

Jerusalem's Fall And Christ's Return

by Charles Whitaker

***Forerunner*, "Prophecy Watch," November-December 2025**

*Preterism*¹ is a term often encountered in the study of eschatology, which concerns mankind's ideas about "last things" or "the end of the age." The hallmark of preterism is the notion that, to quote a commentary, "[A]ll prophecy was fulfilled, including the Second Coming of Christ, the Resurrection of the Dead and the Last Judgement, by the year AD 70 at the Destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans." The church of God does not recognize preterism as a correct view of the Bible's prophetic teaching.

One of the preterists' proof-texts is Matthew 10:23: "I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes."

What did Christ mean by the term "before the Son of Man comes"?² Preterists believe that Christ came in AD 70 when Jerusalem fell to the Romans. They see it as a figurative return, in judgment.

Before we proceed, we need to clarify two points:

1. First, the wording of this formulaic phrase varies, depending on grammatical requirements. Sometimes, it reads "the coming of the Son of Man" or "the Son of Man coming." Other times, it is "when [or *until* or *before*] the Son of Man comes." But it is essentially the same phrase.
2. Second, our consideration of this phrase does *not* include such non-prophetic passages as Matthew 20:28: "... just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve . . ." There are several such passages in which both the context and the verb tense are clearly *not* prophetic but refer to Christ's earthly ministry. For instance, Jesus says in Luke 19:10: "... the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

When we eliminate non-prophetic uses of the formula, we find that most of the prophetic uses cluster about the Olivet prophecy. It appears five times in

Matthew 24, once in Mark 13, and once in Luke 21. The formula also occurs *outside* the Olivet Prophecy in Matthew 25:13,³ following the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, and in Luke 18:8, in the Parable of the Unjust Judge.⁴

Of the interpretations of this formulaic phrase in the commentaries,⁵ *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown* comes the closest to the mark. Finding clues “in the uniform language of the Scripture,” this commentary holds that the term “coming of the Son of Man” is equivalent to “the day of vengeance of our God.”⁶ This view appears to be largely correct. Christ is telling His disciples—and us—that we will not have gone to all the cities of Israel before the day of God’s vengeance—the Day of the Lord. The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 is *not* directly in view here.

Prophetic Timeline

Before we look more deeply, we must be clear about certain definitions and the prophetic timeline. Herbert Armstrong taught that the Day of the Lord is a year-long period during which Christ takes vengeance on His enemies, a time of great wrath. He was also probably correct in placing it as the last year of the “time of Jacob’s trouble” (see Jeremiah 30:7), that is, the final year of the three-and-a-half-year period—not a tacked-on or additional year at the end of that period. At the end of that year, at the end of the Day of the Lord, Christ comes to rule, His wrath spent. Considered this way, both the Time of Jacob’s Trouble and the Day of the Lord end at *about* the same time.

For the record, we will look at two Old Testament descriptions of the Day of the Lord:

Isaiah 63:4: “For the day of vengeance is in My heart, and the year of My redeemed has come.”

Jeremiah 46:10: “For this is the day of the Lord God of hosts, a day of vengeance, that He may avenge Himself on His adversaries.”

(See also, among many other examples, Isaiah 13:6-13.)

In the New Testament, Revelation 16, describing the seven Vials or Bowls of God's Wrath, seems to refer to the Day of the Lord, a time when

every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent. (Revelation 16:20-21)

On the other hand, Revelation 11:15-19 describes Christ's revealing at the end of the Day of the Lord, when, as it says in verse 15, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (compare Revelation 12:10, which may refer to this same event). At this time, He will assume the throne of David. Also at this time, He will set His hand to doing things He did *not* do the year before, during the Day of the Lord.

We need to be clear about that critical distinction. At the time of His revealing at the end of the Day of the Lord, He will work to establish Jerusalem and make it a city of worldwide acclaim (Isaiah 62:7). He will work to regather scattered Israel (Deuteronomy 30:1-5; Isaiah 44:22-23; Jeremiah 16:14; 23:3-4; 33:8; 50:19-20; Ezekiel 16:62-63; 36:33; 37:23; Micah 7:18-19; etc.), to draw all peoples to Himself as nations flow to Jerusalem (John 12:32; Isaiah 2:2). He will work to teach the law from Zion (Isaiah 2:3).

No wonder the prophet Isaiah twice tells us that, upon His return, "His reward is with Him, and His work before Him" (Isaiah 40:10; 62:11). It sure will be! The Millennium, a time when "no one will hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain" (Isaiah 11:9; 65:25), will start in earnest. It is a time *distinct* from the destruction that definitively characterizes God's wrath in the Day of the Lord.

The Parable of the Unjust Judge

We will start with the Parable of the Unjust Judge, recorded in Luke 18:2-8. This passage may seem an unlikely place to begin, but, as we will see, the

context is judgment and vengeance, both definitive aspects of the Day of the Lord. In the brief narration of this parable, the Greek verb for *avenge* appears twice, and the Greek noun for *vengeance* also appears twice.⁷

There was in a certain city a certain judge not fearing God and not having-regard-for the person. And there was a widow in that city. And she was coming to him, saying, “Avenge me from my adversary.” And he was not willing for a time. But after these things, he said within himself, “Even though I do not fear God nor have regard for the person, yet because of this widow’s causing me trouble, I will avenge her—in order that she, while continually coming, may not be wearing me out.” And the Lord said, “Listen-to what the unrighteous judge is saying. And shall not God execute vengeance for His chosen ones—the ones crying-out to Him by day and by night and He is being patient with them? I say to you that He will execute vengeance for them quickly. However, the Son of Man having come, will He find faith on the earth?” (*Disciples’ Literal New Testament*)

The formulaic phrase, stated here as “the Son of Man having come,” appears in a clear context of God’s judgment on behalf of *His chosen ones*. The Jews living in Jerusalem in AD 70 were certainly not “His chosen ones.” Anything but! As Paul explains in Romans 11:16-24, they have been “broken off” for a while.⁸ Scripture shows that the members of His church are the chosen ones. For instance:

John 15:16: “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit.”

Ephesians 1:4: “[God] chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.” (Consider also I Peter 2:9.)

The Parable of the Unjust Judge finds prophetic fulfillment in Revelation 19:2:

For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her.

Here, the verb “avenged” is the same Greek word that appears twice in Luke 18 (also Revelation 6:10). Once again, in Luke 18:8, the formula appears in the context of judgment and vengeance. Importantly, that formula does *not* appear in contexts describing the work Christ will do once He establishes His throne in Jerusalem (see Isaiah 62:7), that is, the work He does after the Day of the Lord has come to its close.

For example, it is not found in narratives describing His work to restore Israel. That regathering work will be one of great compassion and love, not of vengeance and wrath (see specifically Deuteronomy 30:1-10). He will have *already* taken vengeance on His enemies during the Day of the Lord, selectively protecting the people He wishes to protect. There will be nothing helter-skelter about the destruction He metes out on the day of His vengeance.

But, upon His revealing at the end of that year, His focus will be compassion, not wrath. That is the sequence here: First anger, then compassion.

Consider that the formula does not appear anywhere at all in John 10, where Christ, the Good Shepherd, says:

. . . other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd. (John 10:16)

Regathering is in view here, as is compassion, not vengeance. Given that the term “coming of the Son of Man” relates to the time of God’s wrath, the absence of the formula in John 10 is only to be expected.

The Olivet Prophecy

We will now return to the Olivet Prophecy, this time as it appears in Luke 21. Without question, Christ speaks of the fall of Jerusalem. We understand, though, that the AD 70 incident, as well as the disconsolation of Jerusalem by the Babylonians five centuries earlier, are only *types* of a destruction yet to come.⁹ In verses 25-27, the formula—“the Son of Man coming” takes center stage. We need to ask ourselves if all this happened in AD 70:

And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations [note the plural, *nations*, not just the single nation of Judah] with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near. (Luke 21:25-27)

There was not much in the way of redemption around Jerusalem in AD 70! Nor were there many clouds over Jerusalem on that summer day, August 30, when the Romans captured the city. It is clear from the intensely apocalyptic rhetoric here that Christ is focusing on clouds that will be an essential characteristic of *another* day: The year of the Lord's vengeance.¹⁰

In verse 22, our Savior clinches it: “[T]hese are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.” There are plenty of words written in the Old Testament about the day of God's vengeance, all of which need ultimately to be fulfilled.¹¹ This time is what Christ is speaking about, and the fulfillment of them is the Day of the Lord. (Incidentally, that noun *vengeance* in verse 22 is the same word we saw earlier in the Parable of the Unjust Judge in Luke 18.)

In Matthew 24:36-39, Christ, in Matthew's narrative of the Olivet Prophecy, uses the formulaic phrase when connecting His return to the days of Noah:

But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so also

will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

Noah's day, not the fall of Jerusalem, is the historical referent Christ offers regarding "the coming of the Son of Man." The destruction in Noah's day was a cataclysm; the destruction of Jerusalem was a catastrophe. There is a significant difference. The Noachian Flood entailed the reshaping of the entire surface of the earth and the end of civilization worldwide, at the cost of many millions of lives. In scope, the Flood was an event orders of magnitude greater than the destruction of a single city, or even of an already defunct, highly corrupt nation, as was Judah in AD 70. The time of the Flood was a type of the day of the Lord's vengeance, the coming of the Son of Man.

In Matthew 10:23, Christ is not telling His disciples that they will be unable to travel to all of Israel's cities before AD 70. He is looking *far* beyond that—and we should be, as well. By using the term "coming of the Son of Man," He is using code pointing to the Day of the Lord. In fact, He was telling His disciples that, considering the number of cities in all Israel, they could not possibly finish the proclamation of the gospel in the first century, nor for centuries thereafter. That would be a work for others to undertake, later on.

End Notes

1 Currently, the best-known exponent of preterism is [Don Preston](#). Some "variations on the theme" of preterism include [pantelism](#) and transmillennialism, both of which share some common ground in their approach to eschatology, the study of end times. (For more about transmillennialism, see the article on Max King, currently its leading exponent, in [this article](#).)

Rather than focus on the book of Revelation, proponents of these *-isms* tend to concentrate on "time markers" appearing in Christ's comments in the Gospels, especially in the Olivet Prophecy. For example, they see Christ's

comment in Matthew 16:28 as an indication that He thought the Kingdom would come in earnest during His lifetime, using it as a proof-text: “[T]here are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” Apparently, they fail to read on, for in the very next chapter, Matthew 17, three of those disciples standing with Him see Christ in His glory in the Transfiguration.

They likewise fail to understand the time-marker of Matthew 24:34 in the Olivet Prophecy (also Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32): “[T]his generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.” Compare Matthew 23:36, where Christ, speaking in the context of judgment on Jerusalem, says, “Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.”

Many proponents of these false teachings hold that the apostles believed that Christ’s prophetic statements would be fulfilled in their lifetimes. Hence, in Acts 1:6, His disciples ask Him, just before His ascension, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” These same teachers claim that Paul’s “we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord” comment in I Thessalonians 4:15 demonstrates his belief in a first-century return of Christ. Regarding the book of Revelation, preterists go so far as to claim that the term “Lake of Fire” refers to the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans!

2 Christ prophesies that His disciples will not have time to “go over” all the cities in Israel before He comes. The verbal phrase, “gone over,” translates *tele* (*Strong’s* #5055), which means “to fulfill, finish or accomplish.” He is saying, “You won’t finish the job, but work at it anyway.”

3 Some texts omit “in which the Son of Man is coming” here, ending with the noun “hour.”

4 In this author’s view, the references to the Son of Man coming in Matthew 25:31 and 26:64 do not relate to the formula under discussion. The statements in both passages involve the Son of Man doing two things, sitting *and* coming. The context of these passages points to a different prophetic event.

In Matthew 25:31—“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory”—Christ

speaks of a time when “all nations” will be gathered to Him in a massive judgment (verse 32). This refers to the separation at the final judgment during the White Throne Period. It is not a judgment involving the church but “the nations.”

In Matthew 26:64, Christ speaks to the Sanhedrin during His trial:

“You have said it,” Jesus told him. “But I tell you, in the future you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”(*Christian Standard Bible*)

The formula “the Son of Man seated . . . and coming” better refers to His role during the White Throne Period, as it organically carries the idea of the Father’s presence. Notice that in Revelation 20:11, where the subject is the Second Resurrection and the White Throne Period, the wording parallels Jesus’ words in Matthew 26:64: “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it.”

There are no scriptural witnesses to confirm that any Sanhedrin members saw Christ during Jerusalem’s fall forty years later. Evidently, the minimum age for senior members of the Sanhedrin was sixty years. A good number of members would have been in or approaching their eighties at the time of Christ’s trial, so most of the senior members would have died by Jerusalem’s fall in AD 70. Clearly, in using the phrasing of Matthew 26:64, Christ refers to an incident after the Day of the Lord.

Additionally, the preterist argument that Christ was talking only to a young member of the Sanhedrin holds no water. The English pronoun “you” appearing in this passage is a translation of the Greek second-person plural pronoun. Christ was addressing all the members of the Sanhedrin.

Finally, there is an issue with the time-marker in this verse. The prepositional phrase “in the future” (“henceforth,” KJV; “hereafter,” NKJV) is a translation of a Greek adverb *arti* (*Strong’s* #737), which means “now” or “at present,” and probably should be placed with the previous clause: “I tell you *now*, you will see the Son of Man . . .,” as it does not logically fit with the following one, “you will see the Son of Man.” *The misplacement of arti* is like the misplacement (and mis-punctuation) of the adverb “today” (

sémeron, Strong's #4595) in Luke 23:43: "And Jesus said to him, 'Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.'"

5 *Barnes' Notes on the Bible* basically concurs:

By "the coming of the Son of Man," ... is probably meant the destruction of Jerusalem, which happened about thirty years after this was spoken. The words are often used in this sense. See Matthew 24:30; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27, 32.

Concerning the passage in question, Adam Clarke also takes a preterist stance, though he hedges:

To finish the survey, to preach in every one: - till the Son of man be come, may refer either to the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost [*sic*], or to the subversion of the Jewish state.

This exposition echoes the starkly preterist view of *The Benson Commentary* : The term "before the Son of Man come" refers to His coming

to destroy their capital city, temple, and nation. The destruction of Jerusalem by Titus is often called the coming of the Son of man. See Matthew 24:27, 37, 39, 44; Luke 18:5.

Ylvisaker, in *The Gospels*, understands the type/antitype arrangement of the passage, writing, "The prophecy of the coming of the Son of Man finds its first realization in the judgment at the destruction of Jerusalem, the closing fulfilment at His coming on the last day to judge the world" (p. 319).

The Pulpit Commentary comes closer to the truth, asserting that the term "coming of the Son of Man": "... may, perhaps, refer to His coming in the fall of Jerusalem, but rather look(s) forward to His complete return in His second advent."

Among the bizarre views is that expressed by Matthew Poole, who states that the coming of Christ in this passage refers to "the time . . . when you must leave preaching to the Jews and go to the Gentiles, and My kingdom shall be further extended than it is at present." In other words, he believes Christ

“came” when He opened salvation to the Gentiles, as recorded in Acts 10. While Isaiah 9:2 does refer to the Gentiles as having “seen a great light” (quoted in Matthew 4:16) in the person of Christ, there are no scriptural witnesses that unambiguously equate the engrafting of the Gentiles to the “coming” of Christ. They are not comparable.

Even worse is *Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible*, which hedges all bets when it asserts the verb “coming” refers to either 1) Christ’s resurrection (an off-the-wall interpretation), 2) the coming of the Spirit on Pentecost or 3) the destruction of Jerusalem, the preterist view.

The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges states the preterist view but softens it with an incredibly outlandish, almost bizarre, codicil:

[The Matthew 10 passage] treats of the destruction of Jerusalem; and no one who carefully weighs our Lord’s words can fail to see that in a real sense He came in the destruction of Jerusalem. That event was in truth the judgment of Christ falling on the unrepentant nation. In this sense the Gospel had not been preached to all the cities of Israel before Christ came. But all these words point to a more distant future. The work of Christian missions is going on, and will still continue until Christ comes again to a final judgment.

6 The writers avoid the terms “type” and “antitype,” opting to use the term “immediately.”

“The coming of the Son of Man” has a fixed doctrinal sense, here referring immediately to the crisis of Israel's history as the visible kingdom of God, when Christ was to come and judge it; when "the wrath would come upon it to the uttermost"; and when, on the ruins of Jerusalem and the old economy, He would establish His own kingdom.

We would say that the fall of Jerusalem was a “type” of “the coming of the Son of Man,” while the Day of the Lord is the “antitype.”

7 The verb is *ekdike*, meaning “avenge” or “revenge.” The noun is *ekdiksis* (Strong’s #1557): “vengeance,” “revenge,” or “punishment.” This is the noun “vengeance” in Luke 21:22 (“days of vengeance”) and Hebrews 10:30 (“vengeance is Mine”).

8 Consider also the Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers. In Matthew 21:43, Jesus parabolically notifies the Jews: “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.” This took place with the dissolution of the Jewish state in AD 70. He also alludes to this change in Matthew 8:10-12:

When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, “Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

9 In Luke 21:20, Christ uses the plural “armies” when referring to the surrounding of Jerusalem. Again, in Matthew 22:7, within the Parable of the Wedding Feast, He again uses the plural “armies” to describe the destruction of Jerusalem. In AD 70, one army, that of the Roman general, Titus, surrounded Jerusalem. Prophetically, many nations will send armies to Jerusalem in the end-time. His reference to armies is one of many indications that Christ is distinguishing the final attack of the city in the end time from events where only one army sacked Jerusalem. Compare the plural “armies” in Revelation 19:17-22 (also Zechariah 14:2, belligerent “nations”) with the consistently singular “army” in the narratives of Jerusalem’s fall to the Babylonians in II Kings 25:1, 10; Jeremiah 32:2; 34:1, 7; 35:11; 37:5, 10-11; 38:3; 39:1; 52:4, 14.

10 The mention of clouds in this passage brings up the question, “What is the throne of His glory” mentioned in Matthew 25:31? It refers not to the Davidic throne on which Christ will sit but to the portable throne He will ride during the Day of the Lord. The primary text concerning this throne

appears at Ezekiel 1-10, which describes it making its way to Jerusalem, reaching the city in chapter 10. Conjecturally, the events of Ezekiel 1-10 will take place during the Day of the Lord.

11 Compare Revelation 10:7, where the phrase “as He declared to His servants the prophets” punctuates the reference to the finishing of the mystery of God. The context is the blowing of the seventh trumpet, which heralds the coming of the Day of the Lord (and, of course, the coming of the Son of Man). Both Luke 21:22, which relates to the day of the Lord’s wrath at the coming of the Son of Man (verse 27) and Revelation 10:7 refer to the fact that God revealed His coming to the Old Testament prophets.