

Battle for the Future

by [Tim King](#)

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The author of the Left Behind fiction series has joined with other End-Time authors to offer a rebuttle of fulfilled prophecy. In this essay, Tim King offers a Transmillennial® response to their arguments.

Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice have recently joined forces as general editors, along with eight other contributors, to write a rebuttal to preterism called *The End Times Controversy: The Second Coming Under Attack*. Each of the contributors is affiliated with the Pre-Trib Research Center, a non-profit organization with the goal of promoting premillennial dispensationalism.

Combining exegetical summaries with historical probes, these authors diligently and earnestly set out to disprove preterism by exposing its weaknesses and questioning both its philosophical framework and the resultant hermeneutic. The book's focus is not on what is sometimes called "full preterism" – the starting point for Transmillennialism - but on the slightly more mainstream "partial preterist" position of which Kenneth Gentry might be an example.

Ice offers a reason for this: "If partial preterism is deemed untenable, then obviously the more extreme form will not be viable as well."¹ This ignores, however, one of the strengths of the full preterist position: consistency. We might suggest that if partial preterism is found to be untenable, it may be because they don't take the argument to its logical conclusion. Indeed, exposing the inconsistencies in the partial preterist position might serve only to affirm the elegance of Transmillennialism's consistency and intellectual coherency.

In a roundabout way, Ice admits to the strengths of full preterism when he writes, "many proponents of preterism often rush from partial preterism to full preterism almost overnight."² Apparently consistency and logic have a way of being attractive. Perhaps Ice is subconsciously aware that to only address partial preterism is to only partially address the challenge of fulfilled prophecy. It is an easier mark.

Ice also gives a nod to the progress preterism has made in impacting the end-times debates, even among dispensationalists. He writes:

There is no doubt that all forms of preterism, except mild preterism, are on the rise and at an all-time high in popularity in evangelical circles in North America... Until recently, futurism has enjoyed an unobstructed field. But over the last decade, preterism, the polar opposite of futurism, has grown to provide a challenge to the futurist dominance within evangelicalism... With the rise of preterism, futurists are now required to think more about the basis for their position."³

Ice even gives appropriate credit to Max King. In a chapter on the history of preterism, he writes, "The modern-day American champion of full preterism is Max R. King..."⁴ On the basis of his research, Ice acknowledges the groundbreaking work of King in the 1970's that served as the impetus for many other fulfilled prophecy authors and ministries that developed into a rash of 'preterist' writings in the late 80's and early 90's.

Given his familiarity with the Transmillennial® view, it is somewhat disappointing that Ice and his fellow contributors limit the scope of their investigation to partial preterism. It seems odd that

dispensationalism, with its own quest for a kind of consistency, would refuse to grapple with a consistent but diametrically opposed alternative view. They choose instead to take on what many of us see as an unfortunate and unwieldy compromise. The dispensationalists would do well to realize that it is the more extreme and consistent form of preterism that is the most difficult to answer. Perhaps they do.

That being the case, it is not entirely necessary to dismantle the dispensationalist framework. The literature that supports the Transmillennial® view and the philosophical assumptions that move it forward do a healthy job of deconstructing the dispensationalists' foundation. They are, to coin a phrase, metaphorically challenged, and a healthy respect for the literature and culture of biblical times would go a long way toward a corrective of the wooden literalism and sensational hysteria that characterize the *Left Behind* series, however popular it might be.

No, it is enough for us simply to agree with Ice and LaHaye: the partial preterist position is inconsistent and cannot stand under its own weight. What remains is for us to offer an alternative. It is faulty logic to assume that challenging partial preterism – however successful one might be – automatically discredits the whole fulfilled prophecy movement and affirms dispensationalism. This has the intellectual integrity of a Republican candidate defeating a Green Party opponent in debate and assuming that he has handily dismissed the Democratic challenger as well.

This article is the beginning of a Transmillennial® response that will be expanded into a book to be published this Fall. To that end we will examine just a handful of issues that illuminate the nature of the debate and speak to the strength of the Transmillennial® position.

I. A View Too New To Be Right?

In his introductory statements, Tim LaHaye notes that there is “clear evidence that the preterist view is of *recent vintage*” (emphasis added)⁵ and that “preterism is a seventeenth-century invention.”⁶ Furthermore, in making his case against a first-century application of the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24, and the Book of Revelation in general, Ice writes:

You would think that if a large body of Bible prophecy were meant to relate to a specific generation, as preterists contend, then the Holy Spirit would have moved in such a way so that first-century believers would have reached such an understanding. However, there has not yet been found any evidence that indicates that the first-century church viewed Bible prophecy this way. This fact provides a major problem for preterism, which thus far has proved insurmountable.⁷

Ice's contention seems to be that if a theological position is true, then the Holy Spirit should have made sure everyone in the first century understood it correctly and there should be ample evidence that they did, in fact, hold such an understanding. If preterism fails this test it should be noted that *so does* premillennial dispensationalism. In fact, no systematic theology could pass this test because pre-modern Christianity, especially in the early days of the church, simply did not think that way. The necessity of the ecumenical councils and the formulation of creeds suggest that there was not even widespread agreement among the early Christians on such important matters as the nature and person of Jesus Christ!

Ice repeatedly calls for historical verification of the preterist view while apparently ignoring the paucity of such verification of his own view. Dispensationalism did not appear in its present form until the 19th century. The idea of a physical “rapture” is more recent still. In their book, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, authors Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock point out that even in the last thirty years, “significant modification” is taking place within the dispensationalist movement to the extent that even some of its basic and core beliefs are facing “abandonment.”⁸

While many fundamentalists are loath to admit it, all theology is progressive. When it comes to finding evidence from the early church for our particular theological pets, we often are all in the same boat. It does us no good to drill holes in the boat to try to sink our brothers.

God's unfolding purpose and plan often is understood only in hindsight. The prophecies of the Messiah, for instance, were clearly understood only *after* Jesus Christ – and even then, many failed to grasp who he was and why he came. Even the apostle Peter, in a canonical text, said that Paul wrote some things that were hard to understand (2 Pet. 3:16). They were in a time when “the ends of the ages” had come (1 Cor. 10:1ff) and the transition included many things not easily seen or understood by the audiences of Jesus, Peter and Paul.

If we are limited to the faith and doctrine of the first few centuries of the church to frame our understanding of these first-century texts, we are in a bit of a quandary. Which church father is truly authoritative? Tertullian? Irenaeus? Ignatius? Clement? Origen? They disagreed on many matters, and didn't have a whole lot to say about eschatology. Many of us would question some of their beliefs and practices. If we disagree with Tertullian, for instance, on the primacy of the bishop in the local assembly, why would we be afraid to question his thoughts on prophecy?

So, while there is no lock-tight historical precedent for *any* specific eschatological position, the situation is not necessarily as Ice paints it. In fact, he badly misrepresents a significant work on the subject of the early church fathers and eschatology: Samuel M. Frost's *Misplaced Hope*. Ice writes, “Full preterist Samuel M. Frost has written an entire book that sees preterism as a recent development.”⁹ This is an unusual conclusion given that Frost's stated aim is to ferret out threads of preterist thought in the church fathers. Perhaps Ice's misrepresentation of Frost's work is indicative of a wider inability to grasp the unfolding nature of the fulfilled bible prophecy view as a whole.

Regardless of what he does or does not realize regarding first and second-century origins and a developing preterist system of belief within them, he would do well to see that his view is just as much a new and developing theological system. Ice fails to put forth any evidence that his view stands his own test for truth. If this debate is to be settled, it will be the *internal teaching of Scripture* that will decide the validity of truth for any proposed system.

II. Interpretation

Quoting famed dispensationalist Charles Ryrie, Ice writes, “Consistently literal or plain interpretation is indicative of a dispensational approach to the interpretation of the Scriptures.”¹⁰ Furthermore we are told that, “Many scholars and teachers believe that they have been able to satisfactorily interpret the details of Scripture and harmonize their exegetical conclusions into a theology that is the product of consistent literal interpretation. Those who contributed to this book are among those who hold to such a view.”¹¹

According to Ice, this is not to say that dispensationalists do not recognize figurative language or that symbols do not appear in prophecy, or that spiritual truths are not set forth within such proclamations. The rule of thumb for the dispensationalist, however, is that all prophecies should be given a “literal or plain interpretation.”

Ice gives us Isaiah 55:12 as an example: “You will go out with joy and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.” This, we are told, is a description of what will take place during the millennium. However, Ice reminds us, “the trees will not literally clap their hands, nor will the hills speak forth with shouts of joy. Here, the Bible uses figurative speech to say that the curse upon nature will be removed during this future time.”¹²

This forces us to wonder: Why is the language of, say, Matthew 24, any different? Is there some reason that the sun being darkened and the moon turning into blood and the stars falling from the heavens are in a different category of figurative language? Is it possible that this language, too, might be figurative?

According to Ice, No, they are to be taken literally – in other words, the sun will be darkened/extinguished, the moon literally will turn into blood and the stars will indeed fall from the heavens. Quoting Ice, “Why shouldn’t grandiose, super-natural phenomenon accompany the glorious return of our Lord? Only a *naturalist mentality* would say that a literal occurrence of Matthew 24:29 is impossible [emphasis added].”¹³

This insistence on literalism, however, creates interpretive problems. Read carefully the words of fellow contributing author John McArthur as he writes regarding this text in his chapter entitled *Signs in the Sky*: “Most would agree there is a degree of symbolism in Matthew 24:29. Almost no one expects the stars to fall to earth literally. It’s possible, too, that the sun might not be extinguished literally; rather, the sun’s light could simply be partly or totally obscured from the earth...So I agree that *wooden* literalism is not necessary to get the right sense of Jesus’ words.”¹⁴

Ice and McArthur do not agree. One says that these events are to be seen as literally taking place and any deviation is suggestive of a “naturalist mentality,” the other says that there is, in fact, “a degree of symbolism” inherent in the text. Perhaps the dispensationalist hermeneutic is not so simple as Ice would have us believe. According to Ice’s definition, his own contributing author demonstrates a “naturalist mentality” by leaving the door open to a figurative or symbolic understanding of the language of Matthew 24. If the Transmillennialist says such things, he is condemned as a naturalist. If McArthur says them, they get published as a defense of dispensationalist interpretation!

Ice quotes Richard Shimeall in a passage that leads to some interesting questions:

Symbols are the *representatives* of the agents, objects, qualities, acts, conditions, or effects of others of a different and resembling class... In other words, figures are to the literal agents or objects illustrated, what *shadows* are to the *substance*. We cannot use a figure without having in view the *literal* thing from which the figure is derived. For example: If we speak of a man as the *pillar* of the state, we have in view the nature of a *literal column* at the same time.”¹⁵

The Transmillennialist would agree – and wonder why the dispensationalist does not apply this principle unilaterally. What about Old Testament *shadows* and *types* of the New Testament *substance* – Jesus Christ (Col. 3:17)? The tabernacle, priesthood, sacrifices, temple, throne, seed, Israel, mountain, Jerusalem and land – each of these is ‘literally’ established under the Old Covenant age and brought into spiritual reality and substance in Christ.

The tabernacle as found in Amos 9:11-12 and Ezekiel 37:26, 27 is fulfilled in the heavens by Jesus (Heb. 8:1-3). The earthly Aaronic priesthood is the shadow of the realities of the new spiritual priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5-9). The old law sacrifices served to prepare the way for mankind to see the spiritual sacrifices offered by the spiritual priesthood (1 Peter 2:5; Heb. 13:15, 16). The earthly temple paves the way for an understanding of how Christ would make his people into a spiritual building (2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:19-22).

The Old Testament throne served to help humanity understand the eternal spiritual realities of the heavenly throne of Christ (Heb. 1:1-3; Acts 7:49-50). Likewise, the seed of Abraham pointed to the one true spiritual seed of Christ (Gal. 3:16-29). These patterns hold as well for the Israel of God, the mountain of God, the new heavenly Jerusalem and the land in which the people of God would dwell.

There are many such examples of Old Testament shadows and their New Testament spiritual realities in Christ. The dispensationalist seems to assume that the physicality of these types and shadows indicates that they are prototypes of a greater physical reality to come. It is not enough for these physical things to serve as pointers to a greater spiritual reality. In essence, the dispensationalist has Jesus coming to establish the very earthly system he died to take away (Heb. 10:9).

The call of the dispensationalist is for another earthly city and throne of David, sacrificial system, altar, temple, on and on. In this hermeneutic the shadows are reified and must reappear. When believers in fulfilled prophecy point this out, they are accused of having a “naturalist mentality.” It seems that those with the naturalist mentality are the ones who cannot seem to see past a literal duplication of the Old Covenant system that in the early days of the church was already fading away (Heb. 8:13).

It is interesting to see how the Bible interprets the Bible, because it does not always line up with the obvious, with a “plain and literal” rendering. In Acts 2, Peter, referring to the events of Pentecost, says “this is that which was told by the prophet Joel.” He is alluding to the eschatological vision in Joel 2 – but frankly, it does not appear as though Acts 2 is a thoroughly literal fulfillment of Joel 2 in every detail. In fact, it is subtle enough that Peter, led by the Holy Spirit, found it necessary to connect the dots: “This is that.”

Paul does not give any more of a nod to the dispensationalist’s emphasis on literalism. In Galatians 4:21-31 he tells the story of Sarah and Hagar and their sons – and indicates that the story is an allegory, illuminating details of the change in covenants. The dispensationalist might accuse Paul of over-spiritualizing his reading of the text in Genesis but he seems to have good company in Jesus, who said: “It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (John 6:63). It should not be missed that he spoke these words after thousands in his audience walked away and “followed him no more” after interpreting his words in line with their “consistently plain and literal” meaning!

Paul’s allegory is clear enough: the Old Testament types, shadows and patterns were “fleshly,” while The New Testament realities are “life” and belong to the realm of the “spirit.” After all, the Gentiles come into Israel’s spiritual things – this means that Israel must enter her spiritual promises as well (Rom. 15:27).

We cannot help but think that the first-century equivalent of the dispensationalist hermeneutic led many to miss Jesus as the Messiah. The Incarnation, Jesus’ earthly ministry, the way in which he embodied his kingship and preached the coming of the kingdom, even the language he used to describe that kingdom – these did not line up with expectations that came from a literal reading of the Messianic prophecies. Jesus challenged their expectations, their spiritual values, and their worldview. He challenges ours today.

III. Time Texts and Changing Horses

If the dispensationalist mantra is the “consistently literal or plain interpretation” of Scripture, this becomes problematic when applied to texts that involve a specific time frame. Time statements, to the Transmillennialist, have much less interpretive “wobble room.” While there is biblical precedent for a figurative reading of prophetic language (even many dispensationalists do not suggest a *completely* literal reading of Revelation, for instance, and the curious reader might take a look at Psalm 18 – the situation the psalm describes does not support a literal reading of the apocalyptic language David employs).

Ice dedicates 26 pages of *The End Times Controversy* to dismissing the clear, literal meaning of “near,” “quickly” and “at hand.” Contributing author Malcomb Couch spends another 23 pages explaining away the plain, literal meaning of “near,” “shortly” and “about to.” When they are finished, “near” and “at hand” merely mean Christ’s arrival *could* happen at any time, and “quickly” means that when he *does* come, it will happen *real* fast!

In Ice’s chapter on the preterist reading of the time statements he makes the following observation: “Preterism rises and falls upon the validity of the preterists’ so-called ‘time texts’...If the infection is stopped at its source, then there is no danger of the gangrene spreading throughout the rest of the body.”¹⁶

Since Transmillennialism™ relies heavily on passages such as Matthew 16:27, 28, we are most interested in how Ice deals with what we consider to be clear time indications regarding the coming of the Lord in his kingdom – especially if the goal is a plain, literal reading of the text.

Here is how Ice deals with this passage. “Preterists believe that Matthew 16:28 and its parallel passages (Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27) are all predictions of the destruction of Jerusalem as accomplished through the Roman army in A.D. 70. By contrast, I believe that Matthew 16:28 was fulfilled by events that took place on the Mount of Transfiguration.”¹⁷

This seems to disregard the content of the previous verse (16:27): “For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done.” What does Ice do, then, with: a) the coming of the Son of Man; b) the presence of angels, and, c) to judge (“repay everyone for what has been done”)?

The Mount of Transfiguration was only five days away. If this is the answer to verse 28, then why confuse things with the items in verse 27? Moreover, Jesus’ encouragement that some of them would not see death seems an odd addendum; it seems likely that *none* of them would die in the next five days, so why even mention it? In fact this verse alone is a challenge to almost any reading of text; a too early or too late fulfillment of this verse renders it meaningless.

But Ice does not accept this and even chides preterist Gary DeMar saying he “misses the point of the passage in his attempt to prove too much.” Ice presses his point by quoting William Lane; “...it is not said that death will exclude some of those present from seeing the announced event. All that is required by Jesus’ statement is that ‘some’ will see a further irruption of the power and sovereignty of God before they experience the suffering foreseen in Ch. 8:34-35.”¹⁸

Begging Lane’s pardon, that is *not* all that Jesus’ statement requires. It would seem that, in context, it would require that Jesus come with his angels in judgment, and that some of his disciples would still be alive when it happens. The Transmillennialist obviously sees this in a figurative fashion, but even in the preterist hermeneutic the Transfiguration, while certainly splendid to those involved, does not seem to be the sort of thing described in apocalyptic terms (the total destruction of city is another story). In addition, while saying that some would be alive does not automatically preclude the possibility that *all* would be, it is a strange and unprecedented use of language for Jesus to say that if he knew that no one was going to die in the next five days.

Ice is not deterred: “It is clear that the word ‘some’ would include at least two or more individuals, since ‘some’ is plural...the word ‘some’ nicely fits the three disciples – Peter, James, and John (Matthew 17:1) – who were participants at our Lord’s transfiguration.”¹⁹

Grammar, however, is not on Ice’s side. His reading would be tenable if Jesus had said, “some of you will see the Son of Man coming in glory before you taste death.” While there is certainly some

latitude in how certain Greek phrases are rendered in English, I think it is safe to say that particular rendering cannot be supported, and to read the text in that way is nothing short of a grammatical distortion.

The events of Matthew 16:27 and 28 fit perfectly the Transmillennial® understanding of an ‘end of the age coming of Christ’ that was some 40 years away from taking place at the time Jesus spoke these words. In this we can understand the time element overlooked by Ice. The reader must decide if the words of Jesus “there are some standing here who will not taste death” best represents an event to occur within the week or one to occur within a span of 40 years.

Ice gives no explanation for how the Mount of Transfiguration was a “coming of the Son of Man,” says nothing about his coming “with his angels,” and totally ignores the event as a judgment concomitant with all of the above. Then, to make matters worse, he changes the words of Jesus to mean that they would be alive but only “some” – Peter, James and John – would see these things. Within a week!

Ice readily recognizes the importance of time statements to the Transmillennialist. The Greek word *tachos*, for instance, is translated “quickly” in the King James Version, and “soon” in the NIV (cf. Rev. 3:11). No translation is free of bias or presupposition, and Ice takes to task such a translation of this word. While he admits this meaning as a possibility, he suggests that *tachos* is better understood to mean suddenly.

In other words, *tachos* is not referring to how soon, but how fast. He arrives at this meaning by referencing the *Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich Lexicon* (BAG) which lists the meaning of *tachos* as “speed, quickness, swiftness, haste.” This definition is, in fact, in BAG – under Classical Greek (as found in Homer and Plato). A few lines later, BAG offers the definition appropriate to the Koine Greek in which the New Testament was written: “soon, in a short time.”

That is exactly what Transmillennialists are saying. When Jesus tells us in the Book of Revelation that he is to return *quickly*, he means “soon,” or “in a short time.” Ice’s choice of definition fits the dispensational framework, but it just doesn’t fit the New Testament one.

Malcomb Couch sides with Ice’s interpretation but is at least credible enough to add to it the meaning “without delay.” This is rather confusing. How can some two millennia be “without delay”? I suppose one has to assume that once the end times get started, it will all be over quickly. (It is taking LaHaye how many novels to tell the story? Even the book series is not unfolding “without delay.”)

One passage that is never mentioned by any of the contributing editors of *The End Time Controversy*, nor by any of the preterist writers they are critiquing, is Hebrews 10:37. Here the writer says, “For yet in a very little while, the one who is coming will come and will not delay.” The Greek is explicit. This is to take place in a “very little while.” Since we know that the authors are capable of expounding upon the language of the Bible and the intricate interpretive principles found therein, why is this key passage omitted?

For instance, Price speaks of a “cryptic grammatical construction” argument in his chapter on *Historical Problems With A First-Century Fulfillment Of The Olivet Discourse*.²⁰ Surely Price or one of his colleagues could unleash their linguistic forces on this passage? They don’t. There is no attempt in *End Time Controversy* to engage this verse.

Perhaps it is neglected because it is seen as a piece with Hebrews 9:28: “Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring

salvation to those who are waiting for him”(NIV). For LaHaye and Ice, this is not a reference to the second coming *per se*, but to the rapture (part of a constellation of events that comprise the end times for the dispensationalist). The irony here is that while their book is subtitled “The Second Coming Under Attack,” there is only one reference in Scripture to a “second” coming, and that is Hebrews 9:28.

IV. A Stake in the Heart?

Contributing author Mark Hitchcock feels he has discovered “the stake in the heart” of the fulfilled view. “If Revelation was written after A.D. 70 when Jerusalem fell to Rome,” then the preterist/fulfilled case falls apart. He continues, “Therefore, their entire approach is built upon an assumption that is not stated in Revelation.”²¹

Hitchcock is right – the date of Revelation is never stated in the book. So, if your interpretation relies on the date of Revelation, whether early or late, you have no explicit evidence to support your claim. We are once again all in the same boat. Hitchcock makes the mistake, however, of pressing further: “If the date for Revelation is so central to its understanding, why didn’t John clearly state the time of its composition somewhere in its 404 verses?”²²

Can any book of the Bible withstand this scrutiny? It is not likely that Hitchcock would accept a late date for the Gospel of Mark, for instance, and yet the text gives no indication of when it was written. Hitchcock seems to overlook an important principle: whenever the book of Revelation was written, it was most likely written to contemporaries – John was instructed *not* to seal up his prophecy as Daniel did.

Could it be that the crucial audience for John’s prophecy had no need of a time referent, since they were living in the reality he described? Could it be that Revelation is a valuable historical record of encouragement to saints who have gone before, and *not* intended to give us arcane information about our own future? This is not so much a question of time as it is a question of context.

Much of the historical argumentation found in *The End Times Controversy* is specifically aimed at partial preterist points – particularly those made by Dr. Kenneth Gentry regarding the beast, etc. In those cases, we’ll let Gentry defend himself. For our purposes in this brief critique we would like to focus on Hitchcock’s ‘key witness’ for establishing the late date of the writing of the Book of Revelation.

Hitchcock writes, “Irenaeus is Exhibit A for late-date advocates. The importance of his testimony cannot be overemphasized because his credibility as a witness is outstanding.”²³

Hitchcock then quotes a highly disputed text from Irenaeus’s *Against Heresies* where John supposedly saw the “apocalyptic vision” near the “end of Domitian’s reign.”²⁴ For Hitchcock, this is the key testimony for a late date of the Book of Revelation. “Irenaeus spent his youth in Smyrna and claims to have been a pupil of Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, who in turn was a student of the apostle John. Therefore, a more knowledgeable, reliable witness could hardly be imagined.”²⁵

Hitchcock credits church historian Philip Schaff for his information on Irenaeus, which is interesting, because Schaff advocates an early date for Revelation.

Schaff has some additional information on Hitchcock’s star witness: “Irenaeus, the most trustworthy witness of apostolic traditions among the fathers, held the untenable opinion that Christ attained to the ripe age of forty or fifty years and taught over ten years (beginning with the thirtieth), and that he thus passed through all the stages of human life....”²⁶

Either Hitchcock believes that Jesus lived to be fifty or he believes that there is good reason to say that Irenaeus is not such a strong witness to time indicators after all. Since he quotes Schaff to make his case, and since Schaff is an early-date advocate who reveals Irenaeus as having an aberrant view of the age of Jesus, we'll stick with his source (Schaff) and remain early-date advocates as well.

Hitchcock ends his chapter by saying, “the external evidence for the late date of Revelation is overwhelming. And the internal evidence for the late date, *while not as overpowering as the external evidence* (emphasis mine), nevertheless is strong and convincing. It is my prayer that those who hold the preterist position will admit the serious problems with their view and adopt an approach to dating Revelation that is not dependent upon the sandy foundation on which their defense now stands.” 27

His belief is that the “external evidence... is overwhelming” and that the “internal evidence” is not as “overpowering.” What we have seen is that his “overwhelming” evidence begins with his star witness saying that Jesus lived to be fifty. On that basis, if his “external evidence” is not as “overwhelming,” we may only conclude that perhaps his case is not as strong as he would like us to think. Nevertheless, he does not shrink from saying that it is the early-date advocates who have built their case on a “sandy foundation.”

It should strike us as evasive, however, that Hitchcock never once references the following passages: “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must *soon take place* (1:1)... *for the time is near* (v. 3)... I am coming *soon* (3:11)... I am standing at the door (3:20)... God... has sent his angel to show his servants what *must soon take place* (22:6)... See I am *coming soon* (22:7)... Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for *the time is near* (22:10)... See I am *coming soon* (22:12)... Surely I am *coming soon* (22:20)” (emphasis mine).

At this point it is up to the reader to decide – do we go with the external evidence of a man who believed Jesus lived to be fifty, or do we take the “plain, literal meaning” of a number of statements within Revelation itself indicating a *soon coming of Christ*?

In the end, Hitchcock’s chapter “A Stake in the Heart” would perhaps be more aptly titled “A Shot in the Foot”... his own.

In a forthcoming book I hope to answer in greater detail this challenge laid before the fulfilled prophecy world. What is important for us now is the difference our respective views make in how we view the world and its future.

What is this debate about? Where are the battle lines? Where is the “so what” for a cynical, skeptical generation that the church as we know it is failing to reach? What, really, is the difference between catastrophic and constructive views of the future? To comment on this we turn to some of the final words of *End Times Controversy* editor, Thomas Ice.

VI. A World Up For Grabs

Thomas Ice concludes that, “If preterism is true, then we would have a very different view of the past and future than Christendom has traditionally held to. We would have a vastly different view of Christianity altogether.” 28

Good.

It’s about time!

In the premillennial view, it is believed that earth will experience a period of unparalleled tribulation. In the premillennial view World War III is inevitable and the sooner it starts the better – for it ushers in the Second Coming of Christ. According to this scenario, a catastrophic war not only is warranted, but is *welcomed*. Premillennialists seem to giggle with delight when conflict breaks out in the Middle East.

According to premillennialism, two-thirds of all Jews throughout the world will be killed, leading to the repentance of the remaining one-third who will then turn to Jesus to be saved. Therefore, any attack against the Jews *may simply represent*, for the premillennialist, the *will of God*.

This expectation of a cataclysmic end-time war is in danger of becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. The premillennial mentality seems exclusive and militant. It is willing to sacrifice two-thirds of the Jews in order to have one-third turn to God. Is this what Paul meant when he wrote that “all Israel will be saved”? I doubt it.

The premillennial view is reckless in its esteem of human life and insensitive to the biblical portrayal of the victory of God. Despite all of its claims to interpret Scripture in a plain, literal sense, we see a lack of regard for figurative language and an abject denial of the clarity of time statements. In doing so, what emerges is nothing more than a caricature of God’s redemptive work in Christ, fit for novels or cartoons.

The Transmillennial® view, on the other hand, seeks to ground its view in the first-century setting of Jesus and recognize God’s full work in Christ. It also seeks to frame out a worldview on that redemption, and build both church and society on the basis of a constructive future²⁹.

Praise be to God for the victory that is his – and is complete.

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ENDNOTES

1 Thomas Ice, Tim LaHaye, eds., *The End Times Controversy* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2003), 24.

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4 Ibid., p 24.

5 Ibid., p 8.

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23 Ibid., p 128.

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28 Ibid., p 24.

29 The Council on Transmillennialism is an inter-ministry alliance of broadcasters, authors, congregations and ministries that both is defining this worldview, and stewarding its joint efforts. For more on the Transmillennial® view, see <http://www.transmillennial.com>