

GLEANINGS — June 12, A.D. 2016
Futurism and Preterism

Those terms relate to the interpretation* of prophecy in Scripture – specifically to its foretelling aspect, i.e. predicting the future. Bible prophecy includes foretelling, but its primary purpose is not merely to give information about the future. Prediction is subservient to prophetic exhortations to repent and believe. Prophecy comforts God's people and calls them to obedience in dark times. In fact "*the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*" (Revelation 19:10)

Here are a couple of nutshell definitions: Futurism regards a Scriptural prediction as NOT having come to pass yet. Preterism regards a Scriptural prediction as ALREADY having come to pass.

Regarding some predictions, all Bible believing people are preterists. For instance, all believe that specific predictions made by inspired men like David (Psalm 16), Isaiah (chapters 9 and 53), and Micah (5:2) about Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection have all come to pass.

Likewise, all Bible believing people are futurists about other predictions. Jesus foretold the bodily resurrection of all mankind (John 5:28,29), but that is yet to come to pass. And all confess that the ultimate destruction by King Jesus of all His enemies foretold in 1 Corinthians 15:24-26, where death itself is identified as the very last enemy, has not yet happened.

What about the book of Revelation? Is it full of predictions which are still in the future? Or have most of its predictions been fulfilled already? Here are a few reasons for taking a generally preteristic view of this book which is full of symbolism and so challenging to our understanding.

1. According to Revelation's opening and closing portions (see 1:1, 1:3, 22:6, and 22:10) certain events were shortly to come to pass...the time was near. The revelation was given to John on the island Patmos about the middle of the first century. Are we showing faith in God's word to hold that those clear time indicator phrases refer to some point in the 21st century or beyond?

2. Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus are commonly known as the pastoral epistles. They give very practical instructions to their recipients about shepherding the congregations over which they had oversight (1 Timothy 1:3ff, Titus 1:5, et. al.) Christ's seven letters in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 are best considered as seven more pastoral epistles to real Christians for whom those time indicator phrases gave much blessing as they read (see 1:3).

In those letters, the Chief Shepherd directly addresses the angels, i.e. human messengers, of the seven churches. He counsels them about their present conditions and circumstances. No doubt the seven letters and the rest of the book of Revelation have instruction for all congregations of all ages, as does all Scripture. But our interpretation* is sloppy if we disregard the original purpose and intent of Scripture in its historical context.

3. Revelation 11:1 refers to the "*temple of God and those who worship there.*" In His Olivet discourse (Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21) Jesus predicted the temple's destruction and Jerusalem's desolation. Nowhere in the New Testament do we read of the fulfillment of that prediction. But the temple in earthly Jerusalem was destroyed and the city sacked by Roman military might in A.D. 70, about forty years after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, as He foretold.

We have no reason to believe that any of the New Testament was written after that epoch terminating date. So does Revelation 11 refer to a temple that would be built in earthly Jerusalem sometime in the apostles' distant future? Nowhere does the Bible predict that. The new covenant in Jesus' blood has swallowed up and superceded the foreshadows of the old covenant temple and its animal sacrifices; they are gone forever. The letter to the Hebrews labors to teach us that.

If a structure is built by man in the 21st century or later in earthly Jerusalem and called a temple, it will have no more significance in terms of God's plan than the erection of a Hindu temple in New York or an Islamic mosque in Michigan. Revelation 11 refers to that temple to which Peter and John went up to pray sometime after Pentecost but before its A.D. 70 destruction (Acts 3:1).

**Interpretation does not mean assigning a meaning one finds attractive, but discovering the meaning which God and His inspired author intended!*