Outline to Covenant Eschatology (Update 12/11/02) - Compiled by http://planetpreterist.com

Eschatology, definition: The study of last things, or end things. Derives from the Greek eschatos, meaning final, or latter or end of thing(s).

I. DEFINED: "Preterism places the prophecies of intense evil and foreboding gloom in the first century, focusing on the events surrounding the forty-two-month long Neronic persecution, the forty-two-month long Jewish war with Rome, and the destruction of the temple. The word "preterist" (as opposed to futurist) is based on the Latin "praeteritus," meaning "gone by" or "past."

II. Why espoused
a. New Testament time references
i. Jesus’ predictions of a first century Parousia (παρουσία, presence of Christ)
1. Matt. 10:23 - "Truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes."
2. Matt. 16:28 - "Truly I say to you, there are some who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.
3. Matt. 24:34 - "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place." (Jesus’ use of "this generation" throughout the gospels always refers to his contemporaries: 26:36; 11:16; 12:39, 41, 42 and 45; Luke 11:50-51; 17:25; Mk 8:38)
4. Matt. 26:64 - "You [the high priest] will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven."

ii. The Book of Revelation’s predictions indicating Christ’s imminent return
1. SHORTLY, QUICKLY: ταχεί, tachos and en tachei mean "quickly, all at once, with all speed, without delay."
   a. 1:1 - "...things which must shortly take place"
   b. 2:16 - "Repent, or else I will come to you quickly"  
   c. 3:11 - "Behold, I come quickly!"
   d. 22:6 - "...things which must shortly take place."
   e. 22:7 - "Behold, I am coming quickly!"
   f. 22:12 - "Behold, I am coming quickly."
   g. 22:20 - "Surely I am coming quickly."

2. NEAR AT HAND (ἐγγύς, engus)
   a. 1:3 - "The time is near."
   b. 22:10 - "The time is at hand."

3. ABOUT TO, ON THE POINT OR VERGE OF (µέλλει, mello, mellei)
   a. 1:19 - "Write ... the things that are about to take place."
   b. 3:10 - "... the hour of trial ... is about to come upon the whole world."

b. PRETERISM AS THE SOLUTION TO A DILEMMA: The apparent failure of these prophesies to come true has led to skepticism about the reliability of the Bible and the deity of Christ. Preterism solves this problem by maintaining that these prophecies did, in fact, have a first century fulfillment.
III. THE OLIVET DISCOURSE: INDICATIONS THAT IT WAS FULFILLED IN A.D. 70

a. THE CONTEXT OF THE DISCOURSE

i. THE SEVEN WOES pronounced upon the scribes and Pharisees in Matt. 23. They are pronounced not only upon them, but upon the entire generation (23:36).

ii. QUESTIONS concerning when the temple would be destroyed, and what would be the sign of Jesus' coming and the end of the age (24:1-4). The temple is Herod's, and Jesus links its destruction with his future coming and the end of the age.


i. FALSE CHRISTS AND PROPHETS DECEIVING MANY: (Matt. 24:5, 11, 24).
   1. **Josephus** writes that many false prophets and false Messiahs appeared during the government of Felix (A.D. 53-60), deluding many. Such figures played a leading role in the Jewish revolt in late A.D. 66 that led to the Jewish War. (Antiquities 20.8.6, Wars 6.5.2)

ii. WARS AND RUMORS OF WARS (Matt. 6-7). These would not have been perceived as an unusual sign during most periods of world history, but during the **pax Romana** war was extremely rare. E.g., Epictetus writes that "Caesar has obtained for us a profound peace. There are neither wars nor battles" (Discourses 3:13:9) Josephus and Tacitus both write of the unsettledness of the empire leading up to A.D. 70 (see below).

iii. FAMINES (Matt. 24:7). Josephus writes that during Claudius' reign (A.D. 41-54) there were four seasons of great scarcity. In the fourth year of his reign, the famine in Judea was so severe that the price of food became enormous and great numbers died. Cf. Acts 11:28. He also describes starvation and cannibalism during the final five-month siege of Jerusalem (Wars 5.12.3 and 6.5.1)

iv. EARTHQUAKES (Matt. 24:7). These occurred in Caligula's (A.D. 37-41) and Claudius' (A.D. 41-54) reigns. Josephus reports many earthquakes in A.D. 68 in the midst of the Jewish War. He describes one particularly terrifying quake and lightning storm, remarking, "anyone would guess that these wonders foreshadowed some grand calamities that were coming" (Wars 4.4.5). Tacitus reports them throughout Rome, also interpreting them as portents of impending divine judgment (Histories, 1.2-3)

v. PERSECUTION (Matt. 24:9-10) - Jesus predicts the coming persecution and martyrdom of the church, and Israel's impending judgment, adding: "I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation" (Mt 23:32-36). The NT reports the intense persecution of Christians by the Jews in Acts 8:1 and 1 Thess. 2:14-16.


vii. GOSPEL PREACHED IN ALL THE WORLD (Matt. 24:14): "World" is Roman world. NT statements that this had taken place by A.D. 70 - Acts 24:5, Rom. 1:8 and Col. 1:6, 23: "All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing.... This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I Paul, have become a servant."

viii. ABOMINATION THAT CAUSES DESOLATION (15):
   1. CHRIST REFERS TO THE HERODIAN TEMPLE, NOT SOME FUTURE ONE: Mt. 24:1-2
   2. JESUS' PROPHESY OF THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM (Luke 21:20) AND DESECRATION OF THE TEMPLE IS CONFIRMED BY JOSEPHUS: "After the five month siege they breached the wall, burned the temple down and worshiped Caesar at its eastern gate" (Wars 6.6.1)

ix. DISTRESS UNEQUALLED AND NEVER TO BE EQUALED AGAIN (21)
   1. LOSS OF LIFE: 1.1 million Jews died during the Jewish War (Wars 6.9.2)
   2. JOSEPHUS REPORTS TERRIBLE CARNAGE: Jerusalem, the temple, the Mediterranean, Sea of Galilee, Jordan, and Dead Sea covered with blood and gorged with bodies (Wars 3.9.3; 3.10.9; 4.7.6; 4.1.10; 4.5.1; 5.1.3; 6.8.5). Cf. Rev. 8:8-11
   3. JOSEPHUS reports the Romans laying waste to Israel, setting fire to towns, cities, and trees (Wars 6.1.1; 3.7.8; 5.6.2; 3.7.1; 3.7.8; 5.6.2; 3.4.1; 6.6.2; 7.5.5). Cf. Rev. 18:8
4. DISTRESS "UNEQUALLED SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE WORLD AND NEVER TO BE EQUALED AGAIN"? This may be a dramatic device used for emphasis. Such language is used elsewhere in Scripture (Ez. 5:9, 2 Kings 18:5, 23:25). Yet this judgment upon Jerusalem was without equal.

x. CHRIST'S COMING ON THE CLOUDS (Matt. 24:27, 30):
   1. CLOUD COMING AN OT IMAGE OF GOD COMING IN JUDGMENT (Is. 19:1, Ps. 18:7-15, Mic. 1:3-4)
   2. HEAVENLY ARMIES REPORTED BY JOSEPHUS (Wars 6.5.3) AND TACITUS: "In the sky appeared a vision of armies in conflict, of glittering armor" (Histories 5.13)

xi. THE COLLAPSE OF THE UNIVERSE (Matt. 24:29): The same cosmic language is used of the destruction of Babylon by the Medes (Is 13:9-10), and a prophesy against the nations (Is.34:3-5), both of which Christ quotes. Similar language is used of a judgment of the "people of the earth" in Is. 21:18-23, of the Judgment of Judah in Jer. 4:23-29, and of the Day of the Lord in Joel 2:30-31.

xii. THE GATHERING OF THE ELECT (Matt. 24:31): Postmillenialists interpret this as having to do with Christ sending forth his messengers (missionaries) throughout the earth and the conversion of Gentiles from all nations after the fall of Jerusalem.

   1. THE MEANING OF ANGELOS: The word translated "angel" (angelos) can just as easily be translated "messenger" (as it is in Matt. 11:10, Mark 1:2, Luke 7:24, 27).
   2. THE MEANING OF THE TRUMPET CALL: In the year of Jubilee complete forgiveness of debts was announced by a trumpet call: Lev 25: 9-10.
   3. THE DESTRUCTION OF ISRAEL AND GROWTH OF CHRISTIANITY: Ignatius, Melito of Sardis, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Lactantius and others point back to A.D. 70 as proof that God favored the Christians, not the Jews, thus paving the way for the advance of Christianity. Cf. Rev 3:9

C. UPSHOT
   i. CHRIST CAME IN JUDGMENT IN A.D. 70 AFTER THE JEWS HAD "FILLED UP THE MEASURE OF THEIR FOREFATHERS' SINS" (Matt. 23:32).
   ii. THIS JUDGMENT WAS THE PROPHESIED "DAY OF THE LORD." Mal. 4:1-5 (cf. Matt. 11:14). According to Amos 5:18-20 and Zeph. 1:17 the Day of the Lord would be a day of judgment upon the Jews Hence when the disciples asked Jesus in Matt. 24:3 about the sign of his coming and of the end of the age, Jesus spoke of the end of the Jewish age and the hastening Day of the Lord against Israel.

IV. INDICATIONS OF A FIRST CENTURY FULFILLMENT OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

a. REVELATION WAS WRITTEN BY JOHN BEFORE A.D. 70
   i. Evidence for a late dating (A.D. 94-96) of Revelation is greatly lacking, with only one source (Irenaeus, Against Heresies 3.10.3) making vague claims to its late date.
   ii. A late date for Revelation would demand that John would make some reference to the crucial and extremely important events that took place in A.D. 70.
   iii. The Peshito Syriac New Testament manuscripts contain the note "The Revelation, which was made by God to John the Evangelist, in the island of Patmos, to which he was banished by Nero the Emperor."

b. TIME-FRAME REFERENCES INDICATING THE NEARNESS OF REVELATION'S EVENTS:
   ii. Especially noteworthy is Rev. 22:10 - "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near." This is the exact opposite of what Daniel was told in Dan. 12:4. He was told to seal up his prophecy "until the time of the end."

c. THE TEMPLE IS STILL STANDING (Rev. 11:2)
   i. This is an indication of a pre-A.D. 70 date of the book as well, see a. above.

d. IT IS HEROD'S TEMPLE
   i. The Olivet Discourse had been given in response to the disciples' question about the destruction of Herod's temple (Luke 21:5-7). In Luke 21:24 Jesus said: "Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled."
   ii. John, familiar with Jesus' words, has this as his backdrop - the Gentile trampling underfoot of Jerusalem will last 42 months (Rev. 11:2)
e. THIS TRAMPLING UNDERFOOT OF JERUSALEM OCCURRED DURING THE JEWISH WAR that ended with the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. The war lasted exactly 42 months: from spring, A.D. 67 through August, A.D. 70.

f. WHO IS "BABYLON THE GREAT, MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES"? SHE IS...JERUSALEM


ii. SHE IS THE "GREAT CITY ... WHERE ALSO THE ... LORD WAS CRUCIFIED" (Rev. 11:8) Although Rev 11 clearly is speaking of Jerusalem, is this the "Babylon the Great" of later chapters? Yes, the designation, "great city" is used both in Ch. 11 and Chapters 17-18 (17:18, 18:10, 16, 19, 21).

iii. THE IMAGE OF THE UNFAITHFUL WIFE, THE HARLOT, WAS OFTEN USED OF ISRAEL IN THE O.T. Israel is repeatedly called the wife of God (Jer. 2:2, 3:14, Is. 54:5). But she was an unfaithful wife (Jer. 3:20, Hos. 1:2, Ez. 6:9, Ez. 16, Is. 50:1) behaving as a prostitute (Deut. 31:16, Jer. 3:1-2). In the context of Jerusalem’s designation as a prostitute, Is. 1:21 is especially noteworthy: "See how the faithful city has become a harlot."

iv. HER ARRAY

1. Dressed in purple, scarlet, gold, precious stones and pearls (Rev. 17:3-5) - an almost exact description of the high priest’s ephod (Ex. 28:5-6, 36)

2. This combination of fabrics and gems also describes the temple tapestry, which, according to Josephus, was "Babylonian tapestry in which blue, purple, scarlet and linen were mingled." (Wars 5.5.4)

3. The gold cup she holds (Rev. 17:4) is symbolic of the temple’s implements: "The greatest part of the vessels ... were of silver and gold" (Wars 5.4.4.)

4. Josephus’ description of the temple reflects the same opulence: "The outward face of the temple in its front ... was covered all over with plates of gold of great weight, and at the first rising of the sun, reflected back a very fiery splendor, and made those who forced themselves to look upon it to turn their eyes away, just as they would have done at the sun's own rays. But this temple appeared to strangers, when they were at a distance, like a mountain covered with snow; for, as to those parts of it that were not gilt, they were exceeding white." (Wars 5.5.6) The inscription on the prostitute’s forehead is a perverse image of that on the high priest’s: "Holy to the Lord."

v. HER DESTRUCTION:

1. EVEN JERUSALEM’S END RESEMBLES THAT OF AN ADULTEROUS WIFE - DEATH BY STONING: Josephus writes: "The stones that were cast were of the weight of a talent, and were carried two furlongs and further. The blow they gave was no way to be sustained, not only by those that stood first in the way, but by those that were beyond them for a great space. As for the Jews, they at first watched the coming of the stone, for it was a white color" (Wars 5.6.3) This account is reminiscent of hailstones, weighing a talent each, that rain down on the "great city" in Rev. 16:19-21.

2. In the end, a New Jerusalem comes down from heaven, replacing the old, adulterous bride.

g. WHO IS THE BEAST?

i. THE BEAST GENERICALLY CONCEIVED: ROME

1. THE WOMAN (BABYLON) IS SEATED ON THE BEAST: Rev. 17:2-8

2. "SEATED ON" = "IN DEPENDENCE ON, IN LEAGUE WITH"

a. BEFORE THE JEWISH REVOLT, THIS HAD BEEN THEIR RELATIONSHIP. Josephus writes: "It seems to me to be necessary here to give an account of all the honors that the Romans and their emperors paid to our nation, and of the leagues of mutual assistance they have made with it." (Antiquities, 14.10.1-2)

3. THE BEAST TURNS ON THE WOMAN AND DESTROYS HER: Rev. 17:16-17. This happens with the Jewish War, the 42 month period of trampling underfoot by the Gentiles (Rev. 11:2).

4. OTHER INDICATIONS THAT THE BEAST (GENERICALLY UNDERSTOOD) IS ROME
   a. "SEVEN HILLS": "The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits." (17:9) Rome was known in antiquity as the city on seven hills (Septimontium).
   b. ROME RISES FROM THE SEA (13:1). From either John’s vantage point on Patmos, or the Jews’ vantage point, Rome appeared to rise from the sea. Cf. 17:1.
   c. “SEVEN KINGS”: "The seven heads ... are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come." By this time of Revelation’s writing (during the Neronic persecution) five of the Roman emperors had fallen (Julius, Augustus, Tiberius, Gaius, and Claudius), one was still reigning (Nero), and one would remain for only a short time (Galba, who reigned only seven months, from June A.D. 68 to January, A.D. 69), and was followed by three others in short succession.
   d. THE MORTAL WOUND AND ASTONISHING REVIVAL OF THE BEAST
      i. Rev. 17:8 and 13:3 - "One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was astonished and followed the beast."
      ii. NERO HIMSELF INFLICTED THIS WOUND, ALMOST DESTROYING ROME:
         1. TACITUS writes of the months following Nero’s death in A.D. 68: "The history on which I am entering is that of a period rich in disasters, terrible with battles, torn by civil struggles, horrible even in peace. Four emperors were felled by the sword; there were three civil wars, more foreign wars and often both at the same time."
         2. JOSEPHUS writes that Rome was near "ruin." (Wars 4.11.5) The state of the Romans was so "ill" that "every part of the habitable earth under them was in an unsettled and tottering condition" (7.4.2).
   3. TACITUS perceived Rome to be in its death throes: "This was the condition of the Roman state when Serius Galba, chosen consul for the second time, and his colleague Titus Vinius entered upon the year that was to be for Galba his last, and for the state almost the end." (Histories 1.11)
   4. THIS STATE OF AFFAIRS WAS NOT RESOLVED UNTIL VESPASIAN left his Judean expedition to take power in Rome: "The empire, which for a long time had been unsettled and, as it were, drifting through the usurpation and violent death of three emperors was at last taken in hand and given stability by the Flavian family" (Suetonius, Vespasian 1).
   ii. THE BEAST SPECIFICALLY CONCEIVED: NERO (A.D. 54-68)
      1. NERO THE EMPEROR AT THE TIME OF THE WRITING: He is the fifth king "who is." Suetonius’ enumeration of the emperors was: Julius, Augustus, Tiberius, Gaius or Caligula, Claudius (the five kings who have fallen at the time that John is writing), Nero (one "who is"), and Galba - one who "has not yet come, but when he does come, he must remain for a little while" - seven months (Rev. 17:10)
      2. NERO DEMANDED WORSHIP: Rev. 13:5-8. Inscriptions have been found in Ephesus in which Nero is called "Almighty God" and "Savior."
He and Caligula “abandoned all reserve” in promoting emperor worship - they were the only two who demanded divine honors while still alive. Nero claimed to be Apollo.

3. **NERO’S PERSECUTION OF THE CHURCH**
   a. **42 MONTHS IN DURATION:** from November, A.D. 64 through June, A.D. 68. John banished to Patmos during this persecution (**Rev. 1:9**) and Peter and Paul died in A.D. 66 or 67.
   b. **PREDICTED PRECISELY BY JOHN:** **Rev. 13:5** - "The beast was given ... authority for forty-two months. ... He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them."
   c. **THE FEROcity OF THE PERSECUTION:** Tacitus reported that Nero "inflicted unheard-of punishments on those who, detested for their abominable crimes, were vulgarly called Christians" (**Annals 15.44**). The persecution claimed "an immense number" (Tacitus), "a vast multitude of the elect" (**1 Clement 6**).

4. **NERO’S BEAST-LIKE CHARACTER**
   a. **HE MURDERED HIS OWN FAMILY MEMBERS**
   b. **HE “MARRIED” A BOY, THEN CASTRATED HIM**
   c. **HE KICKED HIS PREGNANT WIFE TO DEATH**
   d. **HIS SADISTIC SPORT:** Suetonius writes that Nero "devised a kind of game in which, covered with the skin of some wild animal, he was let loose from a cage and attacked the private parts of men and women, who were bound to stakes." (**The Lives of the Caesars, 6.29**)
   e. **HE WAS EVEN CALLED "THE BEAST":** Tacitus ... spoke of Nero's 'cruel nature' that 'put to death so many innocent men.' Pliny the Elder ... described Nero as 'the destroyer of the human race' and 'the poison of the world.' Juvenal tells of 'Nero's cruel and bloody tyranny.' Apollonius of Tyana specifically states that Nero was called a 'beast': 'In my travels, which have been wider than ever man yet accomplished, I have seen man, many wild beasts of Arabia and India; but this beast, that is commonly called a Tyrant, I know not how many heads it has, nor if it be crooked of claw, and armed with horrible fangs. ... And of wild beasts you cannot say that they were ever known to eat their own mother, but Nero has gorged himself on this diet.'

5. **NERO’S DEATH:** He committed suicide by the sword at the age of 31. Cf. **Rev. 13:10** - "If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he will be killed."

6. **NERO’S NUMBER**
   a. **Rev. 13:18** - "Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man: and his number is 666." (**NASV**)
   b. **THE HEBREWS HAD NO NUMERALS,** and so, used letters to signify numbers, just as the Romans did. *Neron Caesar* (the Greek rendering, documented by archaeological finds), when transiterated into Hebrew (NRWN QSR) had a number of 666. 

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50 \times 50 = 2500 \\
6 \times 100 = 600 \\
50 \times 60 = 3000 \\
so \ we \ have \\
600 + 3000 + 2500 = 666
\]
   c. **FURTHER EVIDENCE:** A well-documented textual variant has 616. A mere copyist’s error? Bruce Metzger speculates: "Perhaps the change was intentional, seeing that the Greek form *Neron Caesar* written in Hebrew characters (nrwn qsr) is equivalent to 666, whereas the Latin form Nero Caesar (nrw qsr) is equivalent to 616."