

The Misused Promise of Matthew 16:28

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Some Standing Here: The Misused Promise of Matthew 16:28 – A Full Refutation of Preterist Claims

“Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.”

– *Matthew 16:28 (KJV)*

Few verses have been as misunderstood, twisted, and misapplied as this single statement from the lips of Jesus Christ. Preterists latch onto Matthew 16:28 as a supposed nail in the coffin of futurist eschatology, claiming that Jesus promised His second coming would happen within the lifetime of some standing before Him. And when paired with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, they claim it as a fulfilled event.

But such a view ignores the context, contradicts Greek grammar, overlooks the witness of Scripture, and flies in the face of Church history. What Preterists present as a slam-dunk is, upon careful inspection, nothing more than a shallow half-truth that disintegrates under the weight of biblical cross-references, linguistic study, and historical reality.

This essay will dismantle the Preterist argument in seven detailed sections:

1. **Greek Word Analysis**
2. **Contextual Continuity: Matthew 17 and the Transfiguration**
3. **Parallel Gospel Passages**
4. **Peter’s Commentary in 2 Peter 1:16–18**
5. **Doctrinal Implications and Kingdom Preview**
6. **The Early Church Fathers and the Historical Record**
7. **The Preterist Fallacy Exposed**

Let us begin by looking deeply into the original Greek wording of Matthew 16:28 to see what it truly says—and what it doesn’t.

1. Greek Word Analysis – What Does the Verse *Actually* Say?

Let’s begin with a careful look at the Greek of this verse:

“ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ὅτι εἰσὶν τινες τῶν ὧδε ἐστηκότων, οἵτινες οὐ μὴ γεύσονται θανάτου, ἕως ἄν ἴδωσιν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενον ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ αὐτοῦ.”
(Matthew 16:28 – Greek)

Key Greek Terms:

- **“οὐ μὴ γεύσονται θανάτου” (ou mē geusōntai thanatou)** – *“shall not taste of death”*
This is a strong Greek double negative with subjunctive, indicating absolute certainty—they will **definitely not die** before something specific occurs.
- **“ἕως ἄν ἴδωσιν” (heōs an idōsin)** – *“until they see”*
The verb **idōsin** (aorist subjunctive of “to see”) suggests a specific moment or event witnessed. It doesn’t imply continuous seeing or enduring fulfillment but a **punctiliar moment in time**.
- **“ἐρχόμενον ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ αὐτοῦ” (erchomenon en tē basileia autou)** – *“coming in His kingdom”*
This is **not** the same phrasing used for the return in judgment described in Matthew 24 or Revelation 19. This phrase implies **arrival in royal glory**, not destruction or vengeance. There’s no mention of angels, wrath, or judgment here. The kingdom context is **regal and visionary**, not apocalyptic in nature.

Preterists err by assuming “coming in His kingdom” must refer to the **destruction of Jerusalem**, but the Greek suggests a **visionary manifestation of royal authority**, which harmonizes perfectly with what follows in the next chapter: **the Mount of Transfiguration**.

2. Contextual Continuity – Matthew 17 and the Transfiguration

To understand Matthew 16:28, we must not stop at the chapter break. The **very next event recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels** is the **Transfiguration of Jesus Christ**, and this is no coincidence. Chapter and verse divisions were added over a millennium later. In the original manuscripts, there was no division between Matthew 16:28 and 17:1—the thought flows without interruption.

Matthew 17:1–2 (KJV) says:

**“And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart,
And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.”**

This event fulfills what Jesus had just promised in 16:28—some standing there (Peter, James, and John) would see the Son of Man **coming in His kingdom**. But notice: it was **not His final Second Coming**, it was a **preview**, a foreshadowing, a manifestation of His future glory.

Why the Transfiguration is the Fulfillment:

1. **“Some standing here”** – Jesus did not say *all*. Only **three disciples** were taken to the mount: Peter, James, and John. These are the “some” who did not taste death before seeing His kingdom glory.
2. **It was visible glory** – The Greek word **“idōsin”** in 16:28 implies *seeing*. At the Transfiguration, they saw Jesus **in the radiant glory** of His future kingdom.
3. **Moses and Elijah appeared** – This shows that the kingdom connects both to **the law and the prophets**. Elijah is prophesied to come before the great and dreadful day of the Lord (Malachi 4:5), and Moses represents the deliverer. Their presence is a symbol of kingdom fulfillment in Christ.
4. **A voice from heaven declared Him as the Son** – Matthew 17:5 says,

“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.”

This matches God’s declaration in Psalm 2, where the Son is the heir of the kingdom:

“Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.” (Psalm 2:6)

5. **They feared exceedingly** – The disciples reacted with reverence and fear, a common response in Scripture when witnessing a manifestation of divine glory (Ex. 33:18-23; Isa. 6:5; Rev. 1:17).

The context of Matthew 16:28 and 17:1–9 shows an intentional flow. Jesus made a promise, and **six days later**, He fulfilled it by **giving His closest disciples a glimpse of the power and majesty of His future kingdom**.

Preterists, in their rush to push everything into A.D. 70, skip over the most obvious, immediate, and **Scripturally reinforced fulfillment** of this prophecy: the Mount of Transfiguration.

3. Parallel Gospel Passages – Mark 9:1 and Luke 9:27

Matthew 16:28 is not isolated—it appears almost identically in **Mark** and **Luke**, and in both cases, the **very next event is the Transfiguration**. This threefold repetition adds weight to its intended meaning. Let’s examine each account:

Mark 9:1 (KJV)

“And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.”

Luke 9:27 (KJV)

“But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God.”

Key Observations:

1. **Each account uses nearly the same wording**—“some standing here,” “shall not taste of death,” “till they see.”
2. **Mark adds the phrase “come with power”**, emphasizing the **glorious demonstration** of divine authority, not destruction or judgment.
3. **Luke shortens the phrase but retains the same essence**, focusing on seeing the **kingdom of God**.

Immediate Fulfillment in All Three Synoptic Gospels

In every gospel, the sequence is identical:

- Jesus makes the statement.
- A few days later (six days in Matthew and Mark; “about eight days” in Luke, possibly counting inclusively), He is transfigured before Peter, James, and John.
- The narrative continues without a break, indicating the fulfillment was **immediate and intentional**.

Misuse by Preterists

Preterists argue that these verses predict Christ’s **final return**, but the Synoptic context proves otherwise. If Matthew 16:28, Mark 9:1, and Luke 9:27 referred to the **Second Coming**, then:

- Jesus **missed His own prophecy** unless His Second Coming was invisible, partial, or metaphorical—a concept never taught by the apostles.
- The “coming in His kingdom” would be reduced to the destruction of a city, not the **glory of the King** being revealed.

- **Peter’s commentary (which we’ll examine next)** would make no sense if he had witnessed the actual return of Christ.

By failing to compare Scripture with Scripture, Preterists isolate one phrase from its context and reconstruct it into a theology that contradicts the very next chapter.

4. Peter’s Commentary – 2 Peter 1:16–18 and the Confirmation of Glory

No passage confirms the true meaning of Matthew 16:28 more explicitly than the apostle Peter’s **own inspired commentary** in 2 Peter 1. Years after the Transfiguration, Peter wrote a doctrinally rich epistle in which he reflects on that mountaintop moment—not as a mysterious vision or symbolic prefigurement, but as a real experience that served as a **preview of the Second Coming**.

2 Peter 1:16–18 (KJV):

“For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount.”

What Is Peter Saying?

- **“We made known unto you the power and coming”** – The Greek word for *coming* is **παρουσία (parousia)**, the very word used for the **Second Coming** in other key passages (e.g., 1 Thess. 4:15, Matt. 24:27). Peter equates the Transfiguration with a **preview** of the parousia.
- **“Eyewitnesses of His majesty”** – This was no metaphor. Peter, James, and John **literally saw** Christ’s glory.
- **“This voice from heaven we heard”** – He’s referencing the exact moment described in Matthew 17:5 when God affirmed Jesus as His beloved Son. This connection shows Peter saw the Transfiguration not as an isolated vision, but as a **theological moment of eschatological importance**.

The Kingdom Preview in Prophetic Pattern

In Jewish prophetic tradition, especially in Daniel and Ezekiel, **visions of glory** often precede the events they symbolize. Peter, steeped in Old Testament imagery, recognized

that what he saw was a **divine preview** of the return and reign of the Messiah. He did not teach that Christ had already returned or that the kingdom had been fully established—he taught that they had been **shown a foretaste** of what was still to come.

Why This Destroys the Preterist Argument

If Peter believed Matthew 16:28 referred to A.D. 70, he would have had **no reason to reference the Transfiguration in the context of Christ's coming in glory**. He would've said, "We told you about His return, and it happened," not, "We saw His majesty as a sign of that still-future event."

This passage completely undermines the idea that Christ's "coming in His kingdom" was fulfilled by Roman armies in 70 A.D. Jesus showed **His coming** in glory to a few, exactly as He said. **Nothing more, nothing less.**

5. Doctrinal Implications – The Transfiguration as a Kingdom Preview

The Transfiguration wasn't just a dazzling spectacle—it was a **doctrinal signpost**. Jesus didn't only show glory for glory's sake. He was **giving a foretaste of His millennial reign**, establishing a theological blueprint: **suffering before glory, rejection before enthronement, cross before crown.**

A Glimpse of the Future Kingdom

Jesus' glorified appearance on the mountain aligns perfectly with **Revelation 1:13–16**, where John sees Him shining as the sun, His garments glowing, His eyes like fire. The Transfiguration is a **microcosm** of what Revelation describes in full. The disciples saw in advance what the world will see at His true Second Coming.

Moses and Elijah – Law and Prophets Confirming the King

The presence of **Moses and Elijah** is doctrinally rich:

- **Moses** represents the Law, the deliverer of God's covenant.
- **Elijah** represents the prophets, the herald of the coming day of the Lord (Malachi 4:5).

Together, they stand beside the King in glory. This reinforces **Luke 24:27**, where Jesus expounded "in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." The kingdom was not a political insurrection or Roman destruction—it was rooted in the testimony of the **law and prophets.**

Peter's Mistaken Impulse

Peter said in Matthew 17:4, “Let us make here three tabernacles.” Why? Because he thought the **Feast of Tabernacles**—a celebration of God dwelling among men—was beginning. Peter thought the kingdom was arriving **then and there**.

He wasn't rebuked for that hope. He was corrected in his timing. The glory had come, but not the full manifestation. The kingdom **will** come in fullness, but not without the cross first. That's why Jesus told them **not to speak of it until after the resurrection** (Matthew 17:9).

Doctrinally: It's a Pattern, Not a Fulfillment

The Transfiguration stands as a pattern:

- A **preview** of the Son of Man coming in glory.
- A **witness** to the apostles that He would return visibly.
- A **guarantee** to the Church that the promises of a future kingdom are not allegory—they are real and literal.

To twist this into a fulfilled prophecy at A.D. 70 is to erase the entire **doctrinal and prophetic significance** that Jesus Himself was teaching.

6. The Early Church Fathers and the Historical Record

If Preterists are correct in saying that Matthew 16:28 was fulfilled in A.D. 70 as a completed return of Christ, then one must ask: **Why did the early Church not know this?** Why did **none of the disciples of the apostles** teach that Christ had already returned?

The answer is simple: **Because they didn't believe it happened.**

The Deafening Silence of Preterism in Early Christianity

Not a single apostolic father, ante-Nicene theologian, or early bishop taught that Christ's Second Coming occurred in the first century. Instead, they consistently taught that the return of Christ was yet **future**, visible, bodily, and triumphant.

Let's look at several key witnesses from Church history:

1. Clement of Rome (c. 95 A.D.)

Clement, a disciple of the apostles and possibly the one mentioned in Philippians 4:3, wrote:

“Let us every hour expect the kingdom of God in love and righteousness, since we know not the day of God’s appearing.”

(1 Clement 23)

Clement wrote **after** A.D. 70. He speaks of the kingdom and return of Christ as **future and unknown**—not recently fulfilled.

2. Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35–107 A.D.)

A student of the Apostle John, Ignatius said:

“Wait expectantly for Him who is above time—He who is timeless, invisible, though for our sakes made visible; He who, coming from a region beyond sight, was seen in the flesh.”

(Letter to the Magnesians, 13)

If the Second Coming had occurred already, Ignatius would not be instructing believers to **wait expectantly** for His appearance.

3. Justin Martyr (c. 100–165 A.D.)

In *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin states:

“He shall come again from heaven with glory, when the man of apostasy... shall venture to do unlawful deeds on the earth against us Christians... Then you shall see how He shall shine from the heavens.”

He speaks of the return of Christ as **future**, connected to judgment and antichrist. There is no hint of Preterism. Instead, Justin teaches a **literal millennial reign** of Christ.

4. Irenaeus (c. 130–202 A.D.)

A disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of John, Irenaeus wrote extensively on the Second Coming in *Against Heresies*:

“But when this Antichrist shall have devastated all things in this world, he will reign for three years and six months... Then the Lord will come from heaven in the clouds, in the

glory of the Father...”

(Against Heresies, Book V, Chapter 30)

Notice:

- He expected a **future Antichrist**
- A **future tribulation**
- A **visible, glorious return of Christ from heaven**

This obliterates the Preterist timeline, which denies a future Antichrist and reinterprets the return of Christ as metaphorical.

5. Hippolytus (c. 170–235 A.D.)

Hippolytus, another early Christian writer, also looked forward to the Lord’s return:

“But the times being fulfilled, and the ten horns springing up in the last times, and the little horn, which is Antichrist, appearing among them, and reigning three years and six months... then the Lord will come from heaven in the clouds, in the glory of the Father.”

(On Christ and Antichrist, 61)

Hippolytus believed in a **literal Antichrist**, followed by the **Second Coming of Christ in glory**. Again, no trace of Preterist thinking.

The Witness of Silence

If Preterism were apostolic, we would expect **at least one** of the apostolic fathers or early theologians to mention it. Instead, we find the opposite:

- The Church universally expected a **future, physical, glorious return of Christ**.
- They did not interpret Matthew 16:28 as a past event.
- A.D. 70 is **never once** presented as the fulfillment of Christ’s Second Coming by the earliest witnesses.

This silence is a **loud condemnation** of modern Preterist revisionism.

7. The Preterist Fallacy Exposed – Twisting One Verse to Rewrite the Bible

The entire foundation of the Preterist argument in Matthew 16:28 rests on one flawed assumption: that the **“coming in His kingdom”** must refer to the **final Second Coming** of Christ. From this, they extrapolate that because some of Jesus’ listeners were still alive in A.D. 70, the Second Coming must have occurred then—**invisibly, figuratively**, and with Rome as His proxy. But this conclusion crumbles under the weight of sound exegesis and honest theology.

Selective Literalism

Preterists claim to interpret Scripture “literally,” yet when Jesus speaks of **coming with clouds, angels, power, and great glory** (Matthew 24:30), they interpret it symbolically. But when He says **“some standing here shall not taste of death”**, they insist it must be **literal** and tied to A.D. 70.

This is **inconsistent hermeneutics**. Either take it all literally or explain the symbolism **with Scriptural context**—not historical retrofitting.

Ignoring the Transfiguration

The clearest, most immediate fulfillment of Matthew 16:28 is the Transfiguration, and yet Preterists **either dismiss it or downplay it**. Why? Because it ruins their entire framework. If the Transfiguration fulfills Jesus’ statement, then Christ did not lie, and there is **no need to redefine His coming**.

Disregarding Peter’s Own Words

Peter interpreted the Transfiguration as a **preview of Christ’s return in glory**. If Christ had already come in A.D. 70, Peter, writing after that time, would have said so. Instead, he wrote as one who still **looked forward** to the coming (2 Peter 3:4–10).

Rewriting the Nature of Christ’s Return

Preterists reduce the **Second Coming of Christ**—the hope of the Church, the destruction of Antichrist, the resurrection of the dead, the judgment of nations, the setting up of the millennial kingdom—to a **military siege by Rome**. They call **fire, wrath, angels, clouds, trumpets, and resurrection** mere metaphors.

In doing so, they **erase the blessed hope** (Titus 2:13) and exchange it for a 1st-century event that brought terror, not glory.

Overruling the Testimony of the Early Church

Every early Church father—men who learned directly from the apostles or their disciples—affirmed a future Second Coming, a personal Antichrist, and a physical kingdom. Preterism cannot be found in their writings because it **wasn't part of apostolic doctrine**.

To argue otherwise is to claim **the entire early Church misunderstood** what Jesus taught—and that only modern scholars have now figured it out.

That's not theology. That's arrogance.

Conclusion – The Plain Truth of Matthew 16:28

When Jesus said, “There be some standing here which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom,” He was not predicting a hidden return in A.D. 70.

He was doing exactly what He said: **giving a few of His disciples a preview of the kingdom in glory**.

- **Peter, James, and John** saw it on the holy mount.
- **The voice of the Father** confirmed His Son's royal majesty.
- **The Law and the Prophets** stood beside Him in unity.
- **The Church Fathers affirmed** a future hope.

Preterists, by clinging to one isolated verse and misapplying it, reject the testimony of:

- The **context** (Matthew 17),
- The **Greek grammar**,
- The **apostolic interpretation** (2 Peter 1),
- The **Synoptic parallels**,
- And **2,000 years of Christian understanding**.

Matthew 16:28 is not a problem. It's a promise fulfilled—just not in the way the Preterist would have it.