

THE ANSWER TO PRETERISM

* * * A CONTINGENT KINGDOM AND A MYSTERY CHURCH * * *

S.L.H.
Soli Deo Gloria!

"And to make all *men* see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hidden in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ."
(Ephesians 3:9)

Introduction to Preterism. Preterism is derived from the Latin adverb *praeter*, which means "past". Preterism teaches that all prophecy, or almost all¹, has already been fulfilled in the past, primarily in association with the Roman siege and subsequent destruction of Jerusalem (70 AD). Its motivation comes from three verses in the Gospel of Matthew (Matt10:23; 16:28; and especially 24:34).

In Matthew 24:4-31, Jesus presents a concise summary of the 70th Week of Daniel (i.e., the 7-year Tribulation; Dan9:27; cf. Rev6-19). It begins with the advent of the Antichrist (vv4-5) and concludes with the 2nd Coming of Christ (v30-31). As part of the Parable of the Fig Tree that immediately follows (vv32-35), Jesus makes an assertion that creates some tension relative to the proper understanding of eschatology.

"Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled". (Matt24:34)

Based on this verse, Preterists conclude that the 70th Week of Daniel must have occurred within the lifetime of those hearing this prophecy spoken by Jesus; thus, it took place in the 1st century and is a past event from our present point of view. Matthew 10:23 and 16:28 present similar challenges that are resolved within Preterism by placing the fulfillment of prophecy in the 1st century AD.

However, the tension created by Matthew 24:34 is not resolved by conceding that its prophecy was fulfilled in the past. Such a solution creates more problems than it solves, since it is self evident that the 2nd Coming of Christ and the resurrection of the saints (as described in the Bible) did not occur in the 1st century. Rather, the tension is revolved by the two-fold recognition of: 1) the contingent nature of the Kingdom, and 2) the mystery nature of the Church (Age).

The Contingent Nature of the Kingdom. If "all these things [were] fulfilled" (Matt24:34) in the 1st century, including the return of Jesus Christ (Matt24:30), then the Messianic Kingdom would have begun at that time. However, Jesus Himself made clear that the offer of the Kingdom was contingent in nature.

¹ Full Preterism asserts that all prophecy has been fulfilled; thus, we are presently living in the eternal state. Partial Preterism concedes that the 2nd Coming of Christ and the resurrection of the saints have not been fulfilled and are yet future.

"Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe the gospel". (Mk1:14b-15)

Consider three important aspects of Jesus' teaching. First, the "time is fulfilled" relates to Daniel's prophecy of the 70 Weeks (Dan9:24-27). The first 69 Weeks of that prophecy, which conclude with the arrival of Messiah (Dan9:25), terminated during the earthly ministry of Jesus (cf. Luk19:28-44); thus, Jesus "fulfilled" the first part of Daniel's prophecy.

Second, with the arrival of Jesus the Messiah in Israel, "the kingdom of God is at hand". The expression "at hand" means *near*. The inauguration of the kingdom was imminent (i.e., it could have begun immediately), but it was not automatic.

Third, the inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom was clearly conditioned on Israel's response to the imperative: "repent, and believe the gospel [of the kingdom of God; v14]".

Since the nation of Israel did not "repent" at the 1st Coming of Christ, the Messianic Kingdom was put in abeyance (allowing the mystery program of the Church to begin). The contingent nature of the prophetic assertions made by Jesus relative to the Kingdom in Matthew 10:23, 16:28, and 24:34 is reflected by the use of the subjunctive mood for the verbals that occur in the Greek text of all three verses. The subjunctive mood communicates possibility rather than reality. In these verses, the subjunctive mood communicates a *possible* future, not a certain one.

The Mystery Nature of the Church (Age). The crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ were prophesied in the O.T. Similarly, the 7-year Tribulation period (i.e., the 70th Week of Daniel) and the 2nd Coming of Christ that immediately precede the inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom are subjects of extensive prophetic revelation. These prophesied events must occur.

However, the birth, growth, and removal (at the Rapture) of the Church during the Dispensation of Grace was a "mystery" not revealed until the Apostle Paul (cf. Eph3:1-10; Col1:24-27). Hypothetically speaking, there is a sense in which the entire Church Age did not have to occur. Had Israel believed the gospel of the kingdom and received Jesus as Messiah at His 1st Coming, His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension would have been followed almost immediately by the appearance of Antichrist, the 70th Week of Daniel, and the return of Christ. In this case the assertion of Jesus in Matthew 24:34 would have been literally true.

Conclusion. It is often the case that apparent errors, contradictions, or paradoxes in Scripture are easily resolved once proper dispensational distinctions are recognized. The offer of the Kingdom at the 1st Coming of Christ was contingent upon repentance on the part of Israel. The mystery nature of the Church means it was not the subject of prophecy, therefore not required. Had the nation of Israel repented and believed the gospel (of the kingdom), the parenthetical Church Age would have been omitted, and the generation that heard Jesus' Olivet Discourse would have witnessed His 2nd Coming.