

## How To Debunk Full Preterism 101

*Preterist from a Latin word meaning “that which is past”*

Before revealing my headline information, let me share how I was first introduced to the topic of Preterism. Believe me when I say, it took me off guard. Being ignorant of the topic and hearing it for the first time, to say I found it disturbing would be an understatement. That said and with the benefit of hindsight, I am now glad I was exposed to it. Who introduced this subject to me? A Pastor — one who did not embrace Full Preterism but did embrace Partial Preterism. At first, I had no idea of the difference, but either way, it was an eye-opening moment. Then I took it upon myself to look deeper into the subject, and it became even more alarming. Full Preterism is beyond the pale of Christian orthodoxy.

For those who have never heard of the subject, the Full Preterism eschatological view in a nutshell is that the entire Bible has already been fulfilled. In other words, all Old Testament and New Testament prophecy saw complete fulfillment in A.D. 70. Period. For example: the Second Coming of Christ, the Great Tribulation, the Resurrection, and we are now living under the New Heaven and New Earth. Needless to say, this author repudiates this view.

There are different ways of interpreting Scripture: literal, symbolic, allegorical, figurative, metaphorical, or spiritual. Full Preterism uses all the above, which is not necessarily wrong; however, because they are not consistent and use whatever method pushes their narrative, they violate the principles of hermeneutics (the art and science of Biblical interpretation). When I wrote my book, “The Bible Vs The Watchtower, You Decide,” Scripture was my authority for debunking Watchtower doctrine. Because of their method of Biblical interpretation, I will not employ the use of hermeneutical exegesis to debunk Preterist doctrine. Instead, I will target their Achilles heel.

Debunking Full Preterism is only a 5-1/2 minute exercise. All you need is the book of Revelation. Not the text itself, but rather knowledge of when the Book was written. Simply stated, if the Book was written after A.D. 70, the entire Full Preterist view crumbles. So what does the evidence show?

“The first clear, unambiguous witness to the Neronian date is a one-line attribution in the Syriac translation of the New Testament c. A.D. 500. There are only two other external witnesses to the early date: Arethas (c. 900) and Theophylact (d. 1107).

The late date, on the other hand, has an unbroken line of support from many of the greatest, most reliable luminaries in church history beginning in A.D. 150. Moreover, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen all support the late date; however, they are not included in the chart since they don’t *specifically* say that John was banished by Domitian. Thus, the external evidence from church history points emphatically to the A.D. 95 day for the composition of Revelation. It has been the dominant view of the church for 1,900 years.

In addition, there are two key lines of internal evidence from within Revelation that also favor the Domitianic date for its writing.” [*The John Walvoord Prophecy Commentaries, REVELATION*, by John F. Walvoord (2011), page 15.]

### SUMMARY OF THE EXTERNAL EVIDENCE

Let us consider the following witnesses who supported the two different views concerning when Revelation was written, also taking note of the dates that each expressed their view:

#### Witnesses for the A.D. 95 Date

Hegesippus (A.D. 150)  
Irenaeus (180)  
Victorinus (c. 300)  
Eusebius (c. 300)  
Jerome (c. 400)  
Sulpicius Severus (c. 400)  
The Acts of John (c. 650)  
Primasius (c.540)  
Orisius (c. 600)  
Andreas (c. 600)  
Venerable Bede (700)

#### Witnesses for the A.D. 65 Date

Syriac Version of NT (c. A.D. 500)

Arethas (c. 900)  
Theophylact (c. 1107)

[Chart quoted from *The John Walvoord Prophecy Commentaries, REVELATION*, page 16.]

As set forth in the Chart above, only *three* witnesses between A.D. 500 and 1107 favor the early date of 65, while *eleven* of the greatest, most reliable luminaries in church history between A.D.150 and A.D. 700 (in addition to Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen) posture in favor of the later date of 95. The eleven who support the A.D. 95 date were also the earlier witnesses, giving their position even more credibility. Why then does Full Preterism use A.D. 70 as the date that Revelation was fulfilled? The only conclusion this author can arrive at is a perpetrated contrivance of truth. In other words, the narrative of Full Preterism becomes their absolute truth, but it is not truth absolute.

In order for Revelation to have been fulfilled in A.D. 70, it had to be written before then, so Full Preterism clings to the unreliable claim that it was written in A.D. 65. They push an agenda of deception when the overwhelming evidence fails to support their narrative. And they employ various interpretive methods for their hermeneutical applications to Scripture ... if the passage will not affirm their agenda/narrative, they just use another method so it does.

Allowing the evidence to lead you to truth before establishing a narrative is one thing, but pushing a narrative regardless of the evidence is quite another. We have just proven by the external evidence alone that the book of Revelation was not written in A.D. 70; therefore, the

Full Preterist dogmatic assertion that it does, in order to fit their narrative, is evidence that they are playing people for fools.

When pushing a narrative becomes the sole objective, and the evidence becomes subjective, truth becomes a lie, and a lie becomes the truth, because truth becomes subjective. This is actually called Relativism.

Why do people embrace an eschatological position when the external evidence overwhelmingly fails to support their asserted position? Perhaps because they are unaware of the evidence, or perhaps they are aware of the evidence and choose to ignore it. You will have to ask those who embrace this view for the answer.

The plain and simple material presented here proves the error of dating Revelation early (i.e., before A.D. 70). The external evidence establishes that Revelation was written in A.D. 95, which refutes the Full Preterism position. Therefore, the Full Preterism doctrine that everything in Revelation was fulfilled in A.D. 70 is erroneous, damaging their entire system of eschatology. As a result, the foundation of Full Preterism falls like a house of cards.

### **FOR THOSE WANTING MORE ...**

For those wanting more on this subject, consider this: If A.D. 70 brought the Second Coming of Christ (as Full Preterism asserts), then no church father would write about the Second Coming, let alone tell the church to look for it. So why did Clement of Rome in his first letter in A.D. 96 or 97 write this to the Church at Corinth:

“Of a truth, soon and suddenly shall His will be accomplished, as the Scriptures also bear witness, saying, ‘Speedily will He come, and will not tarry;’ and ‘The Lord shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Holy One, for whom ye look.’” (To the Corinthians, XXXIII) [*The Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, by Charles C. Ryrie (2005), page 19.]

And why did the Shepherd of Hermas write the following between 140 and 150 A.D.:

“You have escaped from great tribulation on account of your faith, and because you did not doubt the presence of such a beast. Go, therefore, and tell the elect of the Lord His mighty deeds, and say to them that this beast is a type of the great tribulation that is coming.” (Visions, I, IV, 2) [*The Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, by Charles C. Ryrie (2005), page 20.]

Further, if A.D. 70 fulfilled all Biblical prophecy, why did Irenaeus, a bishop of Lyons who died in 200 A.D., and who came in contact with apostolic teachings through his friend Polycarp, write this:

“But when this Antichrist shall have devastated all things in the world, he will reign for three years and six months, and sit in the temple at Jerusalem; and then the Lord will come from heaven in the clouds, in the glory of the Father, sending this man and those who followed him into the lake of fire; but bringing in for the righteous the times of the

kingdom, that is, the rest, the hallowed seventh day; and restoring to Abraham the promised inheritance, in which kingdom the Lord declared, that ‘many coming from the east and from the west should sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.’” ... The predicted blessings, therefore, belongs unquestionably to the times of the kingdom, when the righteous shall bear rule upon their rising from the dead.” (Against Heresies, V, XXX-XXXIII) [*The Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, by Charles C. Ryrie (2005), page 21.]

Let’s now look at some internal evidence, discussed in *The John Walvoord Prophecy Commentaries, REVELATION*, by John F. Walvoord, pages 16-20:

### THE CONDITION OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES

“One of the key internal arguments for the late date of Revelation is the condition of the seven churches of Asia Minor in Revelation 2-3, which show all the symptoms of the second generation of those churches. The period of Paul’s great mission seems to lie in the past. Consider these clues on the date of Revelation from three of the churches addressed in chapters 2-3.

#### *The Church of Ephesus*

If John wrote Revelation in A.D. 64-67, then the letter to the church of Ephesus in Revelation 2:1-7 overlaps with Paul’s two letters to Timothy who was the pastor of the church when Paul wrote to him. In fact, if Revelation was written in 64-66, then it is very likely that Paul wrote 2 Timothy after John wrote to the church. Yet Paul makes no mention of the loss of first love or the presence of the Nicolaitans at Ephesus in his correspondence with Timothy. Neither does he mention these problems in his Ephesian epistle which was probably written in A.D. 62.

Jesus’ statement to the church of Ephesus in Revelation 2:2 that it had guarded itself well against error does not fit what we know of this church in Nero’s day (Acts 20:29-30; 1Tim. 1:3-7; 2Tim 2:17-18). Those who support the early date often respond by noting that error can erupt very quickly in a church. As an example they sometimes cite the churches of Galatia, who ‘are so quickly deserting him who called you’ (Gal. 1:6). But there is a great difference between the condition and maturity of the Galatian churches after Paul’s brief visit there on his first missionary journey, and the church of Ephesus where Paul headquartered for three years, where Apollos taught, where Priscilla and Aquila ministered, and where Timothy pastored for several years.

Moreover, Revelation 2:1-7 makes no mention of the great missionary work of Paul in Asia Minor. On his third journey Paul headquartered in Ephesus for three years and had a profound ministry there. If John wrote in A.D. 64-67 then the omission of any mention of Paul in the letters to the churches of Asia Minor is inexplicable. However, if John wrote thirty years later to the second generation in the churches, then the commission is easily understood.

### *The Church of Smyrna*

Apparently, the church of Smyrna did not even exist during the ministry of Paul. Polycarp was the bishop of Smyrna. In his letter to the Philippians, written about A.D. 110, Polycarp says that the Smyrnaens did not know the Lord during the time Paul was ministering.

‘But I have not observed or heard of any such thing among you, in whose midst the blessed Paul labored, and who were his letters of recommendation in the beginning. For he boasts about you in all the churches—those alone, that is, which at that time had come to know the Lord, for we had not yet come to know him.’(11.3)

Polycarp is saying that Paul praised the Philippian believers in all the churches, but that during Paul’s ministry in the A.D. 50s and 60s the church of Smyrna did not even exist.

### *The Church of Laodicea*

The church of Laodicea is the only one of the seven churches (and possibly Sardis) that does not have one thing to commend. In his letter to the Colossians, probably written in A.D. 60-62, Paul indicates that the church was an active group (Col. 4:13). He mentions the church there three times in this letter (2:1; 4:13, 16). It would certainly take more than two to seven years for the church to depart so completely from its earlier acceptable status that absolutely nothing good could be said about it. Laodicea is also described in Revelation as flourishing economically. Jesus quotes the church as saying, ‘I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.’ Yet the city suffered devastation in an earthquake that occurred in A.D. 60. After the earthquake the Laodiceans refused all aid and assistance from Rome, preferring to rebuild their devastated city from their own resources.

Tacitus, the Roman historian, in his *Annals* (14.27), describes this independent spirit. ‘In the same year, Laodicea, one of the famous Asiatic cities, was laid in ruins by an earthquake, but recovered by its own resources, without assistance from ourselves.’ The extent of the damage to Laodicea and the length of time it took to reconstruct the city are powerful evidence of the late date for Revelation.

Most of the main ruins that survive today in Laodicea are from buildings erected during the time of earthquake reconstruction. The great public buildings destroyed in the earthquake were rebuilt at the expense of individual citizens and were not finished until about the year A.D. 90. The completion date of the stadium can be precisely dated to the latter part of A.D. 79 and the inscription on several other buildings indicate that they too can be dated to this same period. New gates and fortifications seem to have culminated the rebuilding of Laodicea. It is likely that the great triple gate (Syrian gate) and towers were not finished until A.D. 88-90.

Since the rebuilding of Laodicea after the earthquake occupied a complete generation, it is highly problematic to claim that Laodicea was rich, wealthy, and in need of nothing in A.D. 64-67. During those years the city was in the early stages of a rebuilding program that would last another twenty-five years. However, if Revelation was written in A.D. 95 the description of Laodicea in Revelation 3:14-22 would fit the situation exactly. By this time the city was completely rebuilt with its own resources, enjoying property and prestige, and basking in the pride of its great accomplishments.

### *The Banishment of John To Patmos*

Revelation 1:9 states that when John received the Revelation he was exiled on the island of Patmos. Church history consistently testifies that both Peter and Paul were executed in Rome near the end of Nero's reign. Those who hold to the early date for the writing of Revelation maintain that doing this same time the apostle John was banished to Patmos by Nero. But why would Nero execute Peter and Paul and banish John? This seems inconsistent. The different sentences for Peter and Paul as compared with John argue for the fact that they were persecuted under different rulers. Moreover, there is no evidence of Nero's use of banishment for Christians.

Since Domitian was the second Roman emperor after Nero to persecute Christians, and since banishment was one of his favorite modes of punishment, John's exile to Patmos is much more likely under Domitian than Nero.

Taking into account all the relevant evidence, both external and internal, the strongest view is that the apostle John wrote the book of Revelation in the year A.D. 95 while exiled by the Roman emperor Domitian to the island of Patmos. In any case, there is little tendency among scholars who accept the inspiration of the Revelation to place the date later, as some liberal scholars have attempted to do. In many cases the theological bias against the chiliastic teaching of the book of Revelation seems to be the actual motive in rejecting the apostolic authorship. The date must be before the death of Domitian, who was assassinated in A.D. 96, as the apostle was apparently released from his exile shortly after this.

In contrast to other apocalyptic books, the revelation recorded by John is presented as having a solid historical basis in his exile on Patmos. It was there these visions were given to him, and in obedience to the command to write them and send them to the seven churches, John recorded these prophecies. It would seem entirely reasonable that in the midst of persecution the church should be given a book of such assurance as that embodied in the content of Revelation, which holds before them both an explanation as to why persecution is permitted but also a promise of ultimate triumph and reward.”

### **Conclusion:**

The internal and external evidence supporting the A.D. 95 date over the A.D. 64-67 date is overwhelming. Based upon the evidence provided by Dr. John F. Walvoord, an expert in his field, the Full Preterism narrative is not sustainable.

As I said at the beginning, Scripture cannot be used to show the error of Full Preterism. Although Scripture does categorically contradict their narrative, they will ignore the obvious literal interpretation, and will push a figurative, symbolic, allegorical, spiritual, metaphorical or some other interpretive nuance to validate their assertions. In other words, if the text disproves their narrative, they will use another type of interpretation to escape the true meaning of the text. If however, a literal meaning must be applied to affirm their position, they will gladly use it.

When I first began my journey of attempting to understand the brand of eschatology used by Full Preterism, I bought a book. For those wanting to know more about the inside scoop of why they believe what they believe, who better to learn from than a former Preterist. Surprisingly enough, he began his journey through Preterism at seminary school. Here is a very telling excerpt from his book at page 244:

“In addition, preterists have created unnecessary divisions, hindering theological unity within the body of Christ, because preterism undermines a proper understanding of many biblical prophecies that describe our blessed hope at the appearance of Jesus Christ. Many preterists have descended into theological confusion. To reiterate, some have unwittingly accepted the ancient heresy that the day of the Lord has already arrived (2Thess. 2:1-3). Others have stopped short of embracing full preterism, not because of a proper understanding of biblical eschatology, but because of their purported commitment to orthodoxy as defined in the ecumenical creeds.

That many people will repent of the false doctrines of preterism is my prayer and purpose for writing this book. As demonstrated herein, the subtle allure of preterism lies in its claim that its interpretation of the time statements of Scripture is based on clear, logical argumentation. However, the entire preterist hermeneutic is built upon an inadequate understanding of these statements, of the prophetic perspective, and of the ‘already and not yet’ principle of eschatology. My desire is that Christians who read this book will become more informed about preterism and better equipped to challenge its arguments, in order to warn others of its dangers.” [*Debunking Preterism*, by Mr. Brock David Hollett, B.S.E.D., M.DIV., D.O. (2018), page 244.]

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