

TIME TEXT MADNESS

A Critique of Preterist Hermeneutics and a Defense of Futurism

This paper critiques preterist dependence on selective “time texts” that collapse prophecy into the first century. Drawing on the principle of substantial performance, the study demonstrates that true prophecy must align with history in sequence and scope. It highlights overlooked sequencing terms, exposes logical fallacies in preterist reasoning, and explains prophetic idioms. A comparative timeline shows how preterism reduces global promises to local omens, while futurism maintains both historical grounding and eschatological horizon. This study concludes that preterism is “time text madness,” while futurism stands as the coherent and faithful alternative.

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Abstract: This paper critiques preterist reliance on selective “time texts” and demonstrates how such readings collapse prophecy into a single first-century event. By contrast, a futurist hermeneutic preserves order, content, and magnitude across the prophetic timeline. Central to this study is the principle of substantial performance: true prophecy must align with history in order, content, and magnitude. The study examines overlooked sequencing terms, exposes logical fallacies in preterist reasoning, and highlights the role of prophetic idioms (prophetic perfect, conditional subjunctive). A comparative timeline illustrates how preterism downplays global and cosmic promises in favor of local omens, while futurism maintains historical anchoring and an eschatological horizon. Patristic testimony from Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement, Augustine, Jerome, Chrysostom, Hilary, Origen, and others confirms the dual horizon: Jerusalem’s fall as preliminary judgment, the parousia and resurrection as future consummation. Special attention is given to the motif of ‘labor pains’ as the unique marker of the consummation beginning after the times of the Gentiles. The verdict is that preterism constitutes “time text madness,” while futurism remains the coherent, faithful alternative.

Keywords: Preterism, Futurism, Eschatology, Olivet Discourse, Time Texts, Prophetic Idioms, Substantial Performance, Labor Pains, Patristic Consensus

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Introduction

Preterist interpreters build their eschatological framework almost entirely upon selective “time texts” such as *“this generation”* (Matt. 24:34), *“at hand”* (Rev. 1:3), and *“soon”* (Rev. 22:6). These markers are absolutized into rigid countdowns. On this basis, preterists declare that the entirety of the Olivet Discourse and the Apocalypse found fulfillment in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Yet this claim rests upon a methodological imbalance: other equally crucial temporal indicators, *“before all these,” “until,” “then,” “immediately after”* are neglected, minimized, or spiritualized away. The result is what may be described as time-text madness: the privileging of imminence texts while silencing sequencing texts, collapsing Christ’s multi-stage prophetic horizon into a single, localized event.

This study argues that the preterist misappropriation of time texts as *modus tollens* results in a failure to honor fundamental hermeneutics, which holds that the few verses do not override the many clear verses. The essential principle of prophecy is that order, content, and magnitude must all align with historical events for true fulfillment to occur. Following the standard of substantial performance, prophecy must display the correct sequence of events, the full range of promised content, and the magnitude described in Scripture. A.D. 70 fails this test: the labor pains cluster of Matthew 24:4-8, with false messiahs bearing signs, wars, famines, and earthquakes, never appeared in the unmistakable, escalating form Christ required. Without the initiation of these labor pains, the tribulation and consummation cannot be said to have begun. By contrast, a futurist reading preserves both imminence and sequence, recognizing A.D. 70 as a preliminary fulfillment (*“before all these”*) while awaiting the cosmic and universal dimensions (*“then ... immediately after”*) that remain unrealized in history.

Overlooked Temporal Terms

1. “Before All These” (Luke 21:12)

This phrase demarcates early persecution and Jerusalem’s fall as events that precede the later cosmic upheavals. Preterists collapse verses 12–24 into verses 25–28, effectively conflating the fall of Jerusalem with the end of the age. Futurism preserves the sequence: persecution and desolation *before*, cosmic terrors and parousia *after*.

The early Fathers confirmed this reading. Irenaeus declared: *“Jerusalem shall be trodden down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled”* (*Against Heresies* 5.25). Tertullian likewise wrote: *“Jerusalem was to be trodden down by the Gentiles ... until the times of the nations should be fulfilled”* (*Answer to the Jews* 13). Jerome acknowledged that the abomination was fulfilled in the Roman destruction, *“but the consummation is yet future”* (*Commentary on Daniel* 9.27). Chrysostom summed it up: *“All these things were done in type in the fall of Jerusalem, but the greater shall be at the consummation”* (*Homily on Matthew* 24).

Together these voices show that Luke 21:12–24 was understood as foretelling Jerusalem’s fall, yet always with the recognition that the parousia lay beyond. Modern scholarship

reinforces this. Ron J. Bigalke Jr. notes that while Eusebius connected Luke 21:20–23 with the Christian flight to Pella, he wrongly tried to align Matthew 24:15 with A.D. 70. Josephus contradicts this, for the abomination was never seen in the temple prior to its destruction; the Roman sacrifices occurred only after it was burned. Thus even the strongest alleged preterist evidence collapses under historical scrutiny.

2. “Until” (Luke 21:24; Matt. 23:39)

Jerusalem would be “trampled by the Gentiles *until* the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” Preterists compress this into A.D. 70. Yet history testifies otherwise: Jerusalem remained under Gentile domination for centuries. Futurism recognizes this as a prolonged period, not a closed fulfillment.

3. “Then” (Matt. 24:9, 14, 30)

Sequential connectors structure the Olivet Discourse: persecution *then* gospel proclamation, *then* abomination, *then* cosmic upheaval, *then* parousia. Preterists blur these stages into simultaneity. Futurism preserves Christ’s chronology.

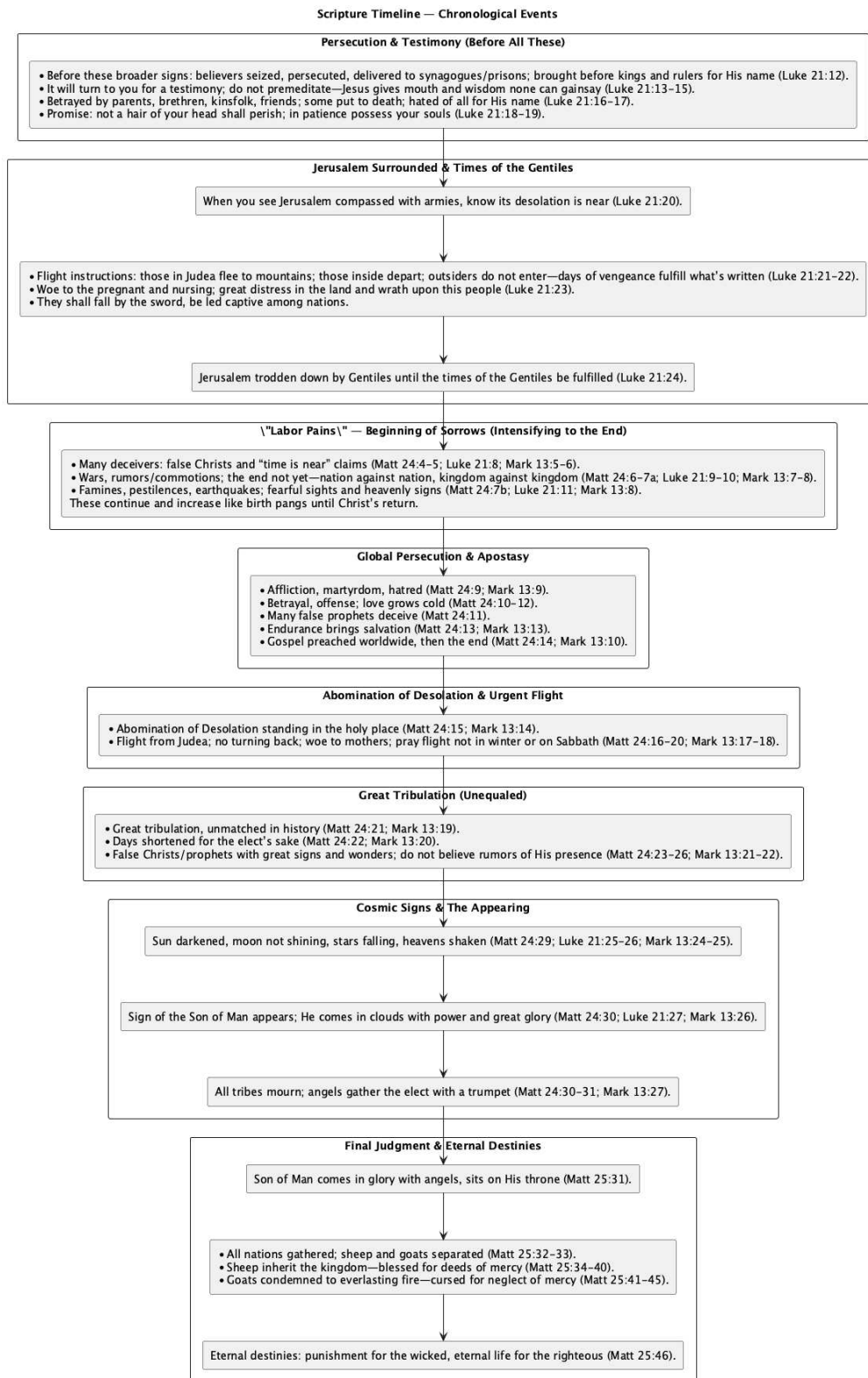
4. “Immediately After” (Matt. 24:29)

Following the tribulation, Christ predicts cosmic upheaval: the sun darkened, stars falling, and the heavens shaken. Josephus records no such phenomena in A.D. 70. To spiritualize these into metaphors violates the principle that fulfillment must match the scale of the promise.

5. “This Generation” (Matt. 24:34; Luke 21:32)

Thayer’s Greek Lexicon (Strong’s G1074) notes multiple senses of *genea*: (1) a begetting or nativity; (2) a family or those begotten of the same stock; (3) metaphorically, a race or brood, often in a perverse sense (e.g., Matt. 17:17; Mark 9:19; Acts 2:40); (4) the whole multitude living at the same time, sometimes in the sense of an age (30–33 years), but also often extending through successive ages (e.g., Eph. 3:5; Luke 1:50; Col. 1:26). Thus, context determines whether the sense is lineage, moral race, or contemporaneous people. Preterists interpret this as a forty-year window. Yet *genea* refers to a lineage or brood (cf. “brood of vipers,” Matt. 23:33). Jesus condemned a rebellious lineage, not a calendar cohort.

Scripture Timeline vs. Preterist Timeline



Josephus: History Timeline — Correlated Josephus' Antiquities and Wars
Compiled by Jeffrey Bramlett

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Scripture Timeline</i>	<i>Preterist Timeline</i>
Early Persecution	<i>Before all these</i> (Luke 21:12) - persecution of apostles and church in early decades (cf. Acts 4–8, 12; 21–28)	Identified with Jewish wars leading to 70 CE
Jerusalem's Fall	<i>Until Jerusalem is trampled by Gentiles</i> (Luke 21:24) - long period of dispersion and Gentile domination (Roman to Byzantine to Islamic to Ottoman rule)	Compressed entirely into 70 CE
"Labor Pains" begin	<i>False messiahs, wars, rumors of wars, famines and diseases</i> (Matt. 24:4-8)	Compressed entirely into 70 CE
Persecution, martyrdom	Continuing labor pains and persecution and martyrdom	Compressed entirely into 70 CE
Global Gospel Proclamation	<i>Then shall the gospel be preached in all the world</i> (Matt. 24:14) prerequisite before the end. Preterist appeal to Rom 10:18 and Col 1:6, 23 reflects missionary hyperbole of reach, not completion; Matt 24:14 functions as a threshold sign prior to the parousia, not a first-century terminus.	Claimed as fulfilled within first century
Abomination of Desolation	The abomination is setup in the temple (Matt. 24:15)	Compressed entirely into 70 CE
Flee Jerusalem	Flee to mountains, get out of Jerusalem	Compressed entirely into 70 CE
Tribulation	<i>Then shall be great tribulation</i> (Matt. 24:21; Dan 12:1) - climactic, global, unprecedented distress (criterion of magnitude).	Collapsed into siege of Jerusalem
Labor Pains increase	Many false Christs performing great miracles	Collapsed into siege of Jerusalem
Cosmic Signs	<i>Immediately after the tribulation</i> (Matt. 24:29) - darkened sun, falling stars, shaken heavens (Jerome, <i>Ep. 120</i> ; Chrysostom, <i>Hom. on Matt. 24</i>).	Spiritualized into political upheaval

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Scripture Timeline</i>	<i>Preterist Timeline</i>
Parousia	<i>Then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man</i> (Matt. 24:30) - visible return of Christ in glory; no visible global epiphany occurred in 70.	Reduced to symbolic judgment in 70 CE
Gathering of Elect	<i>He shall send his angels... gather his elect</i> (Matt. 24:31) - future universal gathering with angels and trumpet, not a metaphorical covenant shift.	Interpreted metaphorically as covenantal shift
Labor Pains (Matt. 24:4–8)	Wars, famines, earthquakes, and false messiahs. Preterists claim first-century fulfillment, but this fails substantial performance: irregular wars, localized famines, sporadic earthquakes, no miracle-backed pseudo-Christes (cf. Acts 11:28; quakes sporadic; Josephus, <i>War</i> 6 for temple chronology).	Claimed as fulfilled within first century
Consummation	<i>Resurrection and final judgment</i> (1 Cor. 15; Rev. 20) - introduced by the 'labor pains' that uniquely identify the start of the consummation after the time of the Gentiles (Irenaeus 5.30; Augustine, <i>Civ.</i> 20).	Collapsed into symbolic vindication of church in 70 CE

Analysis: The Scripture timeline unfolds progressively, preserving order, content, and magnitude. The preterist timeline, by contrast, collapses each stage into A.D. 70, spiritualizing cosmic events and redefining global promises as local omens. Therefore, A.D. 70 fails substantial performance in order (sequence disrupted), content (elements redefined), and magnitude (scope diminished).

Time Texts in the Current Debate

Elton L. Hollon has shown that preterism builds its case upon a false hermeneutic and a false dilemma. Preterists insist that if Christ's time statements are read literally, His predictions must have occurred in the first century; if not, He was a false prophet. Hollon dismantles this logic on several fronts.

1. On the False Dilemma

“If Jesus spoke literally about both the time statements and the cosmic details of his return, then he was a false prophet. But this dilemma is false, for one can affirm the literality of the cosmic details while understanding the temporal markers as idiomatic, contingent, or proleptic.”

This exposes the central fallacy: collapsing prophecy into A.D. 70 is neither required by the text nor demanded by Christ’s truthfulness.

2. On Imminence and Contingency

“The temporal markers function not as countdowns but as assurances. They are idioms of certainty, not exact timetables. They often carry conditional force, contingent upon Israel’s repentance and the progress of the gospel.”

Hollon here echoes the grammatical realities of the prophetic perfect and conditional subjunctive, showing that imminence is a matter of rhetorical force, not chronology. Preterists often appeal to Rom 10:18 and Col 1:6, 23 to insist the Great Commission was “fulfilled” by the first century. These are best read as missionary hyperbole for broad gospel reach, not completed saturation; they do not overturn the Discourse’s sequencing (Matt 24:14) nor its global scope at consummation.

3. On Theological Consequences

“Preterism claims to rescue Jesus from failed prophecy but does so by flattening his eschatology into a single event. In doing so, it robs the Church of its future hope and transforms the parousia into a mere metaphor for political upheaval.”

This frames preterism not only as logically unsound but as theologically reductive, collapsing the magnitude of prophecy below its promised scale.

Formal Contrast (Logic at a Glance)

- *Preterist framing (misapplied modus tollens):*

If Jesus meant a literal, calendar-bound deadline (P), then all was fulfilled by A.D. 70 (Q).

Not-Q (no literal global fulfillment observed by A.D. 70).

Therefore, not-P (so His words must be symbolic/first-century only).

- *Futurist correction:*

If Jesus spoke with idiomatic assurance and covenantal contingency (P'), then the discourse would present urgency and nearness without fixing a deadline (Q').

The lack of first-century consummation does not negate Q', because Q' is not a deadline claim.

Therefore, not-Q' does not obtain; the argument from failure collapses.

Criterion of Exclusivity. A genuine modus tollens requires that the consequent admit no alternative causes or readings. Once viable alternatives are present—e.g., *genea* as lineage rather than forty years; imminence as idiom of assurance; timing conditioned by

“until” clauses—the consequent is no longer exclusive, and the inference becomes a **false dilemma** rather than valid MT. Moreover, true modus tollens requires verifiable evidence that the consequent has indeed failed. In prophecy, the absence of substantial fulfillment in order, content, and magnitude disqualifies the preterist argument as genuine modus tollens. Their claim of non-fulfillment is itself contradicted by the historical record, for nothing of the prophesied magnitude occurred in A.D. 70. Preterists cannot demonstrate substantial performance, and therefore their supposed modus tollens collapses. Because they exclude these broader criteria and assume only a rigid countdown, their argument is not genuine modus tollens but a false dilemma.

Patristic readers, such as Jerome, Chrysostom, Irenaeus, and Augustine, likewise kept Jerusalem’s fall distinct from the parousia, preserving the sequence and scale that the preterist dilemma erases (see §V.4).

IV. Comparative Chart: Preterist Collapse vs. Futurist Coherence

Text	Preterist Reading	Futurist Correction	Notes
Matt. 10:23	Fulfilled in A.D. 70.	<i>Ean elthē</i> = conditional (“may come”); contingent on Israel’s repentance.	Bullinger: “be come = may have come.” Chrysostom (Hom. on Matt. 10:23) emphasizes that the mission continues until the end, not confined to 70.
Matt. 16:28 // Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27	Fulfilled at Transfiguration or A.D. 70.	Refers to a preview of kingdom glory, not its full arrival.	Fathers still awaited parousia. All three Synoptics place this verse immediately before the Transfiguration, reinforcing its role as a preview, not fulfillment.
Matt. 24:34 // Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32	Generation = 40 years.	<i>Genea</i> = lineage, not lifespan.	Lexicons and Fathers confirm. Jerome (<i>Commentary on Matthew 24</i>) interprets <i>genea</i> as referring to the Jewish race, not a forty-year span.
Rev. 1:3 ; 22:6–7	A.D. 70 fulfillment.	Prophetic perfect = certainty, not immediacy. Labor pains mark the unique beginning of	Bullinger & Seow affirm idiom. Compare Isa. 13:6 (“the day of

Text	Preterist Reading	Futurist Correction	Notes
		consummation after the Gentile era.	the Lord is near") idiomatic urgency, yet centuries distant in fulfillment.

Observation: Three of the “time texts” are the same utterance in Synoptics. Thus, preterism builds its system on two unique sayings, forcing the entire prophetic corpus to conform. This is a hermeneutical imbalance of the highest order.

V. The Futurist Alternative

1. Ground Truth: Order, Content, Magnitude

Prophecy demands literal, historical fulfillment. A.D. 70 cannot exhaust Christ’s words: the order is incomplete, the content lacking, and the magnitude diminished. Deuteronomy 18:22 already enshrines this principle: if the word does not come to pass in its declared order, content, and magnitude, it is not the word of the Lord.

2. Literal Hermeneutics

Literal reading respects figures of speech but does not collapse literal promises into metaphor. The exegete must enter the world of the text, avoiding ethnocentric misreadings. Bullinger rightly observed that literal interpretation means recognizing figures as figures, but not collapsing literal promises into mere metaphor.

3. Prophetic Idioms: Certainty and Contingency

- Prophetic Perfect: future spoken as past to stress certainty.
- Conditional Subjunctive: Christ’s coming was contingent, not inevitable in 70 CE.

Old Testament pattern. Jeremiah 18:7-10 demonstrates conditional prophecy. Jonah’s warning of destruction in forty days did not fail when Nineveh repented; it illustrated conditionality. Isaiah 38 shows Hezekiah’s life extended after prayer.

New Testament pattern. Acts 3:19-21 links Israel’s repentance with the sending of Christ. Matthew 23:39 shows that acknowledgment of Christ is a prerequisite for His visible return. Luke 21:24 indicates Jerusalem’s trampling continues until Gentile times are fulfilled.

Grammatical markers. The subjunctive mood and *heos an* clauses demonstrate contingency, showing that imminence need not equal fixed chronology. Seow’s Hebrew grammar likewise confirms that the imperfect and subjunctive forms often carry contingent force, supporting the pattern of conditional prophecy.

Theological coherence. Contingency does not undermine divine omniscience. It demonstrates God’s covenantal dealings with humanity.

4. Witness of the Early Church: Preserving the Timeline

The Fathers consistently affirmed a dual horizon: Jerusalem's fall as judgment and a yet-future parousia. Irenaeus spoke of Antichrist and resurrection still to come (*Against Heresies* 5.30). Tertullian distinguished Jerusalem's fall from the final judgment (*Apology* 32). Clement of Alexandria anticipated a continuing world and final resurrection (*Stromata* 6.15). Augustine emphasized future judgment in *City of God* 20. Jerome maintained that the cosmic signs awaited Christ's return (*Letter 120*). Chrysostom saw the man of sin as still to come (*Homily 4 on 2 Thess*). Hilary of Poitiers warned of Antichrist yet future (*De Trinitate* 10.73). Origen interpreted the sign of the Son of Man as still future (*Commentary on Matthew* fragment on 24:30). From Irenaeus in Gaul to Origen in Alexandria, from Tertullian in Carthage to Augustine in Hippo, the Fathers across geography and era upheld this two-stage horizon: Jerusalem's fall as type, consummation as future reality.

VI. Conclusion

Preterism fails because it confuses idioms of certainty with chronological countdowns, collapses horizons of prophecy, and reduces cosmic scope to local omens. It builds its system on a narrow reading of two sayings, forcing the rest of Scripture into artificial compliance. Its logic, though framed as valid, is materially fallacious, resting on hidden dilemmas and ethnocentric assumptions.

Futurism succeeds because it preserves order, content, and magnitude. It reads imminence as assurance, not deadline; "generation" as lineage or brood, not a fixed span; and sequencing terms as true chronology. Above all, it recognizes the decisive role of the "labor pains" as the unique identifier of the consummation after the Gentile era. A.D. 70 was at most a preliminary judgment, an historical chastisement upon Jerusalem. It was not the eschatological telos. It fails the test of substantial performance, lacking the order, content, and magnitude Christ declared. The labor pains never aligned; the tribulation never commenced; the parousia never appeared. Only futurism maintains the integrity of prophecy, grounded in the idioms of Scripture, the testimony of the Church, and the marker of labor pains as the beginning of consummation after the Gentile era.

Preterists frame their argument as a *modus tollens*, yet because they cannot demonstrate substantial fulfillment in order, content, or magnitude, their case is no genuine *modus tollens* but a false dilemma. By contrast, futurism upholds the Deuteronomic standard that prophecy must align with reality (Deut. 18:22). It preserves not only the coherence of the prophetic timeline but also the integrity of Christ Himself—neither a failed prophet nor a deceiver, but the faithful Lord of history. The verdict is decisive: preterism is time text madness; futurism is prophetic coherence.

Endnotes

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