire seven years along with many Bible passages such as 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10 enable us to confidently place the Rapture before entire seventieth week, which the Old Testament also identifies as the beginning of the Day of the Lord.

What applications do we see from this discussion?

- Preterism is not biblical and can easily be refuted using a consistent literal grammatical historical hermeneutic.
- Expecting a future 70th week of Daniel make Bible prophecy highly relevant for today.